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The Seeds2B Project - Addressing Sub-Saharan Africa's Seed Deficit



The Seeds2B Project fosters the development of “seed bridges” that effectively link breeding initiatives based within Africa and elsewhere to Sub-Saharan Africa’s (SSA’s) seed systems. These ‘bridges’ enable the transfer of better-performing, locally adapted and market-appropriate crop varieties developed by public and private breeders to smallholders in SSA through local seed producers and distributors.

By adding new commercially viable products to the portfolios of local seed enterprises, the Seeds2B Project helps smallholders in the region sustainably serve new markets with the best of locally grown produce. The Seeds2B Project aims to contribute towards building the capacity of SSA’s commercial seed sector and enhance food security in Africa.

The Seeds2B Project is currently being implemented in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Senegal and Mali through

a partnership between the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) and the Syngenta Foundation for sustainable Agriculture (SFSA).

Key Stages in the Seeds2B Project commercialisation Pathway for new improved crop varieties

Identification of suitable varieties



Pre-screening trials (Small scale)



Screening trials (Medium scale)



Pre-commercial trials (Large scale) and, where necessary, varietal registration



Commercial trials (Large scale) and local seed production, where necessary, and /or distribution



Commercial introduction and market growth



Market decline and phase out

Underutilized Commercial Seed Market

SSA is dominated by farms of less than 2 hectares, which number around 33 million and represent 80% of all farms. Estimates indicate that the commercial seed market in SSA (excluding South Africa) is presently worth USD 400 million. This accounts for only 10 percent of the total seed planted by farmers in the region, compared to a global average of 65 percent. This indicates smallholders in SSA depend highly on informal seed systems which partly contributes to declining productivity attributed to the use of low yielding and genetically weak seed that is susceptible to emerging biotic and abiotic stresses.

On the other hand, SSA's emerging formal seed sector is faced with a number of challenges. These include lack of access to new germplasm, variability in seed quality from one season to the next and low smallholder awareness of the existence of improved varieties in local markets. Demand for quality improved seed in SSA often exceeds supply as a result. Notwithstanding these challenges, experiences indicate that, if offered

a choice, smallholders in the region are willing to invest in quality seeds of improved varieties suited to their local environments.

The Seeds2B Partnership negotiates with private and public breeders for access to high potential conventionally bred crop varieties that meet local market requirements. These varieties are then assessed and for performance, adaptability and market acceptance. These evaluation trials support the identification of commercially viable varieties, demand building and generation of data to justify registration and commercial release.

Risk Mitigation Support

To facilitate introduction of new crop varieties, the Seeds2B Partnership also provides risk mitigation support for smallholders, local seed enterprises and breeders. These include creation of advance market demand, guidance on protection of intellectual property rights, direction on local and regional regulatory matters and product stewardship. Oversight of brokered commercial partnerships between local seed enterprises and breeders is provided

to ensure sustainable benefit for all and more so smallholders in SSA.

The Seeds2B Project targets a range of crops, with a keen interest on staple food crops as well as high value vegetables and cash crops. The Project is expected to:

- Improve smallholder access to quality seed for higher yields, increased household income and better livelihoods in SSA.
- Provide effective linkage between breeders and new seed markets for increased returns on investments in technology development.
- Enhance capacity of public and private agricultural research and extension organisations in technology transfer and seed business management.
- Strengthen seed systems through reduced barriers to trade and investment.

The Seeds2B Project is supported by experienced plant breeders; intellectual property rights experts, business strategists, product deployment professionals and seed policy specialists.

Project Updates

First Tomato and Potato Variety Evaluation Trials Carried Out

The Project's first small-scale tomato and potato variety trials were carried out in Malawi and Zimbabwe over the 2014/2015 season. The varieties under evaluation were from private seed companies in India and China. The Project is planning to also begin trials in sorghum, soybean and pearl millet.



A group of smallholder tomato farmers record their views on fruit quality during a sensory evaluation test carried out on the new tomato varieties under evaluation in Malawi.

Seed Business Opportunities in Zimbabwe Explored during the First Seeds2B Open Day

In March 2015, the Project held an Open Day in Zimbabwe with 26 delegates, including representatives from local and international seed companies, national agricultural research programs of Malawi and Zimbabwe, non-governmental organisations and umbrella seed trader's associations in attendance. The Open Day included visits to a farmer managed tomato production field, a Seeds2B Project on-station tomato trial site hosted at the Horticulture Research Centre, Marondera and Farm and City Centre, an established seed distributor in Zimbabwe. The delegates were exposed to business opportunities in Zimbabwe's seed sector and gained a better understanding of the country's seed industry.



A representative of the Asia-Pacific Seed Association appreciates tomato fruits on display as other delegates engage tomato traders at an informal market in Macheke, Zimbabwe during the Seeds2B Project Open Day held in March 2015.

Seeds2B Project Management enhanced

The first Seeds2B Project Operation's Committee (OPSCOM) meeting was held in March 2015 in Harare Zimbabwe. The OPSCOM is constituted by representatives from the Africa Seed Trader's Association (AFSTA), SFSA, AATF and the national agricultural research systems of Malawi and Zimbabwe. The committee primarily oversees and guides Project undertakings to ensure achievement of set objectives and management of emerging issues.



Brazil Seed Sector Holds Discussions with the Seeds2B Project

January 2015 marked a significant milestone for the Seeds2B Project as collaboration opportunities in agri-business development, technology transfer and knowledge sharing were explored between the Project and public and private seed sector organisations in Brazil. Discussions are ongoing on out-scaling project activities to include evaluation of improved bean, groundnut, soybean and sorghum varieties in Malawi and Zimbabwe during the 2015/2016 planting season.



Dr. Gospel Omanyia (AATF) listens keenly as a Brazilian Seed Company owner walks him through a range of crop varieties marketed by the company during a visit to the South American country in January 2015.

India-Africa Partnership Advanced

Dr. Ian Barker of SFSA and Edgar Wavomba of AATF represented the Seeds2B partnership in two meetings in India during February 2015. They contributed to discussions on India- Africa cooperation to address the pressing challenges of food, nutrition and income security in Africa at a conference on 'India-Africa Partnership in New Technologies in Agriculture' organised by Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). They



Prof. S.K. Mohanty (RIS) looks on as Edgar Wavomba (AATF) highlights avenues for Seed Sector Cooperation between India and Africa at a Seminar on "India-Africa Partnership in New Technologies in Agriculture" held in New Delhi in February 2015 (Photo courtesy of RIS)

also attended the India Seed Congress in Agra and delivered a presentation on India-Africa cooperation opportunities in advancing SSAs seed sector. The meetings helped AATF and SFSA strengthen collaboration with Indian Seed companies to support the identification, testing and commercialization of better performing improved crop varieties in SSA.

Project Partnership Expanded in Zimbabwe

SNV Zimbabwe joined the Seeds2B Project Partnership in May 2015. SNV (Netherlands Development Organization) is a Dutch based International Non-Governmental Organisation that provides capacity development services to local

institutions and organizations in more than 30 developing countries. SNV has been in Zimbabwe since 1983 contributing to poverty reduction and economic growth in Zimbabwe in line with Government of Zimbabwe's Medium Term Plan and the global Millennium Development Goals.

The Project's partnership with SNV Zimbabwe is expected to significantly boost on-farm variety evaluation trials of horticultural and oil crops, creation of advance market demand for new improved seed varieties, promotion of best agronomic practice and linking farmers to markets.

Calendar of Events/ Upcoming Events

- **July 20, 2015;** National Seed Association of India Workshop on Enhancing Seed Exports from India, New Delhi, India. AATF and SFSA jointly invited to make a presentation titled 'The Indo-African Seeds Bridge'
- **September, 22 - 24 2015;** Seeds2B Project Consultative Workshop on Regulations on Testing and Registration of New Crop Varieties in Malawi and Zimbabwe
- **September 25, 2015;** Third Seeds2B Project OPSCOM meeting
- **October 5-10, 2015;** Seeds2B Open Day, Senegal.
- **November 16-19, 2015;** Asia Pacific Seed Congress, Goa, India.

Further Reading

- ABRASEM receives representatives of the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) -<http://www.abrasem.com.br/abrasem-recebe-representantes-da-african-agricultural-technology-foundation-aatf/>
- Conference on India-Africa Partnership in New Technologies in Agriculture - <http://ris.org.in/publications/799>
- AATF Seeds2B Program offers insights for APSA members into African vegetable seed market - <http://apsaseed.org/index.php/about/news/item/198-aatf-seeds2b-program-offers-insights-for-apsa-members-into-african-vegetable-seed-market>
- Tropical soybean varieties evaluated in Africa-wide testing platform - <http://soybeaninnovationlab.illinois.edu/sites/soybeaninnovationlab.illinois.edu/files/Soybean%20Innovation%20Lab%20Newsletter%20-%20May%202015.pdf>