

“Watanni Biyu mai Kashe Talauchi”¹



According to the DFID Country Gender Report 2012, Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa. As micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are an important source of employment and income, especially in rural areas, the *Pro-Poor Growth and Promotion Employment in Nigeria (SEDIN)* Programme is targeted at improving the business environment for male and female entrepreneurs in Nigeria, among others, through the development of the potato value chain in Plateau State. In 2011, the potato value chain was selected as one of the focus areas of the SEDIN programme due to its high potential of strengthening women’s participation as women have traditionally been employed in the sector.

Initial situation of potato farming in Plateau State

Due to conducive weather conditions and good soil, **Plateau State** has a **comparative advantage** in potato production compared to other states in Nigeria. However, despite the agrarian advantages of the region, female and male potato farmers and groups have long been confronted with several challenges such as

- unavailability of improved potato seeds,
- lack of/inadequate storage facilities,
- poor agronomic practices by farmers,
- engagement in traditional agricultural practices,
- unavailability and poor accessibility to financial services,
- poor functioning of farmer groups.

The **Peret Women Potato Group** is one of the groups involved in the farming of potato and other cash crops in Plateau State. The group is found in Kerang community in the North Central Zone of the State. Currently, the programme supports about 80 groups with an average membership of 30% women, which is a reasonable figure given the low number of women’s (formal) employment in Nigeria’s rural areas; a few of the groups – such as the Peret Group – are purely women groups.

¹ Hausa for “Two months that kill poverty”

SEDIN's activities in the potato value chain

- A focus group discussion with potato farmer groups, including the Peret Women Group, and private sector organizations was held regarding the need of improved potato varieties in the State to **increase the yield in the local potato production**.
- As a result of the group discussion, **improved potato seeds were imported** from Germany - free of cost for the farmers - to replace the potato seeds that farmers have been recycling for over 20 years.
- Through the availability of the improved seed variety, potato producers have now a **choice in seed selection**.
- The new improved variety has a higher yield compared to the old variety commonly found in the market: **between 6 and 10 tonnes per hectare** compared to between 1.5 and 4 tonnes per hectare. Through the **construction of 12 storage facilities** in Plateau State, the farmer groups are able to accommodate about 20 tonnes of potatoes in each storage facility. The storage facility is also a **direct source of income** to the group as **non-members pay for preserving their potatoes** in the storage facility. One part of these proceeds is used for maintenance of the storage facility; another part is deposited in an account run by the umbrella body of the potato farmer association (of which 20% are women) to allow for other farmer groups to build their own storage facilities. In preparation to the utilization of new (imported) seeds, the farmers were also trained in “Best Agricultural Practices in Potato Production and Storage”.
- Through the SEDIN programme, a **link** has been created **between the potato producers and rather big private business outlets** (like Shoprite and SPAR). This ensures a better access to high-end markets for farmers, reduces the influence of middle-men in the market and eases the supply of potatoes to the available markets.
- It was also eminent that **group formation training** was necessary for the Peret Women's Group and other potato farmer groups in the State. Since the training, the membership network has become stronger; more potato producers are joining the various potato groups while new groups are being formed. The group members serve as “**farmer-to-farmer extension**” to non-members on agricultural best practices and other farming-related issues.
- **Better packaging and pricing mechanisms** allow the farmers to proper sort and grade their potatoes increasing their income, having a ready market and a well-structured customer base.
- The group was also **trained in financial literacy and entrepreneurship**, allowing them to operate a **savings scheme** to give assistance to members in time of insolvency.



In the long run, the programme is **aiming for an increase to 40% of women's employment in the potato value chain**. The increase in the number of women being employed in the potato sector is measured by the programme once per year. To monitor the gender-specific progress and to get feedback on female and male entrepreneurs in the Nigerian potato value chain, SEDIN is also generating **studies and documentation** such as the *2012 Enterprise Baseline Survey* and the *2014 Enterprise Survey* that are **containing sex-disaggregated information**.

Women's participation in economic activity is not only promoted through women's increased employment in the potato value chain, but also in the cassava and rice value chains, as well as in other areas of intervention of the SEDIN programme such as women's access to financial resources.

To achieve gender-specific progress not only on the local but also on the state level, the programme is supporting civil society groups, agencies of the government working with women and the legislative assembly of Plateau State in improving the legal and policy enabling framework for women's socio-political and economic participation. SEDIN has supported the **passage of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill** which contains, among others, a provision on economic empowerment of women. This was achieved through a strong cooperation between the programme and the various stakeholders and demonstrates that positive gender results can be achieved in economic development projects by mainstreaming gender issues into their activities.

Breaking gender stereotypes through women's economic empowerment

With the introduction of the improved variety and the accompanying trainings to run their businesses, the programme's initiative has not only helped to increase the economic situation of these women, but has also facilitated their socio-cultural empowerment, which can be seen from the following testimonials:

"My husband usually quarrelled with me when I was stocked with the old local potato seeds and I could not show any result for my effort, but since I tried the improved variety, my husband has been very supportive." – Phoebe Peshik (Peret Women Group)

"Whenever my customers come to the market to buy potatoes, they call me Madam Marabel-Elizabeth Istifanus." - Elizabeth Istifanus (Nashak Potato Group)

"Now, I am able to provide for my family and have gained respect from my husband who is now supportive of my business and partnership with GIZ." – Phoebe Peshik (Chairwoman Peret Women Group)

To promote the potentials for women in the potato value chain even further, several women were trained in how to make and sell potato cakes in the region.



A new economic opportunity – Potato cake production in Plateau State

With the **introduction of potato cake making** in some parts of Plateau State (Hwoarza, Gyel, Bauchi Ring Road, Bokkos, etc.), the programme has created another form of employment for women and has helped to significantly increase and diversify the income of women as over **1,500 women were trained** in potato cake making. They were also trained in financial literacy and entrepreneurship to see potato production as a business venture where record keeping is a key asset in determining how profitable potato production can be. Many of these women have **multiplied the trainings** towards other women and act as **role models** for them to follow suit.

Some testimonials from the ‘potato cake women’ as they are – kindly – called, reveal the following:

“I used to be a full-time house wife, but after I attended the workshop, I came back home and started a potato cake business. I used the profit I made in taking care of my family. I also extended my business by selling raw potatoes and other agricultural produce.” – Esther Samson

“People call me to make potato cakes for them during some occasions. I have supplied these cakes to wedding events where they serve the cakes to only special guests. I usually make 100% profit from potato cake production.” – Christy Gideon



“When I started the business, people enjoyed eating the cakes so I decided to make them in different sizes so as to make it affordable to everyone. I have been able to train about seven women in potato cake making and I have plans on the ground to train some final-year students in a secondary school. I believe the students can use the knowledge gained in making some money before gaining admission into tertiary institutions.” – Felicia Olusegun

Through the activities in the potato sector and through women’s integration into the value chain, women have increased their employment, income and socio-cultural status and have succeeded to be lifted out of poverty as the overall objective of the programme; or as Mrs. Elizabeth Istifanus from the Nashak Potato Group put it in other words: *“People also refer to the Marabel potato variety as “Wata Biyu mai Kashe Talauchi” (Hausa) which translates to “two months that kill poverty” and which is referring to the seed variety’s early maturity date of 60 days.*

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