

# Nigeria surpasses South Africa as sub-Saharan Africa's leading maize producer

By [Wandile Sihlobo](#)

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Last year, I boasted about South Africa's contribution to sub-Saharan maize production, after having contributed nearly 20% to total production for 2017/18 season. Furthering my indulgence, I compared South Africa's maize yields to then a second biggest producer in sub-Saharan Africa - Nigeria.



Image via [Wandile Sihlobo](#)

South Africa produced nearly 20% of sub-Saharan maize production utilising a relatively small area of 2.6 million hectares. In contrast, countries such as Nigeria planted 6.5 million hectares in the 2017/18 production season, but only harvested 14% of sub-Saharan Africa's maize.

The maize production prominence in South Africa can be attributed to technological advancement, particularly the use of genetically modified (GM) crops, which was adopted in the early 2000s. This has had great benefits in terms of yields and savings on inputs cost.

But this year's [drought](#) in the western parts of South Africa has resulted in a change in sub-Saharan maize production distributions. Nigeria is poised to overtake South Africa, and become the region's largest maize producer in the 2018/19 production season.



Figure 1: South Africa and Nigeria maize yields

Source: International Grains Council and Agbiz Research

The most recent data from the International Grains Council placed Nigeria's 2018/19 maize production estimate at 11.0 million tonnes, which equates to 16.1% share of sub-Saharan Africa's maize harvest. Meanwhile, South Africa's 2018/19 maize preliminary maize production estimate varies between 10.4 and 10.7 million tonnes.

I should note, however, that Nigeria's dominance in maize production will be short-lived as its yields have not improved. The country rose to the first spot due to a decline in South Africa's maize plantings – I discussed this point yesterday [here](#).

To be clear – Nigeria's 2018/19 maize yield is about 1.6 tonnes per hectare, while South Africa's average yield estimate is 4.6 tonnes per hectare. This is according to Agbiz, and International Grains Council estimates.

## ABOUT WANDILE SIHLOBO

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