



# FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



## Designing and implementing seed fairs to support on-going seed market linkages An experience from Eastern Uganda



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## Abstract:

Nine specific actions to promote seed market linkages were proposed as part of the design and implementation of agricultural fairs that took place in March 2020 in Eastern Uganda in response to flooding at the end of 2019. This report describes the ways in which some of these actions were implemented through a participatory action research approach, and the learning that emerged from this experience. Recommendations for future actions to support sustainable market linkages through seed fair programming are provided.

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## List of Acronyms

BMGF	the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
NFIs	Non-Food Items
OPV	Open Pollinated Variety
PDM	Post Distribution Monitoring
QDS	Quality Declared Seed
S34D	Feed the Future Global Supporting Seed Systems for Development activity
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UGX	Uganda Shilling
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## 1. Background: lessons that informed the actionable plan

One of the advantages of seed fairs over direct seed distribution is that they allow for direct interaction between male and female farmers (as seed buyers) and seed suppliers (as fair vendors). As such, seed fairs can potentially support rather than undermine market linkages between farmers and seed suppliers. Existing guidelines<sup>1</sup> encourage the stimulation of seed market development by actively managing the links between buyers and sellers so that seed fairs can lead to more sustainable gains. An S34D/CRS study of agricultural input fairs in southern Africa<sup>2</sup> generated the following lessons in relation to seed market development: (1) Actively designing the supply side is at least as important as focusing on the farmer (demand) side. There is need to include an explicit action guide to engage suppliers and provide guidance on exactly what they should put on offer. (2) Input fairs need to be framed (and planned) as an emerging private sector opportunity for continuing business serving remote or vulnerable clientele (i.e. not as a one-off exercise). Think about designing explicit process links from the fair event itself to post-fair ongoing business. (3) Local suppliers and vendors should be recruited, if possible, as it may be easier to continue to serve the community given shorter distances and interest.

This report describes how some of these lessons were applied in the context of the agricultural input fairs in Eastern Uganda implemented by CRS-Uganda and Caritas-Tororo in early 2020. Using a participatory action research approach (Annex 1), specific actions relating to the above lessons were designed and tested. Feedback and reflections from CRS staff involved in the fairs informed the findings presented in this report (Annex 2). The recommendations presented at the end of this report include the ways in which future actions should be refined as well as the contexts most suitable for seed fairs to enable the emergence of on-going market linkages. The recommendations will be applied in an S34D activity planned for FY21 (Annex 3).

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Relief Services, 2017. Agricultural Fair and Voucher Manual. Baltimore, MD, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Raboanarielina, C., et. al. 2020. Diversity for Nutrition and Enhanced Resilience (DiNER) Fairs and Voucher Programming: Evaluation and Learning in the Southern Africa Region. A Catholic Relief Services and Feed the Future Global Supporting Seed Systems for Development activity (S34D) report.

## 2. Context: the BMGF agricultural fairs in Eastern Uganda

In October 2019, unseasonal heavy rains in the Mount Elgon area led to flooding in Bulambuli and Butaleja Districts, destroying farms, bridges, food stocks, sanitation facilities and homes. In total, 6,140 households, representing 45% of those living in the five most-affected sub-counties, were impacted by the flooding. CRS, Caritas Tororo, World Vision and Plan International worked together to deliver life-saving support to 1,000 affected households: In November 2019, CRS implemented market fairs for food, shelter and non-food items in both districts, with nine participating vendors from the area; World Vision and Plan distributed water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) non-food items (NFIs) accompanied by training and messaging to the community and its water user structures and child protection committees.

While immediate needs were met, early recovery support was also deemed to be necessary. The harvest of November/December 2019 had been affected by prolonged dry spells during the growing season in addition to the October floods that occurred just before the main maize harvest. Maize that was tasseling or almost ready to harvest and rice that had just been transplanted were submerged by the flood waters. Even in areas of Bulambuli where the maize harvest had already occurred, granaries were flooded, and it was reported that the harvest was lost.

With USD 200,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), CRS and Caritas Tororo implemented a 4-month market fair project (January to April 2020) to support 2,000 households to restore their livelihoods with agricultural inputs (including seeds, tools, pesticides, fertilizer, and tarpaulins) plus essential food items (maize meal, salt, sugar, cooking oil). The objective of the fairs was to provide disaster-affected women and men with the assets, tools, and knowledge necessary to rebuild their livelihoods. The CRS-Uganda team reached out to S34D for technical advice and it was agreed that actions designed to enhance the sustainability of private sector seed provisioning would be tested as part of the agricultural market fairs where possible and appropriate.

### 3. Actions proposed for private sector support within the BMGF Uganda seed fairs

In applying some of the lessons from the southern Africa report detailed above, S34D proposed the nine actions below to be tested as part of the BMGF seed fairs in Uganda. Table 5 shows how the actions were modified and applied in practice and the lessons that emerged.

- a) Create awareness<sup>3</sup> among targeted male and female adult and youth farmers about the different types of seed / tools / services / other inputs available through local suppliers by inviting as many local vendors as possible and encouraging them to bring a diverse range of inputs.

- i. Facilitate loans for local suppliers to expand the range of inputs/services available.

Awareness creation can be supported:

- ii. Before the fairs / at time of registration – by providing information to male and female farmers about the importance of quality seed [perhaps use ISSD brochures?] This recommendation would need to consider who actually registers and how this may affect who within the registered household gets the information.
    - iii. At the fairs – by having a series of short presentations by vendors at the start of the fair so that each has the opportunity to publicize themselves and their products and provide info about the advantages of specific inputs / varieties.
    - iv. At the fairs – by encouraging vendors to provide information materials about their varieties, e.g. leaflets, brochures, posters, etc that cater to different client segments attending the fair – women, men, male and female youth, PLWD. This may include illustrations/ photos including women or girls using the seed, list of benefits that cater to different segment groups and designs that address illiteracy and innumeracy.
  - b) Allow male and female farmers to try out appropriate ‘new’ technologies and (hopefully) then create demand for these technologies. It was suggested that test packs or samples of new technologies/inputs (e.g. small quantity of new seed varieties, PICS<sup>4</sup> bags) might be sold at the fairs. If they like them and want to buy more, they can then purchase again through the same supplier. The team organizing the fair should consider “new” technologies that cater to the interest of various gender and age segment groups that would attend the fair.
  - c) Encourage informal interactions between suppliers, distributors, farmers, extension agents, village-based agents, farmer support agents, local chiefs, agricultural officers, etc. so that they can follow up after the fair – either in relation to inputs and services needed for this season and/or subsequent seasons. This could involve a short meeting at the start of a fair to make the necessary introductions (e.g. possibly in conjunction with the presentations by vendors above) and a simple list of names and contact

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<sup>3</sup> Creating awareness can help to create demand. If farmers know about the different types of inputs and services that are available from the suppliers, then this might encourage them to seek such inputs and services from the suppliers.

<sup>4</sup> PICS stands for Purdue Improved Crop Storage. A PICS bag is a triple-layered, hermetically sealed bag for storing grain and seed.



details to be shared among the key contacts. Engaging and empowering women and youth to interact with others must be considered.

- d) Provide a 'learning space' for vendors/suppliers to interact directly with farmers and learn more about local demand for different types of inputs. Farmers will have vouchers with which to purchase inputs of their choice. Farmers' purchasing choices will convey a lot about local preferences to the vendors. Perhaps the actual choices made by male and female adult and youth farmers can be shared with the vendors as a follow up so that they know what the local demand looks like from different farmers.
- e) Identify a number of local vendors (including female and young vendors, where possible) for subsequent training by IFDC who are planning an agro-input dealer training session in eastern Uganda.

The remainder of this report describes how the fairs were planned and implemented and the extent to which it was possible to apply the above actions. Key lessons are presented, and recommendations for future interventions are put forward.

## 4. Seed fair preparation and implementation

**4.1 Planning team and decision-making.** The planning and preparation for the fairs was done by a small team of CRS staff, working closely with the local authorities and with additional staffing resources from Caritas Tororo. Neither CRS nor Caritas had an office or staff based nearby<sup>5</sup>, so the CRS staff were temporarily re-located to Mbale and worked from a guest house. Not only was the team working in an unfamiliar location, but they were also working under extreme time pressure, with a considerable amount of work to be done to ensure that the fairs took place in good time for the planting season. It took approximately six weeks from the time that the team was deployed to Mbale until the first fair took place. Key tasks included meetings and consultations with district-level officials, focus group discussions with community members and farmer groups, a rapid market assessment, farmer registration, vendor selection and contracting, voucher procurement, community sensitization, fair implementation, exit interviews and post-distribution monitoring. Each of these tasks also involved a multitude of decisions that had to be made very quickly to avoid any delays to the planning and preparation processes. Decisions were made according to the overall objective of the fairs (to provide disaster-affected women and men with the assets, tools, and knowledge necessary to rebuild their livelihoods), along with the data collected through the consultations and market assessment, and lessons from previous fairs in Uganda and elsewhere. The core CRS team did not initially include an agricultural expert, though agricultural information was provided by both Caritas and the Ministry of Agriculture in the planning stages. The CRS regional Agricultural Technical Advisor was brought in from Nairobi to help in assessing seed quality at the time of fair implementation. In total, 2,003 smallholder households were served by the fairs, including 928 female-headed households, and 715 extremely vulnerable households.

**4.2 Rapid market assessment.** The rapid market assessment was undertaken with in-country support from the regional Markets and Livelihoods Advisor from the CRS Humanitarian Response Department. The purpose was to assess the appropriateness and feasibility of voucher fairs in Butaleja and Bulambuli, including the supply of locally available seeds and tools, the estimated demand by the farmers, options for the delivery mechanism, and the value of the vouchers. Data were collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with mixed groups (men and women) of flood-affected populations. Recommendations for fair implementation were made according to the market assessment findings. One of the key findings from the community consultations conducted as part of the market assessment was the continuing need for food items in addition to agricultural inputs; this need was strongly expressed by the women who took part in the focus group discussions and led to the decision to include food items as well as agricultural inputs at the fairs<sup>6</sup>. In relation to seed supply, the assessment focused solely on the formal seed sector (i.e. agrodealer shops and improved varieties), though there was also the recognition that – in terms of seed demand – farmers tend to keep their seed from the previous harvest (notably for maize, beans and groundnut) and that

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<sup>5</sup> The Caritas office at Tororo is approximately 50 km from Mbale.

<sup>6</sup> As described above, CRS had earlier implemented market fairs for food, shelter and non-food items in the same project area in November 2019, and it had originally been assumed that the subsequent fairs of March 2020 would provide only agricultural inputs.

only vegetable seeds are normally purchased from agrodealers. All the agrodealer business appeared to be owned by men, though some employed both women and youth. Considerable efforts were made to determine the most appropriate improved varieties of different crops in each of the target districts, and this information was subsequently used to inform the vendors about the varieties that they should supply.

**4.3 Transfer modality.** Cash was not considered as a transfer modality for protection reasons (relating to safety and security) and because there were already many positive experiences with vouchers, both within the project area and elsewhere. Community consultations showed that farmers (including female farmers) had experience with the voucher modality and preferred support being provided by vouchers rather than cash, as cash could potentially cause conflict within the community. Subsequent experience with cash distributions in the Kasese July 2020 flood response were successful with no security issues, though there was a lot of scrutiny from district officials. Decision-making in terms of the transfer modality revolved around whether value vouchers and/or commodity vouchers should be used. It had been proposed to have commodity vouchers for cassava stakes since these are not supplied through the formal seed sector and would have required the use of local-level suppliers at a later date, closer to the planting season. However, this idea was not pursued as it would have been very complicated to implement due to the use of local-level suppliers and the extended time scale. When it became apparent that it was necessary to supply food as well as agricultural inputs at the fairs, the possibility of having two types of vouchers or two wallets – one for food and one for agricultural inputs – was discussed. The decision to have a single voucher type for both food and agricultural inputs was made on the basis of allowing as much choice as possible to the targeted farmer. So, for example, a farmer could choose to spend their entire voucher value on food if necessary. In addition to the voucher value, CRS provided a cash allowance of UGX.2,000 to 6,000 (USD 0.50 – 1.50) to selected market participants based on the distance to the fair and common transport rate of the area. This was to be used to pay for the transport of the items purchased at the fair back to the farmers' home.

**4.4 Vendor selection.** In total, eleven vendors (8 men, 3 women) were selected to supply food, seeds and agricultural inputs at the fairs. Seven out of the eleven vendors (all male-owned businesses) supplied seed; four of these were agrodealers and three were general traders who normally sold tools, but not seed. Five of the seed suppliers were based in Mbale and just two were based in the districts themselves (one from Butaleja and one from Bulambuli). In hindsight, the project staff felt that only registered agrodealers should have been allowed to supply seed due to the technical knowledge required to ensure quality, but the decision to allow general traders to provide seed was made spontaneously during a meeting with potential vendors, at a time when the project team were trying to persuade agrodealers and other traders to take part in the fairs. All vendors were required to have the necessary registration documents for their business and a tax code<sup>7</sup>. During the vendor harmonization meeting, individuals were made aware about who supplied what items to help determine what items were needed, what was covered, and what might offer competitive advantage. A decision had been made to limit the number of vendors at the fairs so that each would receive sufficient profit, thus incentivizing them to take part. More vendors lead to less profit for all, so it is necessary to create sufficient

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<sup>7</sup> In Uganda, a tax code is a legal requirement for commercial sales over UGX.500,000.

choice and competition to keep prices fair, while also ensuring that vendors get sufficient profit to justify their participation.

Follow up visits made by the S34D Advisor to a few of the local agrodealers based in the districts (who were not selected as vendors for the fairs) revealed that they were relatively small and generally acted as agents to specific agrodealer wholesalers, supplying mainly vegetable seeds and pesticides. These agents would not have had the capacity to supply the range of inputs deemed necessary.

Despite considerable efforts by CRS Country Program and S34D staff to enable Local Seed Businesses<sup>8</sup> to supply quality declared seed (QDS)<sup>9</sup> at the fairs<sup>10</sup>, they were unable to participate because they did not have the registration required by the CRS standard operating procedures (SOPs). In hindsight, one of the CRS team members suggested that the SOPs should have been changed to allow for the participation of the Local Seed Businesses<sup>11</sup>.

**4.5 Farmer sensitization.** A total of 2,003 smallholder households (928 female-headed) participated in the fairs. One of the innovations that turned out to be a key success was prior sensitization among farmer participants about budgeting and joint decision-making by husband and wife. This meant that fair participants had already planned how to spend their vouchers by the time they arrived at the fair, reducing the time needed for the fair itself, while allowing plenty of time for joint consultation and decision-making by farmer households. Sensitization teams comprised of CRS, Caritas and district staff visited each of the target communities a few days before each of the fairs took place to provide information to the selected farmers about the purpose of the fairs and what farmers should anticipate at the fair. Information was provided about the three different product types provided – food, seed and other agricultural inputs. By providing a list of prices and available items to farmers a few days before the fairs and encouraging husbands and wives to jointly decide how they should spend their vouchers, farmer participants could plan what they wanted to buy; many participants were seen with their ‘shopping lists’ at the fairs. By having the District Agricultural Officer join the sensitization team that visited the communities before the fairs, information about the different varieties could also be conveyed.

**4.6 Fair implementation.** Between March 12 and March 27, a total of four market fairs were conducted in Bulambuli (Muyembe Primary School grounds on March 12, Nabbongo Primary School grounds on March 17) and in Butaleja (Kangalaba trading center and Namulo trading center). By the time of the last fair, COVID-19 restrictions had come into force in Uganda, and

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<sup>8</sup> LSBs are farmer groups that have been trained by the Netherlands-funded Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD) Project to produce Quality Declared Seed (QDS), with technical support and oversight from ISSD Regional Experts and district agricultural officials.

<sup>9</sup> QDS is a legally recognized seed class in Uganda that is multiplied by trained farmers from foundation seed provided by the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO). QDS requires fewer inspections and has less rigorous production requirements than certified seed and is therefore less expensive than certified seed.

<sup>10</sup> A series of meetings were held with Kampala-based staff from the Integrated Seed Sector Development (ISSD) Project and the ISSD Regional Experts responsible for Mt Elgon Region. The S34D Advisor also visited one of the LSBs, and the ISSD Regional Expert assisted with their vendor application and in trying to obtain the necessary registration document (which was due to be collected from the district office).

<sup>11</sup> Changes have since been made to the CRS internal forms used for contractual arrangements to allow for greater flexibility in contracting seed suppliers.

it was necessary to re-organize the last fair so that it took place over three consecutive days (March 24 – 26), involving smaller numbers of farmer participants on each day.

<b>Table 1. Quick Facts</b>	
Total households served	2,003
Total population reached	20,784
Extremely vulnerable households	35.7%
Female-headed households	46.3%
Number of fairs	4
Number of participating vendors	11
Amount of value vouchers per HH	UGX 180,000 or USD 49.00
<b>Households served per fair site</b>	
Muyembe Primary School grounds	526
Nabbongo Primary School grounds	478
Kangalaba Trading Center	573
Namulo Trading Center	426

*Source: Market Fair Exit Interview & Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) Report (April 2020)*

**4.7 Seed quality control.** The seed brought by the vendors was inspected before the start of each fair by CRS and Caritas agricultural staff, working alongside an official from the District Agricultural Production Office. Inappropriate seed included seed that was not certified and/or was visibly of poor quality and/or tampered bags and was impounded by the district officer.<sup>12</sup> The staff opened randomly sampled bags to check the contents and weighed smaller bags to check that the weight was according to the label. In hindsight, it was noted that the seed inspection could have taken place before the fairs and involved germination tests for a higher level of confidence,<sup>13</sup> though it had previously been decided that this would not have been effective in cases where vendors were determined to try and bring poor quality seed to the fairs by swapping bags after testing samples had been taken.

**4.8 Diversity of crops and varieties.** As noted above, considerable time and effort was spent preparing a list of improved varieties of specific crops considered to be appropriate to the local area. The list specified the varieties allowed at the fairs and formed part of the contract with vendors. The list originally included certified seed of any maize open pollinated variety (OPV) and 13 hybrid maize varieties, nine bean varieties, one soybean variety, six groundnut varieties, seven tomato varieties, two cabbage varieties, two onion varieties, one variety of collard greens, and one rice variety.

Upon holding discussions with the contracted vendors, however, it was agreed that rice, soya beans, and groundnut seeds should not be supplied because of the high prices, difficulty in acquiring certain seed varieties and the lack of certification for groundnuts. At the first fair, seed

<sup>12</sup> The exact quantity of poor quality seed that was impounded is not known, though it is not thought to have been much. Poor quality seed was provided by some of the general traders, not by the registered agrodealers.

<sup>13</sup> In Uganda there is a widespread problem of ‘fake’ and low-quality seed, despite certification processes and labelling.

vendors were surprised to find that bean seed was in very high demand by farmer participants. Although bean seed is normally saved by farmers from one season to the next or acquired from informal traders, the harvest had been low and floods had carried away seed stores, and bean seed was in short supply in the informal seed system. Farmers were so keen to purchase bean seed that they were buying the beans being sold as food with the intention of sorting and planting them as seed. Given the poor harvest, however, the quality was considered to be too poor even for consumption, and it was decided not to allow any beans (as food) to be sold at the fairs. Instead, it was agreed that the seed vendors should supply certified seed of improved bean varieties. Once the seed vendors understood which variety the farmers wanted, then they were able to supply the preferred variety. The seed quality control mechanism allowed for the vendors to provide the required seeds at the subsequent fairs. In general (for most crops), the range of varieties actually provided at the fairs was considerably less than the number of varieties included in the initial list; for example, only three maize varieties out of the 13 listed were available at the fairs.

**4.9 Information about and promotion of agricultural inputs.** The agrodealers contracted for the fairs collaborated amongst themselves so that they brought different varieties to the fairs, therefore reducing the competition amongst themselves whilst offering a choice of varieties to farmers. Although maximum prices had been agreed in the vendor contracts, in some cases – notably the general traders, not the agrodealers – vendors offered price discounts for certain seed quantities purchased (e.g. UGX. 500 off when buying 2 kg of seed). It was reported that farmers were drawn to those vendors who offered discounts.

Most of the seed suppliers at the fairs had leaflets or banners, and each was given five or six minutes at the start of each fair to announce the items that they were selling. This announcement was necessarily quite generalized because it did not allow much time for technical details about the varieties. Nevertheless, it was observed that farmers tended to buy more from vendors who made good verbal presentations of their wares at the start of the fairs. Who and how the information is provided is critical; for example, it was reported that more PICS bags were purchased in Bulambuli because the information about PICS bags was provided in the local language by the main (female) PICS supplier rather than the (male) local agent, who did not speak the local language.

A senior staff member from Caritas who was an agricultural specialist also provided information about the varieties in a general announcement made to the farmers as they waited to receive their vouchers at the start of the fair. An information desk within the fair itself was staffed by agricultural specialists who provided unbiased advice about different varieties and their yields and also recommendations about the knapsack sprayers. It was not possible to continue with the information desk after having to change the structure and organization of the market fairs due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

**4.10 Selected findings from exit Interviews and post distribution monitoring (PDM)<sup>14</sup>.** During the market fairs, exit interviews were conducted with the aim of assessing the level of satisfaction of project participants and vendors with the market fair processes. Subsequently, in

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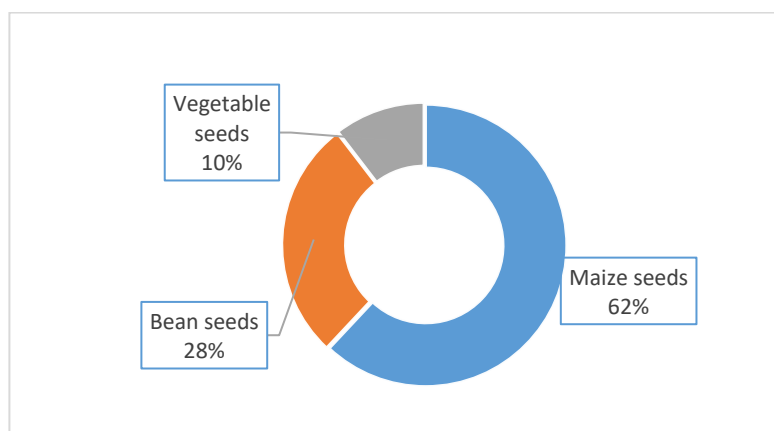
<sup>14</sup> Much of Sections 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11 has been extracted from the Exit Interview & Post Distribution Monitoring Report of April 2020 which was drafted by Jeremiah Mutambo (CRS – Uganda MEAL Officer).

April 2020, the project team carried out post distribution monitoring with farmer households with the aim of triangulating data from the exit interviews, understanding how targeted households used items purchased and assessing the overall impact of the market fairs.

Overall, from the vendor invoices, exit interviews and PDM data, results show that project participants spent on average 55% of the voucher value on farm tools, i.e. spray pumps, hand hoes etc., 33% on food items, and 12% on farm inputs including seeds, pesticides and fertilizers. Overall, there was no significant difference between what was bought in Butaleja and Bulambuli because of the similar setting. There was also no significant difference between female-headed and male-headed households; the most likely reason being decisions on what to buy were influenced by families rather than individual participants, since farmers came with their spouses and other family members to the fairs.

It is interesting to note that – among the tools – knapsack spray pumps were the most commonly purchased item, and gum boots were the third most common item (after hoes). This is consistent with data collected at the time of registration, when male farmers requested to include spray pumps and gum boots on the list of items as these were not on the initial list of items to be supplied at the market fairs. Although relatively expensive at UGX. 66,000 (over one-third of the total voucher value), it is thought that the spray pumps were in high demand because they could be used as a source of income through the provision of commercial spraying services. Gum boots offer the necessary personal protection when spraying pesticides.

Table 2. Sample Households (%) that Purchased Seeds



Source: Market Fair Exit Interview & Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) Report (April 2020)

From exit interview and PDM data, over half of the interviewed households bought maize seeds. This was followed by bean seeds and vegetable seeds (Table 2). The average quantities bought and respective unit prices for each of the items are stated in Table 3 below. Most of the vegetable seeds supplied were hybrid, hence the high price.

Table 3: Average seed quantities purchased and unit price.

Seeds	Av. Qty of seeds bought per farmer (Kgs)	Av. Unit Price (UGX)
Maize seeds	7.3	6,500
Bean seeds	4.1	7,000
Vegetable seeds	NA (Packs varied from 10g – 50g)	45,800

Source: Market Fair Exit Interview & Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) Report (April 2020)

Market participants were asked if there were additional seeds that they needed that weren't offered at the fairs and about one third of the participants responded yes. The items that farmers would have wanted included specific varieties of beans seeds, groundnut seeds and sim-sim (sesame). These are all crops that are typically supplied through the informal seed sector rather than the formal seed sector.

**4.11 Vendor Information.** From the vendor interviews, all eleven vendors indicated that they sourced additional quantities of supplies from Mbale and noted that all items needed were readily available, though some, mostly food items, had increased in price since the time the vendors had agreed to take part in the fairs. Vendors also indicated that they had to borrow money or stocks to be able to source enough supplies for the fairs, with four vendors indicating they got loans from informal providers (i.e. friends and business partners). The other seven vendors reported getting supplies on credit from their usual suppliers. When asked if they faced or experienced any difficulties with the voucher system, all vendors answered no, however commented that giving change was difficult as the UGX 500 denomination was not available, yet most items required having a denomination of UGX 500. Nonetheless, all vendors were very satisfied with the voucher system and indicated they were interested in participating in future fairs.

**4.12 Use of seed purchased from the fair.** Post distribution monitoring results reveal that all project participants who purchased seeds from the fairs reported planting the seeds. Over 90% of respondents said they were satisfied with the varieties, quantities and quality of the seeds provided at the market fairs. When asked how each of the seeds bought performed in terms of germination, vigor in the field and uniformity in the field, the results are presented as shown in table 4 below. No problems were reported from households that purchased and planted vegetable seeds; however, households reported some problems with the maize seeds particularly in Bulambuli, where there was some non-uniformity of seeds and poor germination. As to whether, farmer households were interacting with agrodealers to get more technical support, 73% responded no and 36% responded yes.

Table 4. Seed quality, as reported by sample program participants.

	Good	Average	Poor
<b>Maize seeds</b>			
Germination	119	-	22
Vigor in the field,	119	5	17



Uniformity in the	119	5	17
<b>Beans seeds</b>			
Germination	61	-	7
Vigor in the field,	61	-	7
Uniformity in the	61	-	7
<b>Vegetable seeds</b>			
Germination	27	-	-
Vigor in the field,	27	-	-
Uniformity in the	27	-	-

*Source: Market Fair Exit Interview & Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) Report (April 2020)*

## 5. Implementation of proposed actions

The table below summarizes the extent to which it was possible to implement the proposed actions and presents the key lessons emerging from the experience.

Table 5. Implementation of actions and lessons learned.

Proposed action	What actually happened	Lessons / Unanswered questions
a) Invite as many local vendors as possible and encourage them to bring a diverse range of inputs	The preference was to have fewer vendors overall to ensure that each made a profit. Most vendors were traders/dealers based in Mbale. Most of the local agrodealers (within the districts) turned out to be ‘agents’ and did not have the capacity required for registration as vendors. It was not possible for Local Seed Businesses to participate as vendors due to CRS Standard Operating Procedures.	Is it possible to work with those local agrodealers who do not have the capacity required for selection as vendors by facilitating linkages with the selected fair vendors, and can the selected vendors benefit from having links with local agents? How can female and/or young vendors / agents be considered in such linkages? CRS procedures must be revised to allow Local Seed Businesses with appropriate seed types to sell QDS at seed fairs. <sup>15</sup>
i. Facilitate loans for seed fair vendors through Opportunity International.	Although this was initially among the draft actions, it was subsequently removed because there was insufficient time to implement it. However, one of the vendors (an existing Opportunity bank customer) requested a loan and S34D helped to facilitate this.	CRS has previously provided surety for loans to vendors. With sufficient lead time, this action can be implemented in future. Do female and/or young vendors require additional support in accessing such financial services?

<sup>15</sup> CRS procedures have duly been revised accordingly since this report was first drafted.

Proposed action	What actually happened	Lessons / Unanswered questions
ii. Awareness creation before the fairs / at time of registration – provide information to farmers about the importance of quality seed	During registration and sensitization visits, priority was given to educating farmers about the seed fair process and getting them to understand the vouchers and how to budget. Some information about seeds and varieties was provided by the District Agricultural Officer, though this was not the primary purpose of the sensitization exercise.	This worked well, and more information about seeds and varieties could have been provided with assistance from agricultural / extension experts. One option might be for a local extension agent to form part of the sensitization team. In some contexts, there might be the opportunity to use local radio to convey technical information. Gender must be considered in any sensitization efforts <sup>16</sup> .
iii. Awareness creation at the fairs - short presentations by vendors to publicize themselves and their products and provide info about the advantages of specific inputs / varieties	Presentations were made at the start of each fair by an agricultural expert from the implementing partner and also by each of the vendors, though the time available did not allow for detailed technical information of the different varieties.	This worked well, though it appears that farmers were more convinced by the public speaking ability of the vendor rather than the technical information conveyed. Is it possible to provide additional support to help vendors prepare for these short-presentations?
iv. Awareness creation at the fairs - encourage vendors to provide information materials about their varieties, e.g. leaflets, brochures, posters	Most agrodealers provided leaflets and banners from their suppliers, but it is not known if the farmers found them useful.	Many agrodealers already have leaflets. Is there a need for fair organizers to help vendors to source additional leaflets and/or create information materials? More information as to whether leaflets can effectively inform both male and female farmers is needed. If effective, vendor contracts can be modified to ensure that appropriate leaflets are provided and tailored to different market segments.
b) Allow farmers to try out 'new' technologies by providing test packs or samples of locally appropriate technologies/inputs (e.g.	S34D partners and others identified potential sources of small seed packs for new varieties of yellow bean and rice, but procurement did not proceed. There was a reluctance among seed fair organizers to promote new technologies as part of an emergency response; allowable varieties	One-off fairs in response to an acute emergency are not appropriate for the provision of test packs of 'new' varieties or other technologies due to the technical know-how necessary to ensure that these are locally appropriate. The promotion of 'new' varieties is appropriate when seed fairs are planned in response to climate change or other situations

<sup>16</sup> This includes both the gender of the extension agent, and whether male and/or female household members are targeted and whether they subsequently share the knowledge gained with their spouse and/or other household members. Ideally, both husbands and wives should participate in pre-fair sensitization sessions.

Proposed action	What actually happened	Lessons / Unanswered questions
small quantity of new seed varieties, PICS bags)	were those that had been recommended by agricultural officers and those that farmers were familiar with. PICS bags were made available at the fairs and a few farmers purchased them.	where new varieties may be part of the ‘solution’, and where there is the necessary agricultural expertise among the team.
c) Encourage informal interactions between suppliers, distributors, farmers, extension agents, village-based agents, farmer support agents, local chiefs, agricultural officers, etc so that they can follow up after the fair.	Contact lists for each district were developed and distributed among community leaders at sub county, parish and village level during the market fairs. Some farmers and vendors were seen to be exchanging mobile phone contacts at the fairs. Over one-third of farmers sampled for the PDM survey reported that they had interacted with the agrodealers for additional technical support.	Further follow up is needed to determine whether the contact lists had any effects on interactions / networking. It is likely that networking subsequent to the fair may have occurred after an initial face-to-face interaction and where follow-up information had been requested, e.g. where an agrodealer had asked for the farmer’s feedback during the growing season, and/or offered to provide advice in case of any problem.
d) Provide a space for vendors/suppliers to interact directly with farmers and thus learn more about local demand for different types of inputs.	The situation with bean seeds suggests that agrodealers were not previously familiar with farmers’ preferred varieties, and that they learned about this as a result of the fairs.	In hindsight, assessment information about informal seed systems and LSBs may have helped to generate a more accurate understanding of local demand and the need for quality bean seed prior to the fairs. Nevertheless, this knowledge was quickly gained and addressed through direct interactions between farmers and vendors at the fairs. How can fair organizers actively encourage vendors to seek information from male and female farmers at the fairs? <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It might be assumed that this interaction happens organically in a fair because it is in the vendors’ commercial interests to engage their clients, but more information on this could be helpful.

<b>Proposed action</b>	<b>What actually happened</b>	<b>Lessons / Unanswered questions</b>
<p>e) Identify a number of local vendors for subsequent training by IFDC who are planning an agro-input dealer training session in eastern Uganda.</p>	<p>All agro-input dealers taking part in the fairs were proposed as potential trainees. The largest vendor suggested that their staff should be trained as trainers so that they can subsequently provide training to others, both through the IFDC training and in future through other channels. Unfortunately, however, the training did not go ahead due to COVID-19 restrictions and less than anticipated funding for S34D.</p>	<p>Subsequent training for vendors would necessarily be part of a longer-term program, either by the implementing agency or their partners. Such training would necessarily be gender inclusive in its content as well as in who attends the training.</p>

## 6. Conclusions

**6.1 Effectiveness of the actions tested.** A key challenge to working with local agrodealers (i.e. those based in the remote areas where seed fairs tend to be held) is that – in the market fairs described here - many of them apparently lacked the capacity required to be selected as fair vendors<sup>18</sup>. So, the question then becomes whether it is possible to work with them in other ways (e.g. through partnering with the selected vendors) to build their capacity through seed fair approaches. Providing surety for loans to selected vendors is feasible, as was a certain level of awareness creation among farmers, though there was perhaps a need for a more detailed technical information about seeds and varieties to support farmers' decision-making processes. Awareness creation prior to fair was seen by the fair organizers as a good investment in helping farmers to make choices.

The fair was seen to lead to subsequent interactions between farmers and agrodealers. Although it is not clear what specifically prompted these interactions, it is thought that such interactions can be promoted through small adaptations to the fair and through the behaviors of the vendors. It was reported that one of the agrodealers (from one of the districts, rather than from Mbale) had been able to expand his business and increase his stocks as a result of the fairs. Interactions with farmers at the fairs allowed him to develop a better understanding of the need of farmers and how to meet these needs. Additional follow-up with this vendor may be helpful to better understand this particular example.

**6.2 Short-term vs longer-term objectives.** When implemented as part of an emergency response, the overriding aim of a market fair is to provide affected and vulnerable farmers with the support needed to recover their means of livelihood for the forthcoming agricultural season. Targeted farmers are regarded as the prime beneficiaries, and vendors are regarded as contractors rather than participants whose businesses can benefit from the fair in the long term. The amount of work involved in planning and organizing a fair is considerable, and the core team works long hours over several weeks in the lead-up to the fairs. When decisions need to be made in relation to how things should be done, these decisions are made according to what will be of greatest benefit to the targeted farmers in relation to their immediate needs for recovery, i.e., to plant, harvest and process their crops successfully so that they have food for their households. Establishing long-term market linkages between vendors and farmers is not high on the agenda when implementing a one-off, short-term emergency response. For reasons relating to feasibility and the over-riding objectives of an intervention, it is not appropriate to try and support sustainable market linkages when a seed fair is implemented as a one-off response to an acute crisis. It is more likely that it might be possible to plan for sustainable market linkages within seed fairs that are implemented as part of longer-term programming approaches, for example in relation to resilience building, post-conflict recovery, and/or climate change.

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<sup>18</sup> However, there are examples of other seed fairs that have successfully contracted local seed producers with similarly limited capacity.

The overriding objectives of a seed fair necessarily determine the types of farmers who are targeted as participants. Unless there is blanket coverage, it tends to be those most affected by a crisis and those who are most vulnerable are targeted with support. It can be assumed that those who are most vulnerable are often the poorest households, and tend not to be the types of farmers who are likely to purchase seed from formal sector agrodealers but instead rely on the informal seed system, i.e., relatives, friends, neighbors, and local informal traders to obtain off-farm seed. If a seed fair is to support sustainable market linkages for future access to quality seed, then either the fair must target the better-off farmers who are more likely to purchase seed from agrodealers, and/or the selected vendors should include seed suppliers from the informal seed system and provide the support necessary to improve the quality of seed and market linkages within informal seed markets.

During the planning phase for the BMGF seed fairs described above, it was discussed whether it might be possible to allow non-participants in the local communities to purchase seed at the fairs using their own cash. One way that this might have been possible would be for each fair to be organized in two sessions, e.g. over two days or in a morning session and an afternoon session, and to invite the targeted farmers for the first session, and then extend an open invitation to any other farmer wanting to buy seed in the second session. Logistically, this would have been very challenging, and the vendors may not have been willing to pay for the additional transport and/or accommodation costs needed for a two-day fair. In the case of the Butaleja fairs, however, this may have happened in any case with the change in the structure of the fairs due to COVID restrictions. Rather than holding the fairs in an enclosed space, vendors set up pop-up shops within the local marketplace and remained open for three days. It is possible that during this time they may have served cash-paying customers in addition to the voucher-paying participants. This illustrates that there are various options for adjusting the seed fair format to target different clients and achieve alternative objectives.

From the perspective of the partners implementing a seed fair, an organization that has no presence in the local area and has funding for a short-term emergency response only is unlikely to have the capacity or the interest in supporting longer-term objectives. Where the implementing partner has a long-term presence on the ground and the potential to attract longer-term funding, it is more likely that they will have an interest in promoting longer-term market linkages.

**6.3 Technical capacity of the implementing partners.** Despite the lack of a seed systems specialist or an agricultural expert in the core team, the fairs were considered to be a success in allowing selected farmers to access a choice of food, seed and other agricultural inputs in time for the planting season. A greater understanding of the informal seed system as part of the rapid market assessment may or may not have usefully informed the choice of seed vendors (i.e. to include the Local Seed Businesses) and the crops and seed types provided by the vendors (e.g. to include quality beans and groundnuts from the informal seed system). What is certain is that if seed fairs are to support and enhance market linkages between vendors and farmers, then the implementing partner will need to ensure it has the appropriate technical capacity in agricultural

development, seed systems and gender to sufficiently design a fair aimed at long-term sustainable relationships between farmers and seed and agriculture input dealers.

The need for technical capacity can be illustrated by the example of small ‘tester’ seed packs of new varieties, which is a well-established means of generating demand for new varieties: by making small quantities (e.g. 500g or 1kg) of quality seed of locally appropriate improved varieties available to farmers, this allows them to try out a new variety for themselves on their own plot. If they like the variety and see that it grows well in the local agroecology, then they will purchase a larger quantity of seed for the following season. However, this method will only work if the correct varieties are provided, and it takes a certain level of technical understanding to consult with the plant breeders, agronomists, farmers and others to determine which varieties are appropriate and to ensure that they have been adequately tested in the local context. In the case of the BMGF fairs described here, there was a reluctance to promote what were considered to be untried, untested varieties, or to undertake the consultations needed to identify appropriate ‘new’ varieties. In promoting sustainable market linkages, not only is it necessary to have a technical understanding of seeds, varieties and formal and informal seed systems, but also about markets and the adoption of new varieties by farmers.



## 7. Summary of recommendations for the development of future actionable plans

The recommendations that emerge from the previous section are summarized below. It is expected that these recommendations will be implemented in a follow-up S34D activity planned for FY21 (see Annex 3).

7.1. In terms of the emergency context, it is recommended that actions to support market linkages through seed fair programming are applied as part of longer-term interventions in response to chronic emergencies such as climate change, drought, and/or long-term post-conflict recovery.

7.2. To ensure that the seed fair planning and design incorporate actions to support market linkages, it is recommended that the seed fair objectives include enhanced market linkages as an explicit aim of the fairs, against which decision-making can be made.

7.3. The technical capacity required to design and implement actions to support market linkages as part of seed fair interventions necessitates inputs at key decision-making points<sup>19</sup> from both a market specialist and seed systems specialist, together with an understanding of formal and informal seed systems, gender sensitivity, and farmers' adoption of new varieties.

7.4. It is recommended that, where possible, vendors with experience of seed fairs are actively included in the process to identify additional actions to support market linkages that can be tested as part of future seed fair interventions. Specific actions might be identified to re-structure seed fairs in innovative ways (e.g. as pop-up shops), strengthen seed supplier capacity in gender-sensitive ways, promote the supply of diverse and appropriate products, and encourage inclusive interactions and networking between farmers and suppliers.

7.5. Actions to support market linkages must be gender sensitive with respect to the types of support provided to both vendors and farmers. Services and support to vendors must be tailored to ensure that these are accessible to and appropriate for the needs of female-owned businesses, and that both male and female vendors are better able to cater to different client segments. Information, technologies and support to male and female adult and youth farmers must be provided in ways that cater to their differentiated needs, and also engage and empower women and youth.

7.6. It is recommended that a participatory action approach should be applied to design and test innovative ways in which seed fairs can support gender-sensitive market linkages. This requires active engagement with seed fair implementing partners, potential vendors, male and female farmers and seed specialists from the S34D initiative.

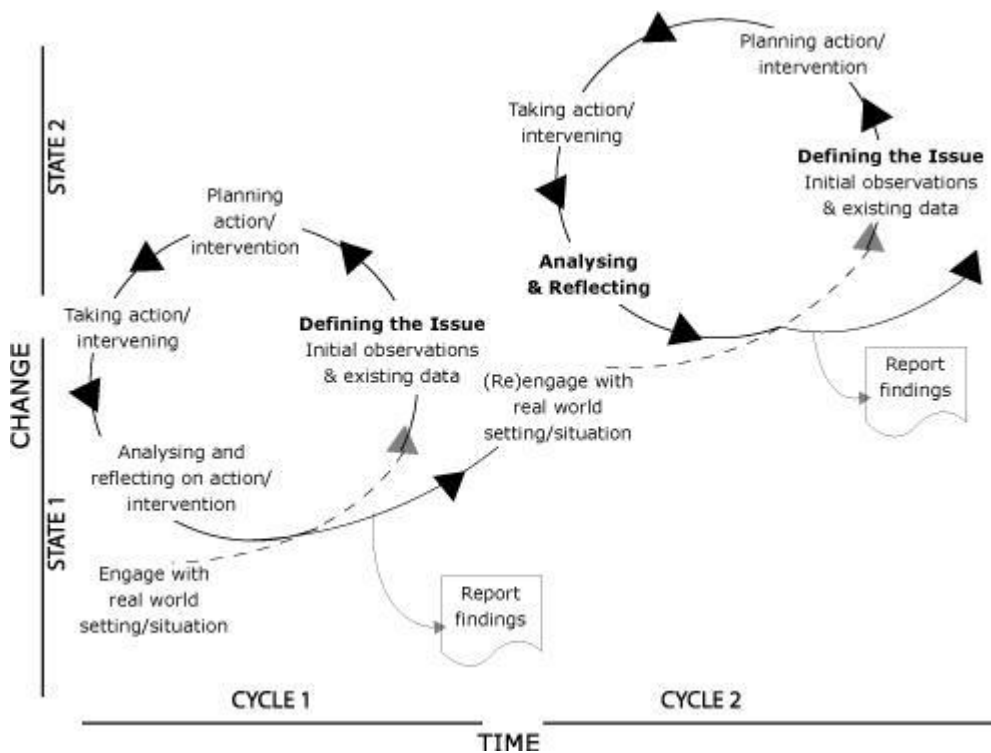
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<sup>19</sup> These decision points would include the development of market assessment tools and analysis of data collected as well as on the fair dates themselves.

## Annex 1. Participatory action research

Participatory action research can be described as ‘learning by doing’. Unlike most research endeavors that present ex post findings, the process is dynamic and continuous, enabling feedback in real time. Rather than taking a standard linear model of research, participatory action research is cyclic, working its way through various iterations of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Figure 1). The participatory and action-oriented focus builds ownership of the process by the participants, who learn through their own experiences and are able to change their own lives and social worlds. Participatory action research can be transformative for specific community segments who are supported to recognize, reflect and act to address the underlying causes of their vulnerabilities.

Figure 1. Participatory action research cycles.



Source: Velasco (2013) *Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Sustainable Community Development*: <http://postgrowth.org/participatory-action-research-par-for-sustainable-community-development/>

Baum, McDougall & Smith (2004) describe how PAR differs from conventional research in three ways:<sup>20</sup> Firstly, it focuses on research whose purpose is to enable action, which is achieved

<sup>20</sup> This paragraph has been extracted from Baum, McDougall & Smith (2004) *Participatory action research*. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6816910\\_Participatory\\_action\\_research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6816910_Participatory_action_research) [accessed Jan 12 2021].

through a reflective cycle. The resultant action is then further researched, and an iterative reflective cycle perpetuates data collection, reflection, and action. Secondly, PAR pays careful attention to power relationships, advocating for power to be deliberately shared between the researcher and the researched, blurring the line between them so that the researched become the researchers. The researched cease to be objects and become partners in the whole research process. PAR has been described as an expression of “new paradigm science”<sup>21</sup> that differs significantly from old paradigm or positivist science. The hallmark of positivist science is that it sees the world as having a single reality that can be independently observed and measured by objective scientists (preferably under laboratory conditions where all variables can be controlled and manipulated to determine causal connections). By contrast, new paradigm science and PAR posit that the observer has an impact on the phenomena being observed and brings to their inquiry a set of values that will exert influence on the study. Thirdly, PAR contrasts with less dynamic approaches that remove data and information from their contexts. Rather than involving people as passive participants, “subjects” or “respondents”, PAR advocates that those being researched should be actively involved in the process.

In the case of the seed fairs that form the focus of the research described in this report, the research participants are the implementing partner staff and – in future iterative cycles – the seed fair vendors.

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<sup>21</sup> Wadsworth Y. What is participatory action research? Action Research International. 1998 Paper 2. <https://www.montana.edu/cpa/news/images/articles/hires/img200603291143660763-1.pdf>

## Annex 2. Questions used in interviews with implementing staff

### Distribution modalities

1. Different voucher modalities were considered when planning for the fairs, e.g. whether to have commodity vouchers for specific types of agricultural inputs (cassava cuttings), or whether to have two types of vouchers, one for food and one for agricultural inputs. Were other modalities considered (e.g. cash or other types of voucher modalities, and at what stage, if so)?
2. Was there any evidence that any farmers used their own cash to make purchases (in addition to the vouchers provided)? If so, what did they buy, and did this cause any problems or shortages of supply?
3. With the benefit of hindsight, do you think that the right modality was chosen? Did we have sufficient information to make a well-informed choice at the time(s) of decision-making? Describe / elaborate.
4. Were the fair participants or other stakeholders asked about their preferences in terms of voucher modalities?
5. What were the different stages / types of information gathering / data collection that contributed to the needs assessment, design and planning processes?
6. For each stage / type of information gathering / data collection, what was the most valuable / useful type of information that it provided to the assessment, design and planning processes? Was there any additional type of information that would have been useful?

### Vendors and input supply

7. How many vendors took part in the end? How many were providing food and how many were providing agricultural inputs? Was this the right number in terms of the range of inputs provided?
8. What are the limiting factors to involving more vendors?
9. What were the factors that limited the involvement of Local Seed Businesses and Local Agents (i.e. the smaller agro-dealers based in the districts)?
10. How would you compare the list of ‘allowed’ items that was prepared before the fairs, the items that vendors brought to the fairs, and the items that farmers actually purchased?
11. Were there any items that were in high demand from farmers but were not supplied or were in short supply at the fairs? Were the vendors able to adapt and meet this demand?
12. A list of appropriate crops and varieties was compiled based on information from district agricultural officers and others (Jonah to elaborate on this). How was this list used by CRS/Caritas? How was this list used by the agro-dealers? How was it helpful? Could it have been done differently?
13. How was the quality of seed and other inputs ensured, and at what stages? Describe any concerns / issues that arose about seed quality.
14. Did the vendors coordinate or collaborate amongst themselves in any way to ensure that a range of different inputs / seed types was provided? Describe.
15. How did different agro-dealers promote their products? Were there any “special offers” (e.g. price discounts, additional “free’ gifts. Etc)? (Take care to avoid possible overlap with Qu. XX on information about seeds / varieties)

### **Information and sensitization**

16. How and when were farmers sensitized about budgeting? How do you think that this may have influenced their choices for voucher purchases?
17. What kind of information about seed and varieties was available to farmers? When and how was this provided? Do you have any evidence that farmers were asking for / seeking this type of information? From whom were they seeking this info?
18. What other types of information / sensitization was provided to farmers? How and when?

### **Farmer / agro-dealer linkages for future input supply [more relevant for extension agent and agro-dealers]**

19. Are you aware of any loans or financial support that was accessed by any participating agro-dealers to allow enhance their participation in the fairs?
20. Was the list of contacts made available? To whom?
21. From your knowledge, is there any evidence to suggest that anyone made use of the contact list?
22. Do you think that the different way in which the final seed fair was organized may have any made any differences to the longer-term linkages between agro-dealers and farmers? If so, how?
23. Have any agro-dealers changed or expanded their sales and/or marketing channels as a result of taking part in the fairs? Describe if so.
24. Did the local agro-input agents benefit in any way from the fairs? Were their business undermined in any way?
25. Have there been any requests for continued support by CRS / Caritas in the local area? If so, what, specifically?

### **General:**

10. What aspect of the fairs do you consider to be the biggest success?
11. In your view, what could have been done better?
12. In your view, what were some of the lessons that emerged from the BMGF market fairs experience?

### Annex 3. S34D Activity 2.2.2.1 (FY21): Design seed vouchers & fairs (SVFs) for resilience and/or long-term programming

**Justification:** S34D reviews conducted in FY20 reveal that seed vouchers & fairs (SVFs), and Diversity for Nutrition and Enhanced Resilience (DiNER) fairs can be used to support last mile seed provisioning, and to enhance sustainable market linkages when implemented as part of longer-term interventions. SVFs were originally designed as an emergency intervention, but seed vouchers and SVF/DiNER programming is very flexible and can be adapted to meet different objectives. The supply-side market strengthening objectives (whether short-term or long-term objectives) are often not clearly defined at the outset. These objectives may include enhancing market linkages, diversifying seed supply, strengthening capacity of market actors, or others, depending on the needs and the context. DiNERs and seed vouchers are increasingly used as part of longer-term programming, often in response to recurrent drought and/or within USAID's Food for Peace Development Food Security Activities (DFSAs), as in Malawi, Madagascar, Zambia, and Uganda. Having originally been developed for emergencies, seed voucher, SVF, and DiNER programming approaches could better incorporate supply-side objectives for longer-term programming with additional guidelines as to what adjustments are needed and how they should be implemented.

**Activity aims:** The activity aims to identify ways in which the seed voucher and SVF/DiNER model can be modified over time (e.g. 3 to 5 years) to build capacity within the seed sector to support the emergence of a sustainable, market-based seed system that offers quality, affordable seeds to smallholder male and female farmers. This may involve adjustments to the seed voucher and SVF/DiNER model itself and/or additional activities to support capacity development and promote the emergence of alternative seed supply methods.

**Key outputs.** (1) A Scoping Report will describe the different ways in which SVF / DiNERs have been programmed in different contexts in recent years, highlighting the overall objectives of the fairs in relation to the specific emergency / developmental context in which they are implemented and the specific programming approaches used, both on the demand side and especially on the supply side. (2) A case study report will present a synthesis of findings from primary data collected from fair vendors, and lessons learned from selected seed fair interventions. It will also propose actions and actionable plans for testing in forthcoming CRS seed fairs. (3) A Supplement to the CRS Agriculture Fairs and Vouchers manual will present proposed modifications to SVF / DiNER programming for longer-term interventions that aim to support the emergence of a sustainable, market-based seed system and standardized M&E tools for SVF/DiNERs assessment. (4) At least one multi-year actionable plan appropriate to a specific intervention will be drafted in close collaboration with the implementing partner. It is envisaged that the actionable plan will be tested by the implementing partner through a new or on-going DFSA or an appropriate CRS Country Program intervention. In this case, a detailed design and implementation plan (including technical support and monitoring from S34D experts) will be developed for implementation in FY22 and beyond.