



E-Review

Electronic Newsletter of the African Seed Trade Association

December 2005

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HARMONIZATION OF SEED POLICIES AND REGULATIONS IN EAST AFRICA

The process was undertaken as all inclusive and involved national, regional and external resource persons, seed industry players and regulatory and policy players, with the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) playing an oversight role.

Five areas were identified for harmonization as they were considered important in increasing seed trade movement in the region. These were:

- Variety evaluation, release and registration
- Certification
- Phytosanitary services
- Plant variety Protection, and
- Import and export issues

The agreements arrived at on each of these key issues are documented in the *ASARECA Monograph No. 4*. These were digested and presented as a document for Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of Agriculture of the three East African Community (EAC) Member countries dated June 18, 2003 titled "*Harmonization of Seed Policies and Regulations in East Africa: Key Agreements*".

Key achievements of Seed Regional working Group (SRWG)/Eastern Africa Seed Committee (EASCOM)

The following may be cited as the most outstanding accomplishments of the harmonization project in Eastern Africa:

1. Variety improvement

- Variety evaluation, release and registration process has been streamlined, leading to reduced period of validation from three years to one or two (< 3) seasons. This in turn has resulted in more varieties being released by more private seed enterprises.
- More companies have been registered to undertake seed business across the region.
- Private seed enterprises are included in variety release committees.
- EASCOM has developed a Regional Variety List for East Africa.

2. Certification

- Certification standards for ten most economically important crops in East Africa have been agreed upon and have been developed for nine crops. Standards for Cassava are under preparation.
- EAC has adopted four seed classes, instead of eight in some countries, in line with the OECD field certification schemes.
- Agreed to separate certification services from variety development or multiplication services.
- The National Certification Agencies for Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda undertook joint field seed inspections in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to build confidence on way certification is actually undertaken on the ground amongst the four national certification agencies.
- Uganda is member of OECD and is at an advanced stage of joining ISTA, while

Tanzania is in the process of initiating the process.

- National Certifying Agencies agreed to authorize private seed enterprises to undertake seed certification services, with Kenya developing Draft Procedures for accreditation.

3. Phytosanitary services

- Used scientific methods to reduce number of quarantine pests from 33 to 3.
- Created awareness on phytosanitary measures in high risk entry points.
- In process of developing Pest List for Eastern Africa.

4. Import and export issues

- Agreed to develop common documentation procedures for export/import.
- Already using EAC Customs Tariffs.

5. Plant variety Protection

- Agreed to develop suitable sui generis system of Plant Variety Protection (PVP). Kenya is a member of UPOV 1978 system and is working on acceding to 1991 Convention
- Tanzania has Plant Variety Protection law and Uganda is in advanced stage of development.
- Rwanda accepted to develop PVP system based on UPOV.

Key Challenges for East African Community

There is need for greater participation of EASCOM in regional integration blocs to share benefits of harmonization.

*By Mr. Obongo Nyachae,
Executive Secretary of EASCOM*

MEETING OF PERMANENT SECRETARIES OF MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE OF SADC ON HARMONIZATION OF SEED REGULATIONS
SADC countries continue the harmonization of their seed regulations. The process has reached the level of the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries of

Agriculture after the work of the technical experts from the SADC countries to draft the technical documents in July 2005. The following is the press release of this meeting:

“A meeting of Permanent Secretaries on Harmonization of Seed Regulations was held at the Cardoso Hotel, Maputo, Mozambique on 8th and 9th December 2005, and was attended by Permanent Secretaries from the Ministries of Agriculture of 12 Member States, namely: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also in attendance were the representatives of seed organizations and International Agricultural Research Centers. The meeting was opened by the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Mozambique, His Excellency Dr. Tomas Mondlate. The objectives of the meeting were:

- To review progress made in the preparation for harmonization of seed regulations;
- To provide further guidance and inputs to the process;
- To take ownership of the process at Policy Level; and
- Develop a road map leading to approval by SADC Ministers of Agriculture and implementation by Member States.

At this meeting technical proposals on SADC Variety Registration and Release System, SADC Seed Certification and Quality Assurance System, and SADC Quarantine and Phytosanitary Measures for Seed were presented. These documents will form an integrated harmonized seed regulation system that would facilitate easier movement of seed

across borders within the region, without compromising quality and plant health aspects. At this meeting the Permanent Secretaries of Agriculture agreed to adopt a *harmonized seed regulation system*. Currently only 10% of farmers in the region are using seed of improved varieties. The system, when implemented, will improve seed trade among Member States, thereby increasing the availability of quality seeds to farmers. This is in line with the Dar es Salaam Declaration, which emphasizes the need for seed security in order to attain food security.

The meeting noted the need for *capacity building* at national and regional levels. The proposed system will require qualified personnel in seed testing and inspections, variety release procedures and aspects of quarantine and plant health. In addition, the proposed system would require adequate seed testing and plant health equipment in order to meet the relevant regional and international standards.

The meeting further noted the need to have a cost effective *institutional framework*, which can be implemented within the existing structures at national and regional levels. The meeting stressed the need for the system to be *sustainable* without unduly burdening the Member States and farmers.

In order to facilitate seed movement across borders, the meeting noted the need to involve the Ministries of Trade and Commerce to participate in the follow-up discussions, which will prepare final proposals for submission to the Integrated Committee of Ministers (ICM). The SADC Seed Security Network (SSSN), operating under the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR) Directorate, has been mandated to spearhead the process.

The meeting expressed appreciation to the Swiss Agency for Development and

Cooperation (SDC) and the program for Sustainable Commercialization of Seeds in Africa (SCOSA) for their financial support to the process and the Seed Security Network, as well as the government and the people of the Republic of Mozambique for hosting this event”.

The SSSN will keep the momentum of this harmonization process with a view to promoting the seed trade in the SADC member States and in Africa in general.

By Mr. Edward Zulu

Coordinator of SADC Seed Security Network

PROGRESS IN HARMONIZATION OF SEED SYSTEMS IN ECOWAS

As directed by the road map of the harmonization of seed policies and regulations in ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) members States, a regional workshop for validating the regulatory framework for seed production and marketing in West Africa was held from 14th to 16th December 2005 in Lomé, Togo in which 77 participants composed of representatives of donors and national seed experts from ECOWAS countries actively participated.

The workshop was meant to develop a consensus among the 15 member States of the West Africa region regarding the technical agreements for seed production and trade within the region by taking into account agreements reached during the previous workshops held in Lomé in November 2004 and in Accra in September 2005, to review and validate draft instruments to be tabled by ECOWAS and UEAMO (West African Economic and Monetary Union) with the goal of submitting them first to their Councils of Sectoral Ministers (Ministers of Agriculture) and then to their statutory meeting of the Ministers in 2006, and to review and validate a proposed institutional

arrangement under which the system will operate at national and regional levels.

Two documents on (1) Variety Evaluation, Release and Common Catalogue and (2) Seed Quality Control and Certification have been adopted for use in the ECOWAS regions. Among others, it was agreed to set up the regional variety catalog for the ECOWAS and UEMOA in close collaboration with the CILSS to avoid any possible conflicts between the Institutions.

The workshop was concluded with a general satisfaction and enthusiasm for the harmonization process of seed schemes in ECOWAS. The workshop was followed by a meeting of the organizers of this workshop, which was chaired by the representative of UEMOA to define the next steps and the way forward of the harmonization process.

By Mr. Justin Rakotoarisaona
Secretary General of AFSTA

POTENTIAL FOR GM CROPS TO REDUCE MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES

Developing new varieties of staple foods, such as [rice](#), [maize](#), [wheat](#), [beans](#) and [cassava](#), by selectively breeding them to enhance nutritional qualities has merit for reducing micronutrient deficiencies in the developing world. This was forwarded by Jere Haas of Cornell University, USA, and his colleagues, as an implication of their recent work on bio-fortified, iron-rich rice and women's nutrition. Using their work as an example, Haas added that "rice that is bred to be higher in iron has great potential as a sustainable approach to reducing the micronutrient deficiency problems so common in developing countries." The efficacy of consuming high-iron rice was tested in a nine-month feeding trial among 192 religious sisters living in 10 convents around Metro Manila, Philippines. Results

showed that the iron status of women who ate bio-fortified, iron-rich rice was 20 percent higher than in women who ate traditional rice. The bio-fortified rice was developed by the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines. Details of the study can be read in "Iron-Biofortified Rice Improves the Iron Stores of Nonanemic Filipino Women" published in the American Society of Nutrition Journal of Nutrition. A Cornell University release is available online at <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Nov05/rice.iron.ssl.html>

Source: CropBiotech update of ISAAA, December 2, 2005.

Upcoming events:

- **26th to 27th January 2006:** ISTA workshop on Purity, Nakuru, Kenya.
- **8th to 9th February 2006:** Workshop on modern biotechnology in Tunis, Tunisia.
- **28th to 31st March 2006:** AFSTA congress 2006, Entebbe, Uganda.
- **28th to 31st May 2006:** ISF annual congress, Copenhagen, Denmark.

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Disclaimer:

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