

27 essentials for a seeds distribution:

Dom's opinion

Research

Social unit of production

This is the smallest social grouping within which all decisions are made, work shared, responsibility taken and harvest shared. We need to know what it is for each different item distributed. In Aceh rice is managed at the family level, but for some heavy tools this is not so. In other cultures there are different rules. Never try to distribute anything to a larger group, as they might share it out unequally

Beneficiary selection

What are you trying to achieve with your distribution? You must be clear about this. If it is tsunami recovery, the beneficiaries will be different to a distribution that aims to improve vulnerability or food security.

Do you want to choose everyone in a community (equitable, but some people will be less vulnerable than others) or only the most vulnerable (which might cause resentment and conflict in the community)?

What does vulnerable mean to you and the community? You should define it with community people first, so everyone is clear what your criteria is

What you should give

You have to ask people what they want and to prioritise them. They will ask for more than they need, so cut it back to the absolute necessities, and be specific – what variety. Expect there to be differences between communities and plan for it. Either inform everyone that your logistics cannot cope with distributing different things to different villages, or be prepared for the increased logistics if you decide to do that

When you should give it to them

Every activity in agriculture happens at a specific time, which changes from place to place. Build an agricultural calendar with people, And make sure you distribute as close as possible to the time of planting. Too late mean you miss the best time to plant, but too early mean they may store seeds badly or even eat them (in the case of rice, corn, peanuts, beans)

Is it sustainable?

Seeds should only ever be given once, but never give hybrid seeds that are infertile in subsequent generations. We do not want to distribute dependency. All tools should be the best quality, and machinery should have plans for maintenance and access to fuel or they will quickly become useless

Name lists

Don't ask one member of the community (such as the village chief) to make the name lists – they could put in their friends and forget their enemies. Make sure the name lists are verified by the staff and by the community members. Make sure there is a chance for people to add or remove names if necessary.

Make sure you collect the names in good time so you can count them and make sure you can deliver enough seeds and tools for them all. Generally it is pointless to buy too much seed, because we want to force people to use their seed well. If we have a reserve stock and they know it, they might not try so hard to get success

Extension

What are the essential messages you want people to know about the seeds? You should compile 'instructions' for each seed even if you think the community knows how – do it with the master farmers, the department of agriculture extension workers and other

experts to know you are right. Consider preparing drawn / comic strip instructions for distribution with the seed, so they can be clear (and they like it)

You must tell people that the distribution of seeds is the only time you will do it. Never let them think that you might be back next year to give out more seeds. They must take responsibility for the quality of their harvest and the storage of seed for next year.

Committee

A committee of community members is useful – to help with explaining the distribution to people, creating the name lists, organising people to come to the distribution at the right time, crowd control, and verification on the day of the distribution itself

Procurement

Tender / quotations

For large orders, put the order out to tender (i.e. advertise the amounts you wish to buy, and let the supplier who want the contract come to you). You interview them, check their facilities etc, and choose the one you think is best. There are lots of things to check!

They must also give you a seed sample, which you will test (see below). If the order is smaller, or if you don't have time for the tender process, get quote from a number of suppliers first, and test their seed and storage situation before buying.

Storage

Is their store clean and dry? Do they store seed on pallets and away from the walls (good) or on the floor and leaning against the walls (bad)? Are there any water marks on the walls or floor? Are there any rat droppings in the corners or underneath things? Are there old seeds scattered on the floor?

Source

You need to get your seed from the nearest possible place to the distribution, and the source of seeds should certainly have the same agro-climatic conditions. The further away you are from the seed source, the more likely your seed will be vulnerable to attack from disease and pests

Contracts

Once you are satisfied you have the right supplier, you can make a contract. The contract should state the prices and quantities, the variety names, and cover you from accidents etc. More importantly, the contract should have an 'escape clause' allowing you to break the deal if the seed tests are under 85%, even if the supplier has procured most of all of the seed for you. In other words, you have to push them to be honest and get the best seed. Have your contract wording checked by a lawyer so you are sure. It is good to have a lawyer present as a witness when you are signing, so he/she can explain the legal language to the supplier.

Variety

Make sure you have the right variety, and make sure you can identify it by sight, so do the research on the internet or with other experts and community members until you are sure. You will need to know this when you are taking delivery of the seed from the supplier

Seed tests

Seeds must be tested for germination, and they should definitely be rejected if the germination is less than 85%. Seeds can be tested on wet paper or cotton wool in a plate – leave them for 5-7 days, and then count the number of germinated seeds. You can also test them in soil but it takes longer. Document the process well (including photographs) so that if you need to break the contract you can prove your decision in court (if the supplier sues you). Don't test all your seed sample – keep some for later (see below)

Delivery

When you take delivery of the seeds, you need to check that the seed you are accepting is the same as the sample which you have tested! This is where your ability to check

seeds by eye comes in useful. You should open up some of the sack / packs of seed, and check the contents. If the sacks are large, check the middle and bottom too – they might have put bad seed underneath and good seed on top! Take a handful of seed from the sack and compare it to the rest of the seed sample. They should be the same in terms of weight, size, colour, dryness, and age. If you are satisfied that all is as it should be, accept. If you discover that they are trying to sell you sub-standard seed, break the contract!

Transporting

Transporting the seed to your warehouse must done carefully. If by road, use covered trucks. If by boat, wrap the seed up as well as possible in plastic sheeting (below too). By air it is easier, although it is expensive and there are limits on the amount you can carry. Remember – seed does not like to be wet, too hot, too cold, or eaten by rats or insects!

Warehouse

Your warehouse must be to the same standards as you expect from the supplier. Even if you will only store the seed for a short while, you must ensure that no rats, pests or water can get to the seed. Seed sacks should be stacked alternately, not leaning against walls, and off the floor. This keeps the air moving around the seed, keeping it dry and alive. Don't stack the seed sacks too high (up to about shoulder height is best). It is good to have some space in the warehouse so that there is space to separate the seeds into family packs.

Distribution

Logistics

Get the distribution planned well in advance – where you want people to come to collect their seeds, how you will control the crowds, at which time and date etc, and tell people well in advance too. Make it easy for yourself – choose a central point and ask people to come to you. Reduce your transport if you can, and best of all, distribute from the warehouse if it is appropriate (depends on the size of the area you are distributing to)

Family packs

Get your seeds packed up into family packs in advance. Don't make packs for 2 families (or more) and expect them to share the seeds equally. That would make your logistics easier, but the eventual distribution less equitable. It is quite acceptable to separate the seeds into plastic bags – fancy packaging is unnecessary if the seeds inside are good, and if you distribute instructions with them. Separating small quantities of seeds into the bags can be time consuming and tedious but it is a good way to maintain a high quality in the distribution. If you ask the supplier to do this job they might mix in bad seed.

The actual distribution

Have different areas marked out with string – one area is for ACF staff only, and that would back onto the warehouse or store (or truck if you are distributing remotely). This area should be guarded so nobody can run in and steal bags of seed from under you. The crowd has to stay outside, and the actual distribution point should be a thin path, just wide enough for one person to walk down. Call the names out from the name list, and the person called will come forward to collect the seed. At the entrance to the path is the village distribution committee, who verify that the person who has come is really that person. If they are allowed into the path, they collect the seed, pass on, collect another item if you are distributing more than one item, and then they pass some of your staff (teachers). The staff are there to tell people certain messages (see below). Then the person can leave and the whole thing is repeated until you are done. The largest number of families I have distributed to in one day with this system was 700, 7.2kg per person.

Crowd control

Lot of people can get noisy and out of control, so be prepared. Have some of the village distribution committee ready to assist in crowd control, and have enough staff ready to help out. Another useful thing to do is to give everyone a talk before the distribution

starts, where you can deliver essential messages (see below) and to tell them that if they cause trouble you will simply pack up and leave, and then they will not get their seeds (I had a near riot on my hands in one distribution, and so had to do just that – pack up and leave, and that village missed their seeds).

Messages

What messages do you want to give them? Remember to tell them that this is the only distribution for them. Add in any other important message. The messages are transmitted by the staff carefully placed along the distribution path, so that everybody gets told the same important messages

Post distribution

Monitoring

You need to monitor the progress of your seeds as they are planted, grow, get harvested and get used. If you do this you can step in with solutions as they occur. Your monitoring team should be rotating through the distributed communities frequently, listening to people and checking the progress of the plants. It helps to create some simple form to fill in, but remember to analyse them, or the effort is wasted

Extension and messages

As the monitoring team passes through the communities they can continue to reinforce the messages you wish to pass to the population. By the end of this process everyone would have heard the same messages at least 3 times – before the distribution, during the distribution and during the monitoring. Less than 3 times is not enough for people to actually listen!

Evaluation

If you do your monitoring well the evaluation is easy – just analyse the monitoring reports and hold a couple of focus group meetings to discuss the distribution work as a whole.

Remember to analyse:

- the technical aspect such as the quality of the seeds, the effectiveness of the methodology, the logistics etc
- the social aspects such as how people use their products, whether you targeted the correct beneficiaries and whether the seeds helped
- the problems such as why there are losses (inevitable) and how they could be avoided next time

Reporting

Document the whole thing well, as people working after you would benefit from your experience. If your suppliers are good (or bad) your organisation needs to know that and remember it. The donor organisation will also need to know the results of the distribution. If the monitoring and evaluation are done well the report is easy

Timing

It is necessary to track the influence of distributions during, immediately after, at planting and germination, during crop growth, at harvest, after harvest, and 6 months or so afterward too – as some changes may not be immediately visible to people. Even if the donor organisation does not require evaluations after so long, it is useful to do it anyway so you know you helped (or not) and why.