

PRESS RELEASE

Homegrown African seed companies outperform multinational peers in serving smallholder farmers

- *East African Seed and Seed Co top Access to Seeds Index for Eastern and Southern Africa*
- *Seed industry efforts to reach smallholders play key part in addressing food security issues*
- *Maize dominates breeding, raising concerns over securing crop diversity and healthy diets*

Nairobi, Kenya, March 4, 2019 – Two homegrown African seed companies top the 2019 Access to Seeds Index for Eastern and Southern Africa, for playing a key role in raising smallholder farmer productivity, according to new research by the Amsterdam-based Access to Seeds Foundation.

Kenyan company East African Seed and Seed Co., placed first and second respectively, have both grown their activities in the region since the first index was published in 2016. East African Seed stands out for its broad portfolio including local crops and large network of extension staff across multiple countries. Seed Co, originally from Zimbabwe but now headquartered in South Africa, is the African seed company with the most extensive breeding, production and sales network, and the widest geographic reach in agronomic training.

The *Access to Seeds Index 2019 – Eastern and Southern Africa* evaluates the actions of 22 leading seed companies in Eastern and Southern Africa. After East African Seed and Seed Co, the top 5 is completed by Thailand’s East-West Seed, US-based Corteva Agriscience (DowDuPont) and Swiss-based Syngenta. Ugandan companies Victoria Seeds, NASECO, Equator Seeds and FICA Seeds also make it in the Top 10 – showcasing smallholder farmer-focused operations in their home country and beyond.

“Two African seed companies at the top of the ranking is no surprise, given their deeper understanding of the region and the challenges smallholder farmers face. But Thailand’s East-West Seed in third place is eye-catching too, because it suggests they are transferring their knowhow and experience with smallholders in Asia to Africa,” said Sanne Helderma, Senior Research Lead at the Access to Seeds Index. “It shows also that these relatively small seed companies are ahead of larger multinational seed companies in integrating smallholder farmers into their business models.”

The report highlights a number of other key findings from across the region. The 2019 Index shows that companies are present throughout the region, ranging from 13 in Zambia to five and three in Lesotho and Somalia respectively, and are investing significantly in seed value chain activities. Eight companies report having breeding activities in South Africa, with the same number producing seed in both Kenya and Tanzania. The index also demonstrates that training of smallholders is lagging far behind company sales activities, with none of the companies in Angola (eight), Namibia (seven), Madagascar (seven) and South Sudan (six) accompanying their sales with extension services.

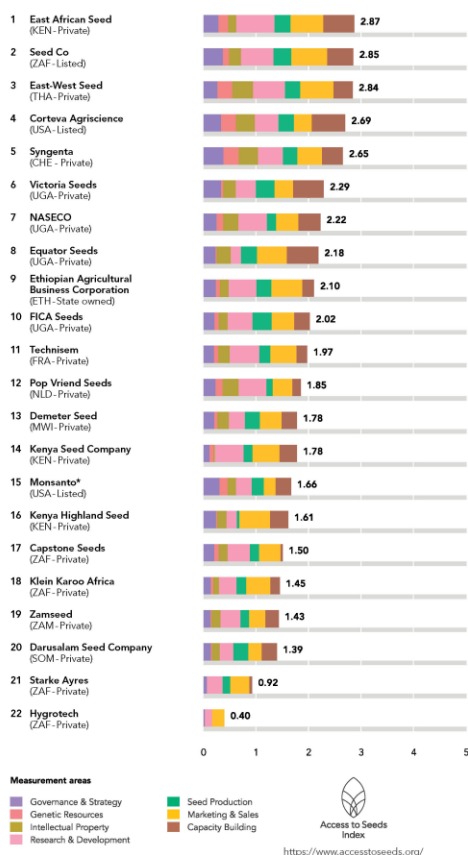
Maize dominates breeding programs in the region as twice as many companies have active breeding programs for maize as for other important crops, such as dry beans, soybean and tomato. This raises concerns about the ability of smallholder farmers to access a broad range of modern varieties of other important food crops, and in turn contribute to achieving sustainable food systems and healthy and diverse diets. Furthermore, while three quarters of the companies have active breeding programs, for the majority of crops even the youngest variety on offer is over three years old. This raises the question as to whether the industry’s response to rapidly changing climatic conditions is sufficient.

The number of undernourished people in the world reached an estimated 821 million in 2017. According to FAO, the number of undernourished people has been on the rise in Southern Africa in recent years, and despite reaching its lowest levels in 2010 is also increasing once more in Eastern Africa. Climate variability and extremes have been identified as a major reason for the increase. The seed industry has a vital role to play in helping farmers to adapt to climatic challenges while simultaneously raising production levels.

“The index reveals that African seed companies are successfully serving smallholder farmers” said Sanne Helderma of the Access to Seeds Index. “The industry’s reach is however far too low, as COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) reports that just 23% of the smallholders in its member countries have access to improved varieties of major field crops, resulting in low productivity and prompting food security challenges in the region.”

The Access to Seeds Index 2019 is one of the first Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) benchmarks published by the World Benchmarking Alliance. The alliance was launched in September 2018 during the UN General Assembly in New York. The Access to Seeds Index was established with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Government of the Netherlands. The Access to Seeds Index for Eastern and Southern Africa focuses on 22 leading seed companies in this region. This was preceded by a ranking of the industry in South and Southeast Asia and a ranking of Global Seed Companies. An evaluation of the industry in Western and Central Africa is upcoming.

Access to Seeds Index 2019 Eastern and Southern Africa



Note for editors

- Link to the online report: www.accesstoseeds.org/index/eastern-southern-africa
- The ranking image, data points and the photos used in the report are online available in the [media toolkit](#)
- For more information or interview requests, please contact Anke van Bruggen, Communications Manager: avanbruggen@accesstoseeds.org