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# Seed fairs in seed security programmes

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# GROUNDUP



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## Making a Difference with Innovations

### FROM COMMUNAL TO COMMERCIAL FARMER



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## Seed fairs in seed security programmes

By Staff writer

For any new innovation to be adopted by any given community the extension methodology used plays a critical role. Some good, relevant and appropriate technologies have not been adopted because of the manner in which they were introduced to the communities or clientele. It is vital to note and keep watch that all classes by gender, sex, age, and wealth have access to information and are involved in the adoption process.

Seed fairs have been successful in promoting seed exchange and seed saver networks in seed programmes within east and southern Africa. A seed fair is a function or forum that brings together farmers to display the seed of crops and their varieties they are growing on their farms. It offers farmers opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences on the crops they grow and performance of newly-introduced crops/varieties. In this way, smallholder farmers strengthen their farmer-to-farmer informal seed supply systems and they gain greater control over their food and livelihoods security. Seed fairs offer a window of opportunity for monitoring the dynamics of crop diversity at farm and smallholder farming community levels. A systematic record of the number of crops and crop varieties on display by farmers on seed fairs should be done on a regular basis.



A seed fair recently conducted in Zambia. Seed fairs have been successful in promoting seed exchanges and seed saver networks.

Most PELUM Members involved in seed and food security programmes have discovered the importance and power in seed fairs. Among the members that have held seed fairs include The Valley Trust in South Africa, Permaculture Trust of Botswana, GROW in Lesotho, CARE

Zambia- Livingstone food security programme, Nyahode learning centre in Zimbabwe, SACDEP, RODI, in Kenya, ITDG in Kenya and Zimbabwe, just to mention a few.

### ITDG-Zimbabwe experience

ITDG-Zimbabwe has had some experiences of seed fairs through its facilitation of the Chivi Food Security and the Nyanga Project. To put this discussion into perspective this story will discuss briefly the context within which seed fairs were conceived, organized and helped to evolve to what they are now in Chivi's Ward 21 community.

In Chivi district the need for a wider range of seed suitable to farmers' environment and circumstances was identified and farmers rated it highly. Scarcity of seed of suitable crops and varieties was linked to chronic food insecurity in the district. In Chivi Ward 21, with respect to possible solutions to the need for suitable crops and crop varieties, the practice of seed collections from friends and relatives within and outside the community was noted and ways of augmenting it were sought. Seed fairs were seen as one viable option of achieving this.

### Seed Fair Process

The seed fair process is a cyclical one. It starts with planning and ends with an evaluation of the event.

#### a. Planning

Preparation of the seed fair in Chivi, Ward 21, starts at the Community Annual Planning workshop. Club representatives come together at Musvovi hall in the Ward to review progress or lack of it in the implementation of the previous Annual Community Development plan. Lessons are drawn from both the identified achievements and failures, and are used to formulate a new Community Annual Plan. The Area Committee Chairperson chairs the fora. Local ward-level technocrats are invited to participate and provide advice and information necessary for the community to make informed decisions. Seed fair dates are set at this meeting.

As the date set for the seed fair approaches, say within three to four weeks to the event, the Area Committee convenes a meeting that then plans the logistics of the event. This meeting sets out the participation fees each club has to pay and the deadlines for the payments. Task teams for prize procurement and food preparation are identified. This instills in stakeholders a

sense of commitment and ownership of the process and activity.

#### b. The event

The earlier seed fairs in Chivi were done when the majority of crops were still green. These days dry crop seed are common to the seed fair. Some farmers display crops and their processed products. Other invited organizations also bring their own displays of their technologies to the seed fair. Judges for the fair are drawn from Chivi Agritex staff. The relevant agricultural supervisor in response to a formal request identifies three or four agricultural extension workers from the neighboring Wards. They are given judging and score sheets prepared by the Area Committee. Competition is at two levels: individual and club levels. The best 3 in each category are awarded prizes.

#### c. Evaluation of the event

A week or two after the seed fair the Community representatives come together to review and evaluate the seed fair event. The evaluation looks at all the aspects of the event: level of participation, management of the whole event, financial reports, prizes and so on. It seeks to learn from what was done well and what was not done so well. The evaluation forms part of the process of planning for the next seed fair.

From the IT experiences, components of successful seed fairs are:

- Build on local activities wherever possible;
- Co-ordinate with local indigenous structures;
- Involve other agencies working in agriculture in the area;
- Announce the event well before time;
- Ensure that the potential competitors understand the criteria for different classes, and the overall rules for exhibiting;
- Ensure that the judges command the respect of the local population;
- Give attractive prizes; and,
- Consider gender dynamics effects well in advance.

Any other organisations that are involved in seed security programmes are encouraged to try out seed fairs. It is an experience that stays in the memory of both the farmers and organisers. ■