



# Evaluation of Market Access Programme in Middle and Sorghum Belt of Nigeria

Executive Summary

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## **Executive Summary**

In Nigeria, small-scale farmers face a variety of problems such as: inappropriate policies, lack of access to profitable markets, lack of agricultural support services, lack of participation in decision-making and poor management of natural resources. The Middle Belt (Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa), where farmers grow mainly rice, maize, vegetables and yams, is one of the poorest regions in Nigeria. In the North, where sorghum is grown, the problems of farmers are worsened by harsh weather and low soil fertility. Sorghum is a staple food as well as raw material for the beverage industry. The beverage industry is a potential market for sorghum, though farmers sell to them through middlemen. There are huge gender inequalities, especially in the North where women, among others, do not have title to farmland and cannot participate in decision-making.

In order to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers in the Middle and Sorghum Belt, Oxfam GB designed a programme in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Due to limited funding, the programme began as a one-year pilot. Oxfam GB has been working with six service delivery organisations to provide fertiliser and micro-credit in the Middle Belt and with model farmers and community associations to provide fertiliser and extension services (also through demonstration farms) in the North. The evaluation was meant to: (a) assess the development and planning processes and the achievements and challenges of the market access programme, including gender considerations; and (b) illustrate how lessons learnt can enhance a redesign of a follow-up project.

An achievement of the market access programme has been the setting up of MIBSSFANET (market access network in the Middle Belt), which has mobilised 3977 farmers of which nearly 55% are females. The majority of the registered farmers are maize growers. About 17% and 24% of farmers have obtained fertiliser and micro-credit respectively. In the Sorghum Belt, 337 farmers have been mobilised for fertiliser allocation. The programme has, however, suffered from lack of a clear strategy, which sometimes led partners to duplicate activities of each other.

There is no doubt that the provision of micro-credit and fertiliser has been of enormous help to small-scale farmers. However, the primary problem of Nigerian agriculture and economy is the neglect of government to develop effective policies and facilitate the provision of services. Thus, the market access programme, both in the Middle and Sorghum Belt, should make advocacy and campaign (the right to be heard) a central strategy. MIBSSFANET should mobilise and empower small farmers to enhance their participation in decision making and lobby for access to agricultural services. MIBSSFANET must be strengthened in order to manage the activities in both the Middle and Sorghum Belt, which will facilitate coordination and exchange of information and experiences.

The relation between Oxfam GB and some partners must improve. Oxfam GB should develop and implement a partner policy, enabling weaker partners to obtain technical guidance from Oxfam GB staff about project development and financial management. It is important to have an independent audit into the operation of the "grant accounts" opened by Oxfam GB in Jos Lafia.

The pilot programme has promoted gender equity and equality. Women are actively represented in MIBSSFANET and the partner organisations. About 55% of registered farmers and 61% of beneficiaries of micro-credit are females. In the North, however, women are completely absent in the community associations. Only 2 beneficiaries of fertiliser (out of 337 beneficiaries) were women. The appeal of the Sorghum project is not so much about the number of male farmers reached with fertilizer, but the ability

to support community associations to organise themselves into marketing units and form gender-based groups which can give women a voice.

The pilot project has been successful in both the Middle and Sorghum Belt in establishing baseline data to ensure an effective monitoring and evaluation of an follow-up (scaling up) activities. In the Middle Belt, most of the partners have been able to compile gender-disaggregated data.

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