



SKG PROJECT DOCUMENT VALIDATION WORKSHOP

HEADQUARTERS OF AFRICASEEDS, ABIDJAN

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Keynote Address by Dr. Kouamé Miezan, Executive Director, AfricaSeeds

My cherished colleagues from Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal and from CORAF, IITA, COMESA, FARA, AFSTA and AFDB, permit me first to wish all of you a big and hearty welcome to AfricaSeeds' headquarters on behalf of the Chairman of the Governing Board, the entire staff of AfricaSeeds and on my own behalf. Many of you have travelled far and we are proud that you have accepted to join us in the next few days on a very important assignment to both yourselves and us, as well as to countless millions out there who not only share in commonality with us, a passion for seed matters but also see in seeds, a great pathway to many things we hold dear in Africa. Let me therefore take advantage of the occasion to try to capture for you the essence of AfricaSeeds and its overall mandate conferred on it by the African Union and particularly the specific assignment in that mandate, which has led to our gathering here this week.

It has long been accepted that quality seeds are a prerequisite to crop production and a key to Africa's cherished goal of food and nutrition security. With that in mind, from 2005, an intense period of expert consultations among African experts was set into motion by the African Union leading to the creation of the African Seed and Biotechnology Programme, ASBP. At the Heads of State Meeting in Addis Ababa in 2007, the ASBP was adopted as the program by which the continent's seed challenges would be confronted. AfricaSeeds was mandated by the Africa Union Commission as the technical agency to implement and coordinate the program on behalf of AU.

AfricaSeeds' mandate is to contribute to the overall development of the seed sector in Africa through partnerships as well as a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach to developing effective and sustainable seed systems that will enable the seed sector of member states to be an effective catalyst for growth and transformation of agriculture. Towards that goal, AfricaSeeds has embarked on a process of installing national coordination systems as well as an intervention plan and collaboration protocols by which to more effectively interact with National Seed Programs and Regional Economic Communities, two key arenas where the fight against seed insecurity will be most earnestly waged.

Dear Colleagues, one of the key premises of the ASBP is that no African country, acting alone, will be able to surmount the burden of seed insecurity that has plagued Africa for far too long. Therefore, right from the onset, emphasis has been put on the need to foster partnerships, coordination, subsidiarity etc. which enable synergistic output of all collaborators acting together. In that regard, AfricaSeeds has given recognition to the National Seed Programme as the key institution that must be propelled to play the lead role in the Africa-owned and Africa-driven initiatives - ASBP and AfricaSeeds. AfricaSeeds must therefore seriously elevate its partnership status with Member States to a level that enables both parties to fully complement each other to attain fully mutually satisfying results which also meet the expectations of AU.

With that in mind, AfricaSeeds Memoranda of Understanding with member countries address, among others, the following imperatives:

- strengthening human resources and expertise in the seed sector;
- strengthening the technical and organizational capacities of seed sector actors;
- an urgent increase in the production of basic and pre-basic seeds;
- an urgent increase in the production of seeds for vegetable and leguminous crops;
- periodic diagnostic reviews of the seed sector;
- technical assistance in the development and implementation of national seed projects;
- promoting and strengthening of small-scale seed enterprises;
- mobilization of resources for the effective implementation of seed projects.

AfricaSeeds will complement current efforts of National Seed Programs to address the seed industry shortfalls but AfricaSeeds will also bring to the table other options particularly the option of smallholder seed enterprises which, from our perspective, seems to be a model more suited to West Africa than the large-scale industrial model, more common to Eastern and Southern Africa.

We intend also to bring to the table some innovative concepts which will assist in the rapid development of the seed sector, irrespective of the industry option that is adopted. At this juncture, permit me to share with you in outline, three of the concepts we are introducing:

1. a rapid process of capacity building to enhance the deployment of modern seed technology and other improved concepts through expanded training of national staff on the FAO/AfricaSeeds Seed Training Toolkit;
2. the Young Seed Professional Program by which we intend to grow and mentor the next generation of seed program leaders and practitioners, and
3. the Seed Knowledge Gateway, SKG, a computerized web-based data and information system, which will be sponsored by the Government of Switzerland and AfricaSeeds in the main, to

address the huge problem of data and statistics insufficiency in seed development planning and implementation in Africa.

Indeed, our gathering here is in respect of the SKG. The Seed Knowledge Gateway, when fully developed, will be freely available to all seed sector operators to aid them in their various seed development and commercial interventions and launch Africa on a credible path towards continental seed security and, thereby, the cherished goal of continental food and nutrition security.

The Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) has supported AfricaSeeds to embark on a Preparatory Phase of the SKG Project which has involved, at a high technical level, the expertise of several African seed technology and ICT specialists who will also be expected to play key roles in the SKG Main Phase project. AfricaSeeds, on behalf of the whole of Africa, lauds SDC for its extraordinary foresight and support.

AfricaSeeds wants also to commend the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for the all the valuable advice by H.E. Honorable Minister, Chief Innocent Audu Ogbeh, as well as technical and financial support the Institution has benefited for the implementation of the preparatory phase of the SKG. Indeed, AfricaSeeds' expectation is that African Governments will show commitment to the SKG by contributing to the required resources and mandating their national institutions to collaborate in the SKG development process. In that respect, Nigeria has shown the way by contributing, under directives at the Ministerial level, a considerable financial allocation which has enabled a smooth implementation of the preparatory phase and facilitated further donor interest. The continued direct technical contribution of the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC) and its Executive Management led by Dr. Olusegun P. Ojo in the development of the SKG, is also highly appreciated.

We would also like, once again, to express our sincere thanks and continued gratitude to the State of Côte d'Ivoire, which has continued to provide consistent and sustained support to AfricaSeeds to enable the institution to strengthen its capacities and work in favorable conditions to fulfill its mission in the most efficient way possible.

The main deliverable of the SKG Preparatory Phase, which we started in July 2018, is a Project Document, which will be used to develop the SKG proper and we have invited you here due to your special expertise in various aspects of the planned SKG, to help to finalize and validate it. We have no doubt at all of your willingness and capabilities to play your expected role and I encourage you to feel free to make your contribution to the initial efforts your colleagues have already made.

Distinguished colleagues, distinguished guests, AfricaSeeds, as you all must know, is not a donor nor a project. Rather,

- AfricaSeeds joins forces with cooperating countries as Africa's purposely designed arsenal to provide the countries with the needed strength to combat the several challenges that they will face.
- we bring on board to partner countries' corner, seed knowledge and skills.
- we connect the countries to solutions based on time- and place-tested experiences across Africa and beyond.
- but beyond that we bring to the countries' corner the determination that a Programme so carefully crafted by Africa's leading experts, to address one of Africa's leading problems, and entrusted to an African institution, owned and run by Africa itself, will not falter but, will, with the backing of all participating countries, successfully result in a buoyant seed sector that will support Africa's agriculture transformation.

In closing, let me once again welcome you all to Abidjan and specifically to AfricaSeeds Headquarters. Consider our offices as your own and let us know if there are other ways that we can make your visit a more memorable one.

Thank you all for accepting our invitation and for heeding Africa's call on you to strike a blow for seed security and move the Continent one more step towards fulfilling AU's cherished goal of food and nutrition security.

Thank you,

God bless Africa and may God bless us all.