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How Do Farmers Source Sorghum Seed after a Poor Rainy Season in Southern Mali?

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Abstract

Farmers in Mali normally use home-produced seed for sowing sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench). In case of problems, farmers resort to using seed from other sources. To better understand what problems farmers in southern Mali may have with seed availability we conducted a survey during the season 2005/2006, following a drought year.

The survey was conducted immediately after the sowing period of sorghum to be able to explore the actual sources of seeds farmers had used. Individual interviews with 287 household heads in a total of 16 villages in the two project regions were conducted using a questionnaire.

Results show that following the drought year a major percentage of farmers (65.2%) planted more than one sorghum variety. This is in contrast to results obtained from a similar survey one season earlier, following a good year for sorghum production. Similarly farmers mentioned using other seed sources than their own production more frequently, e.g. the own village (30%), as well as other villages, projects and markets.

Reasons for searching seeds from outside the household were mostly the interest in cultivating a new variety and to some smaller extend the interest in testing a new variety. About 10% of farmers mentioned that they ran out of seeds. Relations between the seed donors and seed beneficiaries are mostly family ties and neighbourhood. Projects, friends and markets are of smaller importance. Seeds are exchanged or given for free. Purchase is more prominent this season, but still it is less important than the traditional ways of trading seeds.

In the 2005 season the majority (75.5%) of farmers reported that they extended the surface sown with sorghum and 42.6% mentioned the food shortages” after the previous season as explanation.

It can thus be concluded, that farmers did not face a problem in seed availability and access after the bad rainy season. Their decisions regarding seed source and variety choice were driven by their concern about the low cereal harvest in the preceding year. This concern was primarily addressed by extending the area planted with sorghum the following season.

Keywords: Mali, seed access, seed availability, seed sources, sorghum