



# Strengthening Skills, Leadership, and Inclusion

## Learning from Agribusiness Trainings in South Sudan and Nigeria

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Photo credit: IEE training Rumbek East, Lastest State

# 1 Introduction

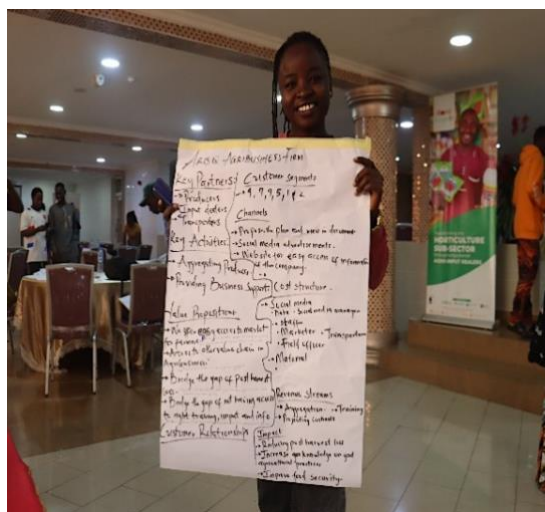
Between 2021 and 2025, KIT and IFDC collaborated on two initiatives – [A3SEED](#) in South Sudan and [HortiNigeria](#) in Nigeria – aimed at strengthening the seed and horticulture sectors in their respective countries. Although operating in distinct sectors and environments, both projects placed gender and youth inclusion as a cross cutting theme in their strategies, supported by dedicated inclusion teams responsible for integrating inclusive approaches across interventions.

These interventions were tailored to the realities of each sector: in South Sudan, efforts focused on strengthening the emerging seed system; in Nigeria, they addressed the rapidly expanding horticulture market and its off-farm opportunities. Despite these differences, a **shared objective** guided both projects – **enabling women and young people to participate more equitably in agricultural value chains and to benefit more meaningfully from sector growth**. Inclusion teams in each country pursued this through a range of context-specific activities, including training on marketing skills, gender sensitisation, and youth engagement approaches.

Across both settings, a **key common challenge emerged**: many women and young men and women farmers, outgrowers, and agribusiness actors lacked the leadership and social entrepreneurship skills needed to fully engage in, influence, and benefit from sector opportunities. This gap reflects broader structural barriers in agrifood systems in both countries, where limited access to resources, networks, decision-making spaces, and confidence restricts the economic potential of women and youth. Addressing these constraints is essential not only for equity but also for sector performance, innovation, and resilience.

In response, the KIT and IFDC Gender and Youth Inclusion teams developed training programs – at different moments during project implementation – on inclusive leadership, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment. Each program had its own focus, target audience, and set of tailored training materials for workshop delivery: the **A3SEED Inclusive Economic Empowerment (IEE) training manual** and the **HortiNigeria Youth Empowerment, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship (ELE) training manual**.

Although adapted to their specific contexts, both programmes were designed to be **practical, flexible, and replicable**, enabling trainers to deliver high-quality sessions even in rural, remote, or time-constrained settings.



*Participant from HortiNigeria workshop in Abeokuta, Ogun, holding her inclusive business model*

In **South Sudan**, the training targeted **female and young seed producers and outgrowers**, aiming to strengthen their agency, leadership, and entrepreneurial capabilities within the seed sector. In **Nigeria**, it focused on **young entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs in the horticulture sector**, supporting inclusive business growth, employability, and job creation.

This Learning Brief brings these experiences together. It documents the **rationale, approaches, results, and lessons that emerged** from implementing these two training programmes and highlights the **added value of cross-organisational learning between KIT and IFDC**. By examining how similar principles and strategies were applied in two very different settings, the brief provides practical insights and recommendations for designing future initiatives that promote inclusive leadership and entrepreneurship in agribusiness.

## 2 Rationale - Why inclusive entrepreneurship and leadership matter in Agribusiness

A3SEED and HortiNigeria developed **tailored gender and youth inclusion strategies** informed by initial gender analyses, knowledge gap studies building from the initial gender analysis report, and service mapping. These analyses confirmed existent **structural barriers limiting women's and youth's participation and benefits** in South Sudan's seed sector and Nigeria's horticultural sector. **Social gender norms, shaping roles, mobility, and decision-making, remain a major constraint, reinforcing gaps in access to resources, skills, markets, and finance.** Key shared findings in both countries provide the rationale for an inclusion strategy focused on strengthening women's and youth's economic empowerment, leadership, and entrepreneurship across both value chains and the development of the tailor-made training workshops for A3SEED and HortiNigeria. Below we present a summary of the main challenges faced by women and youth in both countries.



- **Women and youth are central to production but excluded from decisions:** In both South Sudan and Nigeria, women and young people constitute a large share of the agricultural labour force, particularly in seed production, selection, processing, and horticulture (Nasreen, 2021; Kayokaya, 2023; East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer, 2024; Olakojo, 2017). Despite this, they remain under-represented in leadership positions, farmer organisations, cooperatives, and business ownership. Inclusive entrepreneurship can help shift their role from participation to decision-makers and business actors.
- **Seed and horticultural markets are expanding, but barriers prevent equal participation:** Seed and horticultural markets are growing, with increasing demand for quality seed, improved varieties, and vegetables. However, women and youth face barriers such as limited access to land and irrigation, lower access to finance, credit, and inputs, restricted mobility, weak networks, and gender norms that constrain participation in commercial agriculture (World Bank, 2023). Inclusive approaches are essential to ensure these fast-growing markets do not reinforce existing inequalities.

- **Strengthening local value chains requires diverse, innovative actors:** Seed systems and horticulture depend on local entrepreneurs, agro-dealers, nursery operators, extension agents, aggregators, and processors. Women and youth remain underutilized in these roles (Nasreen, 2021; Kayokaya, 2023; KT, 2024). Promoting inclusive leadership and entrepreneurship expands the pool of innovators, enhancing service delivery, input distribution, marketing, and product quality.
- **Food security and resilience rely heavily on women and youth:** Both countries face conflict, climate shocks, and market disruptions. Women and youth-led enterprises often diversify income streams, invest in community resilience, adopt climate-smart practices, and strengthen local food availability—especially through horticulture (Adeyanju et al., 2023; Shams et al., 2024). Supporting their leadership directly reinforces household and community resilience (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013; FAO, 2023; Ngalamu et al., 2021; IFPRI, 2020).
- **Inclusion supports peace, stability, and social cohesion:** In post-conflict South Sudan and volatile regions of Nigeria, economic exclusion can reinforce intergenerational frustrations, gendered power imbalances, and weakened trust in institutions. Inclusive entrepreneurship provides pathways for women and youth to engage in economic recovery and community leadership, helping to stabilize local economies (Kimote, 2023; ECOSOC, 2025).
- **Youth engagement requires targeted opportunities:** Despite their central role in agriculture, young farmers and entrepreneurs face bottlenecks in accessing opportunities that could reduce youth attrition and urban or international migration (FAO, 2025; Adeyanju et al., 2023). Implementing socio-economic business plans at the grassroots level provides resources for young agripreneurs to thrive while assuming leadership responsibilities within their communities.
- **From inclusion to empowerment and transformation:** Many development programmes rely on women and youth for adoption, training, and outreach, yet without intentional inclusion, they remain beneficiaries rather than value chain actors. Promoting inclusive leadership and entrepreneurship shifts the model toward locally driven, long-term, and gender-responsive agricultural systems (Yami, et al, 2024; FAO, 2026



*Workshop participant describing the qualities of a leader using the Green card in Zaria, Kaduna State).*



# 3 The inclusive empowerment, leadership and entrepreneurship training

## 3.1 Process and justification

- Within A3SEED, the initial project plan proposed a women’s economic empowerment module across all result areas. However, early gender analysis highlighted the need to engage women and youth out-growers, as well as existing or potential seed entrepreneurs, directly. Baseline data, seed fair success stories, and engagement with seed companies revealed key capacity gaps, with economic empowerment, leadership, and financial inclusion emerging as priority themes.
- In response, the A3SEED Gender and Youth Inclusion team developed a context-sensitive Inclusive Economic Empowerment (IEE) training manual tailored to the logistical and educational realities of South Sudan. The manual adopted a practical, modular approach suitable for low literacy levels and remote rural delivery, enabling participants to apply learning directly to their livelihoods. A training-of-trainers (ToT) equipped field agents to implement workshops across hubs in Bor, Yambio, Torit, Juba, and Rumbek during 2024-2025.



*Workshop participants from South Sudan in Rumbek East, Jongeli state, South Sudan.*

- In Nigeria, HortiNigeria aimed to strengthen youth-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in horticulture, enabling young entrepreneurs to participate in—and lead—value chain segments. Existing training programs focused on practical skills such as accounting, marketing, and business management, but analysis revealed a need for stronger inclusion and leadership support.
- Building on lessons from A3SEED, HortiNigeria developed a **Youth Empowerment, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship (ELE) training manual**, adapted to varying literacy levels and logistical constraints. While retaining economic empowerment and financial inclusion as core themes, it emphasized leadership development, inclusive decision-making, and entrepreneurial confidence. The manual was introduced to selected Gender and Youth champions in an orientation session, and ELE workshops were delivered in 2025 across Kano, Kaduna, Ogun, and Oyo.

## 3.2 Objectives, Methodology and key themes

**A shared methodology.** The module employed interactive and participatory learning methodologies designed to maximize engagement and practical application. Activities included exercises, role plays, and plenary and small-group discussions, allowing participants to explore concepts actively and learn from one another. Storytelling and experience sharing were particularly emphasized in contexts with low literacy levels, providing accessible ways to convey complex ideas and link them to participants’ real-life experiences. This approach not only facilitated understanding but also encouraged reflection, peer



learning, and confidence-building, fostering an environment where participants could practice problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership skills relevant to their agricultural and entrepreneurial activities. By combining hands-on practice with peer exchange, the methodology strengthened both knowledge retention and the ability to apply new skills directly within participants' livelihoods and community contexts.



## 4 Early Impacts - Emerging behavioral and business changes

Early observations from A3SEED and HortiNigeria trainings as well as participants testimonies and statements indicate meaningful shifts in behavior, confidence, and business practices among women and youth participants. While these changes reflect the combined effect of multiple project interventions, the trainings themselves have acted as catalysts, sparking experimentation, leadership, and more inclusive approaches to agribusiness.

*"Opportunity of access to sustainable information and knowledge so as to effectively lead.*

*Identifying and utilizing these opportunities empowers us, hence making the position held an instrumental tool to scale up our impact and drive more positive change in horticulture and in our communities and beyond by alleviating poverty, eradicating hunger, enhancing food security, creating employment, mitigating climate change effect and aiding youth and gender inclusion.*

*A very big thanks to @hortinigeria\_program, through their youths and gender department for coming up with this practical and illustrative empowerment training of clarity and purpose driven for their entrepreneur farmers and it was such a huge privilege that Kamroot farms was part of it."*

[Facebook post](#) from participant from KamRoot Farms in Oyo, Nigeria

### 4.1 A3SEED Inclusive Economic Empowerment (IEE) training

- Participants are extending their networks to reach more remote farmers while applying inclusive business strategies. Practical entrepreneurship and leadership skills have increased their confidence and readiness to start or expand ventures. Hands-on exercises and real business cases motivated immediate changes in how they plan and manage their livelihoods.

- Trained agrodealers have expressed readiness to expand their networks to more remote rural areas, reaching additional farmers with quality seeds, following the knowledge they gained on inclusive business approaches through the IEE (Inclusive Economic Empowerment) training.
- New peer and mentor networks were formed, providing participants with stronger support systems and opening pathways for collaboration with A3-SEED partner seed companies and financial institutions. For example, Cizariana Ayuru, an outgrower farmer supported by Afroganics Seed Company, expanded her farm from 1 to 5 feddans after the training. The program helped her develop networking skills and access new opportunities, including joining a VSLA group that provided financial support (Afroganics Seed Company report).
- The IEE training has also empowered young entrepreneurs to try new skills in agribusiness, resulting in the emergence of new spray service providers within the agri-input sellers network, particularly in the Torit and Yambio hubs.
- Foundational capacities for women and youth were strengthened, creating a pipeline of more empowered and economically active actors who are now better positioned to participate meaningfully in the seed sector. Young agrodealers report improvements in their business skills and are increasingly able to take leadership in their enterprises, including making independent decisions after discovering their potential.

## 4.2 HortiNigeria Youth Empowerment, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship (ELE) workshop

- Workshop participants gained knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship through an inclusive approach. Many young entrepreneurs are now applying these learnings in their existing businesses and plan to expand into new ventures, including rabbit rearing, poultry, honey production, and agro-processing. Key outcomes of the workshop included the adoption of inclusive strategies such as community engagement, capacity building, and job creation.
- Participants learned the use of socio-economic value propositions and socio-economic enterprise development and gained ability to leverage community development for increased access to land, subsidized resources, credit and investment.
- The training also contributed to shifts in youth inclusion dynamics: young people gaining understanding that power is responsibility and more so for women in leadership.

## 5 Lessons Learned from Collaboration and Inclusive Training

The experience of A3SEED and HortiNigeria highlights how deliberate collaboration between IFDC and KIT can meaningfully contribute to strengthening inclusive agribusiness interventions. Building on a long-standing partnership rooted in shared values of sustainability, inclusiveness, transparency, and independence, both organizations were able to leverage trust and aligned missions to enable continuous knowledge exchange. Gender and youth inclusion advisors worked together as joint teams, sharing methodologies, tools, and spaces for reflection and analysis. This collaboration not only facilitated cross-project learning but also allowed successful approaches—such as the design of Inclusive Economic Entrepreneurship trainings—to be adapted across different contexts, enhancing their relevance and impact.

**Addressing social and logistical barriers ensures women and youth can fully participate.** Women and youth face different challenges in participating fully. Social norms often place a double burden on women (older and young women<sup>1</sup>), combining productive and domestic roles, while youth (men and women) respond better to interactive and participatory learning approaches. Storytelling, experience sharing, and using peer or translator support proved effective ways to overcome low literacy or logistical barriers. Adjusting training schedules and methods to participant realities made learning more accessible and meaningful.

**Practicality and flexibility are essential for effective training delivery.** Short, rigid training formats often underestimate participants' **travel time, household responsibilities, and language or translation needs**, limiting meaningful engagement and learning. Extending training duration and adapting delivery methods — including working through **trusted local champions** — provided participants with sufficient time to practice skills, reflect on learning, and build confidence. Flexible, context-responsive training design is therefore critical to ensuring accessibility and effectiveness.

**Embedding leadership and agency transforms training into sustained impact.** Training that goes beyond technical content and **intentionally integrates leadership development and inclusive decision-making** enables participants to assume **active roles in their enterprises and communities**. When leadership and agency are embedded within capacity-building efforts, participants are more likely to apply skills, influence local processes, and contribute to longer-term, locally driven impact rather than remaining passive recipients of knowledge.

**Bridging the gap between knowledge and resources is essential to strengthen economic empowerment and inclusive entrepreneurship.** Financial literacy and business skills alone are insufficient if participants lack access to start-up capital or inputs. Linking training to tangible support—like seed kits or initial funding—can help translate learning into real entrepreneurial action and strengthen motivation.

**Cross-organizational learning drives contextual adaptation and contributes to sustainability.** Joint inclusion teams enabled cross-organizational learning, helping adapt tools and approaches to each context while maintaining core principles. Sharing insights between South Sudan and Nigeria strengthened both relevance and effectiveness, producing outputs such as co-developed manuals, trained field agents, and empowered champions who can sustain learning locally.

*"Draw yourself."*

*That was the first instruction we got at the #HortiNigeria ELE Workshop on Tuesday.*

*I thought I came to learn about entrepreneurship. Instead, I was there sketching myself 😊 But looking back... it was genius 😊.*

*Because before we even talked about power, leadership, or business, we had to first answer: "Who are you, really?"*

*From there, it got deeper:*

🗣️ *What makes you feel powerful?*

😞 *What makes you feel powerless?*

😊 *Are you truly leading your life or is something (or someone) else calling the shots? Then came the business side of things;*

*walked through how to turn our skills, resources, and even setbacks into strategic opportunities. Learnt how to build a good business canvas 😊.*

*My mindset? Shifted.*

*This wasn't just another workshop.*

[LinkedIn post](#) from workshop participant in Nigeria

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that in South Sudan, the categories of "women" and "youth" frequently overlap. Although the UN defines youth as individuals aged 15-24 (UN General Assembly, 1981), the country's median age in 2024 was 22.24 (GlobalData, 2024). Most farmers, both women and men, fall between the ages of 18 and 34 (Nasreen, 2021), meaning that a significant proportion of women participating in A3-SEED are also considered youth.

## 6 Takeaways for future initiatives

- **Embedding gender and youth expertise within project teams** is critical to accurately identifying structural and social barriers faced by women and young people. This expertise supports the application of an intersectional lens and enables the design of interventions that are contextually grounded, responsive to lived realities, and aligned with inclusion objectives from the outset.
- **Allocating earmarked budgets for inclusion-focused activities** is essential to translate commitments into action. Dedicated resources enable the implementation of targeted interventions on the ground—including, but not limited to, tailored capacity-building, mentoring, leadership development, and networking opportunities—ensuring that inclusion is not treated as a cross-cutting add-on but as a core programmatic priority.
- **Flexible, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches** enhance participation and learning by actively engaging women and youth as co-creators rather than passive beneficiaries. Adapting methods to local realities, learning styles, and power dynamics fosters ownership, confidence, and more meaningful and equitable outcomes.
- **Combining capacity-building with tangible support and leadership development** strengthens long-term impact by linking skills development with real opportunities to apply them. This integrated approach reinforces agency, supports leadership pathways, and increases the likelihood that inclusion outcomes are sustained beyond the project lifecycle.
- **Cross-project and cross-country learning accelerates innovation** by facilitating the exchange of experiences, tools, and lessons across contexts. It helps ensure relevance, avoids duplication, and builds organizational capacity to design and implement future inclusive agribusiness and economic empowerment initiatives at scale.

## 7 Conclusion

Capacity-building is most effective when grounded in context-specific analysis, addressing the actual gaps and challenges faced by participants. In A3SEED and HortiNigeria, this approach revealed that women and youth needed support not only to develop leadership, entrepreneurship, and economic skills, but also to overcome social and structural barriers limiting inclusion and agency. By combining participatory, hands-on methodologies with targeted content on empowerment, inclusive decision-making, and peer learning, the trainings enabled participants to apply knowledge directly to their livelihoods, expand networks, and experiment with new ventures. Cross-project learning and the use of co-developed manuals, ToTs, and trained champions ensured context-relevant, scalable approaches, reinforcing confidence, motivation, and leadership. These experiences demonstrate that well-designed, locally grounded trainings can catalyze both individual capacity and broader systemic change, fostering more inclusive and resilient agribusiness ecosystems.



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