



A WOMEN'S LENS ON MANAGING SEED. CASE STUDY ON GENDER DYNAMICS IN FARMER MANAGED SEEDS SYSTEMS IN TANZANIA

"We need more support for women in farmer managed seed."

Farmer Juliana Gunzu from Iramba.

Women's knowledge and role in farmer managed seed systems is unseen

Women have particular and important knowledge when it comes to seed – managing selection, storage and use and also deciding which varieties to plant, and when and how much to sow based on the weather. Women are responsible for the health and food and nutrition security of the household, and at the same time, may be constrained in multiple ways, such as lack of decision making power and access to land, finances and appropriate extension support. While men tend to focus on the commercial value of seed, women tend to prefer to save their seed and may focus on crops and varieties that are important for the well-being of the family, rather than those that are commercially viable. It is for this reason that they are custodians of immense local and indigenous agro-biodiversity that is often under-valued by themselves and society, as it is not commercially significant.

Due to the restrained economic capacities of rural women, farmer managed seed systems (FMSS)

provide readily available seed, which is affordable, reliable and largely adapted to their own environments and climate. However, FMSS is facing many threats in Tanzania, where the government has embraced the notion of the 'Green Revolution', which is underpinned by a commercial approach to food production and promotes the use of 'improved' seed varieties cultivated in mono-crops with the support of chemical inputs. In terms of the law, farmers' seed varieties are categorised as grain rather than seed, creating an environment where trade of farmers' seed may be criminalised.

The categorisation of farmers' seed as grain rather than seed also opens the door to biopiracy by the private sector, which may appropriate indigenous seed for commercial gain and remove that seed from the commons through exclusive intellectual property rights.



Unfortunately, women's role in FMSS is rarely documented, despite the huge role that they play. This study on gender security and trading on farmer managed seed systems documented how the use of specific seeds has enabled women and men to better express themselves in the community. The study looked at preferred crops and seed management practices based on gender in several districts, the accessibility and availability of seed by both men and women, the inclusiveness of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship, trade and developing business models related to FMSS and lastly, the benefits and empowerment of women to access to seed systems.

Study findings

In 2015, TOAM began a study on farmer managed seed (FMS) initiatives through a lens of gender security and trading. Approximately 200 farmer leaders or champions of farmer seed systems were involved in this study, which was conducted across several districts¹. Some of these FMS initiatives have been going on for a number of years. The Zyatagwa group in Mbozi was established in and started its activities in 2005. In Karatu, long-standing FMS initiatives were boosted in 2017 when Kilimo Endelevu started a programme on

the multiplication and production of seed and established FMS groups. And lastly, in Iramba district, FMS initiatives started in 2015, which coincided with the study on farmer managed seed systems conducted by TOAM. These ongoing initiatives have been strengthened over the years with support from NGOs such as RECODA, Islands of Peace, SWISSAID, TOAM and PELUM Tanzania.

Farmer managed seed systems undergo different stages and processes, from selection of preferred crops to distribution and marketing. Selected findings on these activities are highlighted below, focusing on gender dynamics and trading as well as decision making around the selection of crops, land and sale of crops and seed.

1. The gender dynamics of preferred crops and seed management

Women's criteria for choosing certain crops is based on a variety of criteria, for example, the cooking time, meal quality, taste, resistance to pest and diseases, processing, preservation and storage. This knowledge is passed down to their daughters. Women also play a role in adaptation and coping strategies on climate change. For example, the study in Hombolo and Singida

¹bembwa in Mbozi district, Kainamrotia in Karatu district, Kinambeu in Iramba district and Kamsamba in Momba district as well as others from Hombolo, Singida, Mbulu, Igunga, Mvomero and Bariadi districts.

districts revealed that women preferred bean varieties, including cowpea more than men as they are early maturing and can withstand periods of drought and erratic rainfall. They also tended to also prefer long-maturing spreading varieties of cowpea, which provide leaves as vegetables for their households, while men prefer other cowpea varieties for grain and selling to the market.

Access to land was identified as a key constraint for women in seed management as in most cases, husbands decide how much land is allocated to each crop. In some cases, women are given a separate plot to grow foods for household consumption. Access to land, land tenure and ownership remains a critical problem for women. In Mbozi district, both men and women share in the activities for land preparation and take part in decision making when it comes to the sale of seed, and this was similar in Karatu. However, depending on the piece of land, such activities such as land preparation, planting, harvesting is also done by workers paid by the head of the household.

2. Access, availability of seed by both men and women

The study found that family farmers source their seed from multiple sources, including from their own farm and neighbours, local markets and seed fairs. Women mostly access from their own farms or neighbours, based on their social ties and networks. Social networks provide important avenues and platforms for the sale and exchange of seed and usually are more convenient for the rural poor - who are mostly women. Small seed sales and exchanges happen between neighbours, relatives, within farmer groups and within communities. Due to their custodianship role on biodiversity, women have greater knowledge on local plants and are mainly responsible for in situ conservation and management. However, the drive to impose the adoption of improved seed varieties, particularly in the current context of green revolution push in Africa, is undermining this knowledge and associated resources.

Local markets are used by all farmers of all wealth classes and for a range of reasons - from garnering

the bulk of supply to searching for key varieties. Local markets are also key outlets for certain cluster of crops such as legumes, used especially by very poor farmers during stress periods when harvest fails. They are also a source for a variety of crops to address issues of malnutrition and climate variability. In Morogoro and Mvomero districts, a wide selection of seed, including local and improved varieties of amaranth, wheat, pumpkin, sorghum, pearl millet, millet, popcorn seed, okra, hibiscus, butternut and tomatoes were available on local markets.

Seed fairs are becoming a common phenomenon across Tanzania and these provide opportunities for farmers to display and exchange their local seed varieties and share related local knowledge among other benefits. These seed fairs further promote seed trade where smallholder farmers, and in particular women, can easily access seed from seed fairs. Unfortunately, seed fairs are dependent on programmes and funding and need to become a part of community and government led initiatives to be sustainable.

3. Gender dynamics in entrepreneurship, trade and developing FMSS business models

When it comes to entrepreneurship, trade and seed business, gender dynamics tend to change depending on who makes decisions in the household. The study found that in male-headed households, men tend to control the sale and marketing of cash crops. Studies have also revealed that when a subsistence crop gains economic value, men tend to dominate the crop and control the income arising from the sales.

An example of this was found in Singida where men took over the processing of sunflower, which initially was controlled by women in order to provide oil for domestic use and limited sale within communities to neighbours and friends. Similarly, an experience with the African Indigenous Vegetables (AIV) in Arusha and Dodoma revealed that women were pushed out of production due to a growth in the commercial value of these crops.

Key Lesson

Attending to the different dynamics between men and women in FMSS contributes to food and nutrition security, management and conservation of farmer seed.



CROPS4HD

This document is an output of the CROPS4HD project (www.crops4hd.org): a consortium of SWISSAID, FiBL, and AFSA supported by the SDC and LED. CROPS4HD has three major components: production, market and policy advocacy.

AFSA, which is responsible for advocacy, is a broad alliance of civil society actors involved in

the fight for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa. Its members represent small-scale farmers, pastoralists, hunters/gatherers, indigenous peoples, faith-based organisations and environmentalists from across Africa. It is a network of networks, currently with 37 members operating in 50 African countries.

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