

North Kivu farmers decry lack of seeds



A small-scale maize farmer. Small-scale farmers in eastern Democratic Republic Congo are struggling to get access to improved seeds due to a nascent seed industry, an inefficient business environment, poor infrastructure and insecurity in some areas. PHOTO | FILE

IN SUMMARY

- Improved seed varieties would increase the farmers' productivity and yield. However, many farmers in North Kivu are making losses due to using bad seeds because the few available improved varieties are not affordable.
- Farmers who talked to *The EastAfrican* said the improved seeds used in their area are smuggled in from Rwanda and they are very costly.
- According to Partners for Seed in Africa (PASA), local enterprises are not well developed; the regulatory system is weak; while free seeds distribution by non-government organisations is killing distribution businesses.

Small-scale farmers in eastern Democratic Republic Congo are struggling to get access to improved seeds due to a nascent seed industry, an inefficient business environment, poor infrastructure and insecurity in some areas.

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According to the farmers, the seed from Rwanda is sold at \$5 per kilogramme, which is unaffordable for many.

"We don't sow it because we don't have money to buy it, but it grows well here," said Furaha Sharubuto from Goma town. Ironically, in Rwanda, very few farmers use the improved variety seeds. According to figures from Rwanda's Institute of Statistics, about 84.5 per cent of small-scale farmers used traditional seeds while 15.5 per cent used improved seed varieties in the 2015 season.

Now, a local agricultural research institute involved in hybrid seed production has recently launched a new initiative that offers small-scale farmers affordable hybrid varieties that will increase productivity four times more than with traditional seeds. A kilogramme of the hybrid seed will be sold for \$1.50 instead of \$2.50.

The institute is also offering the first 10,000 farmers who purchase a kilogramme of the hybrid maize seed, six kilogrammes of fertiliser for free.

"Some of the farmers don't understand the importance of the improved seed varieties, so we will conduct trial farms to demonstrate the results of using the improved seeds versus using traditional seeds," said Audrey Muke Manzekera, a researcher at the local agricultural research institute, while on a field visit to a hybrid maize trial farm in Kanyaruchinya, North Kivu.

Jane Ininda, associate programme director at Partners for Seed in Africa (PASA), an organisation that supports seeds producers in several African countries including DR Congo, said the seed industry in the country is nascent.

"First of all, there are no local seeds companies and there were no hybrid maize seeds being developed here," she said.



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According to Dr Ininda, there are also no seed distributors in North Kivu.

“When you hear farmers say they use seeds smuggled in from Rwanda it is because there is nobody to sell the seed to them here,” she said.

According to PASA, local enterprises are not well developed; the regulatory system is weak; while free seeds distribution by non-government organisations is killing distribution businesses.

Poor infrastructure and insecurity are also other hurdles affecting the seed industry in eastern DR Congo.

Scientists estimate current agricultural production in the area to be less than 1 tonne per ha against a potential of 4-7 tonnes per hectare.

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