

THE SEED GIST

Cultivating Knowledge for Farmer Managed Seed Systems

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EDITORS BRIEF

Introducing The SEED GIST

This is the first edition of the SEED GIST, a quarterly publication aimed at promoting knowledge and empowerment at community, national, regional and international levels in the agriculture sector. The SEED GIST aims at bringing you the latest updates, insights, and stories on seed-related issues, all with a spotlight on promoting Farmer Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) at global scale.

The SEED GIST endeavors to celebrate and champion the vital role that small-scale farmers play in nurturing and preserving the diversity of our seed heritage. From traditional practices passed down through generations to innovative approaches that adapt to modern challenges, we'll delve into the rich tapestry of experiences and knowledge that form the agricultural heritage.

We also seek to foster dialogue, share best practices, and advocate for policies that support sustainable and equitable seed systems. Our mission is not just to inform but also to inspire action, empowering small-scale farmers and stakeholders alike to cultivate a future where seeds are not just a commodity but a cornerstone of food sovereignty and rural prosperity.

In this issue, we focus on the Ugandan context, specifically the Plant Variety Protection (PVP) Act, the Farmer managed Seed System and Farmer Variety Registration (FVR), to highlight the imbalances in the seed sector, as well as interventions and recommendations that significantly contribute to a just seed system that upholds the rights of small-scale farmers.

SEED LAWS AND POLICIES

Uganda's Plant Variety Protection Act: Balancing Breeders' Rights and Farmers' Needs



In the realm of agricultural sustainability and international trade, the Trips Convention of 1991 stands as a pivotal agreement, aiming to mitigate distortions and impediments to global commerce while ensuring effective protection of intellectual property rights. Central to this convention is the delicate balance between promoting innovation and safeguarding against potential trade barriers. Uganda, a signatory to the Trips Convention, has implemented its principles through the Plant Variety Protection (PVP) Act of 2014.

The PVP Act, drawing from international frameworks like the Trips Convention and the UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants), sets out to promote the development of new plant varieties and protect breeders' rights. However, as with any legislation, there are nuances and contestations that arise, particularly concerning the recognition of farmers and farmer varieties within the Act.

One of the primary contentions surrounding the PVP Act is its perceived bias towards formal seed breeders, potentially marginalising small-scale farmers. While the Act grants breeder rights and protection for new varieties, it falls short in recognizing and safeguarding farmer varieties. Moreover, restrictions on farmers' use of breeder varieties for commercial purposes and limitations on replanting and commercialization without breeder permission further exacerbate these concerns.

Sections 15 and 18 of the PVPA exemplify this imbalance. While Section 15 emphasises the rights of plant breeders, it restricts farmers to the non-commercial use of protected varieties. Meanwhile, Section 18 mirrors UPOV's stance on the exhaustion of breeder's rights, potentially hindering farmers' ability to reuse or market seeds derived from protected varieties.

To address these gaps and ensure more inclusive and farmer-friendly legislation several recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Balancing Interests:** The government should strive to strike a balance between plant breeders' rights and farmers' needs. This entails engaging both parties to identify mutual benefits and safeguard traditional farming practices.
- 2. Promoting Farmer Participation:** Government initiatives should actively promote farmer participation in conserving and enhancing plant genetic resources. Recognising the vital role of local indigenous farming communities is essential to benefiting from advancements in plant breeding.

- 3. Establishing policies and systems to protect traditional food and agriculture practices from new threats posed by plant variety protection measures is crucial.** The coexistence of traditional and modern practices is key to ensuring sustainability in agriculture.
- 4. Commitment to International Frameworks:** We should uphold Uganda's commitment to international treaties, such as the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Domestic legislation like the PVPA should not overshadow the contributions of local and indigenous communities, as highlighted in Article 9 of the treaty.

In conclusion, while the PVP Act serves to promote innovation and protect intellectual property rights, it must evolve to better accommodate the needs of small-scale farmers and ensure agricultural sustainability. By embracing

inclusivity and balancing the interests of all stakeholders, Uganda can foster a more equitable agricultural landscape that benefits both breeders and farmers alike.

THE FARMER-MANAGED SEED SYSTEMS

Empowering Farmer-Managed Seed Systems: Strengthening Uganda's Agricultural Backbone



Seed systems, tracing their roots to the very origins of agriculture, serve as the lifeline of Uganda's agrarian landscape, sustaining approximately 80% of the country's population. As of fiscal year 2022/23, agriculture contributed a substantial 24% to Uganda's GDP and accounted for 35% of its export earnings. These figures underscore the pivotal role agriculture plays in Uganda's economy, with estimates indicating that around 68% of the nation's workforce finds employment within this sector.

Uganda's diverse agroecologies, expansive arable land, and the presence of two primary cropping seasons buoy its agricultural prowess. Such favourable conditions facilitate a rich tapestry of agricultural production, offering a multitude of opportunities to bolster seed production and enhance cross-border trade, thereby improving access to regional markets.

Within Uganda's seed sector, both formal and informal seed systems coexist, each grappling with its own unique set of challenges. The formal seed system, characterised by its focus on breeding new varieties and adherence to stringent quality standards, faces hurdles such as high seed prices, limited crop varieties, lax enforcement of anti-counterfeiting laws, and inadequate supply chains. These challenges collectively impede the widespread adoption of formal seed sources.

In contrast, the informal seed sector, predominantly managed by farmers themselves, emerges as a vital counterbalance, offering diverse seed varieties resilient to the adverse effects of climate change. With lower prices and a decentralised approach to seed management, the informal sector serves as a beacon of hope for smallholder farmers striving to secure their livelihoods

amidst evolving environmental challenges.

However, the informal sector is not without its shortcomings. Issues such as inconsistent seed quality due to poor supply chain management pose significant hurdles to its efficacy. Nevertheless, the informal seed system remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing food and nutrition security concerns, prioritising the needs of local communities over commercial interests.

In this intricate tapestry of seed systems, diversity reigns supreme. While the formal seed system caters primarily to commercial production, the informal sector champions the cause of food and nutrition security, ensuring a steady supply of high-quality seed varieties tailored to the needs of diverse farming communities.

To harness the full potential of Uganda's seed sector and fortify its agricultural backbone, empowering farmer-managed seed systems is paramount. By investing in capacity-building initiatives, improving seed quality assurance mechanisms, and encouraging collaboration between formal and informal seed actors, Uganda can unlock a wealth of opportunities for sustainable agricultural development.

As the nation marches towards a future of prosperity and resilience, let us recognise the indispensable role of farmer-managed seed systems in shaping Uganda's agricultural destiny. Together, let us sow the seeds of progress and cultivate a thriving agricultural landscape that nourishes both the land and its people.

FARMER VARIETIES REGISTRATION

Championing Farmer Varieties: Nurturing Seeds of Resilience and Heritage



Generations of small-scale farmers cultivate a treasure trove of genetic diversity in Uganda's agricultural landscapes, amidst undulating fields and vibrant communities. These guardians of the land, like Okello Alfred from Abilipin Village in Katine Subcounty, Soroti District, understand the intrinsic value of farmer varieties in safeguarding seed and food security. For them, access to and control over these varieties is more than just sustenance; it's a pathway to independence and resilience.

Farmer varieties, deeply rooted in the cultural tapestry of farming communities, embody the wisdom and ingenuity of generations past. They are more than just seeds; they are living testaments to the delicate balance between humans and nature, meticulously nurtured and passed down through the ages. Mzee Etoku Wilbert, from MAFA FFS in Ajonai village, Amuria district, eloquently expresses the widely held belief that farmer varieties serve as the guardians of biodiversity, resilience, and cultural heritage.

In a world grappling with the uncertainties of climate change, these diverse genetic resources emerge as beacons of hope. With traits honed over centuries of adaptation, farmer varieties possess the resilience needed to thrive in the face of adversity, be it drought, heat, or flooding. Preserving and promoting these varieties isn't just a matter of agricultural necessity; it's an imperative for creating climate-resilient

agricultural systems that can weather the storms of a changing climate.

However, the journey towards recognition and protection of farmer varieties is fraught with obstacles. Despite their ecological, cultural, and economic significance, these invaluable genetic resources often languish in obscurity, overlooked by policymakers and formal seed systems. Enyou Francis from Angorom FFS, Amuria district, shares the sentiment of many small-scale farmers: the lack of legal recognition hinders the commercialization of improved farmer varieties.

Yet, amidst these challenges, rays of hope emerge. Initiatives led by organisations like ESAFF Uganda, in partnership with Oxfam Uganda and PELUM Uganda, are empowering small-scale farmers to reclaim their agricultural heritage. Farmers are not just participants in the Farmer Field School methodology; they are leaders, driving research and innovation tailored to their community's needs.

As we navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world, the recognition of farmer varieties must rise to the top of all stakeholders' priority lists. Governments, NGOs, and international communities must all come together in a collaborative effort to develop policies that celebrate and incentivize the preservation of these invaluable genetic resources. Investing in research and development that bridges traditional wisdom with modern agricultural techniques is paramount, ensuring a synergy that unlocks the full potential of farmer varieties.

The fields of Uganda sow the seeds of resilience and heritage amidst the rustling crops and whispered stories of generations past. It is our collective responsibility to nurture and protect them, for they hold the key to a sustainable and resilient agricultural future—one that nourishes both the land and its stewards for generations to come.

Cultivating Diversity: The Case for Farmer Variety Registration in Uganda



Nestled among Uganda's fields and tales of the past are valuable treasures: Farmer Varieties. These humble seeds, nurtured by small-scale farmers, embody resilience, flavour, and nutritional richness, making them coveted gems for both producers and consumers alike. However, despite their invaluable contributions to food and nutrition security, farmer varieties often languish in obscurity, unable to navigate the maze of regulations governing seed markets.

In recent years, the discourse surrounding farmer varieties has gained momentum, both nationally and internationally. Recognising the pivotal role these varieties play in ensuring agricultural resilience amidst a changing climate, stakeholders have begun to champion their cause. The seeds of this movement were

sown in December 2018 during an international workshop held at the Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel in Entebbe, Uganda. Attended by key stakeholders from government agencies, research institutions, and Civil Society organisations, the workshop sought to shed light on the importance of farmer varieties and explore mechanisms for their registration in national catalogues.

The National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO-PGRC) developed a draft framework, known as 'Schedule X,' as a notable outcome of the workshop, with the aim of facilitating the registration of farmer varieties. Subsequent field visits to communities in Amuria and Soroti districts provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by farmers in documenting and registering their varieties. ESAFF Uganda organized a National Seed Sector Stakeholders Workshop where they shared these findings and made recommendations to refine and improve the registration process.

Central to the discussions was the recognition that farmer varieties, with their unique characteristics and evolutionary histories, defy conventional registration systems designed for formal-sector plant breeding. The existing framework fails to capture the essence of farmer varieties, leaving them marginalised and undocumented. Therefore, we urgently

need to design a registration system that specifically caters to the needs and realities of small-scale farmers.

The benefits of registering farmer varieties extend far beyond the confines of individual fields. Improved documentation and recognition could unlock a myriad of opportunities, from enhanced farmer incomes to increased access to diverse and high-quality seed varieties. Moreover, formal recognition of farmer varieties holds the promise of bolstering national food and nutrition security, a pressing concern in a world grappling with the challenges of climate change and food insecurity.

Fortunately, Uganda's political landscape provides fertile ground for progress. We can build robust mechanisms for farmer variety registration upon the existing agricultural policies, ensuring the preservation and celebration of Uganda's rich agricultural heritage.

As Uganda charts its course towards a more resilient and sustainable agricultural future, let us not forget the humble seeds that form the bedrock of our food systems. By embracing farmer variety registration, we can cultivate diversity, strengthen food sovereignty, and honour the wisdom of generations past, ensuring a bountiful harvest for generations to come.



CONTRIBUTE TO THE SEED GIST

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Share Your Seed Stories with the SEED GIST!

Do you have insights or experiences related to farmer-managed seed systems in Uganda? The SEED GIST wants to hear from you! We're inviting contributions from farmers, researchers, and advocates to enrich the SEED GIST. Share your success stories, challenges, innovations, or advocacy efforts. Together, let's amplify the voices of small-scale farmers and promote sustainable seed systems. Submit your contributions or inquire at nkalinaki@esaffuganda.org.

Sow the seeds of change with the SEED GIST!



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ESAFF Uganda solicits and compiles stories for the Seed Gist from a variety of sources worldwide, including NGOs, academia, small-scale farmers, researchers and the media among others. These stories are designed to broaden knowledge and drive sustainable change in the Farmer Managed Seed System (FMSS).