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## African Seed and Biotechnology Partnership Platform Operational Guidelines

Africa's development priorities are spelt out in Agenda 2063 - the blueprint for African Union's economic development. Specifically, Agenda 2063 identifies agricultural development as a high priority, as detailed in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) and as further elaborated in the June 2014 Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. The Malabo Declaration specifies seven key commitments including boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services. Another such commitment is to end hunger in Africa by 2025 through, among others, creating and enhancing the necessary appropriate policy and institutional conditions and support systems to facilitate sustainable and reliable production and access to quality and affordable inputs (for crops, livestock, fisheries). These commitments were advanced by the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which seeks to harness market and trade opportunities locally, regionally and internationally.

The creation of an enabling environment for competitive seed systems is a fundamental tenet of the resolution to promote policy and institutional conditions and support systems to advance agricultural production and productivity. An efficient seed system<sup>1</sup> is a means through which farmers gain access to quality seed of appropriate crop varieties or animal breeds to the end user. At the core of a seed system are seeds – “The repository of the genetic potential of crop and animal species and their varieties or breeds resulting from the continuous improvement and selection over time” (FAO, 2019). The benefits of seeds to food security and agricultural productivity cannot be overemphasized: quality animal and plant seeds are the foundations of agricultural productivity improvements, and well-functioning seed systems are critical to improving food and nutrition security, resilience, and livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Africa.

Good-quality seeds of appropriate<sup>2</sup> animal breeds or crop varieties are produced through well-designed breeding programs that, at their best, generate new and improved breeds and varieties in response to changing farmer and market needs and agro-ecological conditions. However, breeding programs are only one component of a seed system. In addition, elements, such as production, marketing and distribution, relevant regimes for

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<sup>1</sup> Systems refer to crop, livestock and forage seed systems.

<sup>2</sup> Farmers having access to the varieties that are suitable to their area of operation

regulation, and quality assurance form part of the system. In a well-functioning seed system, all elements work together synergistically, supporting and underpinning each other.

However, seed systems in Africa are characterized by sensitivities, inefficiencies and bottlenecks, ultimately hindering agricultural productivity and endangering food security. Given the enormous impact seed systems have on food security and livelihoods, understanding and fixing the constraints holds great potential for improving the standard of living in Africa's agricultural communities and the broader population who consume the foods which they provide. In the animal seed sector, Africa as a whole has made no progress for more than 100 years. The very rare national animal breeding or genetic improvement programmes established in the early 1900s that still exist today have at best remained stagnant or are still producing far below the then set productivity targets. In the backdrop of the climate emergency, there is an urgent need to establish animal seed systems in Africa (that must be a combination of livestock and fish breeds characterization, utilization, improvement, dissemination and conservation) to ensure that improved livestock and fish breeds have some or all of the following traits: disease resistance, better production, climate resilient, resource use efficient and low carbon and environmental footprint.

It is important to note that seed sector development has been on the agenda of Heads of State and Government since 2005. Recognition of the importance of access to quality seed in enhancing agricultural production and productivity ought to be accompanied by development, efficient and effective implementation of national seed laws and seed regulations. In 2007, the African Seed and Biotechnology Programme (ASBP) was endorsed by the AU Assembly as a strategic framework for the development of the seed sector in Africa (Assembly/AU/Dec. 135(VIII)). The implementation of this program is the responsibility of all stakeholders under the coordination of the AUC-DREA.

The unique position and composition of the ASB Platform, which brings together a wide range of actors, enables it to play a specific and critical role in African seed development. The Platform recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach which brings on board the traditionally neglected sub-sector: animal seed. This unique role and the value that it adds are articulated in its **Value Proposition** which is: "to provide a platform for facilitating discussion, advocacy for resource mobilization, advancing policy advice and accessing global knowledge for stakeholders in African seed systems to add value to national and regional actions, and programs in advancing Agricultural transformation in Africa.

***Core functions of the Platform include:-***

- **Improve decision making and policy formulation;**
- **Supporting evidence-based advocacy;**
- **Enhance knowledge sharing.**

In undertaking these functions, the Platform will position and empower decision makers to be able to look ahead and preempt emerging issues and take advantage of new opportunities by identifying trends to design coherent strategies. This new approach is

required because seed systems and development agencies have hitherto tended to address seed systems development issues according to their own strategies and approaches. Consequently, the Platform offers a common forum for debating issues affecting seed systems development, enriching the exchange of views and fostering a common understanding of trends and issues. Ultimately, this will improve the designing, resourcing and implementation of policies, research and development initiatives. The Platform will also foster debate and interaction among stakeholders at national, regional and continental levels for identifying trends, constraints and emerging issues as well as provide support for policy formulation and strategy analysis, implementation and monitoring.

## **Governance**

The Platform will act as a policy Think Tank to stimulate policy discussions and coherence for seed systems development in Africa. As such, it will support and facilitate the implementation of the African Seed and Biotechnology Programme.

In terms of policy processes, the Platform will provide a Forum for (i) identification of emerging priority issues (ii) analytical work to generate evidence, (iii) policy debate and identification of common strategic options, and (iv) policy synthesis that will identify priority policy issues and recommendations to be presented to the AU Policy Organs including the Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (STC, ARDWE).

Structurally, the Platform will be composed of the following elements: (i) Steering Group; (ii) Thematic/Geographic Working Groups and (iii) General Assembly.

### **1- Steering Group (SG)**

In close collaboration with AUC-DREA, the Secretariat, the SG will coordinate the activities of the Working Groups and translate outcomes of debates or recommendations of published research/studies, dialogue from high level meetings into feasible policy options to be taken forward into the AU policy processes. It will act as a filter for policy synthesis and feedback of recommendations from STC, ARDWE meetings into the policy processes. It will be composed of twenty eight representatives drawn from AUC (DREA and HRST) AUDA-NEPAD, the Convener of each Working Group, eight RECs, five Member States (Bureau of the STC, ARDWE), Representatives of Conveners of various Clusters including the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative and Development partners who actively contribute to the functioning of the platform with options of co-opting members when necessary. The Steering Group will be chaired by AUC DREA and will convene twice a year (physical and virtual). In all SG meetings, two thirds (2/3) attendance will form a quorum.

### **2- Working Groups (WGs)**

The Working Groups will play a vital policy analytical function. Membership will consist of experts in relevant disciplines from both African and non-African expertise but working on

seed development relevant for Africa. The WGs will provide evidence and ensure access to global knowledge that will inform decision making processes. Working Groups could be established as needed under the guidance of the Steering Group based on dominant policy issues. A tentative list includes:

1. Seed Policy and Regulations:
  - seed legislations;
  - seed regulations;
  - Biosafety regulations;
  - Neglected seeds/farmers' varieties.
  
2. Research, Variety Development and Seed production :
  - a) Crop breeding
    - climate smart breeding
    - Plant breeding innovation; genome editing
    - biotechnology; trans-genetics; biosafety
    - improvement of farmer varieties;
  - b) Biofortification
  
3. Seed Quality Assurance and Certification systems
  - a) Public sector
    - improve farmer varieties
    - extension services
    - facilitate private sector operations
  - b) Private sector (formal and informal)
    - seed enterprises development
    - compliance to seed laws and regulations
      - access improved varieties for seed bulking
    - seed storage
    - distribution
  
4. Plant Genetic Resource Management: Collection, conservation, utilization and exchange of plant genetic resources (plant breeding, seeds/planting materials production and commercialization.

5. Animal seeds: This Group will handle all aspects related to livestock production and genetic improvement in Africa including breeding, insemination, evaluation/certification and delivery systems, animal genetic resource management (commercialization of animal genetics/germplasms, semen, fertilized eggs, fingerlings, embryos)

Considering that seed issues are inter-linked and overlapping, some members may serve in more than one WG. Within each group, there will be some sub-groups to cover issues of neglected seeds, climate change as well as seed systems and gender.

Working Groups may be mandated to address additional emerging issues and may for that purpose invite specific expertise on the issue at hand. Each Working Group (preferably a multidisciplinary team of 10 members on average) will agree on its

operational modalities, including meetings (physical and/or virtual). The modalities of these working groups will be reviewed from time to time to ensure consistency with what is proposed under the ASBP. Their activities will be coordinated by the Steering Group, who may approve their work plan and budget.

Each WG will elect a Convener and a rapporteur. In respect of regional specificity and ownership, WGs will be established at regional levels. The WGs will generate practical policy options for discussions during the regional policy dialogues and the General Assembly.

### **3- The General Assembly (GA)**

This is an open Platform that brings together representatives of all relevant sector stakeholder groups. The Platform will hold biennial meetings to consult and build consensus on priority issues and actions on seed and biotechnology related matters. The discussions will be informed largely by the Biennial Status of the Seed sector Report or recommendations from SG activities. The representation will be organised in six Clusters:

- (i) Public Sector (national, regional and continental);
- (ii) Private Sector (including Agriculture Banks and commercial banks which have specific windows supporting Agriculture);
- (iii) Research and Academia;
- (iv) Development Partners including international partners and Development Finance institutions);
- (v) Farmers and farmer organizations;
- (vi) Civil Society Organisations (including regional and sub-regional platforms advocating for free movement of goods).

The GA will be convened and chaired by the Commissioner of Rural Economy and Agriculture of the AUC once every two years. The GA will be responsible for:

- Assessing the progress in the implementation of the ASBP;
- Providing overall guidance on options to fast track its implementation
- Agreeing on priority issues to be addressed by the Working Groups under the coordination of the Steering Group;
- Validating policy options for submission to the STC, ARDWE.

### **4- The Secretariat**

The Platform will be assisted by a Secretariat hosted by an African institution with a proven record on seed systems development in Africa. Upon the selection of the host institution, a Memorandum of Understanding will be signed between AUC DREA and the institution outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat, the host institution and its relationship with AUC-DREA in the context of the implementation of the ASBP.

The Secretariat will provide administrative and logistical support to the Platform, including the Steering Group and Working Groups. Such support will include coordinating and facilitating activities by the various bodies for the effective functioning of the Platform, advocacy, resource mobilization for the functioning of the Platform, promoting linkages among stakeholders, and information sharing on seed system development projects on

the continent, among others. The work plan and annual report of the Secretariat shall be validated by AUC DREA and endorsed by the Steering Group.

### **5- Role of AUC**

The African Union Commission will ensure coherence, coordination and political ownership in the implementation of the ASBP in close collaboration with AUDA-NEPAD. Specifically, the Commission will:

- (i) Ensure effective communication with RECs and AU Member States building on existing continental, regional and national networks;
- (ii) Facilitate domestication of the ASBP including mainstreaming it in the RAIPs and NAIPs;
- (iii) Facilitate development and harmonization of seed policy legislation and regulatory frameworks;
- (iv) Build strategic partnerships and outreach;
- (v) Conduct advocacy for ASBP;
- (vi) Facilitate the functions of the African Seed and Biotechnology Platform and Secretariat;
- (vii) Enhance information sharing and building effective alliances at regional and continental levels;
- (viii) Facilitate M&E, Learning and impact assessment;
- (ix) Engage with and report to AU Policy Organs.

### **6- The Regional ASB Platforms**

The role of regional platforms will be similar to that of the GA but with a regional focus and membership. The existing regional coordination mechanisms will act as Regional Steering Committees (RSC) for ASBP. The regional ASB platforms meetings will be convened and chaired by the RECs.

#### **Specific Roles of RECs and RSC:**

- (i) Coordination of ASBP activities at regional level including facilitating and mainstreaming it into RAIPs and NAIPs;
- (ii) Developing strategies for implementation of the ASBP at the regional level;
- (iii) Mobilizing funds;
- (iv) Strengthening linkages with existing initiatives;
- (v) Monitoring, evaluation, learning and impact assessment;
- (vi) Reporting.

### **7- National ASB Platforms and Coordination**

The national platforms and advisory committees will facilitate implementation of the ASBP through support in mainstreaming it in the NAIPs. These will also act as liaison with RECs and AUC to enhance M&E and impact assessment functions as well as reporting in the respective Member States.

### **8- The Forum for African Seed Testing (FAST)**

The Forum for African Seed Testing (FAST) is a forum of both public and private seed testing and quality assurance organizations and focuses on strengthening the capacity of members to carry out seed quality testing and quality assurance for national, regional and international trade. The Forum will report to the GA and will hold meetings of its executives prior to the GA. The Chair of the FAST executives will be a member of the Steering Group.

#### **9- The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA)**

The African Seed Trade Association will constitute the private sector caucus of the ASB Platform.

#### **10-Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa (ISSD Africa)**

ISSD Africa is an international community of practice, guiding seed sector innovation and development on the African continent to alleviate the problem of limited access to quality seed. Addressing complex seed sector challenges of continental importance will result in better performing seed sectors with increased access to quality seed, of varieties that farmers prefer. This will have a positive impact on food and nutritional security and on farmer income. Supporting all three of the ASB Platform's functions, ISSD Africa facilitates the sharing of knowledge in eight relevant and related thematic areas to the ones tentatively prioritized for ASB Platform working groups and thereby the evidences for identifying emerging priority issues and common strategic options, and both policy debate and synthesis.

#### **11. African Animal Breeding Academy (AABA)**

The African Animal breeding Academy will support the development and application of tools, resources and other innovations in genetics, genomics, animal breeding and data science to support livestock production and genetic improvement in Africa. These will inform the the formulation and implementation of policies on the setting up of breeding programs, data recording by livestock producers, data storage, maintenance and analysis to provide information for selective breeding and seed stock generation.