



Food and Agriculture
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The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Views, Experiences and Best Practices as an example of possible options for
the national implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty**

Note by the Secretary

At its [second meeting](#) of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG), the Expert Group agreed on a revised version of the [template](#) for collecting information on examples of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights

This document presents the updated information on best practices and measures of implementing Article 9 of the International Treaty submitted by Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE) on 1 August 2019.

The submission is presented in the form and language in which it was received.



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Basic information

- Title of measure/practice

Securing Local Seed System Through Farmers' Seed Clubs

- Date of submission

July 31, 2019

- Name(s) of country/countries in which the measure/practice is taking place

Vietnam

- Responsible institution/organization (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s) and contact person)

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- Type of institution/organization (categories)

Research / Academic Institution

- Collaborating/supporting institutions/organizations/actors, if applicable (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s))

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Description of the examples

Mandatory information:¹

- Short summary to be put in the inventory (max. 200 words) including:
 - Implementing entity and partners
 - Start year
 - Objective(s)
 - Summary of core components
 - Key outcomes
 - Lessons learned (if applicable)

Empowerment of farmers has been an ongoing undertaking and objective in Mekong Delta since 1996, based on various projects and partnerships. One such initiative, implemented by the Mekong Delta Development Research Institute (MDI), in collaboration with Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE), included capacity development in rice breeding and seed production through experiential learning in Farmer Field Schools. As a result, over 300 seed clubs were formed across the Mekong Delta, which produced and distributed 158,000 tons of seeds of 77 rice varieties in 2018, benefitting 24,000 households. They supply at least 35% of the seed in the region and are recognized by farmers and local government authorities, such as Seed Centers, Extension Centers and the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) as important suppliers of good quality seeds. Furthermore, they developed 359 rice varieties, of which four have been registered and certified nationally, while five are in the process of registration. The contributions of seed clubs to improving seed systems and encouraging participation of individuals and communities in local seed production and distribution caused the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) to issue Decision 35/2008/QĐ-BNN, encouraging local authorities to support community-based on-farm seed management.

- Brief history (including starting year), as appropriate

Vietnam is the second country (first was the Philippines) where SEARICE implemented PGR conservation and development. The work in Mekong Delta started in 1996 through the Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation (CBDC) program. The program mobilized farmers, agricultural specialists, policymakers, and funding agencies in a convergence of efforts on the promotion of farmers' rights and empowerment towards proper management of PGR.

In 2006, CBDC was merged with another program called the Biodiversity Use and Conservation in Asia Program (BUCAP), another SEARICE program with different thrusts but with the same end goals as CBDC. CBDC-BUCAP further pushed for the development of the farmer-managed seed system, with the Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) strategy helping build up the capacities of farmers for them to develop their own rice varieties and organize community seed clubs.

Efforts continue with the implementation of the successor of the CBDC-BUCAP called Strengthening Farmer-Agricultural Research and Extension System Partnership or FARES which was implemented in 2011- 2013. Thus, empowerment of farmers has been an ongoing undertaking that has produced significant impacts in the field of plant breeding.

¹ This mandatory information is required in order for the measure/practice to be included in the Inventory.



- Core components of the measure/practice (max 200 words)

The main component of the measure was the capacity development of farmers in rice breeding and seed production. As with the other country partners of SEARICE, farmer field school (FFS) was used as a learning and empowering methodology. Farmers enhanced their knowledge and skills on rice breeding and seed production through experiential learning.

Mekong Delta provides a good example of how PPB works in highly commercial agricultural context as opposed to the common notion that PPB works only in marginal and subsistent agriculture, where there is no vibrant seed industry. Mekong Delta is the rice bowl of Vietnam but seed supply remains inadequate despite the huge capacity of government plant breeding institutions such as the Cuu Long Rice Research Institute and the active seed multiplication and distribution of some private companies in the region.

The other key component of the measure is the organizational development of the seed clubs. Members of the seed clubs especially the Officers have to undergo additional training on group management, marketing, basic accounting, and other skills to help strengthen and sustain the seed clubs.

- Description of the context and the history of the measure/practice is taking place (political, legal and economic framework conditions for the measure/practice) (max 200 words)

Seed clubs, now over 300 across the Mekong Delta, serve as vehicles for farmers' capacity-building, as seed club membership requires interested farmers to undergo trainings in plant breeding and seed production. Seed clubs are also a mechanism for sustainability. A leading rice producer, Vietnam requires great volumes of seeds to meet domestic demands for production, which the government and seed companies in the region cannot meet. Seed clubs supply at least 35% of the seed demand in the whole region. This is highly significant considering that the formal system contributes only 3.5% of the total rice seed requirement in the Mekong River Delta (Tin, et al. 2008).

With the growing demand for seeds, the role of seed clubs as seed producers of farmer- developed varieties and local authorities come into play. Local authorities at the provincial level provide a guarantee system on farmer varieties and apply strict inspection on the seeds produced by the seed clubs to ensure quality. Farmers belonging to seed clubs undergo trainings on seed inspection thus, farmer-developed varieties often pass such tests, allowing for seeds to be sold locally, effectively giving farmer-developed varieties the character of being certified at least locally.

- To which provision(s) of Article 9 of the International Treaty does this measure relate

- Art. 9.1
- Art. 9.2a
- Art. 9.2b
- Art. 9.2c
- Art. 9.3



Other information, if applicable

- Please indicate which category of the Inventory is most relevant for the proposed measure, and which other categories are also relevant (if any):

No.	Category	Most relevant ²	Also relevant ³
1	Recognition of local and indigenous communities', farmers' contributions to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, such as awards and recognition of custodian/guardian farmers		
2	Financial contributions to support farmers conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA such as contributions to benefit-sharing funds		
3	Approaches to encourage income-generating activities to support farmers' conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA		
4	Catalogues, registries and other forms of documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge		
5	In-situ/on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA, such as social and cultural measures, community biodiversity management and conservation sites		
6	Facilitation of farmers' access to a diversity of PGRFA through community seed banks ⁴ , seed networks and other measures improving farmers' choices of a wider diversity of PGRFA.		
7	Participatory approaches to research on PGRFA, including characterization and evaluation, participatory plant breeding and variety selection		
8	Farmers' participation in decision-making at local, national and sub-regional, regional and international levels		
9	Training, capacity development and public awareness creation		
10	Legal measures for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, such as legislative measures related to PGRFA.		
11	Other measures / practices		

- In case you selected 'other measures', would you like to suggest a description of this measure, e.g. as a possible new category? _____

² Please select only one category that is most relevant, under which the measure will be listed.

³ Please select one or several categories that may also be relevant (if applicable).

⁴ Including seed houses.



- Objective(s)
 - a) To address farmers' limited access to quality seeds and locally adapted rice varieties
 - b) To contribute to the livelihood of both farmer seed producers and users of seeds as the seeds are sold at a lower price compared to commercial seeds
 - c) To demonstrate farmers' empowerment and show how farmers can be an effective and efficient contributor to national seed security if given opportunities
- Target group(s) and numbers of involved and affected farmers⁵

In 2018 alone, the Seed Clubs produced and distributed 158,000 tons of seeds which benefited approximately 24,000 households (computed based on 6.6 tons seed rate per hectare with average land area of 1 hectare per household).

- Location(s) and geographical outreach

Mekong Delta, Vietnam

- Resources used for implementation of the measure/practice

Around USD 100,000/year was the cost of the project with counterpart staff time and office spaces of local partners

- How has the measure/practice affected the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?

The role of seed clubs in the conservation and sustainable use of rice genetic resources cannot be denied. All members of the seed clubs are graduates of FFS and are skilled in rice breeding and seed production. Aware of the impacts of climate change, they continue to develop varieties that adapt to their local conditions. From 2000 to 2018, the seed clubs in Mekong Delta developed and “released” 359 rice varieties, of which four have already received national registration and certification, an evidence that farmer varieties can pass the rigid tests of the formal system. Five more farmer varieties are currently in the pipeline for national registration, proof that the common notion that farmer varieties are of “poor quality” is unfounded.

The seed clubs do not only fill a significant share of the gap in the seed supply system, they also provide diversity of choices for farmers. In 2018, for instance, seed clubs produced and distributed 77 different rice varieties compared to the 27 rice varieties produced and distributed through the formal system. Of the 27 varieties produced by the formal system, four are farmer varieties, which again indicates the recognition accorded even by the formal system to farmer varieties.

- Please describe the achievements of the measure/ practice so far (including quantification) (max 200 words)

The major contribution of the Seed Clubs is in terms of securing farmers' access to affordable good quality seeds which are adapted to the local conditions in Mekong Delta. As mentioned in previous sections, the Seed Clubs are able to provide 35% of the potential rice seed demand in Mekong Delta.

⁵ Any classification, e.g. of the types of farmer addressed, may be country-specific.



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Those seeds are more diverse (about 77 different varieties) and are sold at a lower price compared with the commercial rice seeds sold in the market thus providing services to the farming communities. At the household level, seed production contributed to securing additional source of income to the Seed Club members. Seeds command a higher price per kilogram than grains. Hence farmers with the capacity on seed production like the members of the Seed Clubs, opt to specialize in seed production and distribution. The successful registration and certification of 4 farmer-bred varieties is another victory of the seed clubs, which serve as a link between farmers and the relevant local government institutions. Through the seed clubs, local government recognized the potential of the varieties developed by farmers and supported their registration, certification and eventual distribution to other parts of the country.

- Other national level instruments that are linked to the measure/practice
- Are you aware of any other international agreements or programs that are relevant for this measure/practice?
 - a) Convention on Biological Diversity
 - b) Nagoya Protocol
- Other issues you wish to address, that have not yet been covered, to describe the measure/practice

Lessons learned

- Describe lessons learned which may be relevant for others who wish to do the same or similar measures/practices (max 250 words).

Farmers can be very effective partners in securing local seed systems, if they are given opportunity. The key is to always start with what they need and build on what they have. Addressing their needs would ensure commitment from them. If farmers are self-reliant, sustainability can be assured.

It is important to involve key relevant government institutions right from the start to raise their awareness on the important role of farmers and how they can effectively and efficiently support the farmers, and eventually allow them to take on the role of a support system. This support includes allowing farmers to save, exchange, and sell their seeds using a quality-control system which is appropriate to smallholder farmers.

A local variety certification can attest the adaptability of a particular variety to a particular locality that may be, as an example, drought-prone and with high salinity; and that it can generate good yields with minimal external inputs. Moreover, a local certification would allow mass production and trading of that variety in that particular area, and in other areas with similar environmental conditions, which in this case would need a good land use characterization and zoning. This will also reduce the incidence of crop failure, and therefore afford farmers with protection from using poor quality seeds, while at the same time, provide guarantee of access to good quality seeds.

- What challenges encountered along the way (if applicable) (max 200 words)

As proven by the certification of the HD1, NV1, TZ7 and AG1, farmer-bred varieties can have the same qualities, if not better, as those of certified seeds, and therefore have the potential of becoming part of the



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support system to the seed requirements in the country. However, the procedures that varieties need to go through, and the financial costs required before they are granted national certification status are much too stringent for farmer-breeders.

While the national variety seed certification policy has good intent in ensuring good quality planting materials for improved crop production and economic development, it has, at the same time, become a bottleneck rather than a channel that facilitates easy access and availability of good quality seeds. Genetic diversity has been identified as the solution to counter food insecurity caused by climate change. But the increasing dependence on few certified varieties defeats the principle of promoting genetic diversity and counters the objective of developing varieties that will adapt to various needs of farmers considering the very diverse ecological conditions in the country. As experienced, current commercially available varieties have exhibited vulnerability to different kinds of environmental stresses, such as drought, salinity, pests and diseases.

- What would you consider conditions for success, if others should seek to carry out such a measure or organize such an activity? (max 100 words)

Government support is key to the success of seed clubs. The support can be technical, material, equipment, and/or supportive policies. An alternative seed certification system appropriate for farmer varieties would be crucial. Rather than genetic uniformity, variety certification would serve the farmers best by establishing the general identifying characteristics of a variety, with greater allowance for variability, reflecting the diversity of its genetic base, resembling a landrace—the kind of crop that farmers would like to have in their farms. In such a case, national certification may not be necessary, and a local variety certification system may be more appropriate.

- **Link(s) to further information about the measure/practice**

For more information and other related projects, you may visit: searice.org.ph