

Enhancing Awareness of New Common Bean, Cowpea, and Soybean Varieties in Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western Africa Through Private Sector Engagement

1 | Background

A common avenue for delivering information about new, improved legume (common bean, cowpea and soybean) varieties is demonstrations and innovations like farmer field days, agricultural shows and seed fairs. The main objective is to cause a demonstration effect to facilitate the adoption of new technologies. Demonstration effects serve as a bridge between research and adoption. Demonstrations allow farmers to compare varieties and management practices and adopt the varieties and practices that fit their farming systems context. Demonstration effects refer to the influence that observing or experiencing a successful demonstration has on an individual's behavior or decision-making. Agricultural shows and seed fairs offer farmers the choice and flexibility to access seeds, stimulate markets, and build up private sector businesses.

On-farm demonstrations are an entry point where farmers can see the benefits of improved legume varieties firsthand. Demonstrating higher yields, disease resistance, or other desirable traits of new varieties encourages adoption. When farmers witness positive outcomes from adopting new practices or technologies, they are more likely to adopt similar approaches. Successful demonstrations create a ripple effect. When one farmer successfully adopts a new variety, neighbors take notice and follow suit. Extension services, research organizations, and NGOs play critical roles in organizing effective demonstrations.

Evidence of successful demonstrations is important in strengthening extension services' ability to conduct effective on-farm demonstrations. By highlighting market potential, demonstrations can encourage the adoption of varieties for commercial purposes, and other knowledge dissemination channels like social media can complement traditional demonstrations for wider impacts. Showcasing the benefits of improved legume varieties and farmers adopting them can enhance food security, productivity, and livelihoods.

To successfully promote new agricultural practices and technologies, it is crucial to adopt a collaborative approach involving key private sector stakeholders, particularly seed producers, processors and traders. The Pan-African Bean Research Alliance (PABRA) and IITA partner, through the Seed Equal initiative, have been instrumental in this effort. PABRA and IITA have facilitated the creation of numerous demonstration plots by working in partnership with private entities. These demonstration sites serve as platforms to showcase and popularize newly developed legume varieties and integrated management techniques. Through these collaborative efforts,

PABRA and IITA aimed to enhance the adoption of innovative agricultural practices, thereby improving productivity and sustainability in the legume seed sector.

The demonstration plots were primarily established and managed by various stakeholders, including individual farmers, farmer cooperatives, farmer groups, seed companies, and traders. These demonstrations took place in 12 countries participating in the Seed Equal initiative. For common beans, the countries included Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. For cowpea and soybean, the participating countries were Nigeria, Ghana, and Mozambique.

These partners were brought together through the formation of Multistakeholder platforms. These platforms, which were established either at a regional level or at a more localized firm level. The purpose of these platforms was to foster collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders, ensuring the successful implementation and promotion of new agricultural practices and crop varieties through the demonstration plots.

2| Outcomes of three year of catalyzing private sector investments in common bean, cowpea and soybean seed promotion.

Through these collaborative efforts, 10,472 demonstration plots were set up over the three years as part of the Seed Equal interventions. This comprised 2280 demonstrations in 2022, 4520 in 2023, and 3672 in 2024, respectively. These plots were designed to showcase improved legume varieties, many developed within the past decade, and various Integrated Crop Management (ICM) options.

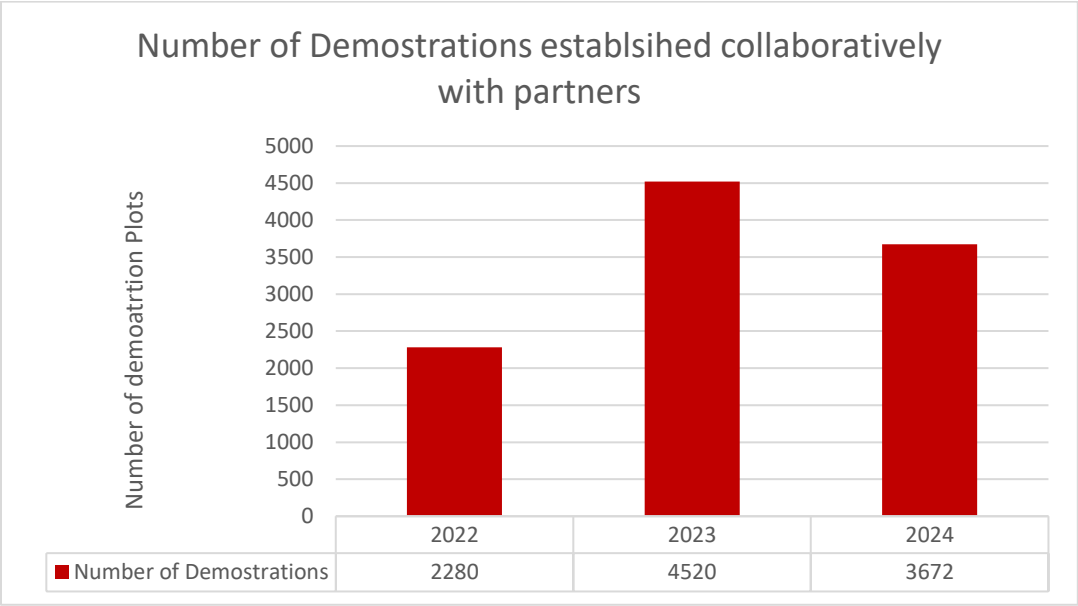


Figure 1: Number of demonstrations established (2022-2024)



Kariba Seed Company Booth at the National Show



I&J Harvest Limited Demonstration in Rwanda



Demonstration in Nigeria



A visit to HIB stand by Governor, Machakos County, Kenya



Tata Bakary in the field during the exchange visit in Foubot, Cameroon



Field Day in Nigeria



Field Day in EIAR, Melkassa, Ethiopia



Seed fairs organized in Nigeria

To further promote these advancements, 224 field days were organized where farmers could observe the demonstration plots firsthand and learn about the new practices. Additionally, 169 agricultural events, including seed fairs and agric shows, were held to provide further exposure and education about the new varieties and ICM options. Overall, these promotional activities are estimated to have directly reached approximately 103,452 farmers (including 47,664 women)¹, helping them to adopt new and improved agricultural practices.

¹The reach could have been high, but data capture for such events is complicated, and thus most receipts may not have been counted

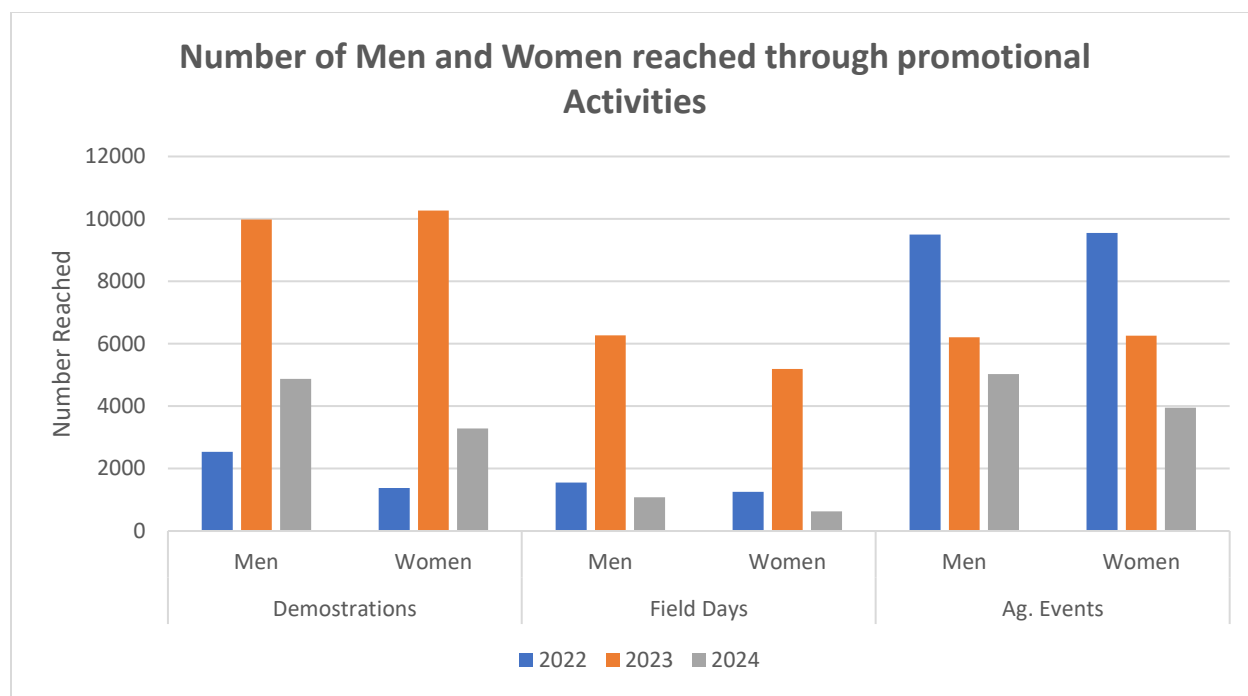


Figure 2: Number of Legume farmers reached (2022-2024)

3| Conclusions

Involving the private sector in collaborating with the public sector, such as the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), in various demonstrations can offer several advantages over relying solely on NARS. Private companies are motivated by market demand, ensuring that the varieties they promote are aligned with farmers' needs and preferences, leading to higher adoption rates. Private sector entities often have more financial resources and infrastructure to support large-scale demonstrations and promotional activities, enhancing the reach and impact of these initiatives. For example, if NARS had ventured solely into demonstration establishment, the scale of demonstrating 10,472, established in 3 years, would not have been possible. Furthermore, once varieties are adopted, the private sector is vested in providing continuous support and scaling up successful varieties beyond initial demonstrations, ensuring long-term sustainability and widespread adoption. This makes the private sector engagement a more efficient promotion strategy to accelerate the development and dissemination of new varieties. The private sector is typically more dynamic in adopting and integrating innovative technologies, which can improve the effectiveness and visibility of demonstration plots. By leveraging the strengths of the private sector, variety demonstrations can become more effective, reaching a more significant number of farmers and promoting the rapid adoption of improved agricultural practices and crop varieties.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SeedEqual's WP 2 acknowledges all the partners that were involved in the generation of these outputs. Partners in the National Agricultural Research Systems: Department of Research and Specialist Services (DR&SS - Zimbabwe); Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI-Zambia); Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO – Kenya); Center for Dryland Agriculture/Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria (CDA/BUK-Nigeria),, National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO); INSTITUT DES SCIENCES AGRONOMIQUES DU BURUNDI (ISABU) - Burundi, Department of Agricultural Research and Specialist Services (DARSS) -Eswatini, Institut de Recherche Agricole pour le Développement (IRAD) – Cameroon, Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) – Ethiopia, Instituto de Investigação Agrária de Moçambique (IIAM) – Mozambique, CSIR Savanna Agricultural Research Institute; University of Agriculture, Makurdi (UAM –Nigeria); Agricultural Research Institute of Mozambique; RAB – Rwanda. played a significant role. Other partners include private seed companies, Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Based Organizations, Schools, agro dealers, Extension agents, bean, cowpea, and soybean off takers, and academic institutions.

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