



Photo: TSURO (SKI partner)

The ChimaniMbeu Market: A case study of how a seed market has grown seed sovereignty in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe

Written by Elfrieda Pschorn-Strauss

“ We now have our own seed and can plant when it rains instead of looking for money to buy seed or needing to wait for government handouts.

Women and men farmers working with TSURO

Introduction: From seed savers to seed buyers and back again

Farmers are dependent on seeds, that is clear. But what seems to be less understood is the complex challenges they face to source their choice of quality seed varieties in time for planting, year after year. Over decades, a range of external factors collided to erode the ancient farmer seed system in southern Africa, replacing nutritious and hardy indigenous crops, such as sorghum and the millets, with maize, and then since 1950s, with hybrid maize. The widespread adoption of hybrid maize meant that many farmers shifted from being seed savers to seed buyers and recipients of

seed aid. They also shifted from growing a diversity of crops to predominantly growing maize. People's diets reflected these changes in cropping patterns, with refined white maize becoming the dominant food item. A decline in crop diversity and farmer seed production not only impacted health, but also meant that whole communities lost the knowledge, skills, and social and institutional frameworks necessary for maintaining a resilient seed system (Fischer, 2021; Marshak et al., 2021). It is thus proposed that to revive the resilience of community seed systems it would be important to follow a commons-based approach, where farmers collectively take responsibility for the handling, breeding and sharing of seed (Kliem, 2022).

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In 2015, Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation (TSURO), an organisation working in Chimanimani District, Zimbabwe, responded to the growing seed security crisis they saw around them by deliberately focusing on community-based seed systems and finding ways to ensure farmers had access to good quality open-pollinated varieties (OPVs) of seed. In partnership with the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), TSURO began strengthening local seed systems by training staff and farmers in a range of relevant skills, initiating farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities, and organising several seed fairs. The idea of having a seed market evolved as farmers' seed production improved and they were producing quality seed in sufficient quantities to sell. The seed market, aptly named ChimaniMbeu (*Mbeu* means "seed" in Shona), aims to facilitate a market outlet for those farmers that have been trained in seed production. The market makes a diversity of good quality OPV seeds available to all farmers in the district and to ensure that even marginalised farmers have access to seed. Critically, the market also presents an opportunity to showcase the importance of community-based seed

systems and to validate the rights of farmers to save, exchange and sell seed.

This case study is the product of a partnership between SKI and TSURO. Information was collected from a range of reports and interviews over five years, from 2017 to 2021. Participatory mapping processes with communities provided in depth information on the context, agroecology practices, seed diversity, and food security. This case study was further enriched with in-depth interviews with NGO staff and seed custodians as well as from farmers' stories of change.

The case study begins by describing the market's context – its unique location, prevailing farming practices, and implications for community seed systems and wellbeing. The reader is then introduced to the market's pioneer host organisation, TSURO, and their journey in working with seed. The case study presents the guiding principles around which the seed market is organised, and examines ChimaniMbeu's impact, comprising positive outcomes as well as dilemmas and future ideas.

BOX 1:

Open-pollinated varieties – why do they matter?

Open-pollinated varieties (OPVs) are seed varieties that are multiplied through random fertilisation — either self-fertilising (such as wheat, finger millet, rice, and beans) or cross pollinating (including pearl millet, maize, and sunflowers). OPVs include what's called farmers' varieties, local varieties, traditional varieties, and landraces. These are all terms describing a population of plants that resulted from a combination of natural and farmers' selection practices. OPVs can also include seed bred by research institutions or seed companies, by crossing select varieties to create a crop with specific, desired characteristics. This seed can be certified and form part of what is called the 'formal' seed system. OPVs are however not popular with seed companies because farmers do not have to buy seed each year as with hybrid seed, i.e. they can save the seed they bought to use for future planting seasons.

OPVs are best suited for smallholder farmers because they can be saved from year to year without paying royalties to any company and without the seed losing its vigour. They also contribute to the resilience of the seed system in any farming area as they represent diversity and plasticity, two qualities important for climate adaptation. However, OPVs are not a guarantee for diversity: the introduction and marketing of a specific high yielding OPV can crowd out other varieties and lead to a decline in diversity.

Context: The more farmers buy seed, the less they remember how to produce a variety of good quality seed themselves.

Where farmers used to rely on their own experience and knowledge to farm and produce seed, they are now encouraged to become dependent on handouts and agricultural inputs and to wait for extension officers and representatives from agrochemical companies to advise them. This has led to a de-skilling of farmers and an enormous loss of knowledge, and with it, agency and the freedom to act in response to changing environmental conditions (Marshak et al., 2021). Agency is an adaptive capacity and a quality of resilience.

Chimanimani is a district in the eastern part of Zimbabwe, unique in the sense that it includes all five of the country's agroecological zones. Most families here grow food and it's predominantly maize. In drier and more remote areas, farmers are more likely to grow small grains as well. With the exception of maize seed, farmers mostly use seed they save or acquire from the local market.

A 2015 baseline study commissioned by SKI in the area examined seed practices around maize. It looked at the type of seed used, and at seed improvement, multiplication, and preservation skills. The study showed that:

- 78% of households in Chimanimani buy hybrid maize seed;
- 76% of the households use some bought OPVs; and
- 35% of households use farm-saved seed.

While it was common for a single household to use all three types of attaining maize seed, only 40% of households reported that they felt confident in multiplying seed and only 36% felt they had the knowledge to improve seed (Mutizwa, 2015). For a community so dependent on seed, this low level of proficiency was of great concern. Many farmers did not treat their seed any differently than grain, and would just use leftover grain when it was time to sow. The only exceptions were those farmers considered seed custodians – they understood the difference!

Why would farmers buy hybrid maize seed rather than OPVs or save their own seed? Because for decades government and extension officers have exclusively promoted hybrid maize and it is also the seed handed out in seed aid programmes, or when subsidised seed is provided. *"Marketing pressure from seed companies*

is exercised all the way down to ward level as companies identify lead farmers in each ward and ask them to serve as their sales agent." Farmers, especially small-scale farmers, face a real dilemma between the high cost of hybrid seed backed by extension officers and the promise of progress, and OPV seed of less certain quality and yield. *"The price of hybrid maize seed though is high so the take up by smallholder farmers is low. Yet the quality of OPV seed is not always high so yields can be low. This discourages some farmers from planting"* (Wilson, 2017).

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Local markets are not well understood as a source of seed, but a 10-year study on seed systems in developing countries highlighted their importance and concluded that 51% of farmers' seed is acquired from local, informal markets (Sperling, 2009). When it comes to small grains, groundnuts, and bambara nut seed, farmers rely mostly on farm-saved seed, whether their own or acquired from neighbours or family (Progressio, 2009).

The picture is thus a complex one and also dynamic, with farmers' seed sources changing as circumstances change. What is conclusive from our own surveys and discussions with farmers, is that much agrobiodiversity has been lost and with it the knowledge on how to grow these crops, and how to produce and save seed.

TSURO and its seed activism

TSURO began work as a grassroots organisation in 2002 and formally registered as an NGO in 2009 (see www.tsuro-chimanimani.org.zw). It works across 75% of the wards in Chimanimani District, empowering communities towards sustaining their natural resource base and improving food security. With their focus on seed, TSURO also aims to enhance seed diversity, knowledge, access, production, and quality – in particular of open-pollinated varieties. Their first step was to train staff on seed production at the

“ Enhancing seed diversity, knowledge, access, production, and quality.

International Crops Research Institute for the semi-arid tropics (ICRISAT) in Bulawayo. This was followed by training 45 farmers identified as seed custodians (62% of these were women), in seed production, selection, storage, and exchange. Several seed study groups, with around 25 members each, were formed to spread this knowledge from seed custodians to other farmers. TSURO also facilitated farmer training, farmer action learning groups, exchange visits, field days, and seed fairs. These are now the key processes they use to promote farmer-to-farmer learning on seed systems (Wilson, 2017).

Seed fairs have been particularly effective and vibrant opportunities for exchanging knowledge and seed, and showcasing the importance of agrobiodiversity to other farmers. Communities now organise their own seed fairs at ward level, while TSURO organises several seed fairs at cluster¹ level, as well as a district level seed fair. In 2016 these seed fairs attracted 247 seed exhibitors and 805 attendees (Wilson, 2017). This grew to 348 exhibitors in 2020, a number tempered by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mukonoweshuro, 2021). According to TSURO staff, the quality of training provided at seed fairs is high as it is carried out with support from the Department of Agriculture's seed specialists.

The farmers interviewed in 2017 said: *“The learning processes have increased the skills and knowledge of a core group of farmers on agroecology and OPV seed.”* Farmers claimed they are now “skilled enough to train others and are training neighbouring farmers.” (Wilson, 2017). Between the TSURO learning processes and training by core farmers, farmers estimated that there were at least 210 farmers (10 farmers per ward)² whose agroecology practices included using mostly OPV seed at that time.

Apart from promoting OPVs, TSURO also encouraged farmers to use more drought tolerant legumes and small grains such as millets and sorghum because of the impact of recurrent droughts on maize production

in the area. *“Farmers that are planting more small grains are getting food whereas those planting hybrid maize may not get food”* (Agritex official in Wilson, 2019). According to TSURO staff, there is increased appreciation and acceptance of both small grains and OPV seed. *“Unlike before, people are rushing to buy OPVs at seed fairs whereas before, the bias was to buy and plant hybrid maize”* (Wilson, 2019). *“OPVs can be used over and over again. They are a more sustainable way to farm”* (Wilson, 2019).

From seed fairs to seed markets

TSURO and SKI's investment in strengthening community seed systems in Chimanimani paid off. Within a short space of time, farmers' capability to produce and improve seed grew tremendously. At the many seed fairs, it was clear that the quantity, quality, and diversity of seed has shown great improvement and farmers were now producing a surplus of good quality seed. More had to be done to facilitate seed exchange and harness seeds' economic potential. A seed market seemed the best way to go and so ChimaniMbeu was born.

A 2017 flyer advertising the market explained its purpose as follows:

- **Small farmers need better access to quality seed of their choice, including traditional and open pollinated farmer varieties that are not easily found in shops.**
- **Farmers want to uphold their right to produce and exchange their own seed and reuse it from year to year.**
- **Resilient community based seed systems are very important for food security. TSURO and many other stakeholders, therefore, support efforts to work towards SEED SOVEREIGNTY IN ZIMBABWE.**

This purpose statement makes it very clear that the market is not only about the technical aspects of seed, but also about promoting farmers' rights and seed sovereignty.

¹ A cluster is made up of 4-5 wards on average and would have names such as Lowveld, Central, Rusito and Eastern.

² This is a low estimate. It was given by women in one focus group discussion. However, all people interviewed were asked to estimate the number of farmers practicing agroecology and OPV seed use. One seed custodian said that 36 households in her ward practice agroecology. A second said that 44 households in his ward practice agroecology and that he had trained 14 of them.



Photo: TSURO (SKI partner)

Organising principles for a seed market

TSURO and the farmers gave ChimaniMbeu a lot of thought before organising the first market. They defined its overall purpose, which is to strengthen the resilience of community seed systems and to ensure equitable access to a diversity of seeds for everyone, and developed four key organising principles to support it.

1. The timing of the market must assist farmers to have seed ready for the planting season

This principle is important for ensuring access to seed at the right time. Unlike government seed programmes that are often criticised for delivering seed too late in the season, ChimaniMbeu is timed to take place in September so that farmers have access to seed just before the planting season. Limiting the time between the market and planting time is important to ensure farmers have the best quality seed for planting and to limit the risk of seed being diverted elsewhere.

2. The market must include seed from a diversity of agroecological region

Chimanimani is a particularly good district to host a seed market because, as already mentioned, it has all five agroecological regions that make up Zimbabwe, from the very hot and dry, with as little as 300mm rain per year, to the cooler, higher altitude areas that receive much more rain, sometimes up to 1400mm per year. When farmers from all these regions come together, they can access a wide diversity of seed to find those that adapt well to their specific climatic and soil conditions. The planting of seed varieties across different climate zones also enhances the plasticity of a seed population, i.e. increases its adaptability when the climate is variable.

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3. Seed fairs and seed markets are more likely to reach their purpose if they are treated as part of a seed programme rather than a once-off event

ChimaniMbeu is organised to contribute to the multiple dimensions of a resilient seed system. This includes promoting small grains in the field and in people's diets, encouraging farmers to grow traditional and OPV seeds, helping farmers realise the economic value of seed, and making seed available that farmers would not otherwise have had access to.

TSURO treats the seed market as one step in a process rather than a standalone event to ensure it contributes to all these goals. Between markets, they monitor what farmers grow throughout the year. Staff record how much land is dedicated to small grains during the season, and facilitate seed study groups where farmers give each other advice on seed production.

During the market, staff use the opportunity to identify and document the variety of seeds displayed. The 2019 inventory showed that there were 12 major seed crops with an incredible total of 321 crop varieties displayed by farmers.

4. Organisers must establish clear rules of participation that encourage fairness and ensure sustainability of the market

The market is organised with the aim of making it fair, sustainable, and worthwhile for both buyers and producers. For this reason, there are clear, well thought through rules on participation fees, quantity, quality, and pricing. The participation fee is set on a sliding scale between US\$2 and US\$20. The quantity of seed is controlled to ensure only farmers with enough seed take up a stall at the market. The minimum for finger millet is 5kg and for maize, 20kg.

The seed quality is strictly managed with the Zimbabwe Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services (Agritex) and the National Gene Bank serving as seed inspectors, assisting with identifying varieties and standardising local names.

The organisers set seed prices to regulate affordability which ensures that even highly valued and scarce varieties are accessible to more farmers. A voucher system was introduced to control pricing and monitor trading volumes.

The impact of the ChimaniMbeu

The first ChimaniMbeu, held on 24 August 2016, was attended by 93 farmer seed producers (including 82 women). Thirty-nine seed producers made use of the voucher system to trade. The turnout of buyers was lower than expected, leading to lower trading volumes than hoped. The ongoing poor cash flow situation in Zimbabwe continues to put a damper on such ventures and many farmers used bartering to acquire the seed they wanted instead of hard currency. By September 2018, over 200 people had attended ChimaniMbeu, with 51 of these selling seed. A seed inventory showed that 19 crops involving 67 different varieties were traded. At the end of ChimaniMbeu 2018, a Wengezi farmer, Peter Manjoro said: *"We are prepared for the season and I can safely say we now have all the seeds we need."* (The Herald, 2018).

In early 2019 however, the Chimanimani district was hit by tragedy. Along with the loss of lives, homes, and livelihoods, Cyclone Idai had a devastating impact on seed supply, especially in the Rusitu and Chikukwa areas. Fields and grain stores were washed away and the excessive moisture severely compromised the quality of what was left. While fewer farmers were able to display and sell seed at seed fairs and ChimaniMbeu that year, the tragedy illuminated the vital importance of such a market by enabling farmers to replenish their seed sources.

The Covid-19 pandemic came short on the heels of the cyclone. The 2020 seed market was compromised by the pandemic as traveling and big gatherings were restricted. Nevertheless, as farming must go on, the market went ahead in October 2020 with farmers arriving with masks and sanitiser, ready to trade seed.

Despite major setbacks, farmers and staff testify to some significant positive impacts of ChimaniMbeu. Four of these are described below:

1. The market contributed to a district-wide collaboration towards more resilient seed systems

Community seed systems are not well recognised and often undermined by government and development agencies. TSURO made full use of the seed market to build support for community seed systems with a range of stakeholders in the district and beyond. They planned and implemented ChimaniMbeu with two other organisations, CELUCT and PORET, which meant

that links were forged between farmers from different clusters and also between farmers and government officers. All three organisations are also members of the Zimbabwe Seed Sovereignty Programme (ZSSP), linking the seed market to farmers from other areas who are part of this national programme. This dynamic illustrates the collective, commons-based approach facilitated by TSURO, where knowledge and seed is shared beyond the local area on a national level.

2. Quality control at the market builds trust in local seed

A key selling point (pushed by seed companies) of seed produced by the commercial seed system is the fact that this seed is certified and therefore reliable. In contrast, seed produced by farmers is devalued and seen as having poor quality with low germination rates. This perception has since also grown amongst farmers, i.e. that OPV seed does not germinate well (Progressio, 2019). However, a study by Kudzai Kusena, who worked with the Zimbabwe Gene Bank at the time, has debunked this myth and proved that farmer seed is of high quality (Kusena, et.al. 2017).

TSURO has prioritised seed quality and implements quality control through its comprehensive monitoring process. As mentioned above, TSURO's monitoring takes place over the whole crop cycle, starting at the beginning of the planting season and ending the morning of the market day. This quality control is important for building trust, not only in the market but in OPV seeds.

3. The seed market contributes to the resilience of communities.

Resilient seed systems are supported by applying a systems perspective – paying attention not only to the technical aspects of seed, but also to the institutions, knowledge, and relationships that support the system and to ensure the system continues functioning when there is a big shock, such as a drought or flood (McGuire and Sperling, 2016). It is also supported by farmers taking collective responsibility for the provision and development of seeds and crop diversity (Kliem, 2022).

Apart from supporting resilience through improving access, the market, seed fairs, study groups, and national networks, all contribute towards building a seed network where knowledge is shared and

important relationships are built. Ongoing joint seed activities between farmers over time strengthens social cohesion and reciprocity, with farmers supporting each other to sell their seed. For example, a farmer who does not have enough seed to qualify as a seller or who cannot afford to attend ChimaniMbeu will give their seed to a friend who is going and will sell it on their behalf (Mukonoweshuro, 2021).

ChimaniMbeu improves access to seed for marginal farmers as it specifically targets farmers from very dry areas who have limited quantities of seed. Access to the market makes seed more readily available at the right time and it makes a wider range of crops and varieties available, thus also improving agrobiodiversity (Mukonoweshuro, 2021).

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One of the spinoffs of the market is a communication and exchange platform called the Chimanimani District Seed Exchange Network which has been put in place on WhatsApp. Farmers who need seed are easily networked with experienced seed producers in each of the 22 wards and connected to 33 seed outlets across the district on this platform. Two farmers per ward are responsible for updating communication and keeping users informed about what seeds are available where, particularly when there are shortages (Mwacheza, 2018).

This platform that encourages broad participation and mutual support enhances the capacity of farmers to respond to a diversity of challenges.

4. The act of farmers selling seed is a political statement

A TSURO staff member put it simply: “Farmers have a right to produce and sell seed, so this market is also a political statement” (Mukonoweshuro, March 2021). Zimbabwe's seed policies and legislation have historically promoted the industrial seed system, in particular hybrid maize. Under current law, farmers are legally prohibited from selling “protected” seed

BOX 2:

Seed is wealth

Clever Garirofa interviewed Chipo Muzaze about her experience with seed markets during ChimaniMbeu 2017, and learnt a few tips on fattening the family purse. Mrs Muzaze is a 62-year-old woman living with a family of eight in Rujeko Village, Ward 10, Chimanimani, Zimbabwe.

“I first got involved in seed fairs in 2013. Before then I used to grow crops for family support only. But when I heard about seed production and seed shows in our village, I was so interested, it did not take more than two words to convince me to join the program. Although I am a farmer myself, I did not know that seed is where the title of being a farmer really comes from.

I attended the ChimaniMbeu seed market day in 2016 and sold at US\$1 per kilogram. This enabled me to fatten our family purse and I could send my children to school having eaten a good meal. Chokwadi handaiziva kuti mbeu hupfumi – I did not know that seed is wealth!

This 2017 ChimaniMbeu seed market day came at the right time as I was well prepared for it having gained so much experience from taking part in ward seed fairs and previous markets. I am expecting to sell all my seed because it is of good quality, and free from both pests and disease. The market day is important to us, not just my family, but my village too. We are five farmers from one village, which means that the program is benefitting our lives as families and as a community.

My family is very involved in all the work it takes to save good seed, from land preparations to harvesting. They also assist me in grading the seed. I am teaching them what I have learnt from workshops and exchange visits. And the kids are really enjoying the traditional dishes we cook. They are in such good health as a result.

We have really benefited from the knowledge on seed security as farmers and now we are even lending and saving the money we earn from seed selling. We have also formed a small group, there are five women and two men, where we share seed, and seed knowledge. What's more, we are planning to build a group granary, and in four years' time, every member of the group should have their own granary.

Because now we know, seed is wealth!”

Chipo Muzaze, Chimanimani, Zimbabwe

and Zimbabwe is in the process of applying to join UPOV 91, which means legislation will become even more prohibitive to farmers' rights. Within the strict interpretation of Zimbabwe's seed laws, some of the commercial activities of the ChimaniMbeu can be considered illegal.

The mere existence and success of this market is challenging the irrelevance and injustice of such laws, and supports farmers' seed sovereignty.

“ **The mere existence and success of this market is challenging the irrelevance and injustice of such laws, and supports farmers' seed sovereignty.**



Photo: TSURO (SKI partner)

Dilemmas and ideas arising from the seed market experience

The ChimaniMbeu market is an outlet for farmers who are good seed producers of OPV seeds and is organised in a way that it improves access to this seed for farmers who would otherwise struggle to access it. In the process, it celebrates and validates the quality and diversity of farmer seed systems and disproves the myth that farmers must rely on the commercial sector for their seed. It has helped to re-establish the status of farmers' seed and invigorated interest amongst farmers and agricultural extension staff. Nevertheless, it does raise a few issues that demand attention and awareness.

There is a tension between commodifying farmers' seed and the culture of reciprocity that exists in the domain of seed. Traditionally, farmers have always shared seed and for this system to continue, seed must be treated as a collective resource freely available to all. So, while the seed market provides an income for some farmers, there is the dilemma that they could stop sharing seed if they know they can get a good price for it at the market or elsewhere. According to TSURO, the culture of sharing and exchanging is still taking place even at a commercial event such as the seed market day. Farmers still share seed with those who have lost their seed, and farmers who do not have money can barter for seed instead (Mukonoweshuro, 2021). This is an issue that needs to be closely monitored as it has the potential to undermine one of the key characteristics of community-based seed systems.

“ *ChimaniMbeu market celebrates and validates the quality and diversity of farmer seed systems and disproves the myth that farmers must rely on the commercial sector for their seed.* ”

The seed market is a centralised event attended by farmers from different agroecological regions, greatly enhancing the diversity of seed made available. However, proximity to opportunities for obtaining seed is very important for farmers living in isolated areas and for some this is just too far to travel. This is particularly so for female-headed households, which make up 49% of households (Mutizwa, 2015). While a decision to rotate the venue of ChimaniMbeu and to organise smaller, more decentralised markets had already been made before Covid-19, the pandemic pushed the implementation of this idea forward.

Sustainability is always an issue for community seed interventions, of which TSURO is very cognisant. Seed quality and pricing need ongoing monitoring to maintain balance between what is worthwhile for producers and affordable to buyers and to uphold the good reputation of the market. There are also plans to diversify activities that will support the market; this could include demonstrations to add value to products as well as processing and cooking demonstrations to promote the consumption of small grains.

BOX 3:

A visitor's experience of ChimaniMbeu

Written by John Wilson

"First prize for the black-seeded pumpkin goes to Anna Ndemo," announced the judge. Anna leapt to her feet, ululating and dancing her way up to the front of the crowd, where she received her prize, a US\$4 voucher for seed purchase. On and on went the announcements of prizes, and proud farmer after proud farmer went up to receive their prize. The mood was joyful. Here was a group of seed custodians from all over the District who had gathered for the annual ChimaniMbeu market which was now drawing to an end.

Earlier that day I joined the queue where vouchers were being sold and bought US\$10 worth in 50-cent vouchers, using my mobile phone wallet to pay. As a first-time visitor wanting to stock up on seed, I was excited by the prospect of going up and down the rows of tables full of all sorts of seed, selecting the varieties that particularly interested me.

As I went into the seed display area, I noticed a small crowd around a table. A bag of groundnut seed was disappearing fast. One of the TSURO helpers told me that it was the very popular Bob White variety. I heard later that it sold out in just 10 minutes!

I was more interested in finding different varieties of *mapudzi*, the gourd that you can eat when it's still young and soft, and I wasn't disappointed. I purchased five different kinds of *mapudzi*, which I will try out this rainy season to see which ones best suit my growing area on the edge of Harare.

I also bought some of the black-seeded pumpkins from Anna Ndemo. This is the variety that produces the best pumpkin leaves for eating, to cook what people in the east of the country know as *mutikitiki*, my favourite cooked green vegetable by far! I also bought different open-pollinated maize varieties as I don't grow enough maize to be able to save my own seed. They say the minimum stand for saving open-pollinated maize seed should be around 500 plants.

Each time I paid for my seed purchase with a voucher, one of the TSURO helpers recorded the transaction, including my name and where I came from. This is part of TSURO's efforts to track how much exchange happens during the day and with whom.

Now I'm waiting for our rains in Zimbabwe to start. I look forward to growing all the varieties that I was lucky enough to get from ChimaniMbeu. I am full of admiration for what TSURO and her sister organisations, CELUCT and PORET, have created, along with seed saving groups from across the district and working closely with Agritex, the government extension service.

The only regret that I had as I left the event was that there hadn't been more visitors from outside to stock up with seed. While the seller of the Bob White variety of groundnut sold all her seed, the volume of seed sales remains a challenge for the ChimaniMbeu. I'm sure TSURO will be exploring ways in coming years to address this challenge.



Photo: TSURO (SKI partner)

Conclusion: A thoughtful seed market can strengthen community seed systems effectively

Seed system resilience is increasingly crucial in the face of climate change. By equipping smallholder farmers with the skills and opportunities to regain control over seed production and breeding, they become the stewards of a dynamic and evolving local seed system.

The governing of this process is important in ensuring that equality and social justice is advanced and that the process is sustainable. It is also crucial to embed the process of reviving seed production and breeding within the important principle of viewing seed as part of the commons, a gift from the ancestors that farmers have an obligation to share onward. A commons-based seed governance system builds agroecological resilience.

Farmers and their supporters will have to fight for the right to seed sovereignty and seed system resilience as agricultural policies and legislation become increasingly restrictive to this kind of event. It is clear from this case study that a simple seed market is a powerful strategy and political statement, bringing

farmers together, reigniting respect for saved seed, remembering effective but forgotten seed practices, enabling learning and fostering cohesion within and between communities, and of course, boosting production, quality, and availability of locally produced seed.

Lastly, it is clear that it is the role of civil society organisations and government alike to provide the kind of support that will encourage the autonomy and adaptive capacity of farming communities.

“ ***It is crucial to embed the process of reviving seed production and breeding within the important principle of viewing seed as part of the commons, a gift from the ancestors that farmers have an obligation to share onward.*** ”



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We are a dynamic partnership of diverse southern African organisations committed to securing food sovereignty and agroecology in the region. For more information about our work and SKI partners, visit our website: www.seedandknowledge.org

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