

PRESS RELEASE

Vast majority of West African smallholder farmers not reached by seed industry, despite growing efforts by local companies

- *Nigeria's Value Seeds tops Access to Seeds Index for Western and Central Africa*
- *Growing number of local companies is positive, but too few currently do plant breeding*
- *Open-pollinated varieties dominate field crops, except for maize where hybrid varieties lead*

Dakar, Senegal, April 10, 2019 - There is a clear lack of private sector led research and development to develop new crop varieties in Western and Central Africa, a new study finds. In only a third of the countries, companies have set up plant breeding activities to develop higher yielding varieties that can help farmers to tackle climate change challenges and support food and nutrition security in the region.

The [Access to Seeds Index 2019 – Western and Central Africa](#) that was presented today in Dakar has evaluated the activities of 23 leading seed companies in the region to improve access to quality seeds for smallholder farmers. Although there are clear signs that emerging local African companies are stepping up efforts along their international peers, most smallholder farmers in the region still struggle to get their hands on quality seed and new crop varieties as sales and training activities are concentrated in a handful of countries.

Senegal is one of the leading countries for seed business in the region. Out of the 23 assessed companies, 14 have a presence in Senegal. Two of them, Tropicasem and SEDAB, are headquartered there. In total, three companies have invested in breeding and four in seed production activities in Senegal. It also stands out with a strong network of seed-producing cooperatives.

The study by the Amsterdam-based *Access to Seeds Foundation* presents a ranking comparing seed company activities in the region. Nigeria-based Value Seeds tops the index. It stands out for its maize and rice 'value kits', all-in-one input packages tailored for smallholders. Also, it provides capacity building activities that specifically target women and next-generation farmers. However, like most of the other index companies that originate in the region, it operates exclusively in its home country

Ranked second is Technisem from France, which has the widest presence in the region, covering 17 countries and offering training in 13 of them. The company sets an example by establishing Novalliance, which taps into local potential of homegrown African seed companies. Among the top-ten index companies that belong to this group are Tropicasem from Senegal, Semagri from Cameroon, and Nankosem from Burkina Faso. Their combined breeding efforts result in the most up-to-date portfolio in the region, with a high number of newly released varieties.

In fact, Senegalese Tropicasem has one of the oldest breeding programs in the region, with a focus on nutritious leafy vegetables, and is innovating with the support for micro-gardens in urbanized areas. It also strives to reduce onion imports from Europe by developing competitive onion varieties.

“What both Value Seeds and Technisem represent is the importance of partnerships to improve access to seeds in the region,” said Ido Verhagen, Executive Director at Access to Seeds Index. “In the case of Value Seeds, its partnership with the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) paid off, as its grant-based support enabled the company to improve its products and intensify its outreach to smallholder farmers.”

For the most part, open-pollinated varieties still dominate across the region, in contrast with Eastern Africa and South Asia. The exception is maize, for which hybrid varieties are more commonly available. In addition, research shows that for almost half (48%) of the crops, the most recent variety is older than five years, with only a fifth (21%) having a variety less than three years. The lack of newly developed varieties seriously impacts the resilience to a changing climate and emerging disease and pests, which reduces yields.

Compared to a dozen of companies active in Nigeria and Senegal, only one company is active in each of Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. “Our study shows the potential of homegrown seed companies. However, most operate only in their home markets, which causes geographic imbalances in seed sector development,” said Mr. Verhagen. “This also means that capacity building activities offered by companies only reach farmers in a handful of countries. This limits the adoption of new technologies by farmers in overlooked countries”, he added.

“The relevance of access to seeds and plant breeding should not be underestimated,” said Verhagen. “The number of undernourished people in the world reached an estimated 821 million in 2017 – it’s rising. Climate change and weather 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.”

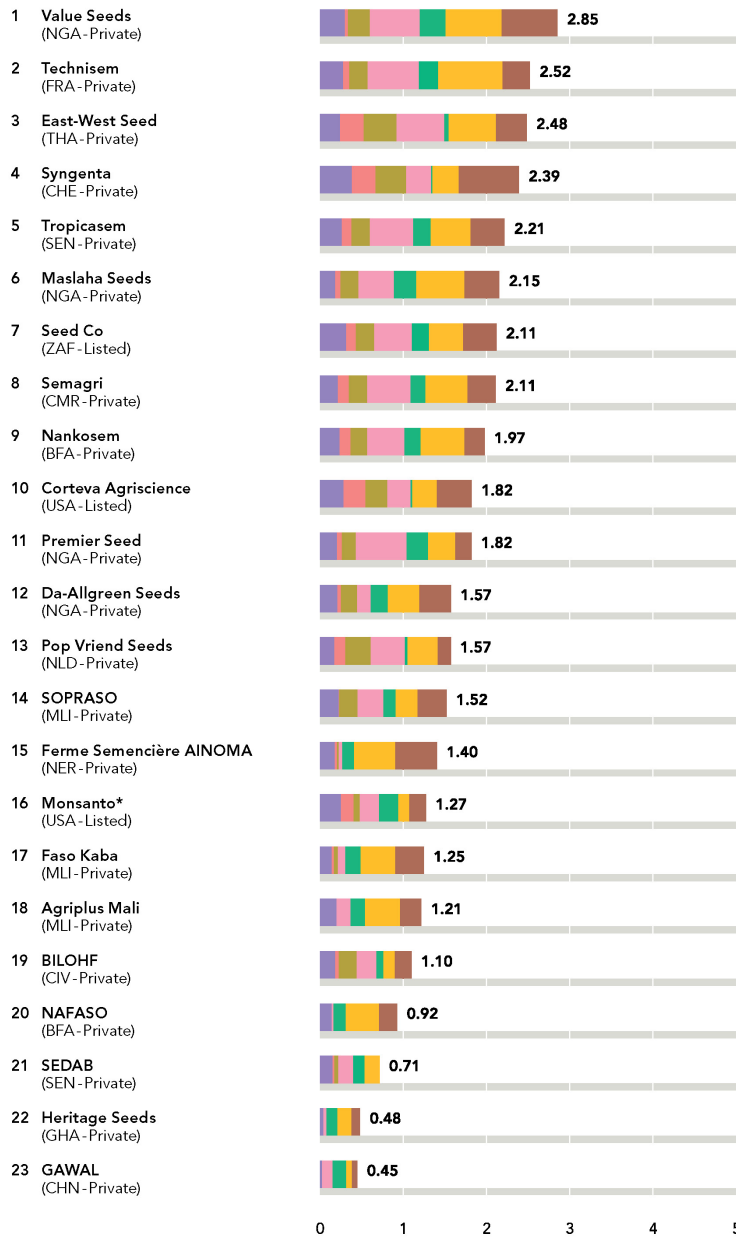
According to FAO (www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/), the number of undernourished people has been on the rise in Western Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole in recent years. Western Africa has seen undernourishment rise to 15.1% of the population in 2017 from 10.4% in 2010.

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 Western and Central Africa focuses on 23 leading seed companies in this region. This was preceded by rankings of the industry in both Eastern and Southern Africa and South and Southeast Asia, along with a ranking of Global Seed Companies.



Access to Seeds Index 2019

Western and Central Africa



Measurement areas



Access to Seeds Index

<https://www.accesstoseeds.org/>

Note for editors

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