About the project

Project goal
- The overall initiative goal is to contribute to the reduction of small-scale farmers and agro-pastoralists producers’ vulnerability, accelerate their recovery, and enhance long-term resilience to the overlapping impacts of COVID-19 and other shocks.

Objectives
Working with VBAs, SOLO aims to
- Support VBAs through incentives to play multiple roles such as technology transfer, knowledge dissemination and feedback loop to suppliers.
- Build the capacity of VBAs and their associations on customer database management to forecast demand for inputs in order to minimize the challenge of low seasonal demand.
- Strengthen VBA associations to act as entry points in training and certification, bulk procurement of inputs and implementation of seed subsidy schemes.
- Support linkages between breeders and seed enterprises with VBAs in the dissemination of information on improved inputs, sustaining VBA-agro-led demos and creating a feedback loop for farmers.
Geographic focus
Activities

- Training of SOLO core team on the VBA model facilitated by FIPS in Nairobi for two weeks.
- Develop selection criteria and training manual for VBAs was completed under guidance from FIPS.
- Recruitment of Village-Based Advisors was done in partnership with MOA and the village elders and vetted by the DG.
- Conducted VBA Training for 120 trainees selected and supported to distribute the seed packs to farmers in their designated areas.
- Selection of demonstration sites will be done for riverine areas while on-farm demonstrations are ongoing under the guidance of the VBAs and the SOLO field team.

Outputs

- 120 VBAs have been recruited so far and have been trained to support 100 farmers each in the following locations;
  - Jubaland
  - Hirshebelle, and
  - South West State
- 12,000 farmers will be reached by the VBAs with the small seed packs which will be monitored in a structured method using the VBA model and log books during the short rains season.
Selection and training of VBAs

- Village Based Advisors (VBAs) selection process was conducted at the Ministry of Agriculture office. Present during the selection exercise were The Minister, DG MoA and community leaders from the target areas.
- So far 120 VBA have been recruited and trained in line with the project targets.
- The delay has been occasioned by the time taken in selection and vetting of the VBAs in the two locations.
- In Jubaland- The 40 selected VBAs received two days training in two batches consisting of 20 participants guided by the locations or districts.
- In Hirshebelle- While the first batch of VBAs training and seed distribution for Jowhar and Balcad,
- In South West- The 40 selected VBAs received two days training in two batches consisting of 20 participants.
- The VBAs were trained on the qualities & characteristics of a good VBA, importance of whole village (house to house) concept, small packs and how to fill VBA log books.
Distribution of Small Packs

- **21,600** Seed packs distributed in Jubaland (Maize, sorghum and cowpea supplied by HornAgro):
  - 7560 Maize small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs,
  - 7992 Sorghum small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs,
  - 6048 Cow pea small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs

- **20,200** Seed packs distributed in South West State (Maize, Sorghum, cowpea, Mung bean supplied by CSET seed production company):
  - 5,800 Maize small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs,
  - 8,700 Sorghum small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs,
  - 2,200 Cowpea small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs

- **14,400** Seed packs distributed in Hirshebelle (Maize and Sorghum supplied by Filsan):
  - 7,200 of maize small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs,
  - 7,200 of sorghum small packs packed and distributed among the 40 VBAs
Photos from the three regions
Planned activities

- SOLO is now focusing on follow-up activities with VBAs using the VBA logbooks with technical backstopping from FIPS.
- The farmer demonstration plots have been established where seed distribution has been done, however, the training demos will be established in riverine areas during this season and expanded to the rain fed during the long rains, this is guided by the prediction of rainfall in the horn of Africa.
- Setting up communication with the farmers and TV and radio awareness (Partnership with UTV has been finalized)
- Recruit and train a further 120 VBAs in the three locations and distribute seedpacks for the long rains
- Setting up the VBA association and building their capacity to play the role of seed distribution agents and deploying digital up-Isubira to coordinate and manage transactions and communications among value chain actors.
Challenges

- Vetting of VBAs took longer between the MOAI and the community leaders delaying training and seed distribution. This was mitigated through the intervention of Mr. Keynan and the federal Government.

- There is Great expectations from farmers given the work of other INGOs like FAO and WFP who have trained some farmers, distributed seeds (different crops 10kg for each crop to every farmer) and are also giving monthly stipend to the farmers.

- Government bureaucracy especially the regional administration and their involvement in the recruitment and vetting the VBAs.

- Security challenges especially around Hirshebelle
Lessons

- The support and enthusiasm from the Federal as well as the regional governments in embracing the VBA model as well as the seedpacks is encouraging. SOLO is looking forward to working closely with the two levels of government to reach more farmers and to build the capacity of more extension staff to upscale the model.

- The uptake by the VBAs gave a good initial indication of the response from farmers to the seedpacks, being their first time to interact with the model.

- We will pick more lessons as we employ the follow up with data from logbooks and especially the long rains season.