

ISSD Africa Topic 1 and 2 Technical Guidance Group - Seed Systems in Fragile and Emergency Contexts

What is ISSD Africa?

ISSD Africa is an international community of practice guiding seed sector innovation and development in the African continent to alleviate the problem of limited access to quality seed. Addressing Africa's complex seed sector challenges will result in better performing seed sectors with increased access to quality seed, of farmer-preferred varieties. This, in turn, will lead to increased crop productivity and production, and ultimately have a positive impact on food and nutrition security as well as farmer income. To unlock the potential of the African seed sector, ISSD Africa identified eight action research topics related to key seed sector bottlenecks, ranging from seed policies to quality assurance and agrobiodiversity. Partners within the ISSD Africa community of practice will lead research and advance the thinking on these eight topics, with the goal of finding innovative solutions to improving the seed sector.

Understanding Seed Systems in Fragile and Emergency Contexts

Fragile states and emergency contexts are the focus of two of the eight ISSD Africa action research topics, both led by [Mercy Corps](#). Fragile states and emergency contexts are characterised by unstable operating environments and susceptibility to shocks. Seed systems in these contexts are often eroded, with ineffective institutional capacity for seed production, distribution and quality control, resulting in poor seed utilization and compromised seed systems resilience. Both fragile and emergency contexts offer unique seed systems challenges and opportunities that require effective interventions, informed by the contextual understanding of donors and other stakeholders.

The aim of Mercy Corps' action research on these two components is to deepen understanding of seed systems challenges and opportunities and to develop tools for context-appropriate interventions, including a context analysis tool, intervention prioritization framework, and seed road map. The purview of this action research extends from reviewing current practices and capturing learning, to identifying, developing and testing tools in a number of emergency and fragile contexts. Mercy Corps intends to adopt an iterative approach to implementation which encourages co-creation, joint experimentation and exchange and learning from ongoing activities.

The key questions guiding this action research are:

- What are the characteristics of seed systems in fragile states and how are they affected by conflict?
- How do we adapt assessments, interventions and learning in conflict-affected environments to promote more resilient seed systems?
- How can we improve the impact of emergency seed interventions?
- How can emergency seed interventions help create more resilient and improved seed systems in the long-term?

Technical Guidance Group

To enable deeper understanding of the key questions above and help refine the action research outputs, Mercy Corps will constitute a technical guidance group consisting of seed systems experts and implementers with interest and experience in fragile and emergency contexts. The group will have three main objectives:

1. Share information to better understand the functionality of seed systems in fragile and emergency contexts
2. Share seed-related intervention challenges, opportunities and responses within these contexts and in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Contribute to ISSD Africa topic 1&2 strategy and outputs to ensure they best meet identified needs.

Outputs from the discussions will be used to review and adapt work plans for the two research topics. Tentatively, initial discussions will address the following seed systems questions:

- a. How do the dynamics of informal and formal seed systems vary in terms of engagement and effectiveness in fragile states and emergency contexts?
- b. What are the modalities for adapting assessments, interventions and learning in fragile states and emergency contexts to promote seed systems resilience?
- c. How are the current emergency seed interventions functioning effectively? Are there opportunities for improving their impacts?
- d. What is the long-term view of the emergency seed interventions both for improved seed systems resilience and in response to impacts of COVID-19 pandemic?

While the proposed questions will guide the initial stages of discussion, additional topics and questions will be included as more relevant seed systems issues emerge.

Proposed participants

Members of the technical guidance group will include ISSD Africa seed systems experts, experts currently leading seed systems interventions in fragile and emergency contexts; professionals with interests and/or experience in seed systems within these contexts; field staff implementing seed and food security programs, and representatives of agricultural research institutes and academic institutions in select fragile states.

Expression of interest

Expressions of interest to join this group can be made via [this form](#), or by sending an email to issd-africa-team@mercycorps.org. Please be sure to include your name, title, organization, seed system experience and reason for interest in joining the group, if submitting an email. Prospective members will be expected to express their interests by 15 September 2020.

Learn more about ISSD Africa, the eight action learning topics and implementing partners by visiting <https://issdafrica.org/>. The guidance for emergency seed intervention during COVID-19 can be accessed [here](#). Be on the lookout for forthcoming *Tenets of Seed Systems Resilience* and *Tools for Remote-Rapid Seed Systems Assessments*.

For more information contact:

issd-africa-team@mercycorps.org, wouko@mercycorps.org, amottram@mercycorps.org.