NADIA ZEINE · THE THINKING OF FOOD SYSTEMS

Sizable Projects

Many projects in Africa struggle or fail to reach financial close or scalability because of their size, their thinking, their mechanisms, and the capital available to them.



A story in eight frames

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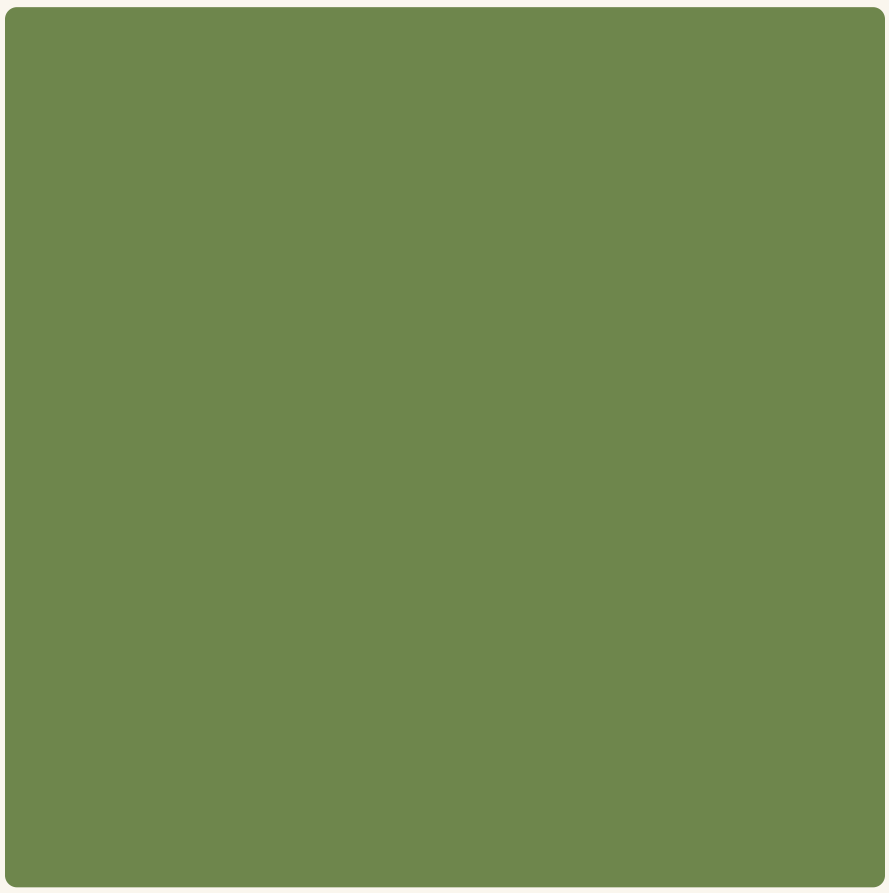
THE FIRST DRYER

Our first dryer came from China.

At the time, we thought it was mind-blowing.



We did not understand *the wet-to-dry ratio.*



30 kg
fresh leaf in



~3 kg
dry leaves out

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18 to 24 hours
to dry, depending on the temperature outside

This is super inefficient.

WHAT IT REALLY COST

Administering this dryer was a completely *inefficient system in itself.*

- How much the gas would cost
- How much time was spent
- People on duty, changing the trays



THE SECOND DRYER

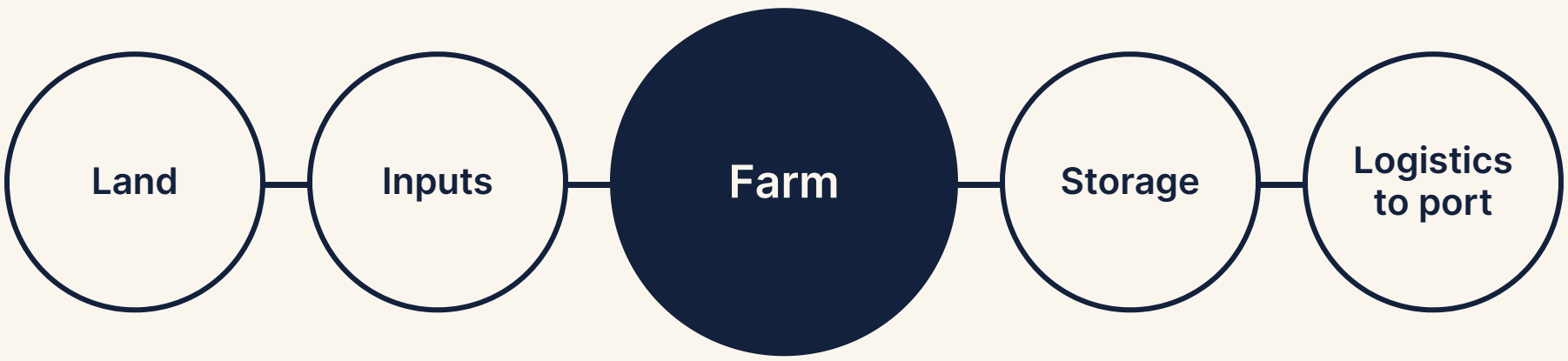
A massive container, retrofitted to do drying. *It significantly increased our output, but it required investment.*



That required capital. We could afford it, and we did.

THE MECHANISM

A player within a value chain will need to play a role in one to two, or even three, nodes *before it, and the same after it.*



Albert Hirschman called these backward and forward linkages, in *The Strategy of Economic Development* (1958).

If you rely on other actors, your project has a greater chance of losing.

WHY SCALE

In agriculture, one needs redundancy.

And you can only afford to invest in redundancy when it comes to scale.

MARGINS

Low on the margin side

RISK

High on the risk side

You cut out inefficiencies by measuring systems, in people or, ideally, in technology.

THE LEAGUE

Where value chains are broken under the guise of opportunity, we only stand a chance at playing within the same league as other global counterparts *by playing within our ecosystems, or even designing the ecosystem itself.*

Read the essay · nadiazeine.com/insights/sizable-projects

