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Newsletter for ECHO/DIPECHO DRR Food Security Partners

Using Wild Crops to Tame Food Insecurity: CARE's Strategic Domestication of Yams

Cyclones and floods regularly hit the high risk areas of northeast and eastern Madagascar, with wind and water inflicting serious damage. This often leads to injuries and loss of human lives as well as the destruction of food and seed stocks. In addition, damages to agricultural production—rural households' main income source, affects their ability to cover day-to-day expenses, such as school and medical fees.

Domestic crops, such as rice and cassava, are often severely damaged during cyclones and flooding, uprooting and flooding the former and causing parasites and rotting in the latter. To meet their food needs, at-risk communities have developed strategies to cope with food shortages, including foraging for wild plants and tubers, such as yams. Yet, even wild crops can be damaged and lost through cyclones and floods, leaving villagers nearly destitute.

However, the losses to yam crops can be minimised if the cultivation techniques are improved and the crop is domesticated. CARE is sensitising villagers in these at-risk areas to the re-introduction of yams as a staple crop and to improved cultivation technologies and practices in an effort to bring yams out of the wild and into the domestic agricultural strategy to be cultivated alongside other usual crops.

CARE selected this strategic crop for a number of reasons. The yam is hardy and re-grows quickly after the withering of the above-ground part of the plant. It is resistant to wind and has adapted to the climatic conditions and soils of the north eastern and eastern regions. The yam has higher yield for the area planted and fits with the local eating habits. In addition, it has a number of conservation possibilities (drying, conservation of the tuber). Yam can be grown in green houses, pots or in the garden because it does not require large amounts of land or soil.

CARE's mobilisation efforts have lead farmers to steadily adopt good agricultural practices. The positive early results obtained by farmers' and marginalised women's groups are likely to influence widespread adoption of the yam as a domestic crop.

Improved production techniques assist with yam domestication, CARE Madagascar, 2011

CARE works with marginalised women and girls to spread yam domestication, FAO Madagascar 2011

Developing an Advocacy Strategy: Key Questions

Developing an advocacy strategy for complementary FS/DRR policies and programming is a core objective of the ECHO FS/DRR intervention. These steps will help guide partners through the advocacy process (Source: Democracy Center's *Strategy Development: Key Questions for Developing an Advocacy Strategy*).

What do you want?
Establish long, medium and short-term goals. Differentiating between content (*what*) and process (*how*) is central to planning advocacy.

Who can give you what you want?
Identify the key people and institutions representing the status quo that you want to change and what stakeholders influence them. This can help you identify the best media and strategies to obtain your goal.

What do decision-makers need to hear in order to be persuaded?
What information should be communicated and how should it be tailored for various audiences?

Who can persuade the decision-makers?
Which messengers are going to be considered the most credible for the delivery of your messages: experts, beneficiaries?

Selecting communication media: How best to convey the message?
How can you best reach your target audience, with what messages and in what form and tone?

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Connecting Beneficiaries With The Seed and Input Market in Mozambique

Preliminary results of a seed sustainability study undertaken within ECHO FS/DRR intervention indicate a gap in small-scale farmers' access to markets to purchase improved seed varieties. The farmers also experience problems in selling excess seed produced in their multiplication activities.

The severity of this gap varies per country and depends on the public and private sector's prioritization of availing inputs to vulnerable rural populations. Because of uncertainty of demand and the costs related to reaching farmers in remote rural areas, the private sector is slow to capitalize on this niche of the market. This has important implications for farmers' ability to sustainably access quality seed for food production and seed multiplication activities.

Understanding the conditions that could make small-scale farmers in remote areas an attractive niche for the private sector is essential for the sustainability of interventions that seek to promote food security – particularly following the occurrence of a hazard.

Forward-thinking entrepreneurs and the under-explored small-scale market

João Morais, owner of Morais Commercial, has been in the seed and inputs sector in northern Mozambique for five years. Morais identified a gap in market access by small-scale farmers outside of city centres. To help close this gap Morais provides small-scale farmers with certified basal seed (acquired from the Ministry of Agriculture's research department) and other inputs. The farmers then multiply the seed for his company to repurchase at a predetermined price.

Morais employs technicians to support the producers and establishes linkages between producers and the government technicians to facilitate the seed certification process. He often finds this a struggle for rural farmers who cannot pay the fees associated with certification monitoring. Presently, Morais engages with 12 small-scale producers in Nampula, who work approximately 200 hectares and from whom he purchases an average of 200 tons of seed per season.

Satellite access to improved varieties in remote areas

In order to increase the availability of quality seed to more remote rural areas, like Mossuril, Mogincual and Ilha de Moçambique where the ECHO FS/DRR beneficiaries are located, Morais has established seven mobile retail units, as well as a mobile trading system, similar to an input fair, to provide beneficiaries with access to quality seed for their own use.

He explains that although these small-scale farmers represent approximately 60% of his overall market, the costs in mobilising to reach them are significant and there is first a need to sensitise communities to the process of seed purchase, the benefits of improved varieties and to see if they like these products.

However, with the increased demand for seed in these areas and the skills already bestowed through the Farmer Field Schools and demonstration plots in the ECHO FS/DRR intervention areas. Morais foresees an opportunity not only for seed sales but also to engage with ECHO FS/DRR beneficiaries as contract farmers, once their seed reaches a stage where it can be certified.

Morais Commercial, Nampula Province, Mozambique, FAO REOSA, 2011

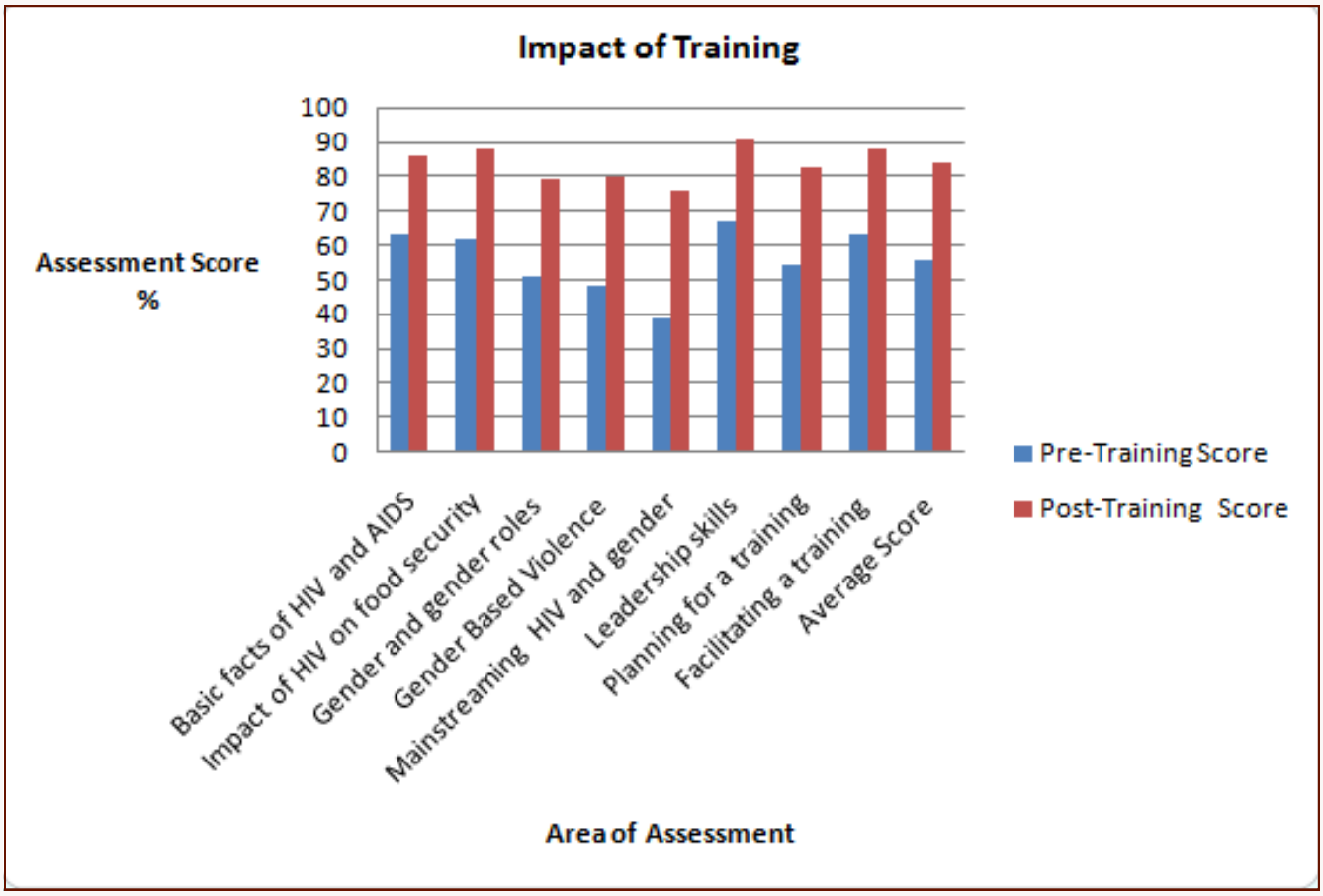
Small-scale farmers, like these beneficiaries from the Sangane Farmer Field School, constitute approximately 60% of Morais Comercial's market. If they can produce quality seed, they could engage with the private sector as seed producers under contract farming arrangements, to provide them much needed income to increase their resilience and improve their food security in face of natural hazards, FAO REOSA, 2011

Training Assessment: Mainstreaming Gender, HIV and AIDS in DRR/FS Programmes

In August, FAO conducted a five-day training in Malawi for 18 DRR/FS project implementers from COOPI, Christian Aid/ Evangelical Association of Malawi and government extension workers. The training offered opportunities for learning, sharing experiences and skills building through both facilitation and practical application of the concepts . Key topics included:

- Basic facts about HIV and AIDS
- Basic facts about gender, gender roles, and gender and development
- Gender based violence
- Impact of HIV vulnerability and gender inequality on food security and livelihoods
- Application of an HIV and gender lens in DRR/FS interventions
- Leadership skills

To measure the impact of the training, an assessment of the pre- and post-training comprehension of gender and HIV and Aids mainstreaming in programming was done. In addition to qualitative feedback that participants felt more comfortable addressing these issues in their project and activity planning, the post-training test scores reflected a genuine increase in comprehension, as indicated in the graphic below. If your organisation is interested in learning more about gender and HIV mainstreaming contact Gertrude Kara at Gertrude.kara@fao.org



Country Updates

Malawi

Early yield data indicates that the crop diversification and use of early maturing varieties in the GOAL, CA/EAM and COOPI intervention areas has significantly increased yields. An average increase of 365 kg/ha for sorghum, 600 kg/ha of millet, 562 kg/ha of OPV maize and 257 kg/ha of hybrid maize has been noted. Early maturing varieties notably reduced the maturation period for crops, an average decrease of 50 days for sorghum, 42 days for millet, 20 days for maize OPV and 32 days for hybrid maize. Food security and gender and HIV/Aids mainstreaming training facilitated by FAO were provided to partners' field staff in July and early August (see page 3).

Madagascar

In preparation for the rice harvest, FAO has trained eight technicians from CARE and ICCO/SAF in harvesting, postharvest handling, treatment and storage techniques. Planting of alternative crops, such as maize, was completed in Fenerive Est and Antalaha, while bean cultivation has begun but is delayed by late rains in the southeast. Agroforestry activities, involving citrus, beans and cloves are currently underway in the intervention areas. X265 rice seed, an early maturing variety that was produced by beneficiaries in the ECHO FS/DRR intervention in the counter season and redistributed to communities in the southeast following cyclone Bingiza in February 2011, is being cultivated throughout August.

Mozambique

Monitoring reports indicate that the adaptation and application of the techniques tested in the farmer field schools are taking place on beneficiaries' own land, indicating early signs of adoption. Most of the FFS members' land is situated in the lowland areas, where they are adapting and applying crop diversification and intensification using the current winter season crops (okra, capsicum, cabbage, tomato, brinjal, lettuce, maize and bean) including crop rotation with Irish potato.

Note: Change of regional workshop date!!

The second and final regional workshop for DIPECHO and ECHO Food Security partners and stakeholders will now take place on **25-27 October 2011** at Birchwood Hotel in Johannesburg.

It is jointly organized by CARE and FAO, the two regional coordinators of the CLaSP and FS/DRR interventions. The first day will be dedicated to partners to make recommendations for programming, the second day will focus on sharing and documenting technical innovations and the third day on advocacy!
For more information visit:
www.disasterriskreduction.net_southern africa

Upcoming Meetings

National and regional Consultation meetings will be held in Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique to share and document national experiences, best practices and advocacy progress in the ECHO/DIPHECO funded CLaSP and FS/DRR Interventions. For details on these meetings contact the relevant country focal points:

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ECHO FS/DRR Southern Africa Partners Website

This newsletter can be accessed on the partners website as well as more information on the projects. Visit:
www.disasterriskreduction.net_southern africa

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