



AfricaSeeds

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

International Workshop on Validation of Seeds Operations Toolkit

Abidjan, 14 -18 November 2016

Speech of the Executive Director

Distinguished guests, Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, on this very important occasion of the International Validation workshop on Seeds Operations Toolkit, permit me to record AfricaSeeds' deep appreciation to all of you for honoring our invitation to come to Abidjan this week. We welcome you to the great city of Abidjan. Your coming is ample testimony of your concurrence that seed sector issues are of great importance in Africa's agriculture and by inference, in Africa's food, nutrition, economic, security, employment and wealth issues.

The advent of the African Seed and Biotechnology Programme (ASBP), brought into being after many years of expert consultation by Africa's seed experts and by eventual proclamation by AU Heads of State and Government during their summit meeting in 2007 in Addis Ababa, no doubt was a milestone as it decidedly pronounced the seed as an indispensable element without which the food and nutrition battle cannot be won. The issue of seeds is considered so critical that AfricaSeeds, which has been charged by AU to implement the ASBP, is required to constantly evaluate the performance of the seed sector and marshal all possible alliances that will restore the sector to a good standing. Our partnership with FAO, the global leader in agricultural development and the center of excellence in seed sector interventions, is one of the key alliances which we have forged and the development of the Seeds Operations Toolkit is sure to be rated as a very important and critical first fruit of this alliance.

Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen, our AU mandate as Implementer and Coordinator of ASBP enjoins us to act as partners to all seed sector actors in Africa. This week, the coming together of this array of seed experts from national seed programs, regional economic institutions and continental bodies, attests to a healthy future of collaboration. In this collaboration, we foresee that our partners will come along with their own particular interests but eventually since we all aim at addressing the needs of the African seed sector, I am sure we will achieve mutually satisfying and synergistic approaches for the benefit of Africa.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, AfricaSeeds, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, is organizing this Workshop as a means of contributing to building up the technical capacity of national program leaders. We have brought together national seed program leaders from at least 21 African countries and Regional entities with active seed programs at varying levels of advancement. The main resource to be used for the training is a recently completed and expert-validated FAO/AfricaSeeds Seed Operations Toolkit which contains technical guidance for conducting activities in some key components of seed sector development: seed enterprise development, seed processing, seed quality

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assurance and certification, seed regulation. The Workshop will aim at achieving a further level of validation of the Toolkit by national and regional experts. Upon return, we expect that participants will be adequately positioned to train their staff and other colleagues including farmers, the private seed sector and sections of the informal sector, on the use of the Toolkit as a guide in conducting seed operations relating to **small scale seed enterprise development, seed processing, quality assurance and the seed regulatory framework.**

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, the African seed scene has benefitted considerably from inputs from international partners who still continue to sponsor a myriad of seed sector intervention activities. But it has become obvious that African Experts need to harness their collective skills and bring their expertise to the table. African seed experts know their continent best and their dedication to solving the mutual continental concerns should go a long way in turning the tables in a battle that has been unsatisfactorily waged for far too long.

At AfricaSeeds, we have recognized the huge potential that should emanate from working through national seed programs. We have explained this in our Strategy document as follows:

Coordination of seed activities at National level will be conducted by AfricaSeeds through the work of the National Focal Point. National authorities will be requested to identify the most appropriate seed expert, most likely the Head of the National Seed Service or at least a Senior Officer very knowledgeable of the national seed program with decision-making powers in seed-related operations in the country, to serve as National Focal Point to promote efficiency and generate concrete and positive impact of AfricaSeeds/National Seed Program collaboration on the national seed sector. The National Focal Point will facilitate and be actively involved in the areas of collaboration between AfricaSeeds and National Seed Programs.

Many of you are already aware that following my recent visits to some Ministers of Agriculture in West and East Africa, the process of appointing National Focal Points has already commenced. As well, the AfricaSeeds Intervention Model by which AfricaSeeds and National Experts will jointly diagnose national seed sector shortfalls and leading on from there, prescribe the needed interventions for corrective actions, has already started. I hope we are able to find time while you are here this week to dialogue a bit with those of you we have not visited so that we can plan the start up of your version of these developments in your own national programs.

This week's Validation Workshop gives us a very important tool in our arsenal for combatting the challenges that face us. It is my hope that through our exchanges here this week, you will own these tools not only to enhance your own contributions but also that by these tools, you will be able to train the next generation of seed development actors in Africa to move the continent's seed sector to a higher plane. We know that several of you have already acquired high levels of seed expertise and we are confident you will be able to contribute your experiences and knowledge in the Validation process. Indeed, it is the intention of AfricaSeeds to exploit the knowledge that is available in several national programs to benefit areas that are less endowed. It is in that regard that AfricaSeeds is promoting the concept of Young Seed Professionals. The Program will enable fresh graduates in seed related disciplines to be attached to AfricaSeeds activities and locations where they will have opportunity to make good contributions to the projects to which they are attached, while enhancing their practical and

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theoretical expertise to be able to play increasingly more responsible roles upon their return to their own programs. The program will also enable relevant staff in advanced national programs to be seconded to assist sister national programs which are less endowed.

At AfricaSeeds, we believe that knowledge is key to development and our plans to develop an information and knowledge gateway, as a critical service to all seed practitioners, is a very important goal for which we will need all of you to have a role, by playing your part at the national level while AfricaSeeds collates all the pieces into a coherent and useful continental picture.

We encourage all of you to give of your best, undeterred, and absorb to your utmost, not only from the course materials but also from your colleagues, each of who has come with a load of knowledge and experiences from far and near. And above all, enjoy your newly-found comradeships and forge strong friendships which will aid your future assistance to each other. And lastly, enjoy Abidjan: it has much more to offer other than just AfricaSeeds.

We thank the FAO for entrusting us with this important and delicate assignment and highly commend all the technical staff of FAO who have tirelessly contributed to bring us where we are today and still continue to stand by us as evidenced by the four- person strong resource group which has joined us here from Rome.

We also thank the Government of Cote d'Ivoire for facilitating our entries so smoothly and for ensuring such a cordial atmosphere so important for the smooth functioning of our development efforts and their good shepherding of AfricaSeeds to be helpful and useful to the cause of Africa as a whole.

And to you all, thank you again for coming. We look forward to seeing you again soon.

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