



Equator Seeds

Corporate data
Headquarters: Gulu, Uganda
Ownership type: Private
Group revenue (2017): N/A
www.equatorseeds.com

Access to Seeds Index

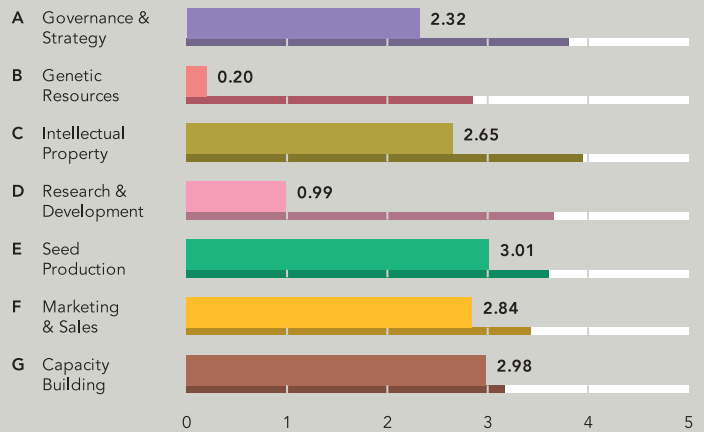
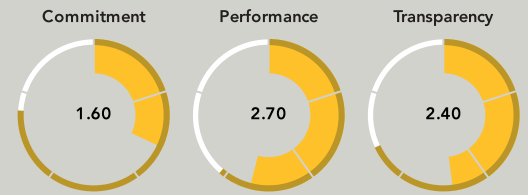
Equator Seeds Ltd (Equator Seeds) was established in 2011 and sells a broad portfolio of oil, field crop and vegetable seeds and seedlings as well as providing other related inputs and services. The company's operations are focused on Uganda, its home market, and neighboring South Sudan. Smallholder farmers are the company's main clientele. Maize, dry beans and sorghum are its main crops.

8
rank out of 22
score 2.18

Eastern and Southern Africa

Equator Seeds ranks eighth in the Eastern and Southern Africa Index, the highest placed newcomer, albeit displaying a mixed performance across measurement areas. The company scores highest in Seed Production, engaging heavily with Ugandan farmer cooperatives, contracting 3,000

smallholders as annual outgrowers and maintaining high quality standards for uniformity and genetic purity. Equator Seeds also has notable Capacity Building programs, including concerted efforts to include women and young farmers as key target groups, and scores well in Marketing & Sales for its commitment to providing promotional and packaging material in a range of local languages and offering its full portfolio of field crops and vegetables in both Uganda and South Sudan. A lack of disclosure on and formal commitments to conservation of crop genetic diversity is reflected in the company's low score in Genetic Resources, while a lack of a breeding program and collaborative research results in a below-average performance in Research & Development.



Leading practices

Equator Seeds works with 51 cooperatives in the region, with a total membership of 32,740 farmers, and uses 1,500-3,000 growers seasonally in seed production. The company produces seed in accordance with Uganda's national standards of certified seed production, with all production fields inspected, and the company's quality department ensures seed being processed meets the recommended quality standards.

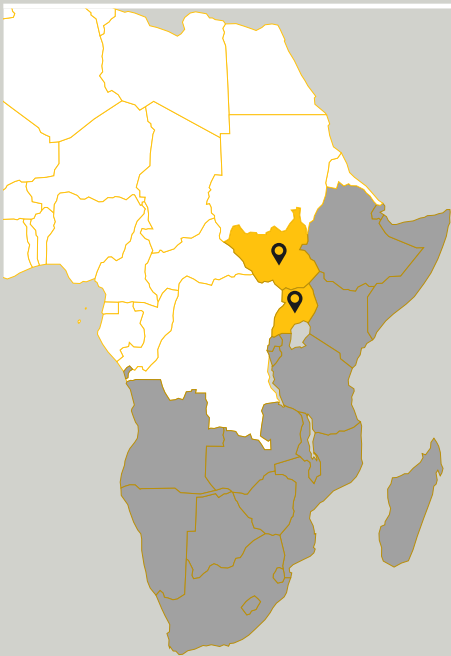
With support from USAID's Feed the Future Youth Leadership for Agriculture Activity (YLA), Equator Seeds expanded its seed production by enlarging its outgrower program in Uganda. YLA helped the company hire six university graduates as full-time agronomists, who in turn trained 65 young community-based facilitators. These facilitators worked with 6,500 young farmers on land preparation, crop management and harvesting techniques, and the company has targeted a further 8,500 young farmers to be reached in future cycles.

Areas for improvement

The company lacks commitments and activities related to the conservation and use of genetic diversity of crops in the company's portfolio and of local agrobiodiversity in the region. It is encouraged to develop a policy in this area, particularly since it has recently established its own research and development department.

Following the establishment of its own research and development department, the company is encouraged to formulate a commitment related to the development of varieties of global and local crops suitable for smallholder farmers in the region.

The company reports having a Human Resource Manual that guides employment procedures and follows the labor laws of its home country, Uganda. However, it is unclear whether these policies are applicable to third parties involved in its seed production, such as cooperatives and contracted seed growers. The company is encouraged to articulate a policy addressing social and labor standards throughout its supply chain, and monitor compliance with these standards.



Operations in scope

- Countries in scope
- Company presence
- 📍 Production locations
- 🔬 Breeding station/R&D

Notable findings

- The company assigns responsibility at the CEO/board level for the implementation of policies and targets related to access to seeds for smallholder farmers and allocates both financial and non-financial resources to meet these targets. Furthermore, the company is a member of the national seed trade association of Uganda and through this carries out lobbying activities to influence policy at the national level.
- The company recognizes that the majority of smallholder farmers in Uganda and South Sudan prefer the practice of farm-saved seed. Through the distribution of improved varieties, including offering lower priced varieties from donor and government institutions, Equator Seeds aims to help increase the uptake of quality seed.
- The company has tailored pricing strategies in place that reflect the purchasing power of smallholder farmers, and it offers bulk purchases to farmer groups to increase access to seed.
- The company depends on the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) for breeder's seed for several crops, and provides the NARO breeding programs with local knowledge and feedback, particularly from women smallholder farmers.
- Equator Seeds is one of five companies active in Eastern and Southern Africa to offer open-pollinated varieties for all crops in its portfolio.
- The company uses a network of 250 sales agents to reach smallholder farmers in the remotest areas of Uganda.
- The company aims to inform the farming community of the source of the seed being purchased and includes security marks on packaging materials to prevent the distribution of counterfeit and/or expired seed. Further, the company works in collaboration with the Ugandan police and Ministry of Agriculture to develop additional measures against counterfeit seed.
- The company considers the specific needs of rural communities by translating promotional leaflets and brochures into a variety of local languages as well as carrying out a wide array of marketing activities. These include radio adverts promoting new varieties and dealer locations, and field days and demonstration gardens throughout the planting season. Furthermore, the company offers loans and bulk discounts to farmer groups and covers any delivery costs that arise.
- The company collaborates with the Grain Council of Uganda in an effort to provide smallholder farmers with more effective links to output markets.
- In 2017, the company piloted technology with the non-profit TechnoServe on 270 Ugandan smallholder outgrower farms. Using drones and sensors to measure farm area, estimate yields and assess crop health, the project was initiated to serve as an early warning system to tackle pests and diseases. The project was discontinued due to high costs.

Portfolio information

Index crops in portfolio	Sales		Seed type			Source		
	SSD	UGA	Hybrid	OPV	GM	Own breeding program	Public research institute	Licensed from other company
Field crops								
Beans, dry	●	●		●			●	
Cowpea	●	●		●			●	
Groundnut	●	●		●			●	
Maize	●	●	●	●			●	
Millets	●	●		●			●	
Pigeon pea	●	●		●				●
Rice, paddy	●	●		●				●
Sesame	●	●		●				●
Sorghum	●	●		●				●
Soybean	●	●		●				●
Sunflower	●	●	●	●				●
Vegetables								
Cabbage	●	●	●	●				●
Carrot	●	●	●	●				●
Cucumber	●	●		●				●
Eggplant	●	●	●	●				●
Okra	●	●		●				●
Onion	●	●		●				●
Pepper (hot)	●	●		●				●
Pepper (sweet)	●	●		●				●
Pumpkin	●	●		●				●
Tomato	●	●	●	●				●
Watermelon	●	●	●	●				●

Angola (AGO), Botswana (BWA), Burundi (BDI), Eswatini (SWZ), Ethiopia (ETH), Kenya (KEN), Lesotho (LSO), Madagascar (MDG), Malawi (MWI), Mozambique (MOZ), Namibia (NAM), Rwanda (RWA), Somalia (SOM), South Africa (ZAF), South Sudan (SSD), Tanzania (TZA), Uganda (UGA), Zambia (ZMB), Zimbabwe (ZWE)