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NEWS FROM THE SEED TRADE ASSOCIATION OF MALI (ASSEMA)
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The Seed Association of Mali (ASSEMA) was formed on 24 December 2002 in Bamako, Mali and was officially registered according to receipt No. 121/MATCL - DNI of 21st February 2003. Its mission is to:

- Serve as a framework for dialogue, exchange of information and experiences;
- To represent the interests of the seed industry in Mali;
- To contribute to the organisation and the training of all the seed actors in view of improving the agricultural productivity in Mali.

To achieve this noble mission, our association has struggled for six years to overcome the following constraints and difficulties:

The seed sector in Mali lacks precise statistics on seed activities of seed traders (producers, distributors, NGO, projects, researchers, production sale and varieties). Very few information is available on seed purchases and sales and the lack of knowledge of the improved varieties by the majority of agricultural producers. In addition to the inadequacy of the regulatory framework, the labelling is not respected, there is no standard for the treatment, processing and marketing of locally produced seed.

Very limited offer on foundation seed for certain varieties and organisational and financial difficulties for producers to express

their needs in certified have seeds in time, the permanent threat of climatic risks constitute the limiting factors in programming the production of seed sales in Mali.



Members of ASSEMA during a workshop on seed regulations at ECOWAS and WAEMU level

Very high logistic expenses due to long distances to be covered between major seed production and distribution centers impede the effort for a census and the establishment of ASSEMA throughout the country.

The obvious insufficiencies of the identification of the place and role of various actors in the value chains of the products delay the development and the growth of the markets of agricultural produce, which can support the seed production and sales. (Cattle, poultry, processing and conservation industry the agricultural produce, bio fuels, etc).

In my point of view, the priorities for the creation of a strong and credible private seed industry in Mali can be summarized as follows:

The instauration of a conducive institutional environment for private national and international investors is of paramount importance (The new regulatory framework, which is being developed should widely drawn from the common texts for the seed regulation harmonization in ECOWAS/WAEMU region)

The political will clearly of the government concerning the progressive disengagement of the State of the functions of production and marketing of the certified seeds (including the basic seeds) should result in supporting the Malian private entrepreneurs to acquire under favorable conditions State seed treatments and firms.

The private distributors must benefit from a support of their partners for the organization and management of the distribution networks. To improve the seed marketing and minimize the impact of informal sector, all the Malian seed professionals must agree to set up and respect standards in terms of seed packaging, treatment and conditioning (especially for seeds locally produced: rice, millet, sorghum, corn, cotton, cowpea, groundnut, onion, etc)

One must reinforce the trust and partnership between the research institutions (State, Projects, NGO, etc.), the producers and the private sector in order to develop, maintain and promote the varieties (created or introduced in Mali) in order to improve in a significant way, the agricultural production and productivity in Mali.

In a context of disengagement of the State from lucrative activities of production and sale, it is important to recognize the role of the private sector as the engine of the national seed industry and ASSEMA as the interlocutor and representative of this private sector vis-à-vis the national authorities and development partners.

AFSTA CONGRESS 2008 IN BRIEF

*By Susan Miyengi, Assistant to the Secretary General
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The eighth annual AFSTA Congress was held in the beautiful city of Casablanca from the 26 – 29 February 2008. The Opening Ceremony was graced by the Permanent

Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and
Maritime Fisheries.



AFSTA Congress 2008 Opening ceremony officiated by the PS Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Morocco

The congress 2008 drew the highest number of participants with 250 delegates from 35 countries, including representatives from regional and international bodies. The mood at the congress was that of great satisfaction and the quality of presentations and level of participation of the delegates were regarded as excellent.

It was an excellent opportunity for the delegates to discuss and exchange information and views amongst themselves. All the technical sessions on important topics such as: Overview of Seed Regulation in the Northern Africa countries and its impact on seed trade: analysis and way forward, the African seed industry facing the challenges of globalization: analysis and way forward, milestones reached in harmonization of seed regulations, latest development in Plant Variety Protection, Seed Alliances and the role of AFSTA, amongst others, interesting topics were all well attended.

The congress was preceded by two half-day workshops: One on “Seed Certification” facilitated by the ISTA and OECD and the other workshop on “Seed Care” facilitated by Syngenta.

Objectives for AFSTA continue to be the organization of technical training related to seeds to build capacity of its members in 2008/2009 among others, strengthening the

knowledge of its membership about latest in technology developments as concerns seeds and seed marketing. It will continue to actively support the seed legislation harmonization process in the sub-regions.

The AFSTA annual congress is surely establishing itself as an event to look forward to and eyes are now cast at the next congress 2009 to be held at the Cape Sun International Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa from 2 – 6 March 2009. The National Organizing Committee for AFSTA Congress 2009 is working hard to ensure that the Congress will meet your expectations in every aspect.

PROGRESS IN SEED TRADE HARMONIZATION IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA

By Cris Muyunda, Senior Agricultural Adviser of COMESA; E-mail: cmuyunda@comesa.int

The commercial seed industry has long been advocating for simplified variety release procedures, common seed certification standards and science-based plant quarantine pest lists to facilitate seed trade in Africa.

Considerable progress towards the goal of establishing a regional seed market has already been made in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region with the development of regional technical agreements, and it is expected that these will be adopted by the SADC Council of Ministers at their May meeting.

However, an even greater prize would be an expansion of these agreements beyond SADC to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). COMESA is the largest regional economic grouping in Africa with 19 member states. In 2007 intra-COMESA trade was valued at \$7.5 billions of which food and agricultural raw materials constituted 32.5%.

This prize is now in sight. At the fifth meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Agriculture in Victoria, the capital of the Seychelles, the Ministers declared that "Member States commit to harmonizing, within two years, seed trade regulations in the region and to finalize a regional protocol

for the protection of new varieties of plants within the same period." This important milestone results from the engagement of the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) with COMESA in partnership with the program for the Sustainable Commercialization of Seed in Africa (SCOSA) over the past two years.

Technical support in the development of the technical agreements will be offered to COMESA by the Eastern and Southern Africa Seed Alliance (ESASA) Team that includes AFSTA, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), the Seed Science Center of Iowa State University (SSC-ISU) and CNFA, Inc. The ESASA Team has already agreed to work in partnership with the Policy Analysis and Advocacy Program (PAAP) of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) that has been supporting seed trade harmonization in Eastern and Central Africa for several years.

AFSTA and its membership have a big responsibility to ensure that COMESA member States both commit to the seed trade harmonization process and implement the agreements. The AFSTA secretariat will be following up with its membership to develop an advocacy strategy in support of this important COMESA initiative.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON IMPLEMENTATION OF SADC HARMONIZED SEED REGULATORY SYSTEM ON THE CARDS

SADC Secretariat is convening a meeting of SADC Ministers responsible for Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources in Harare, Zimbabwe on 9th May 2008. The meeting will be preceded by a meeting for Senior Officials to be held 6 - 8 May 2008. Among other items on the agenda the Ministers will consider and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on implementation of SADC Harmonized Seed Regulatory System. The purpose of this MOU is to provide Member States with a legal framework to coordinate their actions

in the implementation of the SADC harmonized seed regulations. The objectives of this MOU are to:

1. Facilitate the availability of high quality seeds to farmers within the SADC region;
2. Make it easier and cheaper for new and existing varieties to gain access to SADC markets;
3. Stimulate the availability of more varieties of seed and encourage more investment in the seed sector;
4. Encourage faster and safer movement of seeds and reduce costs related to seed trade; and
5. Establish a sustainable funding mechanism for supporting the SADC harmonized seed system.

Source: SADC Seed update, February 2008

UGANDA APPROVES NATIONAL BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSAFETY POLICY

The long awaited Uganda National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy has been approved by the Ugandan Cabinet after a thorough review and deliberation of various stakeholders. The policy which was formulated by the National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) in 2002 aims to build and strengthen national capacity in biotechnology through research and development, promote the utilization of biotechnology products and processes as tools for national development ; and provide a regulatory and institutional framework for safe and sustainable biotechnology development and application. During the recent cabinet meeting for the policy approval, Hon. Fred Jachan Omach, underscored the importance of the policy arguing that biotechnology was one of the frontiers of agricultural and industrial research in the world today and that Uganda should not be left behind in these new technological advancements. The policy's goal towards the safe application of biotechnology will be one of the instruments in poverty eradication,

improvement of health care, food security, industrialization and the protection of the environment. Hon. Omach further stated that the approval of the policy was imperative given that the country had already established an ultra-modern National Agricultural Biotechnology Center, where genetic modification of cotton, bananas and other crops for resistance to diseases and pests are being conducted. For details contact UNCST Executive Secretary at uncst@starcom.co.ug. For other news about biotechnology in Africa, contact Margaret Karembu of ISAAA Africa Center at m.karembu@isaaa.org.

Source: Crop Biotech Update, April 11, 2008

Upcoming events:

- 26th to 29th May 2008: International Seed Federation annual Congress 2008 in Prague, Czech Republic.
- 16th to 19th June 2008: ISTA annual meeting in Bologna, Italy.
- 1st – 2nd July 2008: Annual meeting of OECD Seed Schemes, Chicago, USA.
- 13th to 14th October 2008: AFSTA Board of Directors' meeting, Kenya.
- 9th – 13th November 2008: APSA annual congress 2008, Hyderabad, India.
- 2nd – 6th March 2009: AFSTA annual congress 2009, Cape Town, South Africa.

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Disclaimer:

The African Seed Trade Association takes every precaution in verifying the accuracy of information supplied by its Secretariat, but does not accept liability for errors, which may nevertheless appear in this newsletter. Submissions by contributors to the newsletter may not necessarily reflect the views of the AFSTA Secretariat, the Board or its members.

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