

## SUCCESS STORY #17

# Improved Niger seeds generate better livelihoods

In 2008/2009 the Niger seed was the second largest oilseed export in Ethiopia, accounting for 29 percent of the country's oilseed production., but the use of low-yield seed varieties and poor agronomic practices have kept smallholder yields of the crop low, averaging just 600 kg/hectare.

In June 2009 the USAID/Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Program (USAID-ATEP) set out to improve small-scale production of the Niger seed, partnering with Holetta Agricultural Research Center (HARC) to produce a higher yielding certified seed. The program provided a grant to facilitate the multiplication of two varieties of the Niger seed: Shambu-1 and Kuyu.

“Expanding the technology is essential to improving productivity and developing better access to the Niger seed for an increased number of smallholders,” said Dr. Bulcha Woyessa Dega, Oilseeds Research Team Leader at HARC.

The new seed varieties were produced from a basic seed provided by HARC and distributed to 120 growers working a combined 30 hectares of land near Guder, southwest of Addis Ababa, where farmers had had particularly low yields, averaging 400 kg/hectare. The program provided them with training and technical assistance on plowing, sowing, weeding, fertilizer application and seed germination rate.

“We have been producing Niger seed for other farmers for many years, but we never had access to this select seed or the appropriate knowledge for planting it,” said Gutema Geleta, a Guder farmer.

In November 2009 program farmers harvested nearly 23 metric tons of Niger seed, producing on average 700 kg/hectare—an increase of 350 kg/hectare. They will sell the seed to an estimated 5,000 smallholders through local markets, so that more Niger seed farmers can reap the benefits of the improved seed.

“We used to get 3 birr per kg. Now the price has tripled and we are also getting a 15% premium for producing the high quality basic seed,” said Getachew Eticha, one of the program farmers.

To ensure the sustainability of the seed multiplication initiative, an additional 120 smallholders have been selected to participate in the next program, beginning June 2010. More than 3.2 million smallholders in Ethiopia rely on oilseed crops for their livelihood. Oilseeds include Niger seed, sesame, groundnuts and linseed. These crops are produced on nearly 885,000 hectares across the country.

USAID-ATEP is a five-year initiative supporting four major industry sectors: horticulture; coffee; hides, skins and leather; and oilseeds and pulses. The program is improving productivity and competitiveness for thousands of Ethiopian farmers, processors and exporters, resulting in increased sales, investments, employment and incomes.



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A woman weighs Niger seeds at a market in Guder



Smallholder farmers discuss improved Niger seed technologies at a farmer field day in Guder

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— Gutema Geleta, smallholder farmer in Guder