

REPORT ON THE EXPERT CONSULTATION 'FROM SEED AID TO SEED GOVERNANCE'
Exchanging ideas and experiences on organizing seed security and exploring the concept of seed system governance

Museon, The Hague, Netherlands, 17 June 2014

A list of participants, the program and a photo impression are included at the end of this report.

1. Opening

Evelijne Bruning (day chair) opened the day and welcomed the participants. **Simone Filippini** (Cordaid) introduced Cordaid's work and the research project, and called upon the participants to work with an open mind, an open heart and a good work ethic. **Marcel Beukeboom** (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) also called upon participants to get out of their own space and to develop partnerships between different actors (public sector, private sector, knowledge institutes, civil society; the "Dutch diamond"). He acknowledged the 'governance gaps' in food security between disaster relief and post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation and development, and called for joint solutions. **Otto Hospes** (Wageningen University) then introduced Wageningen University and presented key concepts used in the Draft Final report of the study, which had been shared with participants before the meeting.

The introduction of the concepts and the working groups, as well as the presentations of McGuire, Gildemacher, Remington and Kapran are available as appendices.

2. Practices and paradigms: between theory and practice

Shawn McGuire (University of East Anglia) presented 'What is seed system governance for, and what holds it back? Reflections from Seed System Security Assessments in stressed regions'.

Peter Gildemacher (Royal Tropical Institute) then presented the Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD) program, a pragmatic approach towards seed sector intervention linking the formal and informal seed systems.

3. Practices and paradigms: practitioners' experiences

Thomas Remington (CGIAR-CIP) drew on 20 years of experience with CRS while presenting 'From seed aid to seed governance: The CRS experience 1994-2014'. He discussed the pitfalls of direct seed distribution, and the development of seed vouchers and fairs as an alternative. The often repetitive nature of both types of interventions were discussed.

In his presentation, **Issoufou Kapran** (AGRA-PASS) reflected on experiences with the Program on Africa's Seed Systems (PASS) of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)

4. Working groups. Discussing best practices and pitfalls of seed governance in fragile areas: interventions, systems and resilience

Petra Rietberg (Wageningen University) introduced the working groups. Participants were asked to identify best practices and pitfalls at three types/levels of intervention: direct seed interventions, seed system or sector interventions, and interventions directed towards resilient seed systems. Specifically, participants were asked to discuss best practices and pitfalls related to (1) seed security in fragile areas and (2) questions about arrangements and collaborations between actors and power and decision-making between them, that is, governance. A summary of the most important and remarkable points from two sessions of each of the three working groups is given in the next section.

1. Direct seed interventions

The discussion on direct seed interventions mainly coalesced around seed system security assessments. Conducting such assessments to understand seed system functioning was identified as a best practice. Preferably, donors would provide strong incentives for seed security assessments by requiring that a valid SSSA is conducted prior to any seed-related interventions. These assessments should then be linked to recommendations and follow-up.

Several pitfalls that prevent the execution of seed security assessments were identified. Willingness or ability to conduct a seed security assessment is hampered by: 1) the assumption that people already know what the situation is; 2) the idea that, in an emergency situation, there is no time to conduct an assessment because one needs to act immediately; 3) lack of a simple assessment tool or expertise on how to use it; and 4) the idea that an assessment is a “seed needs” assessment, assuming a problem of seed availability. As a consequence, donors or interveners make decisions on seed with insufficient understanding of seed systems. This also holds for the execution of direct seed distribution which, according to the participants, often is conducted by people who aren't professionals in distribution and who have limited (technical) knowledge on seed.

A shift from reflecting on 'doing things right' to 'doing the right thing' was seen as a best practice, whereas failure to reflect, evaluate and learn was seen as a pitfall.

Lack of accountability in direct seed distribution was seen as a pitfall. The use of the Accountability to Affected Populations guidance (FAO, 2013) was seen as a best practice related to governance.

2. Seed system or seed sector¹ development

Farmer-to-farmer exchange and the building of local knowledge networks was seen as a best practice enabling the development of (informal) seed systems. Agri-Hubs such as developed by Agri-ProFocus, where different actors come together to share knowledge on particular topics, could play a role in such knowledge exchange at a regional or national level.

Banking on existing networks (e.g. producer organizations) was identified as best practice. However, governance-related questions need to be addressed there as well, as these organizations may suffer themselves from lack of accountability and legitimate representation, and favour men and elites.

According to some of the participants, local seed producers are often identified by “big men” and the extent to which they are reliable partners with an interested in producing seed is questioned.

Free direct seed interventions do not contribute to the development of seed systems. A former project of FAO in the Central African Republic was described as a case where the effect of the interventions faded away after the interventions ended. FAO invested in training 800 seed producers and bought the seed they produced to give it to other farmers. However, as the funding ceased, the farmers lost interest in using the seed and consequently the seed producers could not maintain their business. Seed vouchers and fairs might contribute to seed system development if well designed, yet often they do not (a.o. for their repetitive nature, large traders taking over).

Fostering exchange and cooperation between public research and private partners was seen as a good practice for the development of new varieties.

¹ The working group participants generally sensed that seed systems are broader than seed sectors and encompass them. Seed systems include seed sectors as well as farmers, civil society, informal markets and government actors, whereas seed sector seems to refer to formal seed sector actors. As we did not want to narrow the discussion to formal seed sector development only, we decided to focus on seed system development.

At local markets, the quality of seeds may be problematic as seed may be adulterated or sellers may cheat on buyers. However others stated that the quality of seed at local markets is often higher than the quality of farmer produced seed. Certified seed, according to several participants, does not necessarily guarantee varietal and/or seed quality. Quality declared seed was mentioned as an alternative to certified seed that is cheaper and may require less bureaucratic procedures. Such quality declarations not necessarily would need to be backed up by state legislation, although such legislation could allow some formal recognition to quality declared seed.

One of the participants stressed that in order to effectively intervene in and develop seed systems, intervening parties should not only think about the type of activities and practices that would serve their goals, but rather develop a vision on the partners with whom to cooperate and how they would like to work on reaching certain goals.

3. Resilient seed systems

It was generally acknowledged that building resilient seed systems should start *before* the acute emergency situation. Working towards resilient seed systems should be part of disaster risk reduction programs.

Several people advocated a bottom-up approach, strengthening existing systems and building upon them. Such strengthening should allow for self-governance of communities and strengthen local entrepreneurs and the functioning of local markets. Building and fostering relations between farmers and between farmers and merchants was considered important, as social relations play a role in shaping access to seed. When they are mobilized in times of stress, relations between people can turn into social mechanisms of access to seed. Preferably, social relations should be fostered over a wide spatial range: that would enhance the chance that there are contacts with areas that are not hit by a specific shock, and allow for the opportunity to gain access to seeds of specific varieties when needed. Means of communication such as mobile phones were seen as essential in providing information to farmers (e.g. on the availability and price of (new) varieties), and in enabling communication between different farmers and merchants, also over longer distances.

The exploration and expansion of so-called “seed repertoires” was seen as another best practice. This entails the identification of different types of crops that farmers plant or could plant under different conditions. The identification and development of seed repertoires prior to any emergency combined with their mobilization in times of stress could contribute to seed system resilience.

It was also suggested that the relief and development community itself could work on better disaster preparedness and better cooperation between different partners. The United Nations’ Cluster-approach was mentioned as a good example. Under this approach, different actors such as WFP and FAO come together to discuss their roles and responsibilities in emergency situations, so that they can respond to disasters quicker and more effectively and efficiently.

The United Nations Cluster approach is an example of contingency planning, whereby different parties come together to discuss possible scenarios and how to best be prepared for them. More generally, contingency planning by different actors, including government actors and farmers, was seen as a best practice. For seeds, a seed security plan would be the outcome of such contingency planning. Also in this case, fostering relations between different parties is part of disaster preparedness.

Perfectly resilient seed systems react to shocks and stress by absorption of stress, adaptation or system transformation, so that seed security is maintained for all involved.

Several elements of the current dominant humanitarian aid paradigm were critiqued and seen as pitfalls to building resilient seed systems: organisations with limited agricultural knowledge working on seed, the separation between organisations working on relief and those on development, the

segregated funding architecture and the lack of follow-up and continuity. Especially the assumption that seed is not available or that there are no local entrepreneurs is rarely true and made too easily.

5. Concluding debate

In the concluding debate, the findings of the different working groups were briefly discussed and reflected upon.

6. Concluding remarks

On behalf of Cordaid, **Peter Ton** and **Edith Boekraad** noted that the issue of seed governance should be on the agenda of all participants' institutions, as most do not currently have a specific policy on seed interventions in and after emergency. They thanked the participants, speakers and organizers, and expressed their interest in further developing the topic and building relationships with others in the field. **Otto Hospes** (Wageningen University) then reflected on the importance of thinking about governance when discussing seed security and interventions in seed systems. **Geert Westenbrink** (Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs) complimented Cordaid with taking the initiative to organize this expert meeting. He called upon Cordaid to take on a leadership role in the debate on interventions in seed systems. Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs are looking for new ways of combining or better integrating relief and development.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Marcel Beukeboom (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Edith Boekraad (Cordaid)
Gareth Borman (CDI)
Evelijne Bruning (day chair)
Théophile Djedjebi (Cordaid)
Hein Gevers (WUR)
Peter Gildemacher (KIT)
Otto Hospes (WUR)
Issoufou Kapran (AGRA)
Niels Louwaars (Plantum)
Neil Marsland (FAO)
Shawn McGuire (University of East Anglia)
Nicole Metz (Agri-ProFocus)
Lucio Olivero (FAO)
Archana Patnaik (WUR)
Thomas Remington (CGIAR/CIP)
Petra Rietberg (WUR)
Roelof van Til (ZOA)
Simone Filippini (Cordaid)
Peter Ton (Cordaid)
Ido Verhagen (Access to Seeds Index)
Geert Westenbrink (Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs)

THE PROGRAMME

From seed aid to seed governance in fragile areas: Exchanging ideas and experiences on organizing seed security and exploring the concept of seed system governance

TIME	PROGRAMME
08.30-09.00	Registration with coffee and tea
09.00-09.40	Opening by chair: Evelijne Bruning (day chair) Welcome by Simone Filippini (Director of Cordaid) Introduction by Marcel Beukeboom (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Key concepts by Otto Hospes (Wageningen University)
09.40-11.00	Practices and paradigms: between theory and practice Shawn McGuire (University of East Anglia) and Louise Sperling What is seed system governance for, and what holds it back? Reflections from Seed System Security Assessments in stressed regions Peter Gildemacher (Royal Tropical Institute) Integrated Seed Sector Development: a new model for seed sector improvement Debate
11.00-11.30	Break (coffee/tea)
11.30-12.50	Practices and paradigms: practitioners' experiences Stephen Walsh (Catholic Relief Service) and Thomas Remington (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research / Centre for International Potatoes): From seed aid to seed governance: The CRS experience 1994–2014 Issoufou Kapran (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa) Reflecting on experiences with the Program for Africa's Seed Systems Debate
12.50-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.00	Working groups. Discussing best practices and pitfalls of seed governance in fragile areas: interventions, systems and resilience
15.00-15.15	Break (coffee/tea)
15.15-16.15	Working groups. Discussing best practices and pitfalls of seed governance in fragile areas: interventions, systems and resilience
16.15-16.30	Break (juices)
16.30-17.15	Concluding debate - Harvesting ideas and experiences on how to organize seed security in fragile areas - Questions and your action for follow up
17.15-17.30	Concluding remarks Otto Hospes (Wageningen University) Geert Westenbrink (Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs)
17.30-	Drinks

