

## The links between food security and seed security: facts and fiction that guide response

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### **Abstract**

The food price crisis has led to a series of linear connections: that food price rises are due to inadequate food production, and that such food insecurity is linked to seed insecurity. Hence, in response to high food prices, seed resources worth hundreds of millions of US\$ are being shipped into vulnerable farming systems across the world. This article examines the concepts and evidence for linking food security to seed security, particularly in acute contexts, and shows how the challenges facing security features of availability, access, and utilization are markedly different when assessing food and seed security scenarios. The need for sharper thinking around a) seed security strategy *per se* and b) the causal links between food and seed security raises questions about supply-side responses which potentially mis-identify both the problem and the solution. The article closes by suggesting ways to refine seed security goals which can provide more refined strategies for addressing food security needs, even in acute crises.

### ***Les liens entre la sécurité alimentaire et la sécurité des semences : faits et fiction qui orientent***

#### ***Les réponses***

*La crise des prix des produits alimentaires a donné lieu à des suppositions selon lesquelles la hausse des prix des produits alimentaires est due à une production alimentaire insuffisante, et que cette insécurité alimentaire est liée à l'insécurité des semences. Par conséquent, en guise de riposte aux prix élevés des produits alimentaires, des ressources en semences pour une valeur de centaines de millions de dollars EU sont expédiées vers des systèmes agricoles vulnérables de par le monde. Cet article examine les données qui permettent de relier la sécurité alimentaire à la sécurité des semences, en particulier dans les contextes de crise aiguë, et montre que les défis à relever pour garantir ce qui caractérise la sécurité, à savoir la disponibilité, l'accès et l'utilisation sont sensiblement différents lorsqu'il s'agit d'évaluer le scénario de la sécurité alimentaire et celui de la sécurité des semences. Le fait qu'il est nécessaire de mieux réfléchir (a) à la stratégie relative à la sécurité des semences elle-même et (b) aux liens causaux entre la sécurité alimentaire et celle des semences soulève des questions sur les ripostes du côté « offre » qui peuvent identifier à tort le problème et la solution. Cet article conclut en suggérant des manières de préciser des buts relatifs à la sécurité des semences qui pourraient donner lieu à des stratégies plus sophistiquées pour aborder les besoins relatifs à la sécurité alimentaire.*

### ***As ligações entre segurança alimentar e segurança de sementes: realidade e ficção que orientam a resposta***

*A crise no preço dos alimentos tem levado a suposições de que os aumentos no preço dos alimentos devem-se à produção inadequada de alimentos e de que tal insegurança alimentar está ligada à insegurança de sementes. Assim, em resposta aos altos preços dos alimentos, recursos relativos a sementes equivalentes a milhões de dólares americanos estão sendo lançados em sistemas rurais vulneráveis no mundo inteiro. Este artigo examina as evidências para fazer a ligação entre segurança alimentar e segurança de sementes, particularmente em contextos críticos, e mostra como são acentuadamente diferentes os desafios enfrentados na questão de segurança relativos a disponibilidade, acesso e utilização quando se está avaliando os cenários de segurança alimentar e de segurança de sementes. A necessidade de uma análise mais crítica sobre (a) estratégia de segurança de sementes per se e (b) os nexos causais entre segurança alimentar*

*e segurança de sementes despertam questões sobre respostas em termos de fornecimento que podem erroneamente identificar o problema e a solução. O artigo termina sugerindo formas de se refinar objetivos para a segurança de sementes que podem oferecer estratégias mais refinadas para se abordar as necessidades de segurança alimentar.*

***La relación entre seguridad alimenticia y acceso a semillas: hechos y mitos que pueden conducir a respuestas***

*La crisis en los precios de los alimentos ha llevado a creer que el alza de los precios se debe a una inadecuada producción de alimentos y que la inseguridad alimentaria se debe a un acceso limitado a las semillas. Por ello, para enfrentar los altos precios de los alimentos se están enviando cientos de millones de dólares en semillas a sistemas agrícolas vulnerables de todo el mundo. Este ensayo analiza porqué se vincula la seguridad alimenticia con el acceso a semillas, en especial en situaciones críticas, mostrando también cómo los retos relacionados con la seguridad en cuanto a disponibilidad, acceso y uso son totalmente distintos a la hora de evaluar escenarios de seguridad alimentaria y de acceso a semillas. La necesidad de profundizar en el análisis sobre (a) la estrategia detrás del acceso a semillas per se, y (b) los vínculos causales entre seguridad alimentaria y acceso a semillas cuestionan las respuestas basadas en la oferta, las cuales podrían errar al identificar el problema con la solución. El ensayo concluye sugiriendo formas de establecer metas relacionadas con el acceso a semillas a fin de que se afinen estrategias para afrontar la seguridad alimentaria.*

**I. Introduction**

The ‘Food Price Crisis’ of 2007-2008 stimulated widespread donor action in the realm of agriculture. The initial magnitude of funding to support enhanced food production initiatives was impressive: for instance, as of October 2008, The UN Task Force’s Comprehensive Framework for Action had pledges for almost \$4 billion in aid from a cluster of organizations: The World Food program (WFP), The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (CONCORD, 2008).

The general recognition of a food price crisis also quickly, and directly, translated to a perception that there was a seed security crisis. Aid responses implicitly diagnosed the agricultural problem as one due to lack of improved seed (and fertilizer) use across a range of small farmer systems. After a June 2008 Food Crisis Summit, The UN FAO announced it would provide “seeds, fertilizers and other supplies to small farmers in 48 countries as part of an initiative to help vulnerable households cope with the impact of soaring food prices.” Similarly the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Union (EU), pledged significant funds for seed and fertilizer for regions spanning across Asia and Africa (e.g. [http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/adb-pledges-billions-of-dollars-to-tackle-food-crisis\\_10045924.html](http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/adb-pledges-billions-of-dollars-to-tackle-food-crisis_10045924.html); <http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/world/eu+pledges+unused+farm+aid+to+food+crisis/2319412>).

While it is difficult to give precise totals of seed and fertilizer supplies purchased and delivered to small farming systems globally in response to the crisis, figures from the input suppliers give a sense of the magnitude of purchase-- with much of it tied to crisis aid. A review of financial reports of some of the largest seed/pesticide companies in the world showed 2008 profits increasing by 37 to 120% over those of 2007, and respective profits for fertilizer (again from key world-class companies) increasing from 131 to 430% over comparable 2007 figures (GRAIN, 2009).

In brief, the food price crisis led to perceived agricultural input-related crisis, including a focus on perceived seed insecurity. The immediate responses were supply-driven, with emphasis on seed and

fertilizer deliveries. This article examines more closely the possible links between a food and seed security crisis.

## **II. How ‘the Crisis’ treated the relationship between food security and seed security**

It is not unusual for a food security constraint to be linked automatically to the designation of a seed security constraint. This is the current standard practice in both emergency assessment and in emergency choice of humanitarian response. Hence, the seed-related response triggered set off by a ‘food crisis’ designation might have been anticipated.

In terms of assessment, seed security has rarely been assessed in its own right (Sperling and McGuire, 2010a). If there is a production drop, usually labelled a ‘harvest failure’, seed shortage is also assumed to result. For instance, Ethiopian guidelines state that ‘seed aid should be dispensed’ whenever crop production drops below 50% of normal levels (Sperling *et al.*, 2007). Also, commonly, seed aid funding proposals have not needed to demonstrate actual seed needs, but rather simply cite ‘drought’ as the reason for an emergency intervention (e.g. in an appeal for aid to seven countries in Southern Africa; ReliefWeb, 2002). Only recently have specific seed security assessment guides been developed (Sperling, 2008).

This conflation of seed and food security is also commonly seen in emergency aid practice on the ground. The giving of food aid is a normal catalyst for the giving of seed aid, and the two are often donated as a package to the same set of beneficiaries. As food is the catalyst for action, many of the technical issues related to seed aid *per se* have been invisible from direct humanitarian examination (Sperling and McGuire, 2010a).

While the ‘food price crisis’ triggered an almost predictable response --to give seed-- there were aspects which marked it as distinct from a ‘normal’ crisis. The scale of response for agricultural aid was unusually large (e.g. the 4 billion pledged quickly—and without precise planning). Also, the uniformity of response was of interest: across Africa and Asia alike, improved seed and fertilizer were identified as an important panacea. Linked to this was an evolving rhetoric which moved from ‘crisis or safety response’ to forward-looking ideal agendas. This food price crisis signaled the need for a ‘Green Revolution’ so as to double food production by 2030 (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/06/cheap-food/bourne-text/1>). The subtheme was that agriculture in stressed countries should now follow the more western models of intensive, higher inputs for homogeneous agricultural environments (Henschen, 2009).

## **III. Reflecting on the links between food security and seed security**

The assumption that food security and seed security are closely linked, and that an insecurity in one sphere unambiguously leads to insecurity in the other, on the surface this seems logical. Seed is an essential input for agriculture, so seed insecurity undermines subsequent production. Further, many poor farmers obtain most of their seed from local production or local market channels, so food insecurity arising from poor harvests or market failures could also make seed unavailable. Put another way, closely linking seed and food insecurity assumes that a given factor --e.g. drought, price spikes in local market-- will affect both spheres in very similar ways.

This section explores more closely the interface between food security and seed security, in order to understand better how insecurity in one sphere may affect – and sometimes lead to – insecurity in the other. We start by examining definitions and the diagnostic frameworks most commonly used to assess seed and food insecurity. These frameworks are important, because they are used not only to specify the nature of any problem with food or seed, but are used to determine (and justify) specific types of interventions.

### ***Definitions of food and seed security***

Definitions of food and seed security appear, superficially, quite similar. Two widely-cited definitions, both from the FAO, are:

Food security - “All people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” – FAO, 2002 (State of Food Insecurity in the World, pp 4-7).

Seed security – “Farming households (men and women) [having] access to adequate quantities of quality seeds and plant materials of adapted varieties at all times - good and bad ” (FAO Seed and Plant Genetic Resources Service, 1998: 187).

These definitions highlight notions of universality, access, sufficient quantity, and appropriate quality. They also set out optimal situations (though Maxwell *et al.* (2008) argue that the food security definition includes notions of vulnerability and coping with *insecurity*). As such, the above definitions are perhaps more useful for defining rights (e.g. FAO, 2005; UN, 2009), than for analyzing possible gaps to security.

A second set of definitions, originating from the USAID food security framework (1995), and applied to seed security (Remington *et al.*, 2002), is more useful as a diagnostic base. These definitions specify key parameters of food/seed security: *availability* (from production, trade, and transfers), *access* (entitlements) and *utilization* (whether food/seed can meet users’ particular needs)<sup>1</sup>. Table 1 juxtaposes the food security and seed security frameworks .

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<sup>1</sup> Webb and Rogers (2003) add a fourth element, risk, to highlight (food) insecurity, when households cannot limit threats to one of the above elements. In terms of seed security, we consider the element resilience below.

**Table 1: Food and Seed Security Frameworks**

Parameter	Food Security	Seed Security
Availability	Sufficient quantity of food within reasonable proximity to people	Sufficient quantity of seed within reasonable proximity to people (spatial availability), and on offer in time for critical sowing periods (temporal availability).
Access	People have capacity to produce, or adequate resources to otherwise obtain food	People produce own seed, or have adequate resources to otherwise obtain seeds.
Utilization	Households can use the food they have, which meets their needs (food processing, storage, nutrition, child care, health and sanitation practices)	Seed is of acceptable quality (seed health, physiological quality), and meets farmer needs ( is adapted and aligned with farmer preferences)

(adapted from Remington *et al.*, 2002; USAID 1995; Maxwell *et al.* 2008)

Though similar, these parameters have subtly different meanings for food and seed security. Availability, the physical presence of food/seed in the area from any source or of any quality, is a constant concern for food, so its temporal aspect is not specified, but availability of seed is critical for defined periods around planting time. Entitlements (via production, markets, barter, gifts) shape access to both food and seed, though this may come through different means, involving different actors. Utilization has two aspects for both food and seed security: physical quality – how suitable for use as food or seed (i.e. can it be eaten, or will it germinate?); and more innate quality with respect to specific users – does the food/seed have the right characteristics to meet their preferences and needs (e.g. food that is digestible and nutritious for specific groups such as children or the ill; crop varieties with traits users want which can perform in their local environments). For seed, these aspects have also been described in two sub-categories respectively as seed quality *per se* and variety quality (Sperling and McGuire, 2010b).

Ideally, emergency practitioners would use the frameworks in Table 1 to diagnose problems and guide relevant interventions and support activities. For instance, food or seed would be directly supplied to address problems with availability and cash or vouchers would be used to address issues of access. (Sperling *et al.*, 2008). These frameworks are also a good starting point for exploring how food and seed security relate to one another. Specifically, what evidence is there for a strong correlation for individual parameters of food and seed security? When could we expect a gap in a given parameter for food security lead to a gap in that parameter for seed security (or *vice-versa*)?

To simplify this exploration, we mainly consider drivers and processes operating within an agricultural setting directly related to crop production, seed supply, and local markets. While drivers and processes operating at the macro scale, such as market regulation, labor supply, seed policies, and urban demand are also important, they are beyond the scope of this discussion. Also, as we are particularly interested in the immediate links between food and seed security, it is relevant to first reflect on linkages in rural contexts. To frame the discussion, we also focus on linkages in a situation of *acute* (or transitory) stress. These are situations where a discrete event, such as a drought, flood, pest attack, or market shock, has affected security. Acute stress often affects a wide range of people, not only the poor. We concentrate on the acute as these are the perceived contexts most often used as catalysts for ‘emergency or crisis response’.

## ***Interrelationships- acute stress***

### Availability

#### *Food security to seed security*

As mentioned above, a frequent justification for giving seed aid directly is that a drop in crop production (which may affect food availability) translates directly to less (or no) seed for the following season. The reasoning goes that, with a drop, farmers cannot spare any harvest for their seed or that they may even eat their seed as a way of coping with hunger. However, field evidence shows that there is very weak correlation between acute food unavailability and seed unavailability as, for many crops, only a very small proportion of the harvest is needed to meet sowing needs for the following season. Modest harvest needs for seed are especially characteristic for cereals, which have high multiplication rates (e.g. 1 to 100). As practical examples, only 3% of the harvest is needed to sow pearl millet in northern Mali (CRS and Partners, 2006), 2-5% for sorghum in eastern Ethiopia (McGuire, 2007). Even for crops such as groundnuts, with high seeding rates (and low multiplications rates, e.g. 1 to 6) the very poorest farmers, who achieve the smallest yields, may still need only 25% of their harvest to sow for the following season in Zimbabwe (CIAT *et al.*, 2009). Hence, for many crops, a very large drop in harvest (>90%) would still potentially leave sufficient seed for future sowing – though if prices increase in local grain markets, there may be an impact on seed access (see below). As for the notion that food-insecure farmers consume seed stocks, this goes against accepted faming coping patterns, which aim to preserve core productive assets (Corbett, 1988). Also diverse field studies give little evidence of widespread seed consumption, even after periods of sustained drought (e.g. in Zimbabwe or Southern Sudan; CIAT *et al.*, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

#### *Seed security to food security*

Impacts of seed availability on food availability are also not the norm, as seed availability is generally not a problem, for the reasons cited above (Sperling *et al.*, 2008; Remington *et al.*, 2002). Clearly, seed is a vital input, but farmers' production and food security are likely to be affected more by ownership of assets (especially land), use of other inputs, or climate than by small fluctuations in seed availability. Household-level seed availability may constrain very poor households in high-stress environments, who use high seeding rates or multiple sowings to address risk, but seed is almost always available at wider scales (from other farmers, in markets). For example, even where there has been repeated seed distributions (five consecutive years or more), ostensibly to address gaps in seed availability, farmers still obtained the majority of seed actually sowed from non-aid sources (McGuire and Sperling, 2008). In fact, grain traders who have a truly long perspective and broad overview attest that seed is almost always available within reach of producers or markets, following even prolonged ecological stress or in war situations, e.g. in Ethiopia and in Burundi—where distributions have been ongoing for over 20 seasons (Sperling and McGuire, 2010b; Walsh *et al.*, 2004). Problems of seed unavailability have been noted only in three distinct contexts: when there are massive wipe-outs of systems, as in tsunami-type disasters; when disease pressure makes local germplasm unsuitable for planting (e.g. as when Cassava Mosaic Virus struck in East and Central Africa); or when populations are displaced from their normal farming sites (i.e. IDPs- Internally displaced persons). That being said, there are some reports of dietary shifts resulting from (temporary) unavailability of seed; for instance, bean seeds were more affected than maize after Hurricane Mitch in Honduras, so farmers temporarily switched consumption to maize (de Barbentane Nagoda and Fowler, 2003). This may affect nutrition in the short-run (i.e. utilization),

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<sup>2</sup> Given such field evidence, support for seed protection rations (SPR) which gives extra supplies of food aid to specifically keep farmers from consuming their own seed stocks might be usefully reviewed

but probably not cause widespread food insecurity as a result. Thus, there is little evidence for consistent and strong correlations between food availability and seed availability (although, as we aim for realism, there are exceptional types of scenarios.)

### Access

#### *Food security to seed security*

Many forces could limit access to food in rural settings. Besides decreased production, a loss of assets, diminished purchasing power, weakened social capital, and social marginalisation more generally all can contribute to an entitlement failure. These same forces also affect access to seed, as many farmers seek off-farm seed through purchases, loans, gifts or exchanges, to complement (or replace) seed from their own harvests. Direct correlations between food and seed access, at first glance, seem strong. For instance, price increases for grain on the market will also raise the price for seed purchases on local markets, and it stands to reason that farmers with weak financial entitlements to food will also have weak entitlements to seed. Seed systems are social systems; for marginalized groups, or situations where social capital is weak (e.g. post conflict), access to seed or related information can be constrained (Bellon, 2004; McGuire, 2008). However, the relatively small quantity of seed needed for most situations, in comparison with food needs, suggests that increasing prices pose less of an access problem for seed than for food—simply due to scale. Even where markets were not functioning well for food, as was the case following Hurricane Mitch in Honduras or the Rwandan genocide, farmers could still access small quantities of seed if they had the means to purchase it (Mainville, 2003; Sperling, 1997). Also, social safety nets - supply from neighbors and kin - are more likely to operate for seed, even when food exchange has dwindled due to stress-- as quantities are small and the exchange for seed is generally one-off.

#### *Seed security to food security*

Farmers who have weak access to seed may respond in a number of ways that affect food security. Where access to high-yielding varieties (such as F<sub>1</sub> hybrid maize in southern Africa) is low, farmers may switch to lower-yielding open-pollinated varieties, affecting production in the short-term (although arguably stabilizing it over several seasons). Coping strategies may also include lowering seeding rates, or decreasing area sown, although widespread use of these practices has not been well-documented. Poor seed access to any given crop, however, may or may not affect food security overall, particularly as farmers may switch to different crops, or livelihood activities, in response to poor seed access, without strong impacts on food security. Poor seed access may not, in itself, guarantee a household falls into hunger. Access problems are primarily a poverty issue, something recognized through the increasing use of cash and voucher assistance in relief as well as safety-net related interventions (e.g. WFP, 2008)

Access to seed and to food appear to be correlated, though the depth and circumstances of this correlation have received little direct study. In particular, the possibility that social and financial access poses fewer problems for seed than for food remains a hypothesis for further examination.

### Utilization/Quality

#### *Food security to seed security*

There appears to be fewer obvious linkages between food and seed security around this parameter, as the storage and handling of food is usually distinct from seed, and most of the characteristics that make food valuable to a user are distinct from those for seed. Grain stores of informal merchants can be

important seed sources, particularly for the poor, and in times of stress (David and Sperling, 1999; McGuire and Sperling, 2008); where these are affected by storage pests or spoilage/disease, both seed and food security may be affected. However, farmers exercise agency when using local markets, and traders work to maintain quality of their stores, for seed as well as for food, often managing for variety purity as well as for physical quality (Sperling and McGuire, 2010b). It would seem unlikely that utilisation problems in food would frequently cause problems for seed security – though, as above, more study is clearly needed.

#### *Seed security to food security*

It is often assumed that the health and physical quality (seed quality per se) of seed in local systems is poorer than formally-certified seed, though evidence for this is patchy, at best. Farmers and seed/grain merchants use a range of techniques to maintain seed quality, which is relatively straightforward for cereal crops in drier areas (e.g. Rubyogo *et al.*, 2009). However, it is possible that in stress situations farmers sow seed they know to be of inferior quality, as seen in India and Mali (Weltzien *et al.*, 2001). Inferior seed quality can depress yields and lower food availability.

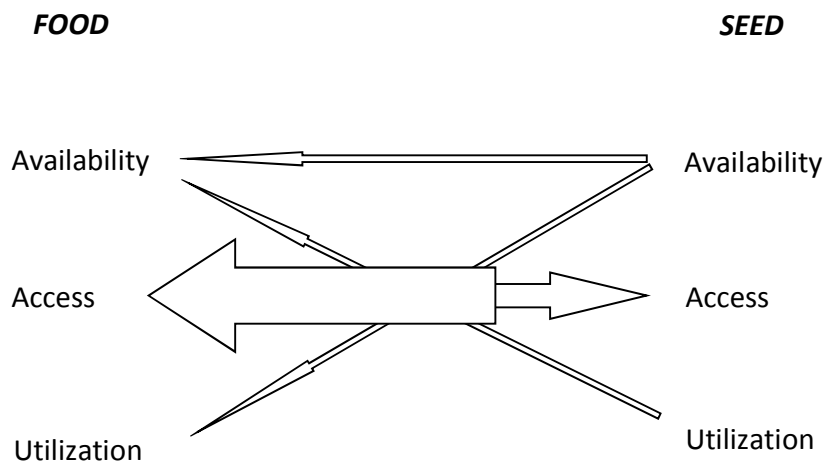
A greater problem is variety quality: are seeds in acute crises known to farmers, with desired traits, and adapted to growing conditions? Again, there are reports of farmers using unfamiliar varieties, or suboptimal varieties, in response to stress, whether knowingly or not (*ibid.*). This may affect future production or earnings, and thus contribute to greater food insecurity. Emergency seed aid has at times itself supplied farmers with poorly-adapted (or poorly-germinating) seed, which also has clearly affected food production and food security (Sperling *et al.*, 2007).

Poor variety quality appears to have a direct impact on food security, though less so in the other direction. Variety quality appears to be a greater issue around utilisation, as this is more difficult for farmers (or traders) to manage, and can have more long-term impacts.

#### *Summary*

For acute stress contexts, Figure 1 now summarizes the above exploration on the links between food security and seed security, at least as we know them to date. Rather than blanket direct, strong, and two-directional links (as current practice would lead us to believe), a more limited and subtle set of links seems to be emerging. The big link (suggested by a relatively wide arrow in Figure 1) seems to revolve around access issues – which may crosscut food and seed issues. Here the stem problems, lack of purchasing power, broken social capital, or poorly functioning markets, may be common and have strong effects on both, although we hypothesize less-so for seed, simply due to the magnitude of need. There are also a number of smaller links (narrower arrows), also seen in field evidence, which all extend from seed insecurity towards food insecurity. There is no evidence of important causal links from the food toward seed constraints, though this is the normal (near only) direction of assumed links between the two in emergency practice.





**Figure 1: Schema of two-directional links between food security and seed security. The relative width of the arrow suggests the relative strength of the relationships.**

*A note on chronic stress: food and seed security interrelationships*

Chronic stress situations raise more complex analytical issues, as the challenges posed by chronic stress tend to be different than challenges posed by acute stress. Thus, the underlying causes and key constraints need careful definition. Clearly, chronic stress can have different causes, which often interact, for instance long-running political crises, persistent ecological pressures such as repeated drought, or weakly-developed institutions. Chronic stress is not simply the same as chronic poverty – which could be found in any situation – though it clearly overlaps with it (e.g. in chronically-stressed situations most rural people may be very poor; Ellis, 2008). Chronic food and seed insecurity links imply a different set of actors and greater range of potential responses than usually found in the emergency arena.

We offer some initial remarks in relation to situations of chronic ecological stress. In such contexts, little or no seed availability would seem unlikely. As long as there is some crop production, and markets are existing (i.e. there is at least some effective demand from some farmers), there should be seed available both on and off-farm – as the traders in Ethiopia and Burundi attested. However, availability of vegetatively-propagated crops may be more constrained, as multiplication procedures can be more arduous, and dissemination of planting material remains quite local as a result. For instance, East Timorese farmers must seek sweet potato cuttings from someone with irrigation who can maintain plants through the dry season. Seed access channels may be constrained under chronic stress, but are unlikely to collapse entirely, due to the small quantities of seed required for most crops. Low effective demand in such chronically-stressed situations may not stimulate really elaborate local markets (i.e. few signals to merchants to specialize in seed, with market institutions remaining generally weak), but poor farmers do continue to purchase seed (David and Sperling, 1999). However, the poorest and most socially-marginalized may have near-total entitlement failure, and thus lack access; this needs particular attention. Seed quality could be a particular issue in chronic stress situations where the varieties or crops are inappropriate for the farming (or market) situation, or cannot address newly-emerging stress situations (such as the appearance of *Striga* in sorghum, or root rot in beans). Poor seed (variety) quality could reflect poor channels of access to new germplasm, or inadequate support from research

and development. A more open question is how chronically poor seed quality affects farmers' agricultural activities? It is possible that these individuals in ecologically stressed areas may renew their seed less frequently, resort to lower quality seed, or change crop profiles, but current evidence for these changes is scarce. Those who only use poor-quality seed in chronic stress situations will likely remain vulnerable, and may withdraw from farming altogether, if possible.

Clearly chronic stress situations – and their different root causes (political, ecological, economic) – raise important and potentially novel issues for a food and seed security analysis. The food and seed security inter-relationships merit further, and intensive consideration. We refrain here from simply extrapolating from acute crisis scenarios.

#### **IV . Linking the two positively: 'Smarter' seed aid as a part of a coherent strategy to advance food security objectives—even in times of acute stress**

We now move to options for action. Better understanding of the links between food and seed security should lead to responses that are more targeted and ultimately more effective. Steps forward in promoting understanding of the links, and interactions have been modest, but important. To greatly leverage the positive effects of emergency aid, moving the joint analysis of food-seed security forward is key. We suggest actions in two distinct realms: a) in the processes of assessment *per se*, and b) in programming mutually reinforcing emergency actions.

##### ***Actions related to assessment per se***

The review of our current understanding of food and seed security links should shape the way assessments are done in at least three ways:

1. Food security assessment should no longer be used as proxies (implicitly or explicitly) for seed security assessments. Food need does not translate to seed need. Donors, as the pivotal power point, should refuse to fund seed aid efforts if only food security has been assessed.
2. Punctual food and seed security assessments might best be done as a unit. Only by charting the two directly, in the same context, space and time period, can we learn even more about useful reinforcing actions — and design more effective responses at the immediate point of analysis. Certainly the UN FAO/WFP system is moving towards such more integrated, and technically accurate, analyses. Starting in 2010, the standard Crop and Food Supply Assessment Missions (CFSAMs) will work to incorporate a much more detailed seed security checklist and seed-related data gathering information system — to complement their already comprehensive food security information gathering procedures (S. Ahmed, FAO- personal communication, November 2009).
3. Sharper seed security assessments *per se* need to be promoted via a fundamental analysis of seed system functioning. Base analyses of seed systems—across a range of stress contexts (e.g. in Ethiopia, eastern Congo, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Darfur and Southern Sudan—to name a few) need to be effected. The veracity of quick, punctual assessments (such as the CFSAM) will only be as strong as their design; and their design, to hold any rigor, must shine considerable light into larger seed system

functioning. This includes, *inter alia*, understanding of: how formal and informal channels operate in a region, and by crop and season; which segments of the populations might normally use which channels; and how these channels are evolving, and might usefully evolve, through time.

So putting seed security assessment on the agenda—in its own right—means that significant intellectual work and capacity-building has to be programmed, and explicitly. Short-term checklist type assessments will be useful here, but only investments in deep background analyses of seed systems will ensure that donors and practitioners understand what is really going on.

### ***Actions related to more strategic seed- related assistance***

Sharper understanding of seed security can also open up opportunities to program ‘smarter’ actions which respond to a more refined understanding of food security needs. There are multiple options, as yet insufficiently explored.

Much of the seed security work to-date, especially in emergency or crisis periods, has focused on using a seed response solely to increase production (or to address the parameter of ‘availability’). Hence, the food price crisis response from 2007 until now has focused overwhelmingly on improved seed (invariably of a small number of crops and varieties) and fertilizer donations, even though prices for major crops as maize and wheat had reached pre-crisis levels by as early as December 2008 (UNCTAD, June 2009). Prevailing ideologies suggest intensive agriculture, which uses high external inputs, is the answer for solving food production concerns (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/06/cheap-food/bourne-text/1>).

However, seeing seed exclusively as a tool to drive gross production increases insufficiently reflects a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective of the needs of vulnerable people —especially those facing emergencies again and again, or chronic stress over years or even decades. For instance, in addition to quantity, food security analysts very clearly emphasize need for quality (healthy, nutritional food), for securing continued access and averting risk (e.g. Webb, 2010). Other analysts warn of the need for new strategies for adapting to climate change (Howden *et al.*, 2007). It might be wise for seed security experts also to hone their vision.

Recent work around food assistance shows how a more refined understanding of food insecurity can translate into more finely-targeted practice. Taking one example, the WFP in the last few years has moved to more holistic food-related programming. Recognizing that ‘access’ is often the key problem, WFP has promoted cash transfers and vouchers, as well as food stamps to allow vulnerable populations themselves to choose the range of foods they may require (WFP, 2008). Recognizing again that ‘access’, including ‘income generation’ can be pivotal, the Purchase for Progress (P4P), launched in 2008, aims to use WFP’s considerable purchasing power to connect small farmers to markets (including aid markets) (<http://www.wfp.org/purchase-progress>). Finally, plans are underway, to distribute zinc- and iron-rich bean varieties as part of a food aid package in Uganda (M. Nyagaya, personal communication), promoting nutrition (the food security feature of ‘utilization’) as well as food availability.

The seed aid side has been less dynamic, with only modest progress in defining clearer goals – or responses intended to help meet these goals. One important exception has been increased use of seed vouchers (and fairs) in emergency/recovery periods to address constraints of ‘access’ and promote local ‘income generation’. Spearheaded by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) (Remington *et al.*, 2002), vouchers

are becoming a routine seed aid response by a range of NGOs (e.g. World Vision, Care) as well as by the big seed aid implementer, the FAO. However, efforts explicitly to promote holistic goals such as system resilience, or enhanced nutrition, as but two examples, are sorely lacking from current emergency seed aid vision. A narrow emphasis on overall production has resulted in sometimes misplaced action (e.g. focus on a few ‘improved’ varieties) but, equally, important, in unexploited potential. Seed aid, which also might be best re-baptised ‘seed assistance’ or ‘seed security assistance’ could potentially help farmers to face the challenges of climate change. Or seed aid could be designed explicitly to improve food quality. Moving seed aid towards a more holistic set of goals implies that the security features be stated, but also probably implies that seed assistance and food assistance be more consciously and ‘strategically’ linked (discussion below).

In terms of the former, targeting specific seed security features, the current three: availability, access and quality, seem insufficient to steer the type of tailored responses currently needed. Table 2 presents a revised version. ‘Resilience’ is probably a security feature equal in weight to the other three. This implies that individuals as well as communities have a portfolio of options –and skills – on hand which allow them to respond to, adjust and even have leverage on variable conditions. The security feature of ‘utilization’ has been expanded to embrace the quality of the food produced from seed given as well as the quality of the seed planted *per se*. The feature ‘access’ can probably stand as described in popular documents, but the description should include a dual emphasis on farmers ‘getting access’ through aid ‘gifts’ (cash and vouchers) plus through initiatives which help farmers generate income themselves, which also heightens their access, but in an active, rather than passive-recipient way. Information, also, is a powerful aspect of access which has been previously overlooked in standard frameworks. Information (e.g. about variety traits) is important to allow farmers to make informed choices among crops and varieties, and also so as to be able to manage well the planting materials eventually in hand.

**Table 2. Seed Security Framework: *modified (italics)***

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Availability</b>	Sufficient quantity of seed within reasonable proximity to people (spatial availability) and on offer in time for critical sowing periods (temporal availability)
<b>Access</b>	People produce own seed, or have adequate resources to otherwise obtain seeds --- <i>and relevant information</i>
<b>Utilization</b>	Seed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is of acceptable seed quality (seed health, physiological quality)</li> <li>• is of acceptable variety quality (is adapted and aligned with farmers’ preferences)</li> </ul> <i>plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>produces food of higher quality per se (e.g. better inherent nutrition; or high income value)</i></li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>	<i>People have the knowledge, skills and planting materials to maintain a portfolio of farmer appropriate seed quality and quantity</i>

Table 3 suggests some ways forward for strategically linking seed and food security, starting with seed security goals that are more holistic than brute production. It suggests seed assistance actions for the immediate crisis period, and for the medium-term, to address these goals. Finally, it highlights key links to food security. These are suggestive examples, rather than a comprehensive agenda, to demonstrate

the value of greater clarity on seed security goals. More synthetic and systematically thinking (and programming) is critically needed.

**Table 3. Select, more specific seed security goals, with examples of new elements of seed security response.**

	<b>Seed Security Goal</b>		
	<b>Adapt to stress/change</b>	<b>Improve nutrition</b>	<b>Income generation</b>
<b>Immediate actions (crisis)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heat- or drought-tolerant varieties</li> <li>• Varieties with high water-use efficiency</li> <li>• Provide options, allowing farmers to strategize</li> <li>• Schedule interventions to suit changed sowing periods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio of crops/varieties for nutrition as well as production stability</li> <li>• Seed of micronutrient-rich varieties</li> <li>• engage women more in planning and delivery in their role both as seed managers and family diet strategists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seed of high-value crops</li> <li>• Seed to support other livelihood activities (e.g. fodder, fibre crops)</li> <li>• Local procurement from traders/farmers</li> <li>• Strengthen relationships with traders for quick dissemination</li> </ul>
<b>Medium-term actions</b>	Vouchers to provide index-linked insurance, as well as seed and other inputs	Support better local practices for seed storage	Develop partnerships through value chain to promote production & marketing activities that benefit poor groups
<b>Food security links</b>	Availability/resilience	Utilization/access	Access/resilience

Adaptation to climate change is a relevant goal for seed assistance, since crisis responses often relate to climate stress (e.g. increased temperatures, drought), and are targeted at locations and populations highly vulnerable to future climate change (ILRI, 2006). Moreover, seed-related interventions can affect many seasons to come, potentially strengthening (or weakening) farmers' resilience and abilities to face future changes. Table 3 suggests ways emergency responses could alter their hitherto production-oriented responses towards actions stabilising production in varying conditions – such as supplying varieties that still can produce under high temperatures or moisture stress. Allowing a choice of crops/varieties, and providing early information on any aid can help build upon, rather than undermine, farmers' ability to strategize in managing uncertainty, so fields and labor can be allotted (McGuire and Sperling, 2008). Emergency workers often do not know about stress-tolerant varieties, or the details of coping strategies in small farming systems, whose 'agriculture is intensely local' (CCAFS, 2009: 14). Such local and technical knowledge needs to become mainstreamed in emergency practice, which entails closer links national R&D, and with farmers. As an example of medium-term actions, practitioners could build upon current humanitarian experience with vouchers to provide insurance linked to a pre-agreed

index (e.g. rainfall; Ibarra and Skees, 2007). These examples show, for instance, how improving utilization, under seed security (variety quality) could strengthen food availability, and the resilience of food (and seed) systems in the face of uncertainty.

Seed aid can also be programmed to give more nutrition as its goal. Recalling WFP's efforts supplying micronutrient-rich food aid, giving seed of such nutritionally-enhanced crops and varieties may be an even more effective strategy in rural areas. Again, maximising farmers' choice in emergency responses could help, as could involving women more in planning and delivery of assistance, to ensure that processing and consumption issues are well-considered. Such efforts to enhance availability or access of diverse types of nutrient-rich types can strengthen access and utilization of food. Finally, seed aid could enhance incomes in a range of ways, by supplying seed which strengthens links to markets or other livelihood activities. Procurement from local producers, traders, or enterprises can also leverage local benefits. A medium-term agenda might explore how emergency responses could leverage markets to benefit poor groups (instead of undermining market function, as crude aid has done in the past); this would require emergency workers to learn much more about value chains. Though we know of no examples of such work in emergency seed aid, principles and approaches can be adapted from elsewhere (e.g. Will, 2008). Seed aid that can jump start asset retention (or creation) can increase entitlements, and consequently strengthen access to food, and resilience to future shocks and stresses.

Achieving seed security can be but a tool for reaching a diverse range of goals, goals beyond brute production increases. However, any goal needs to be considered overtly. All too often, seed aid addresses tacit agendas (McGuire and Sperling, 2008), so greater transparency about goals would be an important step forward, and facilitate more realistic assessments of impact. Moreover, goals such as adaptation to drought or heat stress, nutritional enhancement, or income-generation have clear relevance for food security, as well – though the strength and nature of any links between particular seed security actions and aspects food security need study. The suggestive examples in Table 3 need further development through practice, something that will require the building of skills and capacity within emergency practitioners to manage new agendas and partnerships.

### ***Conclusions – reflections on responses to the food price crisis***

Initial seed-related responses to the price crisis were rather simplistic and reflected linear assumptions about how seed and food security related. However, there is increasing awareness that supply-driven seed aid poses a problem, particularly when actions are not based on on-the-ground assessments of needs. For instance, some donors, such as USAID's Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance now refuse to fund seed aid without clear assessments justifying need, major implementers such as the FAO are moving away from blanket distributions of seed toward vouchers and other approaches, while major recipients, such as Ethiopia, are also starting to refuse seed aid without justification. These are welcome – albeit modest – changes in practice, though analytical approaches lag behind. This paper attempted to move this analysis forward, showing that causal links run mainly from seed to food security, and most frequently around access. Better analysis of seed security – via rapid assessments and deeper analyses of seed systems – is needed, and can help in refining seed assistance goals to address specific aspects of food security. The food price crisis has heralded enormously increased donor interest in seed interventions. If this interest is to lead to long-term contributions to food security, then the links between seed and food security need to be better understood, and intervention goals need to be more explicit and refined.

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