

N2Africa Podcaster no. 40 Special Issue

September 2016

Charlene McKoin and N2Africa

Through this Special Edition of the N2Africa Podcaster we express our sincere gratitude to Charlene McKoin for all of her enthusiastic support, inspiration and friendship over the past four and a half years. Charlene has been Senior Program Officer for N2Africa at the foundation since she took over from Prem Warrior in 2013. She helped in securing the bridging grant through which N2Africa extended to Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda and, together with Vi Shukla, played a central role in the design and planning for the second phase of N2Africa. These discussions during workshops with many partners were not always easy, trying to arrive at a common vision of how best to move from the “proof-of-concept” focus of the first phase to a true “scaling up and out” of the second phase. Charlene insisted that we employed Business Development Officers (BDOs) and many of us had difficulty understanding what sort of skills this implied. Looking back, her input was crucial. N2Africa now has more than 90 active partnerships across the countries and many of them are Public-Private Partnerships led

by companies, individually reaching 20-30,000 farm households. Our team of BDOs led by Edward Baars has been crucial to the establishment of these partnerships. Since the start of the second phase, Charlene has provided wise counsel to N2Africa from her business and value chain perspective, together with Jeff Ehlers whose legume expertise has been very complementary.

Charlene has been keen to get out into the field, to meet many partners and farmers with whom we work. Through this she gained a deep understanding of the opportunities and constraints they and the N2Africa team face from day to day. The boost that such visits gave to both the N2Africa team and our partners cannot be underestimated. Charlene, thanks for travelling with us over the past four years and for being such a great ambassador for N2Africa. We will miss you!

Ken Giller



Charlene discussing with Mr. Million Bogale, General Manager of Bale-green Species and Grain Development PLC, Ethiopia, January 2016



Charlene giving feedback to close the N2Africa Annual Planning Meeting, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, March 2016



Seattle, US, May 2016



Pan African Grain Legume and World Cowpea Conference, Livingstone, Zambia, February 2016



Charlene inspecting chickpea in the field, Bale, Ethiopia, January 2016

Putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder farmers in Africa

Dear Charlene,

I have also very much appreciated your interest in seeing activities in the field in farming communities and discussing with farmers and other N2Africa partners. However I want to focus this letter on something else.

During the development of Phase II of the project, you continued insisting that the project would need to rethink its scaling strategies by focusing much more on the development of market linkages through Private-Public Partnerships. You insisted that we needed extra expertise within the project to facilitate such linkages and not just one business development officer, but one per country! At that time, I must admit, I was not sure what you meant and if we really needed to spend quite a bit of project resources on this. We respected your request and went ahead with budgeting for six business development officers.

Dear Charlene,

It's with mixed feelings today I write these few words to say goodbye to a true N2Africa champion. I guess the old saying that "all good things must come to an end" is true. Honestly, for the 2 years I have worked with you, at no time have you ever let us down, you have always been there for us in facilitating, participating in every key activity of N2Africa and strategizing with us for better results. You were very

Today we are in the third year of the second phase and I confirm that you were so right! We are now operating following dissemination and partnership models that are certainly more efficient and likely more sustainable. We are reaching many more farmers while spending much less money and we've seen the development of a vast and diverse network of partnerships across the various legume value chains and target countries. In fact, the models we are using in N2Africa are now very much considered and incorporated in other investments aiming at taking agronomic practices to scale. Thank you again for insisting during the development of the second phase of N2Africa!

It has been a real pleasure to work with you in N2Africa and I wish you success with your future interests.

Bernard Vanlauwe

professional and avoided micro-managing the project; you gave us space and latitude to make changes as deemed necessary as long as it was for the benefit of smallholder farmers and making N2Africa delivery more efficient. At times, I was very moved by your extreme professionalism, hard-work and the team player spirit. I will never forget your interest in ensuring we put mechanisms in place for our



With Mrs Judith Chawonza at farmers' value addition demonstrations of peanut butter and other products, Goromonzi, Zimbabwe, March 2016

exit-strategy to ensure benefits from N2Africa investments continue to pay dividends way after the project.

To us in N2Africa, you have not only been a donor, but also a fantastic colleague and a true friend. You took any available opportunity to be in the field with farmers; where the actual learning and feedback took place.

Though a great loss to N2Africa and we will all miss you, we were lucky to have had the opportunity to work with you as our Senior Program Officer who gave her best to

Charlene McKoin in Ethiopia

I had a chance to discuss with Charlene a lot on legume value chain development, as this is an important “machine” to bring about a wider adoption of legumes production in the farming system. This was an unusual discussion to have with a microbiologist such as I. But having shared a common vision, it did not take for us to agree that the “market link” is an important driver in this project. Charlene’s vision for the N2Africa project, her unreserved encouragement to us (the N2Africa Ethiopian team), support and ideas to help link smallholder grain legume producers to the market is unforgettable. Here are some statements from smallholder farmers on several recent field visits from all the four regions where N2Africa-Ethiopia is operational:

- *“The technology that you brought to us is wonderful, it has increased yield. But, where is the market? I had good harvest last year, unfortunately I could not sell it so I only consumed it with my family. Yet we cannot consume it all”*
- *“This is the 3rd season that you are coming to our village, are you just going to establish 10 by 10 m demonstration plots again? If so, please do not come. We have seen that the technology works. Please help us access the inoculant and link us to a market so we produce more on larger areas”*



Farewell visit with the Dutch N2Africa team, The Netherlands, September 2016

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support us. Thank you for everything you have given to the N2Africa team and more importantly to the smallholder African farmers. We all wish you the very best in future. I know that whatever the future holds, you will excel and continue to be successful. Please keep in touch and we will see you sooner rather than later.

My kind personal regards,

Fred Kanampiu
N2Africa Coordinator



Charlene with Dr Siboniso Moyo (DDG ILRI), Endalkachew Wolde-Meskel and Ken Giller at >4,000 m on Bale Mountain, January 2016

This is the legacy of her ideas which will remain with us even though she is leaving the foundation. It was a great revelation to work with her!

Endalkachew Wolde-Meskel
N2Africa Ethiopia Coordinator

