



How Yieldwise and one woman's drive are transforming a rural community



 **Rabi Kabiru**
TOMATO FARMER

When Rabi Kabiru ventured into farming in 2016, she had no experience in agriculture but hoped to make some money to cater for herself and her children. The widowed mother of nine set about growing rice on three-quarters of an acre in Shika, which is in Giwa local government area of Kaduna State in north-western Nigeria. Rabi learned as she farmed on how to improve and make the most of her modest acreage. Always one to share her knowledge with others, Rabi invited a small group of women to share her her experiences and encourage them to get into farming. It was there in her living room, as neighbors began to meet regularly to discuss agriculture, that the seed was sown of the Farmers' Service and Agri-business Center in Shika.

By 2017, Rabi had gradually increased her holding to five acres and diversified to tomatoes, cucumber and poultry. She continued to invite women to her farm to share her her learnings in this area, and many were encouraged to start their own farms. "Women did not farm at all, but once they saw that it could be done, they were willing to try," observes Rabi. "They would consult me when they had questions, and I did my best to help them."

When TechnoServe visited the area with the intention of implementing the YieldWise project to reduce post-harvest

loss in tomato production, Rabi was selected to help mobilize farmers for training and aggregation. She was invited to Kaduna for a meeting and then mandated to sensitize the community on YieldWise and its objectives.

TechnoServe supported the establishment of the Farmers' Service and Agri-business Centre, where members are trained on good crop production practices – from optimized planning, to seed production and spacing, to



A farmer delivers a crate of tomatoes to the Farmers' Service and Agribusiness Centre in Shika. Members bring their produce to the center for aggregation and marketing. Use of crates ensures that the tomatoes get to the buyer in good condition without being crushed and spoilt.

use of fertilizer, identification of destructive insects and use of pesticides, and modern harvesting methods. Rabi owns and runs the agribusiness wing, giving farmers easy access to fertilizers, pesticides and improved seeds that they only pay for once their harvest is in, allowing them the necessary breathing space to enjoy their harvest rewards. All these benefits have accelerated the membership of the center. From the small group of neighbors who used to meet in Rabi's living room, the center now has 100 members, all of whom have benefitted from the life changing training.

The investment in aggregation is now unfolding in new directions. Working with EastWest, a seed manufacturer, and with the continued support from TechnoServe, the farmers are now sharing their knowledge with others in their community. "We have learnt a lot," shares one enthusiastic farmer. "Our tomatoes are of good quality because they have staying power. Others last only two days in the market before going bad. So we get better prices for our tomatoes."



A meeting of members of the Farmers' Service Centre at Shika. Effective production techniques, ease of accessing inputs and a ready market have drawn young people and women to tomato farming and given them a source of livelihood.



Rabia Kabiru (left) shows two new members of the Farmers' Service Center how tomato seedlings are grown. The center provides training for members and easy access to agricultural inputs.

The Farmers' Center has signed a contract with Smiley's Mobile Kitchen, a cottage processor of tomato sauce based in Kaduna. Each week Smiley's proprietor, Ogola Lois Kange, sends a vehicle to pick up tomatoes from the center. Purchasing all the tomatoes that the farmers bring in, an average of 40 crates. Farmers benefit from this arrangement as they are paid promptly for their produce. "We used to throw away excess tomatoes. Now we sell everything we grow because it is of good quality, and we have a market for it," says a happy farmer.

"More farmers, including women, are coming to join us because we have a ready market for their produce," says Rabi. "Even young people are now interested because they have seen that with the improved agricultural practices, it is possible to succeed."

The assurance of a market and a buyer who pays weekly has been life-changing for the households of Farmers' Center members. The partnership along the value chain in this high tomato production region offers promising opportunities for how farming can be a pivotal tool for economic transformation.

Rockefeller Foundation's YieldWise initiative was launched in 2016 with the goal of reducing post-harvest loss in select countries and value chains by up to 50 percent. More than 40 percent of fruits and vegetables in developing regions spoil before they can be consumed.

Using a multi-pronged strategy, YieldWise sought to improve millions of rural lives by increasing incomes, increasing the availability of food and protecting finite environmental resources.

The initiative targeted tomato and cassava production in Nigeria, mangoes in Kenya and maize in Tanzania.

YieldWise Initiative in the tomato value chain in Nigeria is implemented by Technoserve and Pyxera Global.