

Seed fairs in Kenya

Teacher notes

**Seed Fairs in Kenya:
Sharing varieties and promoting diversity**

It is vital that traditional crop varieties are not lost

Seed fairs are events where people can buy and sell seeds from local varieties of plants

Farmers save seeds from their harvest. They sell some at local seed fairs. This ensures that the local varieties are exchanged and continue to be grown from one season to the next



A seed fair in Northern Kenya

Seed fairs are a very good method of promoting diversity

Seed fairs in Kenya

If farmers plant new varieties and especially GM varieties of seeds, there is a danger that the original varieties will be forgotten about and eventually disappear.

It is very important that these seeds (and the genetic diversity that they contain) are not lost. Therefore they must be grown from one year to the next.

If farmers do not save (and exchange seed) they need to buy new seed for the next growing season.

If they are tempted to use GM seeds, there is a chance that the seeds contain a 'terminator gene' or are 'suicide seeds' These plants will not reproduce the following year. They have been genetically modified by the seed companies who sell the seed so that the seeds produced are not fertile. That means that the farmer has to buy new seed every year.

In the UK, organisations such as Ryton Organic Gardens hold a Heritage Seed library which contains the largest collection of native seed varieties in Europe. Also in the UK, events called Seed Sundays are held where farmers and gardeners can exchange and buy native seeds.

How do seed fairs help to promote agricultural biodiversity?

Farmers can get a greater variety of locally adapted seeds and can exchange relevant local farming knowledge



Local varieties of crops may be better adapted to the local soils and weather conditions than the commercially-produced seeds which have threatened to replace them

Seed fairs ensure that traditional crop varieties are not lost – that they are grown more widely

Seed fairs promote biodiversity

Seed fairs keep alive a technology that is appropriate and sustainable to poor and marginal farmers. These local seeds are also more resilient to changes in weather patterns and to climate changes.

Jane Kirambia's story


Jane is a farmer living in Northern Kenya with her school teacher husband and three children. This area of Kenya has struggled with drought and many people have had to sell their animals or move away from the area to survive.



Jane is one of the participants in the local seed fairs that were set up by Practical Action. She uses the seed fairs to buy and sell local seed and to swap local knowledge.

Jane is well known in the area and people come to her for information on the best plants to grow

Jane has 8 acres of land. She grows maize, sorghum, green grams, cowpeas, melons, gourds, pumpkins and pigeon peas to feed her family.



She also grows some cotton, which she sells at the nearest village market. She keeps animals which provide organic manure. Her husband sometimes helps with the farming

Jane grows up to 10 varieties each of sorghum, millet and maize. Many of them are locally developed and adapted to local conditions.

This helps to keep her crops and the seeds that she sells healthy.

Jane's family now has enough food each season

Jane Karimba's story

Find out more about seed fairs and biodiversity

- Practical Action
www.practicalaction.org/?id=seed_fairs_and_biodiversity
www.practicalaction.org/?id=farmers_cse_study
- Garden Organic – the Heritage Seed Library
www.gardenorganic.org.uk/hsl/index.php

Find out more