Expert Meeting on the Impact of Seed Laws on Smallholder Farming Systems in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities

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The FAO Voluntary Guide for National Seed Policy Formulation & Its Implementation

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Purpose of the Guide

- Availability and Access to affordable quality seeds and planting materials of the most suitable crop varieties essential for improving food security and nutrition;

- Growing complexity of the seed sector involving multiple actors and necessity to promote an approach that recognizes and integrates the role of various actors.
The Seed Policy Guide

- FAO requested by the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture to provide countries with policy guidance in linking PGRFA conservation, plant breeding with sustainable seed

- Intended for use by policy makers and national seed agencies, public and private seed organizations to guide the formulation of a seed policy:
  - Section A: What is a seed policy?
  - Section B: Policy Formulation
  - Section C: The seed policy document
  - Section D: Key elements of national seed policy
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Why a seed policy?

- Limited clarity regarding the roles of different stakeholders, (the public and private sector) and the respective roles of the formal and informal seed sectors;
- Regulatory framework that does not sufficiently reflect the needs of the formal and informal seed sectors as well as their inter-linkages;
- Limited access to quality seed owing to weakness of delivery mechanisms;
- Limited testing and release of new varieties to meet needs and preferences of the farmers;
- Limited funding for plant breeding for the development of suitable varieties;
- Lack of clear understanding of the different needs of the large scale commercial sector and small farming systems.
What is a seed policy?

- It is a statement of principles that guides government action and explains the roles of relevant stakeholders in the coordination, structure, functioning and development of the seed system comprising both formal and informal sectors;
- It has clearly stated objectives regarding the seed sector and specifies how to achieve them (in the Plan of Action) and be linked to the agriculture and other national policies;
- It clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the key participants in the seed sector (both public and private) and provides coordination mechanisms.
What is a seed policy?

- It includes the elements that are essential to consider in seed sector development.
- Seed Policy is the means by which the Seed Law and Regulations are implemented.
- Can help set priorities, identify conditions for sustainable use of PGRFA, establish partnerships, improve coordination and sharing of experiences.
- Complements the national PGRFA strategy.
- A seed policy is formulated based on the specific needs and stage of development of the agriculture sector in the country.
Key elements of a seed policy

- Variety development
- Seed production
- Seed quality assurance system
- Agricultural extension
- Seed marketing
- Seed import and export
- Seed enterprise development
- Seed value chain
- Seed security
- Capacity building
- Seed legislation
Crop variety development

- Ensure support for PGR conservation;
- Consideration of the needs of small-scale farmers, nutritional and other food requirements;
- Address the diverse breeding needs of crops;
- Strengthen linkages between variety development and seed production to ensure that farmers have easy access to new and adapted varieties, including the ability to easily access, exchange and use seeds underpins the informal sector and is a crucial practice for facilitating access to seeds;
- Enact biosafety legislation and state clear position regarding biotechnology.
Seed production

- Address the roles of the formal and informal seed systems and the need for coordination between components of both seed systems;
- Support/recognize informal seed systems where they prevail:
  - Recognition of the informal sector’s important role and promotion of support in areas such as extension, training schemes for farmers, community seed banks, germplasm conservation, and seed quality control
  - Recognition of the role of women in these various functions
Agricultural extension

- Create awareness among farmers of new crops, varieties, quality seed and which seeds that are suitable under different agro-ecological conditions and contribute to increased agricultural production with highest possible capacity to adapt to climate change.

- Supporting and promoting farmer-to-farmer extension networks and ensuring that small-scale farmers have the freedom to save, sell, exchange, use and reuse seeds of their own varieties.
Seed enterprise development

- Create a conducive environment to the establishment and growth of seed enterprises (private sector, farmer’s cooperatives, small-scale enterprises)

- Should be adapted to the level of development of the seed sector as well as the differences between crops;

- Should encompass an efficient institutional design for the coordination and implementation of the policy.
Seed marketing

- Define government position on seed-related issues such as pricing, subsidies, dealer networks, credit, import and export.

- Recognize, support and improve the traditional seed exchange mechanism by farmers.

- Should encompass an efficient institutional design for the coordination and implementation of the policy.
Implementation Process

- An action plan that is realistic and sustainable for the steps necessary to implement the elements of the policy.
- Strong government ownership and commitment (for funding from national sources and (donor as necessary)).
- Clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders and a coordination mechanism.
- Monitoring and review and revision of the policy as necessary.
- Revision of seed legislation, if necessary.
Conclusions

- Promoting an approach that recognizes and integrates the roles of the various players is critical;

- The main purpose of seed laws are to improve the overall quality of seeds put in the marketplace.

- Seed laws can be also used to promote an environment for farmer managed seed systems and local seed enterprises.

- Policy complements legislation in that it is unable to address certain aspects of seed sector operations.
Thank you for your attention