

Seed Aid for Seed Security

ADVICE FOR PRACTITIONERS

Who are we and what do we do?

The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and CARE Norway, in collaboration with national partners in Africa, are implementing a project to increase the effectiveness of seed-based interventions in acute and chronically stressed African farming systems.

Consensus is emerging from applied research and rigorous *ex post facto* evaluations that conventional seed relief poses concerns. These include:

- Missing, inadequate or incorrect diagnosis of seed insecurity, with the problem often (mistakenly) assumed to be one of seed unavailability.
- Predominance of supply-side approaches, with a strong reliance on the commercial seed sector for relief seed.
- Lack of understanding of farmer seed systems and the important roles they have to play in agricultural relief and recovery.
- Lack of appreciation of the central importance of local markets in informal and more integrated seed systems.
- Repetitive relief interventions leading to chronic seed aid.

CIAT serves as the project coordinator with funding from USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). CIAT's interest in seed systems under stress dates to the Rwanda Seeds of Hope project of 1995-6, where the impact of disaster on seed systems and agrobiodiversity were both key issues. CRS, also with funding from OFDA, is actively engaged in agriculture recovery wherever there is a need in Africa, and emphasizes approaches that stimulate enhanced production and income generation. CARE Norway, with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has developed expertise across broad areas of agriculture recovery.

The goal of the Seed Systems Under Stress project is:

To assist disaster-affected and chronically stressed communities in recovery by strengthening seed systems used by farmers and restoring productivity and enhancing system resilience.

The project seeks to influence and enhance the knowledge, attitudes and practices of donors and practitioners as they support and undertake seed assistance. It does so by increasing understanding, firstly of the impacts of disaster and sustained stress on seed systems; and secondly of the effectiveness of varied seed-aid responses on efforts to strengthen seed systems in the short and longer term.

New knowledge, as well as synthesis of better practice is being generated by this project, and Briefs 3 to 7 share insights on different topics related to

Case studies show seed-based agricultural recovery to be more complex than is commonly assumed.

These Briefs provide practical advice on how to improve seed aid, including specific technical guidance as well as tools and checklists spanning steps from assessment to evaluation – through to new proposal design.

seed relief. However, we recognize that providing information is not on its own sufficient because information alone does not necessarily convert to greater use of knowledge or altered practice. Therefore, the project is also providing new input on how to:

- Analyze and assess seed systems and seed security.
- Design seed-assistance interventions.
- Monitor and evaluate seed-assistance interventions.

Briefs 8 to 10 include tools and guidance for practitioners and donors.

The Project also aims to influence practices by other means. There are ongoing efforts to educate, learn with, and communicate with the range of agriculture recovery actors – from policy to field implementation. Hence we welcome comments on these briefs as people read and use them, as well as more general information exchange and dialogue (see contacts below).

For more information about the project, see <http://www.ciat.cgiar.org/africa/seeds.htm>

The Practice Briefs

No. 2 presents an **overview of the Country Case Studies** undertaken to guide the design of the tools presented in Briefs 8 to 10 as well as to examine the effects of different types of interventions. The case studies were undertaken in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

No. 3 introduces the general **concept of seed security** and differentiates parameters of availability, access, and seed and variety quality, as well as distinguishing chronic from acute stress.

Briefs 4 and 5 consider focused topics that cut across seed assistance and seed security. No. 4 addresses issues of **relief and agobiodiversity**: the importance of diversity in stabilizing systems and the possible effects of various relief approaches in maintaining, enhancing, or undermining such diversity. No. 5 focuses on the opportunities and risks of using seed aid to move beyond the *status quo ante* by **introducing seed of new varieties** (or indeed, new crops altogether).

Briefs 6 and 7 present short overviews of practice. No. 6 looks at the range of seed systems routinely used by small farmers in Africa and highlights the escalating **importance of local markets**. Effective interventions depend on a solid understanding of such standard seed procurement practices. No. 7 sketches the **current major seed-system based response options**, and reflects on their appropriateness in relation to the stresses on hand.

The last set of briefs focus on tools and guidance. No. 8 examines how effective interventions depend on sound and timely assessment, which requires both a **tool to assess seed system security** and the knowledge and skill to use it. No. 9 starts to bring the cycle to a close by giving guidance on **evaluating seed-aid projects**, suggesting the types of evaluation needed and their content. The final brief then looks to the future and suggests a **checklist for the development of proposals for seed assistance**. It is this last which builds on the range of lessons learned.

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