Selling Seeds

As the clouds darken and the promise of rain approaches, the women of Gogrial East and West Counties of Warrap state check their small, hidden stores in the corners of their *tukals* (mud huts). They want to see if they have enough seeds to plant a good crop in the season ahead. Yet, for the most vulnerable, whose harvest was small the year before, no seeds remain. Returnees and IDPs, without any harvest the year before, also had no seeds in stock. Hoping to support these most in-need households, VSF G has been supporting them with seeds just as the rains start to come. 2,200 homes now have sorghum and groundnut seeds to allow a good harvest.

Yet, VSF G used this time of giving seeds not only to help the most vulnerable, but also to develop and utilize the local markets in Warrap State. While seeds can be distributed in many fashions, seed fairs not only allow beneficiaries to select the best seeds for planting, they also allow more advanced farmers to market their seeds.

If you branch right before Lietnom’s local government office and travel another twenty minutes to the east, you find yourself in the village of Warabyei. Displaced from their more fertile homeland by deadly conflict, they have spent over a decade waiting to go home. This April, beneath the wide branches of their central tree, able farmers dragged large sacks of sorghum and groundnuts. Setting up their stalls as the sun rose, by the mid morning the tree housed a bustling market of seed buyers and sellers. Vulnerable women were given seed vouchers that they could exchange for their choice of seeds. The seed sellers would later redeem the value of the vouchers at a previously agreed price.

Wandering between the sacks of seeds, the women run their hands through the sacks, inspecting their size, texture and colour. These most vulnerable women know that they need the best seeds if their cultivation will produce enough to let their families eat. All the seeds are brought by sellers from that payam, ensuring the seeds are likely to grow well in the same local soil. Yet, additionally, as in any market, the women have the benefit of choice. Surrounded by dozens of sacks, they are able to choose the very best. 38 varieties of sorghum were bought to the various seed fairs. Some choose their neighbour’s seeds, having seen them grow so well the year before. Some choose red coloured seeds,
Continued….. knowing that they will give them a quick harvest. Some choose large groundnuts hoping for their own harvest of the same size.

Yet, the benefits of the market also extend to the seed sellers. Having struggle hard the year before, often using new methods, a few dozen farmers in each payam have produce two or three spare sacks of seeds. It was these small-scale, successful farmers who were invited to sell at the seed fairs. Having already set aside food and seeds for the year ahead, the seed fair allowed them to sell their surplus. With this profit, they could add variety to their food stores at home. However, with the rains approaching, even the seed sellers are looking to the year ahead. Many are choosing to use their profit to invest in the next harvest. “Now I know I can make money by selling seeds, I will plant even more in the year ahead”, one seed seller explains. Many seed sellers describe how they will use their profit to hire an ox plough or buy an ox to extend their farm to further reaches. The small money from their seeds allows this innovative investment.

As well as Warabyei (Nyang Payam), seed fairs were carried out by VSF G in Torch North Payam (Ajogo and Mangol) and Pathuon West Payam (Luonyaker and Majok) as well as Kuac South and North Payams of Gogrial West County. 414 local seed sellers participated with 2,200 vulnerable households in four payams receiving 41.2 MT of seeds (23.6 MT of sorghum and 17.6 MT of groundnuts) plus 2200 tools for land preparation. Both sellers and buyers are looking forward to a profitable season of cultivation. A total of 165,715 South Sudanese Pounds (41428 Euros) was paid to the local traders.

*Story by Yohana Tong, Peter arol and Nondi Daniel (Agriculture team)*

**Briefings from the Field**

**Note from the Beny Dit**

With the ground ploughed and the seeds planted, the villages now watch daily in hope that the rains will keep flowing and that their crops will grow. The last couple of dry weeks have left people nervous, making people more aware of the need for improved farming methods and good seeds. At the PARIS supported school farms, children have cleared the ground and are starting to marvel at the foods they are trying to grow. The wet season vegetable gardeners are also making preparations for the years ahead.

In livestock, as the wet season approach, the cattle start to return towards the villages. Those animals trained for use on the ox-plough are now also laboring hard. In some regions of South Sudan the livestock sickness is too high in the villages and this is preventing the use of the ox-ploughs. Yet, in Gogrial East County, with the support of the VSF G supported Community Animal Health Workers, these animals are remaining healthy to continue their contribution to the county’s food security.

*From Tinega (PARIS Consortium Project Manager)*