



J.Martin/Mercy Corps. Bidibidi Refugee settlement, Uganda

TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD SEED AID KAMPALA | WORKSHOP SUMMARY

20 August 2025

Introduction

Crises around the world are on the rise, and smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are among the hardest hit. Conflicts, droughts, displacements and floods, made worse by climate change, continue to disrupt lives and livelihoods.

Seed aid has long been a primary response to crises. The thinking was simple: “give farmers seed so they can get back to producing food quickly.” Early on, this approach made sense: one kilogram of sorghum seed, for example, can yield 100 kilograms of grain. But over time, seed aid has grown in scale and is often repeated in the same communities, season after season. Instead of providing temporary relief, these actions risk weakening local seed systems and contributing to conditions that result in chronic seed insecurity.

The [Ten Guiding Principles for Good Seed Aid \(10P\)](#) offer practical guidance for moving beyond seed distributions toward approaches that engage markets, strengthen local systems and build resilience. As demand grows for more effective seed aid in crisis contexts, the 10P offer a timely framework to reduce donor dependence and improve impact.

Under the [ISSD Africa](#) program, Mercy Corps, SeedSystem and partners are leading dialogue events in multiple countries to introduce stakeholders to the 10P and engage them in practical discussions on how to apply them. On August 20, 2025, one such event was held in Kampala, Uganda. The timing was especially apt as Uganda is receiving a record number of refugees—recently reaching a high of 1.9 million ([UNHCR 2025](#))—primarily from South Sudan, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While Uganda’s

open-door policy is praised globally, the growing influx puts a strain on land, food and seed systems. Uganda is thus an optimal setting to explore how the 10P can guide a shift toward stronger, more resilient local seed systems.

This brief summarizes the major discussion points from the event, highlighting key barriers, potential strategies to address them, and practical next steps for humanitarian and government actors.

The 10P were drafted to help improve seed security practices and present actionable technical guidance on topics ranging from assessment to market-oriented responses.



Dialogue Event

Objectives and Format

Held in collaboration with the [PRO-WASH & SCALE Award](#), the one-day event brought together humanitarian and government actors to reflect on the 10P, including a focus on the use of market-based approaches to enhance seed security. Discussions centered around how stakeholders can put these principles into practice in Uganda, supporting both refugees and host communities to build lasting self-reliance. The event aimed to:

- Deepen understanding of the 10P framework and its application.
- Highlight experiences and lessons learned from implementing emergency seed response activities.
- Explore previous examples of integration of market-based approaches in seed security response.
- Foster discussion on contextualizing the 10P within Uganda and the broader region.

Participants represented six international NGOs and two government departments (Office of the Prime Minister [OPM] and the National Seed Certification Service [NSCS]), including commissioners, a country director, project managers, coordinators, and field officers. Having this mix of backgrounds and roles at the table created a rare blend of policy insight and field experience. It fostered a dynamic space where participants could discuss real-world seed aid challenges, including regulatory requirements, from all perspectives. This was essential to sparking practical ideas and collaboration to shape more effective, locally led programming tailored to Uganda's context.

Ahead of the event, many participants also joined an introductory virtual meeting with Mercy Corps to learn about the event's purpose and clarify expectations. Participants received background materials on the 10P in advance, allowing time for reflection and preparation. During the event, Mercy Corps facilitated the

sessions using a mix of small-group work, brainstorming exercises, and plenary discussions to encourage peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and cross-agency exchange.

Ten Guiding Principles for Good Seed Aid

The dialogue opened with a presentation on the 10P, which helped to explain the meaning and purpose behind each principle and raise awareness of the need for this framework. After this introduction, stakeholders unanimously endorsed the principles (first verbally and later by a show of hands), agreeing they were essential for guiding more effective and accountable seed aid interventions.

NGO representatives explained their support as being driven by two key factors:

1. **Frustration with procurement:** NGOs often struggle to source the right seed (typically from large companies) in time to supply it during the planting window, leading to late deliveries, deliveries of low-quality seed, or procurement of seed not in alignment with farmer preferences. When NGOs cannot find a particular variety in sufficient quantity, they are forced to shift to varieties that are less preferred by farmers.
2. **Donor fatigue:** Some donors are pushing back against routine seed distributions, signaling their appetite for more sustainable and systems-oriented models. In a dynamic donor landscape where aid funds are shrinking, NGOs are seeing a need to respond to donors' growing demand for more effective, cost-efficient and locally driven approaches.



Participants endorsed the 10P as a key framework for guiding more effective, locally driven seed aid.

W. Otto/Mercy Corps

While the NGO representatives saw the value of the 10P, they also raised initial concerns about building awareness. The need for the principles was clear to technical teams, but securing leadership's understanding and buy-in was expected to lag. This risked slowing organizational alignment and left participants questioning how quickly different management levels could come together to integrate the 10P.

While government representatives voiced support for the 10P, they also showed hesitation about the next steps. Their concerns were largely related to adapting departmental mandates for emergency response. Adjusting these mandates will require brokering conversations between OPM, NSCS and other key teams to align and reinforce each other's technical roles in seed aid delivery (see "Policy Challenges," below). Participants suggested that strong NGO momentum and collective advocacy could help bring government partners more fully into active implementation.

The sessions also included a representative from the Ethiopia Seed Partnership (ESP) program, who shared lessons from Ethiopia's Tigray region, which has been ravaged by prolonged conflict. In Tigray, the regional government (with ESP support) chose to endorse the 10P as the guiding framework for seed interventions carried out by the many humanitarian actors operating there. While not all actors welcomed the principles—

some preferred approaches that maintained the status quo—the Tigray Bureau of Agriculture led a structured process to convene partners and secure endorsement. Implementation is still a work in progress, but the Tigray example underscored an important lesson for Uganda: strong government leadership is critical for turning principles into practice.

In small groups and plenary, participants analyzed the relevance of the 10P to the Ugandan context, including barriers to their application.

W. Otto/Mercy Corps



Barriers to Implementing the 10P

Participants then had time to dissect the 10P in greater detail, dividing into groups of humanitarian organizations and government representatives. While all principles were examined, discussions centered on the six most relevant to the participants' work: Assessment, Timeliness, Market-based Approaches, Crop and Variety Suitability, Seed Quality, and Farmer's Choice. Humanitarian organizations explored how these principles practically fit within their programming, and government representatives concentrated on quality assurance and policy relevance. The small groups then shared their discussions, allowing for deeper reflections and consensus building across groups.

The conversation was rich and honest. Participants agreed that the principles made sense but also acknowledged that putting them into practice might be challenging. A summary of participants' concluding thoughts from this discussion is below, with additional notes in Table 1 of the Annex.

➤ ***Start with an assessment (Principle 1)***

Participants felt that seed responses too often kick off without solid evidence from a proper assessment. Instead of consulting farmers initially, agencies often assume what farmers need in terms of the crops, variety diversity and timing, leading to seed procurements that are mismatched with local preferences. While some organizations understand the importance of conducting assessments, they often lack the capacity to effectively use existing tools, such as those for conducting a Seed System Security Assessment (SSSA), because of their complexity and time demands. A quicker, easier-to-manage tool that adequately captures local context would support more tailored responses in emergencies.

➤ ***Timing is everything (Principle 5)***

Timeliness emerged as the most common challenge, drawing nods all around. As farmers often say, "Seed delivered late is essentially wasted." Procurement delays due to bureaucratic procedures, slow planning and transport hiccups often mean that by the time seed arrives, the rains have already started and the opportunity to support farmers is gone.

➤ **Using market-based approaches (Principle 6)**

Participants emphasized that markets should be part of the solution, yet they are often overlooked. Genuine seed dealers are rare in remote areas, and when large procurement orders are issued, non-seed businesses/suppliers frequently step in. These actors sometimes use dubious business practices, such as procuring and selling counterfeit seeds unabated to participants. The persistence of counterfeit seed in markets is largely attributed to limited institutional capacity to enforce regulations and conduct effective market surveillance. Rather than strengthening local seed systems, such practices weaken them. Participants noted that political influence in contracting processes, particularly those financed by government funds, can lead to preferential treatment of known vendors, undermining competition and disadvantaging some credible seed suppliers. Strengthening these systems to protect and enable authentic seed businesses (particularly for farmers at the last mile) was flagged as a key priority.

➤ **The right crop in the right place matters (Principle 7)**

Participants also highlighted concerns about selecting crops and varieties that suit the local context. Often, NGOs assume what farmers want, leading to a mismatch between supplied seeds and actual needs. This problem is sometimes compounded by poor packaging, which makes it difficult to identify the seed inside and further limits farmers' access to climate-adapted or diverse varieties. Without the right options, efforts to build resilient seed systems remain out of reach.

➤ **Quality builds trust (Principle 8)**

Participants emphasized that poor-quality seed is a recurring headache during emergencies. Sometimes seed varieties are mixed up, sometimes seed is the wrong type or variety, and sometimes the seed is damaged or moldy. Participants pointed out that weak regulation and weak monitoring let low-quality seed slip through frequently. They noted that once farmers lose trust in the seed aid system, it is an uphill battle to win it back.

➤ **Consider farmers' choice, consider their voice (Principle 9)**

This principle sparked a lively debate among participants who asked:

- Do farmers know which varieties are best for their context?
- Will the local types they usually prefer even be available?
- Is there enough time to genuinely consult farmers during an emergency?

Despite the concerns, everyone ultimately agreed on one clear point: farmers must be at the center of seed aid decisions. When decisions are made without them, aid risks missing the mark entirely. Farmer choice matters, even during emergencies or if education is needed to inform farmers about all potential seed options.

Participants emphasized that engaging farmers early isn't just about fairness; it's about effectiveness. When farmers have a say, seed aid becomes more targeted, timely, and resilient, ensuring that what is delivered meets real needs.

Market-Based Approaches for Resilience

Mercy Corps facilitated an interactive session to gauge participants' understanding and experience with market-based approaches to seed aid in Uganda's context. When asked whether they were familiar with, or

had ever applied, such approaches in their interventions, the overwhelming majority responded no. This echoed findings from the pre-registration survey and matched participants' own expectations: there is limited knowledge and exposure to market-based seed response programming among most actors.

Even after a presentation introducing the main pillars of market-based approaches, participants struggled to engage in deeper discussion. Their contributions revealed that many remain deeply rooted in conventional direct seed aid delivery models. Only a few participants signaled prior experience with market-based approaches (one NGO representative mentioned using seed fairs in early recovery contexts). Other models, such as vouchers, were unfamiliar. Participants' prior work focused almost entirely on seed distribution in emergency settings. Despite the novelty of the approach, they were enthusiastic about learning more.

The discussion highlighted both the knowledge gap and the opportunity for targeted awareness-raising and technical support to help shift mindsets toward approaches that strengthen and leverage local seed systems.



Most participants were new to market-based seed aid but eager to move beyond direct distribution models and explore more sustainable approaches.

W. Otto/Mercy Corps

Policy Challenges

Through these conversations, barriers came to light related to Uganda's policy environment and the roles of government institutions responsible for declaring, regulating, and coordinating emergency interventions, including seed aid. The OPM, under the Office of the President, manages emergency contexts. Under the Emergency Powers Act (Chapter 297, revised 2000), the President declares a state of emergency and OPM coordinates the response, regulating humanitarian interventions by government and development partners, including seed aid. As one participant noted, "Unless the camp commandant receives approval from OPM, no activity is permitted within a refugee settlement."

Emergency seed interventions for refugees and host communities are coordinated by OPM, which approves procurement and distribution but often lacks the technical capacity to ensure quality, adaptability, and timely delivery. Though mandated to regulate seed quality, the NSCS currently has no formal emergency response role, creating a gap in oversight and flexibility. Representatives from NSCS explained that they are often excluded from emergency procurement in refugee settings because their role in crises is undefined.

Participants noted this presented a key structural difference compared to the example highlighted from Tigray. In Tigray, a technical agency (the Bureau of Agriculture) led the process. In Uganda, the non-

technical OPM would need to take the lead and then engage NSCS. Understanding this distinction was an important takeaway for both OPM and NSCS as they consider how to advance 10P integration in Uganda. This gap underscores the complexity of regulating emergency contexts and the risks it poses for effective seed aid delivery.

Key Takeaways

➤ **Broad Endorsement and Timely Awareness**

All stakeholders - government and humanitarian actors alike - overwhelmingly endorsed the 10P as essential for guiding effective seed aid. For many, this was their first time engaging with the principles or with market-based approaches, making the dialogue a timely eye-opener.

Organizations expressed their commitment to continue engaging with ISSD Africa to support their review of existing practices, identify where their existing practices align with the 10P, and develop a plan for further integrating 10Ps into their work (see Annex Table 2).

➤ **Need for Wider Awareness and Government Engagement**

All participants underscored the importance of in-depth awareness creation, especially targeting OPM, which regulates NGO activities related to seed aid. One NGO offered to work closely with ISSD Africa in engaging OPM, noting that endorsement and enforcement of new principles would require strong government buy-in, as learned from Tigray's experience endorsing the 10P. OPM and NSCS themselves also indicated the need for wider awareness within their own institutions and departments to build consensus towards 10P adoption and implementation.

➤ **Quality Assurance Gaps**

NSCS raised the critical concern that they are not one of the primary actors in emergencies, which creates risks of fake or poor-quality seed entering seed aid channels. This lack of oversight can spread pests and diseases through contaminated seed and ultimately undermines farmer trust. Stakeholders agreed that emergency responses involving seed aid must formally integrate NSCS to ensure regulation, enforcement, and complementary roles alongside OPM.

➤ **Newness of Market-Based Approaches**

Participants observed that the application of market-based approaches in seed aid remains relatively new in Uganda. They emphasized the need to increase awareness and capacity building on the design and implementation of such models. Facilitating learning exchanges among humanitarian and government actors could enhance the uptake and integration of market-based approaches in seed aid programming. This represents a timely opportunity for ISSD Africa to provide targeted training, promote knowledge sharing, and document emerging lessons across partners.

➤ **Championing the National Endorsement Process**

One of the participating NGOs expressed readiness to champion the 10P endorsement process in Uganda, with close technical support from ISSD Africa. This could include identifying key influencers within OPM, coordinating strategic meetings, providing targeted briefings on the 10P, and supporting decision-making toward a formal national endorsement. This presents a practical entry point for translating dialogue into action.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Uganda's journey toward stronger, more resilient seed aid is beginning to take shape. It starts with awareness — bringing OPM, humanitarian agencies, and partners up to speed on the 10P and why they matter. The next step is collaboration: roundtables with OPM, NSCS, and development partners will help clarify roles and build a shared approach to emergency seed aid. At the organizational level, NGOs and other agencies will integrate the 10P into their own programs and procedures, turning principles into practical action. Driving this process forward will require national champions, backed by ISSD Africa and Mercy Corps, to ensure the 10P move beyond paper and become a guiding force for seed aid that farmers, refugees, and host communities can truly rely on.

The Kampala dialogue confirmed strong interest in the 10P among humanitarian and government actors and generated momentum for their integration into Uganda's seed aid system. However, participation was somewhat limited by staffing and travel budget constraints among NGOs, as well as political distractions associated with the national elections, which affected the availability of some government officials, including representatives from OPM. Going forward, deliberate government engagement, strengthened quality assurance, dedicated NGO resources, and organizational-level adoption of the 10P will be essential to ensuring seed aid is timely, high-quality, and responsive to local realities.



CONTACT

Geoffrey Otim | ISSD Africa
geotim@mercycorps.org

Kristin Lambert | Mercy Corps
klambert@mercycorps.org



Annex

Table 1: Analysis of barriers to implementing 10P and mitigation measures, Uganda context

Principles	Principle needed	Explain	Barriers	Mitigation	Who to involve
Principle 1: Assessment	Yes	- Understand actual needs and opportunities	- Inadequate technical capacity - Resource limitations - Timing challenge	- Integrate assessment costs in budget at proposal time - Capacity building of team - Allocate adequate time in workplan	- Donors - Implementing partners & ISSD Africa - Local authorities/districts
Principle 5: Timeliness	Yes	- Agriculture activities are seasonal	- Poor planning - Procurement hurdles	- Proper planning - Utilize seed from local sources and distributors	- Project team - District production department
Principle 6: Market based assistance	Yes	- Ownership and sustainability - Diversity	- Unregulated quality - Inadequate supply - Local market taxes	- Advocate for seed authority - supportive policy - community and local actors' sensitization	- MAAIF/Local gov't - Private sector - Development partners
Principle 7: Crop and Variety suitability	Yes	- Meet right needs of users and context - Gender aspects	- Lack of awareness of climate adapted varieties	- Identify market channels for available seed - Integrated locally available seed - Conduct assessment	- Farmers - implementing partners - Private sector/seed companies
Principle 8: Quality Assurance	Yes	Poor quality seed is a source of: - No germination - Disease spread - No value for money - Mistrust on quality seed use	- Poor coordination between research & farmers, government department, government & donors - National Seed Certification Services is among primary actors in emergencies. - Inadequate capacity of local seed producers - limited awareness among farmers on variety diversities - improper identification of varieties, due to poor packaging - limited number of genuine seed dealers in remote areas - Seed faking by some dealers due to large procurement demands	-initiate dialogue among relevant stakeholders - create awareness among seed users - Incentivized (agro-dealers) last mile delivery -Build capacity of local government to support enforcement & quality assurance -Create mechanism for gathering and acting on feedback	- MAAIF/NSCS -NGOs -Media -NARO/ZARDIs -Local Governments -Financial institutions -National level agro-input dealers Ministry of Local Government -Office of the Prime Minister, OPM
Principle 9: Farmer's choice	Yes	- Type of farming; commercial & subsistence - Farmers preferences	- No assessment done - limited diversity in the market - Poor planning - assumption of farmers' needs by development partners	- conduct assessment regularly - Get feedback from farmers	- Farmers - District local government - Central gov't, OPM - Implementing partners

Table 2: This table summarizes key insights and organizational commitments from the workshop survey on Next Steps.

Stakeholders' perspectives	Actions required
Relevance of Principles	Support coordination and access to quality seed
	Ensure seed aid is effective, efficient, and sustainable.
	Enhance value for money and strengthen farmer/beneficiary confidence.
	Fit-for-purpose humanitarian seed aid reaching the right farmers.
	Strengthen livelihoods and resilience in fragile contexts.
Willingness to Engage	Regular meetings and involvement in activities.
	Experience sharing, learning, and feedback exchange.
	Joint advocacy and awareness with stakeholders.
	Integration of 10P into programming and operational work.
Support Needed from ISSD	Capacity building on market-based approaches and tools for rapid assessment.
	Training and sensitization workshops.
	Technical and financial support for operationalizing 10P.
	Support to generate evidence, case studies, and policy briefs.
Ways to Strengthen Awareness	Direct engagement with partners and emergency coordination actors.
	Regular updates, webinars, and knowledge-sharing platforms.
	Involvement of local government and community-level actors.
	Dissemination of lessons learnt widely across stakeholders.
Commitments (Short/Medium/Long-Term)	Short-term: Organize special meetings, raise immediate awareness, share training materials.
	Medium-term: Establish links with emergency actors, follow-up engagements, experience-sharing workshops.
	Long-term: Adoption of 10P across organizations, integration into programming, policy influence.
Collaboration Opportunities	Joint learning, knowledge sharing, and policy advocacy.
	Co-develop best practices, manuals, and guidelines.
	Explore funding opportunities together.
	Document and disseminate lessons from fragile and emergency contexts.