Communiqué on Integrated Seed Sector Development

AU-African Seed and Biotechnology Programme (ASBP)

Integrated Seed Sector Development - Africa Project

Delegates from AU Member States and regional organisations in Africa discussed seed sector development in a meeting organised by the African Union Commission and Wageningen University and Research Centre, financially supported by the Government of the Netherlands. The meeting took place from the 10th to the 11th of May 2011 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This synthesis workshop was preceded by a workshop held in Addis Ababa in October 2010, seed sector assessments and consultative multi-stakeholder workshops in Ethiopia, Mali, Malawi, South Sudan, Uganda and Zambia.  

Recognising that seed is the basis of all crop production and carries the genetic information for capturing the benefits of improved farming systems. Seed is thus at the heart of food security policies at the Continental, Regional, National and household levels. Seed is also a commodity that is the subject of promoting agricultural economic development and entrepreneurship. Seed is a key aspect of biodiversity, making it also a subject of climate change adaptation and environmental policies.

Recognising that different subsectors in agriculture make use of different seed systems, which all have specific values and limitations. The bulk of seed used in Africa is produced by farmers themselves, despite important advances in public and private sector involvement, particularly for maize, and alternative community based initiatives supported by researchers and development agencies.

Whereas countries have taken important steps to develop their seed systems, significant challenges remain to increase seed quality and seed security for all crops, particularly the cereals, pulses and vegetatively propagated crops that are key to food security. Addressing these issues is important as countries begin to implement their agricultural development strategies and investment plans developed on the principles of the African Union endorsed Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

Whereas developments in the seed sector of different African countries differ, several common experiences can be drawn to inform seed sector development strategies at National, Regional, and Continental levels.

1 Zambia received support from Self Help Africa in this project
The meeting observed that:

Different seed systems can be identified in each country that operate alongside each other, broadly described as formal (commercial) seed systems, community-based seed systems and informal (farmer-saved) seed systems. In each country, further seed systems have been identified for particular crops and farmers. These seed systems require targeted policies and programmes to enable their development.

Creating interactions between formal and informal seed systems provides opportunities to improve the effectiveness of seed provision. Examples are the participation of farmers in plant breeding and providing seed technologies and business skills to farmers, which contribute to farmer based local seed business development.

Challenges have been identified in a range of areas, including the provision of early generation seed, access to improved and adapted varieties, incentives for breeders and seed entrepreneurs, seed quality control mechanisms including certification, accreditation and Quality Declared Seed, the transformation from Government and NGO distribution or relief seed provision to sustainable market-based systems, mechanisms to support seed quality and availability in farmer-saved systems and capacity development along the seed chains.

The pluralistic orientation at the National level should be fed into the current processes of Regional harmonization that aims at facilitating international seed trade.

The meeting concluded that:

A pluralistic approach to seed sector development is required to optimally serve objectives of food security, economic development, entrepreneurship and biodiversity.

Seed policies at the National and Regional levels can be based on a definition of a range of seed systems, which – when demarcated well – serve to frame regulations and their implementation mechanisms, as well as incentives for targeted programmes, including capacity strengthening.

The African Union through its Africa Seed and Biotechnology Programme, the Regional Economic Communities, Sub-Regional organizations, the private sector and development partners are requested to continue providing the necessary political, technical and financial support to African Union Member States as they address the challenges identified as priorities within the seed sector development component of countries’ agricultural development strategies and investment plans, which have been developed and elaborated on the principles of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).