

A Manual on Planning and Implementing Seed Fairs in Zimbabwe



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Abstract

This manual non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Zimbabwe that have interests in implementing voucher based seed fairs. Extensive field visits were carried out by ICRISAT during the period 2004 to 2006 to assess the implementation of seed fairs by different NGOs across Zimbabwe. Review meetings with NGO staff were carried out to discuss seed fair processes, lessons, and how best to improve on the implementation. Based on these consultation a need for a revised guide to implementing seed fairs was agreed upon and ICRISAT held wide consultations with donors, NGOs, national extension staff and representatives of seed companies and agro-dealers, in order to draft a seed fair manual. This manual will benefit first time seed fair implementers and will set the bases for improving the process for more experienced agencies delivering agricultural inputs through voucher-based fairs.

The manual provides a brief background to alternative agricultural input delivery systems and discusses concerns with direct seed distributions. Seed fairs are being promoted by NGOs as more cost-effective relief delivery system with potential to strengthen rural seed markets and at the same time enhance agro-biodiversity. The use of vouchers in relief programs is preferred as this is easier to monitor, providing better accountability, and generally meeting donor requirements.

The major part of this manual describes different stages of seed fair implementation. These include the planning process, sensitization of participants and the final evaluation process. The last section compares the cost effectiveness of different relief input delivery systems, where seed fairs are more cost effective; particularly when seed is obtained from local farmers.

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Planning and Implementing Seed Fairs in Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

Seed fairs have become an important activity of relief programs in Zimbabwe as agencies shift from direct input distribution to this voucher-based intervention. ICRISAT has played a leading role in monitoring seed fair processes. As a result of discussions at review meetings on seed fairs it has been recommended that a seed fair manual be written for agencies operating in Zimbabwe.

This manual is a follow-up to two earlier seed fairs manuals produced by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and ICRISAT/INIA that were based on experiences from East Africa and Mozambique, respectively. Highlights of the changes necessary include encouragement of competitive pricing, avoiding preferential access to fairs by outside agro-dealers, and, where necessary, hosting seed fairs on multiple days in one location. This manual is aimed at enabling more effective implementation in order to stimulate the development of community-level seed markets.

1.1. Alternative relief input delivery systems

The provision of seeds to strengthen the recovery of agricultural production systems following disasters has become an important activity for many relief agencies, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This is done on the premise that seed delivery has been an innovative and effective step forward in helping farmers recover, re-establish plantings and sustain farming systems. In Zimbabwe the distribution of seed through relief and recovery programs has become so common that several small seed companies have emerged to service this market, while larger seed companies maintain at least some stock of a range of food crops to respond to this demand (Rohrbach, Charters and Nyagweta 2004).

Distribution of agricultural inputs through relief programs is based on the assumption that farmers affected by disaster have no seed and other inputs. The provision of such inputs will ensure that farmers will be able to produce some crops in the coming season. Recent research, however, has challenged this assumption (Longley and Sperling 2002). Studies undertaken in Southern Sudan (Jones et al. 2002), southern Africa (Friis-Hansen and Rohrbach 1993), Rwanda (Sperling 1996), and Sierra Leone (Longley 1997) have shown that not all farmers lose their seed, and even if they do, seed is often locally available through grain markets or from farmers in neighboring areas. Results from ICRISAT surveys show that both recipients and non-recipients of

seed aid programs obtained at least 40% of seed planted in 2004/05 cropping season from own retained stocks (Mazvimavi et al. 2006). Implicit in such findings is the need to reconsider the aims and modalities of conventional emergency seed projects that include direct seed distribution based on the assumption that there is no local seed.

Direct seed delivery has been a significant response to disasters since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. But this delivery method has been criticized as being ineffective in terms of timeliness, crop and variety appropriateness, and community/farmer participation and empowerment. It has been argued that they have disrupted the development of local seed enterprises.

The success of relief seed distribution is generally judged in terms of expansion of cropped area and production. Seed is distributed to farmers believed to have little or no seed stocks. If this seed were not distributed, food crops would be planted over a smaller area, and food insecurity would persist. However, available evidence has shown no significant relationship between planted area and receipt of relief seed brought in through direct distribution. Therefore, there has been critical need for alternative responses that will strengthen the local seed system and its links to the formal sector, with increased emphasis on developing seed enterprises at the local level that are most likely to meet the preferences of the local community. This has been the basis for introducing the seed fair concept in agricultural input relief programs.

CRS is credited for introducing seed fairs in eastern and southern Africa (CRS/ODI/ICRISAT 2002). In Zimbabwe seed fairs have gained popularity with NGOs, particularly after the 2003/04 cropping season. Based on earlier assessments of these fairs, it has been noted that a large number of seed varieties, even old varieties, were still available locally with evidence of crop diversity.

Seed fairs implemented using a voucher system permit farmers to select from a diversity of crops and varieties available within the local community. In some instances agro-dealers are permitted to trade at seed fairs bringing in improved varieties from commercial seed companies. Table 1 presents a comparison of seed fairs against direct seed distribution.

Another alternative option to input delivery is the use of existing local retail outlets, where selected recipients are given vouchers to purchase agricultural inputs at these participating shops. Though this has promised to be a more market-friendly approach to the delivery of relief assistance, the current macro-economic environment in Zimbabwe presents challenges to retailers if they have to stock large quantities of inputs. The hyper-inflation and non-existence of credit makes it impossible for smaller rural traders to afford stocking adequate inputs to participate in the relief voucher programs. However, this promises to be the most sustainable delivery strategy that creates or strengthens market linkages that will continue to function after the relief programs have ended.

Table 1. Seed fair versus direct distribution of seed

Seed fairs	Direct seed distribution
Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wider choice of seed crops and varieties• Chosen seed is more likely to be planted• Farmers have access to traditional varieties• Agro-biodiversity enhanced• Encourages local seed production• Seed is cheaper• Money retained in community• Strengthens rural seed markets	Advantages <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easier to implement• Cheaper to implement• Greater assurance that seed is available for those most in need• Improves access to new varieties• Quality of seed provided is more assured
Disadvantages <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More time and labor required to implement• Additional training required• Access to new varieties may be restricted• More expensive to implement	Disadvantages <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seed may not be adapted to environment• Farmers may received seed of crops they are not interested in• Undermines rural markets• Seed is more expensive

Source: Adapted from Leonardo (ed). 2003

1.2. Use of vouchers in relief programs

Proponents of cash- and voucher-based approaches argue that they can be more cost effective and timely, allow recipients greater choice and dignity, and have beneficial knock-on effects for local economic activity (Hay 1988, Dreze and Sen 1990). On the other hand, there are fears that cash and voucher approaches are often impractical due to additional risk of insecurity and corruption, and the fact that targeting of cash may be more difficult than commodities. In situations where voucher approaches have been preferred there are still concerns on the additional administrative burden associated with managing such programs. Although cash transfers have been used in emergency situations, vouchers are easier to track and monitor, provide better accountability, and satisfy donor regulations.

This manual recommends the use of vouchers by selected vulnerable recipients of relief seed at the fairs.

2. Stages in conducting seed fairs

The various NGOs implementing stages of seed fairs in Zimbabwe have generally followed the descriptions in the CRS/ODI/ICRISAT manual (CRS/ODI/ICRISAT 2002). However, there have been considerable variations on how each stage is handled in the field by each implementing agency. This manual proposes some modifications to the

original CRS/ODI/ICRISAT manual to enable a more effective seed fair implementation based on 3 years experience in monitoring the different seed fairs in Zimbabwe. The schematic presentation in Figure 1 shows the proposed different stages in seed fair implementation. A summary of timeframe proposal for seed fairs is shown in Table 2.

NGOs have several options to reduce the risks of not having enough seed to sell. One is to advertise the dates and locations of seed fairs more broadly. In some communities, local seed sellers also need more information and possibly a larger incentive to participate in seed fairs. Some farmers have been reluctant to bring their seed because they are afraid of being disqualified from receiving food aid. Better communication with both prospective sellers and community leaders should dispel this perception. In addition, providing seed sellers with special access to small amounts of seed of new varieties, or access to specialized advice on seed production, may create a positive incentive.

NGOs can also encourage the participation of non-recipients to witness the event and watch educational programs such as those on HIV/AIDS that are normally hosted at the fairs.

2.1 Assessing the need for a seed fair

Assessment of local seed stocks is vital to establish the need for seed fairs. Local leaders, civil authorities, NGOs and the community should be actively involved. This assessment should aim to answer the following questions:

- How long has the community lived in the area?
- What is the average cropping land per household?
- Are there any alternative sources of seed in the community?
- Are seeds being retained?
- What is the period when the cropping season commences and what are the major crops grown?
- What are the household resource endowments – physical, social and financial?
- Which NGOs were previously working with that community (as coordination with other NGOs is vital to complement previous interventions)?

Donors are encouraged to commit seed fair funding well in time to ensure adequate planning. Implementing agencies should aim to have completed all preparations at least a month before the day of the fair. The seed fairs should generally be hosted at least a month before the onset of the planting season in each specific location and this should be around September and October.

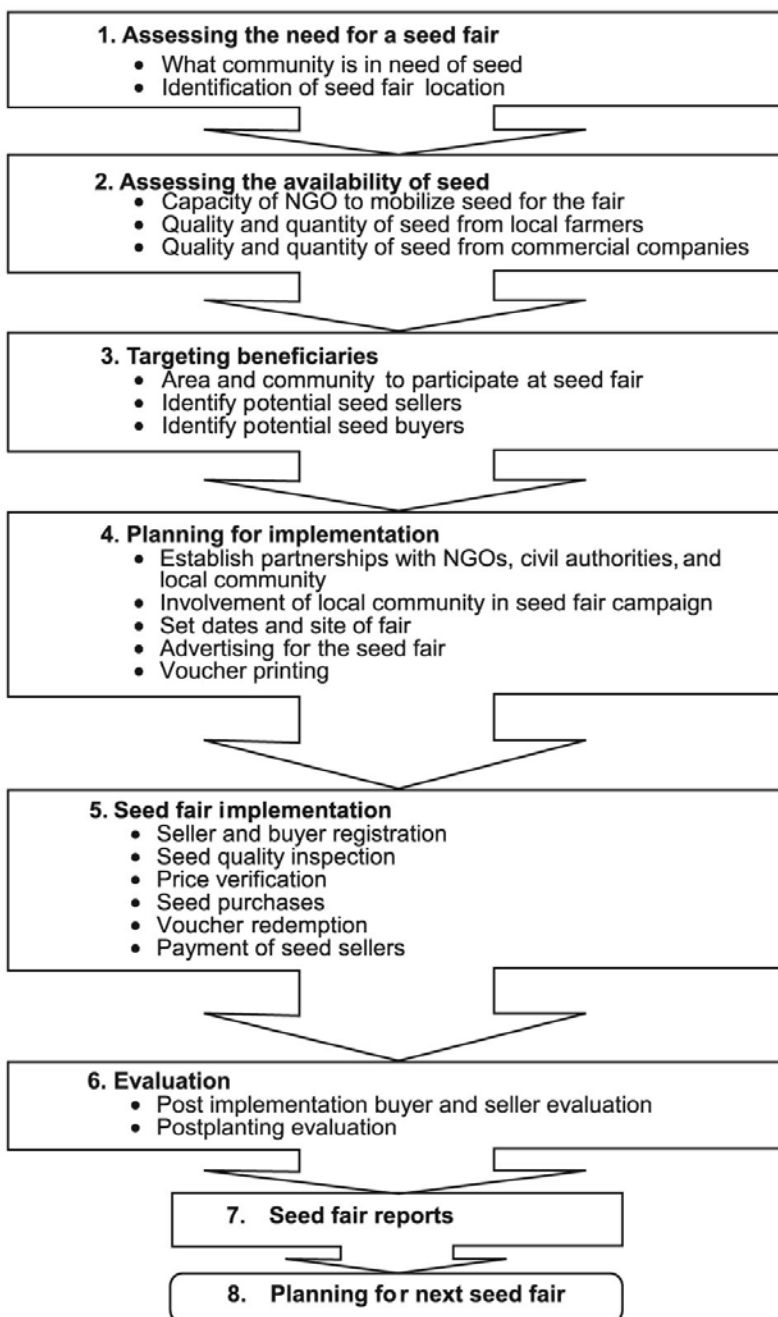


Figure 1. Stages in conducting seed fairs

Table 2. Schedule of main activities for holding seed fairs per location/site.

Days of work																	100	200	250			
Step	Activity	Responsibility	Days	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	-102	-202	-255	
1.	Assessing the need for a seed fair	NGO staff Local leaders Civil authority	3																			
2.	Assessing the availability of seed	NGO staff Local leaders Civil authorities Community	3																			
3.	Targeting beneficiaries	NGO staff Local leaders Civil authorities Community	1																			
4.	Planning for implementation	NGO staff Local leaders Civil authorities	5																			
5.	Seed fair implementation	NGO staff Local leaders Civil authorities Community	2																			
6.	Evaluation	NGO staff Local leadership	6																			
7.	Reports on seed fairs	NGO staff	6																			

2.1.1 Identification of the recipient community

The districts where seed fairs will be conducted should be identified and selected jointly by the implementing NGO and local authorities in consultation with other organizations to avoid overlapping of assistance to beneficiaries. The districts and wards are normally selected from areas where the NGO has existing development activities. At times specific communities are selected based on perceived availability of local seed.

The identified wards should be assessed to understand the physical, demographic and socioeconomic conditions within that area. This assessment will highlight the number and size of vulnerable households, level of insecurity and what assistance has already been provided.

2.1.2 Identification of the seed fair site

The site should be identified in consultation with community leadership and other stakeholders to participate at the fair. The site selection will consider storage and security of seed stocks, and proximity to local sellers and selected voucher recipients.

2.1.3 Set local seed fairs committee

A committee should be established to mobilize both seed sellers and buyers who will participate at the seed fair. In the past such a committee was responsible for setting prices for the fair. In situations where competitive pricing is allowed the committee should be able to provide guidance on seed prices.

2.1.4 Assessing the availability of seed

Preliminary surveys should be conducted before seed fairs to determine the availability of local seed and community needs for external seeds. This assessment will guide the mobilization of seeds and inputs from within the communities or external sources where necessary. The amount of seed required for a particular fair can then be estimated depending on the value of vouchers given to each household and the total number of beneficiaries. Estimated seed prices should be collected from visits to local markets and informal discussions with grain traders and other farmers. This will allow the implementing NGO to make necessary budgetary adjustments.

2.1.4.1 Seed from local farmers

Large investments in the distribution of relief seed are based on the assumption that farmers have limited seed stocks because they have been forced to consume their seed as grain. Available evidence suggests this is not commonly true. Also, local farmers are reluctant to supply seed to seed fairs as they fear that they will be seen as food secure by relief agencies jeopardizing their chances of obtaining seed and food aid in the future.

There is need to adequately sensitize farmers on the benefits of seed fairs as this will attract more seed sellers to the fairs. This has generally been observed in areas where seed fairs have been implemented over multiple years, and the operating NGOs have collaborated closely with agricultural research and extension services (AREX) and other stakeholders in planning the fair, resulting in more seed delivery from local farmers.

Much larger gains may be achieved through promotion of new varieties that will allow broader choices of seed types. The impact of seed fairs on local production have remained limited and NGOs may need to consider rewarding seed sellers with access to small packets of new varieties, or with advisory assistance to help them improve their seed production.

2.1.4.2 Seed from commercial companies

Agro-dealers should be invited to participate at seed fairs. However, agents for seed companies are to be invited only when the area is believed to be in short supply of local seed. NGOs must be discouraged from making special arrangements with individual agro-dealers for the right to be a sole supplier of a particular seed type. In the past, some NGOs sought to help traders by encouraging farmers to buy commercial maize seed first. This defeats the purpose of choice and local farmer participation at seed fairs. Monopolistic behavior at the markets also distorts pricing of seed in the community.

2.1.5 Targeting beneficiaries

Targeting should endeavor to identify and select the most food insecure households that are unlikely to have access to seed for the following planting season. Targeting at the local level should be done jointly by community leaders, NGO field staff and civil authorities. The team should develop criteria to identify the most needy households and this should be location specific rather than region and circumstance specific. The criteria should be clearly understood by the community to ensure transparency. Vulnerable households should be selected using a participatory method as this minimizes targeting conflicts. Registered beneficiary households may then be verified and final lists submitted to the implementing NGO. In some instances NGOs may need to carry out random ground verification surveys on selected households to improve targeting efficiency.

Beneficiary targeting and verification should be completed a month prior to the day of the fair. Verification and updates should also be done on the day of the seed fair to capture dropouts due to non-participation.

2.2 Planning for implementation

The implementing NGO must take the lead in planning for the seed fair. The planning process should be initiated soon after the harvest period, though this could be subject to budget availability.

2.2.1 NGO and civil authority partnership

Successful seed fairs require cooperation and support from civil authorities and seed traders. The planning timeframe and extent of need should be clearly discussed and sufficient time should be spent sensitizing partners about the seed fair. Community sensitization is vital at the planning stage. Participatory community sensitization should be encouraged and led by civil authorities and staff from the implementing NGO. The roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder should be clearly reviewed during community sensitization. The facilitators of the discussions should clearly:

- explain why the seed fair is the appropriate intervention,
- review the advantages of conducting a seed fair,
- describe the operational aspects and steps involved,
- describe the process of registering beneficiaries, and
- jointly develop a plan for conducting and evaluating the seed fair.

2.2.2 Community participation

A seed fair team should be set up to assist in the planning and implementation of the program. This should include all partners: extension agents, civil authorities, NGO personnel and other community stakeholders. The roles of each partner should be defined and agreed upon. The team should undertake the following tasks among others:

- develop a targeting criteria for beneficiaries,
- confirm and register beneficiaries,
- identify suitable sites and dates for seed fairs, and
- advertise seed fairs to potential sellers.

2.2.3 Implementing agency planning

The implementing NGO should arrange for the following forms that are needed at the seed fair:

- registration forms for seed sellers,
- vouchers,
- beneficiary evaluation forms, and
- seller evaluation forms.

During sensitization all stakeholders should understand the various forms to be used. Additional materials required include:

- weighing scales (for seller registration),
- ink and ink pads (for seller payments),
- clipboards, and
- pens and pencils.

The NGO, in consultation with local civil authorities, should provide adequate security arrangements in advance. On the day of the fair, there will be many

people and large amounts of cash requiring civil authorities to ensure the safety of NGO staff and other partners.

2.2.4 Set location and day of the seed fair

The location of the seed fair should be convenient to both beneficiaries and sellers; they should reach the site on foot or by bicycle without difficulty. All stakeholders should jointly identify a location that is secure, provides adequate shade and a water point, and must be large enough to accommodate both sellers and buyers. Seed fairs should be conducted just before the onset of the planting season to give farmers adequate time to plan their cropping programs. The dates should be communicated to other agencies working in the area to avoid conflict with other activities.

The duration of the seed fair depends on the number of beneficiaries. The seed fair schedule should allow for multiple days at each location and be flexible enough to handle delays and setbacks. There should be adequate time to explain operational aspects of the seed fair, distribute vouchers, register sellers, allow beneficiaries to exchange their vouchers for seed and pay sellers. If there are many beneficiaries the seed fair may be run for several days.

2.2.5 Vouchers

The implementing NGO is responsible for the voucher design and printing in consultation with other stakeholders. In most cases, the funding agency requests a uniform design of voucher coupons for all their implementing partners. The vouchers should clearly show the NGO logo and the value. If the vouchers are time bound, ie, to be used at a specific place and during a particular period, the date must be printed on the voucher. Different voucher denominations should be printed in different colors for easy distinction by less literate people. Based on market assessment and pricing strategy, voucher denominations should be as small as possible, enabling beneficiaries to acquire seeds of different types and quantities from different sellers as desired. The value of the voucher coupons to be given to each beneficiary will depend on the price of grain in the local market, number of beneficiaries, and the budget available for the fair.

The implementing agency should ensure that printed vouchers are at district offices a week before the seed fair to avoid unnecessary logistical delays.

2.2.6 Advertise the seed fair

Advertising for the seed fair should start at least 3 weeks before the scheduled date of the first fair. In effect, it is ideal for NGOs to let the local community be aware of possibilities of hosting seed fairs soon after the harvest. Advertising is vital as it will attract a large number of sellers with diverse crops and thereby minimize seller collusion and monopolies. Sellers should be forewarned that the implementing NGO cannot guarantee that they will sell their seed. Buyers should be allowed to make choices

of seed types to purchase. The fair can be advertised in various ways: handwritten posters, announcements during chiefs' meetings, churches, local markets and in strategic places across the villages. The mode of advertisement should mention the date, place, and time of the seed fair. The seed fair team, including the local committee, should continue sensitizing sellers and beneficiaries and interact with civil authorities and community leaders prior to the day of the fair.

2.3 Seed fair implementation

In the past buyers have complained that they were rushed to select their purchases and did not have the time to make a proper selection of preferred seed types. Some buyers have asked for seed fairs to be implemented over multiple days. But this has been viewed by NGOs to be difficult as there is need for close monitoring and limited time to cover other locations. However, implementing seed fairs on multiple days has its advantages. If maize seed is stocked with a local retailer, vouchers may be redeemed over a period of weeks. Local seed of a wider array of varieties can similarly be sold over an extended period at a village market place. If preferred seed is not available, the NGO has more time to facilitate the delivery of stocks from more distant sources.

Farmers redeeming vouchers also complained about being unable to purchase seed of preferred crops or varieties if they were at the end of the queue. There may be a need to initiate the redemption process with older and weaker farmers, while stronger participants are queued later. Again, this will require extra time to organize.



Those who get there first get the most preferred seed types. The most vulnerable persons will end up purchasing least preferred seed to get rid of the vouchers.

It is vital for the seed fair team, extension agents, local authorities or NGO staff to supervise the seed fair implementation process. Sellers and beneficiaries may have questions or conflicts pertaining to prices, voucher values, choices or other operational aspects of the seed fair. Local seed fair committees must be available to assist and give direction to all seed fair participants. Supervision ensures appropriate interaction between all participants and minimizes the collusion among sellers, or between sellers and beneficiaries.

2.3.1 Seed seller registration

All seed sellers should be registered upon entering the fair. Registration is done to assess the amount, type, and varieties of seed brought to the market and to ensure that only registered seed sellers will redeem cash for vouchers. Registration forms can vary in design depending on how much information the implementing NGO requires. The form as shown in Annex I should enable monitoring of seed quantities and financial accountability. Seed sellers should have a form with their name and registration number, location and seed quantities. This form, which should have an NGO logo and date stamped where possible, should be used during the payment process. This ensures that only registered sellers participate and that only sellers, and not beneficiaries, redeem vouchers for cash.



Seed choices at the fair.

2.3.2 Seed quality inspection

AREX and NGO staff should conduct quality assessments to check for insect damage, sprouting, rotting, and off-type grain. Only seed that has been physically examined should be registered. The quality assessment should be done in full consultation with the seed seller. Also, the local community should be forewarned about this process. Any seed that does not meet the quality test standards should be rejected for sale at the seed fair.



Extension staff inspecting seed.

2.3.3 Price verification

Sellers and local authorities should agree and endorse the pricing strategy and prices should be communicated to all seed fair participants, preferably in advance of the seed fair date. Seed fairs are encouraged to allow competitive pricing, whereby the cost of each transaction may be negotiated between buyer and seller. This allows prices to reflect quality differences and allows premiums to be paid for preferred varieties. At the end of the fair leftover seed should be open for cash purchases by both voucher beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

One concern is that sellers may collude to charge high prices. Where there is evident collusion, issuing of vouchers should be suspended until a solution is found. The pricing strategy depends upon many factors that include month of hosting seed fair, transport

costs, availability of seed, beneficiary knowledge of seed crops, and presence of lobbying groups such as farmers' associations. It may be necessary to set a threshold price in advance. Where the price exceeds threshold levels indicating profiteering by sellers, the organizers should stop issuing vouchers or stop the process until the issue is resolved.

2.3.4 Distribution of vouchers – seed purchases

Vouchers are distributed on the day of the seed fair to avoid losses and cheating. Before vouchers are distributed all participants should be re-sensitized about the operational aspects of seed fairs and the value of vouchers and prices of various crop types. Once the vouchers are distributed to all beneficiaries, they can be exchanged for seed. There is need to provide clear instructions to guide the order in which recipients receive the vouchers and purchase the seed. This order is important since early voucher recipients have a better choice of seed on offer than the last persons in the queue. Seed fairs should also allow cash purchases by both recipients and non-recipients of vouchers after all the voucher purchases have been completed.



Buying seed using vouchers.

2.3.5 Payment to seed sellers

The payment system should be established and agreed upon in advance. The same form used for seller registration should be used for payments. It is ideal to pay cash to local seed sellers at the end of each seed fair and make check payments to traders and seed houses that deliver bulk seeds at a later stage that is convenient to both parties. Enough change and small denominations should be brought to pay sellers, as it may be difficult to find these in local markets. Sellers should produce their identity cards and registration form to collect payment. After receiving cash they should sign their name or fingerprint indicating they have received the payment. The registration form can then be used by the NGO for financial accountability. It is encouraged to pay seed sellers as soon as possible after the fair, preferably within a week.



Voucher redemption process. There is need for re-verification and at times a call for witnesses.

2.4 Evaluation

Feedback is gathered from beneficiaries, sellers and other stakeholders during and after the seed fair to evaluate the impact of the fair. This is important for NGOs to improve on the seed fair process in future. Pre-trained enumerators do evaluations. The seed

fair team should identify suitable enumerators before the seed fair. These enumerators should be familiar with local crop varieties and local languages. Enumerators should be selected based on their language skills, arithmetic skills, clear handwriting, knowledge of agriculture, and their ability to extract information and solve problems. Enumerators should be familiar with the evaluation format; each question should be discussed and understood clearly during enumerator training.

2.4.1 Evaluation on the day of the fair

A representative sample of beneficiaries and sellers should be randomly selected and interviewed to evaluate the seed fair process. Beneficiaries should be interviewed after they purchase the seed and before they depart. Seed sellers should be interviewed during or after payments. A simple one-page questionnaire should be used to capture basic information about variety, quantity and quality of seed purchased at the fair and how beneficiaries used the vouchers (see Annex II). This will help the implementing NGO to understand beneficiary needs, supply and demand of various seed types. The feedback will then be used to better plan future seed fairs in the area.

2.4.2 Evaluation after the seed fair

Feedback obtained at the fair (beneficiary evaluation questionnaires and sellers registration/payment forms) should be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The summary analysis form can be used for record keeping, reporting to donors and assessing access and availability of crops and varieties in the area.

Depending on funding availability, post seed fair monitoring is done during the cropping season (January to February) and after harvest (May to June) to assess how the beneficiary households used the seed they obtained. The questionnaires should capture information on why they selected certain crops, how they used the purchased seed and other inputs they chose at the fair, different seed sources used for the seed they planted that season and yield levels obtained by farmers (see Annex III and IV). This survey will help understand the community seed fairs, plan extension support and future seed fairs.

2.5 Seed fair reports

The seed fair report should be prepared soon after the seed fairs and should include background information, location, number and list of beneficiaries, crops and varieties, seed prices, voucher values, quantities of seed bought and sold at the seed fair as well as challenges/constraints faced and recommendations.

2.6 Plan for next year's seed fair

After the seed fair a review meeting should be held with other stakeholders interested in the seed fair process to discuss the lessons learned: what went well, what needed

improvement, comments from beneficiaries and sellers on seed prices. Based on the evaluation reports, NGOs will attempt to plan fairs for the coming season if funds permit.

3. Choice of relief input delivery systems

As several NGOs have shown, the choice of distribution strategy is not a simple either-or selection; some seed may best be distributed through commercial channels, whereas other seed may be distributed via seed fairs. The choice of strategy may depend on the differing market circumstances for different crops. For example, Zimbabwe has long had a well-developed wholesale and retail distribution system for hybrid maize seed.

The maintenance of strong wholesale and retail distribution channels remains essential to improve longer-term seed security and to maintain productivity growth in the larger agricultural sector. NGO programs should endeavour to support the maintenance of these markets while extending seed availability to more remote regions. One way to achieve this is to assure that all maize seed flows through commercial channels. At a minimum, seed companies should be encouraged to participate directly in more seed fairs. Even better, vouchers should be redeemable for maize seed at rural retail shops.



Outside agro-dealers brought loads of maize seed.

Similarly, the presence of local agro-dealers at seed fairs should be encouraged as they may continue selling seed in rural communities in future years. These include local agents for seed companies but this does not necessarily include agro-dealers based in Harare. The latter appear less likely to continue marketing seed after relief programs end. These traders also tend to have less information about the commodities they are selling.

Insofar as one of the objectives of these programs is to improve the productivity and food security of smallholder cropping systems, stronger efforts are needed to assure

supply of the best new varieties. This implies closer planning with seed companies to assure stocks availability and possibly a joint investment in the establishment of seed security stocks of the best new varieties (to supplement common investments in grain security stocks). NGOs need to learn about the suitability of the range of varieties available on the national market and encourage seed companies to produce and supply the best possible options. In seed fairs, farmers should be given a clear choice of whether to purchase a range of products from the commercial companies or to purchase this seed from their neighbours.

Although seed fairs are becoming more common, some NGOs and donors continue to be concerned about the cost effectiveness of these operations. The following is an analysis of the cost effectiveness of seed fair operations based on a case study of two NGOs implementing both seed fairs and direct distribution in Zimbabwe.

3.1 Cost effectiveness of seed fairs versus direct distribution

The analysis of cost effectiveness of seed fairs is based on a program to provide each of 1700 households in one district with a package of seed inputs comprising 10 kg of hybrid maize seed, 5 kg of sorghum seed, and 5 kg of groundnut seed. This package represents a common sort of seed pack used by a number of NGOs in Zimbabwe. Five possible sources of seed are considered: (1) the local farm community for seed fairs, (2) local agro-dealers at seed fairs, (3) local commercial seed company agents at seed fairs, (4) local commercial seed companies for direct distribution, and (5) imported seed for direct distribution.

3.1.1 Labor requirements

Three major categories of activities were identified: the seed needs assessment, the organization of the distribution, and the implementation of seed distribution (Table 3). This analysis assumes that the staff skills required for each type of distribution program are similar. This allows the labor days to be consistently valued. However, the labor demands underlying the organization of the distribution program differ. Since seed fairs are a new concept, more time is needed to explain how the fair will be run. Also, more time is needed to organize the seed sellers involved in the fairs, prepare the vouchers and organize the seed inspection. The collective estimate of labor requirements required for organization of the distribution programs suggests that the fairs are approximately twice as labor demanding as direct distribution. This time requirement for seed fair organization is expected to decline in the future as NGO staff become increasingly familiar with hosting seed fairs and the process will become more efficient.

Table 3. Labor requirements and travel costs for distributing seed packs to 1700 households in one district.

Item	Unit costs (US\$)	Seed fairs		Direct distribution	
		Quantity	Value (US\$)	Quantity	Value (US\$)
Labor					
Seed assessment	25/labor day	8	200	8	200
Organization	25/labor day	8	200	4	100
Implementation	25/labor day	40	1000	8	200
Total labor costs			1400		500
Travel	0.25/km	1000	250	600	150
Total costs			1650		650

According to Table 3, the actual implementation of the seed fairs also demands more labor. Direct distribution encompasses issuing inputs and signing a beneficiary register to confirm receipt of seed. In most cases, community leaders assist in the verification of registered beneficiaries and issuing of input packages. Seed fairs include registration of sellers, weighing of seed, inspection of seed, issuing of vouchers, checking of sales, and payment of sellers. Additional NGO personnel are required to coordinate and monitor the process. The collective estimate indicates that seed fairs are approximately five times more labor intensive to implement than the direct distribution program.

3.1.2 Material requirements

Materials required for the implementation of these programs in addition to seed include the printing of vouchers, stationery, scales and promotional materials (Table 4). Again, more materials are required for the implementation of seed fairs compared with direct distribution programs. Whereas the seed provided through direct distribution is generally pre-packaged and weighed, the seed fair requires the hiring of scales suitable for a variable range of seed lots. Since farmers at the fair have a choice of seeds to purchase, more promotional materials tend to be prepared explaining such options. Roughly estimated, the materials needed for successfully implementing seed fairs cost approximately four times more than the materials needed for direct distribution programs.

Table 4. Costs of materials for distributing seed packs to 1700 households in one district.

Item	Cost for seed fairs in US\$	Cost for direct distribution in US\$
Printing of vouchers	170	0
Stationery	100	50
Hiring scales	40	0
Advertising and promotional	100	50
Total	410	100

3.1.3 Cost of seed

The cost of seed depends on whether the seed was imported, bought from commercial seed companies, or was locally grown seed delivered by farmers at seed fairs. While recognizing that farmers at seed fairs may choose any configuration of seed, for comparison purposes, a standard 'pack' was assumed to include 10 kg of hybrid maize seed, 5 kg of sorghum seed, and 5 kg of groundnut seed. This approximately corresponds with the value of vouchers distributed. The results in Table 5 show that the cost of imported seed (US\$24/pack) was far more expensive than any other option. In comparison, packs of seed obtained from the local community were the cheapest option at US\$8.72/pack. The high costs of imported seed, and added logistical expenses involved in finding this seed, obtaining appropriate clearances, shipping and handling, push the value of imported seed to almost double the cost of local commercial seed.

Table 5. Costs of seed packs by source (October–November 2005)

Item	Units	Seed fair			Direct distribution		
		Local community	Local agro-dealer	Local commercial	Local commercial	Imported	
Seed prices per unit	Maize	ZW\$/kg	30 000	36 000	28 000	28 000	81 250
	Sorghum	ZW\$/kg	9 000	35 000	26 000	26 000	43 750
	Groundnut	ZW\$/kg	40 000	93 000	80 000	80 000	93 750
Cost of input pack	Maize	ZW\$/10kg	300 000	360 000	280 000	280 000	812 500
	Sorghum	ZW\$/5kg	45 000	175 000	130 000	130 000	218 750
	Groundnut	ZW\$/5kg	200 000	465 000	400 000	400 000	468 750
	Total	ZW\$/Pack	545 000	1 000 000	810 000	810 000	1 500 000
		US\$/Pack ^a	8.72	16.00	12.96	12.96	24.00
Cost of 1700 packs		US\$	14 824	27 200	22 032	22 032	40 800

^a US\$1 = ZW\$62 500

The cost of buying seed through agro-dealers was more expensive (US\$16.00/pack) than the cost of buying seed directly from the national seed companies (US\$12.95/pack). This is because agro-dealers sought higher prices in order to offset their transport and accommodation costs as well as the risks of ending up with unsold inventories.

3.2 Cost analysis

This analysis indicates that the cost would be the same regardless of whether seed companies provided seed through direct distribution or through seed fairs. However, as noted above, seed companies were reluctant to service most seed fairs because of the uncertainty of sales and the higher profitability of selling larger lots in response to NGO tenders. The most cost-effective means to provide the designated seed pack to the 1700-targeted households is through seed fairs wherein all seed is provided by local farmers (Table 6). This is almost 30% cheaper than the next best alternative of direct distribution of commercially supplied seed. Use of imported seed in direct seed distribution is the most expensive option.

Table 6. Total costs of distributing sorghum seed to 1700 households (US\$)

Item	Seed fair			Direct distribution	
	Local community	Local agro-dealer	Local commercial	Local commercial	Imported
Labor	1400	1400	1400	500	500
Travel	250	250	250	150	150
Materials	410	410	410	100	100
Seed ^a	14 824	27 200	22 032	22 032	40 800
Total	16 884	29 260	24 092	22 782	41 550
Cost/household	9.93	17.21	14.17	13.40	24.44

^a Including shipping and handling

The most cost-effective means to distribute commercial seed is through direct distribution of stocks obtained from seed companies. The reliance on local agro-dealers to provide this seed through seed fairs is relatively expensive. An alternative choice would be to provide some seed (eg, maize) through commercial channels and the rest of the seed (eg, sorghum, pearl millet, groundnut, cowpea, etc.) through a fair. This has the advantage of strengthening commercial sales channels while also supporting local markets.

4. Conclusions

Seed fairs are a more cost-effective relief input delivery system, particularly for the provision of local seed types, than direct distribution of seed. However, the participation of agro-dealers is encouraged as they bring in commercially produced seed types that might be difficult to access locally. In fact, all interested stakeholders within the community should participate on the day of the fair, and these include participating NGOs, AREX, local community leadership and the police.

The success of a seed fair depends on providing adequate time for planning and implementation. Sufficient time must be given to mobilize seed sellers, explain the fair processes, and present information about the seed to buyers in order to make the best purchasing decision. Special consideration should be given to the more vulnerable persons, such as the elderly or sick, in case they are left out in the long queues and end up purchasing less preferred seed types. Competitive pricing allow seed prices to reflect quality differences and premiums to be paid for preferred varieties. Cash purchases should be encouraged at the end of the fair for leftover seed and should be open to both voucher recipients and non-recipients.

Seed fairs have the advantage of widening farmer choice of different varieties and this has potential to preserve agro-biodiversity in local farming systems. Seed sellers are encouraged to bring a wide range of seed crops and crop varieties, including traditional varieties that are no longer widely grown. However, farmers at the seed fair should remain with an option to purchase both local seed types and improved seed from commercial companies. The participation of agro-dealers, including agents for seed companies, at seed fairs should be encouraged as these are likely to continue selling seed in future years.

The impact of seed fairs on local seed production and marketing has so far remained limited. Larger gains could be achieved by strengthening NGO efforts to improve community seed production, even in years without humanitarian aid. Also, local seed sellers need more information and possibly a larger incentive to bring in their stocks. Some farmers have been reluctant to bring in their seed because they are afraid of being disqualified from receiving food aid. Better communication with both prospective sellers and community leaders should aim to dispel this perception.

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ANNEX I

Seed Fair Seller Registration Form

NGO name..... Date.....

District..... Ward..... Venue.....

Name of seller..... Sex..... I.D. Number.....

Crop	Variety	Quantity of seed at the fair (kg)				
		Delivered	Rejected	Accepted	Sold	Left Unsold

Signature of seller Date

Signature of NGO payment officer..... Date.....

Signature of NGO verifying officer.....Date.....

ANNEX II

Seed Fair Post-Implementation Evaluation

These are administered at the close of the seed fair

A. Seed seller

Seller identification – Name, District, Ward, Village, Seed fair site, Sex

1. Which crops did you bring for sale?

Crop	Variety	Source of seed	Price/unit (Indicate price range)

2. How long have you sold seeds, including non-seed fair sales?
3. Describe how the seed prices were set.
4. How do you intend to use money from seed sales at the fair (most important uses only)?
5. What are your seed sales plans in future?
6. What improvements can you recommend for seed fair processes?

B. Seed buyer

Voucher recipient identification – Name, District, Ward, Village, Seed Fair site, Sex

1. Which seeds did you purchase with vouchers?

Crop	Variety	Quantity	Price/unit

2. How would you rate the quality of seed purchased? – Good, average or bad
3. Was there a range of crops and varieties to choose from?
4. How was the timing and organization of the seed fair?
5. What improvements can you recommend for seed fair processes?

ANNEX III

Post Seed Fair Monitoring Evaluation

Seed Seller Evaluation Checklists

A. Background Information

1. Identity of seller
2. Experience in seed sales at fair and other markets

Seed fair

3. How did you decide which crops and varieties to sell at seed fair?
4. How were prices decided at the fair? Fixed, normal market prices, etc.
5. How far was the seed fair venue from your home?
6. How did you transport your seed to the seed fair site?
7. What other inputs would you like to sell at the fair?

B. Seed Source

1. What seed types did you sell at the fair? Source of seed, quantities and prices?
2. What seed types did you sell at other markets?
3. Do you usually plant crops for sale as seed? If yes, which crops?
4. How did you use the money obtained from sales of seed at the fair?

ANNEX IV

Seed Fair Postplanting Evaluation

Beneficiary Checklist

Voucher recipient identification – Name, District, Ward, Village, Seed fair site, Sex

A. Seed fair operation

1. When they have started participating in seed fairs
2. Ability to access preferred varieties at the seed fairs
3. Whether the farmers used all the vouchers they received, and if not why not and what happened to the vouchers which were not used
4. When, how and by whom were farmers informed about participating on the seed fairs. Information about registration and the selection criterion

B. Seed purchases

1. All seed types, varieties, sources, quantities, prices of seed purchased at seed fairs
2. What was the quality of seeds purchased at the seed fair
3. All seed types, varieties, sources, quantities, prices of seed obtained from alternative sources
4. Any extension advice received on seed purchased at seed fairs and sources of this advice

C. Seed preferences

1. Any seed preferred which were not available at seed fairs
2. Any seed preferred but could not be obtained from other sources

D. Crops planted

1. All crops varieties, sources and quantities planted including date and area planted

E. Seed sales, gifts, barter, stocks, consumption

1. Any seed which remained in stock after planting and what happened to that seed
2. Seed sold, traded or given away for free in the previous season
3. Any seed received from NGOs or purchased at seed fairs which was consumed in the previous season

F. Improvements

1. Problems encountered at seed fairs
2. Suggested improvements on seed fair implementation for the future.



About ICRISAT®



The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is a non-profit, non-political organization that does innovative agricultural research and capacity building for sustainable development with a wide array of partners across the globe. ICRISAT's mission is to help empower 600 million poor people to overcome hunger, poverty and a degraded environment in the dry tropics through better agriculture. ICRISAT belongs to the Alliance of Centers of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

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