



AfricaSeeds

Implementing agency for the African Union seed programme
Agence pour la mise en œuvre du programme semencier de l'Union Africaine

Keynote Address

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Honorable Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to extend fraternal greetings from AfricaSeeds and the AU Commission on the auspicious occasion of the ISSD Africa Conference. Many of us recollect very fondly the early stages when the ISSD idea was first mooted and it gives us all a lot of pride that we have travelled this far with this concept.

Ladies and gentlemen, It is my singular honor and privilege to present the keynote address first in my capacity as Executive Director of AfricaSeeds, the Coordinating and implementing agency of AU's continental seed programme, ASBP; but more importantly, I am acting for Dr. Janet Edeme, Director of Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission, AUC, who regrettably couldn't be with us due to an urgent official assignment at the UN this week.

Those of us who are familiar with Dr. Edeme and her work will bear testimony to the passion she brings to African seed sector issues, particularly as they relate to ASBP, which propels me to suggest that she must be missing being here with us today. I can only pray that I can, in my own small way, succeed in imparting to this august body the interest, the concern and the hopes that AUC harbors for the future and well-being of the African seed sector in general and the ASBP in particular.

The ISSD Africa project has confronted four key challenges in the African seed sector: (1) how to promote seed entrepreneurship; (2) how to increase access to varieties in the public domain; (3) how to match global commitments with national realities; and (4) how to support seed sector development under CAADP, each of the topics being assigned to one Thematic Group.

The first two phases of the ISSD Africa project have been concluded. In the first phase, the Launch phase, the project was embedded in suitable institutional arrangements, thematic working groups were started and preparation of the action-learning projects were undertaken. In the second phase, the Action-learning phase, action-learning projects were implemented and preliminary project results were validated. Currently, the third phase, the Consolidation phase, is being planned and in that phase the results of the action-learning projects will be synthesized and shared.

It has been an exciting period. Ten countries have been involved from the onset: Burkina-Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. My own country Côte d'Ivoire joined in at the Action Learning Stage. We all have a lot to report and we

are looking forward to the country presentations which will illustrate the depth of activities and findings in the participating countries.

But what does this all mean in the larger continental seed sector picture that lies out there? There is not that doubt several of you are familiar with ASBP, AU's continental seed program. But just to recapitulate, let me give a bit of the history and purpose of the program.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the highest level of leadership, Africa has long recognized that quality seeds play a critical role in building food and nutrition security. Therefore the serious inequities and challenges which have, for long, plagued Africa's seed sector constitute huge barriers to the continental goals in agricultural development. In view of that, the AU Heads of State and Government, during their Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU) in Sirte, Libya, on 5 July 2005, requested that African experts should lead in the development of an effective and sustainable seed sector that would form a pathway for the achievement of continental food and nutrition security. A continental effort, involving a wide range of stakeholders, fully responded to this request and in 2007 the Heads of State and Government adopted the African Seed and Biotechnology Program (ASBP) as the continental framework for seed sector development in the continent.

The overall program goal is: To contribute to increased food and nutrition security and to poverty alleviation in Africa, through the establishment of effective and efficient seed systems and enhanced application of biotechnologies and methodologies within the seed sector. The program is based on an interrelated set of components that collectively provide a strategic approach to address the main barriers and challenges to improving the seed sector in Africa. The program has been designed with a focus on diverse farmer needs across the continent of Africa. It promotes partnerships with international organizations which will assist nations to achieve commitments under relevant international conventions.

Overall, the program has a total of 20 interrelated Components, composed of six Components at continental level, six at the regional level and eight at the national level. In the implementation arrangement approved for the African Seed and Biotechnology Program, AfricaSeeds has been designated as lead implementer and coordinator of AU's seed program.

However, AfricaSeeds is not meant to act alone: more importantly, AfricaSeeds will collaborate with all other relevant institutions, initiatives and stakeholders involved in seed development and coordinate or cooperate in all seed interventions which may be conducted by them, whether within ASBP as a program or when they adopt ASBP as a framework. Indeed, ASBP is designed in such a way that any activity that is conducted in Africa's seed sector could find accommodation there irrespective of the implementation modality. We all aim at the same goal and all that is desired is to share information that will enable AfricaSeeds to incorporate the progress made into its gap analysis and periodic reporting to the AUC to keep track on progress towards the continental seed sector goals.

With that in mind, the mandate of AfricaSeeds is to implement and coordinate the implementation of ASBP and serve as technical, policy and resource mobilization initiator with a view to assisting

in the development of comprehensive national, regional and continental seed programs in Africa. In that vein, AfricaSeeds serves the overall interests of all seed development stakeholders and takes on an advocacy role to promote the importance of quality seeds and provide greater visibility for seed systems development, thereby assisting in the development of comprehensive seed program initiatives.

The strategy of AfricaSeeds is based on the overall requirements of the ASBP which recognizes the specificity and complexity of the African seed sector. The strategy therefore embraces, in an integrated manner, the entire seed value chain, spanning from genetic resources, plant breeding, seed production and quality control to seed marketing by the private sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, even before ASBP concretely got off the ground, leading experts in both Africa and external institutions led by CDI, saw the merit in it and recognized its relevance in addressing the challenges and peculiarities of the African seed sector. The recognition that in Africa it is not the corporate seed sector model alone that needs to be desired but that there is a continuum of seed systems, starting from seed saving practices and other farmer based initiatives to community- based seed strategies and smallholder seed production techniques, forming an integrated and complimentary continuum with the corporate model which then delivers to end users equitably according to their needs and circumstances, and ensuring that the seed needs of all crops, and the preferences of all farmers, are addressed in a holistically healthy seed sector in its entirety, not just healthy for a few crops and selected seed producers.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to dwell a bit on the situation of the Informal Seed Sector, a tag which is a bit anathema to some. Well, in Africa not only does the informal seed sector form about 80% of the seed source, but it also confers many advantages from the African farmers' and consumers' point of view. For that alone, we have justification to formally make interventions in that sector. But more importantly, to guide the policies of formal sector proponents, let me remind that if we desire to grow the formal or private sector in Africa beyond the current 10 to 15 % average, that percentage increment must come from the ranks of the informal sector. Practically this can only come about when we intervene in the informal sector, building up required capacities, changing practices and opening up opportunities and then gradually, with scaling up, the informal sector conversions go to swell up the corporate ranks.

I am happy to note that a large number of seed specialists have participated in the ISSD Africa activities. I see that the situation mirrors the overwhelming participation of African Seed Experts and their international partners during the ASBP formulation processes. No doubt this augurs well for the full implementation of ASBP. AUC sees in ISSD Africa a microcosm of ASBP, recognizing that the key components of the program from Policy, Variety Development, Seed Production, Conditioning and Storage to Marketing, Extension and Quality Assurance are all inherent in the ISSD framework, making it truly a preparatory forerunner to ASBP. A little over four years of implementing the ISSD Africa project, from its inception when the institutional arrangement was embedded in suitable national entities, to the second stage, action learning research stage, which has prepared the way for take-off into a wider continental coverage, we foresee that the skills and knowledge which have been so precisely honed to serve as a critical policy, technical and

organizational tool, will be available to serve national seed programs well, in the next level of seed sector development in Africa.

But much beyond anticipating the next level of activities under ISSD Africa, its successes so far are substantial and convincing enough to even now serve as basis for all of us taking on ASBP in its entirety. In a nutshell, ISSD has established the importance of seed mapping which will enable a credible and rational take off of seed project plans; it has brought to the fore the importance of analyzing success stories as basis for scaling up and adapting them to solve other problems; it has encouraged policy makers to address policy lapses and develop consensus prescriptions which are aimed at linking with policy processes, particularly as they relate to CAADP, to address inequities.

Above all, we have, in our various countries, learnt how to identify the key themes of relevance to the seed sector issues pertaining in our countries and those that we wish to see taken forward in the further elaboration of the ISSD concept into a continental ambience. AfricaSeeds would like very much to see much more collaboration with ISSD in a future expanded ISSD program. While ISSD Africa would bring to such a collaboration the valuable experiences and lessons learnt in the current and past phases of the ISSD program, AfricaSeeds would bring to it the wide range of tools and strategies that it has developed for conducting its mandate of coordinating and implementing ASBP. Added to this would be the marshalling of the participation of the 45 member states of AfricaSeeds, across the length and breadth of Africa, who are at various stages of seed development but who all have particular contributions they can bring to the table.

The agenda before all of us is clear. We have dialogued a lot and now is the time to act:

- The decision on ASBP by AU Heads of State in Addis Ababa in 2007;
- Seed sector targets established at the CAADP @10 meeting in Durban in 2014;
- Signals from the Malabo Declaration later in 2014 based on those targets;
- Resolutions on seed from the Dakar Agricultural conference in 2015;
- Conference on EGS in Addis in 2016,

All these point to a consensus agenda which must guide all of us in prosecuting the urgent war on Africa's seed woes.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to briefly state the emerging consensus elements of that agenda which we will need to address as the next phase of seed sector development in Africa:

- A rapid development and growth in seed enterprises in which small and medium scale seed entities are prioritized;
- Development of a facilitatory regime of policy and regulatory processes which will provide the required basis for actions by the public and private sectors, as well as civil society organizations and other stakeholders in the short, medium and long term;
- Adoption of a corrective program of expanding the benefits of modern crop improvement to the

large number of traditional and minor crops which have hitherto been sidelined by research and the seed companies;

- Ensuring a holistic coordination and monitoring of all seed sector efforts with a view to enhancing collaboration by all stakeholders, supported by a strong continental data and knowledge base which is easily available to all actors;
- Deploying Public Private Partnership strategies and eliminating duplications.

Both AUC and AfricaSeeds see the agenda elements forming the thread by which both ASBP and ISSD are woven and look forward to seeing ISSD playing a lead role in translating the agenda into concrete activities as indeed it has done in the ISSD Africa Project over the past two years.

At this juncture, let me pay tribute also to the large number of development partners and donors who have rallied to Africa's side, to build a continental seed sector that will constitute a credible pathway towards the achievement of food and nutrition security, agriculture transformation and economic prosperity.

In conclusion, Ladies and gentlemen, let me recognize that a wide range of contributions and effort by governments, development partners and other stakeholders have currently converged to make this period an era for seed development in Africa. These efforts, if properly directed and coordinated, should go a long way towards the fulfilment of Africa's cherished goal of seed security for food and nutrition security. What AfricaSeeds brings to contribute to these efforts are the important features of holistic and integrated approach, complementarity, collaboration and consultation, as well as advocacy and commitment. This contribution is aimed at eliminating some of the hindrances which have, in the past, impeded progress. The role of AfricaSeeds as lead implementer and coordinator of ASBP will be based on relevant and effective partnerships with all, and within the framework of the CAADP process. Therefore, on this great occasion when we have the chance to see a bit of the insides of ASBP through the ISSD Africa lens, AfricaSeeds sends out a clarion to all of Africa's seed development practitioners, development allies, farmers and all other related institutions to join forces with it as well as with ISSD, and with each other, to achieve the seed sector goals that Africa has set.

Thank you and God bless us all.