

Seed distribution initiative to combine food security and Ebola containment strategies

Thousands of smallholder farmers in Liberia are set to benefit from an innovative seed distribution initiative that seeks to strengthen the fragile food system by providing quality seed paired with Ebola prevention messages to farmers - many of whom cannot access critical inputs, particularly seeds.



Image source: [AGRA](#)

The initiative is led by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) in partnership with the government and other stakeholders.

"The 50MT of high yielding yellow maize seed donated today will go a long way in ensuring that smallholder farmers and their families remain food secure during this difficult period of the Ebola epidemic," says AGRA President, Dr Agnes Kalibata. "We do not want the Ebola epidemic to spiral into a food crisis."

"Ebola has the potential to disrupt our food systems, since it affects the most productive parts of our economies - much like the HIV pandemic did in the past. AGRA has built a platform that can help deliver not only agricultural inputs but health messages and awareness," said Strive Masiyiwa, Board Chair of AGRA and Chief Executive Officer of Econet Wireless. "I am excited to see AGRA shoring up support for small-holder agriculture in Liberia in partnership with the government and private sector, while combating Ebola," he added that the AGRA platform is one of the most effective delivery mechanisms in Africa, led by Africans.

Targeting smallholder farmers in four counties, starting in Liberia

Though Liberia as a country is largely dependent on agriculture, the sector has suffered severe setbacks with many of its smallholder farmers unable to produce at an optimal level. This situation has been worsened by the negative impact of the Ebola epidemic, where farmers have left their fields for fear of Ebola. The new initiative by AGRA is targeting smallholder farmers in four counties, starting in Liberia. The high yielding maize seed has the potential to increase harvests by a factor of two to three, mitigating food supply pressure, while Ebola awareness messages and simple tools like buckets and soaps will provide farmers the first line of defense against the disease.

AGRA worked with the governments of Liberia and Ivory Coast, the African Development Bank and the private sector in this effort. "AGRA is grateful to the African Development Bank President, Dr. Donald Kaberuka and the Ivory Coast government for assisting us to get the seeds across the border in good time," said Dr Kalibata.

"With this support from the Econet Development Foundation, and in response to the looming food crisis in the country, our Program for African Seed Systems (PASS) will intensify its work by increasing access to high quality seed to improve agricultural practice and food availability for Liberian smallholder farmers," says PASS Director, Joe DeVries. "We will work in partnership with the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, private seed companies, national farmer organisations and other local partners to ensure that the support provided gets to the targeted farmers."

While this round of seeds is distributed freely, given the financial pressures faced by farmers, this initiative is part of the comprehensive approach that AGRA takes to ensure better food systems by creating seed companies and training agro-dealers to create the proper market incentives to ensure long-term economic sustainability.

Through previous support from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, PASS has worked to build a sustainable seed system based on farmer demand for quality seed. The organisation is currently supporting three local seed companies to produce, multiply, and make quality seeds available to farmers. PASS has also provided funding to the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) to research on staples such as rice, cassava, and maize in order to improve agriculture productivity and has trained eight Liberian seed specialists at the Kwame Nkrumah University for Science and Technology, Ghana, all in the bid to ensure smallholder farmers in the country break away from using low-yielding seeds to high-yielding ones.

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