WHEN DISASTER STRIKES: A GUIDE TO ASSESSING SEED SYSTEM SECURITY

Pathway Component: food production, agricultural income, processing & storage

Search Category: agricultural productivity; farm & non-farm income; value chains & market systems

Date of Design: 2008

Designer: International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) & Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

Contact Institution: L.Sperling@cgiar.org

URL: http://seedsystem.org/assessment-tools/when-disaster-strikes/

CONTENT SUMMARY

Brief Description: This guide presents a seven-step method for assessing the security of farmers' seed systems during a crisis and its aftermath, and for identifying what seed-related assistance is needed. The Seed System Security Assessment (SSSA) helps managers and field staff assess whether interventions in seed systems are needed, and if so, guides the choice of relief or development actions. The underlying principle is that emergency seed aid interventions must be carefully matched to the local ecology and people's preferences. This guide aims to help humanitarian agencies boost the positive effects of seed aid.

Uses: By following the steps laid out in this guide, humanitarian agencies will be able to:

- Determine whether there is short-term insecurity of the seed system, long-term insecurity, or both.
- Focus on problems related to insecurity (such as low availability of seed, lack of farmer access to it, or poor seed quality) and the underlying causes.
- Immediately lay out an action plan to counteract acute seed insecurity or, in the case of chronic, longer-term insecurity, to define a set of counter- measures.

Tool Components: The Practical Work component of the guide is comprised of seven steps:

- Step 1: Identify zones for assessment and possible intervention
- Step 2: Describe the normal status of crop and seed systems
- Step 3: Describe the broad effects of the disaster on farming systems
- Step 4: Set goals for agricultural relief and recovery operations based on farmers' needs
- Step 5: Assess the post-crisis functioning of seed channels to determine whether short-term assistance is needed
- Step 6: Identify chronic stresses requiring longer-term solutions, and identify emerging development opportunities
- Step 7: Determine the most appropriate responses, based on analysis of priority constraints, opportunities, and farmers' needs

OPERATIONS

Number of Staff Required: The number is not specified, but the guide notes that the assessment team should include extension workers and development project agronomists who know local farming systems well. It is also useful to have an economist on the team to help with market analysis, as well as representatives from the formal seed sector and agricultural research systems. The team should have solid representation from organizations or other groups that will be directly involved in subsequent relief and recovery.

Time: Depending on the size and heterogeneity of a zone, the field assessment can be conducted in 3-to-10 days; longer if the zone is particularly vast and varied.

Cost of Assessment: Across the SSSAs, budgets for work covering one to three sites have ranged from $15,000 to $25,000. More comprehensive SSSAs (five to eight sites, 'countrywide' coverage) have cost between $40,000 and $65,000.

Training: This will vary depending on the capacity of the assessment team. At minimum, some basic training on the questionnaires will be required for the whole team.

Geographic Targeting: Identifying zones for assessment is the first step of the SSSA. Precision is crucial since the effects of a disaster may vary over short distances. It may be wise to conduct a separate SSSA for each major agroecological zone and cropping system, and for each ethnic or occupational group (such as 'primarily farmers' or 'livestock herders').

Type of Data Collection: An SSSA includes desk-based research, key informant interviews (with agricultural offices, extension workers), focus group discussions, and interviews (with individual farmers, farmer groups, seed traders, and formal sector specialists).

Degree of Technical Difficulty: The guide aims to be accessible to development workers who are not seed system specialists, but it is expected that the assessment team will include some technical specialists.

Complements other Resources: Depending on the assessment objective, the SSSA could be complemented by a nutrition-focused assessment, with the SSSA then focused on locally acceptable and available nutrient-dense crops. The SSSA could also be complemented by market assessments.