



Foundational concepts

Emerging insights and perspectives for advancing the transformation of Africa's seed sector

ISSD AFRICA BRIEFS:

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Terminology

This document complements the **Third Communiqué on Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa (ISSD Africa)**. It provides a general introduction to the concepts and terminology used in the communiqué. It is the first in a series of eight briefs.

Brief 2 – Initiative, introduces ISSD Africa, the ISSD Africa Conference, and their association with the African Seed and Biotechnology Programme of the African Union Commission. **Briefs 3-7** capture **five ambitions** for seed sector transformation in Africa that are presented concisely in the communiqué; they elaborate the insights driving these ambitions. **Brief 8 – Enabling environment**, shares insights into the cross-cutting theme of stewarding transformation.

The following concepts are applied by partners in the ISSD Africa Community of Practice (CoP). We define them here in this brief since they feature in the terminology used in the third ISSD communiqué and associated briefs.

Farmers, seed, and varieties

The seed sector comprises multiple seed systems, seed value chains, and activities; each delivers seed to the farmer, who in turn sows it in his/her field. This seed is of a given variety. The demand for quality seed of that variety is determined by the farmer, whether he or she has a relatively small or large farm, for meeting his/her objectives, including household food security and nutrition, income generation, resilience to shocks and stresses, and/or adaptation to climate change. Such objectives define the farmer's behaviour, including his/her use of and willingness to pay for quality seed of that variety. This behaviour directly drives the functioning of the seed system and associated seed value chain of the variety, and indirectly those of other seed systems and seed value chains that make up the rest of the seed sector by their competition and/or complementarity.

Seed sector performance

The performance of the seed sector in Africa remains constrained, in terms of farmers' use of quality seed, and their access to and adoption of improved varieties; these constraints consequently impact on crop productivity, food security and nutrition, climate change adaptation, and poverty reduction. This impedes Africa's progress towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals and those of Agenda 2063, Africa's development blueprint. Given increasingly urgent calls for food system transformation, critical attention should be given to how the seed sector contributes to desired food system outcomes. These include increased seed availability, access, use, and stability, and a wider crop and varietal portfolio, complemented by socio-economic and environmental outcomes of seed sector transformation.

ISSD Africa encourages your further reading of its communiqués, briefs, and other knowledge products, and participation in the Community of Practice.

For more information, visit www.ISSDafrica.org

Seed systems

The seed sector is comprised of different seed systems. A major problem is that, historically, many interventions in seed sector development have been oriented towards existing formal and commercial seed systems only, disregarding other important channels through which farmers access quality seed and adopt improved varieties.

It is helpful to broadly categorize these as formal, intermediary, and informal seed systems. Formal seed systems involve specialized activities of the seed value chain governed by an official regulatory environment. Seed in formal systems universally carries a label of certification, and activities along the seed value chain are to a large extent commercialized.

Informal seed systems include the activities of farmers, rural communities, and other stakeholders in saving, exchanging, bartering, gifting, and selling seed without formal regulatory involvement, with varying degrees of commercial orientation. We recognize that informal seed systems can be perceived as a pejorative term. More neutral terms are local, traditional, and farmer seed systems. However, given the wider application of the formal/informal dichotomy in literature, we conform to this terminology but by no means consider informal seed systems inferior.

Intermediary seed systems involve individual seed entrepreneurs and to varying degrees also organized groups of farmer producers, like cooperatives and associations. These may be engaged in commercial seed production and marketing with facilitated loose or temporary linkages to formal institutions including research, extension, markets, financial services, and regulation.

Principles for integrated seed sector development

ISSD is guided by eight principles:

(i) foster pluralism and build interventions upon a diversity of seed systems; (ii) design interventions according to the structure of the seed value chain; (iii) promote entrepreneurship and market orientation; (iv) recognize the relevance of informal seed systems; (v) facilitate interactions between informal and formal seed systems; (vi) seek complementary roles for the public and private sector; (vii) support enabling and evolving policies for a dynamic sector; and (viii) promote evidence-based seed sector intervention.

See also this ISSD Africa video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BQxR5vdvZw>, which explains the principles.

Commitments to transform the seed sector

We recognize the goodwill, knowledge, commitments, policies, and engagements of a diverse set of stakeholders, including national governments, regional and continental bodies, donors, the private sector, civil society, farmers, and knowledge institutes in advancing the seed sector's contribution to food security and nutrition, climate change adaptation, and poverty reduction.

Food systems

Food systems include all the connections and feedback loops between: (i) the activities of producing, processing, distributing, preparing, and consuming food and managing waste that arises therefrom; (ii) elements of the environment, people, inputs, infrastructure, and institutions; and (iii) impacts on food security and nutrition, and socio-economic and environmental outcomes.

Transformation

Transformation is a fundamental change over time. The concept of transformation may be understood in different ways depending on the individual - it is not a neutral concept. Even if there is agreement to pursue a common direction, people may differ in their position on how to get there. As such, transformation includes human performance, contestation, and embedding in political processes. For ISSD Africa and partners, transformation is considered to be the collaborative process of achieving a shared and co-defined vision for the seed sector.

Perspectives

Perspectives provide direction and positioning for seed sector transformation. Perspectives are different points of view. In the context of the ISSD Africa Conference and the current communiqué, perspectives arise as particular attitudes towards seed sector transformation.

Insights

Insights are the clear, deep, and sometimes sudden understanding of a complicated problem or situation. They are, for all intents and purposes, lessons learned.

Colophon

Authors and contributors

This brief is part of a series that includes the Third Communiqué on Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa. These briefs capture insights and perspectives from the ISSD Africa Conference. They were developed by several authors with support from contributors; for further details please visit www.ISSDafrica.org

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