



Investing in rural people

IFAD's experience in converting old technology to innovative community-based seed-revolving mechanisms in the Kyrgyz Republic

Introduction to the Community Fodder Seed Programme in Kyrgyzstan



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About this paper

The paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the Community Fodder Seed Programme and its execution through phases I and II of the Livestock and Market Development Programme (2013–2021) in Kyrgyzstan, supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

It also provides a historical framework for the developments and reforms in Kyrgyzstan's agricultural sector since 1991, with a focus on seed production and distribution and the creation of community seed funds to support farmers in mountainous regions affected by natural disasters. The role of local NGOs, international organizations and the Kyrgyz Government in these efforts is analysed, along with the impact of land reassignment and legal frameworks surrounding seed fund development.

The authors examine the operational and technical aspects required for the creation of community seed funds, with emphasis on IFAD's expertise and the role of the Agricultural Projects Implementation Unit. The authors compiled data and information to consolidate the acquired expertise and insights on this particular topic from individuals actively engaged with the programme's processes. The ultimate objective is to furnish policymakers and governments with a comprehensive understanding of the potential advantages offered by these innovative approaches in rural areas throughout the nation.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADF	Agricultural Land Redistribution Fund
APIU	Agricultural Projects Implementation Unit
CSF	community seed fund
CFSP	Community Fodder Seed Programme
LMDP	Livestock and Market Development Programme
NFCSF	Public Association of Community Seed Funds
PC	pasture committee
PUU	pasture users' union



Historical background and first international development interventions in the seed sector

The Kyrgyz Republic gained independence in 1991 and underwent several agricultural reforms to reorganize its production sector. As part of these reforms, the Government created state-owned seed farms to produce and distribute certified seeds for crops such as maize, oilseed, cotton, fodder (alfalfa) and potatoes. Further to the Regulation on the Reorganization of Livestock Breeding and Seed Production Farms, the status of these farms under the Agricultural Land Redistribution Fund (ADF) was altered. Originally, the *kolkhozes*¹ and *sovkhozes* in Kyrgyzstan had seed production farms, and when they were privatized, 25 per cent of the land under the ADF was assigned to them with the official status of “seed production

¹ *Kolkhozes* were collective farms organized by law into production cooperatives in the Soviet Union. *Kolkhozes* existed along with *sovkhozes*, or state farms. These were two elements that featured in the post-1917 October Revolution agricultural sector.

farm,” and the remaining 75 per cent were reassigned and distributed as land shares. Seed funds remained a feature of the ADF, yet the possibility of providing and distributing seed dwindled with the reassignment of land to Kyrgyz citizens under the agricultural reforms of the 1990s.

In response to severe droughts and early snowfall in 2000, the Government of Kyrgyzstan and key development partners such as the World Bank,² the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and agricultural research groups (CGIAR/Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, International Center for Tropical Agriculture), agreed to include specific support for farmers in poor mountainous regions heavily impacted by these natural disasters by providing them with quality seed for multiplication and on-farm use. This resulted in the creation of community seed funds (CSFs), for which the IFAD-funded Livestock and Market Development Programme (LMDP) financed the initial start-up capital (in the form of seed grants) and the operating expenses of a group of competitively selected local NGOs that provided institutional support to the new CSFs. Local NGOs, including the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme of the Aga Khan Foundation, along with other local NGOs supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), were involved. This support consisted of providing capacity-building training to communities/people involved in seed production, certification and distribution.

As a result of the above reforms and land reassignment, in 2013 the Ministry of Agriculture, supported by the Agricultural Projects Implementation Unit (APIU), decreed that farmers should access seed material by setting up CSFs.

Further to their creation, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kyrgyz Republic delegated the authority to create and develop CSFs to the National Association of Pasture Users of Kyrgyzstan (*Kyrgyz Jaiyty*) in late 2017. Following the delegation of authority, the following documents were produced, approved and passed on to the National Association of Pasture Users of Kyrgyzstan for further use in the CSF organization:

- I. The concept for the development of seed funds through the *Kyrgyz Jaiyty*;
- II. The operational guidelines for the creation and development of CSFs within the framework of the LMDP through the *Kyrgyz Jaiyty*;

² APIU implemented the Agricultural Investments and Services Project funded by the World Bank and IFAD. The project implementation period was 2008–2013. This project provided support to the Community Seed Fund for Forage and Food Crops.

- III. The business plan for the development of CSFs for the cultivation of cereals and forage crops; and
- IV. The Memorandum of Cooperation between the APIU and the *Kyrgyz Jaiyty* on the creation and development of CSFs.

Following the approval of this series of documents, *Kyrgyz Jaiyty* specialists selected 63 pilot pasture committees (PCs) under the LMDP-I (phase I), including 31 in the Issyk-Kul region and 32 in the Naryn region. Operational meetings were held in all 63 CSFs, with the direct participation of the heads of district administrations, the heads of the District Department of Agricultural Development, the heads of *aimaks*³ and local *keneshes*;⁴ chairs of PCs and other interested parties. A total of 91 CSFs were created under the LMDP-II project (phase II), including 33 in the Osh region, 18 in the Batken region and 40 in the Jalal-Abad region.⁵

Old seed distribution mechanisms become an innovative programme

The Community Fodder Seed Programme (CFSP) is an innovative revolving financing mechanism introduced and managed by local communities and PC⁶ in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Under the LMDP, IFAD supplied grant financing mechanisms directly to the pasture users' unions (PUU)⁷ under which the CSFs were established. These grants in the form of seed and fertilizer served as the initial capital and basis for further development of the CSFs and would become the CFSP.

³ An *aimak* is the smallest rural administrative unit with an elected mayor. It usually consists of less than 20 settlements.

⁴ A *kenesh* is the Supreme Council or Parliament.

⁵ This chapter reflects the experience and testimony of the APIU and Karim Sissoko, IFAD Programme Officer and author of this document.

⁶ "PCs represent the views of local users and use a participatory approach. As such, PCs receive capacity-building training in order to establish rules about pasture use in their villages, such as the timing of movement between summer and winter pastures, fees for pasture use, management of fertilizer and access to water. Each community tailors the plan to best suit their pastureland and breeders' needs, and informs PUUs on the community's needs. PCs do not have administrative powers but rather public managerial competencies." From: Introduction to Community Pasture Management Plans in Kyrgyzstan: Synthesis of the Country's rural pastoral development and lessons learned through IFAD-funded projects, IFAD, December 2022, p. 9.

⁷ "PUU is the community organization open to all pasture users who are local residents of the community, hold livestock or use land for all other livelihood purposes. Each rural municipality has its own PUU, which communicates with neighboring PUUs. Fees are determined by each PUU, based on community and pastureland needs." From: Introduction to Community Pasture Management Plans in Kyrgyzstan: Synthesis of the Country's rural pastoral development and lessons learned through IFAD-funded projects, IFAD, December 2022, p. 9

The CFSP operates by procuring and allocating improved locally adapted fodder seed to a predetermined number of PUU members on a credit basis. These members proceed to cultivate and increase the volume of seed, ultimately repaying the agreed quantity of seed to their respective PC. This seed is then redistributed to other members under the same principle.

Managing Community Seed Funds

In addition to providing improved varieties of seed, the programme assists beneficiaries with the necessary training,⁸ coaching and monitoring services for proper planting, harvesting, cleaning, packing/packaging and storage. The CFSP's primary objective is to increase the availability of high-quality feed and mitigate feed scarcity in winter for pastoral communities. This initiative was launched under the LMDP in collaboration with the Public Association of Community Seed Funds (NFCSF) in the Batken, Jalal-Abad and Osh *oblasts*⁹.

The NFCSF, which operates under the Ministry of Agriculture, is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the CFSP and creating up to 91 CSFs focused on winter fodder crops in the programme area. Its core functions are:

- I. facilitating the selection of the members and executive of CSFs;
- II. allocating grants and providing complementary training and logistical support to facilitate the production of fodder seed varieties tailored to the specific climate conditions of targeted localities; and
- III. safeguarding the interests of CSFs and providing training to pasture users for sustainable development of the CSF.

NFCSF activities were coordinated through the APIU under LMDP phases I and II.

⁸ Source APIU: CSF leaders and members were trained in alfalfa and sainfoin cultivation techniques, cereal crops cultivation technology and the preparation of CSF business plans and marketing. The trainings aimed primarily at increasing the potential of PC and CSF members in cereal and fodder crop cultivation technology.

⁹ An administrative and territorial division in eastern Europe and central Asian Countries. Term used in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and former Republics of the Soviet Union, conventionally translated into English as 'region' or 'province'.

Issues addressed

Over the past three decades, a substantial increase in livestock numbers has led to the overgrazing of village pasturelands that produce grass from spring to autumn. Lack of continuous maintenance has led to the degradation of these pastures, reducing their productivity. In 2009, after enactment of the Pasture Law, the responsibility for managing pasture resources was decentralized to PCs, which launched a pasture regeneration and restoration plan, adhering to local regulations. These plans, known as “community pasture management plans”, are components of the overarching community-based pasture management framework. Drawn up and established by PCs for pasture management and use, they indicate how pastures will be restored or improved. Community pasture management plans outline methods for restoring or improving pastures, among them introducing grazing rotation systems, seeding fodder grasses and putting up fencing to allow for pasture recovery periods.

Box 1 – IFAD. Introduction to Community Pasture Management Plans in Kyrgyzstan: Synthesis of the Country’s rural pastoral development and lessons learned through IFAD-funded projects.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY PASTURE MANAGEMENT?

Community-based pasture management is the process of compiling a pasture inventory and providing local authorities with pertinent data and information on soil, vegetation and existing infrastructure. This information also includes maps with delineated borders and easements, as well as recommendations concerning the carrying capacity of specific pasture plots. This approach facilitates planning processes that are both socially equitable and environmentally sustainable. Local authorities periodically revise these maps contingent upon demand and the carrying capacity of individual plots, thereby improving planning and land tax accuracy, refining and improving management strategies and plans and addressing land use conflicts.

For more information, visit: <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/-/introduction-to-community-pasture-management-plans-in-kyrgyzstan>

As part of this overall restoration plan, the CFSP was also designed to address the issue of feed shortage during winter and to increase the availability of fodder by promoting the cultivation and use of improved varieties of fodder seed. Conceived as an innovative model for sustainable livestock feeding in pastoral communities, the CFSP is aimed at achieving

self-sufficiency in fodder production and promoting the resilience of pastoral communities in arid and semi-arid areas by outsourcing and procuring locally adapted, improved varieties of fodder seed to be distributed to and grown by pastoral communities. The fodder obtained through this process serves as a supplementary food source for livestock in winter, when grass from overgrazed pastures becomes scarce. The sustainability of the CFSP is embedded in its operational mechanism. In autumn, seed costs are refunded at a 1:1 ratio, or alternatively, if reimbursed with marketable wheat, at a 2:1 ratio, ensuring that seed fund stock remains self-sustainable. Consequently, revenues from CFSP wheat sales can be allocated towards the purchase of certified seed. Execution of the CFSP has proven vital in addressing the prevalent issue of feed scarcity in the winter months and supplementing fodder supplies impacted by overgrazing. The National Association has overseen and coordinated all aspects of this operational procedure.

Box 2 – IFAD. Introduction to Community Pasture Management Plans in Kyrgyzstan: Synthesis of the country’s rural pastoral development and lessons learned through IFAD-funded projects.

How is livestock and pasture management linked to Sustainable Development Goal 13?

“The production of quality fodder is important in addressing greenhouse gas emissions as better-quality feed leads to healthier animals, which in turn reduces the need to keep excessively large herds of livestock. More nutritious crops from locally grown food, rather than hay or imported feed, can reduce methane emissions from enteric fermentation.”

First steps and implementation¹⁰

In an effort to boost feed production and ensure sufficient supplies for winter, PUU member farmers have identified the locally adapted fodder varieties most suitable for growing in each specific area. The selection includes barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), lucerne (*Medicago sativa* spp.) and sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*).

¹⁰ The source of the information in this paragraph was APIU staff.

In this undertaking, unions have benefited from technical collaboration with the NFCSF, thanks to whose support the CSFs were created.

The CFSP implementation process begins with the selection of participating farmers from the community. Each CSF features a Supervisory Board comprised of five individuals, including the head of the *Ayil Okmotu* (village council), female representatives, deputies, youth groups and *akasakals*.¹¹ The Board determines the eligibility of participants and evaluates their financial capacity. A certified seed¹² grant package is subsequently provided that includes training and logistical support. The seed varieties provided under the grant are specifically chosen for their adaptability and performance under local climate conditions. CSFs could supply seeds to an average of 10-15 individuals annually. During the participant selection process, emphasis is placed on assisting vulnerable smallholder farmers (e.g. those living in poverty) in each target area. To bolster and stimulate local economies, seed procurement is effected predominantly within the community, the majority of suppliers being local seed producers and distributors.¹³

CFSP participants obtain the revolving grant package, plant the seeds, receive the dedicated training and assistance and make the in-kind repayment of the agreed volume of seeds to the NFCSF following harvest. The harvested seeds are then processed, cleaned, packaged and certified by the NFCSF.¹⁴ This cyclical procedure is perpetuated, as the recovered seeds are certified and redistributed to other producers. In conjunction with the implementation process, PUUs supplement the CFSP initiative with other investments, including the procurement of farm machinery, feed and fodder-related equipment and storage and the rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation systems. To sustain these investments, PUUs impose fees for pasture use, sell certified seed to non-members and generate resources to finance additional initiatives. Through these strategies and financing mechanisms, CSFs have achieved economic self-sufficiency.

¹¹ *Akasakals* are the “grey beards” or elder representatives in Kyrgyz rural and pastoral communities.

¹² In the context of agricultural research, the term “Improved” seed describes any type of seed with high-yield potential resulting from cross-breeding that is more adapted to local conditions. “Certified” seeds are those with recognized germinative potential.

¹³ Once the initial seed is imported, it is farmed and multiplied. Subsequent purchases are made locally from producers. This allows money to circulate in the community rather than outside of it. The CFSP distributes seed (in kind) to members, who will repay in kind. Individuals who are not CFSP members may pay local producers directly in cash to stimulate the local economy and market.

¹⁴ Through a document that certifies the quality of the seeds and their potential to germinate.



Key results achieved

As of 2018, the LMDP, under the auspices of the NFCSF, had successfully established 95 CSFs during phase I and an additional 91 during phase II. In all, 186 CSFs were established in five regions of the republic to provide seed material.

Phase I of the project commenced operations in 2013, with an initial cohort of 697 households in 2015. These farmers received 128 metric tons of certified spring barley seed, 57.6 metric tons of sainfoin and 96 metric tons of fertilizer.

In 2018, there was a significant increase in the project's scale. The farmer cohort expanded to include an additional 1,475 households, approximately 110 of which were headed by women. This period also saw the distribution of 504 metric tons of spring barley and an equal quantity of fertilizer by 63 established CSFs, benefiting 315 households (including 10 headed by women, who utilized these resources to cultivate 2,520 hectares of land).

A significant project milestone was reached in 2018 and 2019, as repaid seeds were redistributed to an additional 694 households, including 57 headed by women. The repayment mechanism stipulated by pasture users involved settling debt either through marketable wheat (at a 2:1 ratio) or the cost of seed (at a 1:1 ratio).

By supporting the creation of 95 CSFs in phase I, the programme has facilitated access to certified seed for 3,181 households, including 280 headed by women. This access has also provided an opportunity to cultivate an extensive area of 3,549 hectares.

Table 1 - CSF Overview of quantity, amount, hectarage and total number of households¹⁵

<i>Year</i>	<i>Product</i>	<i>Tons</i>	<i>Total Amount (KGS)</i>	<i>CSF</i>	<i>Hectarage</i>	<i>Total HH</i>	<i>No. Women</i>
2015	Spring Barley Seed	128	4.353.480	32	1029	697	103
	Sainfoin Seed	57.6	7.217.600	-	-	-	-
	Fertilizer	96	2.863.200	-	-	-	-
Second-Cycle	-	-	-	-	-	1475	110
2018	Spring Barley Seed	504	11.131.200	63	2520	315	10
	Ammonium Phosphate Fertilizer	504	1.645.983	-	-	-	-
Second-Cycle	-	-	-	-	-	694	57
Total			38.211.463	95	3549	3181	280

¹⁵ Source Adapted from Kyrgyzstan – Livestock and Market Development Programme, Project Completion Report, Appendix 4: Project internal rate of return (detailed analysis), p. 64, Table 7 - CSF Overview of quantity, amount, land size and total number of households, 03/04/2020.

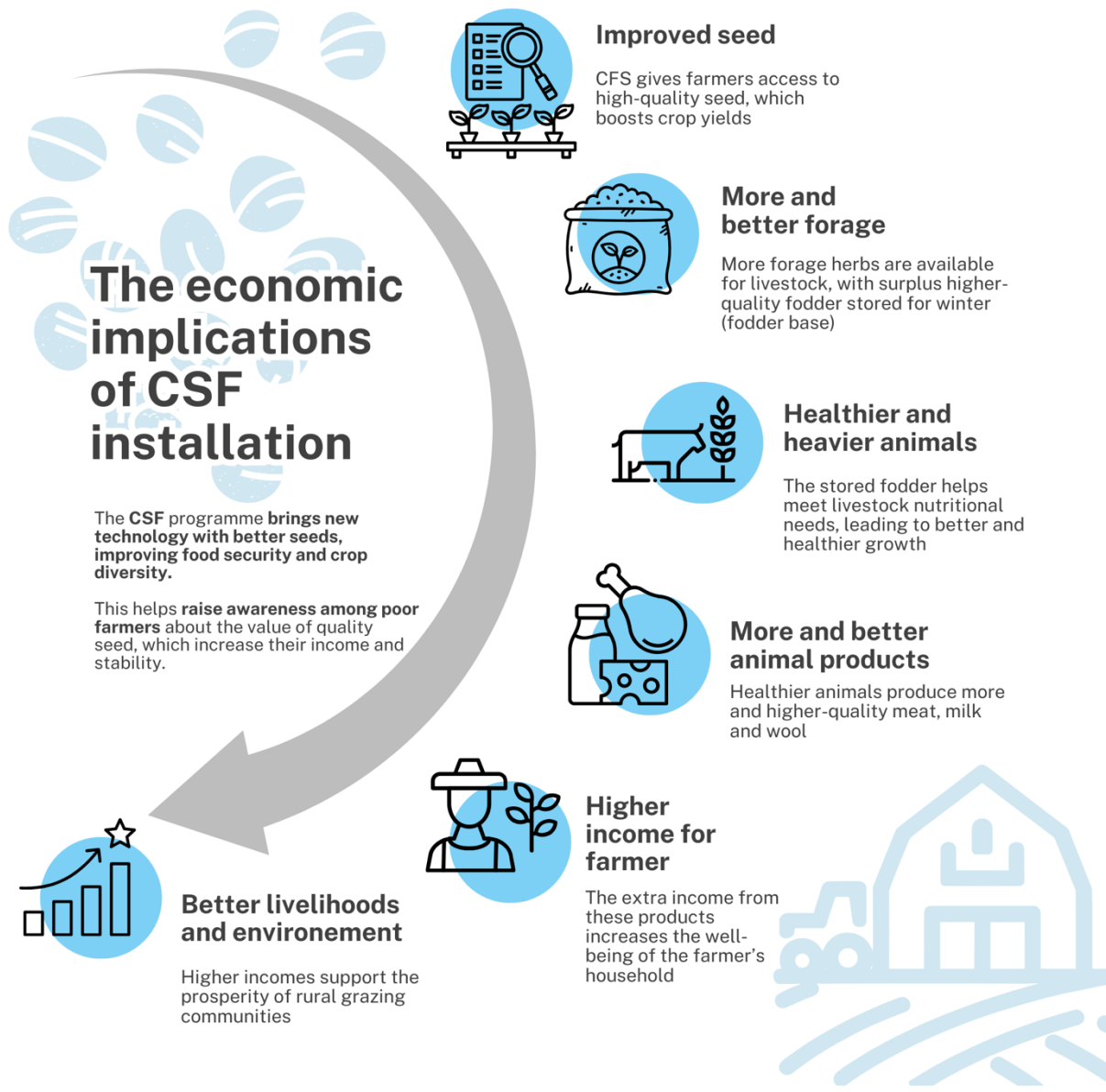
During phase II, “91 new Community Seed Funds established to provide 189 PUUs members access to quality seeds for fodder production so as to reduce grazing pressures on degraded winter pastures.”¹⁶

The first seeds and mineral fertilizers were purchased in the spring of 2018 through a grant under LMDP-II and supplied to all the established CSFs. The following year, a second batch of seeds (alfalfa, sainfoin and barley), along with mineral fertilizers, was procured for 50 such farms. Following the first reproduction, the second reproduction was obtained in autumn of that same year. Both seed harvests were distributed to farmers, who, in return, gave the third reproduction back to the CSFs. Since their inception, the CSFs have renewed their reproductions annually, with seed production carried out by farms holding state-pedigree status. The main distinction between community seed funds and state-pedigree seed farms lies in their scope: farms sell seed universally, while CSFs operate on the unique principle of community engagement and exchange.

The CSF initiative has proven particularly attractive to rural women, providing an invaluable opportunity to procure quality seeds through loans, repayable in the fall. This innovative approach has contributed significantly to economic development and has had a pronounced impact on family well-being.

The economic implications of creating CSFs warrant further investigation, as they give farmers access to high-quality seed, triggering a cascade leading to higher crop yields. The harvested forage herbs are fed to livestock, while a reserve is stored for the winter period (fodder base), helping to meet livestock nutritional needs during winter and thus, boosting productivity across multiple metrics such as live weight, meat, milk and wool yields. The products sold increase farmers' income, positively influencing household well-being and ultimately, the overall prosperity of rural grazing communities. In addition to immediate relief and poverty alleviation, the CFSP has facilitated the dissemination of improved technology in the form of superior seed quality, greater food security and crop diversification. These factors increase poor farmers' awareness and income by highlighting the advantages of using quality seed.

¹⁶ Source Kyrgyzstan - Livestock and Market Development Programme II - Project Completion Report - Main report and appendices, p. 1, 03/01/2022.



Finally, the CSF mechanism, which had initially received funding through LMDP-I, has since proven economically self-sufficient. This is an outstanding result that amplifies the impact of both LMDP phase I and phase II in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁷

¹⁷ The author has extracted numbers and results from the IFAD LMDP2 Completion Report, 2021.

Lessons learned

The CFSP has proven to be a good practice that addresses perceived needs for more and better forage at the grassroots level, especially during the winter season. This has led to the seamless achievement of its sustainability, as beneficiaries have fully embraced and taken ownership of the initiative.¹⁸ The CFSP's efficacy will be assessed from the following standpoints:

- I. **Economic.** By increasing farmers' access to high-quality seed, a chain reaction is set in motion. The cultivated forage grasses serve to nourish livestock and create reserves for winter (feed base), leading to higher animal productivity. Consequently, the sale of these goods generates higher revenue for farmers and their communities. Moreover, this method averts the trampling of spring pastures in autumn by delaying livestock pasture grazing by 5 to 15 days, further mitigating land degradation.¹⁹
- II. **Environmental.** The condition of pastures is improved by sowing grass seed. Rather than increasing livestock numbers, farmers concentrate on improving the quality of farm animals, effectively relieving pressure on pastures and diminishing factors such as methane emissions

Sustainability lies in the exchange mechanism. The CSF exchange mechanism is attractive and convenient to farmers. Beneficiaries do not seek funds to purchase seed and instead are provided with community seed funds at the expense of future harvests.

¹⁸ "This series of steps and processes were the result of a pilot. When the World Bank piloted the CFSP, it understood that the programme had the potential for success. It was then supported and scaled up by the LMDP projects, and the interest was there to adhere to it, since it provided a solution to the winter fodder issue, which was sorely felt by herders. Furthermore, "The CSFs were established within the PCs as social organizations necessary to launch the initiative in simplified terms without taxation or other legal liability. This yielded positive results, members were provided with high-quality forage seeds and were able to improve their forage supply. Since the CSFs were established under PCs, the chairs of the PCs supervise the activities of the CSF. The formalization, i.e., granting legal status to the CSF, means they would have to pay taxes, social deductions and other government fees, which is currently impossible mainly because of the limited funds available - given they are still in the start-up phase." (Cit: Kyrgyzstan - Livestock and Market Development Programme II - Project Completion Report - Main report and appendices, para 261, p.37, 03/01/2022.

¹⁹ Due to the lack of winter fodder, farmers drive animals out to pasture earlier, exacerbating land degradation, as pastures quickly become unusable. An improvement in the forage base prevents this from happening, as farmers will drive their livestock out to pasture some 5 to 15 days later.

- III. **Technology and knowledge transfer.** The CFSP effectively facilitates technology dissemination. The embedded training component fosters favourable conditions for imparting skills and knowledge associated with climate change adaptation practices and proper animal husbandry and pasture preservation techniques.
- IV. **Challenges and risk mitigation.** CSFs are vulnerable to climate shocks such as droughts and floods. They are susceptible to natural disasters, which can disrupt seed production and result in the depletion of financial resources. To address this, the programme includes risk management measures, such as promoting drought-tolerant seed varieties and providing communities with training in climate adaptation techniques.
- V. **Scaling-up.** The active involvement of the NFCSF simplifies scaling-up processes, providing institutional support and endorsing the project's objective of improving pasture quality and productivity while increasing winter feed availability. This institution not only encourages the creation of new seed funds but also supports existing ones, preserving CFSP's institutional memory beyond the completion of IFAD-funded projects.²⁰

²⁰ The NFCSF has supported the project in facilitating improvements in the quality and productivity of pastures and fodder crops, with a particular focus on increasing the availability of winter feed. It has facilitated the creation of new CSFs and the expansion of existing ones. To date, this role has made the NFCSF the institutional memory, as well as the initiative owner, of the CFSP, with its scaling up beyond completion of the IFAD-funded project. It is recognized in the regions that this is a good method of supporting farmers, based on mutual assistance and support. Many farmers would not be able to grow their own crops without such support.



The way forward and final considerations

Although no longer financed under an IFAD project, the CSFs remain operational and fully efficient, demonstrating their sustainability. Future projects should evaluate further investments in this revolving seed mechanism while simultaneously considering its scaling-up potential, which has been widely accepted by producers and farmers, including natural gender inclusion without external demands. Future action could involve additional programme enhancements to maximize the benefits derived from the CFSP initiative. To further improve the programme's efficacy, future considerations may include the following measures:

- I. It would be beneficial for the Ministry of Agriculture to consider designating CSFs as seed farms, in contrast to their current status as public entities.²¹
- II. The challenge of land allocation from the ADF could be addressed by imposing distinct quotas, with local authorities (municipalities) overseeing these matters.
- III. Establishing a designated credit line for CSFs at commercial banks could facilitate the procurement of certified seed, fertilizer and other agricultural inputs.
- IV. Advocating for and supporting the proliferation of Indigenous seed varieties can contribute to the programme's sustainability and further stimulate local markets.

In sum, the CFSP has exhibited considerable success thus far and could potentially be further optimized through the aforementioned approaches. Its unique nature allows for potential scaling up at the regional level and warrants greater promotion in future projects, as well as nationally. The programme's significant impact on a national scale and its capacity for broader implementation constitute its distinct characteristics.

²¹ Yet, further evaluations should be considered to promote economic sustainability during the process, as "The CSFs were established within the pasture committees as social organizations necessary to launch the initiative in simplified terms without taxation or other legal liability. This yielded positive results, members were provided with high-quality forage seeds and were able to improve their forage supply. Since the CSFs were established under PCs, the chairs of the pasture committees supervise the activities of the CSF. The formalization, i.e., granting legal status to the CSF, means they would have to pay taxes, social deductions and other government fees, which is currently impossible mainly because of the limited funds available - given they are still in the start-up phase." LMDP-II Project Completion Report paragraph 261, p. 37.




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