

# East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer

## Background information

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### **Background to East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer**

Recognizing the need for improved on-farm skills and innovation, East-West Seed supports intensive training to farmers as a precursor to commercial activities in less developed or emerging markets. To ensure that these pre-commercial training activities are most effectively geared towards benefiting smallholder farmers, the company created an independent non-profit foundation 'East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer'. Dedicated to showcasing profitable and sustainable production practices, East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer works hand-in-hand with farming communities in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and (soon) Bangladesh.

This sustainable solution to market development has been recognized through the Access to Seed Index, and more recently, the contribution that this brings towards improved nutrition through the 2019 World Food Prize awarded to the founder of East-West Seed, Simon Groot.

By providing long-term technical support in communities struggling with low yields, East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer catalyses the uptake of improved production practices. The resulting demand for higher quality farm inputs drives the development of competitive and sustainable agri-input markets. In this win-win situation, farmers benefit from improved knowledge and access to a wider range of products from East-West Seed as well as a range of other companies supplying mulch, trellis net, seed trays, better quality agri-chemicals and other seed varieties.

With improved production knowledge farmers are better able to optimize the benefits of using improved varieties adapted to local agronomic and climatic conditions. Alongside better farm practices, improved varieties offer smallholder farmers increased vigour and yield and greater resilience to disease and stress. In addition, superior marketable and post-harvest qualities enables farmers to better align their production towards the specific needs of their markets.

### **How we work with farmers**

Pre-commercial Knowledge Transfer centers around building skills on profitable and sustainable agricultural technologies and practices. Leveraging a peer learning approach, local Technical Field Officers support key farmers to manage hands-on demonstrations showcasing improved production practices. These are used as 'hubs of good practices' to train neighboring farmers on key stages of crop production:

- Improved land preparation (including optimal layout and raised beds).
- Sustainable soil management (understanding soil as a living system)
- Improved seedling production (showcasing different systems of seedling production from improved open bed nurseries to the use of leaf pots and seedling trays).
- Effective pest and disease management (including safe and judicious use of pesticides).
- Effective nutrient management (correct type, placement and timing of fertilisers).
- Use of trellising
- Use of mulching (rice straw and plastic)
- Water management
- Business management (variety selection, crop planning and farm record keeping)

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To further amplify knowledge dissemination, technical field days are organized on each demo. As well as providing technical information on crop production, these trainings (open to any interested farmers), are used to promote the economic opportunity of vegetable production. Sharing financial and marketing information (cost and return analysis of farm records) helps accelerate farmers' understanding on the benefits of adopting new varieties, technologies and practices.

By supporting about 20 key farmers over at least 3 crop cycles, each Technical Field Officer is able to directly reach approximately 1,000 farmers (with varying degrees of intensity) every year. In our experience, showcasing replicable and profitable production practices for several seasons is enough to put farmers on a track towards becoming more innovative and risk taking. Once this happens farmers are better able to find solutions to new problems and to distinguish between genuine and profit driven advice from local agri-input suppliers.

Currently East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer reaches 100,000 farmers per year with field based activities. Over the coming years we hope to increase this number to 300,000 farmers per year.

### **Extension material**

East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer has produced a series of high quality training modules and extension material specifically designed for smallholder vegetable in local languages. To ensure best practices and up to date recommendations on agro-chemicals, these materials are designed in close cooperation with Wageningen University and Research. All of EWS Knowledge Transfer extension material (technical crop guides, instructional videos) are available through our on-line learning platform [GrowHow](#)

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer uses an advanced App based farm management and monitoring system to track activities and record expenditures and returns on each demonstration farm. This information is used to evaluate profitability of different crops over different seasons. Detailed information of farmers participating in all training events helps with tracking the adoption of improved practices amongst groups of farmers.

### **Use of digital media**

East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer is increasingly using digital media to share knowledge more widely in farming communities. Although this cannot substitute field based activities, digital media is an attractive opportunity for farmers to strengthen their knowledge within project areas as well as widening the knowledge network to farmers outside of the project.

As well as supporting knowledge exchange in social media groups, East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer is currently piloting a new approach to learning through mobile networks. Farmers will be able to follow intensive modules at their own pace and receive a joint certificate with Wageningen UR on successful completion.

### **Partnerships**

East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer is funded through a fixed percentage of EWS seed sales. To enable wider outreach we leverage additional resources of like-minded organizations such as ACIAR, ADB,

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AVRDC, DFAT, DFID, GIZ, ICCO, MEDA, Mercy Corps, Netherlands Enterprise Agency, Embassy of the Netherlands Uganda, SNV, Solidaridad, Swisscontact, USAID, Wageningen University and Research etc. As well as funding, we look for cooperation which brings complementary skills such as community mobilization, access to finance, conflict sensitivity, youth and gender inclusion etc.

### **Africa**

Over the last few years, East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer has been steadily growing its presence in Sub Saharan Africa. With a large market potential and relatively undeveloped horticultural sector, East-West Seed has supported technical training to smallholder farmers in Tanzania since 2014. From 2017 East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer has supported the development of a team of 25 local experts focused on pre-commercial farmer training in northern Uganda. This includes an innovative project aimed at bringing pragmatic economic opportunities to refugees from South Sudan and their host communities.

More recently, East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer has started building a team of 25-30 extension officers in Nigeria. After intensive training over 2018, the first part of this team become operational in early 2019 in Kaduna. Initial pre-commercial knowledge transfer activities will focus in Northern Nigeria (especially Kaduna and Kano which have more than 400,000 Ha of vegetable production). However with time and resources it is expected to extend these activities to other states where there is a need to develop the skills of Nigeria's smallholder farmer community.