

Gender-Responsive Approaches for the Promotion of Improved Maize Seed in Africa



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Introduction

Improved maize seed is essential for African farming systems because of its relatively higher yield potential, better adaptation to common biotic and abiotic stresses such as diseases, pests, drought and low nutrients, and more efficient use of water. Some improved maize germplasm such as orange maize is bred for better nutritional content. Adoption of improved maize seed is very important in the smallholder agricultural subsector, where adoption rates for improved maize seed varieties are generally low. For instance, a recent study in five countries estimated the following rates of adoption: 28 percent in Mozambique; 48 percent in Malawi; 56 percent in Tanzania; 58 percent in Ethiopia; and 70 percent in Kenya. These statistics however, do not reveal differences in adoption intensity and adoption rates across space and demographic groups. More importantly, several studies have revealed that women farmers are less likely to use improved seed than men, leading to relatively lower productivity levels. These gender gaps represent real costs to households, seed companies, agro-dealers and society. With widespread support from donors, national governments and research institutions, the seed sector in eastern and southern Africa has rapidly evolved in ways that have greatly altered the landscape of seed delivery to smallholder farmers. As the types and volumes of improved maize seeds increase, several questions arise: How do men and women farmers learn about the performance of these new improved maize varieties compared to those that they presently grow? Which approaches are most effective in reaching different demographic groups? How can one ensure that women get opportunities to learn about and access improved maize varieties?

Purpose

This publication provides basic guidelines on how to create awareness about improved maize seed varieties in ways that enhance farmers' decision-making process and bridge knowledge gaps between men and women. It is complemented by tools for gender-sensitive demos, data collection from field days, and gender-responsive budgeting for creating awareness. These guidelines target public and private organizations that are involved in promoting improved seed varieties.

These include:

- Private seed companies,
- Agro-dealers,
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs),
- Local agricultural extension services, and
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).



Rationale for gender-responsive awareness creation approaches

Men and women play important and often complementary roles in agriculture. Women in all their diversity (women who head their own households, women who head their households in the absence of their spouses, married women who co-reside with their spouses, widows, old, young, rich, poor etc.) are actively involved in decision-making on seed adoption and use as well as seed preservation. However, very often cultural norms, attitudes, and practices limit the extent to which women are able to access information about technologies such as improved seed. Some of these norms limit women's mobility and their ability to engage with outside partners or formal social networks. In addition, women have limited overall decision-making power. In most households, men and women are likely to discuss together what seeds to purchase. It is therefore important that both spouses have similar and up-to-date information on the performance of available seed varieties. Thus, approaches

to the creation of customer awareness of the performance of available seed varieties also need to take into account gender-based constraints, in order to facilitate an equitable flow of information between men and women farmers. Awareness is a necessary condition for sustained adoption. For new varieties to be widely adopted by smallholder farmers, they need to perform well under given agro-ecological conditions, demonstrate yield stability, be readily accessible from traceable and trusted sources, be affordable, and be complemented with essential agronomic decision-support tools. Increased farm-level demand for improved seed results in higher profit margins for companies that deliver the best basket of options for men and women farmers. As seed companies thrive, so will families and communities, provided that weather and other conditions are favorable for crops to thrive.

Approaches for awareness creation

Seed companies often use a combination of promotional approaches to create awareness of improved maize seed varieties among farmers. These approaches include demonstration plots (demos), field days, small seed packs, corporate wear, apparel, national and community radio, television, printed materials such as leaflets and brochures, advertisements in newspapers and magazines, mobile road shows, agricultural shows, seed fairs, billboards and other forms of signage, lead farmers, videos, documentaries, bulk text messaging and, increasingly, social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and so forth (see figure below).



Figure 1: Promotional approaches for improved maize seeds



Given limited promotional budgets and the fact that no single promotional approach will work for everyone, the questions that arise are:

- Which of these approaches are effective in facilitating adoption?
- Which ones are effective at reaching a certain demographic group?
 - ◇ Men (old and young)?
 - ◇ Women (old, young, married etc.)?
 - ◇ Both men and women equally?

Gender-responsive demos and field days

Demos and field days are by far the most effective way to demonstrate the actual performance of different types of improved maize seed. When accompanied by small seed samples, demos are more effective at influencing farmers' decision-making than any other approach.

Several reasons make demos the most effective at building awareness:

- Firstly, “seeing is believing”; farmers are able to see the performance of different varieties from planting to harvesting and utilization.
- Secondly, demos can be combined with effective agronomic knowledge-sharing that includes timing of planting, seed spacing and plant population management, application of complementary inputs such as inorganic and organic fertilizers, timing for weeding and harvesting etc.

Key issues to consider when
planning and organizing demos
in order to maximize impact



Women groups facilitate better access to a wider range of women in given communities

Women farmers should be selected to host the demo

Demos can also be hosted by a man or woman within households

INCLUSIVE APPROACHES



Hosting of demos and farmer selection

In a typical community, male farmers generally host demonstrations or play the role of lead farmers. Lead farmers are usually selected by the village chief or the community. When selecting lead farmers, chiefs and other leaders should be encouraged to select women farmers at local meetings. Village chiefs often base their decision on what resources men farmers own, such as land; this excludes relatively resource-poor farmers and women. Therefore, it is important to select lead farmers and or role model farmers based on equity rather than resources like land. Where possible, teams should try to situate demos such that the hosts represent the demographic composition of a given locality. Ideally, half of all demos should be hosted by women. Similarly, half of all sample seed packs should be directly distributed to women. Women's groups facilitate better access to a wider

range of women in given communities. Men and women's networks tend to differ – even among married couples. By situating demos with women and women's groups, one increases the chances of reaching more women, who would otherwise be missed if all demos were hosted by men. Since men and women are not homogenous groups, the selection criteria should maximize diversity in terms of age (both old and young), socio-economic status (both rich and poor), ethnicity, marital status, and so forth. Where demos are hosted by a man or woman within households, inclusive approaches (sometimes called household approaches) should be used to engage both spouses in the establishment and management of the demo. Importantly, farmer selection needs to be done at least a month ahead of the season's onset.



Harnessing extension workers to influence change

Demo management is best led by local extension officers (government or NGOs or CBOs) who can facilitate participatory processes for selecting hosts. In many countries, extension services – both private and public – are predominantly staffed by men. Seed companies have some level of control over whom they hire. Ideally, seed companies can try to build gender-balanced teams of extension staff as a way of effectively reaching men and women farmers. Women extension workers play a critical role in cultural contexts that limit the interaction of women household members with men extension workers or any male outsiders. Women farmers may feel comfortable discussing certain issues with fellow women. Therefore, governments, seed

companies and NGOs should continue to lead efforts to ensure that women extension workers and lead farmers receive training, information and improved technologies to take the message about improved seed to women farmers. Given the rapid turnover of seed varieties due to genetic improvements, men and women extension workers need to keep abreast not only of new technologies, but also of new ways of fostering awareness and encouraging adoption. Moreover, local extension teams have the capacity to harness the power of mobile phones, to spread the word about field days in ways that were not previously possible.



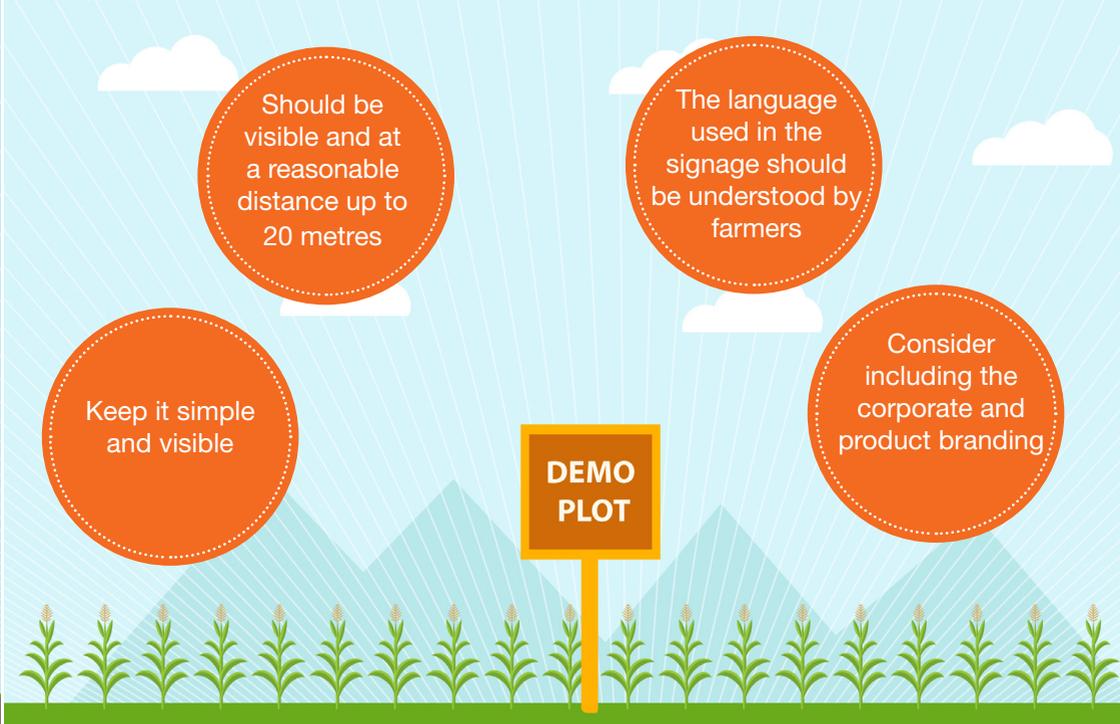
Distribution of demos need to be even in all possible areas where farmers are located

Field days should be conducted in areas that ensure coverage of all demographic groups across the landscape

Geographical spread

Demonstration plots tend to be located in 'high visibility' areas such as along major roads and highways. Motorists and individuals who pass by these roads are able to view the performance of specific varieties. However, roadside demos have a number of limitations. Firstly, they are not accessible to individuals with limited mobility, especially women. Secondly, both men and women farmers seldom get the opportunity to interact with extension officers or agronomists from seed companies, in order to learn about

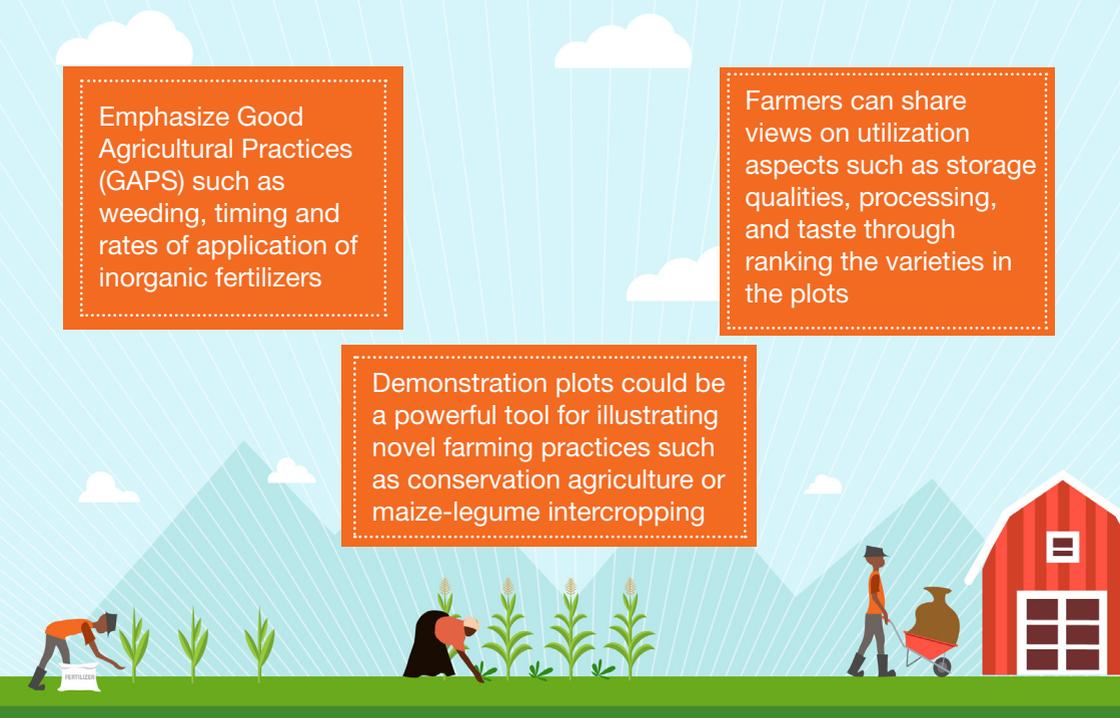
specific varieties throughout the season. Therefore, in order to build awareness among all demographic groups within a locality, those managing demos need to carry out a situation analysis to ensure the even distribution of demos in all possible areas where farmers are located. Similarly, field days should be conducted in areas that ensure coverage of all demographic groups across the landscape. Geo-referencing of field day locations allows teams to monitor and learn over time.



Demo signage

Awareness creation using demos can only be successful with appropriate signage at the demos – “keep it simple and visible”. In order to capture the interest of both men and women farmers, it is imperative that demo signage should be clearly visible from a reasonable distance, up to 20 meters away. The language used in the signage should be understandable by farmers. Corporate and product branding has a lot of impact on creating interest in a specific improved seed variety, particularly in demos where multiple products from a number of seed companies are being

demonstrated. Some of the questions to consider when developing demo signage should include these: Will the signage enable ease of understanding of the seed products among smallholder farmers? What language is best understood by the target audience for the demo? What symbols would best represent the product among the target clientele? After visiting or seeing the demo, will farmers be able to remember the seed product?



Emphasize Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS) such as weeding, timing and rates of application of inorganic fertilizers

Farmers can share views on utilization aspects such as storage qualities, processing, and taste through ranking the varieties in the plots

Demonstration plots could be a powerful tool for illustrating novel farming practices such as conservation agriculture or maize-legume intercropping

Agronomy

For pay off from investments in improved seed, men and women farmers need to adopt new crop management and agronomic practices. Well-managed demos should therefore be combined with effective, season-long learning opportunities similar to the Farmer Field Schools concept. Extension workers and agronomists should integrate effective messages on all aspects associated with maize production, commonly referred to as Good Agricultural Practices (GAPS). Depending on available budgets, it is important to convene the broader community at planting, grain filling and harvesting stages. Aspects such as weeding, timing, and rates of application of inorganic fertilizers should be emphasized. Additionally, where possible, farmers can also share their views on utilization aspects such as storage qualities, processing, and taste at the time of harvesting, by having

a few farmers rank the varieties in the plots. The ranking should be done by both men and women following simple criteria to bring out differences in perception of processing characteristics in particular. With regards to demonstration plot size, typical plots are small, usually 3x3 meters or at best 5x5 meters. We recommend that – budgets allowing – some demonstration plots should be relatively larger (10x10 meters or, land permitting, half an acre, but on different farms) to fully demonstrate the plant stand, yield, and other aspects. This allows farmers to have a complete visual of varietal performance at scale. In addition, since maize is often integrated into a farming system, demonstration plots could be a powerful tool for illustrating new farming practices such as conservation agriculture or maize-legume intercropping.

We recommend that at least half of the field days be convened at women-managed plots

Teams planning field days should budget for child care, and where possible, child feeding options, in order to encourage nursing mothers to attend

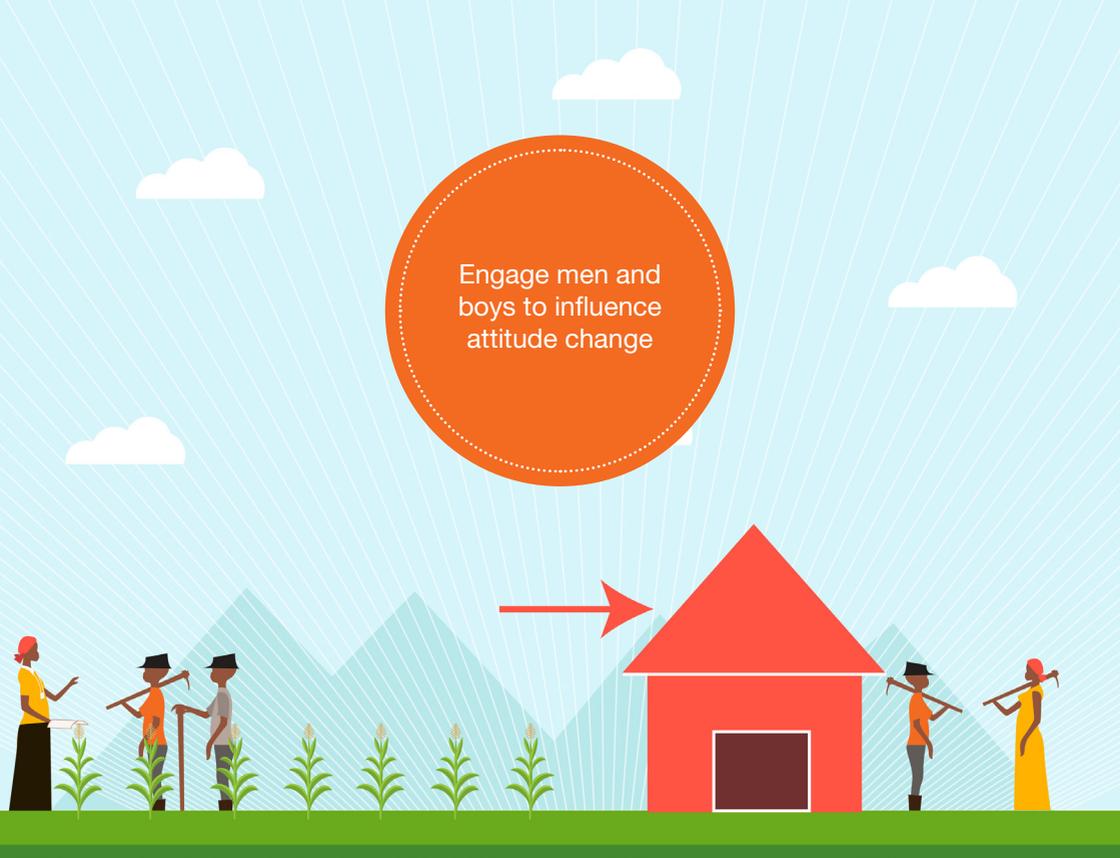
Field days must be convened on days and times that are most convenient for women



Timing and execution of field days

Field days are often convened at a subset of demo locations. We recommend that at least half of the field days be convened at women-managed plots. In addition, it is important to provide women with the opportunity to share their perspectives and views on the performance of various varieties and their experience of hosting demos. Moreover, given women's multiple responsibilities within households, field days must be convened on days and times that are most convenient for women. Teams planning field days should budget

for child care, and where possible, child feeding options, to encourage nursing mothers to attend. In contexts where specific demographic groups (for instance men and youth) are underrepresented at field days, teams should find out reasons for this and develop strategies for (i) making sure they attend, or (ii) alternative ways of reaching them with the same information.



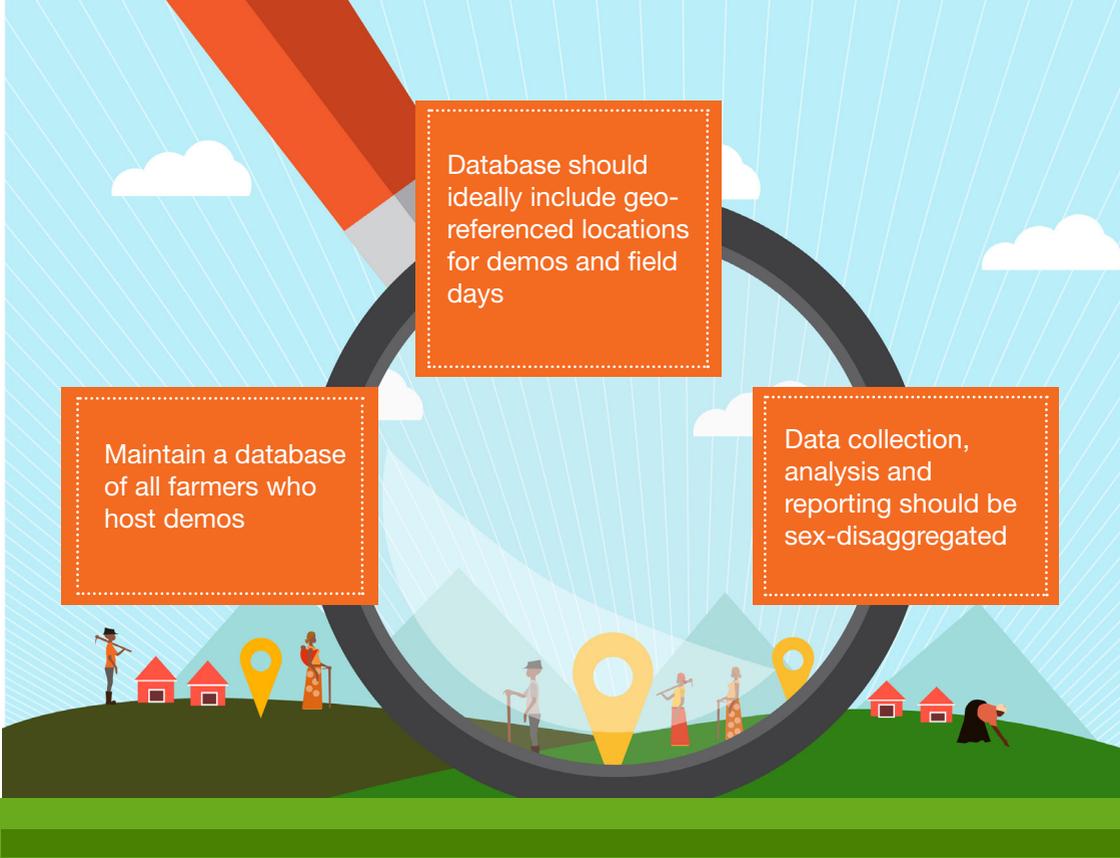
Engage men and boys to influence attitude change

Engaging men and boys in the discourse on the adoption of improved seeds

In communities where, cultural norms limit the participation of women in seed purchasing or in development activities, it is important to engage men and boys at a young age to influence attitude change.

Tailored messages can effectively encourage men to:

- i. Allow their spouses to learn about new varieties through demos, field days, and other events,
- ii. Discuss all aspects of farming, including seed choices, with their spouses and other women in their households,
- iii. Enable and encourage their spouses and other women in their households to be involved in seed purchasing, and
- iv. Engage in village and community wide learning opportunities.



Database should ideally include geo-referenced locations for demos and field days

Maintain a database of all farmers who host demos

Data collection, analysis and reporting should be sex-disaggregated

Monitoring and learning

Seed companies, farmers, extension workers and researchers have an opportunity to learn about men and women farmers' preferences, as well as patterns of participation in field days and demos. Therefore, data management is important to foster effective feedback loops. We recommend maintaining a database of all farmers who host demos and keeping a record of field day attendance disaggregated by gender and farmer feedback. The database should ideally include geo-referenced locations for demos and field days. Most smart phones come with inbuilt applications

for recording Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates, which eliminates the need to purchase extra gadgets. Also, socio-economic surveys and focus group discussions provide useful information on behavior change among farmers as well as constraints and opportunities. All data collection, analysis and reporting should be sex-disaggregated. Analysts should identify gaps that exist and suggest alternative approaches to reach specific sub-groups with information on improved seed varieties.



Effective partnerships

In order to maximize profits, seed companies aim to capitalize on sales and expand their market share within the framework of a competitive seed market, which offers farmers a wide range of improved seed options and choices. Therefore, in addition to demos and field days that are managed by individual companies, other partners such as extension agents and NGOs have a role

to play in demonstrating the performance of varieties from more than one company – as long as they are suitable for the agro-ecological zone and altitude. Executing these demonstration plots therefore requires effective partnership between seed companies, local extension, and NGOs.

Other promotional approaches

When using the approaches described in this brief, such as demos, field days, small seed packs, and other promotional approaches listed in figure 1, the basic principle is to ensure equal opportunities for all demographic groups to learn about available improved varieties.

Teams should develop or adapt decision-making tools that can guide investments in promotion. Key questions to ask are: Which sub-group do we hope to reach? What constraints do they face (e.g. literacy, mobility, time etc.). What is the most appropriate way to reach specific sub-groups? For instance, apparel is often a preferred way of promoting

specific brands and seed types. The ‘gold standard’ for apparel investments is often t-shirts and caps, but these are seldom appropriate for women farmers. Can marketing teams explore culturally appropriate and desirable forms of apparel – in consultation with different demographic groups? For example, branded wrap cloths (chitenje or kitenge), head gear and branded cloth shopping bags are considered to be preferred by women farmers in Africa. Furthermore, can radio programs be developed in local languages and aired at a time that maximizes the chances of reaching both men and women farmers?



“Branded wrap cloths (chitenje or kitenge), head gear and branded cloth shopping bags are considered to be more preferred by women farmers in Africa”

Conclusion

The genetic gains from breeding efforts have not fully paid off at farm level. One of the greatest challenges of our time is to foster higher levels of adoption of improved seed among men and women farmers. As seed companies rapidly commercialize new, improved varieties, it is important to develop effective ways of ensuring that farmers learn about alternative options. This guide has attempted to provide tips on how to promote new varieties in ways that create awareness more generally – and among women in particular. This

guide is most useful for teams that are involved in developing promotion strategies. It should be complemented by use of relevant tools such as the gender responsive promotion budgeting tool, demos and field days data collection tools. Overall effective promotional efforts must be matched with timely delivery of appropriate seed varieties in localities where they can be easily accessed by all farmers including women and youth.

Checklist: Gender-responsive
promotional approaches for improved
maize varieties



Checklist: Gender-responsive promotional approaches for improved maize varieties

How to use the gender checklist

The following checklist should be implemented by partners in the seed sector when promoting improved maize seed, to enhance knowledge, access to, and adoption levels among women and men farmers. This checklist should be used hand in hand with this guideline and it is also complemented by tools for gender responsive demonstrations (demos), data collection from field days, and budgeting tool for promotion.

1. General Situation Analysis	
Identify target geographies for product promotion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assess constraints that men and women face in accessing information in target geographies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evaluate best mix of promotional approaches to reach men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify partners with whom to work on promotional activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Demonstration Plots	
Initiate participatory process of identifying demo hosts at least a month ahead of the planting season	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve local extension partners in identifying farmers and managing demos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure that half of all demo hosts are women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve both spouses in establishment and management of demos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify and situate demos among women's groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify and locate alternative demo hosts, such as schools, religious organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain an accurate database of demo hosts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Locate demos evenly across space – move beyond roadside demos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrate agronomic knowledge-sharing on plant population management, timing for planting and weeding, conservation agriculture, fertilizer application timing and rates, intercropping etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Establish clear signage for specific varieties	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where possible establish demos on bigger plots of land	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where possible demonstrate the performance of more than one variety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilitate knowledge-sharing among farmers throughout the year e.g. at planting, grain filling, harvesting, storage and utilization	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Field Days	
Identify locations where field days will be held at least a month ahead of time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure that half of all field days are held at women-managed plots	<input type="checkbox"/>
Publicize the field day as widely as possible to all demographic groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Convene field days on days and times that are convenient, especially for women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make arrangements to accommodate infants, to facilitate the effective participation of nursing mothers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Systematically collect data on participation and preferences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve women and youth – as key speakers – in sharing experiences on improved seeds	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve chiefs and local men and women leaders, to influence attitudes on gender equality in seed knowledge, access, and adoption	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Seed Packs	
Distribute half of all seed packs to women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve women's groups in distributing seed packs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distribute to diverse demographic groups – youth and the poor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where possible include more than one variety and improved legumes	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Apparel	
Involve women and men in designing appropriate promotional apparel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involve youth in designing appropriate promotional apparel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allocate budget equally for men and women's apparel	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Other Promotional Approaches	
Determine alternative promotional approaches (agricultural shows, seed fairs, billboards and other forms of signage, videos, documentaries etc.) that are effective in reaching men, women, and youth	<input type="checkbox"/>
For print and bulk text messaging, utilize language that is accessible to men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop and air community radio programs at a time that is convenient for women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use symbols that are clear for both men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Determine what social media approaches (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc.) can effectively reach men, women and youth in particular	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Monitoring and Learning	
Collect sex-disaggregated data	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure that you create an environment where individuals can comfortably share their preferences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analyze data and understand men's and women's preferences and reasons for choosing certain varieties of maize when planting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify demographic groups that are difficult to reach	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify the most effective ways of reaching different demographic groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Share information widely with all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop and refine strategies for promotion based on new knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Team Composition and Capacity Building	
Build extension teams that have equal representation of men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide training opportunities for both men and women team members	<input type="checkbox"/>

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See CIMMYT Gender-responsive tools for demos and field days data collection.

See CIMMYT Gender-responsive budgeting tool for the promotion of improved maize seed in africa

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