

Equity and inclusion

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

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Ambition

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Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa (ISSD Africa) is an international Community of Practice (CoP) working to alleviate the problem of farmers' limited access to quality seed. Its vision is a vibrant, pluralistic, and market-oriented seed sector in Africa. The CoP unites diverse organizations that are inspired in their work by ISSD's guiding principles; they promote pluralism in the seed sector, recognize the value of formal, intermediary, and informal seed systems, take an evidence-driven approach, and pursue multiple desired food system and seed sector outcomes.

This document supports and complements the third ISSD communiqué. It is one in a series of eight briefs.

Brief 1 – Terminology, defines the foundational concepts informing the communiqué and accompanying 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 the **five ambitions** for seed sector transformation in Africa. **Brief 8 – Enabling environment**, shares cross-cutting insights into stewarding transformation.

This brief presents insights generated from individual sessions of the ISSD Africa Conference, laying the foundation for developing perspectives and strategies for pursuing the ambition of equity and inclusion. This document refers to and thereby acknowledges the ISSD Africa Conference sessions, ISSD Africa topics and/or other regional initiatives and hosting organization(s) that contributed to the development and formulation of individual insights.

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

ISSD Africa Conference: sessions, insights, ambitions, and perspectives

Concluding the third phase of ISSD Africa, 170 seed professionals met in Kigali from 17 to 19 October 2022 for the ISSD Africa Conference, where they shared and discussed outcomes of the CoP's action research activities. This took place over the course of eight sessions, corresponding with ISSD Africa's eight topics, and was complemented by seven additional sessions on topics proposed by other continental and regional initiatives.

Each of the sessions provided specific insights. A committee comprising participants from diverse backgrounds, expertise, and areas of engagement in the seed sector, prepared a synthesis of emerging insights and perspectives. These have been grouped into five ambitions that provide direction and shape a vision for seed sector transformation in the coming years. These ambitions are food security and nutrition, equity and inclusion, competitiveness, climate change adaptation, and resilience to shocks and stresses. The third ISSD communiqué has been compiled to share these perspectives for advancing seed sector transformation in Africa.

Call for action

ISSD Africa aimed to document the outcomes of the conference in the communiqué and briefs as accessible formats for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers active in and concerned with the transformation of Africa's seed sector. ISSD Africa strives to inspire these readers and encourage their use, exchange, and discussion of the perspectives and insights shared. It is ISSD Africa's hope that the communiqué and briefs support reflection on and guidance of organizations, programmes, and individual professionals in contributing to the transformation of the seed sector with the ultimate goal to improve farmers' access to and use of quality seed of improved varieties.

Ambition

The representation and participation of different groups of individuals in activities of the seed sector and their equitable access to, control over, and benefits from resources in the sector is ensured.

PERSPECTIVE 9: Understand the needs, preferences, and barriers of different social groups to develop more socially sensitive and inclusive strategies to variety development, variety promotion, and seed supply

Key to increasing the use of quality seed and better varieties is an in-depth understanding of the social groups targeted by breeding programmes (i.e., who they are, and what their needs, preferences, and barriers are in accessing varieties and seed that they prefer). However, since gender and social norms are highly context specific, the success of a socially responsive approach in one place should not be taken as a given elsewhere. An improved understanding of adoption behaviour requires a context-specific analysis of gender and social relations, and specifically of the power dynamics and the social norms that affect preferences as well as pre-existing perceptions about quality seed. Moreover, solutions developed based on this research need to be tested through rigorous empirical research.

INSIGHT:
Impactful plant breeding requires a transdisciplinary approach with all parties involved having to overcome interdisciplinary barriers to working together

The current organization of variety development programmes of public agricultural research institutes is driven by plant breeders. Yet, diverse demands for variety traits, including not only productivity, but other consumer preferences such as nutrition, taste, cooking time, and climate resilience need to be considered too. Collaboration with nutritionists or gender experts may provide this level of depth.

INSIGHT:
Plant breeders, seed companies, and gender experts should work together proactively

For a more informed targeting of the groups that will benefit from new varieties, an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of the targeted area is important. The integration of gender and social analysis in the design of seed sector interventions

will allow for the design of tailored and inclusive strategies for variety development, variety promotion, and dissemination, and will cater to the diversity of seed users.

PERSPECTIVE 10: Involve farmers, traders, processors, and consumers in variety development

To ensure new varieties meet user demands and preferences, plant breeders need to involve not only farmers but also traders, processors, and consumers in their variety development programmes at the earliest stage. Farmer participatory approaches should be gender balanced with sensitivity to the socio-cultural context, inclusive of the most disadvantaged groups, and designed with the goal of empowering diverse local seed users.

INSIGHT:
The participation of local stakeholders in variety selection captures more diverse demands

Engaging the full spectrum of stakeholders involved or interested in variety selection may require more effort but is likely to increase the chances of variety uptake. This is because it gives greater consideration of the richness and value of local knowledge.

PERSPECTIVE 11: Enable inclusive access to information about quality seed

Seed companies and extension services should enable seed users to access information that supports them in decision-making on variety and seed purchases. Additionally, they should design and disseminate user-friendly tools that improve seed accessibility for disadvantaged groups.

INSIGHT:
There are multiple channels for disseminating variety- and seed-related information

A multiplicity of dissemination channels can ensure broad spectrum outreach, but it can also cause confusion and/or duplicate and dissipate efforts. Where beneficial, alignment, integration, and convergence should be encouraged. Such channels should

embrace digitalization and more contemporary media for targeting farmers.

PERSPECTIVE 12: **Foster the inclusion of women and youth in seed business**

With the support of experts on gender and social inclusion, seed sector stakeholders should identify and address the challenges that limit the participation of women and younger generations in seed business. In addition, to boost confidence among those interested in seed business, stakeholders could identify and showcase champions in seed business to serve as role models for others. While offering an opportunity for empowerment of new seed entrepreneurs, increasing the participation of less represented groups in seed business could lead to an enhanced understanding of the different needs and preferences of farmers and consumers.

INSIGHT:
It is critical that women and youth take on leadership roles in the seed sector

For an inclusive seed sector, women and youth working in research, industry, regulations, and policies, and as entrepreneurs, must be actively promoted.

Deliberate consideration and adoption of more inclusive seed systems will greatly broaden the

opportunities for women and youth. In the guise of potential role models, women and younger generations could catalyse fundamental changes contributing to a more socially inclusive and gender-balanced seed sector.

PERSPECTIVE 13: **Develop, test, and evaluate policies to prompt more inclusive interventions**

Policymakers should apply a pluralistic lens recognizing multiple seed systems (formal, intermediary, and informal), and include considerations on gender and social equity to facilitate social and financial inclusion of the most marginalized groups. For new policies to challenge the status quo of inequitable gender and social relations, the design of seed sector strategies and investment plans should be conducted in consultation with women, men, and youth from different social backgrounds. To highlight the impacts of this approach, efforts to test more inclusive policies need to be documented and empirically evaluated.

INSIGHT:
Policymaking should be more inclusive

Historically, policies, regulations, and services have targeted just a few formal commercial seed systems and, in some cases, have gone so far as to outlaw informal exchange among farmers. Whilst

policymaking increasingly adopts a pluralistic approach, an important next step is for the participation and representation of different social groups, including small, medium and large enterprises, and farmer entrepreneurs - men and women of different ages and social statuses - in dialogue on policy options. Considerations of gender and social equity should inform policy, regulation, and instruments of their implementation as well as business practices. Informing decision-makers will, however, require more evidence on the impacts of socially inclusive approaches.

PERSPECTIVE 14:

Accommodate different interests in diagnostic frameworks for monitoring, evaluation, and learning of seed sector strategies and plans

Various programmes support the design and development of seed sector strategies and investment plans. A common critique is that it is essential that they also accommodate the different, and in some cases conflicting, interests of multiple stakeholders in the seed sector, including those operating in intermediary and informal seed systems, and men and women small-scale farmers of different ages and socio-cultural backgrounds.

INSIGHT:
Diagnostic and strategic frameworks need the right level of contestation

Various programmes and initiatives support expert and stakeholder consultation in the design and development of seed sector strategies and investment plans. These include diagnostic and strategic frameworks, e.g., SeedSAT and the National Seed

Road Maps Toolbox. To monitor progress in transformation, they include dashboards with a set of performance indicators. In parallel, benchmarking organizations have developed different indices that assess multiple dimensions of seed sector performance, e.g., the African Seed Access Index (TASAI), Access to Seeds Index, and the Enabling the Business of Agriculture project of the World Bank. A common critique is that these tools need to accommodate the different and, in certain cases, conflicting interests of multiple stakeholders, including diverse entrepreneurs (e.g., SMEs; national, regional, and global seed companies, but also service providers, traders, and agrodealers). If the ambition of assessments and strategies is to contribute to a more gender-balanced and socially inclusive seed sector, this has implications for the way the frameworks and indices are developed and progress is monitored.

ISSD Africa conference session references:

The insights presented above emerged during specific sessions of the ISSD Africa Conference, organized by partners in the ISSD Africa CoP and global and regional initiatives. These sessions included:

- **ISSD Africa Topic:** Gender dynamics in seed systems (IFPRI/CGIAR Collaborative Platform for Gender Research)
- **ISSD Africa Topic:** Creating demand for quality seed (Wageningen University & Research)
- **Initiative:** Are environments truly enabling private companies to invest in the seed sector? (Access to Seeds Index of the World Benchmarking Alliance and Resilience)
- **Initiative:** Seed company strategies targeting smallholder farmers in Africa (Access to Seeds Index of the World Benchmarking Alliance and Resilience)
- **Initiative:** SeedSAT Guiding the development of a strategy for investment in the seed sector (AGRA)
- **Initiative:** Community-based seed production and marketing: Experiences and perspectives (Oxfam-Novib).

Colophon

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