Acha producer: on the perks of having access to processing services

“I have been going to the farm since I was five years old and planting on my own farm since I was 20. I cultivate acha in addition to other crops. In a season I typically harvest about ten 100kg bags of acha. The problem for us is that acha is very hard to process. It takes a lot of time and requires a lot of labour. It takes me 4 days to dehull and winnow a 50kg bag of acha. Washing, destoning and drying takes me another day. It is difficult to do all these with other demands. Sometimes I ask friends to help me and I don’t pay them, but I have to feed them and give them N500 each for soap. If 2 people helped me, it would take me about two days to process a 50kg bag. I continue to cultivate acha for three reasons: it is our traditional food, it is highly nutritious, and can be made into so many recipes. It also brings in more income than other crops, so when there is a financial need like my children’s school fees, I can sell my acha to meet those needs.” Change Mann - pictured below

Propcom Mai-karfi is an innovative ‘making markets work for the poor’ (M4P) project funded by UK aid and implemented by Palladium

Acha (Fonio) is a cereal crop grown in parts of West Africa. Acha production, which is dominated by women, is on the decline. This is partly a result of the drudgery involved in the manual processing of these small grains like pounding the acha in a mortar to dehusk. In 2015, Propcom Mai-karfi (PM) identified an indigenous company - Pye Ryat - which manufactures machines for processing acha. Recognising that acha producers cannot afford these machines, PM and Pye Ryat developed a strategy to provide processing services to acha producers in rural communities. The cost of this service ranges between NGN25 - NGN40/kg, varying by the cost of diesel. So far, in the pilot programme which commenced in early 2016 in Ganawuri, Plateau state, 500 women and men have used this service and are saving an average of NGN46/bag on processing costs.

“I first used the machine service in January 2016. I was very surprised at how quickly it did the job. The machine takes about 40 minutes to dehull, destone and winnow the same quantity that took me 4 days to complete. I also saw all the chaff (husk and debris) being removed all at once. In the past I had to winnow and destone over and over again to take the chaff all out, and even then it was not as clean. This service has brought me much ease. I used to have body pain and wounds on my hands doing it myself, but now I don’t anymore (shows us her palms). Before I had to wake up very early to process acha and then go to the farm around 10am. Now I can go to the farm by 6am and now have extra time for my business and house chores. I will definitely increase my acha production as I no longer have to worry about processing.” - Change

Women’s Economic Empowerment Series