Seed Security Assessments in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan 2003 – 2013: Key Findings and Recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Providing seed to rural households in s in situations of food insecurity has been carried out for decades. By the mid-1990's there was increasing concern about the effectiveness and appropriateness of widespread direct seed distribution following a crisis, and in 1996 a USAID/OFDA commissioned report[1] recommended that henceforth a needs assessments should always be conducted before providing seed aid. Two years later the development of the seed security conceptual framework[2] paved the way for more analytically robust assessment methodologies for examining seed security. Since then a large number of assessments have been undertaken, mainly in Africa. A key milestone in this regard came in 2008 when CIAT in partnership with CRS and with USAID funding published **When *Disaster Strikes: A Guide to Assessing Seed System Security***[3] The methodology was first piloted in Mali (2006) and then used in a number of other countries. This is a comprehensive approach that includes household surveys, focus groups, local markets, seed trader and companies and other secondary sources of information to provide an overview of the national seed systems as well as analysis of the impact of humanitarian crisis on specific households and communities. Based on the data collection and analysis, appropriate recommendations can be developed to improve seed security. This tool has been used to good effect in a number of countries, normally led by specialized seed experts/consultants.

Since the first SSA conducted in Mali in 2006 many assessment have been conducted to address chronic as well as acute crises. Led by CIAT with funding from OFDA and in partnership with CRS, FAO and other international and national collaborators assessments were undertaken in Zimbabwe, DRC, Haiti, Kenya, South Sudan, Malawi, and Zambia. In addition, CRS and FAO have conducted assessments separately in several countries in the Horn and the Sahel, and FAO and CRS recently collaborated in SSA in the Sahel in 2012 in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.

It is clear then that Seed System Security Assessments (SSSAs) and Seed Security Assessments (SSAs) are not new in the Sahel or the Horn of Africa, having been undertaken since at least 2006. A conservative estimate is that since 2003, at least 50 assessments have been conducted and most of these have taken place in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Perhaps surprisingly, despite this number of assessments, thus far there has been no systematic review of the technical quality, key findings and perhaps most importantly the impact of these assessments on decision making. In order to address this, and to provide guidance for the development and application of an enhanced SSA methodology, all known seed security assessments undertaken in the last 10 years in the eight countries in the Sahel and the Horn[4] were analysed against the following questions:

- Why was the assessment done and who commissioned it?
- What kind and level of training was done to support the assessment?

[1] Osborn, Dommen and Ross-Sherrif: "Seed for Disaster Mitigation and Recovery in the Greater Horn of Africa" (1996)
[2] Remington,1998 and Remington et al.,2002
[3] Sperling, Louise.2008
[4] Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan.

- What kind of methodology was used in the assessment (quantitative, qualitative)?
- What were the key findings of the assessment?
- How long did the assessment take?
- What, if anything, was the impact of the assessment on subsequent decision making in relation to seed security related interventions?

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the systematic review of SSA in the eight countries in the Horn of African and the Sahel the following findings and recommendations have emerged.

1. Uptake of SSAs by seed sector stakeholders is extremely low. A stark finding from this review is that less than 10 percent of post-disaster seed related interventions undertaken in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel over the past 10 years were based on Seed Security Assessments. Even within the organizations leading the SSA, the results are often not taken on board by the decision makers, particularly if they are not aware of or properly understand the SSA or if the assessment was conducted largely by external consultants.

AND

2. Chronic Seed Aid Syndrome is endemic in all 8 countries in the Horn and the Sahel

Seed aid has become an established response to sudden onset emergencies and protracted crises. Donors, national government and humanitarian organizations see this as an immediate short term response even without conducting an assessment to understand if there is a problem of seed security and the nature of the problem. Seed aid has been used continuously for 40 years in Ethiopia and for 20 years in South Sudan, Kenya and Somalia. Seed aid is more recent in the Sahel than the Horn but has been used for ten years. Though SSA has been used in these countries and achieved positive results it has not been able significantly to change the nature of seed aid.

Recommendation: *Awareness and ownership of SSA in the humanitarian community should be raised. National level Food Security Clusters should be targeted as key entry points and champions, along with national governments, International NGOs and donors in an effort make SSA more widely used to inform decision about seed security interventions. Currently there is no seed security community of practice in the Horn or in the Sahel either at country or regional levels. The creation of Communities of Practice can be a critical mechanism for improving awareness of SSAs through sharing, discussion and feedback. SSA needs to be part of the standard humanitarian information system in the same way that food security assessments are and become widely used by governments.*

3. SSAs conducted have been extremely varied in quality, depth and consistency. The SSAs reviewed ranged from large in-depth studies to smaller rapid assessments. There have been examples when SSAs were conducted with international experts with adequate funding and other assessments conducted by local consultants or national staff without sufficient knowledge or experience of the methodology and minimal funding. In addition there have been situations where SSAs have been conducted but a report of the findings was not produced in time or not at all because staff needed to address other urgent responsibilities. There were situations where some of the recommendations were not feasible or did not truly reflect the findings. It is essential that the SSA steps – assessment, analysis & interpretation, recommendations are logically linked and not distorted to ratify a specific seed aid

precedent or because of inadequate funding or staffing or time constraints. Though virtually all assessments indicate that own saved seed and local market seed remain the two most important seed sources, there are seldom recommendations on supporting and strengthening the informal sector. Rather the default recommendation is either to do Seed Voucher and Fairs or Direct Seed Distribution with a focus on certified seed of modern varieties Support t=o the seed sector is generally critical to build resilience of the sector and thus reduce vulnerability to subsequent crises and shocks.

Recommendations:

- *The quality of SSAs should be made more consistent by more widespread adoption of standardized methodology in which analysis and recommendations are based very clearly on the Seed Security Conceptual Framework*.
- *An essential prerequisite for conducting SSA is the training of the teams that will do it. This training should include the principles of seed security, and the participatory design of the field tools to reflect the specific seed system, seed sources and disaster context and how to turn the finding of the assessment into feasible actions in the short and medium term. Many more people need to receive high quality SSA training to build up a critical mass of SSA practitioners capable of producing good quality analysis and recommendations.*
- *SSAs should include analysis of seed system resilience and prescribe appropriate actions to support resilience at different levels.*

4. FAO, CIAT and CRS are Lead Organizations in Seed Security and Seed Aid. There has been significant collaboration between these organisations; however there is room for more systematic and deeper collaboration around SSA and seed distribution policy along with NGOs and national governments. In recent years, WFP has become a bigger player in seed distribution and it therefore should be included in discussions around SSA and seed aid.

Recommendation: *Collaboration in the area seed assessment and intervention should be strengthened between FAO, CRS, CIAT and WFP along with other humanitarian partner's national governments and research institutions. The establishment of a global, Community of Practice, with FAO acting as the secretariat is worth considering. The terms of reference of the CoP could include information sharing, support in SSA activities and establishment of common seed intervention guidelines standards and guidelines. The CoP should be linked to the global Food Security Cluster.*