

# Developing Rural Agribusinesses to Transform South Sudan's Agriculture

By Catherine Mgendi

After years of technological isolation due to protracted war, the world's newest nation prepares to transform its agricultural production to meet rapidly growing food demands.

Juba – Rural agro-dealers across the Equatoria states of South Sudan last week received training to improve their business management skills and knowledge of agro-inputs (including fertilizer, improved seed, and crop protection products) to help the country transform its agriculture from subsistence farming to commercial production.

With U.S. Government support through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), rural agro-dealers from Central, Eastern, and Western Equatoria states were trained on how to effectively supply and guide farmers on the proper use of agro-inputs, including hybrid maize and fertilizers, as they prepare for the next planting season due to start in March. The use of agro-inputs is in line with new government policies aimed at increasing food production. The training was provided by Seeds for Development, a new project funded by USAID and implemented by the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) in partnership with the USAID-funded Food, Agribusiness and Rural Markets (FARM) project.

This is the first time in the history of the southern Sudan region that farmers will be exposed to hybrid seeds and mineral fertilizers following the drafting of new government policies to increase food production.

"The agro-dealer training is an essential step in catalysing the development of a private sector that can supply farmers with agro-inputs to increase food production in the long term. Establishing commercial farming – rather than subsistence farming – is essential to develop the economy of South Sudan," said IFDC country representative Dr. Caleb Wangia.

About 85 percent of the people of South Sudan rely on agriculture for their livelihood. However, most of the country's farmers use traditional farming methods, which barely meet their daily household consumption needs. The country imports more than 80 percent of its food from Uganda and Kenya in order to satisfy the rapidly growing national food demand.

"Our experience in helping smallholder farmers gain access to agro-inputs across Eastern Africa shows that at least 35 percent of farmers rely on agro-dealers for information about agricultural technologies. We therefore have to educate the agro-dealers about the types of fertilizers best suited for different crops, how they should be applied and how farmers benefit from using agro-inputs," said Allan Mukisira, the project's agro-dealer specialist.

The Seeds for Development project will also connect trained rural agro-dealers with input manufacturers and suppliers, and financial institutions so that they can access credit to increase their stocks of agro-inputs in order to effectively meet farmer demands.

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