



Stewarding transformation

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

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Enabling environment

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.

This brief concerns fostering an enabling environment for stewarding seed sector transformation. In this regard, disparate perspectives and accompanying insights, crosscutting the five ambitions of food security and nutrition, equity and inclusion, competitiveness, climate change adaptation, and resilience to shocks and stresses, are shared. 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 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.

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

Insights

Food security & nutrition

PERSPECTIVE 1:

Invest, professionalize, and collaborate in increasing farmers' seed security

Food security does not exist without seed security. Farmers need physical and financial access to sufficient quantities of quality seed of adapted and preferred varieties at the right time. Physical access means that the right amount of seed is available, while financial access means farmers can afford the seed. To achieve this, multiple issues need to be addressed simultaneously.

INSIGHT:

Insight: Political will and policy must align

The Third Biennial Review Report on the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) (2015-2021) reveals that only ten member states of the African Union have been able to

provide a growth rate for the ratio of the supply of quality agriculture inputs, including seed, to the total national inputs requirements for food and other crops. The report reaffirms the need to put in place adequate regulatory processes, enabling policies, and legal frameworks to facilitate access to inputs. Whilst progress in general shows slight improvement, just one country is currently on track towards achieving the CAADP Malabo commitments by 2025.

PERSPECTIVE 7:

Develop policies supportive of crop and seed system diversity

Seed-related policies mainly focus on few staple crops (cereals), commercialization, and the formal sector. It is important that policymakers tailor policies to other crops, including small-grain cereals, pulses, oilseeds, roots, tubers, and bananas, as well as intermediary and informal (farmer-led) seed systems. Policies need to enable farmers to generate a living income, enhance the resilience of their livelihoods and those of their communities, and reinforce household food security and nutrition.

INSIGHT:

There is a need for pluralism in the seed sector

Variations exist in the commercial potential of different crops. Hence, different models for seed production and distribution are needed to respond to these variations, working with e.g., seed companies,

small and medium enterprises (SMEs), seed producer cooperatives, and farmer seed enterprises. Quality seed production and distribution for highly commercial crops will be managed by the private sector. Subsistence and traditional crops will require public efforts to produce and distribute quality seed.

Public breeders should make their varieties available through whichever channel reliably sustains farmers' access. They should not exclusively offer varieties through a single channel, especially when it has yet to prove its effectiveness.

Equity & Inclusion

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 few formal commercial seed systems and have, in some cases, gone so far as to outlaw informal exchange among farmers. Whilst

policymaking increasingly applies the lens of pluralism, 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.

Competitiveness

PERSPECTIVE 15: **Delineate roles of the public and private sectors in different seed systems**

The seed sector is complex. Public, private, and civil society actors all have a stake, and many different issues are of concern. Large investments and new developments in the sector, including further commercialization, and challenges in the space where public and private interests meet, require revisiting responsibilities and task division. Evidence needs to guide structural reforms and public-private partnerships, and create an environment that endorses public responsibility while truly enabling private investment. Government, civil society, and development organizations should refrain from financial support that distorts markets and undermines seed business. The private sector also has a responsibility in building seed systems' resilience to shocks and stresses.

INSIGHT:
Seed sector investments are not always strategic in the long term

In recent decades, governments, donors, development organizations, and banks have made significant investments in the seed sector. They completely or partially fund public services that are critical to a well-

functioning seed sector - e.g., variety development, early generation seed (EGS) supply, and seed quality assurance. Moreover, they subsidize the strategic engagement of private investors in the production and marketing of seed, including EGS. In a dynamic and evolutionary way, dialogue and evidence should inform and guide the investments of the public sector, restructure partnerships, moderate interactions between public and private entities, and foster an enabling environment.

PERSPECTIVE 16: **Support community-based seed systems**

Farmers have diverse demands for quality seed of a wide range of crops. Seed of certain crops is more profitable than others, and many locally important food crops are not of interest to large-scale commercial seed producers. These crops are covered by farmer-led and community-based seed production and marketing (i.e., informal and intermediary seed systems). The governance systems and incentive mechanisms that drive the seed sector should support all seed systems, spanning all crops.

INSIGHT:
Community-based seed stakeholders contribute to the local availability of quality seed and access to new varieties

Community-based seed stakeholders, such as farmer seed enterprises, local seed businesses, and community seed banks, play an important role in supplying small-scale farmers with quality seed of many locally important food crops, particularly those that are not of interest to commercial seed companies. The critical contributions of community structures to not only seed supply but also to the conservation of diversity and input to crop improvement should be recognized and supported.

INSIGHT:
Recognize farmers' varieties

It is important to recognize the role that farmers play in developing adapted and preferred local varieties. In many cases, these are not eligible for variety registration, early generation seed production or quality assurance. As farmers may have limited opportunity, collaboration between breeders and farmers may be pursued to speed up variety improvement in a more participatory way, especially for less or non-commercially incentivized crops.

PERSPECTIVE 21: **Facilitate alignment and transparency in the provision of seed sector information**

Various (digital) platforms provide information guiding the development of the seed sector. To avoid duplication of efforts and confusion among stakeholders, and to facilitate effective information exchange, (digital) platforms need to be aligned and - where beneficial - converged. To enhance opportunities for regional trade, platforms need to include regional information.

INSIGHT:
There are multiple dissemination 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 22: **Involve multiple stakeholders in the development and monitoring of seed sector strategies**

Seed sector strategies and investment plans provide direction to development efforts. Considering the diversity of stakeholders, sometimes with conflicting interests, it is critical to involve a wide diversity of stakeholders in contestation over strategies and plans. Supporting the development of a competitive and economically viable seed sector, it is important that entrepreneurs at different levels (cooperatives, SMEs, national, regional, global) in different parts of the seed value chain (seed production, processing, trade) are included in strategy development and monitoring.

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 the assessments and strategies is to contribute to a more competitive and economically viable seed sector, this has implications for the way the frameworks and indices are developed and progress is monitored.

INSIGHT:
Seed regulatory systems maps have a variety of users

Regulatory systems maps (or RSMs) depict regulatory processes in detail and highlight intervention points, good practices, and areas of regional alignment. New Markets Lab develops RSMs for economic rules and trade agreements, sector-focused regulations (including agricultural regulations, such as those related to seed and fertilizer), and procedures involved in registering businesses. In the seed sector, RSMs represent relevant regulatory processes, e.g., variety registration, seed certification, and seed trade. Additional features of seed RSMs include the cost and time required to complete regulatory processes, aspects of inclusion, and sector features related to the variation that exists among crops, seed systems and seed sector stakeholders. Seed sector stakeholders can use RSMs to compare country regulations and procedures, identify best practices, reform systems, and improve the regulation of seed markets.

PERSPECTIVE 23: **Drive the transition towards a nature-positive seed industry**

For transitioning towards a more nature-positive seed industry – one that uses more diversity for resilience, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and improved nutrition – the private sector should be encouraged to work with policymakers to adapt and change the governance systems and incentive structures that currently drive the seed sector. This is required to overcome the negative impacts of conventional crop production systems on the environment and human health.

INSIGHT:
Nature-positive is emerging as an alternative to conventional agriculture

Conventional agriculture contributes significantly to several global crises: a nutrition crisis, a climate crisis, land degradation, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity. Agricultural production systems need to be transformed to become more sustainable. Nature-positive agriculture is an emerging alternative to what has become conventional. Promoting ecosystem services, regenerative practices, agroforestry, circular economy, and waste management all contribute to nature positive agriculture. Production systems move from monocropping and uniformity, to more complex and diverse systems. This requires investment in research and development for new farming practices, with new crops, varieties, varietal traits, and seed systems, as well as an enabling environment with policies and institutional support for fostering and advancing the transition to nature-positive agriculture and associated seed systems.

Climate change adaptation

PERSPECTIVE 29:

Design policies conducive to climate change adaptation of agri-food systems

To promote the implementation of climate-smart farming practices, including the use of adapted crops and varieties, and more resilient production practices adapted to climate change, clear policies and institutional support are required. These policies need to support farmers and other stakeholders who apply such sustainable practices, protect the environment, and meet climate goals. Policies need to promote access to and use of agrobiodiversity. They also need to transform farming and market systems so that they are conducive to and rewarding of sustainable practices. In this context, regional and global dimensions must be considered.

INSIGHT:

The transition to sustainable agricultural production must be gradual

Food security and nutrition must be maintained whilst making the transition to sustainable agricultural production. Government support for unsustainable agricultural practices should be halted as soon as possible, but without risking food insecurity or pushing people into poverty. The monitored introduction and success

of market- and non-market incentives for sustainable agricultural practices will support the managed transition to a more sustainable future.

Resilience to shocks & stresses

PERSPECTIVE 34:

Develop enabling policies for non-formal seed systems and diverse goals

Seed policies generally promote the development of the formal commercial sector and also focus on major food crops. The development of a seed sector resilient to shocks and stresses requires recognition of the important role of informal seed systems in facilitating access to diverse seed for farmers, and in delivering when all else fails. Seed policies need to enable the functioning of informal seed systems and provide room for their improvement. This requires the review of seed-related policies through the lenses of promoting diversity, nutrition, and climate resilience.

INSIGHT:

Crop diversity is crucial for nutrition and climate change adaptation

Crop diversity choices, preferences, and selections are driven by the diverse needs and specific conditions of farming households. These relate to food, nutrition, income, livestock, soil, local climate, and production environment. In

the context of coping with hardship, crop diversity choices may include considerations of strategic local food crops. Informal seed systems play a dominant role in addressing the multiple goals of farmers contributing to resilience building. Seed policy should broaden its scope by supporting the functioning of informal seed systems where the roles of women, local markets, traders, and seed social networks are key to crop diversity management and seed supply.

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:** Enabling seed policies (IFPRI/CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets)
- **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:** SeedSAT Guiding the development of a strategy for investment in the seed sector (AGRA)
- **Initiative:** Delivering genetic gains in farmers' fields: Genetic innovation in the One CGIAR (CGIAR)
- **Initiative:** Regulatory System Maps supporting seed sector transformation (New Markets Lab)
- **Initiative:** Community-based seed production and marketing: Experiences and perspectives (Oxfam-Novib)

Colophon

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