

11. Input and output marketing

Seed quality and access

- Good harvests start with good seed selection.
- Quality seeds are essential for the growth of strong and healthy crops which can resist diseases or even drought.
- Good quality seeds can be purchased from trusted sources like certified seeds stockists or agro-dealer shops.
- Farmers can produce their own seeds but seed selection and management are very important. Best seeds offer higher yields.
- Farmers should ensure the seeds are handled and stored properly. Poor storage of seed results in poor germination and vigour.

Factors to consider in Quality Maize and Legume Seed purchase.

- **Adaptability**

Selected maize and legume seed should be adaptable to the existing soil and climate conditions. It is important that the seed of choice is suitable for your area before purchasing.

- **Yield Potential**

All things being equal, choose seeds with high yield, this will determine very much the profitability of your farms

- **Cost of Seed**

Farmers should purchase quality seeds within the limits of their budget. Remember a good quality seed cost more. Other indirect costs to consider when purchasing seed include seed handling and transportation.

- **Pests and diseases resistance**

Seeds that are resistant to diseases and pests will help reduce risks and losses. Farmers should purchase quality seed of crop variety that are resistant to major diseases and pests common in their area. Though, it is always difficult to find seeds with all the desired traits on the market, choose seeds based on the most important yield limiting factors.

Understanding smallholder participation in maize and legume markets

- Market participation is the ability of smallholder farmers to participate in a market efficiently and effectively.
- Smallholder farmers market participation in Eastern and Southern Africa is limited due to biophysical, socio-economic and institutional factors. These smallholders face high transport and production costs due to geographic barriers such as remoteness or biophysical limits to productivity (e.g. water availability). Road infrastructure is poor, and this causes high transport and production costs; remoteness increases costs and reduces competition.
- Smallholder farmers in ESA have limited productive assets such as land, livestock, labour, and farm equipment which limit their capacity to produce and market any surplus.
- They face difficult and variable institutional arrangements including difficulties in contract enforcement conditions, product grades and standards, access to credit, insurance, and technical information through extension services and ICTs.
- They also lack commercial information, bargaining, screening, monitoring and coordination skills. Uncertainty about these raises the risks to farmers, which must be managed.
- Smallholder farmer due to these constraints tend to avoid risks.
- Risks come from adverse weather, pests and diseases, unstable prices and policy environments,
- The adoption of technology packages creates risks associated with production.
- They are also targeted by unscrupulous traders generating risk both in formal and informal markets

Potential solutions for integrating smallholders into the markets

- Support socially inclusive market development through cooperatives, farmer commodity groups, auction markets and enforced forward contracts.
- Facilitate development and implementation of policies supportive of smallholder market integration
- Technological solutions
 - facilitate development and implementation warehouse receipt systems
 - Improved access to market information, weather, pests and diseases information through use of ICTs, weather index-based insurance services for seeds and other inputs
 - Reduce transport costs through use of e-commerce
 - Facilitate access to subsidised credits and reduction of credit risks through collaborations of value chain actors.