



## No. 5.3 Agricultural Programmes: Seed Fairs

### What are seed fairs?

Seed fairs can *help ensure farmers have sufficient seeds (in terms of quality, quantity, diversity) at the right time when emergencies disrupt normal and predictable supply*. They involve distribution of vouchers or money to affected farmers, who then purchase a diversity of seeds provided by local traders and producers on a specified day and place. Traders redeem money for the vouchers at the end of the fair.

Seed fairs aim to *encourage dialogue and raise awareness amongst producers and local seed businesses or vendors* about alternative seed varieties, growing practises and experiences, and so on. Organised at the local or village level, this system promotes a greater feeling of ownership and participation among beneficiaries than allowed by general seed distributions.

Seed fairs can also:

- Help promote local entrepreneurship;
- Reduce costs and logistics associated with other

agricultural programme responses;

- Guarantee the appropriateness of seeds to the local context; and,
- Help ensure money invested in project remains in intervention area (if seed vendors are local).

Table 1 outlines some other advantages as well as disadvantages or challenges of seed fairs.



Fig. 1: Seed fairs can expose producers to different varieties and practices (Credit: Sarah Livingstone/OXFAM)

### When is it appropriate to organise seed fairs?

When food insecurity is due to a reduction or loss in crop production, and a lack of seed (quality and/or diversity) limits production, seed fairs can be an appropriate programme response.

They can be implemented at various stages of an emergency response. In the **acute phase**, seed fairs can help prevent farmers exhausting their seed stores to cover immediate food needs (i.e., planting seeds for food and/or selling them for cash). In the **recovery phase**, they can be used to recover agricultural

livelihoods. Seed fairs can also be used in the **development and mitigation phase**, to improve seed supply where the agricultural sector is poorly organised.

However, the following criteria must be present for a seed fair to be a viable programme response:

- Seed fairs should be planned for and held well before the start of the sowing season and beneficiaries can easily reach the fair location;
- Suppliers (farmers or traders) are available locally and can provide sufficient seed quantity and variety;
- Seeds displayed in fairs have minimum quality guarantees i.e., that they are safe from diseases and parasites, and have a good

#### Box 1: Seed fairs in emergencies – a rough checklist

- ✓ Assessment of existing seed stocks conducted
- ✓ Targeting criteria identified and beneficiaries selected
- ✓ Value of voucher/cash for distribution determined
- ✓ Rapid baseline survey conducted in the target area on the type of seeds, normal seeding rates and landholding sizes
- ✓ Committees are established to support the organisation and implementation of the event
- ✓ Potential sellers identified and sensitised to the programme
- ✓ Seed quality verified prior to the fair
- ✓ A suitable time, date and location determined for the fair
- ✓ Fair is locally promoted (poster, local radio, etc)
- ✓ Partnerships formed with local agronomic services (for training, awareness, demonstrations to be supplied at the fair)
- ✓ Vouchers designed and printed
- ✓ Support from finance secured for repayment of vouchers to traders
- ✓ Monitoring/evaluation system developed (for beneficiary listing, exit/entry of seeds, markets, the fair itself, and post-distribution and harvest evaluation)

- germination rate and agronomical quality (some countries only allow the trade of certified seeds); and,
- Security conditions allow the transportation of cash to pay suppliers on the day of the fair (in certain cases suppliers could be paid after fairs, and bigger suppliers could be paid by cheque).

**Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages or challenges of seed fairs**

Advantages	Disadvantages/challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering – beneficiaries can purchase seeds they need and prefer (as opposed to emergency seed distributions)</li> <li>• Seeds more likely than imported seeds to fit local context and conditions (and thus crops are less likely to fail)</li> <li>• Limits risk of importation of external pathogens</li> <li>• Logistic constraints are fairly low (no need to transport seed to beneficiaries)</li> <li>• Does not rely on external supplies and hence can be launched fairly quickly</li> <li>• Stimulates local economy and experience-sharing and communication between farmers and other agricultural actors</li> <li>• Gathers beneficiaries in the one place, allowing sensitisation and training in other agricultural issues</li> <li>• Making a variety of seeds available helps preserve biodiversity and insure farmers against climatic risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of seeds can be low if not properly certified (a germination test may be necessary)</li> <li>• Communication and sensitisation of beneficiaries needs are more intensive than in a simple seed distribution</li> <li>• If using vouchers, beneficiaries needs to be appropriately briefed on their use</li> <li>• Identification and control of potential sellers can be potentially time-consuming</li> <li>• Reaching the fair location itself can be a constraint for some beneficiaries</li> </ul>

#### What are the expected outputs or outcomes of a seed fair?

Potential outputs/outcomes of a seed fair include the following:

- Access to seeds is improved for the entire targeted community;
- Beneficiaries can grow x ha of crops, ensuring x months of food at harvest (improved food security);
- Improved dietary diversity (if the crop has been successful);
- Local economy revitalised, particularly for small traders and farmers who participate in the project;
- Beneficiaries, through improved crop diversity, are more resilient to future shocks;
- Improved farming techniques through capacity building and strengthened community linkages; and,
- Community empowerment—farmer choice rather than traditional emergency distribution systems.

#### Are there any programme examples that used seed fairs?

Oxfam GB programmes that have used seed fairs include:

- Eritrea 2005—recurrent drought, plus years of border conflict, left vulnerable communities in Debub in a chronic state of food insecurity. Seed fairs were implemented as part of a broader agricultural programme response, which included tool distribution and training; and,
- Haiti 2004—following flash flooding in south eastern Haiti, seed fairs were set up as part of a livelihoods recovery project for affected families, that included tool and livestock distribution, and support for petty trade.

#### Where can I find further reading and more detailed information?

Oxfam EFSL Rough Guides on Agricultural Programmes: – 4.1 – Agricultural Response – 4.4 – Germination Test	ICRISAT 2003. <i>Organising Seed Fairs in Emergency Situations</i> . <a href="http://www.icrisat.org">www.icrisat.org</a>
Practical Action Technical Brief: Seed fairs <a href="http://www.appropedia.org">www.appropedia.org</a> (Accessed March 2010)	Bramel P. and Remington T. 2002. <i>CRS seed vouchers and fairs in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Gambia</i> . <a href="http://www.odihpn.org">www.odihpn.org</a>

#### Who can I contact for more information and guidance?

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