



## Access to Seeds Index

# The rise of the seed-producing cooperatives in Western and Central Africa: A viable path towards improving access to quality seeds in the region

Committee on Agriculture (COAG), 26th Session

Access to Seeds Index Side-event

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### List of Panel Members

|                       |                                                                                                              |
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| Ernest Asiedu         | Former Chief of Party WASP and consultant for CORAF, Senegal                                                 |
| Kees Blokland         | Managing Director at AgriTerra                                                                               |
| Yacouba Diallo        | Research Consultant for Access to Seeds, Mali                                                                |
| Hans Dreyer           | Director, Plant Production and Protection Division at FAO                                                    |
| Hans Hoogeveen        | Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to FAO and chair of the meeting                       |
| Nancy Wakawa Mohammed | Managing Director of Jirkur Seed, Nigeria. Although, not present she was also able to contribute via webcast |
| Yacouba Tanda         | Seed Production Technician, Union Mada Ben de Falwel, Niger                                                  |
| Ann Tutwiler          | Director General of Bioversity International                                                                 |

Photo Album of side-event:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/faonews/sets/72157674090637688/with/44164954315/>

Webcast recording of side-event:

<http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/4861/icode/?lang=en&q=high>



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### Introduction

The Access to Seeds Index was invited by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to host a side-event in parallel with the Committee on Agriculture's (COAG) 26<sup>th</sup> session. COAG is one of FAO's Governing Bodies providing overall policy and regulatory guidance on issues relating to agriculture, food safety and nutrition, to name a few. The Access to Seeds Index was able to share with COAG participants a panel discussion related to its recent publication, *The Rise of the Seed-producing Cooperative in Western and Central Africa*. The panel representatives encompassed a range of perspectives: including representatives from FAO to representatives of the seed-producing cooperatives mentioned within the Access to Seeds publication itself.

### Panel Discussion



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#### HANS HOOGEVEEN

Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to FAO and chair of the meeting

*“Food systems start with farmers ... they are crucial not only for our food system but especially for achieving the sustainable development goals. For many of these goals we depend on the farmers.”*

The meeting was opened and chaired by H.E. Hans Hoogeveen, who emphasized the important role that farmers in the developing world play in our present and will most certainly play in our future. This is especially true in regard to achieving the global goals, such as zero hunger, and mainstreaming others, such as agrobiodiversity. He cautioned that we need all the farmers we can get, and that the trends of young farmers leaving the

countryside must change. He hopes that through the discussions held today, and through the actions of those sitting on the panel and in the audience, that we can find a positive way forward and tackle the challenges of food security – especially in Africa, where the population is still expected to increase dramatically in the coming decades.



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#### YACOUBA DIALLO

Research Consultant for the Access to Seeds Index, Mali

*“Seed-producing cooperatives cover more countries in West Africa than global or regional seed companies.”*

Yacouba Diallo took the floor next to give an introduction to the Access to Seeds Index publication, *The Rise of the Seed-producing Cooperative in Western and Central Africa*, explaining how experts from the region emphasized that to truly understand the seed industry in Western and Central Africa, the Access to Seeds Index must also look at seed-producing cooperatives when studying the local seed industry. The Access to Seeds publication found that cooperatives are in fact reaching far more farmers in

Western and Central Africa than global or regional seed companies. Mr. Diallo highlighted the key findings of the study, namely that cooperatives are considered part of the formal sector in this region, that they often bring forward new varieties by partnering with research institutes, that they distribute seed on a national scale, and that they work on a variety of crops – often not found in the portfolio of seed companies.



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### YACOUBA TANDA

Seed Production Technician, Union Madda Ben de Falwel, Niger

*“In our partnership with ICRISAT, we took part in participatory evaluation, we made the choice of varieties, we had tasting tests, and we made the final choice of millet varieties.”*

Yacouba Tanda followed to share his perspective as seed production technician for the seed-producing cooperative, Union Madda Ben de Falwel of Niger, which works in collaboration with ICRISAT in order to develop new varieties, particularly of millet. Union Madda Ben de Falwel was one of the cooperatives short-listed in the Access to Seeds Index publication. Though Union Madda Ben de Falwel has had many successes working with

ICRISAT (marked increase in area harvested, number of seed production technicians, and overall seed production), Mr. Tanda cited that the cooperative still faces difficulties, for example with lack of financial means to support seed producers, lack of access to inputs, inaccessibility to institutional markets and problems with certifying seeds, to name a few. The Union does, however, have plans to address these problems, such as by multiplying points of sale and supporting producers throughout the whole process of certification.



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### NANCY WAKAWA MOHAMMED

Managing Director of Jirkur Seed, Nigeria

*“Our mission is to improve farmers income and reduce poverty through the provision of high quality certified seed, accessed by farmers in Borno State and beyond.”*

Although not present in Rome, Nancy Wakawa was able to contribute to the panel via video to relay her experience with the seed-producing cooperative, Jirkur Seed. Jirkur Seed was also one of the cooperatives highlighted in the Access to Seeds Index publication. Ms. Wakawa explained the evolution of Jirkur Seed from an IITA project to a full-fledged

seed-producing cooperative. Jirkur Seed takes part in a considerable list of activities, ranging from sourcing good quality foundation and breeder seed, contracting out-growers and training them on the use of improved technologies, providing inputs beyond seed, such as chemicals and fertilizers, facilitating field inspections, and cleaning, packaging, and selling the out-growers' seed through a network of agro-dealers. These successes have, in part, been thanks to contributions from and collaborations with institutes such as AGRA, IITA and the National Agricultural Seed Council, however Jirkur Seed still faces its share of challenges, many of which are financial, “we need money to do everything...we depend on hiring...we hire warehouses, bikers to distribute seed...the extension agents that work for us, we hire almost everything. So funding is our great problem.”



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### Ernest Asiedu

Former Chief of Party, WASP and consultant for CORAF, Senegal

*“What we want to see is quality seed. This is what we want farmers to get, so that their productivity increases.”*

Ernest Asiedu contributed to the panel his experience from the perspective of CORAF (and WASP) and working with various seed actors from the region. He shared some early challenges in the seed sector and the interventions and outcomes CORAF has been a part of. Early challenges of course centered around low farmer access to quality seeds but also frictions between the company and cooperative perspectives, which did not always see eye to eye. Mr. Asiedu shared details of a number of CORAF projects, such as PAPROSEM-ROPPA, which



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increased seed supply in maize, groundnuts, and soybean by 10 percent. He also highlighted Rice Seed Up Scale, which trained seed producers, including youth farmers, reiterating that, “every step that we have taken, we have never left the cooperatives behind.” Since 2011, rice, maize, sorghum, millet, cowpea, and groundnut have all seen increases in certified seed supplied, thanks in part to the implementation by CORAF of such projects—certified seed supplied in 2011 amounted to less than 50,000 tons, by 2016 this number is over 250,000 tons. One challenge still to overcome is to bring more attention to sorghum, millet, cowpea, and groundnut. Maize and rice have seen exceptionally larger increases due to their preference by seed companies.



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### Ann Tutwiler Director General of Bioversity International

*“We all know that the formal sector is not reaching nearly enough farmers in Africa and many parts of the developing world.”*

Ann Tutwiler, who is also a representative of the Access to Seeds Foundation’s Supervisory Board, broadened the scope of the conversation to ask the panel and audience to consider what makes a resilient seed system. Emphasizing that the community-based projects, seed banks and enterprises, such as some of those mentioned previously during the panel discussion, are a meaningful component of the world’s seed systems, and

that cooperatives, in particular, often go a step farther in (1) being more responsive to farmers’ needs than is standard in the formal, supply-driven sector (2) developing R&D systems that are based on cooperation and learning and (3) bringing more women into the system. She suggested, for example, that a focus on multiple crops (including neglected and under-utilized crops) would be important in considering the resilience of a food system. Notably, this is a focus that seed-producing cooperatives had previously been mentioned as including in their portfolios.



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### Kees Blokland Managing Director at AgriTerra

*“The [Access to Seeds] Index is very important because seeds are so important for farmers...this [cooperative] study brings to the floor this enormous effort that farmers are already making in Africa.”*

Kees Blokland of AgriTerra underlined the important role that seed cooperatives play, both in Africa and worldwide in the communities which they represent, however he stressed the important role that governments and the international community still have to play, pointing out that the role of cooperatives in West Africa have “been strengthened by the fact that they’ve been acknowledged in the law of many West African countries.” He provided additional input on the role the private sector should be playing, emphasizing that the private sector “cannot build islands of progress in these countries...it has to link up with these kinds of domestic initiatives, and cooperatives are the best option for that.”



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### Hans Dreyer

Director, Plant Production and Protection Division, FAO

*“The private sector is key in developing and promoting quality seeds...there needs to be a strong collaboration between seed producers and those that produce commodities.”*

Hans Dreyer emphasized the FAO's focus on supporting its member nations in transitioning to more sustainable crop production systems, in particular, through the 'save and grow' approach - using less inputs while producing more - but also through advising on improved national seed legislation systems and through direct support through seed delivery systems. He

underlined that the support FAO provides its member nations ultimately boils down to improving access to quality seeds and as such the FAO very much welcomes these efforts mentioned from West and Central Africa during the panel discussion. Mr. Dreyer emphasized the key role cooperatives, which make up the private sector, play in promoting and achieving access to such quality seeds.

## Closing Remarks

Hans Hoogeveen closed the panel, noting that the day's discussion around seed-producing cooperatives is an exciting, genuine, story about farmers taking the lead, “but they have to have access to quality seeds – that's clear.” He emphasized the valuable lessons that can be learned from these kinds of discussions, such as that of the rise of the seed-producing cooperatives, and the more central role these discussions should be playing at a policy-level. He concluded the day by thanking the entire panel, in particular the cooperative representatives for not only their presentations but moreover the work they're doing on the ground, Ann Tutwiler for what she's doing for resilient biodiversity, agrobiodiversity and access to seeds, and Kees Blokland for making the link to the private sector.