

Seed Alert

#02 June 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

Mobility restrictions and lockdown disrupt the processes involved in the release and registration of new varieties

Alert 2

Mobility restrictions and fears among staff of critical stakeholder organizations hinder the timely supply of early generation seed (EGS)

Alert 3

Mobility restrictions hamper seed quality assurance in EGS production, and reduces availability of varieties in high demand

Alert 4

Mobility restrictions impede seed producers' access to agro-inputs, labour and finance

Alert 1

Mobility restrictions and lockdown disrupt the processes involved in the release and registration of new varieties

What is the impact?

- The formal processes and speed of variety release and registration are disrupted (survey: 92%¹)
- Only a limited number of staff members of the Plant Variety Release, Protection and Seed Quality Control Directorate (hereafter called the Directorate) are able to work in the office, causing delays in the completion of activities
- The Directorate faces challenges in obtaining necessary data from some of the Technical Committees (TC)
- At the time of writing (12 June 2020), the secretariat of the National Variety Release Committee (NVRC) has not yet completed summarizing technical reports on the candidate varieties to be submitted to the NVRC
- Even though it normally meets in March-April, the NVRC has not yet been able to schedule this meeting owing to the lockdown restrictions
- If the process for the release and registration of the varieties is not concluded in June, farmers' access to new and better-performing candidate varieties of rain-fed crops, such as maize, sorghum and potato, will be delayed by one year
- Research organizations and breeding companies will not be able to produce or make EGS available, thus delaying the production of certified seed
- Pre-extension demonstration of new and released varieties cannot take place
- If these challenges are not addressed before 20 June 2020, it is unlikely that farmers will be able to benefit from investments in crop improvement for some seasons to come

What actions are required?

- Urge two of the three staff members of the Directorate to get the missing TC reports, finalize the summaries, ensure that the TC has evaluated candidate varieties for their value for cultivation and use (VCU), and attach these summaries to the applications of candidate varieties by 12 June 2020 at the latest
- Permit these staff members to return to the office to complete the work, arranging safe transport to and from the office if need be, and providing the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE)

¹Survey percentages refer to the percentage of respondents who indicated the statement concerned.

- Send summaries to NVRC members individually and ask that they approve those varieties recommended for release by the TC
- Directly upon approval and before 20 June 2020, inform breeders/institutes that varieties have been approved by 50% or more of NVRC members so that they can start the production of EGS and kick-off pre-extension variety demonstration
- Urge research institutes to prioritize access to irrigation for breeder seed production and the pre-extension demonstration of newly released varieties that missed regular planting time under rain-fed conditions

What stakeholders are involved?

- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), State Minister for Agricultural Development
- MoA, Plant Variety Release, Protection and Seed Quality Control Directorate
- NVRC
- Breeders and institutes that submitted applications for variety release in 2019/20
- Crop research directors and commodity research programme directors of agricultural research institutes

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- The Integrated Seed Sector Development Programme in Ethiopia (ISSD Ethiopia) has provided details on the situation to the relevant State Minister, the Chairperson of the NVRC, and the Director General of the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), and has asked them to address the challenges
 - The Directorate drives the actions identified
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Seed germination test at Asella seed laboratory, Oromia, Ethiopia (Photo: Mirjam Schaap)

Alert 2

Mobility restrictions and fears among staff of critical stakeholder organizations hinder the timely supply of EGS

What is the impact?

- The processing and supply of EGS of maize, common beans and other crops are delayed, owing to a shortage of staff in research centres, e.g. EIAR and Regional Agricultural Research Institutes (RARIs)
- The rising death rate, and the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, worries staff and reduces their commitment to come to work and their enthusiasm to complete their responsibilities
- Given that the EIAR is a primary source of EGS, the delay and prospective untimely supply of EGS will jeopardize the delivery of quality seed of new varieties to farmers
- The shortage of labour particularly affects the processing of breeder seed, which is cleaned manually owing to its small quantities
- Communication and coordination between EGS suppliers, EGS producers and authorities responsible for quality assurance are hampered
- ISSD is unable to effectively play its role in facilitating the establishment of a sustainable EGS supply system, as entrusted by the MoA, owing to restrictions in public meetings and the reluctance of stakeholders to participate
- Many of the original plans and processes for signing contracts for next year's EGS supply, as well as the facilitation of this year's transactions, have been disrupted
- If there is a shortage of EGS affecting farmers' access to seed in diverse agro-ecologies, private seed producers and seed producer cooperatives will be those most affected (survey: 1st and 2nd rank; see also this [link](#))

What actions are required?

- Encourage the EIAR and RARIs to prioritize the processing of EGS
- Support staff to get access to PPE and other sanitary equipment, strengthen their commitment, and assume their responsibilities
- Conduct an inventory of EGS demand and supply on a regular basis to optimize utilization
- Speed up the re-allocation of EGS from less needy customers to those most in need, in cases where the former do not collect on time, i.e. minimize the carry-over of EGS
- Prioritize the allocation of alternative production sites, e.g. large farms, and the off-season production of EGS with irrigation to catch up on the supply of basic seed for next year's main season

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA and Bureaus of Agriculture (BoAs) for decision-making
- EIAR and RARIs
- Seed regulatory authorities, particularly the labs
- Public seed companies and large-scale farmers
- ISSD Ethiopia

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- ISSD Ethiopia conducts an inventory and informs stakeholders
 - EIAR and RARIs engage in the production and supply of EGS
 - Public seed enterprises engage in EGS production and supply
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Alert 3

Mobility restrictions hamper seed quality assurance in EGS production, and reduces availability of varieties in high demand

What is the impact?

- Field and/or laboratory inspections required for quality assurance of EGS have been disrupted in production sites of some research centres; as a result, EGS cannot be certified or made available for supply
- For example, at an irrigated production site of Werer Agricultural Research Centre in Afar, the seed of a new sought-after wheat variety was sampled and tested, but results have not been communicated, and thus EGS seed has not been certified
- Another example is that the production of maize inbred lines by Bako Agricultural Research Centre, where the seed could not be certified because germination standards were not met
- Seed producers continue to have an interest in the production of certified seed of the wheat and maize varieties in demand

What actions are required?

- Urge research organizations and seed producers involved in EGS production and seed regulatory bodies to demonstrate strategic flexibility in seed quality assurance and facilitate the continued supply of EGS as much as possible during the current crisis
- Speed-up communications between the MoA and the regional regulatory authority; urge that laboratory tests are concluded and that wheat varieties multiplied at Werer are certified for EGS production
- Permit the use of seed of maize inbred lines that is not certified due to its low germination rate, under a special arrangement in which the producer increases the seed rate to compensate for low germination
- Propose that the MoA elaborates guidelines for the certification of EGS under current exceptional conditions

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA, State Minister for Inputs and Outputs
- MoA, Regulatory Directorate for Variety Release and Registration, Protection and Quality Assurance
- Regional seed regulatory authorities and BoAs
- EIAR
- Public seed companies
- ISSD Ethiopia

Who takes initiative? Who drives action?

- ISSD Ethiopia has started facilitating discussions between EIAR, regional regulatory bodies, and seed producers, on the issues of maize inbred lines
 - EIAR has to take the initiative to discuss the issue of wheat seed with regional and federal regulatory authorities
 - ISSD Ethiopia encourages stakeholders to develop guidelines aimed at avoiding future similar situations
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Alert 4

Mobility restrictions impede seed producers' access to agro-inputs, labour and finance

What is the impact?

- As a result of their limited access to and availability of agro-chemicals, labour and finance, public seed companies, private seed companies and seed producer cooperatives are constrained in the seed production operations for maize hybrids, wheat, potato and several other crops
- Agro-chemicals for plant protection are expected to remain in short supply this year
- Limited reserves of foreign currency, aggravated by a decrease in remittances transferred into the country, result in a reduction in imports of agro-chemicals for crop and seed production
- Global transportation is affected, which in turn impacts on the shipment of agro-chemicals to Djibouti
- Djibouti has become a hotspot for COVID-19; drivers returning from Djibouti regularly test positive for the virus, causing further disruptions in supply chains for agro-inputs
- The government is currently purchasing agro-chemicals; it also releases foreign currency to facilitate agro-input importation, although the amount remains inadequate
- Mobility restrictions, social distancing and fear among agricultural workers negatively impact the availability of labour for seed production
- Labour wages rose two-fold in May, increasing the cost of production and thus significantly reducing profitability for private seed producers and seed producer cooperatives
- Current government restrictions on the provision of credit limits the amount of capital available from banks for production, particularly for private seed producers and local seed producer cooperatives
- Insufficient supply of inputs, labour and finance may result in a failure to produce sufficient seed, and will at least significantly raise the cost of production, reduce profitability and curtail willingness to invest in seed production in the future
- Survey respondents identify poor farmers and female-headed households as the seed users most affected by the reduced availability and thus affordability of quality seed (see also this [link](#))



Seed Producers Cooperative management accessing credit from Cooperative Bank of Oromia. Oromia, Ethiopia (Photo: Mirjam Schaap)

What actions are required?

- Encourage the MoA to prioritize agro-chemicals when allocating foreign exchange currency for imports
- Inform and encourage the MoA and the Ministry of Transport on how to increase the safety of transport workers travelling to and from Djibouti
- Provide PPE and sanitary supplies, and raise awareness on the risk of infection by COVID-19 for transport workers engaged in the importation of agro-chemicals from Djibouti
- Encourage and support seed producers to attract, mobilize and secure labour by providing PPE, safe transport and, if possible, board and lodging, whilst raising awareness about the disease in collaboration with local authorities
- Inform the MoA and engage with banks in the provision of credit for seed production by private seed producers and seed producer cooperatives

What stakeholders are involved?

- MoA, State Minister for Inputs and Outputs Marketing
- Ministry of Transport
- Transporters
- Banks
- Agro-dealers, unions
- Private seed producers, seed producer cooperatives

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

- ISSD Ethiopia informs and consults the State Minister and draws up a plan of action
 - Stakeholders implement the actions identified
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Farmers accessing seed selling point at cooperative office. Amhara region, Ethiopia (Photo: Wonzie Asmare)

Dashboard

Outcomes of June 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 Alert June
Breeding on-station and multilocational variety trials	■	■
Farmer variety trials	■	■
Variety release committee and release process	■	■ Alert 1
Production of early generation seed	■ Alert 2	■
Supply of early generation seed	■ Alert 3	■ Alert 2, 3
Field inspection for seed quality assurance	■	■
Laboratory testing for seed quality assurance	■	■ Alert 3
Access agro-inputs for seed production	■ Alert 2	■ Alert 4
Access to labour for seed production	■ Alert 2	■ Alert 4
Field operations for seed production	■	
Post-harvest practices for seed marketing	■ Alert 1	
Seed distribution	■ Alert 1	■
Stocking seed at points of sale		■
Access by seed companies and agro-dealers to points of sale/input markets		■
Seed and variety promotion	■	
Mobility of farmers to point of sales/agro-dealers	■	■
Mobility farmers to informal/grain markets	■	■
Accessibility informal seed sources	■	■
Chance that that quality seed is sold for grain consumption		■
Presence of substandard seed in markets	■ Alert 4	■
Sales of quality seed	■	■
Government funding of services	■	■
Government investment in marketing and distribution	■	■
Government exemptions and tailored strategies for agricultural and seed sector	■	■
Seed sector information sharing and coordination		
Farmer willingness to pay for quality seed	■ Alert 3	■
Quantity and quality of produce harvested	■	■
Food and income security	■	■
Quantity and quality of produce harvested	■	■

Additional results from the survey are shared through infographics available in the supplementary document through this [link](#)

Rapid Assessment & Seed Alert

To avoid a food and hunger crisis following the current COVID-19 pandemic, urgent action is needed to address key agricultural challenges, including those identified in the seed sector. The rapid assessment conducted for the current Seed Alert was carried out in the first week of June. The survey included 55 respondents covering 33 stakeholder groups, while the focus group discussions engaged 16 participants from 8 different organizations. We plan to repeat these rapid assessments at least once a month, to identify alerts and determine the immediate action required. More details on the methodology and steps can be accessed through this [link](#).

Purpose

The aim of the Seed Alert is to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the seed sector. The Rapid Assessment project operates in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nigeria and Uganda, where Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI) is working on seed programmes in collaboration with partners. More details can be accessed through this [link](#).

Alerts in other sectors

In June and July 2020, similar Alerts are anticipated to cover the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the sesame, fertilizer and horticultural sectors. Working with a similar model in various sectors and countries within a specific timeframe facilitates an interpretation and synthesis of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on food systems at national, regional and global levels, while also providing insights into immediate and practical actions needed to address emerging challenges. It furthermore offers insights into the use of the sector model as a diagnostic tool for supporting strategic development, planning, and monitoring interventions that aim to enhance the functioning, resilience and inclusiveness of specific agricultural sectors and food systems.

The 'Seed Alert' is published within a series of 'Rapid Assessments' and 'Alerts' in multiple countries, and is a WCIDI Sector Transformation publication.

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Institutional reference

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Contributing organizations

The 'Seed Alert: Ethiopia' involved representatives of the following organizations in the survey and focus group discussions: the Ministry of Agriculture; Agricultural Transformation Agency; Amhara Bureau of Agriculture; Oromia Bureau of Agriculture; South Bureau of Agriculture ; Tigray Bureau of Agriculture; Amhara Agricultural Input Regulatory Authority; Ínstitiitii Qorannoo Qonna Oromiyaa; Oromia Agricultural Input Regulatory Authority; Ethiopian Agricultural Business Corporation; South Agricultural Input Regulatory Authority; Afriseed; Amuari PLC; Corteva; Ediget Seed Union; Errer Union; Fate Muruta Dicha SPC; Hollome PLC; Maichew Hadinet Raya Union; Oromia Seed Enterprise; Sidama Elto Union; South Seed Enterprise; Wama PLC; Zereta Kembata Union; Amhara Agricultural Research Institute; Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research; Hawassa University; Mekele University; South Agricultural Research Institute; Tigray Agricultural Research Institute; Bilateral Ethiopian-Netherlands Effort for Food, Income and Trade (BENEFIT) Partnership; ISSD Ethiopia; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH.

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