

Sukuma Wiki Super Seed

Smallholder vegetable production is an important engine for economic growth in peri-urban areas of East and southern Africa. Growing vegetables provides nutrition, income and employment to over four million poor people in Kenya. The potential number of beneficiaries is huge – in Kenya alone there are more than two million farmers growing significant quantities of vegetables and almost everybody is a consumer of vegetables, particularly kale or *Sukuma wiki*, meaning ‘pushing the week’ in Kiswahili.

Realising that unless good viable seed is planted a good crop cannot be produced, project R8312 has worked jointly with the farmers to strengthen existing systems, through tackling the issue of quality and health of kale seed. The project team has a unique composition, combining expertise from the research, regulatory, farming and private sectors.

Many kale farmers in Lari Division near Nairobi save their own seed of non-commercial kale varieties. The farmers informed the researchers of the methods they use in saving the seed and their perceptions of seed quality. This traditional process of saving seed carries the risk of spreading seed-borne diseases, or can result in poor quality seed due to diseases which have a detrimental effect on germination and productivity. The researchers were able to make recommendations which improved these systems.

The regulatory authority, KEPHIS, has a key role in assisting the farmers in characterising their kale lines in order to describe a variety that they can call their own. Five improved kale lines are currently undergoing trials for distinctness, uniformity and stability across different agro-ecological zones in Kenya. Already, indications are that improved seed production will provide economic benefits to both seed producers and kale farmers with indirect benefits to consumers. Lagrotech Seed Company has provided a valuable commercial perspective, and the Director Dr Moses Onim said that getting involved with kale farmers and looking at the genetic diversity has been a very valuable exercise and he has never seen such good kale lines in his life. Working with the kale producing communities has provided them with the opportunity to commercialise varieties in a market with great demand for better varieties.

This project has led both to improvements in the kale seed system and to the establishment of new working



Participatory learning with farmers



Covering kale seed heads with plastic bags protects them from attack by birds



Improved Kinale kale seed lines

relationships between key elements in the ‘informal’ sector in Kenya. Potentially this is a key foundation stone in the development of the traditional vegetable cropping systems.

R8312: Promotion of quality vegetable seed in Kenya
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