



Background

This tool is designed to support a seed company that is asking the question: “How do we make our processes gender responsive?”

It is a tool that seed companies and private actors can use as a guide for discussions and actions aimed at enhancing ‘gender integration and responsiveness’ in the seed value chain. This tool is designed to catalyze conversations and actions around changing practices and intentions in the seed business in order to reduce inequalities in the chain as well as improve service delivery aimed at improving agricultural outcomes for farming communities. It is also aimed at making good business sense for the company. It is not designed to be prescriptive for companies or actors but gives general guidance on ‘areas that are opportunities for innovative gender-responsive actions’. Each seed company can use this tool to choose an area that is appropriate for gender interventions based on their context and the efficiencies the company wants to enhance in their work. We propose gender-responsive actions that get incorporated into the existing processes, not as extra assignments, but more integrated into the standard routines of the seed company.

At a Tropical Legumes III groundnut seed systems meeting held in Dodoma, Tanzania, from 7–8 September 2017, we discussed an example of the seed consortium that was designed in order to popularize bean varieties that ‘the market wanted’ under Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA). It was a great example of ‘good practices’ in making high-quality seed of improved varieties available to all farmers at the country level. However, it also raised questions such as: “*Was the consortium gender-responsive or infused with strategies to reach women and youth farmers? What assumptions were made about the targeted farmers? How gender-responsive was the process followed?*”



Photo: Eleanor Manyasa

Figure 1. Groundnut farmers selling their produce at Soroti, Uganda.

Gender integration in the seed chain

Seeds are the foundation of agricultural productivity. A steady supply of high-quality seeds enhances the chances of obtaining high yields of a quality crop at the farm level. Seed production companies, in tandem with seed certifying agencies, are the bridge that connects the research outputs (after release of improved varieties) to the users of improved seeds, who are mainly the farmers. The process of increasing seed from the plant breeders program to the ‘certified seeds’ is referred to as the ‘seed chain’. In the seed chain, new varieties are made available to farmers for use in their farming programs and pure seed stocks of older but satisfactory varieties are maintained. Certification offers a program for quality control in the planned production of seeds of the desired varieties. The seed chain is an opportunity for business development besides ensuring continuous supply of high quality seeds to the industry. For a long time, actors in the seed chain were mainly specialized seed companies but recently, the industry has seen the involvement of farmers/farmer groups playing different roles at different nodes of the chain under different arrangements.

What are the gender issues in the seed chain?

GENDER refers to the socially given attributes, roles, activities, and responsibilities connected to being a woman or a man in a given society. These roles and responsibilities are learned, changeable over time, and have wide variations within and among cultures and should be analyzed with other socio-economic variables; they are socially constructed.

¹ Esther Njuguna-Mungai, Scientist, Gender Research, ICRISAT, East and Southern Africa.

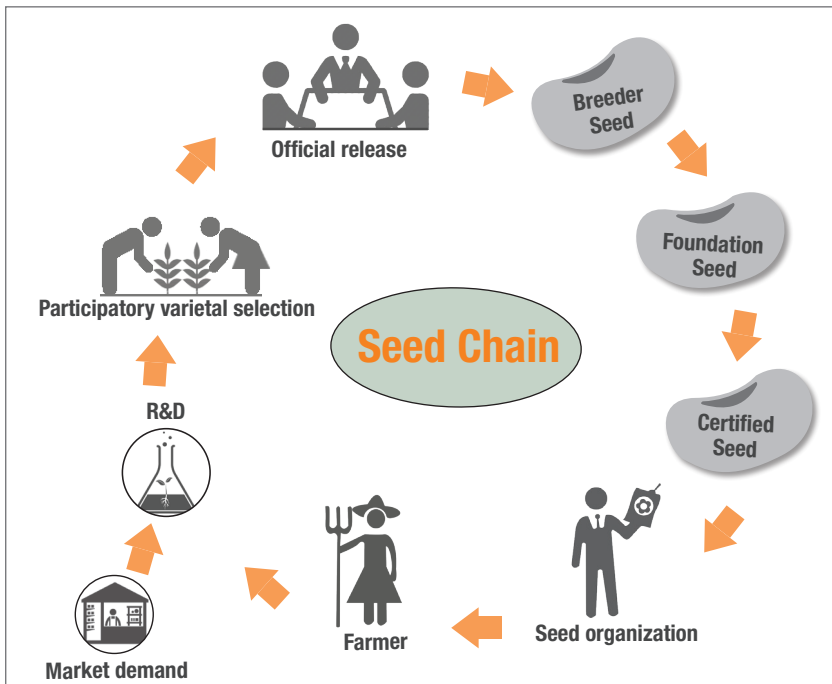


Figure 2. The seed chain has multiple stakeholders.

Gender analysis is therefore not about women but about the relationship between women and men in society. Persistent gender disparities in control of, access to and benefits from technologies, services and inputs across developing countries are due to differences in roles and responsibilities of men and women in societies. Understanding the differential impact of interventions on men and women, as clients or workers – and how their traditional roles and responsibilities impacts on their ability to do their work in the seed chain and be effective in converting opportunities to results that lead to gains by the company – is critical for finding the right levers to improve the seed chain systems and processes. Misunderstanding these gender differences or ignoring their potential impact leads to inadequate planning of workflows and has the potential of perpetuating negative gender inequalities that already exist and diminishing returns on investments of the seed company.



Figure 3. Seed display at the Nane Nane Day celebrations, Tanzania, 2017.

By requiring seed companies to be gender responsive, we anticipate that they can create a working environment that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of men and women, and addresses the issues that are specific to them in their line of work, even when those issues may seem to be peripheral to the core roles the men or women workers are hired to do. To have a gender-integrated seed company does not imply having completely different add-on set of activities that are labelled 'gender activities'; it means tweaking the activities that are already being implemented so that they respond to the unique needs of men or women, either employees or clients, so as to enhance efficiencies in the seed chain

Action 1: Opportunity for gender-responsive seed marketing and targeting

Women play a critical role at the household level, in deciding what seed will be used and where it will be sourced from, especially for the non-hybrid type of seeds that are recycled from season to season. From two studies^{2,3} published in 2016, it was clear that less than 10% of non-hybrid seeds were sourced from formal systems (agro dealers, stockists, etc. through whom the improved varieties are sold). However, farmers were actually buying 'grain' and using it as 'seed' either from the open-air markets or from their neighbors and friends. Saving their 'own seed' was an important source too. Buying grain-for-seed and using own-saved-seed was contributing to over 80% of the seed. *We can, therefore, hypothesize that these two seed sources are the domain of the women for decision making and practices at the farm household level.*

In personal communication with a Director of a seed company in Tanzania, he shared with me the fact that despite being a seed merchant, his wife has a much higher decision-making role at the farm level. To increase the percentage share of households using improved seeds from less than 10% to a higher percentage (this target can be contextualized based on the company market share) is therefore a '*gender-responsive agenda*' that would result in improved business for the seed companies and actors, that has the potential to impact overall production of groundnuts (and other legumes and cereals) in the

2. Njuguna, EM, Mwema C and Kandiwa V. 2016. Beyond a unitary household measure: Does gender matter in legume seed systems among smallholder farmers? 5TH International conference of AAAE, 23-26 sept 2016. United Nations Conference Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

3. McGuire S and Sperling L. 2016. Seed systems smallholder farmers use. Food Security 2016: 8: 179- 195

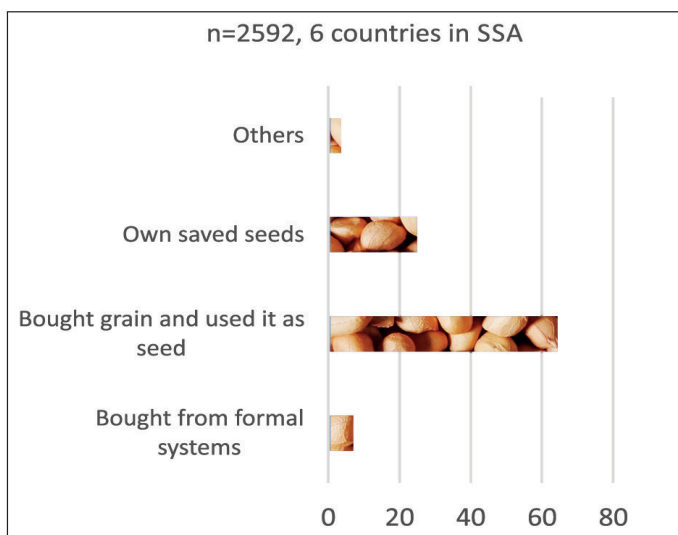


Figure 4. Seed sources as per McGuire and Sperling, 2016.

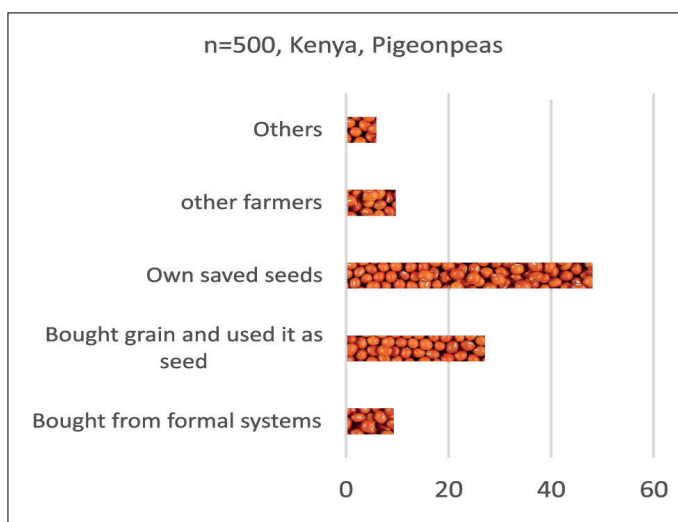


Figure 5. Seed sources as per Njuguna et al., 2016.

drylands, leading to reduction in poverty, and enhanced food and nutrition security as anticipated in the SDGs. Women are a significant seed market share/component. So companies would need a program of identifying ways to reach the rural women seed buyers. Since it is documented that women in rural areas are more comfortable talking to women agents, does the company have enough women field agents? If the women seed buyers do not walk into agrovets to buy their seeds, where can the company reach them? How would they be convinced to change their seed-buying behavior to include the improved seed varieties in their basket of choice? Unconventional methods of communicating and delivery of improved seed to women/men geared towards behavior change can be designed and tested. Sales can be monitored and evaluated based on the areas of operation.

What role do women and youth currently play in seed companies supplying groundnut seeds in Tanzania?

At a meeting of groundnut seed stakeholders in September 2017, representatives (who were all men)

from seed companies were asked to share about the role women (or youth) played in their seed chain processes. What came out was as follows:

- 1) There were less than 10% women in senior management positions in the seed companies represented.
- 2) It was difficult to find qualified women to hire for operational/management positions when the positions are advertised (women candidates do not apply, and when they do, most times they are outcompeted).
- 3) Some managers did not feel comfortable sending women employees to the field operations, away from home (or the women employees felt uncomfortable doing field work away from home for days).
- 4) Most of the women played non-mechanical, highly laborious roles e.g. manual sorting of the seeds.
- 5) 'Youth' were not identified as a category in the staffing of the seed companies, where staff join at different ages.
- 6) The companies were open to identifying areas in which they can be more gender-responsive.

Action 2: Opportunity for gender-responsive recruitment and capacity building

The representative companies in Tanzania demonstrated that there are few women in senior and operation field positions in the seed companies. Following the arguments of Action 1, reaching out to rural farmers with seed information that leads to behavior change might require that the companies take into consideration the cultural norms that guide interactions between women and men in the rural areas. Have more women as agents to enhance communication with rural women. It would help if the company, in their staffing policy, has a clause on social inclusion/diversity. This would be a statement that guides the advertising, talent search and recruitment of X% of women and Y% of youth across the different cadres. However, the company managers were concerned that women candidates that apply for hire in the companies are not able to compete against the men candidates.

To support the confidence of the women candidates, instead of spot-on recruitment exercise, the company can design three-to-six-month internship programs focused on women and/or youth, in collaboration with universities and colleges, for fresh graduates to join the seed company workforce, train on different aspects of the seed business and contribute to the workforce for a season. Based on some developed criteria, the best candidate from the cohorts can be hired. During the internship, the cohort members can be challenged

to design gender-responsive marketing strategies, which can be a constant ground of learning for the company and also for the cohort members. For most young people, men and women alike, looking for the first engagement with industry, they are always asked about their prior experience. For young people, this is a challenging question especially when they intend to join specialized fields like seed production. An opportunity to generate the requisite experience would be a great contribution the lives of the young women who join the internship program, even if they don't get the employment positions directly. If the program can be organized so that each cohort grows enough seed that can be sold and the revenue generated can be used to sponsor the next cohort of interns, the program can be sustainable over time.

Action 3: Gender-responsive work schedules and childcare spaces

One of the most significant worries for mothers, especially young mothers, is how they can provide quality care to their preschool children and be able to work as employees. Of the jobs that are mostly affordable for women in the seed value chain, sorting of seeds is one which is not well paying but requires long hours of labor. Childcare needs require that women workers organize someone else to take care of their child(ren) at home while they are at work, which is not always affordable or safe; or drop the child(ren) to a day care center or school before coming to work. At the end of the day, the women need to leave their work stations early to pick up their young children. Sometimes it requires negotiating for support from other family members, or taking the children upcountry to their grandparents who are assumed to have more time to provide childcare. These arrangements are a constant cause of worry for the mothers, apart from the unintended consequences of the children getting malnourished, and getting less than adequate attention from their parents. When the women in question are in the low cadres of employment, e.g. casual workers



Photos: Esther Njuguna

Figure 6. A young mother sorting beans while her child plays, Ethiopia, 2017.

in seed-sorting roles, childcare might cost in excess of 50% of their income. When the situation gets to be very challenging, they end up giving up on employment to offer childcare, while missing out on the extra income that could support them be better providers for their children, pushing them further into poverty.

This gendered challenge is indirectly a cost for the seed company which loses significant hours of productive time as women negotiate this role with divided attention, sometimes missing days' work, or the women not offering their labor anymore to the company. The company spends substantial resources on recruitment for replacement of staff, losing skilled staff due to this challenge. If the women come with their children to the sorting grounds, the space is not healthy for the young children who may end up sick (due to dust, flu, allergic reactions, etc.) which also leads to the women missing days of work to get the child treated. If the company decides not to hire women, it is an injustice to society, which continues to propagate an inequality.

A seed company that would commit some of their resources, e.g. the Corporate Social Responsibility budget, to offer women employees at all levels spaces for childcare support (crèche and preschool with supplies – food, water, a caretaker or teacher) would ease a major burden for women workers, greatly enhance the quality of life for mother and child and impact a future generation's nutrition security and quality of education. It expands opportunities for the women workers while greatly enhancing the commitments of the employees to the vision and mission of the company. The gains of such an action can be measured through monitoring labor efficiency indicators.

The concept of co-working nurseries has been tried in the UK (e.g. the Third Door Office) where mothers with young children, though working in different sectors, hire offices or set up office space and crèche/childcare on



Figure 7. The childcare facility at ACOS Seed Company in Adama, Ethiopia.

site in the same location, reducing the commute time significantly (compared to dropping a child to a day care center, then commuting to an office and doing a reverse commute in the evening). The concept has been proven to work for both regular employees and freelancers. In Africa, we have an example of a seed company in Ethiopia that has set up a kindergarten with successful outcomes for the women employees, the company and the children. The Ethiopian facility is now even offering a service to the general community around the company.

Action 4: Gender-responsive seed out-grower schemes

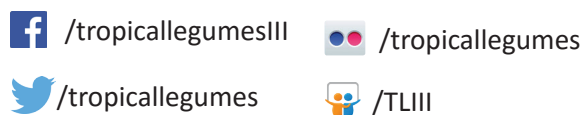
Policy of integrating women and youth in the company's out-grower schemes is beneficial for equitable benefit sharing in the seed chain. Seed production requires resources (land, labor/machinery, fertility inputs as well as seed) which may not be easily accessible to the young men/women who are starting out on a farming career or women who may be constrained by gender norms limiting their access/control of such resources. A company can intentionally choose to support a women's group or youth group to have such resources provided as credit and repaid at the end of the season until the group is able to generate enough money to afford its own resources.

Conclusion

These four action areas, as proposed above, focus on activities that seed companies are already engaged in that can be leveraged to make the company actions and processes gender responsive: recruitment – tweak it to take care of youth and women inclusions; seed marketing – tweak it so that it takes care of the needs of the rural woman farmer who is key for non-hybrid seed choice; management of women employees' needs – tweak it so as to be sensitive to the needs of women employee and her child to enhance commitment to the company and enhance labor efficiencies; out-grower schemes – tweak it so that women, who may not have large farm and machinery may still be able to contribute to the needs of the seed company while her rural life is improved. The result is a benefit to the company that can be demonstrated through establishing a strategic MLE system that collects data on key indicators that monitor the gains accruing along the seed chain.

Seed companies need not choose all four, although they would be recommended, but take actions that are affordable and manageable and lead to the highest gains for the company, the women and the families they represent.

For TL III updates follow:



For more information:

Contact

Dr Esther Njuguna-Mungai, Gender Research Program,
ICRISAT – ESA, NAIROBI Kenya.
Email: E.Njuguna@cgiar.org

Contacts: To contribute or participate in Tropical Legumes III:

Dr Rajeev K Varshney, TL III - PI, Email: r.k.varshney@cgiar.org and/or

Dr Chris Ojiewo, TL III - Coordinator, Email: c.ojiewo@cgiar.org or

Address: ICRISAT-Nairobi, UN Avenue, Gigiri, Po.Box 39063 – 00623,
Nairobi, Kenya, Phone: +254-20 722 4566, Cell: +254 720 351 323

Webpage: <http://tropicallegumes.icrisat.org/>