SEED SECURITY ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

WHAT IS SEED SECURITY?

Good food comes from good seeds and food and nutrition security starts with seed security. Farmers have seed security when they have good quality, affordable seeds of their choice at the time of planting, which are adapted to their production environments and meet their socio-cultural needs.

Experiencing seed insecurity is fairly common among farmers whenever there is a breakdown in the seed systems they depend on.

THE SEEDCHANGE APPROACH

SeedChange has designed a unique Seed Security Assessment and Action Plan tool to assess all aspects of both formal and farmers' seed systems. It provides a comprehensive understanding of local seed security, identifying both challenges and opportunities to improve the situation.





Group of farmers using the SSAAP methods during a SeedChange training in Cuba.

The SSAAP methodology was initially developed by Seed-Change and piloted in Cuba in collaboration with the National Institute of Agricultural Sciences (INCA), in 2014. Since then, Seed-Change has further developed and used the methodology to support its Seeds of Survival program in countries in Asia (Timor Leste), Africa (Mali, Burkina Faso) and Latin America (Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua).

SEED SECURITY FOR SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

Smallholder farmers throughout the world produce, save, use, and conserve their own seeds. They also exchange and sell their seeds locally in the community. These farmer seed systems contribute between 60-100 per cent of their total seed requirements, depending on the crop.

Despite the critical role that farmers' seed systems play in feeding the world, the majority of public and private investments and policy supports are directed towards the formal seed system.

Smallholder farmers also maintain very high seed diversity – diversity in the types and varieties of seeds, which shapes on-farm crop diversity. Keeping seeds in their hands and maintaining a high diversity of seeds are critical for farmers in building a resilient food production system in the face of climate change.

In addition, the formal system is increasingly dominated by the private sector. This is evident by the fact that the ten largest companies now control 73 per cent of the commercial seed market. Moreover, in many countries, there is little or no policy or legal recognition of farmer seed systems. As a result of these factors, farmers are increasingly dependent on external and commercially controlled seeds, often unadapted to the local environment, and are losing control over their seeds and associated knowledge.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SEED SECURITY

To address these issues SeedChange has developed a holistic, biodiversity-based approach to strengthen farmers' seed systems that builds the capacity of farmers and communities to achieve seed security on a sustained basis and promote their rights to seed sovereignty.

Unlike other seed security assessements that exist mainly for post-disaster relief, the methodology developed by SeedChange focuses on building ongoing resilience in farmers' seed systems by using a food soveringty framework.

By recognising that smallholder farmers face seed security issues on a daily basis and not only at times of disaster, SeedChange uses a SSAAP methodology designed to assess root causes of seed insecurity and identify a set of interventions to achieve more resilient seed systems.

SeedChange

Formerly USC Canada



HOW IT WORKS

Conducting a comprehensive SSAAP involves community workshops, household surveys, review of secondary data, and follow-up workshops for action plans. It can take up to several months to review existing policies and information on both formal and farmers' seed systems, collect field data, analyse the data, and collectively determine appropriate interventions with all relevant stakeholders. A rapid SSAAP, using components of the larger methodology, can also yield important results.

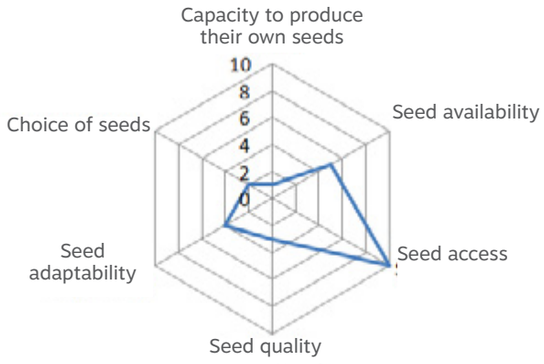
SEED SECURITY ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLANNING PARAMETERS FROM SEEDCHANGE

AVAILABILITY	Are there enough seeds available within a reasonable distance to meet farmers' needs when they need them?
ACCESS	Are farmers producing their own seed? If not, do they have the means to buy or trade for appropriate seeds within their community?
QUALITY	Are the seeds of good quality (including purity, vigour, health, and germination)?
ADAPTABILITY	Are the seeds well adapted to local growing conditions (both climatic and management)?
CHOICE	Do farmers have the ability to choose seeds having desired traits such as taste, colour, maturity duration height etc.?
CAPACITY TO PRODUCE	Do farmers have the technical, social, and institutional capacity to produce their own seeds?

Utilizing the assessment framework, SSAAP workshops generate information across six parameters that are immediately useful to communities. Knowledge comes to light as women and men analyze the seed security situation through exercises.

The methodology integrates a gender-sensitive approach, to ensure women's crucial knowledge of seeds and food security are prioritized. As the process is highly participatory and visually engaging, awareness levels are raised and support is built for the intervention plans necessary to achieve seed security at the local level.

Our experiences have revealed that SSAAPs not only provide a good understanding of the production and distribution of quality seeds but that they also help to identify policy and legal issues that are critical in achieving seed security.



Socratic wheel featuring the six parameters of seed security.

THE SSAAP GUIDE

SeedChange has developed an SSAAP guide that includes instructions on conducting workshops using focus group discussions, household surveys, analysis guidelines and procedures for writing reports. It features testimonials and results that highlight a wide range of interventions and user benefits. SeedChange is currently refining a streamlined modular rapid assessment approach to suit different needs in response to demand.

FINDING A LOST SORGHUM VARIETY

During a SSAAP in Mali, farmers learned that a local variety of sorghum called Nguene, previously thought to have been lost, was being saved by a local farmer, Fanta Traoré. She had been saving this variety since she found it was good for intercropping. This resulted in sharing of the variety and increased community acknowledgement of the important role of women in protecting seed diversity.

SSAAP COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

SeedChange is working with various organizations, farmer networks, and government institutions who are interested in jointly organizing SSAAPs or in building their institutional capacity for SSAAPs.

Contact us if you would like to learn more. Our Participatory Seed Security Assessement and Action Plan Guide will soon be freely available in English, French, and Spanish.

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