

# Seed Aid for Seed Security

ADVICE FOR PRACTITIONERS

## Developing a Seed-Aid Proposal: *A Rapid Review Checklist for Practitioners*

Working through a set of guiding criteria, practitioners can ensure that any proposals for implementing seed system support are well-grounded and stand a good chance of achieving their objectives.

**D**isaster has a devastating impact on agricultural livelihoods and often demands support in the food security sector. Even as immediate needs are being considered, attention turns to supporting agricultural recovery, and that often includes seed assistance. The design of these seed-aid proposals is challenging for three reasons: seed interventions are complex and context-specific, especially so following a disaster; time is short as seed is needed before the next planting season; and the implementing agency best placed to respond often lacks experience and expertise in seed systems and seed security analysis.

This rapid review checklist is intended to assist practitioner agencies to review and provide feedback to people who are developing proposals focused on seed security. It can help to determine whether proposals have exploited the seed-assistance body of knowledge, whether they are grounded in an understanding and appreciation of farmer systems and capacity, and whether they reflect better seed-aid practices. Proposal writers too can use it to determine whether they have covered the major topics before prescribing a response of seed aid. It can also be used by donors to complement other project review guidance.

The checklist highlights issues that are unique and critical for guiding seed security strategy and the design of broad seed system interventions. It is emphatically not a 'how to do seed aid' manual. The Table overleaf presents the various elements of the checklist. Each of the assessment criteria is then discussed in more detail.

TABLE 1  
Rapid Review Checklist

CRITERIA		Y	N	Further Needs/Comments
<b>Assessments</b>				
1	Is the disaster sufficiently well described, in terms of scope and detail, to provide context for the intervention?			
2	Have the <i>ex ante</i> cropping systems been adequately and accurately described?			
3	Have the <i>ex ante</i> seed systems been adequately and accurately described?			
4	Is the diagnosis of the impact of the disaster on seed security supported?			
5	From the assessment, does it appear appropriate and feasible to consider a farming-related intervention within the period specified?			
<b>Intervention Objectives and Strategy</b>				
6	Are the proposed objectives for seed-related assistance clear?			
7	Do the objectives and proposed strategy address the seed security problem? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• short term</li> <li>• longer term</li> </ul>			
8	Is the proposed strategy sound and supported by past experience?			
9	Have the populations needing seed-related assistance been adequately defined?			
10	Are the choices for seed channels clearly explained and justified? (Distinguish between seed multiplication and distribution, if appropriate.)			
<b>Implementation and Activity programming</b>				
11	If seed is to be made available through some form of aid, are the activities for ensuring variety and seed quality explicit and sufficient?			
12	Are monitoring, evaluation and reporting planned and budgeted? (Distinguish short-term focus on outputs and longer-term focus on impact and learning.)			
13	Is an exit strategy articulated?			
14	Does the proposal engage and empower women and communities?			
15	Is there the required expertise and capacity to achieve the objectives (both within the institution and <i>via</i> collaborators)?			
16	Is the timing feasible to achieve the objectives?			
17	Have possible negative effects been anticipated (with necessary actions programmed)?			

## Explanation of Review Criteria

### 1. Is the disaster sufficiently well described, in terms of scope and detail, to provide context for the intervention?

Before focusing on the seed or agricultural systems, one needs to have an overview of the effects of the disaster, to assess whether an agricultural intervention is warranted at all. Obviously, the scale and scope of the disaster need to be understood, including details of the people and regions affected. For seed-related interventions, the heterogeneity of impact is particularly important, because less-affected regions may provide useful supplies of locally-adapted seed. Some guiding questions: Is there reason to believe that the agricultural system was affected?

- Did the stress affect natural capital?
  - Land degradation (soil erosion)
  - Access to land (in cases of conflict and displacement)
  - Water shortage (drought)
- Did the stress affect human capital associated with agriculture?
  - Was there large loss of agricultural knowledge and labor due to death, displacement or migration?
- Did the stress affect social capital associated with agriculture?
  - Did war, civil strife, political tensions mean that labor sharing, seed exchange or cooperative arrangements may be altered?
- Did the stress change financial arrangements, for example access to agricultural credit or increases in debt?
- Did the stress potentially affect physical capital?
  - Loss of productive assets; draft animals, tools, granaries, crops and livestock
  - Loss of domestic assets; homes, furnishing
  - Loss of roads to market and damage to bridges
  - Market function disrupted

### 2. Have the *ex ante* cropping systems been adequately and accurately described?

An understanding and appreciation of the existing cropping systems, before the stress or shock, needs to inform proposal development (whether or not one aims to maintain the pre-crisis status quo). The types of crops and varieties grown, their seasonality, and their end uses (for home consumption, income or both) are important kinds of information. Not all crops are equally important for farmers' livelihoods, and the profile of crops critical for poorer farmers may not be the same as for the better off. Input use and special management practices should also be noted.

### 3. Have the *ex ante* seed systems been adequately and accurately described?

Understanding the existing seed systems that farmers use in the target area informs the design of recovery activities. There is a better chance that recovery will be rapid and sustainable when an intervention is grounded in the dominant seed systems. Practitioners often source seed directly from the commercial seed sector in spite of the fact that poor farm families do not normally purchase commercial seed, because of the crops and varieties on offer and the cost. Farmers may normally get their seed from a range of channels: home production, local markets or from neighbors, and sometimes from more formal seed sellers as systems intensify. It is also important to understand that a disaster impacts each of these seed channels differently, some being more resilient than others.

### 4. Is the diagnosis of the impact of the disaster on seed security valid?

Seed security needs to be diagnosed independently of food security, as the two are not always highly correlated. Households can have enough seed to sow a plot, but very little to eat at any one time.

Conversely, households can have adequate food, but lack access to the seed they need to make their plots productive. In assessing disaster impacts, quick deductions also need to be avoided, particularly the false notion that a drop in harvest, or production shortfall, automatically means that there is a seed shortfall. Similarly, when there is food insecurity, it is important not to hastily conclude that farm families have eaten all their seed. Seed insecurity can generally be understood as a problem of availability, a problem of access (related often to cost of seed) or a problem of seed quality or a lack of preferred crops and especially varieties. These problems also have to be framed as either short term (acute) or long term (chronic).

A solid aid proposal builds from an understanding of seed systems and crop systems before as well as after the disaster. Recovery can be rapid and sustainable only when interventions work to support the dominant functioning systems.

**5. From the assessment, does it appear appropriate and feasible to consider a farming-related intervention within the period specified?**

Are the people affected by the disaster otherwise seed secure? Are farmers confident that stability (security) is all they need to enable them to successfully cultivate and harvest? Do they have sufficient access to fields and other means of production (such as labor) to follow through an agricultural season? Are they willing to re-engage in agriculture?

**6. Are the proposed objectives for seed aid clear and do they address the seed security problem?**

In reflecting on relief and recovery objectives, several points are important. Farming systems are not static; they change continuously in positive as well as negative ways. Furthermore, the demands of farmers for the things they need immediately, and which can spur them to recovery, should also be put in focus. The default objective is usually to facilitate the quick return of the cropping system to the *status quo ante*. If this is the chosen strategy, the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system should be understood, and built on

Seed system proposals need to be reviewed not only in terms of what they can strengthen, but also in terms of what they may damage.

accordingly. (Similarly, choices need to be made of the crops to focus on. Those most affected? Income generating crops? Crops for quick food recovery?) When a different objective is proposed, such as strengthening or improving the seed or crop system, perhaps by introducing new crops and varieties, this needs to be explained and justified in the context of an emergency response. In all cases, the risks involved need to be carefully analyzed.

**7. Do the objectives and proposed strategy address the seed security problem, in the short and the long term?**

A clear diagnosis of seed security status and a vision of whether the system should stay as it is or evolve should then lead to a set of activities that addresses the problems at hand. Are there clear links between the identified seed problem and the

cluster of proposed relief activities? For instance, if the objective is to ensure that farmers have seed to plant in conditions of chronic drought, are the choice of crop and variety and the chosen seed system channel appropriate? Emergency proposals are by definition focused on response and short-term recovery. However, it is important that they be designed within the context of what was in the past and what is desired in the future.

**8. Is the proposed strategy sound and supported by past experience?**

This simple criterion is important because it indicates whether the practitioner is grounded in relevant past experience, either direct experience or indirect experience gathered from the growing body of knowledge on better seed-aid practices. More of the same may not be what is needed. In some cases capacity building (to test new options) may have to be built into proposal development.

**9. Have the populations needing seed-related assistance been adequately defined?**

Seed is a relatively expensive commodity because only certain types are adapted and not all available seed will be of adequate quality. Targeting those who require seeds (as opposed to those who need food) can be important for ensuring that supplies are adequate. Defining target groups is also important in determining which crops and varieties to give prominence. Women's needs and preferences may differ from those of men; different ethnic groups may have different needs, as will those geared to growing for market compared to those growing for subsistence.

**10. Are the choices of seed channels clearly explained and justified?**

Individual farmers use seed channels differently, at different times and to differing degrees, to obtain seed of different crops and varieties. Some farmers use their own saved seed or seed obtained from neighbors for certain crops, others rely on the market for those same crops and still others prefer to purchase and plant commercial seed. Disaster influences farmer demand for seed from different channels for several reasons; lack of seed in a preferred channel, increase in price, lack of cash to purchase seed. The choice of a seed channel for aid must be grounded in an analysis of what farmers need in times of crisis, rather than being based on possibly vested interests on the supply side. Multiplication of seed, if programmed within the proposal, needs to be consciously designed from the beginning with an explicit linkage between production and distribution and marketing.

**11. If seed is to be made available through some form of aid, are the activities for ensuring variety and seed quality explicit and sufficient?**

There are no absolute rules about what types of crops or varieties or what quality of seed should be given in an emergency. Ironically, donor demands rather than farmer needs sometimes dictate this critical item. Minimally, what is given or offered in a crisis should be at least as good and trustworthy as what farmers normally use. The proposal should show some evidence that what is on offer will do no harm and, more positively, that it may actually spur farmers onto a path of recovery. Involving farming communities and specific target groups in these critical choices increases the chances that seed given as aid will actually be sown and will subsequently grow and yield.

**12. Are monitoring, evaluation and reporting planned and budgeted?**

In responding to an emergency, time may not be taken for rigorous monitoring, thoughtful evaluation and effective reporting. This has often been the case with seed aid, as year follows year of repetitive seed aid with no change in knowledge, attitudes or practice. Monitoring and evaluation have to go beyond an analysis of efficiency, focused on inputs, whether they were delivered on time and how many people were reached. They have to address basic issues of effectiveness: whether the activities made a difference to the farming system, perhaps in terms of crops and varieties, and more broadly to the local economy. Negative and positive reflections are equally important and integral to evaluation.

**13. Is an exit strategy articulated?**

There need to be benchmarks to seed system assistance beyond the delivery of seed. At some point, one should be able to exit from emergency activity and begin to program real development. Seed deliveries that last more than three or four seasons signal that aid action is off-course.

**14. Does the proposal engage and empower women and communities?**

Enabling communities to participate in their own development is always a challenge. Involving them in their own recovery from disaster is even more so. Nevertheless, it is important to engage communities in articulating the problem, identifying solutions, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating. Women often play key roles in managing varieties and seed selection on farm, and in many regions (particularly in Africa) they are key sellers in local seed/grain markets. An intervention that empowers

women results in quicker recovery and strengthens their traditional roles in seed systems.

**15. Is there the required expertise and capacity to achieve the objectives (both within the institution and via collaborators)?**

Seed aid is not a logistical exercise and is distinctly different from food aid. Such aid, better phrased as 'seed system support', intervenes at the heart of an agricultural system, makes use of farmers' land and labor at a risky and perhaps unstable period, and may have effects for seasons to come. Seed-aid planning demands sound technical expertise and strategic farming-system thinking. Even during an emergency, it also requires a longer-term perspective. Agricultural expertise has to guide the center of seed assistance development (i.e. support should be cut to those who buy and distribute seed – and then move on to the next relief activity).

**16. Is the timing feasible to achieve the objectives?**

The pivotal issue is to ensure that farmers have seed in time, not only for planting but also in time to strategize about which crops and which varieties to plant in which fields. This means that seed has to be in farmers' hands several weeks prior to sowing. Does the implementing agency have time to complete the range of logistical issues and still deliver seed far enough in advance of planting? Issues such as proposal review and responding to feedback, coordination among implementers, acquiring any needed inputs, field staff coordination, and interaction with communities and local authorities all need to be considered to assess whether the timing is feasible.

**17. Have possible negative effects been anticipated (with necessary actions programmed)?**

Finally, seed interventions are a serious business. If done poorly and repetitively they can create dependencies, increase the risk of harvest failure, negatively change agrobiodiversity profiles and undermine functioning seed markets. Proposals need to be reviewed not only in terms of what they may strengthen but also in terms of what they may damage.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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