HoA SSA CoP Discussion Summary

Period: From Thursday 22nd May to 30th May 2014

MAIN SUBJECT: A META-ANALYSIS OF PAST AND CURRENT SEED SECURITY ASSESSMENTS IN THE REGION

Moderator: Joseph Okidi – FAO REOA

It has been a good start for our Community of Practice on Seed security Assessment which kicked off last week, and we have been receiving very interesting contributions from members. I would therefore like to rewind the discussion to our initial discussion on Sudan and Ethiopia Review. We have the following key questions in reference to the summary documents I shared with you at the start;

a) Which key aspects captured by this report can help improve the way you work?
b) Which are the aspects that are missing?
c) Based on Report findings, can we generate any lesson learning?

Contributor: Mary Karanja – Kenya.

- **Community seed bulking:** Recommendations for sustainable programmes such as community seeds bulking to improve seed security are very important especially in situation of chronic seed insecurity. It builds the capacity of the local community to multiply their own seeds. Seed banking should be incorporated to ensure seed availability following bad seasons.

- **The seed security conceptual framework:** The elements of seed security captured during seed security assessments such as seed availability, access, quality and suitability are important when needs arises to distribute seeds. It improves targeting the right people with the right seeds of good quality. In some situations seeds have been distributed to farmers without proper assessment leading to distribution of wrong seeds to the wrong people.

- **Emphasis on varietal suitability and seed quality:** Factors such as farmer's seeds preferences should be included to avoid situations where farmers are given seeds which they do not plant. It is also important to consider the capacity and ability of people at the local level to assess seed quality. Do they have requisite training to assess seed quality?

- **Importance of the informal seed sector**: The reports points out the importance of the informal seed system as the main source of seeds for most farmers in the region. Like in Sudan, most of the seeds distributed is said to come from the local seeds systems. Some countries have not given full support of

the informal seed system in terms of policy, research and finance. There is therefore need to advocate for inclusion of the informal seed system in country policies.

- **Limited assessment in Kenya:** The reports points out the importance of conducting SSA using the Seed Security Conceptual Framework before any kind of seeds distribution is undertaken. This is not happening in some countries such as Kenya. There is need for capacity building on seed security assessment and mainstreaming SSA into food security assessment especially following disasters.

Sub-topic: Drought Tolerant Verities Needed

Eyebrow raiser: Daniel Gebeyehu [mailto:dgebeyehu@fh.org] Food for the Hungry-Ethiopia (FH-E)

- **Appreciation:** I am pleased to see the COP has officially started and I am happy to be part of this community. I have also read the report for Ethiopia and took a good lesson from what we have to do in both short and medium term.

- **Drought tolerant varieties needed:** I just want to make emphasis on the need to work on drought tolerant and short maturing seed varieties as a major solution to climate change related disasters. Selection of proper seed types is one of the choices of climate change adaptation technique.

Moderator – Joseph Okidi – FAO REOA

- I totally agree with you that the effect of climate change is pinching us seriously in the Horn of Africa (HoA). Having drought tolerant crops is one of the ways we could partly address this problem.

- **Best bet varieties from NARS and CGIAR needed:** There are quite a lot of research works going on in the region, and with the presence of NARS and CGIAR centers around us for all these year, we need their best bet drought tolerant varieties out to the famers.

- **Need to have sustainable multiplication and supply system:** This however requires substantive efforts in multiplication and distribution/supply system that can benefit the vulnerable and the poor. This many times are lacking in remote areas.

- **Suggestion:** We probably need to get our brothers in research on the same, as well as share the best bet model for multiplication and distribution which focuses at the most vulnerable/poor farming households in the region –

- **Question**: Who there has this bright idea of getting the needed drought tolerant varieties out to the famers? (See sharing experience from Mary Karanja from Kenya)

Contributor – Mary Karanja - Kenya

- **Appreciation:** I am pleased to be part of this CoP.
- **Traditional High Value crops (THVC) programme in Kenya:** Have been contributing to food security, mitigation to climate change and adaptation through the promotion of traditional high value crops programme previously known as 'orphan crops' of the ministry of agriculture, livestock and fisheries, state department of agriculture in distribution of these crops seeds. Through this program the drought tolerant crops, beans, green grams, cow peas, pigeon peas, dolichos, sorghum, millets, cassava and sweet potatoes are bulked by KARI on their farms and through identified seed bulking farmer groups. The seeds are distributed to resource poor farmers in ASALs since 2006. This programme has had a great impact on food security and nutrition, social protection, income generation and also resilience after droughts and during floods as well as availing seed closer to farmers.
- **Implication of seed security assessment:** The seed security assessment exercise will inform on what has worked, what has not worked and the lessons learnt to advise Government on policy on seed systems development and promotion for food security and nutrition.

Moderator – Joseph Okidi FAO REAO

- **Appreciation and query:** I would like to appreciate your contribution and sharing with us what the government of Kenya has been doing in trying to address drought problem and putting into consideration 'orphan crops" of which some are normally not the preferred crops for multiplication by "big seed companies" in the region. Just to a little bit understand your approach;
    a) Are these seed bulking groups formed by your program? How?
    b) What kind of support do you provide to the seed bulking?
    c) What distribution mechanism have you put in place to ensure that the resource poor famers in ASAL are assisted?
    d) What have you put in place to ensure sustainability of such program?

Contributor – Mary Karanja - Kenya

THVCs Program – Experience

- **The program** works closely with KARI in seed bulking where they have formed seed development units mainly in eastern region of Kenya. The groups produce seed under the KARI license while KEPHIS does the seed certification. The seed bulking groups are common interest groups, social groups with a common interest. A common interest group (CIG) is a self-managed, independent group of farmers with

a common shared goal and interest. The members work together to achieve this goal jointly developing an enterprise development plan, learning together but individually implementing the lessons learnt, they then pool their produce in order to market/process together but the resulting benefits are individual. Once the seed is bulked it's processed by KARI and packaged for sale. Most seed bulking farmers who make about 2500 groups have benefited immensely from the venture.

- **Seed distribution mechanism:** Under the THVC program, the seed is also distributed to resource poor farmers who are competitively identified by stakeholder fora after meeting set criteria. They also form CIG to produce for household food security and nutrition and to generate income from sale of extra seed. The farmers are given seed on a loan basis where they retrieve twice what they receive for onward distribution to secondary beneficiary. The groups go through series of trainings on good agricultural practices, seed bulking and production as well as seed bulking and commercialization of these crops. They are also linked to markets e.g. Schools where they pay fees using the produce, super markets, EABL among others. Amalgamation of CIGs coupled with the expansion in scope of the CIG activities leads to the realization of a producer group (organization/commercial village).

- **Beneficiaries:** Once the beneficiaries are identified, their details are put down by the MOA staff who takes down the name of farmer, identity number, location, type of crop to be issued, acreage and the farmer commits him/herself to give back twice what they receive. The very resource poor benefit from the retrieved seed as they may not retrieve any seed, they may end up consuming or selling any balances. The groups sign committal form that is endorsed by the administration officer of the area. All beneficiaries receive capacity Building during the distribution of the seed, in the farmer's demonstration plots, during field days, seed fairs and exhibitions.

- **Stakeholders and their roles:** The counties and sub counties have stakeholder forums that are involved in the identification of the beneficiaries. There are also local committees at the ward level that ensure that the beneficiaries retrieve seed issued and support the groups in establishing seed banks although this is not viable when there is severe drought in two to three subsequent dry seasons and the farmers go back to whatever seed is available when the rains come.

- **Challenges:** The major challenge of the drought tolerant crops is that a fund has to be available to give seed for recovery every so often. This made worse by the fact that most farmers sell their produce immediately after harvest to avoid post-harvest losses and to meet their immediate family financial needs.

- **Sustainability:** To ensure sustainability of the program, a lot of capacity building has been done, especially on seed bulking, a team of officers were trained, 4 Agricultural trainings conducted. Centers supported to produce drought tolerant seed as a business venture ther by availing seed near the farmers. KARI has been supported on seed production. Farmers now know how to aggregate their money for bulk purchase of their seed through capacity building. These seeds were not available in the seed companies but have some seed companies such as the Kenya seed company, fReshco seed company, Dryland seed company and leldet seed company among others now selling drought tolerant seed in eastern region and other regions. This ensures farmers can walk into an Argo dealers shop and procure the seeds unlike previously. Some of the counties, since devolution came into place is already committing funds for purchase of these seeds and even supporting the commercial villages in seed

bulking. However there is need to take stock of the impact of the program since 2006 as this has not been done to get clear lessons learnt, what worked well, what did not work and why? What is the way forward for the seed bulking groups who have a wealth of knowledge on seed bulking in ASAL areas. Must the farmers continue going back to research to buy the breeders seed? Could this farmers be supported to operate function seed banks? With designed standard structures and with clear food safety and quality standards being observed? How could we strengthen the local quality seed systems?

Contributor: Michael K. Kendagor Farming Systems Kenya (FSK) - Kenya

- **Promoting short maturing varieties:** I agree on the need to utilize drought tolerant crops to mitigate the effects of climate change. We at Farming Systems Kenya are working closely with KARI Centers to promote the short season drought tolerant crops among the rural poor in Nakuru, Baringo and Laikipia and the response is quite good.
- **Multiplication and distribution:** I would concur with you that effort needs to be put in the multiplication and distribution of these varieties to arrest the situation.

Contributor: Habtegabriel, Resom [mailto:Resom.Habtegabriel@plan-international.org] – South Sudan

- **Collective efforts needed:** Indeed such collective efforts are the best way in addressing challenges facing crop production in the region.
- **Shortage of water:** As stated, shortage of water is the most serious physical constraint on production in semi-arid areas.
- **Consideration and suggestion:** Considering cereal transplanting to efficiently utilize the short or the declining rains could be an area to explore in the cycle of thinking for a possible action. It is recommended (as experimented in some countries) that raising some proportion of sorghum and millet crops in nurseries using small amounts of water and transplanting seedlings could be a way of extending the growing season in short duration rainfall areas, thus providing an extra dimension to food security. This practice would complement increasing desired yields from drought tolerance crops.

Moderator: Joseph Okidi – FAO REOA

- **Comment:** On your suggestion, I am a bit concerned about the practicability of transplanting small seeded crops (millet & sorghum) in a traditional set up of our rural famers. Whereas this possible on experimental basis, it might be a very trick approach to our mall scale famers having 1-3 acres.
- **Question:** And how scalable is this approach in order for us to create the desired impact? I would appreciate if anyone in the region could share with us such experience.

- No practical Experienced shared

Contribution: Michael Yemane [mailto:myemane@InternationalMedicalCorps.org] - Ethiopia

- **Holistic and integrated approach to drought management:** It is good to think about early maturing improved varieties. That is great. But we need more holistic response; an integrated approach like water harvesting, conservation measures, pest management, organic fertilizers, harvesting and storage mechanisms has to be part of the equation to expect good yield from the seeds

Sub-topic – Revolving seed to promote sustainable seed system

Eye-bow raiser: Michael Yemane [mailto:myemane@InternationalMedicalCorps.org] – IMC-Ethiopia

- **Building sustainable seed system:** Making the seed system sustainable is quite important without creating any dependency syndromes. It is possible to design revolving seed system, where the farmers will replace either the seed or equivalent money and that can be re-used to reach other farmers. Involving local community and local leadership is required to implement community based solution for the people at the grass root level.

Moderator – Joseph Okidi – FAO REOA

- **Sharing Experience:** I agree that it is possible to have a revolving local seed system to support vulnerable and crisis affected population. I have seen such scheme with one of the Local NGO called Women and Training Association Promotion (WOTAP) in South Sudan. What they normally do is to have a local seed committee within the community to identify who to be supported, get involved in ensuring the right people get supported, monitor their production activities to ensure that they recover the seed (no money is involved) – it is part of the local system where seed production is an integral part of the production system). However, in the events of crop failure (not all will fail), those affected will be exempted from paying back the seed and the organization put in some little effort to raise funding to top up the input. Similar approach was used by World Vision in Western Equatoria, South Sudan in early 2000s. Such experience need to be documented and shared among us.

- **Suggested modification:** We may want to modify this to enhance quality of recovered seed and to avoid genetic erosion over the years, especially where we provide basic or certified seed as startup "capital" for such scheme – Just to start thinking around how to improve such shame particularly in emergency and rehabilitation context. Few experienced famers could be identified from among the beneficiaries, given some basic training on how to ensure quality. This could work well when we are providing OPVs.