

Historic Congress celebrating 25 years of AFSTA held in Kigali, Rwanda

By **Aghan Daniel I AFSTA Communication Officer | daghan@afsta.org**

The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) held its 25th Annual Congress in Rwanda, bringing together at least 280 seed traders and producers from 50 nations around the world.

The memorable gathering of the seed sector players held at the Serena Hotel in Kigali, Rwanda, from March 3, to 5, 2025 was presided over by Rwanda's Minister of State for Agriculture and Animal Resources, Dr Eric Rwigamba, who recognised the Association's instrumental role in uniting seed companies and national seed associations in Africa and beyond. Dr Rwigamba commended AFSTA's dedication to advocating supportive seed policies, facilitating trade and promoting harmonised regulations, adding that these had been pivotal in transforming the continent's seed industry.

Key at the historic congress was AFSTA's celebration of its silver jubilee. This was marked by the publishing of a special edition of The African Seed Magazine and introduction of the media centre, which gave opportunity for seed companies to address

scribes one on one for more publicity.

Besides, a special luncheon held on the sidelines of the congress saw AFSTA acknowledge the role of women in the seed sector and celebrate them. Finally, a day's consultative dialogue sponsored by CropLife International was held by top African government officials to discuss the place of plant breeding innovations in the seed system.

Speaking during the official opening of the congress, Dr Rwigamba asked participants to emphasise and prioritise investment in research and development, climate finance, new breeding techniques, capacity building, regulatory

reforms and innovative seed technologies.

Additionally, he lauded AFSTA for being an enabler in building resilient and inclusive seed systems that not only ensure food

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Rwanda's Minister of State for Agriculture and Animal Resources, Dr Eric Rwigamba & AFSTA President Mr. Amadou Sarr (front row), at the opening ceremony

security but also position Africa as a key player in the global seed industry, enabling collaboration, innovation, knowledge exchange and a co-shared vision.

“We need to emphasise and prioritise investment in research and development, climate finance, new breeding techniques, capacity building, regulatory reforms and innovative seed technologies,” he said.

AFSTA President, Mr Amadou Sarr, noted the stages of development and challenges in the seed industry in Africa, and showcased AFSTA's recent efforts to implement new management tools and initiate updates of its constitution and bylaws.

Mr Sarr reinforced the central role that seeds play in Africa's quest for food security, sustainable development and economic prosperity, adding that seeds were much more than inputs for crops as they are the foundation of the future.

Highlighting this year's theme 25 Years of Innovative Quality Seeds for Sustainable Agriculture in Africa, AFSTA Secretary General Dr Yacouba Diallo emphasised the importance of partnerships in advancing AFSTA. He said collaboration at local, regional and international levels had significantly contributed to this success.

The organisation has advocated and facilitated the harmonisation of seed regulations across the continent through collaboration with governments, policymakers and regional economic communities such as COMESA,



The Guest of Honour with AFSTA President visiting the booths

ECOWAS, SADC, and the African Union.

“AFSTA has significantly influenced policy decision-making, ensuring that seed companies operate more freely and efficiently across borders,” he noted.

This congress comes when Africa is actively shaping its agricultural future amid global challenges like climate change, food insecurity and the need for sustainable technologies.

Africa produces over 500,000 MT of certified maize seed annually, with South Africa being the led producer of the seeds.

During the congress, **11 new members joined the association. West Africa led the pack with five entries from NAFASO, Union Nationale des Societes Coopératives des Producteurs Semenciers**

du Burkina and La Voix Des Champs (Lavodec) from Burkina Faso. Association Nationale Des Semenciers Professionels De Cote D'Ivoire (SeedLife) from Cote D'Ivoire and Newage Agric Solutions Ltd from Ghana completed the list from the region. South Africa enrolled two in Lake Agriculture Pty Ltd and UPL South Africa (Pty) Ltd. From the US came Iowa State University Seed Science Centre and Resourced Inc. Completing the list was Moon Star Seeds Pty Ltd of Pakistan.

The next AFSTA Congress will be held in in Cape Town, South Africa, from 23 - 25 March 2026.

Rwanda Committed to improving its seed sector

By Aghan Daniel I daghan@afsta.org

Despite agriculture being the source of employment for every seven in 10 Rwandans, contributing around 25 per cent to the national GDP, the sector's progress has remained slow.

In an effort to boost productivity and improve the sector's growth, Rwanda has committed to strengthening its seed sector through various interventions.

"We recognise the pivotal role of seeds, not just as the foundation of agricultural productivity, but also as a catalyst for economic growth, food security and climate resilience. Through targeted interventions, we aim to strengthen the seed sector and foster sustainable agricultural development," said Eric Rwigamba, the Minister of State for Agriculture and Animal Resources.

Mr Rwigamba spoke during the 25th African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Congress held in Kigali, Rwanda, from March 3, to 5, 2025.

"A key measure of success for our seed industry will be its ability to deliver sufficient high-yielding quality seeds to Rwandan farmers and export markets. To achieve this, we must establish a self-regulated system that fosters innovation, efficiency and competitiveness while ensuring accountability and adherence to high standards," he said.

Already, Rwanda has undertaken significant initiatives to advance the sector. The government has implemented comprehensive reforms in policies and regulations as well as restructuring institutions to create an enabling environment for the seed industry.

"These efforts are aligned with internationally accepted systems, enhancing our competitiveness locally and globally," said Mr Rwigamba. Recognising the importance of collaboration, Rwanda actively participates in regional and continental efforts to harmonise seed regulations. As a member of

the East African Community (EAC), COMESA and the African Union, the country is committed to facilitating intra-African seed trade, ensuring that quality seeds are accessible to farmers across borders.

Mr Rwigamba said the Rwanda National Seed Testing Laboratory was undergoing the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) accreditation alongside the protocols on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Seed Scheme for the country's seed sector to align with international standards.

To achieve the goals set out in Rwanda's Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (PSTA5) and Vision 2030, he said will need to emphasise and prioritise investment in research and development, climate finance, new breeding techniques, capacity building, regulatory reforms and innovative seed technologies.

Seed sector fronts public-private partnerships for agricultural development

By Aghan Daniel Idaghan@afsta.org



Mr. Innocent Namuhoranye addressing delegates at the March 2025 congress in Rwanda

Partnerships between the public and private sector are crucial for enhancing agricultural development across the continent, a seed expert has said.

Innocent Namuhoranye, the Chairperson, National Seed Association of Rwanda, said during the 25th African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA)

Congress in Kigali, Rwanda, that the Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) were a powerful mechanism for fostering a shared vision, securing broad stakeholder engagement and ensuring tangible progress in agricultural development.

He said conditions necessary for transforming the agriculture sector included a well-functioning and vibrant private sector that can manage and allocate skills and capital to scale emergent success and drive long-term sustainable agribusiness growth.

“The public sector has a critical role to play in enabling these conditions and letting these businesses flourish,” said Mr Namuhoranye.

He outlined more conditions, including large-scale dissemination of productivity, which involves increasing technology and inputs. Others were input and capital intensity; development of input and output market structures, as well as incentives that allow

full realisation of the value of increased production.

“Through strong PPPs, we are rapidly enhancing our seed system to provide the necessary infrastructure, policies and innovations required to introduce new technologies, improved seed varieties and agricultural inputs,” he said.

He observed that through more collaboration with international partners such as AFSTA, Rwanda had made progress and that preparations were underway to acquire the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) accreditation for the national laboratory, modernise the seed production certification system, review the plant variety protection system and develop a GMO regulation policy.

He called for collaboration with different international and local partners. “We must foster synergy across all levels of the seed value chain, ensuring better coordination between our systems across the continent,” he said.

Six countries develop seed road-maps with evidence of increased crop productivity

By Aghan Daniel | daghan@afsta.org



Dr. Solomon Gizaw of TAAT

At least six African countries have developed seed road-maps with support from the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) and TASA Inc.

During a presentation at the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Congress in Kigali, Rwanda, Dr Solomon Gizaw, the Head of TAAT Clearinghouse, named the countries as Sierra Leone, Kenya, Cameroon, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia.

"These road-maps are designed to help countries invest in their seed systems and build the capacity of value chain actors. This will enable them to consistently supply high-quality seeds to farmers, ultimately improving productivity," Dr Gizaw said.

He announced that they were

working to support development of seed road-maps in 25 other countries, including Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.

The development of the seed roadmaps is in line with the organisation's goal of increasing agricultural productivity in the continent by deploying proven agricultural technologies to farmers.

Other activities by TAAT to achieve this goal include conducting training of more than 20 seed inspectors and analysts from Chad, DRC, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Somalia, Mali, Niger, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

According to Dr Gizaw, the training will help to enhance access to quality seeds because of improved quality control and accuracy in laboratory seed testing, which will reduce incidences of farmers' exposure to poor quality seeds in the market.

Additionally, it will lead to adherence to standards set by ISTA in seed testing and inspection.

Besides, the organisation is supporting countries and regional economic blocs such as ECOWAS and COMESA to domesticate and harmonise seed regulations.

Already, the TAAT efforts are

realising positive results in increasing access to seeds. In the Sahel region, specifically Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan, the organisation oversaw production and distribution of about 540 MT and 851 MT of certified millet and sorghum seeds respectively.

"The average yield for sorghum was 3 MT/Ha while that for sorghum was 4 MT/ha," Dr Gizaw said. He noted that the TAAT Sorghum and Millet compact, in association with the TAAT- Water Enabler Compact, organised farmer field schools for demonstration of the performance of the two crops' varieties.

In the bean sector, a collaboration between TAAT and the Pan-African Bean Research Alliance (PABRA) has facilitated cultivation of 169,229Ha with High Iron Bean (HIB). Over 898,308 farmers were reached with 48,461 MT of certified seeds of various HIB varieties.

Further, the TAAT Rice Compact disseminated 67,739 MT of seeds of climate-adapted and high-yielding rice varieties, which were planted on 1,354,780Ha and benefited 2,252,987 farmers, boosting rice production by 5,039,579 MT of paddy and 3,326,122 MT of milled rice.

West African countries harmonize seed sector regulations

By Aghan Daniel I daghan@afsta.org

West African countries have resolved to work together to harmonise and standardise seeds testing, certification and marketing.

The agreement came through the Economic Community of West African States, West African Economic and Monetary Union, and Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel region.

The standards have been agreed for 20 ECOWAS priority crops, for which the Enabling Technical Regulations are developed, validated by the West Africa Seed Experts and adopted by the Regional Seed Committee.

The phytosanitary control and sanitation regulations are based on operating standards and procedures, which are still being completed. The phytosanitary conditions of seeds is defined by the category of pests found in the seed batch. According to the regulations, marketing of seeds is based on procedures for obtaining approval for the conduct of commercial activity.

With respect to the ECOWAS Seed Regulations provision, only varieties registered in the regional catalogue can be marketed at similar level. Also, marketing seeds by producer-distributors and distributors is subject to official accreditation.



Besides, all seed distributors must keep a stock accounting. However, the implementation of these regulations has met constraints related to phytosanitary control, with poor understanding of regulation procedures and certification by NPPO Inspectors at the member State borders, including National Seed Committees

members.

Operational phytosanitary laboratories besides insufficient phytosanitary inspectors at the border points are lacking.

These are besides the inadequate policy reforms blamed on weak support to member States; and low enforcement. Other limitations relate to variety release and challenges arising in seed quality control, with insufficient operational seed infrastructural facilities, equipment and materials for data collection; as well as inspectors and analysts.

A national reference document outlining harmful organisms carried by seeds has not been launched either.

“this merger will boost regional trade, as seeds approved in one country can be marketed and sold in others, set a standard network to improve seed quality, yield and resilience in the face of climate change and food insecurity, and help align efforts in seed research, development, and farming practices in the region.”

Seeds of change: How AVBC is cultivating Africa's agricultural future

By Aghan Daniel | AFSTA Communication Officer | daghan@afsta.org



Mr. Mwasilwa Ambali, presenting at the Congress

In a world grappling with food insecurity, climate change, and rural poverty, a quiet revolution is taking root in African agriculture. The Africa Vegetable Breeding Consortium (AVBC), a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) led by World Vegetable Center (WorldVeg), is sowing the seeds of transformation one crop, one region, and one partnership at a time. Unveiled during a recent presentation by Mr Mwasilwa

Ambali, AVBC is more than just a consortium. It is a movement aimed at leveraging science, collaboration, and innovation to uplift African farmers and reshape food systems.

“AVBC isn't just a consortium, it's a partnership,” Mr Ambali emphasised. “Your input enhances our breeding programmes for producers' benefit. Your feedback and collaboration drive our shared success,” he added.

Formed under the umbrella of the WorldVeg-APSA initiative, AVBC has assembled a rich portfolio of crops tailored to African agro-ecologies. From Solanaceae-like tomatoes and pepper, to indigenous legumes and other vegetables, the consortium aims to improve yields, resilience, and market value across the continent.

These improvements align

strongly with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which calls for “a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.”

At the heart of this effort lies the WorldVeg Genebank, the world's largest public collection of vegetable germplasm. With over 65,000 accessions from 151 countries, the Genebank provides AVBC members with access to diverse breeding lines for innovation. “This isn't just about access, it's about giving African researchers and companies the tools they need to breed for local needs and preferences,” said Mr Ambali.

One example is Coprosem's journey from simple seed multiplication to becoming a thriving R&D hub. With breeding successes like the DOUBAP and TERIP pepper varieties and the 50-day cycle mung bean that has attracted NGOs supporting women farmers, Coprosem exemplifies how the consortium model can empower local enterprises.

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Through annual workshops like those recently hosted in Tanzania and Benin, members participate in dynamic, hands-on sessions with top breeders. These forums allow for exchange of ideas and skills, and open up access to exclusive breeding lines and early protocols. Membership fees, scaled for national, regional, and international entities, ensure broad participation while maintaining world-class standards.

Importantly, the AVBC model supports Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The emphasis on developing host resistance in crops like chili pepper through projects such as the five-year, \$600,000 Thrips resistance programme demonstrates AVBC's commitment to climate-resilient agriculture. Moreover, its work aligns with Kenya's Vision 2030's agricultural pillar, which aims to transform the sector into a modern, commercially viable, and internationally

competitive industry. By introducing high-value traits like intense aroma, fruit color, and elevated capsaicinoid content, AVBC helps African producers to tap into premium markets while improving food diversity and nutrition at home.

Capacity building is another key pillar. Special projects and training programmes allow local scientists and agribusinesses to co-develop new varieties and stay ahead of global trends. Dr Ambali noted: "We are not just breeding vegetables; we are cultivating knowledge, entrepreneurship, and resilience."

In a continent where more than 60 per cent of the population relies on agriculture for livelihood, initiatives like AVBC represent more than research. They are also a blueprint for economic empowerment and food sovereignty.

As Africa moves toward its vision of inclusive growth and sustainable development, AVBC is proving that collaboration, innovation, and local leadership can turn the continent into the world's next agricultural powerhouse.



CGIAR New initiatives aiming to secure the future of plant breeding

By Aghan Daniel | daghan@afsta.org



Prof. John Derera

The CGIAR has launched a five-pillar initiative to accelerate innovation in agriculture. The five interconnected pillars are dubbed breeding, market intelligence, inclusive delivery, breeding resources and ENABLE.

Speaking in Kigali, Rwanda, during the March 2025 AFSTA Congress, CGIAR's Dr John Derera said the approach code named Breeding for Tomorrow (B4T) would help develop better-performing, farmer-preferred crop varieties. It is also expected to decrease the average age of varieties in farms, providing real-time adaptation to climate change, evolving markets and production systems.

Dr Derera was flanked by Biswanath Das, and Jean Claude Rubyogo, all part of the CGIAR's Genetic Innovation team.

The team stated that such bold and science-driven efforts were part of the response needed to tackle climate volatility, food

insecurity, and increasing inequality response.

Dr Derera appealed for more partnerships with public, private, and civil society organisations to boost development and deployment of products aimed at improving the quality of life for small-scale, resource poor women and men farmers in low- and middle-income countries.

"The programme seeks to deliver crop, livestock and aquatic varieties that are not only more productive and resilient, but also more nutritious, sustainable, and market-preferred," said Dr Derera.

He said at the initiative was a transformative vision focusing on food systems that nourish people and the planet, while at the same time empowering the most vulnerable in low- and middle-income countries.

"The mission of B4T is as ambitious as it is necessary. It seeks to drive genetic innovations that go beyond yield increases, focusing on holistic outcomes like regenerative soil health, diversified landscapes, reduced inequality, and even conflict mitigation. In other words, it is not just about better seeds; it is about better futures," he said.

The team further spoke of the remaining pillars, including Market intelligence, Inclusive delivery, Breeding resources, and ENABLE, explaining how they directly align with continental and global development frameworks, sustainability, equity, as well as innovation as per the African Union's Agenda 2063 aspirations for a prosperous and food-secure Africa.

The CGIAR team said as a research institution and a catalyst for large-scale transformation, they envisioned a world where smallholder farmers, particularly women and youth, have access to the tools and technologies they need to survive and thrive.



COMESA's COMSHIP initiative poised to transform Africa's agricultural sector

By AFSTA Secretariat | afsta@afsta.org

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is making strides in transforming the agricultural sector through its Seed Harmonisation Implementation Plan (COMSHIP). This initiative aims to improve regional seed trade and increase access to high-quality seeds, ultimately contributing to food security, economic growth and sustainable development.

Speaking at the 25th AFSTA Congress in March, COMESA underscored the urgent need for a harmonised seed system to ensure smallholder farmers have access to high-yielding, climate-resilient, and nutritious seeds. "The COMESA seed system is designed to scale up access to quality seeds that are climate-smart and highly productive, thus ensuring agricultural sustainability in the region," said Dr. John Mukuka, the Chief Executive Officer of the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), a Specialised Agency of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

Africa's agricultural sector faces numerous challenges, including poor seed quality, limited access to improved seed varieties, and restrictive cross-border trade policies. COMSHIP aims to resolve these challenges by catalysing agricultural transformation through reliable, affordable, and timely access to quality seeds.

"Our goal is to enhance seed trade among member states, saving time and resources while improving food and nutritional security," noted a representative from the COMESA Seed Office.

The initiative is particularly crucial in addressing food shortages caused by climate variabilities and unpredictable weather patterns.

One of the key achievements of COMSHIP has been the establishment of harmonised seed trade regulations across COMESA member states. Countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Egypt, and Malawi have already gazetted these regulations, enabling streamlined cross-border seed trade.

"By implementing harmonised regulations, we are reducing barriers to seed movement and creating a more efficient and competitive seed market within the region," said Dr Mukuka.

Under the COMESA Variety Release System, seed companies can now commercialise their products without the previous two-to-three-year delay before market entry. As of now, 119 seed varieties from 20 companies and CGIAR centres have been registered in the COMESA Variety Catalogue, allowing for faster adoption of high-



quality seeds by farmers. COMSHIP aligns closely with key continental and global development agendas, including the African Union's Agenda 2063, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Kenya's Vision 2030. By boosting agricultural productivity and food security, the initiative directly contributes to Agenda 2063's aspirations of modernising agriculture and eradicating hunger. Similarly, it supports SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by ensuring the availability of nutritious food through increased seed production and distribution.

Furthermore, Kenya's Vision 2030 emphasises economic growth through agriculture, and COMSHIP plays a pivotal role in achieving this by fostering regional seed trade and empowering smallholder farmers. Despite its progress, COMESA acknowledges the need for greater awareness and adoption of its seed trade harmonisation regulations. Moving forward, the organisation plans to strengthen collaborations with national seed authorities, seed companies, and research institutions. "We need to increase awareness of the COMESA seed trade regulations and encourage more countries to domesticate these laws," added Dr Mukuka.

Efforts are also underway to enhance seed labeling, support private sector engagement, and promote the release of high-yielding, climate-resilient maize, bean, and wheat varieties through the COMESA Variety Catalogue.

As COMESA advances its efforts through COMSHIP, the initiative is expected to drive economic integration, food security, and resilience to climate change across Africa. With increased participation from governments, private sector stakeholders, and farmers, the vision of a food-secure Africa is well within reach.

"By improving seed access and trade, we are not only strengthening Africa's agricultural sector but also securing a prosperous future for millions of farmers and consumers across the continent," concluded a COMESA representative.

The COMSHIP initiative stands as a beacon of hope, promising a future where quality seeds, economic growth, and sustainable agriculture go hand in hand.

Scaling Finance for Small-holder Farmers in Africa – High level conference

By Catherine Langat IAFSTA Technical Manager | catherine@afsta.org



On March 17th - 18th 2025, AFSTA Secretariat and Board represented by Innocent Namuhoranye (NSAR Chairman), participated in the high level conference on scaling finance for smallholder farmers in Africa. The conference took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

The welcome remarks were done by the Vice president, Agriculture, Human Resource and Social Development of the African Development Bank which was focussed on innovation, inclusion, and investment in the agri-food sector. This event brought together stakeholders from across the agricultural value chain— different government ministers of Agriculture, researchers, policymakers, private sector actors, development partners, investors and, most critically, the farmers themselves—to explore scalable solutions for trans-

forming food systems, particularly through empowering smallholder farmers.

As the global population approaches 10 billion by 2050, the demand for nutritious, affordable, and sustainably produced food is increasing dramatically. Agriculture remains the backbone of many economies, especially in low- and middle-income countries in Africa, where it accounts for up to 25% of GDP and employs over 60% of the workforce. Within this landscape, smallholder farmers—those managing less than two hectares of land—play a pivotal role in ensuring food security, biodiversity, and rural livelihoods.

It was relevant for AFSTA to participate in the event as it provided a critical platform to build partnerships, share & exchange knowledge, and co-create strategies to harness the full potential of the agri-food sector. The main message being by focusing on inclusive innovation, power of partnerships with the private sector and scaling successful models, it is possible to empower smallholder farmers in Africa not just as beneficiaries, but as co-architects of a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food system.

Summary and key Messages

a. Opportunities in the Agri-Food Sector

The agri-food sector offers a wealth of opportunities across production, processing, distribution, retail, and innovation. With increasing consumer demand for sustainably sourced products, climate-smart agriculture, and value-added food processing. The event underlined that there is significant potential for growth in:

- **Agri-tech and digital solutions:** Innovations such as precision agriculture, mobile advisory platforms, and blockchain traceability are revolutionizing farming practices and improving efficiency.
- **Climate resilience and sustainability:** Adoption of regenerative agriculture and circular economy principles is attracting green investment.
- **Nutrition and food security:** Developing nutrient-dense crops and fortified foods is crucial to combating malnutrition and enhancing public health.

b. The Role of Smallholder Farmers

Speakers underlined that smallholder farmers are central to the above opportunities, producing up to 80% of the food consumed in sub-Saharan Africa according to different studies. Their intimate knowledge of local ecosystems, traditional practices, and community dynamics makes them key agents of change in the transition to sustainable agriculture. Despite their potential, smallholders often face barriers such as limited access to markets, information, modern inputs, and financial services as observed by most panelists.

c. The Financing Gap and Opportunities to Scale

One of the most pressing constraints, spotted by the panelists, in scaling impact in the agri-food sector is persistent financing gap. The Africa Development Bank (AfDB) and other institutions estimate that smallholder farmers require over \$200 billion annually in financing—yet current levels meet only a fraction of this demand. The gap is driven by a

combination of perceived risks, lack of collateral, fragmented markets, and misaligned financial products.

However, most discussants agreed that this gap also represents a **tremendous opportunity:**

- **Blended finance models** that combine public and private capital can de-risk investments and crowd in new partners.
- **Digital financial services** are expanding the

Access to quality inputs and strengthening input supply chains – the role of the private seed sector

reach of credit, savings, and insurance products.

- **Impact investors** are increasingly interested in agriculture as a driver of inclusive development, climate resilience, and gender equity.

d. Access to quality inputs and strengthening input supply chains – the role of the private seed sector

Some of the major points highlighted include:

- **Improved Seed Varieties:** Private companies drive innovation in hybrid and climate-resilient seeds.

These varieties can lead to yield increases of 30–50% under optimal conditions.

- **Timely Availability:** Private seed companies ensure seeds are available at the right time in planting seasons, reducing dependency on informal or unreliable seed sources.
- **Localized Solutions:** Some firms invest in regionally adapted seeds tailored to local soils, rainfall, and cropping patterns.

It was clear that in most African countries, the private seed companies often work with Agro-dealers - expanding the reach of certified seeds to remote areas as well as Outgrower schemes - providing seed and input credit to smallholders in exchange for produce.

In conclusion, the private seed companies are pivotal in transforming smallholder farming from subsistence to market-oriented systems. Their contributions—both direct and indirect—affect several dimensions of smallholder success. To achieve scalable and sustainable impact, public-private partnerships must be structured to align private sector incentives with smallholder priorities. By doing so, we can unlock the transformative potential of smallholder agribusinesses and create more equitable and resilient food systems.



Plant Breeding Innovation Key to Unlocking Africa's Food Potential

By Catherine Langat IAFSTA Technical Manager | catherine@afsta.org



Agriculture remains central to Africa's socio-economic transformation, contributing significantly to food security, rural incomes, employment, and GDP. As outlined in Agenda 2063, achieving a prosperous and sustainable Africa hinges on investments in science, research, innovation, and emerging technologies. These investments align with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) and its 2026-2035 Strategy and Action Plan, which seek to modernize

agriculture, increase productivity, and triple intra-African trade in agricultural goods and inputs by 2035.

Plant breeding innovations (PBI), including genome editing, represent critical tools to achieve these goals. Genome editing offers efficient, precise, and cost-effective methods to enhance crop yields, resilience to climate change, and nutritional value. However, the adoption of these technologies is hindered by unaligned regulatory frameworks, insufficient policy flexibility, and limited public awareness.

To address these challenges, the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA), in partnership with key stakeholders including the African Union and its agencies organized a high-level policy dialogue to align efforts with the Kampala CAADP Declaration and the African Seed and Biotechnology Program (ASBP).

The dialogue held at the occasion of the AFSTA 25th Congress in Kigali, Rwanda, emphasized the importance of harmonized, science-based policies that foster the safe application of genome editing and other innovations, contributing to Africa's food security, agro-industrialization, and climate resilience. The outcome of the dialogue also aligns with the Continental Guidelines for Biotechnology, which provide a blueprint for leveraging agricultural biotechnology while ensuring biosafety.

By fostering collaboration and harmonizing policies, the dialogue paved the way for a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable agrifood system across the continent. The following countries/institutions were represented in the dialogue – AUDA NEPAD, African Seed and Biotechnology Program Platform (ASBPP) represented by FARA Secretariat, AFSTA Secretariat & AFSTA members (including some AFSTA

Board members), ISF Secretariat and representation from the ISF, CLI, Kenyatta University, Edo State University, delegates from African Member States – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, and Zimbabwe – Selected partners – AATF and AGRA.

The primary objectives of the dialogue included:

1. Policy Alignment and Coordination: Assess and promote the implementation of continental policy frameworks, including the AUDA-NEPAD guidelines, the ASBP, and the African Model Law. Facilitate coordination among African Union (AU) bodies, regional economic communities (RECs), and member states.

2. Regulatory Harmonization: Exchange insights on national and regional regulatory frameworks for plant breeding innovations, with a focus on successful case studies and opportunities for harmonization to reduce trade barriers and foster intra-African collaboration.

3. Roadmap Development: Formulate actionable recommendations and a roadmap to:

- (i) Strengthen national and regional regulatory frameworks.
- (ii) Promote public-private partnerships for innovation adoption.
- (iii) Support preparations for the 6th Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical

Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment in October 2025.

4. Public Awareness and Communication: Enhance public awareness and understanding of genome editing, ensuring transparent and science-based messaging to build consumer confidence.

Through expert presentations and in-depth discussions, the



meeting addressed various topics and themes, including the following:

- Progress in biotechnology and gene-edited products guidelines development at the national, sub-regional and continental level.
- Challenges in adapting and adopting sound plant breeding innovation and biotechnology regulations, and policies
- Applicable genome editing regulations and their implementation challenges.

- Genome Editing developments and the corresponding challenges from a regulatory standpoint.
- Communication adjustments improved and harmonized definitions and genome editing language.
- Highlights on the Genome Editing product pipeline in Africa.
- Contribution to the high-level ministerial meeting; expected output and subsequent communicate.

The main conclusions and key take-aways included the need for continued collaborative frameworks in these important discussions on PBI especially in the continent. There was a consensus on the need for a

roadmap on private public partnerships and capacity building on PBI in the continent to propel agricultural innovation in Africa. Further, developing and promoting an advocacy strategy for plant breeding innovation at continental level was agreed upon. As a conclusion, the participants underlined the importance of domesticating and harmonizing the AUDA-NEPAD led guidance on genome editing to be adapted by African Member States.



World Vegetable Center

Save the Date

The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) and The World Vegetable Centre cordially invite you to a webinar on the African Vegetable Breeding Consortium (AVBC)

DATE: 24 JUNE 2025
TIME: 12:00 - 14:00 GMT+3
NAIROBI TIME



Join us for an insightful webinar on: **AVBC: New Technologies and Opportunities for Seed Companies**

This session aims to sensitize stakeholders on the latest innovations and improved vegetable varieties developed through the **African Vegetable Breeding Consortium (AVBC)**.

Why Attend?

- Learn about new and improved vegetable varieties available to seed companies
- Discover how Seed companies can leverage these advancements
- Explore ways to strengthen food security through access to climate-resilient and high-performing seed

Don't miss this opportunity to connect with experts and access valuable resources that can improve your product portfolio and market share in Africa.

CONTACT
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23 - 25 MARCH
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AFSTA Congress 2025 memorable moments



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AFSTA Congress 2025 memorable moments



AFSTA Congress 2025 memorable moments



UPCOMING EVENTS

1. Uganda seed strategy technical meeting ; 17th - 20th June 2025
2. Africa Vegetable Breeding Consortium (AVBC) webinar; 24th June 2025
3. Zambia's 3rd National Seed Congress: 17th - 18th July 2025, Lusaka Zambia
4. AFSTA mid-term virtual Board Meeting: 29th July 2025
5. ACLBC Annual workshop and demo plot field visit: August 4–5, 2025, Kenya
6. AVBC annual workshop 2025: 2nd - 4th September 2025: Arusha, Tanzania
7. ISTA Workshop on Purity and Other Seed Determination: 9th September 2025
8. Africa-India Seed Summit: 11th - 13th September 2025
9. AFSTA Board meeting: 15th - 16th October 2025: Nairobi, Kenya
10. World Congress of Agricultural Journalists: 15th - 18th Oct 2025, Nairobi, Kenya
11. Euroseeds2025 Congress 19th - 22nd October 2025: Edinburg, Scotland
12. Asian Seed Congress 2025: 17th - 21st November 2025, Mumbai, India
13. AFSTA Congress 2026: March 23rd - 25th 2026, Cape Town, South Africa

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