



## Agric Productivity Success Story: **Helda Ishaku's Transformative Journey**

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*Dear Partners and Stakeholders,*

***As we joyfully step into the promising year of 2024, it is my great pleasure to extend warm Christmas greetings and best wishes for a prosperous New Year to each one of you. May this festive season bring joy, peace, and an abundance of blessings to you and your loved ones.***

Now, let us delve into the first edition of the Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity Newsletter for the year 2024. As we embark on another chapter of our journey, I am delighted to share the

remarkable stories and achievements that have unfolded in the agricultural landscapes of Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe States.

Our first-quarter review meetings set the stage for the year, bringing together over 218 participants in a collaborative effort to enhance knowledge exchange, strategic planning, and advancements in the agricultural sector. The central theme of these meetings, "Strengthening Partnerships," resonated powerfully, emphasizing the transformative power of collective efforts. We celebrate the commitment and enthusiasm of Extension Agents, Women in Agriculture (WIA) Agents, and Community-Based Seed Entrepreneurs (CBSE) leaders who actively engaged in discussions on establishing and managing cooperatives.

Financial access, a cornerstone of agricultural development, took center stage with insightful sessions on loan opportunities for farmers' cooperatives. Representatives from NIRSAL Micro Finance Bank and Unity Bank shared valuable insights, announcing a favorable interest rate for our CBSEs. This landmark decision is set to provide farmers with greater financial flexibility, paving the way for increased investment and growth.

In our unwavering commitment to leaving no one behind, our Youth and Gender Officer, Mrs. Aishatu Alli, led constructive discussions on empowering women and marginalised groups. Her emphasis on promoting gender equality and social inclusion echoes through the pages of this newsletter: "By dismantling barriers and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities..., empowered women become the engines of thriving communities."

Our journey into the year 2024 is marked by impactful initiatives, including targeted seed distributions for dry-season farming and empowering Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) households through small and medium-scale processing training. These efforts not only empower individuals but contribute to the resilience and prosperity of entire communities. In these pages, delve into the success story of Helda Ishaku, a subsistence farmer whose story symbolises hope, resilience, and community leadership. His journey from hardship to sustenance is a testament to the effectiveness of our Activity in fostering positive change.

As we celebrate these achievements, let us reflect on the collaborative spirit, dedication, and resilience that define the Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity. Together, we are laying the groundwork for a thriving agricultural future, one harvest at a time. Wishing you a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year, and an insightful and inspiring read,

**Mr. Prakash Silwal Kant**

*Chief of Party*

*Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity*

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# Quarterly Review Meeting- Strengthening Partnerships

***We are delighted to share the success of the Agricultural Productivity Unit's first-quarter review meetings, which marked a significant milestone in the fifth year of the Activity. Across Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe States, comprehensive sessions engaged over 218 participants, providing a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, strategic planning, and advancements in the agricultural sector.***

A central theme that resonated throughout these meetings was the transformative power of partnerships. From collective bargaining advantages and economic efficiency to risk mitigation and enhanced market access, the discussions underscored the myriad benefits that farmer-driven organizations bring to the table. Participants, including Extension Agents, Women in Agriculture (WIA) Agents, and Community-Based Seed Entrepreneurs (CBSE) leaders, gained valuable insights into establishing and managing cooperatives, paving the way for a more collaborative and prosperous agricultural landscape.

Recognizing the vital role of financial access in agricultural development, the meetings featured informative sessions on loan opportunities for farmers' cooperatives. Representatives from NIRSAL Micro Finance Bank and Unity Bank shared valuable insights into various loan packages, terms, and government initiatives aimed at de-risking the sector. Notably, a negotiated rate was announced, providing farmers with greater financial flexibility and laying the groundwork for increased investment and growth.

In our commitment to leaving no one behind on the journey towards agricultural progress, the Youth and Gender Officer, Mrs. Aishatu Ali, led constructive discussions on empowering women and marginalised groups. Aisha emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality and social inclusion in agricultural practices, stating, "By dismantling barriers and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for women farmers, we witness a ripple effect – not only do overall yields and food production increase, nourishing more mouths, but empowered women become the engines of thriving communities."

Looking ahead, the review meetings not only celebrated past achievements but also laid the foundation for a successful second quarter, in FY2024. Stakeholders collaborated actively to develop strategies, address challenges, and set ambitious goals. This dedication to collective action accentuates the Agricultural Productivity Unit's commitment to driving positive

change in the agricultural sector of Northeast Nigeria.

The Activity is laying the groundwork for a thriving agricultural future by promoting collaboration, empowering farmers, and advocating for inclusive practices. As we move forward, the lessons learned and partnerships forged during these impactful review meetings will continue to bear fruits, guaranteeing a more prosperous and equitable future for all.



▲ Photo: A cross-section of the participants at the Gombe module of the Activity's Quarterly Review Meeting listening to the Youth and Gender Officer, Aisha Ali.



▲ Photo: The DCoP, Mr. Kayode Faleti, Addressing participants at the Borno State Meeting held in Biu.

# Empowering Dry Season Farming Through Seed Distribution

*In a strategic move to bolster dry season farming, the Activity recently executed targeted seed distributions with the landholdings of Community-based Seed Producers (CBSPs) in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states. This distribution played a crucial role in providing foundation rice and maize seeds to 98 farmers, as part of the groundwork for an impactful dry season cultivation.*

The success of this endeavour can be attributed to the meticulous planning and execution of the seed distribution, which directly benefited farmers in the implementation states. The distribution process followed a well-structured training program on dry season seed production, collaboratively delivered by the Agric Productivity Unit and officials from the National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC).

Notably, the targeted seed distribution resulted in 21 farmers embracing maize cultivation, dedicating a total of 16.9 hectares of land to this vital crop. Simultaneously, 77 farmers enthusiastically embraced rice cultivation, diligently stewarding an impressive 53.65 hectares of farmland. The impact of this initiative is far-reaching, showcasing the commitment of the Activity to enhancing agricultural productivity during the dry season.

The collaboration between the Activity and NASC officials played an important role in equipping farmers with the knowledge and resources needed for successful dry-season farming. This partnership further exemplifies the power of collective efforts in driving positive change within the agricultural sector.

As we reflect on the outcomes of this initiative, it is clear that the combination of targeted seed distribution and comprehensive training has empowered farmers to make the most of the dry season. The dedication of these farmers to cultivating maize and rice speaks volumes about their commitment to sustainable and resilient agricultural practices.



▲ Photo: Dry Season farming seed delivery at farmers skill acquisition center in Fufore to EAs prior distribution to the participatory dry season farmers in Fufore LGA

▲ Photo: Dry season seed distribution at Old Demsa in Demsa LGA

# Empowering Internally Displaced Persons Through Small and Medium-scale Processing Training

*In a significant step towards fostering self-sufficiency and empowerment, the Activity recently conducted a step-down training for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) households. A total of 191 households, comprising 89 in Adamawa (1 male and 88 female) and 103 all-female households in Yobe, were equipped with essential skills in small and medium-scale processing of legumes and cereals.*

This activity took place across communities in Yola South, Gombi, and Hong Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Adamawa State, as well as Fika LGA in Yobe State. The primary goal of the training was to promote the consumption of nutrient-dense legumes and cereals through food diversification, focusing on food safety and handling. By enhancing the processing skills of beneficiaries' households, the program aimed to uplift nutrition, livelihoods, and purchasing power within these displaced communities.

During the training sessions, participants delved into practical sessions of processing a diverse range of safe meals from soybeans, peanuts, cowpea, sorghum, millets, maize, and rice. The curriculum not only covered the practical aspects of small-scale processing but also emphasized the nutritional values and health benefits of the foods being processed. Furthermore, women were educated on removing various anti-nutritional factors in soybeans, such as trypsin inhibitors, which could potentially interfere with children's growth and development.

The impact of this training extends beyond the immediate acquisition of skills. Women who participated gained confidence in preparing nutritious meals using locally available foodstuffs. This newfound knowledge has not only enhanced the nutritional well-being of their households but has also empowered them to venture into small businesses aimed at improving their livelihoods.

An inspiring outcome of this initiative is the emergence of a few women who, just a day after the training,

started their own business in soya milk production. This entrepreneurial spirit contributes to the economic resilience of these households and also adds to the local production and availability of nutritious food options.



▲ Photo: A cross-section of the participants at the training held in Gundiri community in Shani LGA, Adamawa State.



▲ Photo: Participants at the training held in kukurpu community, Hong LGA, Adamawa State.



# Agric Productivity Success Story: **Helda Ishaku's Transformative Journey**

*In the serene rural landscape of Song Local Government Area in Adamawa State, North East Nigeria, a 32-year-old subsistence farmer named Helda Ishaku faced the daunting challenges of insurgency and economic hardship. For years, Helda toiled in his fields, grappling with meagre harvests and the looming threat of insecurity. Little did he know that a transformative journey awaited him, one that would change his life and the landscape of his community.*

Three years ago, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) introduced Helda Ishaku to the Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity, a program funded by USAID aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity in the region. This marked the beginning of a journey that would turn challenges into opportunities for Helda.

Embracing the program, Helda received crucial support - improved seeds, including the

resilient Sammaz 27 maize variety, along with valuable knowledge in good agricultural practices and business development skills. With newfound resources and knowledge, Helda cultivated one hectare of land in 2022 and reaped an impressive harvest of 25 bags of grains, a significant leap from his previous average of less than 15 bags in previous years.

Helda's success continued to grow in 2023 as he planted the improved Sammaz 51 variety,

achieving an even more bountiful harvest of 28 bags. But Helda's story goes beyond personal success; it is a story of community engagement and empowerment.

Recognizing the importance of giving back, Helda is gearing up to employ local youth in his community, sharing the knowledge and skills he gained from the program. In doing so, he becomes not only a successful farmer but a community leader and mentor, symbolizing hope for a brighter future in North East Nigeria.

Today, Helda proudly stands in front of his completed house, a tangible symbol of his journey from hardship to prosperity. His business has flourished, and with careful financial planning, Helda now boasts savings. No longer burdened by debt, he can comfortably provide for his family and has secured a storage facility for his grains.

As we witness Helda Ishaku's success story, we see more than just a farmer – we see a community leader, a mentor, and a symbol of hope for a brighter future in North East Nigeria. Thanks to the USAID-funded Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity, lives are changing, one harvest at a time.

“ ***His business has flourished, and with careful financial planning, Helda now boasts savings. No longer burdened by debt, he can comfortably provide for his family and has secured a storage facility for his grains.*** ”



◀ Photo: Excited Helda in front of his completed house.

# Strengthening Women in Smallholder Families through Cosmetology Training

*In Kwaya Kusar local government area of Borno State, Maryam Hauwa Sajo, a 33-year-old mother of four, has emerged as an example of entrepreneurial success. Identified through her local women's association and mobilized for service under the USAID Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity, Maryam is a good example of the transformative impact of the women-focused non-farm enterprise development program, specifically in the field of cosmetology.*

Before her journey with the intervention, Maryam was a petty trader selling zobo drinks and sachet water, aspiring for a more reliable source of income to support her family's needs. In 2021, she became one of the participants in the cosmetology training organized to empower and deepen the resilience of women in rural communities. The training became a catalyst for Maryam's entrepreneurial spirit.

After completing the cosmetology training, Maryam diversified her business by venturing into the production of petroleum jelly, hair cream, shampoo, and liquid soap alongside her existing zobo and sachet water business. She recounted, "To my surprise, I sold everything within one week," highlighting the immediate success she experienced with her newly acquired skills.

Starting her cosmetology business with a modest personal investment of 5,000 naira, Maryam's venture has now grown to approximately 50,000 naira investment. She has successfully produced over 1,000 litres of liquid soap and more than 50 cycles of petroleum jelly and hair cream. Maryam's weekly sales reach up to 8,000 naira, with an average profit of 3,000 naira on each production cycle. Her customer base has expanded to nearby villages, attracting wholesale buyers seeking quality cosmetology products.



▲ Maryam Sajo displaying her products

In Maryam's own words, "Adding cosmetology to my business has changed my story in the community and improved my livelihood, thanks to IITA and USAID for the skills."

Despite her success, Maryam faces challenges related to credit sales and delays

in payment from customers, impacting her production capacity. In response, the Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity is proactively addressing this issue by organizing financial literacy and business management training for micro-enterprises in the first quarter of 2024.

Under the guidance of the Activity, Maryam has also taken steps to formalize her business by registering it with the Small and Medium Scale Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) with Business registration ID: SUIN62385243.

Maryam's journey from a small-scale trader to a thriving entrepreneur exemplifies the positive

impact of targeted training and support for women entrepreneurs. Her success story resonates as a testament to the transformative power of empowering women in rural communities, creating a ripple effect of change that extends far beyond individual households.

As we celebrate Maryam's achievements, we look forward to continuing our commitment to women and gender empowerment, fostering resilience, and creating sustainable pathways for success in the communities we serve.

# IAA Participates in the Annual Agribusiness Outlook Roundtable of the Institute of Agribusiness Management of Nigeria (IAMN)

*The USAID-funded Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity participated in the national roundtable for 2024 agribusiness outlook in Nigeria, hosted by the Institute of Agribusiness Management of Nigeria (IAMN), at Jades Hotel, 24 Ndola Crescent, zone 5, Abuja, on Saturday 9th December 2023. The Activity was represented by the Youth and Gender Facilitator, (Quadri Shakiru) who is also a Fellow of the Institute (FIAM). Participants in the workshop include fellows, associates, members of the Institute and stakeholders across the country and sectors, including the academia, government, non-profit organizations, private sector, agribusiness teachers and practitioners in the value chain.*

The keynote address, which was delivered by the Registrar of the Institute, Professor Ayodele Olorunfemi (FIAM), dwelled on critical insights for navigating the future of Nigeria's agriculture and agribusiness in 2024 and beyond. He drew the attention of participants to emerging global and local trends that will drive Nigeria's agribusiness sector in the coming years, such as precision agri-

culture, artificial intelligence (AI), inclusive agricultural policy and practice, the youth bulge and youth in agribusiness initiatives, climate variability and climate change, regional trade policies and opportunities, including the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA). Dr Steve Arowolo (FIAM), a South Africa-based Agric economist who spoke on

“Market Trends and Strategies for Nigeria’s Agribusiness in 2024” took participants through anticipated market trends and the potentials and implications for Nigerian local agribusinesses. He spoke about agricultural insurance through the prism of the value chain; and issues bordering on global demand and supply, product quality, food safety and export opportunities even within the ECOWAS sub-region.

Panel and plenary discussions examined the importance of specific, adaptable and sustainable technological innovations for Nigeria’s Agribusiness towards survival in 2024 and beyond. Digital agriculture, climate-smart farming systems, sustainable practices for increased productivity, and improved income

across the agribusiness value chain were recommended. The Youth and Gender Facilitator, Integrated Agriculture Activity, leading a discussion session suggested a paradigm shift in efforts to attract youth participation in agriculture and agribusiness, including concrete efforts to stop the “dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean” and the lure for insurgency by the youth, out of frustration. He also called for transparent and purposeful leadership at all levels, as an inspiration for youth participation. Participants also called on the government to consider a strategic policy instrument that can stimulate agricultural productivity, and ensure a steady food supply, farmers’ resilience, stable farmers’ income, environmental integrity, and rural development, such as the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).



◀ A call out of Fellows of the Institute at the workshop, IAA youth & gender coordinator (Quadri Shakiru), extreme left.



◀ Cross-section of participants at the workshop



### **About the Activity**

The Feed the Future Nigeria Integrated Agriculture Activity (IAA) issued under the US Government's Global Food Security Act was awarded by USAID Nigeria to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and its partners in July 2019 towards the economic recovery of North-East Nigeria, in the wake of the devastation caused by the ongoing insurgency in the region.

The Activity supports vulnerable populations in 12 Local Government Areas of Adamawa and Borno states to re-engage in basic farming activities and aims to advance the objectives of inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth, strengthened resilience among people and systems, and a well-nourished population, especially among women and children in targeted locations.

To achieve these objectives, the Activity works with a coalition of public and private sector partners to facilitate improved agro-input and extension advisory services to serve vulnerable populations; strengthen the institutions that form the market system and the networks that serve smallholder farmers disenfranchised by conflict, and facilitate the engagement of youth and women in economic and entrepreneurial activities.

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