Update: 2019 Access to Seeds Index

As reported recently in *Asian Seed* (Volume 23, Issue 6, page 34) dozens of APSA members will be assessed in the next Access to Seeds Index. The 2019 index, which will be published towards the end of this year, is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the government of the Netherlands. To find out what's new, *Asian Seed* reached out to Coosje Hoogendoorn, who leads the research process for South and South East Asia at the Access to Seeds Foundation.

AS: What's new since last update? Aside from addition of countries and companies, are there any other specific revisions to the methodologies or approach worth highlighting?

CH: First of all, we see a growing attention for enabling smallholder farmers to cope with the effects of climate change. As announced at the "One Planet Summit" in Paris on 12 December 2017, the European Union together with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have pledged more than €500 million to develop tools and technologies to help the world's poorest farmers better adapt to increasingly challenging growing conditions brought about by climate change.

This makes the Index very timely because obviously seed companies play a key role in delivering new tools and technologies in the hands of smallholder farmers. Findings presented by the Index feed the dialogue on how the seed industry can support a growing food production in the world while remaining within planetary boundaries and reduce climate change impact. We are clearly linking company actions for smallholder farmers with the UN's global Sustainable Development Goals issues such as climate change, nutrition, agro-biodiversity, sustainable intensification, and women farmers.

The 2016 Index underlined the crucial role regional seed companies play in addressing these issues. Therefore we doubled the number of companies assessed from 25 to 60 in total. This allows us to include more regionally-operating companies in West & Central Africa, Eastern & Southern Africa as well as South and Southeast Asia.

With respect to data collection for the new index, how has progress been thus far: have companies been cooperative and transparent?

We are in the middle of data collection and are in touch with virtually all companies selected for the SSEA regional Index. Some of them were already involved in the 2016 Index. Not surprisingly those companies that are new to the Index in general have more questions and need time to build up an understanding. For each company, two analysts from the Access to Seeds Index team are available for specific questions and other support until the moment the data submission period closes in June.

Compared to smaller companies, larger companies with more resources may be more capable of meeting criteria, supplying information, even if only for show considering that much of the data is supplied voluntarily. That said, how can Access to Seeds ensure objectivity and accuracy of the results?

One of the findings of the 2016 Index was that smaller companies based in the region are almost by default more geared towards the market of smallholder farmers, which usually gives them a head start over the multinationals from the Access to Seeds Index point of view. The Index also gives more weight to performance than to commitment, i.e. to actions over policy documents, to quality over quantity. Also, we can scale for size and presence to account for company size. In this way

A young, Indian rice seed farmer outside Agra excited for harvest. Photo: Steven Layne / APSA

Coosje Hoogendoorn of the Access to Seeds Foundation

we, and the experts that advise us, are confident we have an adequate level playing field.

We provide the companies with a platform to show their presence, portfolio and performance. This information is used by other companies, research agencies or governments looking for companies to partner with. So it is in their own interest that companies provide us with correct information. Although we cannot do checks on the ground, we do verify the information through cross checking and analysis. In case of doubt, we consult experts.

From the work done so far, what are some of the challenges and advantages you think Southeast and South Asia face compared to other regions?

Our landscaping studies show that the enabling environment for the seed industry in South and Southeast Asia is overall more advanced than in Sub-Saharan Africa.

On the other end, the positive effect of SAARC and ASEAN on stimulating cross border seed trade remains unclear, although potentially this could be of great value to the industry. We have identified many seed companies in the region, but as yet still have to learn a lot about the industry's attention for smallholder farmers.

More information can be found at accesstoseeds.org.

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Regional Index for South & Southeast Asia

	Company	Country
1	Acsen HyVeg	IND
2	Advanta	ARE
3	Bayer	DEU
4	Bioseed	IND
5	BRAC	BGD
6	Charoen Pokphand	THA
7	DowDuPont	USA
8	East-West Seed	THA
9	Groupe Limagrain	FRA
10	Kalash Seeds	IND
11	Known-You Seed	TWN
12	Lal Teer Seed	BGD
13	Mahyco	IND
14	Monsanto	USA
15	Namdhari Seeds	IND
16	National Seeds Corporation	IND
17	Nongwoo Bio	KOR
18	Nuziveedu Seeds	IND
19	Punjab Seed Corporation	PAK
20	Rallis/Metahelix	IND
21	Sakata	JPN
22	Syngenta (ChemChina)	CHE
23	Takii	JPN
24	Vinaseed	VNM