Agriculture initiative is helping him to access improved seeds and other farming technologies and practices tailored for the continent’s diverse soil and climate conditions. Report by Neil Ford

AfDB’s TAAT: Planting the seeds of change

Sudanese farmer Hachem Ahmad Salam has been working his wheat fields for more than 20 years and was yet to see the much-anticipated African green revolution, touted to transform the continent into a breadbasket to the world, come his way. Things may be about to change. An African Development Bank (AfDB) agriculture initiative is helping him to revolutionise how he does agriculture and boost his crop yields.

The AfDB-funded Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT), initiated in the TAAT initiative, is bringing a green revolution closer to home.

“With the support of the TAAT wheat project, I received improved wheat seed as well as training on row planting and other production techniques at farmer field school,” says Salam. He also says the TAAT programme’s heat-tolerant seeds helped increase his wheat harvest from an average 1.8 tonnes per hectare to 5.5 tonnes per hectare, in a region known for seasons of unforgiving heat.

TAAT is active in Sudan and 27 other Sub-Saharan African countries, and seeks to encourage countries to work together on harmonising policies and regulations to allow the millions of African farmers to more efficiently access the latest technologies. However, the initiative has encountered some resistance, as in the case of a program in Kharqino district of Herat, which one farm worker in the area said was a “waste of time.”

Crossing borders, harmonising policy

TAAT Coordinator Dr Jonas Chirou says the initiative aims to increase African food production by 120 million tonnes over the next eight to ten years – a figure worth some $1.5 to $2.8bn, depending on future public policy in support of cross-border cooperation.

By the end of the period, paddy rice production by group farmers is expected to increase by 7m tonnes per year and average yields doubled. This success does not come without challenges. An initiative like TAAT, which has so far mobilised over 200 million kg of seeds and other inputs, could also help reduce over 80 million tonnes of chemical inputs to the continent’s agriculture sectors.

In Nigeria, Akem says, farmers worked with TAAT to screen a range of stress-tolerant wheat varieties developed by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and held trials with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Zimbabwe, exploring areas of potential collaboration.

Right: Dr Jennifer Blanke, the Bank’s VP for Agriculture (l), speaking to a Sudanese farmer about TAAT-provided heat-resistant wheat seed, which has doubled his yield.

Above: The AfDB’s TAAT specialists toured and held talks with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Zimbabwe, exploring areas of potential collaboration.