

AFSTA POSITION PAPER ON INFORMAL SEED SYSTEM

(Adopted by the AFSTA General Assembly on 29 February 2008)

The African Seed Association (AFSTA) recognizes the importance of using high quality seed to improve yield in agriculture. However, most African farmers sow seeds from informal seed sector whose quality is not known since seeds do not undergo any formal quality control whether in the field or in laboratory. This is one of the main causes of poor agricultural productivity and contributes to the chronic food insecurity in Africa.

Therefore concerted efforts of all seed stakeholders should be made so that African farmers have access to seed of adapted varieties and good qualities in order to fully benefit from the use of others agricultural inputs such as irrigation, fertilizers and crop protection products with a view to improve their livelihood. Awareness creation on the importance of well adapted high quality seed through various media should be on-going activities.

The most efficient way to achieve that goal is certainly to develop a formal seed sector by collaborating with all seed professionals. The private sector is well placed and willing to participate in that effort. However, to encourage private investment in plant breeding, seed production and marketing it is essential to have an enabling regulatory environment at both national and regional level. In particular AFSTA considers that the protection of intellectual property rights is necessary to ensure the development of new varieties that will help to overcome the new challenges that African agriculture is facing, all the more that public research in that domain is shrinking. The ratification by African countries of the 1991 Act of the UPOV Convention would certainly encourage private investment in Africa. It must be noted that under the 1991 Act of the UPOV Convention the breeder's right does not extend to acts done privately and for non commercial purposes, thus exempting, in particular, subsistence farmers from royalty payment. In addition the 1991 Act also allows countries to authorize farmers to use, for propagating purposes, on their own holding, the product of the harvest of a protected variety, which they have obtained by planting on their own holding, provided that this is done within reasonable limits and subject to the safeguarding of the legitimate interest of the breeder. However, as agreed during the diplomatic conference, that authorization should apply only to crops and varieties for which that usage was common practice before the adoption of the 1991 act.

AFSTA members are conscious that such a change will not occur overnight and that, transitorily, efforts should be made to improve the quality of seed from the informal sector. However AFSTA members are of the opinion that this transition should be as short as possible to ensure farmers access to seed from reliable sources.

The African Seed Trade Association is willing to cooperate with all the seed stakeholders at national, regional and international level to enhance the formal seed supply in Africa with a view to strengthening the African seed industry from plant breeding to seed production and marketing of high quality seed.