Access To Seeds Index

An assessment of smallholder farmers’ access to seeds says greater engagement from global seed companies would help boost yields and food security.

The Access to Seeds Index said the large multinational companies’ quality and range of seeds, if available and affordable, could help boost yields.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, smallholders are responsible for the majority of the region’s food production. However, only 2.5% of seeds used by the farmers come from global seed firms.

The 2016 index, published in the end of February, assessed the main food crop and vegetable seed companies’ efforts to make their products available to smallholder farmers in the most food insecure regions of the world: South and South-East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Africa and Western Africa.

“It is often thought that smallholding farmers save their seeds from season to season but that is not true,” said Access to Seeds Index executive director Ido Verhaegen.

Research shows that they use a mixed bowl of seeds, including seeds they have saved themselves, seeds that they buy from the market and certified seeds from companies. However, he explained, access to certified seeds from global companies was limited for a number of reasons.

“It is not only availability, but also affordability and sometimes capability – seeds are not always suitable for their system or their practices,” he told BBC News.

The findings show that the “seed industry as a whole is active in all countries in the scope of the index. This was with the exception of Western Africa, where there is a clear gap.”

Mr Verhaegen observed: “We cannot blame the companies for not going to Western Africa because companies need a business environment and market opportunities.”

of State for Agriculture and Rural Development, Henkiek Lokobiri has said. More than 200 different varieties of cassava have been developed and registered in Nigeria. Flour mills are being encouraged to substitute at least 10% high quality cassava flour for wheat flour to be included in bread production. (Daily Trust 29/2)

Coffee, Angola: The director of the Angolan National Coffee Institute (INCA), João Ferreira Neto, has launched a programme to increase coffee production and exports, which aims to triple the amount of coffee exported to 30,000 tons within two years.

This programme, designed to support existing producers, includes the delivery of 230m coffee seedlings and 1.5bn palm seedlings, according to news agency Angop.

Coffee is currently produced in 10 of Angola’s 18 provinces, namely Cabinda, Bengo, Kwanza Norte, Kwanza Sul, Uige, Benguela, Huambo, Bié, Malanje and Huila, in an area of 18,000 hectares, compared to 120,000 hectares in the period before independence in 1975.

In 2015 the coffee production structure comprised about 50,000 registered producers, of which 98% represented family farms and the remaining 2% were corporate farms in the provinces of Bengo, Kwanza Sul and Uige.

In addition to increasing production, INCA is supporting sales programmes through direct purchase of coffee by private commercial agents and through rural markets in cooperation with the authorities.

Recent studies by INCA found that in the medium term (five years), with investments channelled into coffee, Angola may be producing 50,000 tons of commercial coffee per year. This is about a quarter of the production before independence, when the country was the world’s fourth largest coffee producer. (Macauhub 14/3)

GOLD

DR Congo

Illegal exports are funding terrorist groups.

Gold moved illegally from eastern DR Congo is funding terror groups, a think tank has said.

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) is currently carrying out research to track illicit financial flows related to resource extraction in DR Congo and how gold is smuggled through East African countries before finding its way into the global market.

Preliminary findings of the Pretoria-based think tank show al-Shabaab and Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) have joined gold smuggling networks.

The think tank said smuggling of DR Congo’s natural resources is linked to conflict in the region, warning that al-Shabaab remains sufficiently resourced to fund its activities despite efforts by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the United Nations (UN) to cut off its channels of funding.

Although ISS research is ongoing, it has already identified Bukavu, Butembo, Bunia, Aruwara and Kisangani as the main trading towns in eastern DR Congo for gold smuggling.

The gold finds its way to Kampala, Nairobi, Bujumbura and Dar es Salaam before being smuggled to other markets. Al-Shabaab and ADF-NALU are involved in networks benefiting from the proceeds of gold and other natural resources exported illegally to Dubai and China. (The East African 28/3)