



DFCD Project Snapshot

Strengthening climate-resilient food systems through traditional vegetable seed value chains

June 2026

Name of client	Starke Ayres Zambia Limited
Website	www.starkeayres.com
Region	Africa
Country	Zambia
Project duration	August 2026 to July 2027
Confirmed financing	€107,000 grant from the DFCD Origination Facility (OF)
Anticipated finance leveraged	~€2.5 million debt financing

Who is our (prospective) client?

Starke Ayres Zambia Limited is an established vegetable seed company supporting farmers with access to high-quality seeds, technical expertise, and agricultural solutions. The company is part of the wider Starke Ayres group, which has more than a century of experience in vegetable seed development and operates across Southern and Eastern Africa.

Building on its existing research capacity and distribution network, Starke Ayres aims to develop and scale a new traditional African vegetable (TAV) seed value chain in Zambia. These include locally important crops such as amaranthus, African eggplant, sweet potato leaves, pumpkin leaves, cassava leaves, and bean leaves.

While these crops are valued for their nutritional benefits and adaptation to local growing conditions, production remains largely dependent on informal seed systems. This limits access to consistent, high-quality seeds and reduces opportunities for farmers to improve productivity, income, and resilience.

Why do we fund this project?

Smallholder farmers in Zambia are increasingly affected by climate change, including changing rainfall patterns, drought, and pressure on agricultural productivity. At the same time, food systems face growing challenges related to nutrition, affordability, and access to diverse diets.

Traditional African vegetables offer an opportunity to address these challenges. They are locally adapted, nutritious crops that can strengthen household food security, diversify farmer incomes, and improve resilience to climate shocks.

However, the TAV market remains underdeveloped. Limited availability of certified seeds, fragmented supply chains, and low market awareness prevent these crops from reaching their full potential.

Starke Ayres aims to address this gap by developing a commercially viable and inclusive TAV seed system; combining improved seed varieties, farmer support, and market development.

The project also contributes to agricultural biodiversity by promoting the sustainable use of underutilised traditional crops.

Scaling this model requires further investment. Key barriers include validating market demand, strengthening seed production systems, supporting farmer adoption, and ensuring that commercialisation benefits smallholders, women, and youth.

What is the intended funding objective?

The DFCD Origination Facility will support Starke Ayres to develop an investment-ready model for scaling traditional African vegetable seed systems.

The support will help validate the commercial opportunity, strengthen the business model, and reduce investment risks while ensuring positive outcomes for food security, climate resilience, biodiversity, and inclusion.

The grant will be used for undertaking

- **Market validation:** assessing local and regional demand, distribution channels, and opportunities for TAV commercialisation.
- **Seed development and farmer trials:** testing seed performance, climate resilience, productivity, and market acceptance.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** strengthening collaboration with farmers, agro-dealers, research institutions, and regulators.
- **Environmental, Social, Governance and GESI assessment:** identifying opportunities and risks related to environmental management, inclusion, and equitable participation.
- **Investment readiness:** developing the financial model and investment documentation required to mobilise long-term financing.

These activities aim to strengthen both the commercial and impact case of the business and prepare the TAV model for scale.

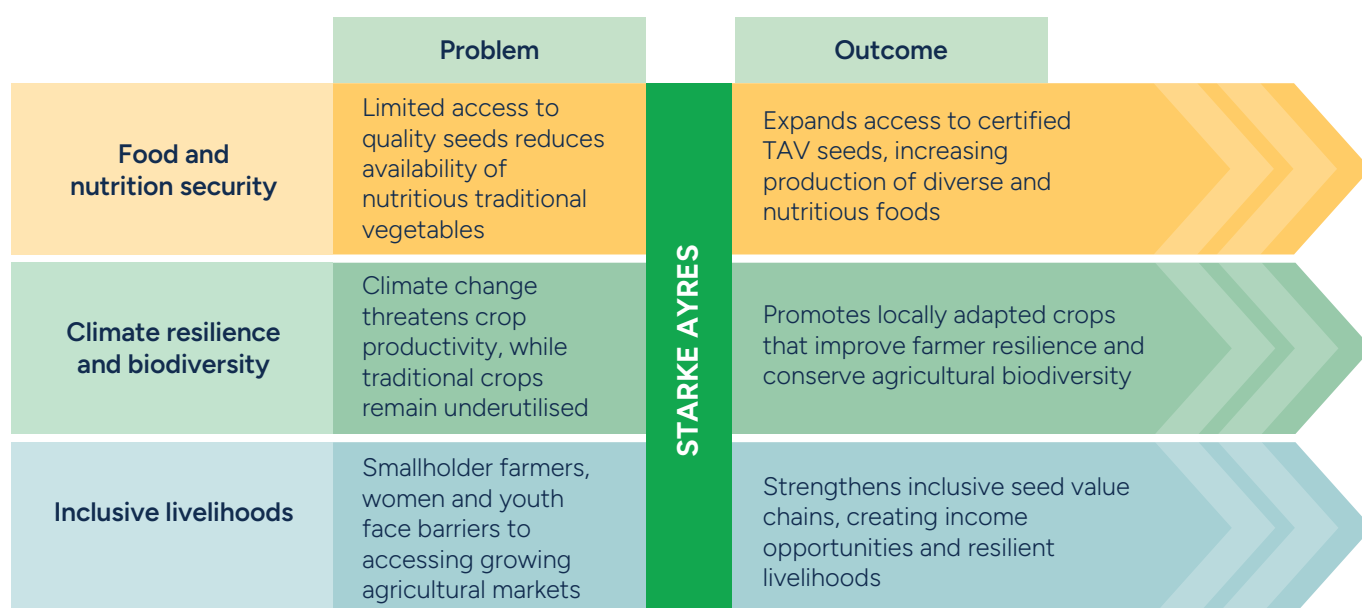


Figure 1: Linking key food system challenges to outcomes: Starke Ayres' approach.

What are the expected impacts of the company?

The project is expected to contribute to:

- **Improved food and nutrition security:** increased availability and adoption of nutritious traditional African vegetables.
- **Climate resilience and livelihoods:** smallholder farmers improve productivity and income through access to quality seeds and training.
- **Agricultural biodiversity:** increased conservation and sustainable use of locally adapted traditional crop varieties.
- **Inclusive economic opportunities:** strengthened participation of women and youth across TAV seed and vegetable value chains.

Detailed impact number estimates will be determined as a part of the origination work.



Environmental and social rationale

The project is expected to deliver positive environmental and social outcomes while managing risks linked to the commercialisation of traditional crop systems.

On the environmental side, the project promotes locally adapted crops that contribute to climate resilience, agricultural biodiversity, and more diverse food systems. Environmental considerations linked to seed production, agricultural inputs, and resource management will be further assessed.

On the social side, traditional African vegetables are closely connected to local food systems, with women often playing an important role as producers, traders, and knowledge holders. While commercialisation creates opportunities for improved incomes and market access, the project will assess how to ensure benefits remain accessible to women, youth, and smallholder farmers.

Key risks and opportunities will be addressed through strengthened environmental, social, and GESI practices aligned with international standards.

About the DFCD

The Dutch Fund for Climate and Development (DFCD) is a European flagship blended-finance initiative, with a total facility size approaching half a billion euros. It mobilises private investment for climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries, accelerating resilient, nature-positive growth. DFCD is led by FMO, the Dutch entrepreneurial development bank, with the Origination Facility delivered by SNV and WWF-NL. The Origination Facility plays a critical role in de-risking and preparing high-potential businesses, providing tailored technical assistance and structuring support that enables them to reach bankability and attract blended and commercial capital, with over €80 million mobilised to date.

Contact us

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 Dutch Fund for Climate and Development