



## SEED FAIRS IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS



**Location: Uganda's Lira and Oyam Districts and the Democratic Republic of Congo's North and South Kivu Provinces**

*As part of its food security and livelihood programs, Action Against Hunger (ACF-USA)\* has organized seed fairs in rural areas of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo to provide farmers with seeds. The fairs have been widely spread and had a great number of direct beneficiaries and vendors, successfully facilitating local agricultural production.*

### CHALLENGE

Twenty years of conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Uganda People's Defense Force between 1980s and 2006 caused the displacement of approximately 1.5 million people into over 100 camps in the Acholi (Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts) and Lango (Lira and Apac) regions of Northern Uganda. During this time, agricultural activity ceased. Many farmers were forced to either sell or consume seed surpluses and relied on the World Food Programme food rations while living in camps. Seed availability was also limited because traders were reluctant to travel to the unstable northern regions where households had low purchasing power. In Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) Kivu Provinces, successive conflicts opposing the government military and armed groups and militias since 1994 resulted in significant population movements, asset loss, and decreased access to seed stocks. Farmers could not save a portion of their harvests like they traditionally did for replanting in the next season, and local markets were disrupted.

International NGOs have often provided agricultural inputs to vulnerable households. This model is associated with a number of shortcomings. For instance, the types of seeds distributed through NGO programs often fail to meet the specific needs of the farmers. Further, direct seed distributions often disrupt local market dynamics by decreasing demand for local vendors and therefore seed distribution can foster dependency on external markets. Direct seed distribution is nonetheless critical when seed fairs cannot be held because of conflict.

### RESPONSE

In contrast to direct seed distribution, seed fairs are designed to boost the local economy, increase access to local seed varieties and empower farmers to choose their own seeds rather than receive donor-designed kits that may not meet local conditions. Additionally, seed fairs have the potential to promote sharing of a wide range of traditional crop varieties in order to promote agro-biodiversity. A system of vouchers with several denominations enable participating households to negotiate and buy seeds at fairs modeled after the local market.

In 2006, ACF piloted the seed fair in Uganda's Lango sub-region. A total of six fairs were conducted in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, reaching 7,500 households. In 2007, the approach was extended to the Oyam and the Acholi sub-regions. A total of 16 fairs occurred in IDP camps in 2007 (11,110 beneficiary households) and 17 fairs in 2008 (31,500 beneficiary households).

In 2009 and the first half of 2010, 39 seed fairs were organized in the Masisi, Minova, Bunyakiri, and Walikale areas of North and South Kivu, serving 15,531 conflict-affected households. Overall, 232 tons of seed were purchased, leading to a total estimated production of 4.5 million tons of food: peanuts, beans, rice, and maize.

In Uganda, the Acholi/Lango seed fairs aimed to boost local households' purchasing power and attract seed vendors. In DRC, the goal was also two-pronged: to address income and seed stock loss among displaced, host, and resettled households and encourage the recovery of agricultural livelihoods.

To ensure the greatest impact, extensive assessments were conducted prior to the seed fairs, including:

- **Market study:** Determine market prices and set price ceilings to prevent vendors from using the fairs to raise their prices.
- **Beneficiary identification:** Perform a selection criterion reflective of the intervention area. In the Kivu regions of DRC, for example, it made sense to target vulnerable households, usually female-headed, displaced, host or returned households, and often having to support ill or disabled member and/or malnourished child. In Uganda's Acholi and Lango regions, organizers targeted displaced households as well as returnees. These groups had little to no seed access. A common criterion for all beneficiaries was sufficient land access and labor to conduct agricultural activities.
- **Registration and sensitization about the fair:** Inform people about the fair's logistics.
- **Vendor identification and registration:** Invite local seed vendors—especially individual farmers and farmer groups—to participate in the seed fairs using direct contacts, media advertisements, and notice boards in refugee and IDP camps.
- **Quality Control:** Qualified staff or agricultural technicians visually inspected the seeds at the Kivu fairs to ensure their quality. In Acholi and Lango regions, local committees conducted the quality control and acceptability.

Other logistical activities that took place prior to the fairs included securing venues, hiring casual workers, and general

organization. The day of the seed fair, the seed quantities from each vendor were weighed and recorded. ACF and Ministry of Agriculture staff provided negotiation assistance and technical farming advice.

At the end of the fair, around 10 percent of beneficiaries were randomly selected and interviewed on their background and level of satisfaction with the seed fair. The same process was conducted with the vendors, whose unsold seeds were weighed to determine how much was sold and farmer preference. The vendors were either paid on-site against their vouchers or given a receipt for cash.

Seed fairs were complemented with hands-on training to ensure crop protection and minimize post-harvest loss, demonstration sites, educational radio shows, and monitoring to evaluate yields and performance.

## RESULTS

In Uganda, the project allowed targeted farmers to resume their production whereas in DRC, it permitted a boost in production. Additionally, training on post-harvest crop handling and storage practices increased the local availability of seeds over successive crop seasons, decreasing the widespread reliance on aid. Increasing their productive capacities has improved farmers self-sufficiency and food security.

*In the Acholi and Lango regions:*

- 95 percent of seed fair beneficiaries planted the seeds obtained at the fairs and three percent held them for planting later in the season. Seventy-two percent anticipated sufficient harvest to store seeds for the 2009 planting season. Post fair monitoring also revealed that most participants—81 percent in Amuru, 91 percent in Acholi—selected a single seed type for their production (groundnuts), largely guided by market value and possible income earning potential of the crop, as well as seasonality.
- During the 2007 season in the Gulu, Amuru and Goyam districts, vendors received 67,100,000 UGX (\$37,570), 61 percent of which went to farmers and farmers groups. The amount earned by individual vendors ranged from 1,925,000 (\$1,077) to 22,593,000 UGX (\$12,650). In the Lira districts, individual vendors each received between 7,580,000 (\$4,244) and 34,845,000 UGX (\$19,510).

Farmers with marketable surpluses and local traders who supplied seeds improved their livelihoods: 36 percent of Gulu vendors reported using revenues to pay for school fees and 27 percent used the money to purchase food for their own households. All Amuru vendors used the additional income to purchase food for their households.

*In the Kivu provinces:*

- Almost 25 percent of beneficiary households were female-headed, and almost fifteen percent headed by widows.
- 245 vendors participated in five seed fairs in Walikale, North Kivu, of which 71 percent were either small farmers or farmer cooperatives. There was enormous range in seed sold—from 5 kg provided by a single vendor up to 800 kg from commercial vendors. Most seed came from vendors' own production.
- Beneficiary households sourced 100 percent of bean seeds, 95 percent of groundnut seeds, 90 percent of rice seeds, 25 percent of maize seeds, and 80 percent of soy seeds from the fairs, with the balance coming from stocks, purchases and gifts. Rice and groundnut seed were in greatest demand.
- In the Buyakiri and Kalonge health zones, each household harvested an average of 59 kg of beans, 43 kg of peanuts, and 46 kg of corn, using seeds bought at the fairs: 8 kg, 4.6 kg and 1 kg, respectively.
- Following the 2010 season A harvest (the main production season), households in Bunyakiri and Kalonge reported the gradual restoration of their seed stock. 97 percent of those surveyed responded that they would store a portion of their harvest.
- 88 percent of beneficiary households surveyed reported that the 2010 season A harvest was better than the previous year's harvest. 77 percent attributed this to the fairs, and 12 percent said the benefit was due to the new agricultural techniques acquired during training sessions.
- Prior to seed fairs only 48 percent of households surveyed cited their own production as their main source of food. After the seed fairs, during the 2010 season A, 98 percent of households cited their own production as their main source of food.

\* This case study is based on ACF internal reports.

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**FRONT PAGE PHOTO:**

Woman at a seed fair. © ACF Uganda

Seed fairs are designed to boost the local economy, increase access to local seed varieties and empower farmers to choose their own seeds.



Women at a seed fair in Bunyakiri. © Alexa Reynolds, ACF DR Congo

Overall, 232 tons of seed were purchased, leading to a total production of 4.5 million tons of food: peanuts, beans, rice, and maize.



Seeds and vouchers in Minova seed fair. © Alexa Reynolds, ACF DR Congo

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