Seeds of Survival Scale Up Program Report
(2015-2020)

Preliminary Results and Lessons Learned



Ethiopia

SeedChange
Formerly USC Canada

ETHIO - ORGANIC SEED ACTION

Outline and Objectives

This country program report aims to share the preliminary results of SeedChange's SoS Scale Up country program with key decision-makers and practitioners in Ethiopia. This report covers the four main outcome areas of the program: Food/Seed Security and Climate Resilience; Economic Security; Women and Youth Empowerment; and Scaling Up and Out of SoS Innovations and Practices.

Elements to be included in this presentation include key results, lessons learned and recommendations for key decision-makers and practitioners to consider in extending support to the sustainability and further scaling out of this project's initiatives and approaches.

Introduction

The Seeds of Survival Scale Up Program is a five year, $19.5M climate resilience and food security program (2015-2020) funded by Global Affairs Canada. It is implemented in six countries with leading local partners and technically supported and managed by SeedChange. The objective of the program has been to scale-up tested biodiversity-based strategies and innovations that strengthen resilience and food/seed security of marginalized farm households and Indigenous and non-Indigenous farming communities. Over the five year program, the project has supported over 31,500 rural farmers in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

In Ethiopia, the Seeds of Survival Scale Up Program 2015-2020 has supported 5,213 participants (39% women, 14% youth) in 37 communities, in 2 Districts (South Wollo and Arsi). Over 30,000 direct beneficiaries were positively impacted by the program.

Over the 5 year program Ethiopian Organic Seed Action (EOSA) provided technical and material assistance to farmer conservator associations (cooperatives) in Ethiopia to increase food security through agricultural biodiversity and improve farmers' access to just markets. SeedChange's SoS program with EOSA aimed to improve food security, climate resilience and income-generation in the selected representative lowlands and highlands of Ethiopia. In a context of repeated droughts and climate instability, a key priority was to support women and men farmers to diversify crops, improve locally adapted seed access and production, as well as strengthen cooperative businesses to provide a more stable income for families. For the entirety of the 5 year program, and indeed for a decade prior, EOSA maintained links and a key partnership with the Ethiopia Biodiversity Institute (http://www.ebi.gov.et/). Technical exchanges and farmer linked participatory varietal trials were maintained over the long term, allowing important grow out and evaluation opportunities for over 60 different field crop varieties

Food / Seed Security & Climate Resilience

Key message

Knowledge intensive and low-cost biodiversity and agroecology based strategies strengthen local food/seed systems, contribute to food and nutritional security, and enhance resilience to climate change.

Key Results

- Community led seed security initiatives such as community seed banks have improved access to 96 locally adapted crop varieties for 36 communities in Ethiopia.
- 5,000 households in EOSA's program area have better access to fruits, vegetables, and a more diverse array of crops and varieties, improving food security and dietary diversity for program households.
- Community organizing for on-farm agrobiodiversity and agroecological practices strengthens the adaptive capacity of marginalized communities.

Lessons Learned

- Investments in community structures and practices need to be accompanied by strengthened linkages with supportive CSOs, research institutions, and government extension services to ensure they are effective and sustainable.
- Communities that are supported to create collective strategies for the conservation and dissemination of diversity, such as farmer research groups, see strong results.

Improved Economic Security

Key Message

Investments and support to community-led production and marketing of agrobiodiversity products to local markets under fair conditions contributes to economic security of rural men, women and youth in marginalized rural communities.

Key Results

- 8 women's groups and 9 youth groups were supported to market agrobiodiversity products, increasing their ability to raise revenues from bio-inputs and seed production
- Women participants generated increased income through vegetable gardening
- Farmer Conservator Associations supported 17 groups to rent land for collective farming

Lessons Learned

- Investment and support to micro-enterprise development are effective at improving access to resources, income and leadership opportunities for women and youth.
- On-farm agrobiodiversity strategies generate food surplus that can be developed into viable economic opportunities in local markets if properly supported with market assessments, business planning, and advisory support services.
- CSO intermediary support for community led economic initiatives and the establishment of fair markets and sustainable institutional linkages is critical.

Women's & Youth Empowerment

Key Message

Investing in agroecological approaches to women's and youth collective enterprise development and resource access contributes to income generation, leadership, agency and confidence building.

Key Results

- Women's leadership in program groups rose from 49% to 52% and they established 15 women-led farmers' groups
- The program established 9 youth-led farmers' groups
- Over 180 women and 140 youth were supported to access land and 380 women and 150 youth were supported to access agroecological inputs, a consistent barrier to their participation in agricultural activities in all program countries
- Access to better markets and financial resources for women and youth

Lessons Learned

- Enhancing women's skills, access to financial resources like revolving funds, and opportunities for organizational leadership and business management contributes to women's empowerment and gender equality in collective enterprises and farmer research groups.
- The establishment of collective market-gardens, home gardening, intercropping strategies and cooperative organization assists women to secure greater access to good farming land and opportunities for increased revenues.
- Micro-enterprises and farmer research groups focused on agroecological production and marketing are contributing to youth empowerment and leadership and reducing youth migration.
- Gender equality strategies were effective in supporting women's resource access and participation/leadership, but the absence of a systematic gender equality analysis and approach meant that more transformative change at the level of power dynamics and resource allocation was not addressed.

Scaling Out & Up

Key Messages: Scaling Out & Up

Collaborating in the delivery of training and the sharing of information and resources through structured partnerships is an effective strategy to support the adoption (scaling up) of agroecology and biodiversity-based practices and innovations by other organizations as well as communities and individual farmers (scaling out).

Key Results

- 36 communities in Ethiopia have innovated, tested and promoted the spread of biodiversity supporting innovations and solutions.
- After 5 years, 99% of SoS households in Ethiopia say they are using 3 or more SoS practices, and communities feel more confident that they are implementing those practices well.
- 31 organisations in Ethiopia have demonstrated interest in, collaborated with and/or received training and information related to the implementation of SoS practices and policies.
- 12 government agencies, NGOs, farmer organizations, research institutes, and national, regional and international networks have adopted practices or policies that reflect SoS practices and/or approaches.
- 1 collaborative agreement between research institutions and gene banks has been established to assist in the development and dissemination of farmer-bred varieties to hundreds of communities.

Lessons learned

- Civil society actors like NGOs play an important role in facilitating broad-based engagement among CBOs, institutions, and government agencies in joint activities, which builds ownership and awareness among key stakeholders.

Strengthening the Enabling Environment

Key Message

Support for systemic participation by civil society actors in national multi-stakeholder platforms such as plant genetic resource commissions and national seed law committees contributes to important revisions in seed laws and regulations that support farmers' rights.

Key Results

- EOSA developed 1 communication tool that has been disseminated providing evidence-based support to advocacy and policy initiatives.

- In Ethiopia, EOSA collaborates with Ethiopia's national gene bank, the Ethiopia Biodiversity Institute (EBI), on issues of policy, environmental change, exchanges of planting materials, and sharing farmers' knowledge and experience across their programs.

Lessons Learned

- The inclusion of farmers' voices in policy processes is essential to influence outcomes that reflect farmers' rights and needs.
- Implementation of participatory, multi-stakeholder seed security assessments and action plans are creating ownership of results by community participants and visibility and demand for these services from government, civil society networks and NGO actors.
- Joint stakeholder ownership of pilot projects (such as the Seed Security Assessment process) is essential to build support for civil society advocacy and policy asks.

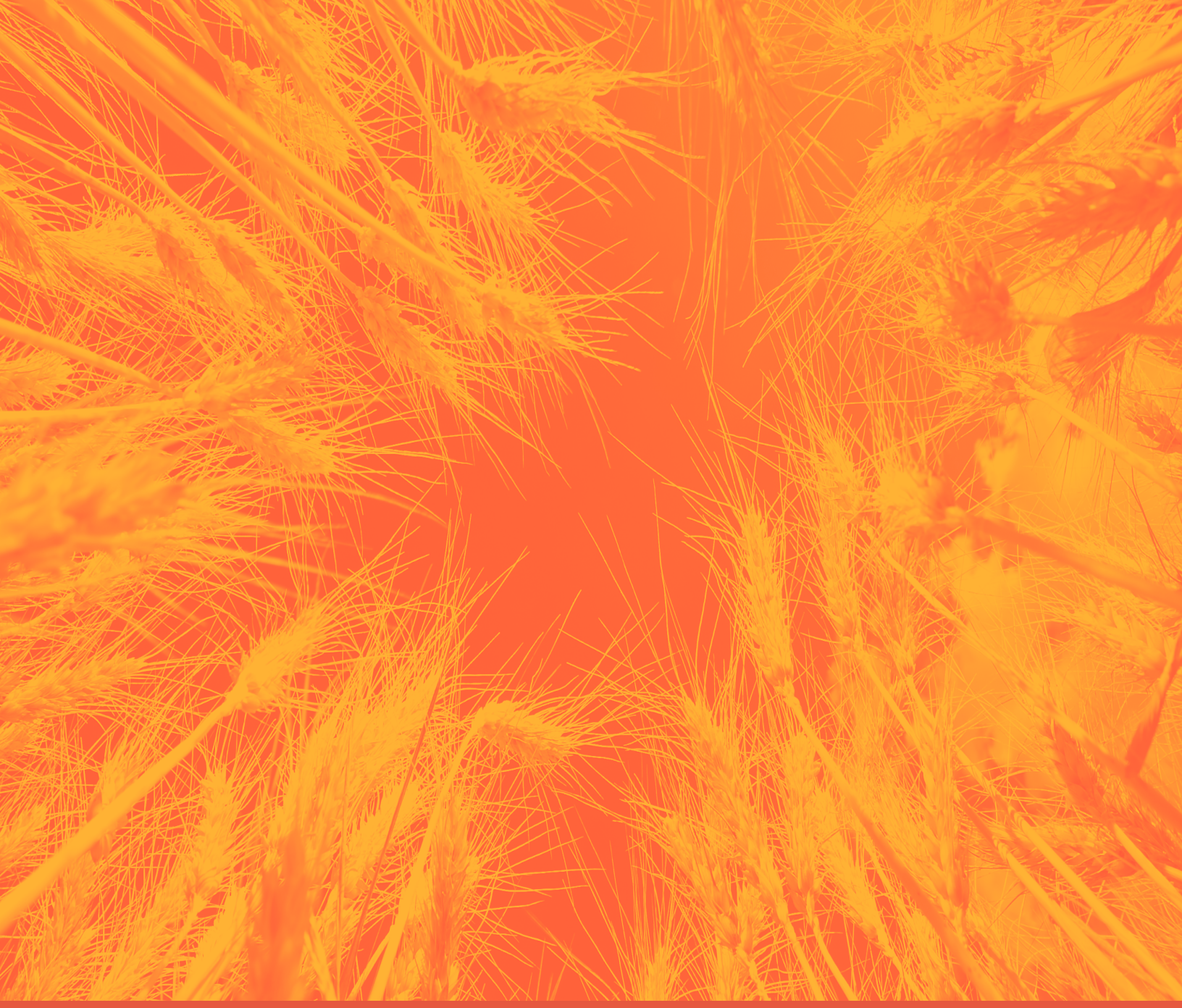
Program Reflections

- New methodologies (SSA, CSB, PVS, farmer research) should be piloted on a small scale and well-supported to reduce risk, produce evidence, and support learning prior to scaling out of the methodology.
- Investment in CSO/CBO capacity to support business development is a critical first step to consider in implementing inclusive economic strategies.
- Farmers' seed systems are key for food security and climate resilience and require more institutional support as well as collaboration from civil society, donors and governments.
- A regular structured review of community led practices (such as CSBs, revolving funds) is important to ensure that approaches are effective, needs based and sustainable.
- Wide dissemination of locally adapted farmer seed varieties (through PPB and PVS) is inhibited by policy and legal restrictions that make it difficult for farmers' organizations to officially register and market their seeds.

Recommendations

- Increase support for women's rights organizations to collaborate with rural CBO and CSO's in strengthening gender equality, women's empowerment and leadership, and rights-based approaches to farmer food and seed system development.
- Allocate long term funding and support to women and farmer-led research and knowledge exchanges that support climate resilience and promote agroecological solutions

- Promote smallholder farmer participation, leadership and voices in public policy by supporting farmer-led networks and decision-making structures concerned with agroecology, seed policy, plant genetic resource management, and farmers' rights.
- Support the development of seed policy and laws that recognize farmers' rights to develop, sell, and register their seeds.
- Prioritize scale-up opportunities that support government collaboration with community-led models (such as community seed banking, participatory varietal selection, on-farm diversification, agroecology practices, research and action planning) that are proven to contribute to food security and climate resilience.
- Strengthen CSB governance and linkages with broader networks and institutions to foster sustainability and ensure responsiveness to community needs.



56 Sparks Street, Suite 600, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5B1 Canada
1-800-565-6872 international@weseedchange.org

@weseedchangeorg | weseedchange.org

SeedChange
Formerly USC Canada

in partnership with

Ethio-Organic Seed Action (EOSA)
Regassa Feyissa regfey88@gmail.com

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