

Pilot Project for Small-Scale Pearl Millet Seed Production in Namibia

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Abstract

At a meeting convened in 1993 by the Agricultural Development Centre (ADC) in the Omusati Region of Namibia, local farmers were invited to participate in a pilot project for the production and multiplication of pearl millet seed (Okashana 1 variety). Fifty farmers registered; but this number was later reduced to 10 after the suitability of their farms was assessed on-site in accordance with five criteria. These farmers were supplied with seed for sowing, but followed their normal crop management practices, with occasional guidance, and brought their crop to the purchasing center for machine threshing and Grade-1 quality assessment. An encouraging ± 17 t of seed was produced from 70 ha of smallholder farmland.

Introduction

A small-scale seed production pilot project was launched in the Omusati Region of Namibia at the beginning of the 1993/94 season. The project was sponsored by FAO.

The project was designed to train selected farmers to become the future seed producers of the region. They would produce the seed that the government had hitherto been producing. The seed, Okashana 1, is a pearl millet variety that is of short duration, and is very suitable for Namibian conditions. If findings from the pilot project were encouraging, projects would be launched in the other two regions of the Agricultural Division North Central, which comprises the four Owambo Regions—Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena, and Oshikoto.

It was expected that the selected farmers would form a seed cooperative, and then a seed company which would control all seed production and sales in the region.

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Activities

Farmer selection

A meeting of farmers in the Omusati Region was convened at the ADC location at Outapi, and methods for on-farm seed production and multiplication were explained to them. About 50 farmers registered themselves.

Seed distribution

Thereafter, the ADC carried out a survey of the registered farms to determine their suitability, according to the following criteria:

1. The farm should be situated so that the seed crop is at least 200 m away from neighboring *mahangu* (local landrace variety pearl millet) plots, thus avoiding contamination by cross-pollination.
2. The farmer should not be allowed to sow any other *mahangu* variety except the seed crop. He may, however, sow other crops, e.g., sorghum.
3. The seed to be used should be the basic seed supplied by the Directorate of Research.
4. The farmer's land should be fertile.
5. The crop should be protected against animals and other pests.

Each farmer was issued with seed sufficient to cover his/her land. Some farmers had to collect seed to sow for the second and even the third time because of losses from drought after sowing. Each farmer then managed his land in the normal way as in the past.

Farm visits

Various stages of crop growth were monitored during farm visits. Farmers were advised on the management of the crop. The need to rogue volunteer and other undesirable plants was emphasized, especially that of shibra (wild millet), which occurs commonly with the *mahangu* crop. The farmers were also advised to thin and weed early.

Harvesting and threshing

The farmers were advised to harvest in good time because of the susceptibility of Okashana 1 to postmaturity insect attack. The project included the provision of a thresher for use at basic cost. The crop was then brought to Mahenene Research Station for seed-cleaning. The crops were cleaned and graded, and only the Grade 1

crop was accepted as seed. This was paid for, and the farmer took back the remainder for consumption.

Conclusion

The results of the project were encouraging. Approximately 17 t of seed was produced from an area of 70 ha by some 10 farmers.

The seed was bought from the farmers at about N\$37 000 (N\$1 = 1 Rand = US\$ 3.5). It will be used as seed supply for the 1994/95 sowing season and sold to farmers in Omusati, Oshana, and Oshana/Oshikoto Regions.

It is recommended that the farmers' seed cooperative should be strengthened so that it can produce seed under government control.