

Article was successfully updated. ✕

How to Facilitate Seed Exchanges During Country Meetings or as a Single-Day Event

[✎ \(https://www.echocommunity.org/en/articles/174/edit\)](https://www.echocommunity.org/en/articles/174/edit)

By: Ruth Tshin

Published: 2013-03-20

From: ECHO Asia Notes (/en/resources/d0eaf359-b4a4-43a1-801b-ab1320c1ba76) | AN Issue #16 (/en/resources/f4f45d34-ead4-4767-8928-16f2fba7e51)

[an-issue-16.pdf](#)<https://www.echocommunity.org/en/resources/f4f45d34-ead4-4767-8928-16f2fba7e51/download>

📄 ☆☆☆☆☆

Since 2011, ECHO Asia has developed and facilitated seed exchange events during meetings with local partners. Through conversations with farmers and NGO staff, we have gained better insight about locally-important plant varieties, seed saving practices, attitudes towards saving seeds, and sustainable farming. The most exciting part of these events is hearing success stories! At our first agriculture workshop in Myanmar during November 2012, we were excited when one organization from southern Shan State brought over 75 cuttings of chaya to share with delegates, after having successfully introduced it as a food and forage plant on their small farm resource centre. All of their stock came from a single cutting received only one year earlier during ECHO Asia's biennial Tropical Agriculture conference in Chiang Mai!

In this article, we share our method for implementing seed exchanges that are carried out in the local language and attended by local farmers and development workers. The materials required for a seed exchange are basic, but the actual process of exchanging and capturing information requires prior preparation and an adjustment based on the culture and realities in the particular country.

[\(/resources/fe17dce5-333d-46f0-9259-5c83a6353344\)](/resources/fe17dce5-333d-46f0-9259-5c83a6353344)

We recommend reading the article "Seed Fairs: Fostering local seed exchange to support regional biodiversity (http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.echocommunity.org/resource/collection/F6FFA3BF-02EF-4FE3-B180-F391C063E31A/Seed_Fairs.pdf)" (ECHO Asia Notes [AN] issue 12, January 2012) as it explains the reasons why it is important to build capacity around local plant biodiversity and understand local seed systems. We hope this article helps in your subsequent efforts to implement seed exchange activities in support of those reasons.

Basic materials for exchanging seeds:

- Enough seeds and plant propagation material to share

- Small re-sealable bags in which to distribute seeds
 - In Thailand, we buy small plastic medicine bags from local pharmacies
 - You can easily substitute newspaper or sheets of paper, paper envelopes or bags for plastic bags
- Permanent markers and labels
 - Seed packages should be clearly identified with common and variety names (preferably in local language as well as in English)

ECHO Asia's Seed Source information

(Before we place seeds in the seed bank and access them we need the following information. Please take some time to complete the form and provide as much detailed information as possible.)

Seed Source Information	Plant Characteristics
ECHO staff in involved in transfer and Date of Transfer วันที่ย้ายส่งเมล็ด	Family Name: กระจับกูด
Source Name ชื่อของบุคคลที่ให้เมล็ด: Source Address: ที่อยู่ของบุคคลที่ให้เมล็ด Source Telephone/Email: เบอร์โทรศัพท์/อีเมล	Scientific Name of plant: ชื่อวิทยาศาสตร์ Common name ชื่อสามัญ Variety พันธุ์พืช
The seeds were (circle one): Free / Purchased _____ (price) ฟรี / ซื้อ เท่าไร _____ บาท	Description of plant: ลักษณะของพืช Seed color สีของเมล็ด Features of main parts harvested (pod/fruit/shoots?) ลักษณะเมล็ดที่เก็บเกี่ยว(ถอม, ฝัก, ลูก)
Place where seeds originated (village หมู่บ้าน/ district อำเภอ country จังหวัด): Additional Information on Seed Source: ข้อมูลเพิ่มเติม	Edible? เป็นอาหารทานได้ Marketing/Can you sell it? การตลาดขายอย่างไร? Where are seeds usually planted? In garden? Forest? ปลูกในสวนครัว? ปลูกในป่า? What sets this variety apart of other? ลักษณะพิเศษของพืช? How does it look/test/cook/store differently from other? สังเกตโดยวิธีไหน/รสชาติทำอาหาร/การจัดเก็บแตกต่างจากอย่างอื่นอย่างไร?

(/resources/458505bc-e2ba-4560-84bd-57669fac8a9d)

Basic materials for the seed exchange facilitator:

- White board or poster paper to list regions or organizations in attendance
- Clipboards, pens and copies of a simple data sheet (Figure 1) for collecting seed information
- Local language translators
- People ready to record seed information

Implementing seed exchange during a multi-day meeting attended by less than 100 people

1. **Well before the event, communicate with and encourage participants to bring seeds and plant propagation material to the meeting.** Include requests for seeds and plant material when you begin advertising the meeting with local organizations. If possible, request each organization to bring a minimum of 500 grams of seed to be able to share with attendees, as well as materials that help explain special characteristics of each species (for example, large colour photographs, seedlings, videos, etc.). Consider also that adequate lead time is needed for delegates to gather seeds and plant materials to share.

2. **Determine whether educational or capacity-building components are required.** The article "Seed Fairs: Fostering local seed exchange to support regional biodiversity" (AN 12) has a list of questions to help you decide whether additional discussions should be considered in addition to the seed exchange, including:
- Are delegates knowledgeable about local crop biodiversity or farmer-produced seed supplies? Are they aware of conditions driving agricultural change in the area? Do they have interactions with the commercial seed industry?
 - Do you need to separate discussion groups into farmers, government agents and development workers?
3. **Decide on parameters of seed exchange.**
- If you are conducting a multi-day meeting/workshop, consider: 1) which days would be best for collecting seed information, 2) if discussions among delegates are needed, and 3) how to conduct the exchange activity (see below). You may need to set a deadline during the workshop for accepting seeds into the exchange.
 - Consider who should receive seeds. Should delegates receive shared seeds if they did not bring any to share? Or should only delegates who bring seeds participate in the exchange? ECHO Asia typically brings additional seeds for all delegates to receive as a "gift bag" whether they brought any to share or not.
 - Consider the amount of seeds brought to the meeting – there may or may not be enough to share with everyone. Should every delegate from every organization receive seeds? Or should each organization receive only one set of seeds?
4. Determine method for implementing seed exchange during the meeting. Meetings that take place over several days are ideal, because it takes time to collect seed information from delegates before the actual exchange. You may need to assign one person to manage and prepare for the exchange apart from regular meeting events. Consider what time constraints you may be faced with, because preparations and the exchange activity may take more time than anticipated. ECHO Asia meetings are usually three days in duration, and we have found the following process to be successful:



(/resources/3c3b701b-8fd3-4114-a1d7-90b482ffb040)

Day 1 – Register the seeds brought by delegates separately from the normal registration process on the first day. ECHO Asia "registers" the seeds in order to compile a master list of varieties shared at our meetings and to record indigenous plant and seed saving information. Typically this process requires translators to ask questions in the local language and people to record information in Thai or English. We have found that simultaneous meeting and seed registration results in confusion, so it is easier to keep these procedures separate. Consider registering seeds after registration is complete or on a separate day as part of the meeting agenda, with a team of translators and recorders dedicated to the task.

Compile a complete list of seeds brought by delegates. Once a list is completed with delegate names and seeds brought to the meeting, you can continue recording notes and special characteristics for the duration of the meeting. It may be helpful to include delegates' contact information for future correspondence and future plant evaluations.

During seed registration, record the special characteristics of seeds to be shared. Use a simple form (Figure 1, Seed Fair Template Form) prepared ahead of time to capture information as efficiently as possible. ECHO Asia tends to take this opportunity to interview delegates and ask in-depth questions about regional plant varieties and seed systems. You may not need as much information so capture only what you need.

Source of seed

- In what village/district/province/region did these seeds originate?
- Were these seeds produced by an NGO/government agency/farmer/other project?
- Were these seeds propagated by the seed producer?
- Any additional information?

Propagation, usage, and special characteristics

- How did the seed producer propagate the plants? Any special techniques?
- What time of year do you like planting these seeds?
- What parts of the plant do you like to eat? When do you pick the edible parts? How do you cook the edible parts?
 - Can you feed any part of the plant to animals? What parts?
 - Can the plant be used for construction, fuel, agroforestry applications, etc?
 - Are there any other special cultural uses for this plant?
 - Is there a similar plant you also like (to plant, to eat?)
- Describe special characteristics of plant: bushy, vining, drought-resistant, pod and seed colour, etc.
- Are there any specific problems this plant/variety faces?

Production and harvesting

- How did the crop perform in recent seasons?
- Are there specific techniques for harvesting seeds from the plant?

Day 2 – Prepare seeds and plant material for the exchange. Delegates may bring seeds in bulk amounts that then need to be split into smaller portions and into re-sealable bags. For seeds like beans, measure out 10-20 seeds per small bag. For smaller seeds like amaranth or mustard green, measure out 1 tablespoon into the smaller bags. Be prepared for late seed submissions after the registration process is complete. Bags containing seeds should be clearly marked with common and variety name.

- Decide whether to provide time for groups to sell seedlings or bulk seed apart from the exchange activity. We recommend that groups sell their products at the meeting site as a scheduled activity and at a designated area adjacent to the meeting room. A group representative can be given 5 minutes to introduce their goods during public announcements. Each group is responsible for handling receipts and providing exact change. In our experience, allowing seeds or plant material to be sold has not affected the main seed exchange activity.

Day 3 – Implement the actual seed exchange: 45 to 60 minutes total duration. Each organization can be given 5-10 minutes to introduce their seeds and why they are sharing it with the group. Showing actual seedlings and large colour photos of lesser-known plant varieties, and explaining growing and seed harvesting methods and the use of each plant can be helpful in generating discussions. Prepared seed factsheets are



(/resources/3cb7a3c9-be12-4277-8347-94c9d0046cf3)

also a great way to disseminate information. A time keeper is important to keep this part of the exchange moving along. Following introductions, the exchange activity usually takes 15-30 minutes to complete. However, the exchange format depends on how many delegates are in attendance:

For 40 or fewer people, delegates can gather around a table on which seed packets are displayed and collect as many seed packets as they want.

For 100 or fewer people, calling groups one at a time to collect a limited set (one set of seeds per group) or a designated amount of seeds is most efficient. Groups that brought seeds for exchanging are given priority and are allowed to choose seeds first. Seeds names should be clearly marked and displayed neatly on tables or on the floor.

For our biennial conference of over 100 delegates, a more methodical process is required. We encourage delegates to pre-order seeds and assign a team to manage distribution throughout the duration of the conference.

5. After the meeting is concluded, review seeds and information collected and assess the exchange event itself. Was the exchange activity and discussion well received by the delegates? Was the event managed well and was enough seed information collected? What improvements should be considered for future events? Organizations with ongoing presence in the region can follow up on issues and concerns brought up during the exchange. ECHO Asia also collects a sampling of all seeds brought to meetings and evaluates them at our seed bank facility for future use. If your organization maintains a seed bank, you might also want to collect a sample of all seeds present for future dissemination.

Implementing the seed exchange as a single-day event

Seed exchanges can also be facilitated as a stand-alone activity, rather than over the course of several days.

The main challenges are: managing time efficiently, having enough people to translate and record, and clearly delegating tasks amongst your team so that the event runs smoothly.

1. Identify and delegate specific tasks before the event. It is easy for the activity to devolve into confusion without considering the following roles:

- Several people to act as translators and recorders, to manage registration and the collection of seed information. Consider having one translator/recorder pair for each group of 5 to 7 attendees, spending no more than 10 minutes per attendee to collect information.
- Several people to help direct attendees towards the registration area especially if the event is attended by many people. • Several people to distribute re-sealable bags to farmers as soon as they arrive, and to help farmers divide their seeds into smaller lots. Consider distributing bags the day before the exchange activity, with clear instructions to place enough seeds in each bag (depending on seed size; for example, at least 10 to 20 bean seeds or 1 tablespoon of mustard green seeds per bag). This activity should take place separately from the registration area to avoid crowds of people and more efficient activity flow.
- One person to compile the master list of seed information and to write down debrief notes after the activity.
- If necessary, several people to manage food and drinks for the participants. We found that providing refreshments helped maintain everyone's sense of humour when we had exchanges during extremely hot weather! Consider including food and drinks in the event budget and organizing with your local contacts ahead of time, how these will be delivered to the site and distributed during the event.

2. Create a program with time limits for each activity and announce it at the start of the day. We found that some farmers lost interest and disappeared if we took too long to complete initial registration. For our single-day events, we started at 8am and finished at 3pm, including a lunch break. Here is a breakdown of how we typically spend the day:

- Registration, information collection and division of seeds into smaller bags – 60 to 120 minutes
- Training or educational component, if needed – 45 to 60 minutes
- Introduction and explanation of seeds provided for the exchange – 60 to 90 minutes
- Actual seed exchange – 30 to 60 minutes
- Post-exchange debrief with team – 30 minutes
- Snack break – 15 minutes; lunch break – 30 to 45 minutes



(/resources/f3d5ef58-1611-4eb9-b77e-a5fe6f3c5da2)

Conclusion

We want to hear from you! Please send us stories about your successful seed exchange events or lessons learned from not-so-successful events. We also want to know whether or not you have found these guidelines helpful. Email us at echoasia@echonet.org. (echoasia@echonet.org)



(/resources/74980e96-1657-46f8-a98f-003c71323529)

Permanent Links

Regions

Asia (/en/resources/tagged/Asia)

Comments

0

Add Comment