ANNUAL REPORT
2020
OCTOBER 1, 2019 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation is a USAID-funded program that builds partnerships with agribusinesses to help them sell new products and services to smallholder farmers, who represent a potential market of more than 500 million customers worldwide. With program support, more than 1.7 million smallholder farmers have purchased over $110 million worth of these products and services to date, enabling them to boost farm production, increase incomes, reinvest in their businesses, and strengthen food security. In total, Partnering for Innovation has helped to commercialize 133 technologies and management practices.

In fiscal year 2020, Partnering for Innovation’s partners sold $6.7 million worth of technologies to smallholder farmers and leveraged nearly $3 million in private sector investment.

OCTOBER 1, 2019 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

304,963 farmers cultivating 354,832 hectares of land have benefited from partnerships

13 technologies and management practices commercialized, with $6,671,000 in sales of technologies by partners

$2,997,000 in leverage spent by partners to date, $2,774,567 invested by Partnering for Innovation

CUMULATIVE: FY 2012 – 2020

1,713,198 farmers cultivating 849,064 hectares of land have benefited from partnerships

75 partnerships in 24 countries through September 2020

133 technologies and management practices commercialized, with $110,036,515 in sales of technologies by partners

$104,580,000 in leverage spent by partners to date, $47,112,712 invested by Partnering for Innovation
New Partnerships

Partnering for Innovation launched 16 new partnerships in fiscal year 2020, which are currently being implemented with the support of the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (USAID/RFS) and USAID/Mozambique.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRICE RISK MANAGEMENT</th>
<th>USAID/Bureau for Resilience and Food Security</th>
<th>2 PARTNERSHIPS, $432,598*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide smallholder coffee producer organizations with knowledge, tools, and financing to effectively mitigate price risk exposure.</td>
<td>=&gt; Farm Africa Limited, Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)</td>
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<td>=&gt; Oikocredit International, Peru</td>
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<tr>
<th>MOZAMBIQUE</th>
<th>USAID/Mozambique</th>
<th>4 PARTNERSHIPS, $1,746,723*</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support recovery from Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, and strengthen resilience to environmental and economic shocks.</td>
<td>=&gt; EcoEnergia, Mozambique</td>
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<td>=&gt; Empresa de Comercialização Agrícola Lda. (ECA), Mozambique</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>=&gt; International Development Enterprises (iDE), Mozambique</td>
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<td>=&gt; NCBA CLUSA, Mozambique</td>
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<tr>
<th>COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE</th>
<th>USAID/Bureau for Resilience and Food Security</th>
<th>10 PARTNERSHIPS, $1,199,521*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliver customized assistance to private sector agribusinesses to enable them to support and sell to smallholder farmers, create jobs, and drive economic growth both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
<td>=&gt; Agro-Inputs Suppliers Ltd. (AISL), Malawi</td>
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<td>=&gt; Bell Industries, Kenya</td>
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<td>=&gt; Casa do Agricultor (Cda) Farmer’s House, Mozambique</td>
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<td>=&gt; EthioChicken/Flow Equity LLC, Ethiopia</td>
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<td>=&gt; Good Nature Agro, Zambia</td>
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<td>=&gt; Musoni Microfinance Ltd., Kenya</td>
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<td>=&gt; Servicios de Post Cosecha, Guatemala</td>
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<td>=&gt; ReelFruit/Nature’s Bounty Health Products, Nigeria</td>
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<td>=&gt; Stewards Globe, Zambia</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>=&gt; Tolaro Global SAS, Benin</td>
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*Total Partnering for Innovation program investment
COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on the Agribusiness Sector

During FY2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 intensified the challenges already faced by agribusinesses in emerging markets. To better understand these impacts, Partnering for Innovation turned to its global network of private sector agribusiness partners to learn first-hand how they were responding in five critical business operation areas: Sales; Workforce; Liquidity and Financing; Production; and Decision-Making.

The response rate from partners was high, with invaluable on-the-ground insights garnered from 44 partners in 19 countries operating across four agribusiness sectors: Improved Inputs and Production; Postharvest Processing and Storage; Information and Communications Technology; and Access to Finance. Responses revealed that the majority of these businesses were facing significant challenges, especially when it came to sales of products and services, production of technology products, and overall company cash flow and cash holdings. Key findings from the COVID-19 Partner Survey are highlighted below. Partnering for Innovation designed new awards to assist 10 of these partners in responding to the economic fallout of the pandemic through a new COVID-19 Pandemic Response activity with support from USAID/RFS (see the COVID-19 Pandemic Response section for more information).

**SALES**

*Significant drop in sales*

- 86% experienced a decrease in sales

**WORKFORCE**

*Deep and enduring cuts*

- 36% have laid off or furloughed employees

**LIQUIDITY & FINANCING**

*Clock is ticking to save businesses*

- 41% have 3 months or less in current cash flow and cash holdings to maintain operations

**PRODUCTION**

*Significant drop in production*

- Nearly half of partners that experienced a production decline in April 2020 saw levels drop by 50% or more

**DECISIONS**

*Cash is a top priority*

- The vast majority of partners listed cash as the most important type of support desired for navigating the pandemic
Acceleration Services

In FY2020, Partnering for Innovation launched the Growing Women’s Entrepreneurship (GroWE) award and announced its two inaugural winners: Linnet Akol of Krystal Ice and Sylvia Natukunda of Farm Reap. As award recipients, the Uganda-based agribusiness owners were matched with local business development service providers tasked with co-designing and delivering tailored business support services to the two companies. In a separate initiative, Partnering for Innovation provided customized acceleration services to two current partners in Latin America – Semilla Nueva and Acceso Oferta Local – to support their efforts in addressing critical commercialization and overcoming barriers faced by their respective businesses.

Lastly, Partnering for Innovation commissioned two studies in FY2020. The first study will explore key lessons learned and best practices in commercializing agricultural traceability software products in emerging markets, using two former program partners – Solutions S.A. and Farmforce – as case studies. The second study will capture the extent to which past program investments in private sector agribusinesses have catalyzed transformational change in the markets in which selected partners operate.

Thought Leadership

This year, Partnering for Innovation continued efforts to capture and share lessons learned about making agricultural technologies and services commercially available for smallholder farmers in partnership with private sector businesses. In October 2019, the program invited two former program partners to speak about their experiences commercializing new technologies and services in smallholder markets at SOCAP19, a major annual social investment conference. In June 2020, more than 80 people joined a Partnering for Innovation-hosted webinar titled Challenge & Opportunity: How Three Female Agricultural Entrepreneurs are Responding to COVID-19, to learn about the efforts of three program partners in adapting their businesses to the challenges introduced by COVID-19. In addition, the program published 19 articles, along with an infographic series, that spotlighted partner achievements, new program partnerships, and key results from the COVID-19 partner survey. This content was promoted extensively through Partnering for Innovation’s online communication platforms and monthly newsletter, and was frequently amplified through Feed the Future’s newsletter and social media platforms.
Partnering for Innovation is working with the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security to promote technologies and services that strengthen smallholder farmer capacity to respond to risks and shocks such as drought, floods, pests and disease, and volatile markets.
Background

Through this partnership, Agri Seedco Limited (Agri Seedco) will strengthen farmer resilience in Kenya by increasing access to and demand for its two improved sorghum seed varieties among smallholder farmers. Agri Seedco will produce, process, market, and sell sorghum seed through expanded seed outgrower and agrodealer networks. The company’s sub-partner, Cereal Growers Association (CGA), will work with farmers to establish demonstration plots and provide agronomic support on sorghum production. Agri Seedco and CGA will organize farmers into groups and link them to aggregators and other bulk sorghum buyers, including breweries, which receive incentives from the Kenyan government to procure sorghum locally. Agri Seedco will also link farmers to millers, which will likely soon be required by the Kenyan government to fortify maize flour with sorghum and other more nutritious grains.

Sorghum is an attractive alternative to maize production for Kenyan farmers, as maize is increasingly vulnerable to inconsistent rains and increased incidences of traditional and emerging pests, including fall armyworm, maize lethal necrosis, and striga (witchweed). Agri Seedco’s improved sorghum varieties, SC Sila and SC Smile, are drought-tolerant, disease-resistant, and early-maturing, making farmers more resilient to changing climates. Both varieties are also higher-yielding than traditional sorghum varieties and, due to their high malting content, are ideal for brewing beer. East African Breweries Limited is already using SC Sila sorghum as an alternative to barley in its beer production.

FY2020 Progress

Agri Seedco continues to focus on producing and commercializing SC Smile and SC Sila in the Kenyan market. In FY2020 the company completed a commercialization report on SC Smile, a brown sorghum variety preferred by Kenyan consumers and less susceptible to damage from birds. Agri Seedco also submitted this variety for a malting test for potential use by Kenyan breweries. However, the variety did not pass and the company is pursuing other commercialization opportunities. This year, Agri Seedco also achieved its partnership production target by producing 310 metric tons (MT) of sorghum and has sold 50 MT of the seed to date.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Agri Seedco and CGA have faced difficulties in training agrodealers, hosting field days, and managing demonstration plots due to movement and gathering restrictions introduced as a way curb the spread of the virus. A curfew imposed by the Kenyan government, combined with an increased tax on alcohol, also significantly reduced demand for beer, and in turn, the sorghum used to brew it. With fewer off-takers for sorghum grain, demand for seed has fallen among smallholder farmers as they pivot to crops with more reliable end-markets. In response, Agri Seedco leveraged social media and other digital tools to replace in-person meetings and trainings, and is exploring ways to connect smallholder farmers to new end-buyers for sorghum grain, such as animal feed processors, millers, and export markets.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Agri Seedco aims to sell an additional 260 MT of sorghum seed to smallholder farmers. However, falling demand for sorghum poses a significant risk to meeting this goal and locust infestations in the region threaten to destroy crops. Agri Seedco and CGA will provide extension services to farmers, train agrodealers, and form linkages between growers, aggregators, and end-buyers of sorghum. The company will also pursue new buyers of SC Smile.
COLDHUBS LIMITED
MARCH 2019 – FEBRUARY 2021

Background

Through this partnership, ColdHubs will reduce postharvest loss and increase smallholder farmer resilience by establishing 10 new solar-powered cold storage hubs across Nigeria, each equipped with two cold rooms (20 cold rooms in total). This network of hubs will link high-production, weak-market zones in northern Nigeria with high-demand market centers in the south. To facilitate this linkage, five hubs will be established at farmer clusters in the northern states of Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, Gombe, and Benue; an additional five hubs will be established at market centers in the southern states of Ogun, Lagos, Enugu, Abia, and Rivers.

The hubs will operate on a pay-per-use model, charging farmers for each 20 kilograms crate of produce stored per day, thereby allowing them to rent only the space they need. At full capacity, each hub will be able to store 150 crates and serve 200 customers per day, with customers storing and withdrawing their produce at different times as needed. ColdHubs will increase demand for and awareness of its cold storage service by hiring hub operators and market promoters at each site who will train farmers, traders, and retailers on the importance of postharvest cold storage. Through workshops and field days, these trainings will emphasize postharvest loss prevention with topics ranging from sorting, grading, and packaging to on-farm cooling and best practices in transportation, storage, and preservation.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, ColdHubs established four new hub sites, equipped with two cold rooms each, in market centers located in the northern state of Kano and in the southern states of Lagos, Ogun, and Abia. Prior to opening, ColdHubs staff at each of these locations conducted trainings to raise awareness of the benefits of cold storage and to develop relationships with vendors and farmers.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

Early in the pandemic, country-wide lockdowns resulted in the complete closure of all hubs and significant revenue loss for the company and its farmer customers. The opening of additional hubs was delayed due to pandemic-related challenges in importing essential equipment and accessing closed market sites. In response, ColdHubs developed a COVID-19 response plan outlining its strategy as well as its construction and procurement objectives for moving forward with expansion. In July 2020, the Nigerian government slowly began lifting restrictions on the movement of people and goods, and partially opened markets. ColdHubs has since resumed plans for establishing six new hubs, each equipped with two cold rooms, before the end of the calendar year.

Going Forward

In FY2021, ColdHubs will establish six new hubs. Two of the hubs will be located in southern Nigeria, targeting retailers and wholesalers, with the remaining four in northern Nigeria aimed at farmer clusters and aggregation centers. New hub operators will be trained to deliver postharvest management workshops to prospective customers on a quarterly basis. As the new hubs become operational, ColdHubs expects to make progress toward reaching its partnership sales milestones.
HESTER BIOSCIENCES NEPAL PRIVATE LIMITED
MARCH 2019 – FEBRUARY 2021

Background

Through this partnership, Hester Biosciences will improve livestock health and the resilience of smallholder herders by commercializing a thermostable version of the Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) vaccine in Nepal. Since the first reported case in 1994, PPR has become endemic in Nepal among small ruminants (sheep and goats), which provide a critical source of income and food for smallholder households. While a PPR vaccine is available in Nepal, the current formula is not thermostable and therefore requires a cold chain from production to vaccination. This results in very limited distribution of the vaccine to rural areas where the majority of smallholder herders are located. Through this partnership, Hester will commercialize a thermostable and thermostolerant PPR (TPPR) vaccine developed by Tufts University targeting smallholder herders in Nepal. Hester will transfer the technology to its facility in Nepal, license the technology for sale in-country, and undertake commercial production and distribution of the vaccine.

Hester will develop a reliable supply chain for vaccine distribution by utilizing Nepal’s network of agrodealers and vaccinators, including the government of Nepal’s agrovets, junior veterinary technicians, and Community-based Animal Health Workers (CAHWs). From its production facilities, Hester will sell directly to large distributors at the district level who will supply vaccines to agrovet retail shops in rural areas. Veterinary technicians and CAHWs will then have access to the vaccines for last-mile distribution to farmers. Hester will train CAHWs on the risks of PPR, the benefits of the TPPR vaccine, and proper vaccination techniques, including safe handling and disposal of equipment post-vaccination. As a result of these trainings, CAHWs will be equipped to distribute the vaccine using a fee-for-service model and will raise awareness of the dangers of PPR among smallholder farmers, increasing demand for the vaccine.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Hester defined its strategy for distributing the TPPR vaccine in Nepal, which included identifying distributors and local retailers, and their locations. Hester also included capacity building strategies for rolling out the vaccine to actors along the distribution supply chain. Finally, the plan outlined Hester’s strategy to ensure the integrity of the vaccine, from distributors to farmers.

Hester made significant progress in the production of the TPPR vaccine in FY2020. This included receiving approval from the Nepal Department of Livestock Services to import PPR Nigeria 75/1 master seed to begin vaccine production, finalizing the technology transfer process from Tufts University, and receiving its quality certificate from the Pan African Veterinary Vaccine Centre of the African Union (PANVAC).

COVID-19 Impact and Response

Hester is in the final stage of the regulatory approval process as it awaits a marketing license from the Nepal Department of Drug Administration (DDA). While the application was submitted in March 2020, the DDA has been leading the COVID-19 response in Nepal and all non-COVID-19-related approvals have been put on hold until the pandemic is under control.

Going Forward

Hester will begin selling the vaccine in the Nepalese market once it receives its license, and work toward its goal of selling 400,000 doses of the TPPR vaccine by the end of January 2021.
NEUMANN KAFFEE GRUPPE GMBH
MARCH 2019 – FEBRUARY 2021

Background

Through this partnership, Neumann will increase smallholder farmer resilience in Honduras and Kenya by establishing farmer service units (FSUs) embedded in its in-country subsidiary companies. While FSUs will be tailored to the country-specific needs of coffee producers, each FSU will offer smallholder coffee farmers a comprehensive financing package paired with technical assistance and training on production practices. FSU field officers will provide technical assistance on integrated pest management, safe pesticide use, and best harvest practices. The financing package will include short-term loans for fertilizer and other inputs; medium-term loans to purchase processing equipment and facilities at the cooperative level; and long-term loans to renovate coffee trees with high-yielding, drought-tolerant, and pest- and disease-resistant varieties. Financing will take the form of input advances or credit, which will be repaid by farmers through coffee sales to Neumann. These initiatives will stabilize Neumann’s supply chain while benefitting farmers through improved coffee quality, lower production costs, and higher incomes.

To aid this process, Neumann will launch the Field Buzz software application to improve management, traceability, and reporting along its supply chains in Kenya and Honduras. The application will map individual growers, assess credit worthiness, monitor financing, and eventually, enable Neumann to track coffee from farmer to consumer and sell traceable coffee at a premium.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Neumann disbursed loans to three cooperatives in Kenya and 59 cooperatives in Honduras, providing more than 19,210 farmers with access to $4,590,100 in financing. The company launched a pilot program to provide 100 farmers in Honduras with long-term loan packages to update aging farms with more productive, disease- and drought-tolerant coffee trees. Through this initiative, farmers planted more than 300,000 improved varieties of coffee on more than 100 hectares of land.

Neumann continued to build its FSU program in FY2020, with cooperatives in Kenya using Field Buzz to accept 6,844 MT of fresh coffee cherries delivered by smallholder farmers. The company also completed its Field Buzz strategy report to guide the development of key modules related to inventory management and financial transactions. In Kenya, Neumann will expand the software application to new cooperatives and develop additional advanced modules. In Honduras, Neumann will invest in additional trainings and awareness campaigns to ensure farmers and cooperatives are knowledgeable of Field Buzz.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

The outbreak of COVID-19 prompted governments in both target countries to implement movement restrictions. FSU technicians in Kenya were unable to deliver in-person Field Buzz training to new cooperative leaders. In Honduras, the company faced difficulties holding group trainings and delayed the rollout of the Field Buzz purchasing modules.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Neumann will expand its FSU program to at least seven additional cooperatives in Kenya, and to at least 30 additional cooperatives and 200 individual producers in Honduras. Neumann will develop, test, and launch new Field Buzz modules in both countries. Finally, Neumann will complete a final plan to hone its expansion objectives over the next five years, including potential strategies should proposed new coffee regulations take effect in Kenya that may make it difficult or impossible for the company’s subsidiary to disburse long-term loans.
Background

Through this partnership, Takaful will sell index-based livestock insurance to Kenyan pastoralists facing increased herd loss due to recurrent droughts. Takaful’s Sharia-compliant insurance product – Index-Based Livestock Takaful (IBLT) – uses predefined drought conditions to trigger automatic payments for pastoralists at risk, preventing negative coping strategies that often compromise pastoralists and herds. When the index pays out to policyholders, payments are delivered via mobile money, which they can use to purchase fodder and water, or to cover costs for more distant scouting and grazing. Rather than replacing an animal after it dies, payouts allow pastoralists to keep their herds healthy, even in times of drought-related shocks and stresses.

To increase awareness of and demand for its insurance product, Takaful will expand its sales agent network and conduct community education and outreach campaigns in target counties. Because most pastoralists have no experience with any form of insurance, Takaful will train communities on the benefits of insurance and why it is important to purchase it every season, even though the index will not always trigger a payout. Working with sub-partner Project Concern International (PCI), Takaful will bundle its insurance product with the mobile application “AfriScout,” developed by PCI. This application helps pastoralists identify the nearest water and forage sources using satellite imagery and community input. It also identifies hostile groups of herders and predators by crowdsourcing information from other users of the application. This eliminates the need for costly scouting trips and helps pastoralists make informed resource decisions.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Takaful achieved its first sales milestone by selling 3,617 IBLT policies, with 1,121 of them bundled with the AfriScout application. Building upon a previously developed joint marketing plan, Takaful and PCI introduced a new promotional package offering pastoralists a progressive discount on the IBLT/AfriScout bundle as they purchased additional coverage. The launch of the promotion – initially planned for the August/September 2020 sales window – was delayed due to training and coordination issues between Takaful and PCI.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

The outbreak of COVID-19 further delayed the launch of Takaful’s new promotional package. COVID-19 response restrictions made it difficult for Takaful to train agents and hold promotional events, and contributed to lower sales in areas more affected by the pandemic. In response, the company shifted to one-on-one trainings and promotional activities. Due to these delays, Takaful extended its August/September 2020 sales window until the end of October 2020.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Takaful and PCI will collaborate during the extended and upcoming (January/February 2021) sales windows, and aim to make up their sales deficit by selling an additional 5,383 IBLT policies, with 5,129 of them bundled with AfriScout. Takaful expects to make large insurance payouts in the coming year due to current drought conditions in Kenya, with plans to offset this cost by increasing premiums.
Partnering for Innovation is working with the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security to provide smallholder coffee producer organizations with knowledge, tools, and financing to effectively mitigate their exposure to price risks.
Background

Through this partnership, Farm Africa, in collaboration with Root Capital, will improve the price risk management (PRM) capacity of at least 30 coffee producer organizations (POs) in Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by delivering workshops to a minimum of 90 PO management representatives. Root Capital will identify POs from its existing and prospective loan client base in these three countries to participate in Farm Africa’s PRM workshops. Farm Africa will develop PRM training curriculum tailored to the unique needs of the participating POs and deliver two rounds of workshops to each group. These PRM workshops will equip POs with the capacity to better understand their exposure to price risk and apply PRM tools and strategies to mitigate that risk.

By integrating the PRM workshops within the client base and pipeline of a working capital provider, the workshops will function as a de-risking tool to facilitate access to finance. POs that complete the PRM training course and demonstrate improved PRM capacities will be considered for loans from Root Capital. Root Capital will approve at least $225,500 in credit to participating SPOs during the life of the partnership.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

Farm Africa had initially planned for the PRM trainings to take place in-person during the months of March/April 2020. However, given COVID-19-related travel restrictions and precautions, Farm Africa was forced to initially postpone the trainings and eventually adapt the curriculum for remote delivery. In FY2020, Farm Africa worked with its PRM expert consultants to modify and migrate the training curriculum to an online platform, combining self-paced modules with live virtual classrooms. Additionally, Farm Africa completed a strategic plan, through which it formulated a business and growth strategy, and developed a willingness-to-pay survey to be conducted with participating POs in FY2021.

Going Forward

In November 2020, Farm Africa will deliver its remote pre-harvest PRM trainings to representatives from at least 30 POs across Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC. Root Capital loan officers will also participate in this training series in order to provide follow-up support to the individual POs. In FY2021, Farm Africa will deliver a second set of PRM trainings (in Spring 2021); work with Root Capital to approve $225,500 in new loans to POs that have received the PRM trainings and demonstrated their improved capacity to manage price risk; and conduct a willingness-to-pay survey with participating POs.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Farm Africa and Root Capital identified more than 40 coffee producer organizations across the three target countries that agreed to participate in the PRM program. Farm Africa conducted a remote PRM self-assessment with the POs, which collected more than 75 data points on each organization, and used this baseline information to establish a profile and develop tailored PRM curriculum at the basic, intermediate, and advanced levels.
Through this partnership, Oikocredit – through the Stichting Oikocredit International Support Foundation – will improve the price risk management (PRM) capacity of at least 10 smallholder coffee producer organizations (SPOs) in Peru. Oikocredit will deliver trainings and one-on-one tailored support services on PRM strategies and tools to SPO management representatives. In addition, Oikocredit will transform its current spreadsheet-based Open Position tool into a streamlined Open Position Dashboard that directly sources data from SPOs’ existing management systems to generate a real-time “open position” (i.e., the net measurement of price exposures). Oikocredit will train SPOs to use this open position information to improve their decision-making regarding physical and financial management strategies to mitigate and minimize risk in the face of price volatility. As a result of these capacity-building efforts, SPOs that demonstrate improved capacity to manage price volatility will be eligible for options financing from Oikocredit. At least $80,000 in options financing to participating SPOs will be approved by Oikocredit during the life of the partnership.

**FY2020 Progress**

In FY2020, Oikocredit identified 11 coffee SPOs that committed to participating in the PRM program. Oikocredit held kick-off meetings and conducted in-person baseline assessment visits with each of the SPOs, during which it collected information on initial PRM capacity and software management systems. Using this information, Oikocredit developed and launched its Open Position Dashboard product and add-ins with the SPOs. The system includes seven distinct modules for data management and is available online and offline in desktop and mobile versions.

**COVID-19 Impact and Response**

Oikocredit nimbly responded to COVID-19-related travel restrictions by launching its dashboard and providing ongoing support and monitoring to the SPOs remotely. To date, 10 SPOs have uploaded data to at least one module. Oikocredit also hired an education expert consultant to adapt its basic, intermediate, and advanced PRM training curriculum – initially meant to be delivered in-person to SPO representatives in June 2020 – to an interactive e-learning platform. As of the end of FY2020, the curriculum has been fully developed and will be delivered in October 2020 after the main harvest campaign has concluded.

**Going Forward**

In the coming months, Oikocredit will facilitate its remote PRM training sessions with the SPOs, and continue to work closely with SPOs to improve uptake and use of the Open Position Dashboard tool. In FY2021, Oikocredit will approve at least $80,000 in new options financing for participating SPOs that have demonstrated a strong capacity for managing price volatility. Finally, Oikocredit will continually monitor the PRM capacity of the SPOs, along with their use of financial derivatives as a PRM strategy, and submit a long-term strategic growth plan to guide Oikocredit’s strategy for scaling its PRM training and tool offerings in Latin America and beyond.
COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Partnering for Innovation is working with the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security to deliver customized assistance to private sector agribusinesses to enable them to support and sell to smallholder farmers, create jobs, and drive economic growth both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo credit: Katey Linskey/Semilla Nueva
Background

From 2015 to 2017, Partnering for Innovation partnered with Agro-Inputs Suppliers Ltd. (AISL) to scale its production and distribution of the legume inoculant NITROFIX to help boost smallholder productivity of soya (soybeans) in Malawi. Under this partnership, AISL established demonstration plots, built a laboratory facility to produce NITROFIX, and successfully commercialized NITROFIX in 12 districts of Malawi, selling more than 500,000 sachets to smallholder farmers. AISL has since expanded into new products and services, including selling legume seeds. AISL has also established an outgrower scheme through which contracted smallholder farmers produce soya using AISL products – the company then purchases, aggregates, and sells the soya both domestically and regionally.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, AISL has experienced barriers to export markets, decreasing sales, increasing costs, and difficulty fulfilling its contracts with client farmers. Movement restrictions and social distancing requirements in Malawi have also prevented AISL from conducting its typical in-person marketing and sales activities.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with AISL in FY2020 to ensure the company can effectively manage its supply chain in order to continue delivering high-quality agricultural inputs to smallholder farmers. Through this partnership, AISL will pivot its business model by piloting new remote marketing strategies that eliminate the need for in-person events. AISL will also invest in an enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform that will provide AISL with real-time information to better track its sales, orders, inventory, and distribution. Ultimately, this platform will help AISL improve its responsiveness to the changing demands of customers, and consistently fulfill that demand. With these new systems in place, AISL will aim to sell more than 100 MT of legume seed and 50,000 sachets of NITROFIX inoculant to smallholder customers.

FY2020 Progress

AISL produced a strategic plan outlining the steps the company will take to address COVID-19-related challenges facing its operations and to increase its resilience to future shocks and stressors. In this plan, AISL presented strategies for achieving its growth objectives, including employing a company-wide ERP system to remotely manage inventory and developing virtual marketing and purchasing mechanisms via online platforms.

Going Forward

In FY2021, AISL will launch a new marketing strategy to reach customers during COVID-19 through targeted social media campaigns, local agrodealer networks, and field days and demonstrations that are compliant with social distancing and gathering restrictions. These marketing efforts will leverage marketing and sales information drawn from AISL’s new ERP software system, which will be rolled out in FY2021.
Background

From 2013 to 2014, Partnering for Innovation partnered with Purdue University to support Bell Industries in introducing Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICS) bags, a small-scale grain storage solution that reduces post-harvest loss, to the Kenyan market. The partnership aimed to increase adoption of PICS bags by Kenyan smallholder grain producers in order to strengthen household food security and provide farmers with the option of delaying grain sales to capture higher off-season prices. Purdue University and Bell Industries successfully introduced and scaled the PICS bag technology in Kenya, selling a total of 60,177 PICS bags under the partnership.

Bell Industries has faced a number of challenges since the outbreak of COVID-19. Product delivery delays, rising production costs, transportation and logistics bottlenecks, and the temporary closure of many agribusinesses that typically sell its products have adversely impacted the company’s operations and sales. In addition, Bell Industries’ in-person sales and training models have been complicated by movement and gathering restrictions, as well as unreliable transportation services. Finally, as consumers prioritize cost and necessity over quality, farmer demand for PICS bags – which accounts for 60 percent of the company’s current sales revenue – has fallen.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with Bell Industries in FY2020 to ensure the company continues to supply PICS bags to the smallholder market during and after the pandemic. Through the partnership, Bell Industries will adapt its business operations to overcome mobility and logistics challenges, and further drive sales of its PICS bags. The company will hire 10 youth promotors to conduct approximately 1,000 small-group product demonstrations and trainings, which will comply with social distancing and health protocols, to reach an estimated 15,000 smallholder farmers. Bell Industries will also conduct a remote sensitization and marketing campaign to complement these field activities. Finally, Bell Industries will work with its sales agents and youth promotors to expand its one-to-one sales and distribution model. As part of this effort, Bell Industries will pilot an on-demand transportation service to deliver PICS bags efficiently from warehouse to distribution points.

FY2020 Progress

Bell Industries began to develop a strategic plan detailing actions the company will take to address the impact of COVID-19 on its operations and increase long-term resilience. Through its pivot to new marketing, sales, and distribution approaches, the company will develop a more diverse, resilient business model, and continue to drive sales of PICS bags to meet the post-harvest storage needs of smallholder grain farmers.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Bell Industries will hire, train, and deploy youth promotors; conduct adapted trainings and marketing activities; scale its one-to-one sales model; and pilot a new on-demand transportation service to deliver PICS bags.
Background

From 2016 to 2018, Partnering for Innovation partnered with agribusiness Casa do Agricultor Farmers House, Lda (CdA) – known at the time as its subsidiary, Tecnologia e Consultoria Agro-Pecuária, LDA (TECAP) – to scale its network of one-stop agriculture service centers and expand its distribution of agro-inputs in Mozambique. The partnership reached more than 18,750 smallholder farmers with sales of improved agro-inputs and mechanization services totaling $2.8 million.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on CdA’s business operations. Import restrictions and supply chain disruptions have cut CdA off from many of its agro-input suppliers in Europe and Asia, and mobility restrictions have made it difficult for the company to reach its client base, especially last-mile customers located in remote rural areas.

In response to these challenges, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with CdA in FY2020 to support the company in adapting its procurement strategy and strengthening its logistics and inventory management systems. Under this partnership, CdA will shift from relying on multinational input suppliers to sourcing from regional vendors. To support supply chain diversification, CdA will design and adopt an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that will enable the company to more effectively manage its procurement, logistics, and inventory systems, and engage in real-time information-based decision-making. In addition, CdA will undertake a COVID-specific public relations and informational campaign to continue to drive demand during the pandemic.

Through this partnership, CdA will seek to increase sales of regionally-sourced agro-inputs to smallholder farmers by 2.1 million Mozambican meticals (~$30,000) to above pre-COVID levels. By diversifying its supplier network and adopting digital solutions, CdA will establish a more stable and resilient supply chain and ensure that it is able deliver high-quality agricultural inputs to smallholder farmers for years to come.

FY2020 Progress

CdA initiated the development of a strategic plan to help guide its implementation of partnership activities and pursuit of business objectives. The plan will include the key components of the ERP system that CdA will adopt and the operational improvements the software is expected to provide.

Going Forward

In FY2021, CdA will design and implement a new ERP software system as part of its effort to re-shape its procurement and inventory management practices. The company will also seek out new regional suppliers from which it can source its inventory, and undertake marketing efforts to drive sales of its products and services.
ETHIOCHICKEN
JULY 2020 – JULY 2021

Background

From 2015 to 2016, Partnering for Innovation partnered with EthioChicken to scale the production and sale of improved varieties of day-old chicks (DOCs) to smallholder farmers in Ethiopia. Under this partnership, EthioChicken recruited and trained 450 sales agents, who sold 3.2 million DOCs to approximately 345,000 farmers. Since the partnership ended in 2016, EthioChicken has continued to develop a nationwide network of over 6,500 sales agents, reaching more than 3 million smallholder households through the sale of 19.8 million DOCs to date.

COVID-19 has adversely impacted the Ethiopian poultry value chain and EthioChicken’s operations in several ways. Movement restrictions and market closures introduced by the Ethiopian government to slow the spread of the virus have made it difficult for the company and its sales agents to maintain a presence in key markets and reach smallholder customers to conduct trainings and facilitate sales. Misinformation and fear regarding unsubstantiated linkages between the poultry value chain and the coronavirus have combined with other market factors to dampen demand for DOCs. As a result, EthioChicken’s sales decreased from an average of 530,000 DOCs per week in early 2020 to just 40,000 DOCs per week in April 2020. In addition, disruptions in international supply chains have made it challenging for EthioChicken to import the parent stock and micronutrients necessary to maintain its inventory of DOCs.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with EthioChicken in FY2020 to help the company strengthen key operational areas in order to sustain production and sales during and after the pandemic. Under this partnership, EthioChicken will build up its inventory of micronutrients and feed necessary to maintain the parent stock it uses to produce DOCs, storing a minimum of two weeks’ worth of inputs at each site to mitigate the effects of any supply chain disruptions. EthioChicken will also deliver comprehensive trainings to equip its network of more than 6,500 sales agents with approaches for conducting sales safely during the pandemic.

Next, EthioChicken will design and launch customer insight surveys to better understand current challenges faced by customers and end-users, and to capture information about demand shifts. These insights will enable EthioChicken to better support its sales agents, reach its customer base, and make informed, ongoing decisions related to its business strategy.

Through these activities, EthioChicken will seek to sell 17.4 million DOCs to more than 2 million smallholder farmers, and make the Ethiopian DOC market more resilient to future shocks for all value chain actors.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, EthioChicken produced a strategic plan identifying the challenges the company faces as a result of COVID-19. The plan also outlines actions the company will undertake to strengthen its supply chain and inventory management, as well as the preparedness of its sales team. Finally, the plan describes how EthioChicken will increase its resilience to future economic shocks in order to continue providing access to affordable, improved poultry breeds to smallholder farmers in Ethiopia in the long-term.

Going Forward

In FY2021, EthioChicken will stabilize its supply chain by building up its inventory of feed necessary to sustain its parent stock. EthioChicken will train its sales team in safety and health protocols, and design and launch customer insight surveys.
Background

From 2017 to 2018, Partnering for Innovation partnered with Good Nature, a for-profit social enterprise that produces improved legume seed for the smallholder market in Zambia. Through the partnership, Good Nature expanded its seed outgrower model, through which the company provides seed to contracted farmers and buys back 100 percent of the certified seed crop at harvest for a premium price. Good Nature established its own foundation seed farm, expanded its private extension agent (PEA) network, provided soil analysis services and trainings to farmers, and developed an organic fertilizer blend formulated for smallholder legume seed farmers. Under this partnership, Good Nature trained 200 PEAs, incorporated 5,200 new smallholder farmers into its outgrower network, and expanded its presence in the smallholder market by selling directly to rural agrodealers. Since 2018, Good Nature has continued to grow its network, with more than 110,000 farmers planting Good Nature seed in Zambia in 2019.

COVID-19 has impacted Good Nature’s business dramatically. Restrictions on the movement of goods and people have disrupted supply chains and distribution channels, and made it difficult for the company to conduct its typical in-person trainings and procurement activities. Import and export restrictions have delayed the procurement of necessary items, such as packaging, and hindered plans for cross-border marketing and sales. These challenges have been compounded by the dwindling availability of external investment, delaying access to cash needed for growth.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with Good Nature in FY2020 to support the company to adapt its sales strategy to ensure continued access to high-quality legume seed for smallholder farmers during and after the pandemic. Through the partnership, Good Nature will use technology to expand its Source program, which targets smallholder farmer customers and bundles seed with training, financing, and the option to sell harvested seed back to Good Nature.

To date, Good Nature’s Source model has been dependent on high-touch sales via extension agents, which have been hampered due to COVID-19. Under this partnership, the company will harness technology to engage with farmers remotely by digitizing farmer payments and trainings. Good Nature will also improve its customer relationship management (CRM) system to track farmer information as well as manage inventory, sales, and distribution. Finally, Good Nature will improve last mile logistics by leveraging technology – including fleet management technology – to more efficiently manage distribution and collection activities at rural aggregation sites. As a result of this partnership, Good Nature will expand its Source program in eastern and central Zambia, with the goal selling 300 MT of high-quality legume seed to 7,000 smallholder farmers.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Good Nature began to develop a strategic plan outlining how the company will navigate the challenges introduced by COVID-19 and emerge more resilient to future shocks. The plan will specifically address strategies for digitizing trainings, expanding digital payments, and improving last mile logistics.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Good Nature will launch new digital tools, develop and integrate customer relationship management systems, and improve last-mile logistics to increase market access for remote smallholder customers.
MUSONI MICROFINANCE LTD.

AUGUST 2020 – JULY 2021

Background

From 2016 to 2017, Partnering for Innovation worked with the Grameen Foundation and Musoni Microfinance to expand Musoni’s Kilimo Booster loan product in Kenya. The Kilimo Booster loan is specifically tailored to the needs of smallholder farmers, including flexible repayment terms and a customizable grace period based on seasonal cash flow. As a result of the partnership, Musoni disbursed $5.3 million in new loans and reached nearly 14,000 new smallholder loan recipients. Musoni has continued to grow its Kilimo Booster portfolio and in 2019 disbursed more than 31,000 Kilimo Booster loans valued at $12.6 million.

Despite impressive growth and proven sustainability of its financial products, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted nearly every aspect of Musoni’s operations. Given that 70 percent of Musoni’s loan book is comprised of group clients, Musoni has seen significant decreases in repayment rates since the Government of Kenya banned public and social gatherings, preventing groups from meeting to manage outstanding debts. Additionally, many of Musoni’s clients are out of work or working with reduced pay, making it challenging for them to make payments on their loans. New loan applications have also decreased significantly; in March 2020, Musoni disbursed approximately KES 110M (~$1.02M) compared to its set target of KES 401M (~$3.71 million) across all loan products.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with Musoni in FY2020 to ensure that the financial institution continues to offer its customized loan product to smallholder farmers during and after the pandemic. Under this partnership, Musoni will expand its use of web applications to remotely manage the full Kilimo Booster lending cycle, from application to repayment.

Musoni will develop and launch a series of technological enhancements aimed at digitizing operations and streamlining customer and loan management. These new tools and systems will improve and decentralize remote customer relationship management, expand digital loan application options, and decrease the turnaround time between loan application and disbursement by leveraging the mobile phone-based money transfer service M-PESA. By further digitizing the loan cycle, Musoni will seek to disburse 530 Kilimo Booster loans to 15,500 farmers under this partnership.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020 Musoni produced a strategic plan outlining how it will respond to the challenges brought about by COVID-19. In its plan, Musoni outlined the digital services it plans to launch, the business rationale for these functionalities, and the timeline for roll-out.

Going Forward

In FY2021 Musoni will introduce technological enhancements aimed at digitizing and streamlining the management of its Kilimo Booster loan portfolio, and train its loan agents and client base in the use of these new systems. These online functionalities will supplant in-person activities in response to COVID-19, but also serve as powerful long-term investments in the competitiveness and sustainability of the Kilimo Booster product during and after the pandemic.
Background

From 2016 to 2018, Partnering for Innovation partnered with Servicios de Post Cosecha (Post Cosecha), a Guatemalan input supplier that produces and sells improved potato seed varieties to smallholder farmers. Through this partnership, Post Cosecha established a laboratory, nursery, and greenhouse to produce improved, certified potato seed. Additionally, Post Cosecha recruited and trained seed outgrowers to grow certified seed and established direct market access to buyers. Through this partnership, Post Cosecha successfully established a network of 63 outgrowers and sold improved potato seed to 2,218 smallholder farmers. Since 2018, Post Cosecha has continued to expand sales to smallholder farmers and cooperatives, and has introduced a new line of improved potato seed.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has adversely impacted Post Cosecha’s marketing and distribution model, which relies on a network of outgrowers to produce and sell certified seed to smallholder producers and cooperatives. Sales have fallen by 40 to 50 percent since the outbreak as a result of movement restrictions limiting transportation between regions and general consumer uncertainty. The company’s operations and production levels have also been negatively affected as movement restrictions have made it difficult, or even impossible, for Post Cosecha’s employees to travel to work.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with Post Cosecha in FY2020 to support the company to adapt to the current market environment and continue to provide smallholder farmers with access to improved potato seed.

Through this partnership, Post Cosecha will pivot its business model by piloting new marketing and distribution strategies. Under the direction of a newly hired communications manager, Post Cosecha will leverage social media to generate demand, build out the company’s customer information database, and explore the possibility of developing an online platform where customers can purchase seeds directly. The company will also launch a new distribution model through which a network of 12 agrodealers will act as local distributors of certified potato seed, with the aim of reaching an additional 1,440 smallholder farmer customers through this model.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Post Cosecha produced a strategic plan detailing actions the company will take in response to the immediate challenges of COVID-19, as well as how it will strengthen its resilience to shocks in the long-term. The plan included how the marketing and distribution strategies to be implemented under this partnership will expand Post Cosecha’s customer base, drive future business growth, and ensure smallholder farmers continue to have reliable access to high quality potato seed varieties.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Post Cosecha will launch its new marketing strategy, engaging customers through targeted social media and field days that adhere to health and safety protocols. Post Cosecha will also identify and integrate new agrodealers into its network and pilot its new distribution model.
Background

In 2018, ReelFruit Founder and CEO Affiong Williams was a recipient of the Feed the Future Accelerating Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) prize in recognition of the potential of her dried fruits and nuts packaging and distribution business, the largest of its kind in Nigeria. As an awardee, Partnering for Innovation provided a set of acceleration services to help advance ReelFruit’s growth.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, ReelFruit has struggled to maintain operations and growth. Previously secured sales contracts and investment opportunities have fallen through and supermarkets – representing ReelFruit’s largest customer segment – have delayed payments due to decreased demand. These obstacles have caused significant cash flow challenges for ReelFruit and have hindered its plans for expansion. Furthermore, movement and border restrictions imposed by the government of Nigeria have caused supply chain disruptions, making it difficult to source raw materials from smallholder farmers. Finally, the pandemic has made it challenging for ReelFruit to operate at scale while ensuring the health and safety of its employees.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a partnership with ReelFruit in FY2020 to assist the company in adapting its business model by diversifying its product lines and expanding into new markets. Under this partnership, ReelFruit will install a number of new production lines capable of bulk processing in order to meet the requirements of large buyers. ReelFruit will also enter new markets in the business-to-business sector – including bakeries, food processors, and large snack manufacturers – that depend less on direct in-person contact and are more likely to be insulated from the effects of COVID-19 and other shocks.

Through these efforts, ReelFruit will diversify its revenue streams and allow the company to source fruits and nuts in bulk from smallholder farmers, providing them a larger, more reliable market. ReelFruit will seek to sell 4,000 MT of new fruit and nut products under this partnership, and emerge more resilient to future shocks.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, ReelFruit completed a strategic plan and a product diversification plan. The strategic plan laid out steps to expand ReelFruit’s product offerings and customer base by investing in processing equipment and tapping into new export and business-to-business market opportunities. Through its product diversification plan, ReelFruit detailed its product development strategies and goals, which will guide the company as it launches four new, coconut-based products into the market. With this groundwork in place, ReelFruit has hired six employees to produce and market the new products, in positions ranging from machine operator to market executive.

Going Forward

In FY2021, ReelFruit will install additional hygiene and sanitation facilities on its premises and train its staff in COVID-19-related health and safety protocols. ReelFruit will also install new processing equipment, develop marketing materials for its new fruit and nut product lines, and commercially launch the new products.
Background

From 2016 to 2018, Partnering with Innovation partnered with Zambian seed company Stewards Globe to expand its certified legume seed outgrower scheme by contracting more than 200 additional smallholder seed producers. The company provided extension services and inputs on credit to its outgrowers, which increased farm-level production volumes substantially. The collected seed was then sorted, treated, and packaged by Stewards Globe at its Lusaka factory, and sold under its AFRISEED label to more than 60,000 smallholder farmers.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, movement and mass gathering restrictions have hindered Stewards Globe’s typical marketing and sales activities, such as agriculture shows, field days, and expos. Distribution and sales have also been impacted as clients are unwilling or unable to travel to purchase inputs, leading to a significant decrease in sales. Simultaneously, Stewards Globe’s operational costs have increased by up to 40 percent due to the limited supply of inputs and pandemic-related health and safety equipment expenses.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with Stewards Globe in FY2020 to help the company mitigate the effects of the pandemic and re-envision the way it delivers its products and services. Through this partnership, Stewards Globe will pursue a new marketing strategy built around smaller group gatherings, in place of large-scale farmer field days. Stewards Globe will also launch a new business model by establishing roughly 20 retail shops in rural areas. By selling directly to farmers, as opposed to through agrodealerships, Stewards Globe will expand its typical delivery model through consumer-oriented, one-stop-shops. By establishing rural points of sale, Stewards Globe will reach new customers, particularly last-mile farmers located far from market centers with few options for accessing quality seeds and inputs.

To support the new retail shops, Stewards Globe will expand the current use of its enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform, which it uses to manage inventory, fulfill orders, track sales, and geo-tag transactions in real-time. By scaling up the use of this software, Stewards Globe will ensure that it is able to effectively monitor its sales operations from its headquarters office. Stewards Globe will seek to sell 200 MT of seed to 20,000 smallholder farmers through its new retail shops, and strengthen the resilience of its business model to continue providing access to improved inputs to Zambian farmers in the long-term.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Stewards Globe developed a strategic plan outlining its approach to navigating the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on its operations. The establishment of new rural retail outlets, supported by Stewards Globe’s digital management platform, will enable the company to achieve profitability and ensure access to improved legume seed for smallholder farmers in last-mile markets.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Stewards Globe will design and execute adapted trainings and field days that comply with health and safety best practices. Stewards Globe will establish and operationalize approximately 20 rural retail shops and commence direct sales to consumers in untapped rural markets. Finally, Stewards Globe will scale up the use of its ERP platform to improve inventory and sales management.
TOLARO GLOBAL SAS
AUGUST 2020 – JULY 2021

Background

From 2016 to 2018, Partnering for Innovation partnered with the cashew company Tolaro Global to expand its cashew processing operations in Benin to capture value-addition at origin. Through the partnership, Tolaro Global established a cashew roasting, seasoning, and packaging plant in Parakou, Benin. Tolaro Global also introduced an equity ownership arrangement with its network of 3,230 smallholder farmers that supplied raw cashew nuts to the company. In addition, Tolaro Global offered agronomic training to the farmers, helped them achieve organic and Fair-Trade certifications, and offered premium prices. Tolaro Global sold a total of $175,000 in processed, organic and Fair Trade-certified cashews to buyers in US and European markets under this partnership.

The outbreak of COVID-19 arrived just as Tolaro Global was recovering from coping with several years of volatility in the global cashew market. With the onset of the pandemic, Tolaro Global initially closed its processing facility for one month. Since it has resumed operations, production has been significantly curbed as government-mandated social distancing protocols have forced the company to operate at half capacity, cutting its daily processing capacity from 30 MT of cashews to 17 MT. Additionally, Tolaro Global has experienced logistical bottlenecks and slow-downs, alongside unstable demand in the commodity market leading to cancelled or delayed purchasing contracts.

In response, Partnering for Innovation launched a new partnership with Tolaro Global in FY2020 to support the company in diversifying its product offerings into flavored, dry-roasted cashews, cashew butter, and cashew flour. These products are higher-value, less susceptible to price fluctuations, and can be processed more efficiently using limited resources. Under this partnership, Tolaro Global will install a new, mechanized processing line, which will enable the company to achieve high output of these new products.

Tolaro Global will also launch a new marketing strategy that will support the company in pivoting toward a direct-to-customer and direct-to-retailer sales model to drive demand for its new products. As part of this effort, Tolaro Global will incorporate an e-commerce platform into its existing website and launch a social media campaign to drive sales.

By pivoting to higher-margin product offerings and direct marketing, Tolaro Global will shield itself and its farmer network from price volatilities in the bulk cashew market that have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Tolaro Global will seek to sell 350 MT of the new value-added cashew products under this partnership, and incorporate an additional 2,000-5,000 farmers into its network in the coming years.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Tolaro Global began to develop a strategic plan for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 and building resilience to future market shocks. In this plan, Tolaro Global will outline how adding a new processing line and pursuing direct-to-retailer/consumer sales will drive business growth and ensure a stable market for its network of smallholder cashew farmers.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Tolaro Global will establish and operationalize its new cashew processing line, including hiring new full-time personnel. Tolaro Global will develop a comprehensive digital marketing strategy and design the packaging for the new products. Finally, Tolaro Global will bring the new products to market, including via the launch of its new e-commerce platform.
Partnering for Innovation is working with USAID’s Bureau of Latin America and the Caribbean to create market linkages and supply improved inputs to smallholder farmers.
Background

Through this partnership, Acceso will increase the availability of locally produced and processed vegetables in El Salvador by expanding its processing capacity and its network of smallholder farmer producers. Acceso currently sells unprocessed avocados, green peppers, red onions, tomatoes, and cucumbers to high-end buyers in El Salvador, including restaurants and supermarkets. However, Acceso and other local suppliers have been unable to keep up with growing demand for locally sourced and processed horticultural products. In particular, companies lack the proper facilities and machinery to wash, grade, and process produce in order to meet the safety and quality standards demanded by the market; consequently, the vast majority of processed produce in El Salvador is imported. To address this issue, Acceso will build a new processing facility and washing station that will enable it to initiate production of processed vegetables that meet required food safety and quality standards.

In order to scale production, Acceso will add 150 new smallholder farmers to its network. These farmers will receive inputs like fertilizer and improved seed on credit, and equipment such as microtunnels and irrigation supplies on consignment. Farmers will also receive technical assistance and training on quality control and sanitation.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Acceso completed construction of its vegetable processing facility and potato washing facility. The company also completed an analysis aimed at maximizing the productivity and efficiency of its new vegetable processing facility. The analysis will help guide Acceso in identifying market opportunities and launching new product lines with support from a consultant hired under Partnering for Innovation’s acceleration activity (see Acceleration Services section).

COVID-19 Impact and Response

COVID-19-related travel restrictions prevented an external consultant from traveling to El Salvador to perform a required calibration of Acceso’s vegetable processing machine. Acceso and the manufacturer have since arranged for a local technician to calibrate the machine remotely, which will enable Acceso to commence production. The delay in calibrating the machine, combined with decreased demand – largely from fast food restaurants forced to close or reduce operations – led to significant cash flow issues for Acceso in FY2020. While the potato washing facility remained operational during this period, the shift in consumer preferences toward foods with a longer shelf life resulted in greater demand for unwashed potatoes, as opposed to washed potatoes.

In response to these market realities, Partnering for Innovation modified Acceso’s agreement to ensure it could meet shifting demand and sustain operations during the pandemic. These amendments permitted Acceso to count vegetables aggregated at the new facility, but not processed by the equipment, towards its production and sales milestones. To capture the processing component of the partnership, Partnering for Innovation added a new sales milestone specific to vegetables processed by the machinery. Given these new parameters, in FY2020 Acceso aggregated and sold more than 1.3 million lbs. of vegetables, exceeding the partnership target of 1 million lbs.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Acceso will calibrate the vegetable processing machine, and produce and sell at least 100,000 lbs. of processed vegetables to Subway, Super Selectos, and other clients. Acceso will also complete a final strategic plan, which will incorporate recommendations from the marketing consultant hired under Partnering for Innovation’s acceleration activity.
Background

Through this partnership, Semilla Nueva will address both malnutrition and low maize yields in Guatemala by commercializing the Fortaleza F3 seed, an improved and biofortified maize variety. Fortaleza F3 maize contains 250 percent more protein and almost 40 percent more zinc content than traditional maize varieties, contributing to improved nutrition, particularly among children. The seed also averages 10 percent higher yields than traditional maize varieties, resulting in increased farmer incomes.

Using contracted outgrowers, Semilla Nueva will produce, process, and package Fortaleza F3 seed for sale by targeting seven new geographical regions in Guatemala: Santa Rosa, Jutiapa, Jalapa, Chiquimula, Zacapa, Petén, and the Ixcán region of Quiché. To build smallholder farmer demand for Fortaleza F3, Semilla Nueva will employ field technicians and work with agrodealers to manage demonstration plots and host field days that promote the benefits of the seed in terms of increased yields. Semilla Nueva will also host buyer events that will create demand for harvested Fortaleza F3 maize among traders and processors. These buyer events will highlight the nutritional benefits of the improved variety and assure buyers that biofortified Fortaleza maize is comparable to traditional varieties and deserves a comparable price.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, Semilla Nueva successfully met both its processing and sales targets by selling more than 4,000 bags of Fortaleza F3 seed to agrodealers. Sales were bolstered by investments the company made earlier in the year to restructure and build the capacity of its sales team. Semilla Nueva also completed a farmer impact survey related to Fortaleza maize consumption, which generated insights on uptake and customer preferences. Semilla Nueva continued to face challenges this year with intermediaries who purchase Fortaleza F3 grain from smallholder farmers. These intermediaries penalize the grain due to its smaller size and offer farmers lower prices for it, which disincentivizes farmers from purchasing the seed again in the future. To address this challenge, Partnering for Innovation, under its acceleration activity (see Acceleration Services section), hired an expert consulting firm to develop a marketing strategy aimed at changing intermediaries’ biases against Fortaleza F3 seed. To date, the firm has completed the framework and implementation plan for the study.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

Semilla Nueva’s ability to market its seed has been significantly impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19. Restrictions on travel and large-group gatherings implemented in May and June 2020 came at the beginning of the growing season and the most important sales window for maize seed companies. Sales technicians were prevented from hosting field days and traveling to farmer communities – two critical ways that farmers typically learn about Semilla Nueva’s seed. In response, Semilla Nueva developed new ways to connect with farmers amid the pandemic by implementing a digital marketing campaign to drive demand for the improved seed. Through this initiative, the company launched WhatsApp, SMS, radio, and billboard campaigns – including audio and video messages to overcome literacy barriers – in target markets across the country. Semilla Nueva also harnessed technology to enable its sales technicians to provide remote support to farmers.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Semilla Nueva will complete an updated five-year strategic plan. Semilla Nueva will continue to work with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) to identify and test new, hybrid seed varieties for potential inclusion in the company’s product portfolio.
CAMBODIA

Partnering for Innovation is working with USAID/Cambodia to develop shared-value partnerships with private sector companies selling high-quality inputs and services to farmer customers.
Background

Through this partnership, ATEC* will expand sales of its plug-and-play biodigester package in 12 target provinces across Cambodia. ATEC*'s biodigester product is sold as a comprehensive package that includes the biodigester system, a fertilizer storage hut, a gas-powered rice cooker and stove, and a desulfurizer. This biodigester is suitable for small-scale farm use and can produce 20 MT of organic fertilizer per year and 1,500 liters of biogas per day. The biodigester system can improve soil health and agricultural yields through its fertilizer output, while simultaneously preventing kitchen air pollution from wood-burning stoves and curbing deforestation.

To increase demand for ATEC*'s biodigester and maximize its household- and farm-level impact, ATEC* will integrate training on good agriculture practices, including fertilizer use and crop diversification, into its sales model. ATEC* will also pilot and commercialize a payment system “PayGo” which will allow the company to directly finance the purchase of biodigesters for qualified farmers. Farmers will then repay ATEC* in installments using mobile money outlets.

FY2020 Progress

ATEC* continued to scale its PayGo system in FY2020 and was able to meet its milestone of selling 50 biodigesters using PayGo financing. This system, which allows farmers to purchase biodigesters through a monthly payment structure managed by ATEC*, has proven very popular among farmers who lack access to formal and informal financing for agricultural investments. The successful launch of PayGo supported ATEC* in achieving its first sales milestone of 500 biodigesters sold in March 2020.

To integrate the promotion of good agriculture practices into its sales model, ATEC* launched three educational videos in FY2020. These videos, which were produced in collaboration with and aired on Cambodia’s BTV television station, covered topics including soil health, household nutrition, and bio-slurry. The videos reached over 1.6 million television viewers in addition to tens of thousands of additional viewers on ATEC*'s and BTV’s social media channels.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

The impacts of COVID-19 have been significant for ATEC*, both because Cambodian farmers have been hesitant to invest in biodigesters during the pandemic and because the company relies on an in-person, field-based sales model. The company developed a COVID-19 strategic plan in FY2020, which included the launch of “try before you buy” promotions, referral sales incentive programs, and a pivot toward call center-based sales.

Going Forward

ATEC*'s COVID-19-related sales and business model pivots have proven successful in supporting sales during the pandemic, and the company is evaluating how to best incorporate these new best practices into future operations. ATEC* will leverage these new models as it continues to work towards its goal of selling 3,000 biodigesters by July 2021.
Partners for Innovation is working with USAID/Mozambique to identify and invest in companies that catalyze change in the agricultural market system, with an emphasis on supply chain management, agriculture support services, and access to finance. Partners for Innovation is also working with USAID/Mozambique to support private sector-led response to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, and to strengthen resilience to environmental and economic shocks.
Background

Through this partnership, Adicional will mobilize its logistics and distribution network to deliver agricultural inputs to smallholder farmers and link large-scale commodity purchasers to farmers and aggregators in rural areas. Adicional currently operates warehouses that serve as logistics and distribution hubs in the provinces of Maputo, Sofala, Manica, Nampula, and Tete, and will establish three additional hubs in Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Zambézia under this partnership. The hubs will be used to establish last-mile routes for clients that want to distribute their agricultural products to customers in rural Mozambique and for purchasers seeking to source agricultural commodities from those routes to use in value-added processing. These hubs will increase the availability of high-quality agricultural inputs in remote areas of Mozambique and expand opportunities for farmers to sell their crops to distant markets.

FY2020 Progress

In FY 2020, Adicional completed the renovation of two warehouses in the provinces of Cabo Delgado and Niassa. With these warehouses operational, Adicional delivered 2,028 MT of inputs for last-mile sale and distribution, far exceeding the partnership goal of 770 MT. Adicional has also identified and commenced renovation of its third warehouse in Zambézia Province. Completion of this final warehouse under the partnership will enable Adicional to eventually reach last-mile customers across Mozambique’s entire northern region through the establishment of six new commercially viable distribution routes.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

While COVID-19 has not had a direct impact on Adicional’s ability to meet the objectives of this partnership, the pandemic has had an impact on the business overall. The company reported many of its suppliers and clients have struggled with disruptions to supply chains due to manufacturing shutdowns or import restrictions. As a result, both the supply and demand side of Adicional’s business have been affected. The company estimates its current sales revenue to be just 30 to 40 percent of projected revenues. While Adicional holds a confident outlook that business will return to normal post-pandemic, this shortfall will have an economic impact on the company that will endure well into FY2021.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Adicional will continue to develop its offtake model and work toward its target of transporting 2,000 MT of commodities purchased from smallholder farmers. To achieve this goal, Adicional will continue to pursue adding new offtake clients, such as food processors, grocery stores, and firms in the oil, gas, and mining industries.
Background

Through this partnership, agricultural producer and processor EcoEnergia de Moçambique, Limitada (EcoEnergia) will create income-generating opportunities for smallholder farmers in the cyclone-impacted province of Cabo Delgado by diversifying into high-quality organic cashew production, processing, and export.

Mozambique has historically played a significant role in the global cashew market. However, despite boasting one of the world’s most suitable climates for producing high-quality cashews, a lack of investment in cashew tree rehabilitation and renovation, coupled with minimal use of improved inputs, has resulted in the production of primarily poor-quality nuts. The country’s cashew sector was also hard-hit by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in March and April 2019, respectively, which resulted in large-scale destruction of crop and farmland across the region.

EcoEnergia will support recovery in Cabo Delgado by sourcing organic cashews from at least 50 cooperative farmers under this partnership. EcoEnergia will lease 3,000 of its own certified organic trees to cooperative farmers and source from an additional 1,000 trees owned by neighboring farmers, who will receive support in achieving organic certification. Additionally, EcoEnergia will establish a nursery for cashew tree seedlings, and construct a new cashew processing and packaging facility in order to capture value-added processing in-house and sell its cashews under its Cabo Caju brand. Ultimately, EcoEnergia will source a minimum of 3 MT of organic cashews from farmers under the partnership, who will receive a premium compared to conventional cashews.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, EcoEnergia developed a marketing strategy outlining its plans to promote its Cabo Caju brand in international cashew markets. EcoEnergia also created a cooperative development strategy detailing how farmer cooperatives will produce organic cashews, initially through leasing cashew trees on EcoEnergia’s premises and then long-term through cashew production on the farmers’ own land. Finally, the company developed a training plan detailing how the company will support the cooperatives’ development through continued training and technical assistance to guarantee quality production.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

The impacts of COVID-19 have slowed EcoEnergia’s progress in establishing its new cashew processing facility. The procurement of key materials, including the building’s superstructure, have been delayed due to import restrictions. Additionally, as a result of travel restrictions, the facility’s architect has been unable to visit the site to conduct pre-construction surveys. Owing to these delays, Partnering for Innovation granted EcoEnergia a two-month, no-cost extension to allow additional time for it to complete these critical milestones.

Going Forward

In FY2021, EcoEnergia will operationalize its new cashew processing facility, which will allow the company to purchase and process at least 3 MT of organic cashews sourced from 50 smallholder farmers. Additionally, EcoEnergia will establish a new cashew orchard, which will allow the company to expand its services to 200 farmers within the next three years.
Background

Through this partnership, maize aggregator and miller Empresa de Comercialização Agricola Lda. (ECA) will help smallholder farmers in Manica Province recover from the devastation of Cyclones Idai and Kenneth and strengthen their resilience to future shocks by incorporating them into the company’s commercial maize value chain. ECA will increase the number of farmers from which it sources maize to at least 12,000 (1,700 additional farmers). In order to expand its procurement reach, ECA will build 10 small-scale warehouses that will be used to aggregate maize and deliver trainings to farmers on climate smart agriculture and good agricultural practices. ECA will extend inputs on credit to 2,500 of its contracted farmers, specifically for the purchase of improved maize seed, and partner with Hollard Insurance to ensure that all maize seed distributed or sold to farmers is covered by weather-based index insurance. Finally, ECA will build a new silo on its premises to accommodate new maize volumes, and install a new maize dryer to ensure quality of processed maize and prevent aflatoxin contamination. Under this partnership, ECA will source a total of 14,500 MT of maize from contracted farmers.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, ECA developed plans outlining its strategy and procurement efforts to meet anticipated future demand for its products by sourcing maize from additional smallholder farmers over the next five years. The plans include steps ECA will take to establish 10 new small-scale warehouses for aggregating and storing maize. ECA also detailed its strategies for increasing smallholder farmer maize yields through the distribution of improved inputs, extension services, and credit facilities, as well as the potential establishment of remote agrodealer shops to provide inputs and services to farmers.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

COVID-19 restrictions on imports and group gatherings have slowed ECA’s progress in receiving equipment to establish the silo and drying machines and in rolling out farmer extension services. Despite these challenges, ECA instituted new COVID-19 safety protocols for its employees and contractors in an effort to continue its expansion efforts. With these protocols in place, ECA is nearing completion of its first five storage warehouses and starting construction on the remaining five.

Going Forward

In FY2021, ECA will fully operationalize its 10 new storage warehouses. ECA will also establish its new silo and install a new maize dryer to improve its storage and processing capacity. Using this new infrastructure, ECA will procure at least 14,500 MT of maize from 12,000 contracted smallholder farmers.
Background

Through this partnership, IDE will forge long-lasting market relationships between commercial input suppliers, agrodealers, and farmers in the cyclone-affected provinces of Sofala and Manica in Mozambique. Since the cyclones hit in 2019, IDE has held voucher-based agricultural Input Trade and Technology Fairs (ITTFs), which facilitate access to inputs for farmers affected by the devastation in order to replant and recover. Under this partnership, IDE will host a series of market and field days to assist smallholder farmers in making informed decisions when using vouchers at ITTFs, and procuring and using inputs more broadly. During these market and field days, IDE will inform farmers of the types of inputs that will be available at the ITTFs and train them in their use on demonstration plots. By soliciting farmer feedback during market and field days, these events will also help inform the types of input suppliers, agrodealers, and specific technologies that should be invited to and promoted at IDE’s ITTFs.

Under this partnership, IDE will work to transition the ITTF model from a short-term, disaster relief activity to an activity that builds long-term, sustainable commercial relationships between market actors. To achieve this, IDE will help strengthen market relationships between input suppliers, agrodealers, and farmers, thereby incentivizing input providers and agrodealers to enter rural, last-mile geographies affected by the cyclone. IDE will host capacity-building workshops for eight commercial input suppliers and 20 rural agrodealers to improve their ability to profitably and sustainably sell along last-mile routes and develop commercial relationships with target farmers. Ultimately, IDE will deepen market relationships between these commercial input suppliers and agrodealers and 2,000 smallholder farmers who will purchase their inputs or mechanization services.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, IDE produced a strategic plan detailing how it will leverage market and field days, as well as the ITTFs, to strengthen relationships between market actors, and support and scale agricultural input supply chains. Additionally, IDE identified eight input suppliers and 20 agrodealers to participate in the market and field days, and developed a training plan for suppliers and agrodealers outlining how they can improve their ability to profitably and sustainably sell along last-mile routes and develop commercial relationships.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

During FY2021, COVID-19 restrictions on large gatherings delayed the ITTFs and market and field days planned for 2020. As a result, the first events under the partnership are expected to be held in early 2021.

Going Forward

In FY2021, IDE will hold its first market and field days with farmers, input suppliers, and agrodealers. It will also continue to develop its Market System Resilience Index, which it will use to complete a last-mile farmer and market data report that assesses the potential for strengthening distribution relationships between farmers and suppliers.
Background

Through this partnership, NCBA CLUSA will work with Phoenix Seeds, a private-sector Mozambican seed company, and Hollard Insurance, a major private-sector insurer, to commercialize a product that automatically bundles weather-based index insurance with seed sold to smallholder farmers. Insured seed will be sold at no additional cost to smallholder farmers and will be launched in Manica and Zambézia provinces, which were severely affected by Cyclone Idai. In the event that the index is triggered, the insurance will allow smallholder farmers to receive replacement seed at no cost from any Phoenix Seed outlet. Phoenix Seeds will bundle insurance protection with a variety of improved and locally-adapted seeds, such as maize, sesame, and several bean varieties.

Under this subaward, NCBA CLUSA will support the first sales of the seed/insurance bundle through a pilot program targeting commercial companies that work with smallholder outgrower networks in Manica and Zambézia provinces. The pilot will allow Phoenix Seeds to test its operational model and key systems, as well as assess the extent to which bundled insurance acts as a selling point for clients. Following the pilot, NCBA CLUSA will support Phoenix Seeds to begin selling the bundle directly to smallholder farmers, including by training distribution agents and increasing awareness through social media marketing.

Through this partnership, NCBA CLUSA will support the capacity of Phoenix Seeds and Hollard Insurance to sell 50 MT of insured seed in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 seasons to at least 5,000 smallholder farmers.

FY2020 Progress

In FY2020, NCBA CLUSA supported Phoenix Seeds in the first sales of its insured seed product through a pilot program targeting commercial companies that work with smallholder outgrower networks. Through this initial pilot program, NCBA CLUSA and Phoenix Seeds have tested the sales model and key systems, including registration, SMS alerts, claim verification, and seed replacement systems.

NCBA CLUSA and Phoenix Seeds also developed a social marketing and training plan for use during the upcoming cereal growing season, which runs from October – December. As part of this effort, NCBA CLUSA and Phoenix Seeds have developed educational videos and radio programs to promote the bundled product and provide clear guidance on how to register purchased seed for insurance.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

While the use of technology to reach farmers has always been part of NCBA CLUSA’s strategy, it has become increasingly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel restrictions and social distancing guidelines have made it challenging to connect with farmers in person, so NCBA CLUSA and its partners are relying on SMS messaging, WhatsApp, and radio and video programming to educate farmers about the insured seed product.

Going Forward

In FY2021, Phoenix Seeds will begin to sell the seed and insurance bundle to smallholder farmers through its network of commercial partners and agrodealers. NCBA CLUSA will support Phoenix Seeds in strengthening its sales and distribution systems by assessing the role of agrodealers in promoting and selling the bundled product. This will include analyzing the distribution supply chain, establishing the process and timelines for getting insured seeds to agrodealers and farmers, and developing strategies for consolidating the distribution network.
Partnering for Innovation worked with USAID/Zambia to expand market opportunities, increase access to improved agricultural inputs and mechanization, and develop better quality technical advisory services for smallholder farmers in Zambia.
Background

Through this partnership, MRI-Syngenta built a sustainable network of youth-operated vegetable seedling production and distribution businesses across Zambia to meet the rising demand for horticultural products, particularly tomato and cabbage. Targeting the southern and eastern regions of the country, MRI-Syngenta commercialized seedling production by supporting youth operators in establishing and operating vegetable seedling nurseries. Seedlings were grown from high-quality hybrid seeds, addressing the lack of quality seed stock in Zambia and increasing farmer awareness regarding the value of hybrid seeds.

MRI-Syngenta provided entrepreneurial young plant raisers (YPRs) with business and technical training, and also helped facilitate market linkages. YPRs managed the seedling centers, conducted farmer outreach, and marketed the vegetable seedlings to farmers. By establishing and supporting 20 pilot seedling production businesses operated by youth, MRI-Syngenta introduced new high-yielding technologies to farmers in the form of hybrid seed varieties, and also improved the economic prospects for youth in agriculture in Zambia.

FY2020 Progress

In the final months of the partnership, MRI-Syngenta reached its final sales goal. With this achievement, the company sold $597,563 worth of seedlings to 6,060 farmers, which exceeded the $500,000 cumulative sales goal of the partnership. MRI-Syngenta also completed a strategic plan describing how it will continue to improve and scale its YPR model.

The partnership with MRI-Syngenta was originally scheduled to end in August 2018, but was extended to December 2019 to give the company more time to meet its milestone targets. MRI-Syngenta had experienced significant challenges with low tomato prices and lack of market access for smallholder farmers, which reduced demand for its seedlings.

Going Forward

MRI-Syngenta submitted its final milestone in January 2020. During the next one to two years, MRI-Syngenta will explore options to transition from its current YPR model to an aggregation model, in which its current sites would be used as hubs for farmers to buy seedlings and sell their harvested produce. MRI-Syngenta is currently exploring potential for this model with the Syngenta Foundation and is also in discussions with World Vision on partnership opportunities to increase smallholder farmer customers and facilitate access to finance.
ACCELERATION SERVICES

Growing Women’s Entrepreneurship (GroWE) Award

In the first half of FY2020, Partnering for Innovation announced Linnet Akol, CEO of Krystal Ice, a fruit ice popsicle company, and Sylvia Natukunda, CEO of Farm Reap, a yogurt production company, as winners of the Growing Women’s Entrepreneurship (GroWE) award. As recipients, the Kampala, Uganda-based entrepreneurs were matched with local business development service providers – The Challenges Group and Open Capital Advisors – which co-designed and delivered tailored support to the companies to address their business challenges and accelerate growth.

Soon after the announcement, the two leaders found themselves facing a dramatically different business landscape due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Movement restrictions made it difficult for their employees to travel to work, and both companies experienced plummeting sales as their key market channels, such as in-person events and supermarket displays, were impacted by shutdowns or reduced demand. To navigate these unprecedented challenges, Linnet and Sylvia relied on expert assistance provided through the GroWE award. The women received customized marketing and distribution strategy reports from their respective business service providers, as well as tactics for overcoming barriers and achieving growth. During the first half of FY2021, the two entrepreneurs will continue to receive assistance as they implement and refine their business strategies.

In late FY2020, Partnering for Innovation released a targeted solicitation for the next round of GroWE award winners. The next round of GroWE award recipients is expected to be announced during FY2021.

Acceleration in the Time of COVID-19

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sylvia saw demand for her yogurt drop as travel restrictions made it difficult for consumers to reach grocery stores, the company’s primary market. As sales began to fall, she pivoted operations to reach consumers where they are (at home) by introducing a direct-to-consumer delivery service.

With the support of Partnering for Innovation through the GroWE award, Farm Reap worked with The Challenges Group to evaluate different strategies before ultimately piloting the service using Safeboda, a ride-hailing company in Kampala. In May 2020, the company’s new delivery service outperformed in-store sales from its top supermarket customer. By quickly and strategically pivoting its business model, Farm Reap was able to turn adversity into opportunity to generate critically needed sales, launch a promising new sales channel, and strengthen its resilience to survive when the unexpected occurs.
Customized Acceleration Support

Partnering for Innovation designed customized acceleration support services to two partners – Semilla Nueva in Guatemala and Acceso Oferta Local (Acceso) in El Salvador – to help them overcome key commercialization and scaling constraints.

Acceso Oferta Local

In 2019, Partnering for Innovation partnered with Acceso, an agricultural product supplier in El Salvador, to initiate and scale production of processed vegetables in order to meet growing demand for locally-sourced products. Under this partnership, Acceso constructed a processing facility and has sold 1.3 million lbs. of vegetables to date. While these advancements have opened up a wide range of new domestic and export market opportunities for Acceso, the company lacks the capacity to identify and enter into these new markets.

Partnering for Innovation leveraged Acceso’s unique pre-existing relationship with Acceso US, a provider of strategic guidance and business development services, to hire a marketing consultant to help Acceso respond to these challenges. In FY2021, the consultant will analyze the company’s current constraints and opportunities; research, evaluate, and prioritize new market opportunities, including new product lines and/or sales channels; and develop and launch implementation plans. Through these efforts, Acceso will emerge better positioned to accelerate its sales growth by more effectively tapping into high-value market opportunities.

Semilla Nueva

In 2019, Partnering for Innovation partnered with Guatemalan seed company Semilla Nueva to scale the commercialization of its biofortified maize seed brand – Fortaleza F3 – to smallholder farmers. While the company has sold 1,500 bags of Fortaleza seed under the partnership to date, it faces a key barrier limiting further scaling of the product: penalization of the grain by intermediaries due to its relatively small size. As a result, smallholder farmers are offered a lower price for the grain, which in turn acts as a disincentive for them to continue purchasing the seed or to recommend it.

To help Semilla Nueva overcome this marketing constraint, Partnering for Innovation hired the expert consulting firm Explico S.A. to develop a marketing strategy aimed at changing intermediaries’ biases against Fortaleza F3 seed. The firm worked with Semilla Nueva to gain a better understanding of the negative perceptions surrounding the seed brand and to identify approaches for reaching influential audiences to change these perceptions. In FY2021, Explico will develop recommendations and a customized capacity-building tool to help guide Semilla Nueva in developing a strategy for testing and implementation during the company’s next sales season.
KNOWLEDGE & COMMUNICATIONS

Partnering for Innovation captured and shared lessons learned about making agricultural technologies and services commercially available to smallholder farmers in partnership with private sector businesses.

Events

In October 2019, Partnering for Innovation facilitated the participation of two program partners – Fredric Kawalewale with Agro-Input Suppliers Limited and Stephanie Angomwile with Stewards Global – in a panel on “Bringing Agri-Business Technologies and Business Models to Scale” at SOCAP19 in San Francisco. Joined by innovators from the Powering Agriculture Grand Challenge and representatives from USAID’s Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Horticulture, these partners discussed their experience commercializing new technologies and services in smallholder markets. Partnering for Innovation also secured placement of two articles by Frederic and Stephanie on the SOCAP website highlighting their experiences as entrepreneurs.

In June 2020, Partnering for Innovation hosted the webinar, Challenge & Opportunity: How Three Female Agricultural Entrepreneurs are Responding to COVID-19, to spotlight the efforts of three partners – Linnet Akol of Krystal Ice, Sylvia Natukunda of Farm Reap, and Affiong Williams of ReelFruit – in adapting their businesses to COVID-19. More than 80 participants joined the webinar to learn about the businesswomen’s on-the-ground experiences and to hear opening remarks from Katie Garcia, Director of the Private Sector Engagement Community of Practice and Team Lead of the Private Sector Engagement Secretariat within USAID’s Bureau for Resilience and Food Security. Key findings from Partnering for Innovation’s COVID-19 partner survey were also presented during the webinar.

Articles and Social Media

In FY2020, Partnering for Innovation published 19 articles highlighting partner achievements and providing in-depth content on key partner issues, such as connecting smallholders to high-value agriculture, utilizing PayGo financing to make biodigesters more accessible in Cambodia, and accelerating business operations in the time of COVID-19. These articles were published on USAID’s Agrilinks and Marketlinks websites, NextBillion.com, and/or through Partnering for Innovation’s Medium page, monthly newsletter, and social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn). Several were featured in Feed the Future’s monthly newsletter and social media channels. In conjunction with the June 2020 webinar, the program launched a five-part infographic and article series to share key findings and analysis from the COVID-19 partner survey.

During Feed the Future Week (September 14-18, 2020), several Partnering for Innovation partners were spotlighted as Cultivators of Hope on Feed the Future social media platforms as well as in its 2020 Feed the Future Progress Snapshot. Partnering for Innovation also actively participated in a Feed the Future-hosted twitter chat to highlight partners’ successes and to commemorate Feed the Future’s decade of impact in building a food-secure, nutritious, and resilient world. On September 25, USAID issued a press release announcing its commitment of $1.2 million, through Partnering for Innovation, to support 10 agribusinesses cope with the impact of COVID-19 and remain resilient both during and after the pandemic.
CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Partnering for Innovation identified challenges and lessons learned alongside its partners to find solutions for delivering agricultural products and services to smallholder farmers and to contribute to improved practices across the development industry. This year, the program’s primary challenges and lessons learned were related to COVID-19 response and recovery.

Take the time to understand what partners need.

⇒ In the immediate wake of COVID-19, the biggest challenge Partnering for Innovation faced was understanding how its partners were impacted by the pandemic and what they needed to navigate it. Indeed, in the initial months of the pandemic, many partners did not fully understand their own challenges as local government guidance, rules, and regulations were changing on a near-daily basis. Taking the time to survey program partners and have in-depth discussions about the constraints facing their businesses was key to designing immediate recovery and response strategies and helping these partners pivot toward models that could ensure longer-term resilience. As an added bonus, the results of these surveys provided valuable insights to the larger development community on how private sector agribusinesses were impacted by and responding to COVID-19.

Find opportunities during the pandemic.

⇒ In some instances, Partnering for Innovation was able to help partners expand sales during the pandemic by supporting them in pivoting business models to respond to emerging market demands. While the program’s partnership with Acceso in El Salvador was initially designed to help the company launch a line of processed vegetables, the pandemic shifted demand in that country toward less-processed, longer-lasting products as restaurants shut down and consumers tried to stretch every dollar. Partnering for Innovation helped Acceso respond to this new demand by supporting them in scaling-up their sales of less-processed products that still used elements of their processing infrastructure (pack houses, washing stations, etc.) supported by Partnering for Innovation. As a result, Acceso has been able to source 1,450,000 pounds of smallholder-produced vegetables to date under its partnership with Partnering for Innovation, allowing the company to thrive and providing an invaluable source of stable income to its network of smallholder farmers.

Above all else, remain flexible.

⇒ Remaining flexible has been key in responding to the varied COVID-19-related needs of program partners. For some partners, such as Farm Africa, this has meant extending milestone due dates to provide time to shift from in-person to remote price risk management trainings in Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For other partners, like ColdHubs in Nigeria, flexibility has meant establishing new milestones to help the company better assess and navigate the business implications of the pandemic. Regardless of a partner’s specific need, allowing for flexibility in timelines and approaches while providing customized support have been critically important for successfully supporting Partnering for Innovation’s partners through the pandemic and enabling them to emerge from these unprecedented challenges as a stable and profitable business.
### ANNEX 1: PROGRAM IMPACT

#### Standard FTF Indicator EG.3.2-27*

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*EG.3.2-27 replaced EG.3.2-6 in the March 2018 FTF Indicator Handbook.
### Standard FTF Indicator EG.3.2-24

**Number of individuals in the agriculture system who have applied improved management practices or technologies with USG assistance**

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### Standard FTF Indicator E.G.3.1-14*

**Value of new USG commitments and private sector investment leveraged by the USG to support food security and nutrition (US$,000)**

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Custom Indicator

Number of public-private partnerships formed as a result of program assistance
## Custom Indicator

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