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PRACTICAL TOOL FOR HUMANITARIANS USING THE SERT DECISION TREES

A Companion to the Seed Emergency Response Tool (SERT)

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Background

Emergencies, whether caused by natural or human made disasters, often disrupt the lives of farming families and their agricultural production. Smallholder farmers are particularly vulnerable and face a range of shocks and stresses, including climate variability and conflict. During emergencies, humanitarian practitioners need to respond with speed to help restore the local farming system to its pre-disaster state or better, ensuring farmers can resume food production and become more resilient in the short- and long-term.

Seed interventions are a particular focus of humanitarian aid as seed is relatively easy for farmers to use and can give quick returns. While good seed aid can bolster farming systems, poor seed aid can increase



farmers' vulnerability. For instance, seed that is delivered too late or of poor-quality wastes farmers' land and labor resources. Also, aid repeated over multiple seasons breeds farmer dependency, distorts the functioning of the local seed system and stifles the development of commercial seed enterprises.

To support humanitarian practitioners working in these contexts to do seed aid better, Mercy Corps and SeedSystem developed the [Seed Emergency Response Tool \(SERT\)](#).

Overview of the SERT

The [SERT](#), developed by Mercy Corps and SeedSystem through ISSD Africa, is one tool to help policy makers, program managers, and field staff engaged in emergency and early recovery agricultural responses do seed aid better. It helps those new to this area of work, as well as those with experience, to make informed, quality decisions about the choice of a seed security intervention and how best to implement it. Effective seed security responses require strategic thinking and deliberate design actions. Clear goals must be set; choices among equally good interventions need to be mapped out; and the selection of appropriate responses must be geared to equitably meet the varied needs of men and women farmers.

The SERT provides guidance on how best to tackle these tasks. It presents the background and concepts needed to understand how farmers in stress periods might obtain the seed they want and need, including information on diverse seed systems and seed security features. Then, it synthesizes the growing body of 'good or better practices' linked to seed security planning, assessment, and response.

The SERT structure broadly follows the timelines and sequence of activities one might face in the field:

1. Gaining the fundamentals of seed system knowledge
2. Understanding the seed security problem(s), including possible differences in access to seed by farmers and those from marginalized communities
3. Reviewing and comparing potential response interventions
4. Focusing on a particular response (or set of responses) for a given context
5. Implementing 'good practices' (or the best possible ones) for that response

The SERT is complemented by the [Context Analysis Tool \(CAT\)](#), which aims to help implementers working specifically in conflict-affected areas of fragile states. The CAT aims to help these actors quickly grasp the environment and circumstances in which seed systems function, and then to identify practical entry points for designing and implementing interventions to bolster such systems, making them more resilient. Pushing beyond the standard interventions that focus on importing and distributing seed, the CAT is a modest but important beginning for promoting more tailored, and hopefully, better practice in these challenging contexts. For implementers working in a conflict-affected area, the CAT is a vital tool to support them in understanding the conflict and seed system context prior to doing a seed-related intervention.

How to use this companion tool

The practical companion tool (see [Excel file](#)) supports implementers who are using the decision trees found in Section 5 of the SERT (pages 39-45.) The decision trees are meant to be used by humanitarian practitioners in an emergency situation, who are choosing among diverse seed response options. There are many steps and decisions, big and small, to make before implementing a seed security response. The more

informed practitioners are of the conditions for an intervention, the possible types, and the steps to choose and implement, the greater the prospects for improving humanitarian seed-related practice. The decision trees presented in the SERT can be further refined based on practitioner use and insights.

The decision trees are organized according to the sequence of decisions to be made:

- A Is a seed security-linked intervention feasible?
- B Have the broad parameters of a possible seed security intervention been established?
- C What are the key considerations in choosing a specific seed security response? This subsection is divided into trees that address specific types of seed security features:
 - C1 Seed availability
 - C2 Seed access
 - C3 Seed health
 - C4 Variety suitability

In this practical tool, the SERT decision trees are expanded to include the following:

- Guidance for ***types of evidence to look for, tools to use to collect evidence, and/or steps to help make a decision*** at each step of the decision trees.
- Blank “evidence” columns for implementers to fill in with their own program evidence as they advance through the trees.
- An example decision tree, which was filled in using data from Northeast Nigeria. The data was collected during a pilot test of the Context Analysis Tool. The resulting report has information related to conflict, seed systems and the impact of conflict on seed systems. The report is available [here](#).

Implementers should first read the **START HERE** tab, which explains in detail how to use the tool.

Access the tool here: [Practical SERT companion tool](#)

Feedback

Should you have feedback on the tool, the SERT or the decision trees, please let us know! This tool aims to help practitioners who are using the decision trees to more easily capture evidence and move through their decision-making processes. The example from NE Nigeria requires additional data related to farmer preferred varieties and more (see *Next Steps* section of the [report](#)) in order for a program team to move confidently forward with a response choice. This example highlights the types of information needed in order to work through the decision trees to inform response options. Practitioners can learn from this example and use the “evidence/steps to take” columns to ensure their data collection tools collect necessary and sufficient information to confidently move forward with their decision making.

Should you have feedback or questions, please contact Abby Love, alove@mercycorps.org, or Andrea Mottram, amottram@mercycorps.org.

Resources

Love, Abby, Wilfred Ouko, Tijjani Babakura, Charles Dawha, Sunday Duntoye, Lauren Pincus, Usman Saad, and Muhammed Umar (2023). Seed Systems in Conflict-Affected Areas: A report from pilot testing the Context Analysis Tool in NE Nigeria. Produced by Mercy Corps as part of ISSD Africa.

Sperling, Louise, Andrea Mottram, Wilfred Ouko and Abby Love. 2022. Seed Emergency Response Tool: Guidance for Practitioners. Produced by Mercy Corps and SeedSystem as a part of the ISSD Africa activity.

Sperling, Louise; Charles 'Ted' Holmquist; Wilfred Ouko; Andrea Mottram & Abby Love. 2022. Seed Systems in Conflict-Affected Areas: Context Analysis Tool. Version 1. Produced by Mercy Corps and SeedSystem as part of the ISSD Africa activity.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within.

Now, and for the future.



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