

Seed Alert

#01 May 2020

Seed Alerts identify current challenges and urgent action in the Ethiopian seed sector, based on surveys and focus group discussions with various stakeholders

Ethiopia

Alert 1

Precautions hamper seed processing and distribution

Alert 2

Short supply of inputs and labour constrain seed production

Alert 3

Social distancing diminishes government's capability to coordinate EGS supply

Alert 4

Concern that substandard seed will make its way onto the market is heightened

Alert 1

Precautions hamper seed processing and distribution

What is the impact?

- COVID-19 and precautionary measures taken by government and society limit mobility of seed transporters and traders
- Because they fear surface transmission of the virus, workers are reluctant to operate equipment and perform loading and unloading tasks at seed processing facilities
- Transporters and retailers are reluctant to meet each other at points of exchange in the seed distribution network
- Retailers fear meeting transporters as they come from busier urban centres where the virus is suspected
- 90% of respondents in the survey believe that transport to and stock at points of seed sale will be negatively impacted by the crisis
- To avoid last minute rush to and congestion at retail outlets, government has given direction to companies to distribute their seed swiftly
- Indications are that good progress has been made, particularly in the case of maize, but processing and distribution of other cereals like wheat is still underway
- If momentum is not maintained and seed distribution is impeded, farmers will have little other choice but to turn to their own and their neighbours' grain harvests as a source of seed or delay planting in the expectation that seed will still be distributed, either of which could be detrimental both in terms of the quantity and quality of grain harvested

What actions are required?

- Provide workers at seed processing facilities with personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitation supplies
- Increase involved workers' confidence in their safety by posting illustrations of the precautionary measures put in place in their workplace
- Screen, if possible test, and isolate labourers with symptoms in collaboration with health officers
- Monitor current operating capacities in seed processing facilities, assess potential and document challenges
- Alert government and companies to the situation and urge that they communicate and collaborate when and where needed
- Coordinate more optimal use of resources in increasing the combined output of processors

What stakeholders are involved?

- Seed processors and companies, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and regional state Bureaus of Agriculture (BoAs), respective offices of public health at federal and regional levels, ISSD Ethiopia, and other projects

**Who takes initiative?
Who drives action?**

- ISSD Ethiopia will take the lead in consolidating information from seed processors across Amhara, Oromia, SNNP and Tigray regions and alert MoA, BoAs and companies on the extent of the challenge so that immediate collaborative action can be taken
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Seed inspection officers in Oromia wear masks during sampling seed for testing (Photos: Mesertu Lemma)



Alert 2

Short supply of inputs and labour constrain seed production

What is the impact?

- COVID-19 and precautionary measures taken by government and society will likely disturb seed producers in their access to labour
- Labourers much needed for seed production are reluctant to leave their homes for fear of catching the virus
- Whilst in Tigray region, their movement between administrative areas is more restricted than elsewhere
- Agro-input suppliers may also shut their doors to customers or face similar disruption in their supply chains to that of seed (see Alert 1)
- 87% of respondents in the survey indicate that reduced access to inputs and labour poses a significant threat to early generation seed (EGS) and certified seed production in 2020
- Labour is a key constraint to seed production, in particular for hybrid maize at the time of detasseling
- As a result of limited access to labour, labour costs will likely increase and drive up the cost of production
- The increased cost of production impacts upon the business model of seed companies, puts upward pressure on seed prices, and may result in less affordable quality seed being available next season
- Coupled with the worsening plague of desert locusts in the country, the outlook for future seed and food availability is gloomy

What actions are required?

- Develop new working conditions that apply the 1.5 metre distance restriction during routine field-based labour activities
- Print pamphlets with illustrations of these and other precautionary safety measures that can be applied in the field
- Distribute these through seed producers and local agriculture and labour offices to labourers to raise their awareness and confidence of safety
- Broadcast the same messages over rural radio to increase their reach
- Encourage labourers to frequently wash their hands with soap and water, and prioritize the use of hand sanitizer where water is unavailable
- Screen, if possible test, and isolate labourers with symptoms in collaboration with health officers
- Re-prioritize the supply of labour-saving technology to selected producers
- Promote the use of mechanical cutting apparatuses for detasseling in hybrid maize seed production
- Communicate virtually and frequently with producers to monitor progress
- Regarding agro-input suppliers including farm service centres, follow the actions of Alert 1

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA and BoAs, respective offices of public health and labour at federal and regional state levels, seed companies, seed producers and farm service centres

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- MoA and BoAs to develop new working conditions and produce pamphlets for labourers with the advice of health and labour offices
- MoA and BoAs to coordinate and channel resources accordingly at federal and regional levels.

Alert 3

Social distancing diminishes government's capability to coordinate EGS supply

What is the impact?

- COVID-19 and precautionary measures taken by government and society disturb interaction among key stakeholders in EGS supply
- Commonly, MoA and BoAs convene joint planning among stakeholders in EGS production and are key decision makers in EGS allocation
- They also witness and enforce contractual agreements in EGS supply
- Because of social distancing measures, advances in these formal procedures are struggling to take place
- Virtual conferencing is unfamiliar practice in government
- Despite information and communication technology (ICT) being available, government faces difficulty in communicating with stakeholders
- Almost all panellists in the survey (90%) perceive a strongly negative impact of the crisis on government's capability to coordinate seed sector activities; EGS supply is no exception
- This concern is raised in particular in Amhara and Tigray regions
- Disarray in the coordination of not only current but future supply of EGS could have profoundly negative effects on the quantity, quality and variety of seed on offer in the short- to mid-term

What actions are required?

- Promote virtual conferencing and ICT to government and technically backstop their adoption for continued planning, coordination and decision making in EGS production and supply
- Create awareness of the Electronic Signature Proclamation No.1072/2018 and binding of agreements executed digitally in accordance with the law
- Give formal approval for digital countersigning of contractual agreements
- Facilitate agreements remotely by (e)mail either digitally or e.g. DHL courier service
- Ensure that MoA/BoAs witness and enforce agreements
- Enforce agreement to tight deadlines of delivery, and immediately re-allocate EGS when performance is compromised
- Monitor progress in production and delivery of EGS frequently and remotely by SMS, telephone, email or virtual conferencing
- Reprioritize experimental plots at research stations and commercial farms for EGS production of the most demanded varieties
- Use development agents (DAs) in supervising EGS production off site, providing them with EGS production manuals
- Permit, under exceptional circumstances where basic seed cannot be supplied, the use of C1 seed in authorized certified seed multiplication

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA and BoAs, agricultural research institutes, seed companies engaged in both EGS and certified seed production, other seed producers and parties to contractual EGS supply agreements, and ISSD Ethiopia and other projects

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- ISSD Ethiopia, as the temporarily mandated party in facilitating the establishment of a coordinated system of EGS supply in Ethiopia, will drive action under this initiative

Alert 4

Concern that substandard seed will make its way onto the market is heightened

What is the impact?

- COVID-19 and precautionary measures taken by government and society disturb seed supply chains and mobility of inspectors and input supervisors in seed markets
- Close to two-third of the survey's respondents (63%) share the concern that substandard seed will make its way onto the market
- The use of substandard seed will have consequences on both the quantity and quality of farmers' harvests
- A poor crop and its harvest could spell catastrophe for farmers food and nutrition security and income generation at a time when grain prices are already beginning to soar

What actions are required?

- Establish a working group of BoA and regulatory staff to monitor quality at various nodes in distribution to stamp out substandard seed
- Conduct post-control checks at major seed markets without prejudice with immediate effect
- Set up a customer complaints hotline to direct the attention of seed inspectors to sites where seed of dubious quality has been sold
- Initiate an awareness raising campaign on radio to alert farmers and DAs to this concern and how to scan for substandard seed in the market

What stakeholders are involved?

- Seed regulatory authorities, BoAs, seed companies, and seed agents/dealers

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- BoAs should oversee the efforts of regulatory authorities in stamping out incidences of substandard seed on the market

New practices at seed selling centre in Amhara (Photos: Wonzie Asmare)



Dashboard

Outcomes of May Survey Ethiopia -
identification of FDG topics or Alerts

- Severe negative impact
- Negative impact
- Slight negative impact
- No impact; business as usual

Seed sector operations and services

Seed Alert May

| Seed sector operations and services | Seed Alert May |
|---|------------------|
| Breeding on-station | ■ |
| Multilocational variety trials | ■ |
| Farmer variety trials | ■ |
| Variety release committee and release process | ■ |
| Production of early generation seed | ■ Alert 2 |
| Supply of early generation seed | ■ Alert 3 |
| Field inspection for seed quality assurance | ■ |
| Laboratory testing for seed quality assurance | ■ |
| Access agro-inputs for seed production | ■ Alert 2 |
| Access to labour for seed production | ■ Alert 2 |
| Field operations for seed production | ■ |
| Post-harvest practices for seed marketing | ■ Alert 1 |
| Seed import | ■ |
| Seed distribution | ■ Alert 1 |
| Seed & variety promotion | ■ |
| COVID-19 measures on mobility | ■ |
| Mobility of seed companies to point of sales/agro-dealers | ■ |
| Mobility of farmers to point of sales/agro-dealers | ■ |
| Mobility farmers to informal markets | ■ |
| Accessibility informal seed sources | ■ |
| Presence of substandard seed in markets | ■ Alert 4 |
| Sales of quality seed | ■ |
| Government funding of services | ■ |
| Government investment in marketing and distribution | ■ |
| Seed sector information sharing and coordination | ■ Alert 3 |
| Affordability of quality seed to farmers | ■ |
| Farmer cash availability | ■ |
| Farmer willingness to pay for quality seed | ■ |
| Quantity and quality of seed sown | ■ |
| Quantity and quality of produce harvested | ■ |
| Food and income security | ■ |

Rapid Assessment & Seed Alert

To avoid a food and hunger crisis following the current COVID-19 health crisis, urgent action is needed to address key agricultural challenges, including bottlenecks identified in the seed sector. The Rapid Assessment is conducted at country level through a survey and focus group discussions. On at least a monthly basis, reiterations of a Rapid Assessment identify alerts and actions, and Seed Alerts are published. [More details on the methodology and steps can be accessed through this link. \(https://bit.ly/sectoralertMETH\)](https://bit.ly/sectoralertMETH)

Purpose

The purpose of the Seed Alert is to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the seed sector. The project operates in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nigeria and Uganda, where Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI) collaborates with partners in seed programmes. [More details on the Rapid Assessments Project for the Seed Sector can be accessed through this link. \(https://bit.ly/seedalertINTRO\)](https://bit.ly/seedalertINTRO)

Alerts in other sectors

In May and June 2020, likewise Alerts are foreseen to cover the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the horticultural and sesame sectors. The use of the tool is explored in other specific commodities such as dairy and potato. Working with a similar model of Rapid Assessment in various sectors and countries over a time series allows for interpretation and synthesis of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on food systems at national, regional and global levels, while also gaining insights into immediate and practical actions addressing emerging challenges. It furthermore provides insights into the use of the sector model as diagnostic tool supporting strategic development, planning, identification and monitoring interventions that aim to enhance the functioning and resilience of specific sectors and food systems.

The Seed Alerts are published for multiple countries and are part of the WCDI Sector Transformation publications.

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Institutional reference

The Seed Alert Ethiopia is the result of a collaborative project that brings together experts working in the Integrated Seed Sector Development in Ethiopia programme (ISSD Ethiopia) that is part of the Bilateral Ethiopian-Netherlands Effort for Food, Income and Trade partnership (BENEFIT) as implemented by WCDI in a partnership with various organizations in Ethiopia.

Contributing organizations

The Seed Alert Ethiopia involved representatives of the following organizations in the survey and focus group discussions:

- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)
- Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA)
- Amhara Bureau of Agriculture
- Oromia Bureau of Agriculture
- Tigray Bureau of Agriculture
- South Input Regulatory Authority (SIRA)
- Amhara Seed Enterprise (ASE)
- Oromia Seed Enterprise (OSE)
- South Seed Enterprise (SSE)
- Ethiopian Agricultural Business Corporation (EABC)
- Ethiopian Seed Association (ESA)
- Amuhari Seed Company
- Avalo PLC
- Corteva
- Erer Seed Union
- Gawat PLC
- Maichew Hadinet Raya Union
- Wama Seed Company
- Amhara Regional Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI)
- Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)
- Tigray Agricultural Research Institute (TARI)
- Hawassa University
- Mekele University

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