



## **ONLINE TRAINING OF TRAINERS FOR FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS ON "SEED PRODUCTION AND MARKETING"**

**FINAL REPORT, June 2021**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security (SD=HS) program, is a global program that is currently implemented by consortium partners in eight countries and coordinated by Oxfam Novib. SD=HS takes an integrated approach focused on: 1) crop diversity through participatory plant breeding (PPB); 2) farmer seed production and marketing; 3) local food plants for food security and nutrition; and 4) an enabling policy environment. The second component aims to ensure that indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers enhance their livelihoods, income and seed security through improved production of and market access to high quality seeds of diverse crops and varieties, adapted to farmers' needs and preferences. This so called "Pillar 2" is currently being implemented in China, Guatemala, Nepal and Zimbabwe.

To further the work on this topic a Farmer Field School (FFS) Guide on Farmer Seed Production and Marketing has been developed and shared with the partners in the SD=HS countries. The guide aims to facilitate and support farmer-led seed production and marketing to address the shortcomings of both farmers' and formal seed systems by developing the capacities of indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers to produce and market good quality seeds that are suited for their farming systems and changing agro-ecological systems and that are currently not available in the local markets. The focus on marketing skills as well as seed production helps farmers to effectively respond to market demand, contributing to their livelihoods.

The guide follows the Farmer Field School (FFS) learning approach and applies it to local seed markets. The FFS on farmer seed production and marketing builds on the FFS on PPB and nutrition and local food plants. It provides a first step towards activities that may result in more formalized farmer seed enterprises in the medium to long term. After a cycle of FFS implementation of this guide, it is expected that participants:

- are capable, reliable and self-confident seed producers;
- understand how seed markets work and have developed the skills, knowledge and linkages to capitalize on market opportunities; and
- are able to connect farmer seed production and marketing with other components of the SD=HS program on PPB, nutrition and local foodplants, and policy

The Training of Trainers (ToT) is the main step prior the establishment of the Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Considering the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent travel and gathering restrictions, the ToT could not be conducted as traditionally planned, since the Oxfam Novib team in the Hague could no longer travel to the programme countries to participate in the ToTs together with partner organization staff. As a result, to support in-country implementation of the guide, an online

course was developed for partner organization staff and master trainers that will train the FFS facilitators on a national level. This online course was held through a [Google Classroom](#) platform from 26 April to 7 May 2021.

## PARTICIPANTS

Thirteen facilitators participated in the online course, coming from 3 different countries (Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and different organizations (PELUM Uganda, CTDZ Zambia, CTDZ Zimbabwe). They were supported by master facilitators from their organizations (including Champion Farmer Seeds Cooperative) and the global team from Oxfam Novib. These facilitators subsequently organized national Training of Trainer events (in Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) that took place from 17 to 21 May 2021.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MODULES

During the week of 26 April, the participants started working on the first four modules of the online course, based on the first 4 modules of the FFS Guide on Seed Production and Marketing:

- Module 1: Introduction to the FFS on Farmer Seed Production and Marketing
- Module 2: Preparatory activities
- Module 3: Diagnosis and planning
- Module 4: Analysis of the seed market and crop selection

During a live cross-country Question & Answer session on 30 April, these topics were discussed with the participants. One of the participants presented a summary of the main findings and highlights of each module, inviting others to discuss and share their ideas and experiences. Through the assignments and presentations, participants were invited to reflect on their own experiences and local context, for example when it comes to setting up an FFS, dealing with gender dynamics and undertaking market research.

An interesting discussion took place regarding crop selection and balancing a market focus with the general approach of the SD=HS program to safeguard and increase crop diversity for food and nutrition security. This also referred to the role and focus of the FFS participating in this project, building on their previous work on participatory plant breeding (PPB) and local food plants (LFP). It was agreed that for this pilot project, the chosen FFS should already be established, mature groups that have gone through several seasons of PPB and LFP work, and that are now looking to take a next step towards seed production and marketing. This to avoid overburdening new FFS with much new information, and the limited time that is left for this pilot.

*“When looking at diversity we should look at a system of diversity which is maintained in farmer systems, in seed systems managed by farmers. That is what we need to maintain, to keep all the options that farmers have now in the future, to cope with climate change for instance, but also to cope with differences with developments in markets, in consumer preferences. We need that system of diversity, which is not the same as a need to keep every single crop and variety there ever is and was. Over time we are bound to lose - in whatever system we work in - some varieties, and in some cases maybe an entire crop. Sometimes for bad reasons and sometimes for good reasons, because they're simply better or tastier crops that are more easy to process for instance. But the bottom line is we're keeping a system of diversity, not necessarily every single variety.”*

**Bert Visser**, Scientific Advisor at the SD=HS project, addressing the importance of maintaining diversity and storing seeds and specific varieties in Community Seed Banks for food security and future developments.

The screenshot shows a Google Classroom interface. At the top, there's a header with the course title 'FFS on Seed production and Marketing' and location 'Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe'. Navigation tabs for 'Stream', 'Classwork', 'People', and 'Grades' are visible. A 'Create' button is prominent. The main content area displays a list of lessons under the heading '0. Welcome'. The lessons are: '0.1 INTRODUCING YOUR FACILITATORS' (2), '0.2 INTRODUCE YOURSELF!' (1), '1. Introduction to the FFS on Seed Production ...' (3), '1.0 WHAT NEXT FOR ME? CHIEDZA'S ST...' (1), '1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THIS FIELD GUIDE' (1), '1.2 PROGRAM INTRODUCTION, COURS...' (1), and '1.3 CROP DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE ...' (1). A 'Google Classroom' watermark is visible on the right side of the screenshot.

The facilitators and participants discussed how there are several questions to ask and several conditions to consider that might influence the choice of a FFS on moving their focus from one (PPB or LFP) crop to another because of market considerations. During the diagnostic stage that the FFS on PPB and LFP have done over the past seasons, farmers will already have identified crops that have potential to start seed production, so the expectation is that they will base the choice of crops on this earlier work because there is a logical connection between the previous work and this pilot. In general, it would be recommended that the FFS chose a crop that they already work(ed) with, but the reality might be that the seed market for that crop or variety is small and has limited potential, or it might be difficult to save and keep the seeds in good condition. If there are good reasons for a FFS to deviate from earlier work on PPB or local food plants, they should be able to do so. Several factors, encompassing socio-economic, cultural and climatic considerations, in addition to market potential of a crop or variety should determine the choice of crop or variety with the objective to improve the livelihoods of the farmer.

One of the questions that was raised referred to selecting a single crop or variety for seed production, and if that might shift the ratio of the marketed crop or variety in relation to the other crops grown. The risk here being that it might undermine the previous work of the FFS to increase crop diversity in the community. The facilitators emphasized that all pillars in the SD=HS program are interlinked and that the Pillar 2 focus on markets does not imply that FFS should focus on a single crop and abandon the diversity element of the program. The key is that throughout everything that the farmer field schools are doing, the facilitators need to always take them back to the core objective of the group, also referring to for example the nutrition aspects. So the FFS can focus on marketing of a single crop for commercial purposes, while also continuing to work with others crops. If a farmer field school feels they are not strong enough in marketing more than one crop, they can focus on one to start with. The stronger the FFS gets, the better they can handle producing and marketing more than one crop or variety. Additionally, when different FFS in a community or area chose different crops or varieties for seed production, the entire community will benefit from the increased access to diverse quality seed production, of different crops and different varieties in larger quantities.

Finally, it was agreed that the importance of local seed laws and legislation, and the impact this has on farmers' seed production and marketing, merits further discussion. The global team will follow up on this topic to respond to the request from participants to discuss this in more detail.

The second week of the course required participants to dive deeper into the remaining modules:

- Module 5: Introducing seed business concepts and policy issues
- Module 6: Seed production
- Module 7: End-of-season evaluation and next-season planning

A very elaborate presentation by another participant highlighted the different aspects of these modules and the exercises shared with those involved. The participants were asked to reflect on the technicalities of seed production, business planning, record keeping, risk management and the crucial undertaking of planning and evaluation of the work (to be) done by the FFS. The most appropriate monitoring tools and the feasibility of monitoring progress by and of the FFS were discussed and agreed to be taken further by the global team based on the input from the countries.

An issue that was discussed in more detail during the session was the definition of a (local) market, considering the different needs and context in which small holder farmers operate. Facilitators and participants shared their experiences on dealing with governmental schemes, agro-dealers, seed fairs etc. It was clear that each FFS needs to dedicate a session to define their target market, and the players in it, as this differs significantly according to the socio-economic and geographical context of each FFS. Aspects like the type of crop, the amount of land farmers have access to in order to grow the crop and their production capacity all constitute important factors. In this context it is also important not to “overlook” the local and informal markets (like roadside selling), as there is often a need to strengthen these and potential for farmers to produce for farmers in or near to their own communities.

In addition to this, it was agreed that we seriously need to look at the way we tap into youth as one of those actors who are key in terms of linking these farmer initiatives and production to markets, both rural and urban.

*“The definition of a “market” requires some critical thinking. In Zambia we have the farmer input support program. This is a program that basically tries to empower farmers by giving them subsidized inputs, especially seed. This means that when we are doing our market research, whatever crop that the Farmer Field School will select, there is a need to also consider that that crop might be competing with other crops that are already on the program. Then, in addition to that, there's a trend of healthy consciousness; people being more health conscious, eating healthy foods. This means that most consumers, most people on the market, are actually more interested in consuming local foods, traditional foods, so that means that even as we are doing our market research, the priority should head towards that direction. And also there is the issue of COVID these days. When we are talking about a market, some people these days would even prefer not visiting that physical market. Then we need to also consider the issue of, for example, online marketing and using social media platforms to market. This means that we should not only consider the physical location of going to the marketplace, but also using some social media marketing techniques”.*

**Joseph Mwitumwa**, Seed Production and Marketing Officer at CTD Zambia, on the importance of critically reflecting on the definition and choice of market by the FFS.

*“A market could be anywhere, really, as long as the people that you are targeting to buy have one desire, to buy a specific product or service, and also the ability to buy. When we are talking about ability, we have to consider things like access to transport, the transport to a market which is hundred kilometers or any other distance away: is it available? Can they go and come back? Is it affordable? These would be the questions to ask. Sometimes people are prepared to travel for long distances if the return on the investment and the inconveniences are covered by the benefit of buying the seed.*

*“Another thing would be also to consider access to various payment terms when we're targeting a market. If we're targeting smallholder communal farmers and we are going to sell the seed in a certain currency or payments methods like cash or mobile banking or like that, those are the things that you also would want to consider when we are defining the market. So it is the ability to pay, the ability to travel, the ability and the desire to actually go to where that market is.”*

**Tsungai Bwerazuva**, Seed Specialist working with Champion Farmer Seed Cooperative, on the factors that influence what the target market will be.

## **EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS**

During the evaluation process it became clear that the participants found the online material to be a useful addition to the FFS Guide on Seed Production and Marketing. They found the content to be interesting and generally liked the accessibility of the Classroom platform. During the Q&A's the direct impact of local (national) seed laws and legislation on smallholder farmer seed production for this project became more apparent, and participants and facilitators expressed the desire to dive deeper into this topic, a request the global team will try to accommodate in the current planning.

A major challenge was the short time available for the participants to go through the materials and complete the assignments, so it was recommended to reserve more time for a course like this in future occasions. Another recommendation was to have more one-on-one contacts between facilitators and course participants, and to present the participants with hard copies of the course materials to anticipate internet connectivity issues.