

CONCEPT NOTE

RWANDA NATIONAL SEED CONGRESS 2024

DATE:

July 29 – 30, 2024

VENUE:

Kigali Marriott Hotel

THEME:

**“CONTRIBUTE TO THE MODERNIZATION OF THE RWANDA SEED
TRADE SYSTEM TO UNLOCK LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES”**

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BACKGROUND

Africa's agriculture sector is plagued by low productivity which hinders the ability of the continent to adequately feed its growing population, with a wide gap existing between potential and current yields for major food crops, especially maize, wheat, potatoes, sorghum, and rice.

For seeds to play the desired role in Africa, an essential priority is to have an effective seed sector at the national, regional, and continental levels. However, the seed sector in Africa is plagued with serious inequities which render it ineffective to cater for the overall needs of agriculture. As food and nutrition security is heavily dependent on seed security, the goal of food and nutrition security will remain elusive unless the seed security of farming communities is achieved first.

The management of the seed sector is therefore of paramount importance. The basic requirement in a seed system is that good quality seeds should be made available in locations where they are required, as well, farmers should have access to them and be able to utilize them properly for the required output.

Given the critical role that improved varieties play in increasing agricultural production, a key question is how to facilitate the development of a seed system that is capable of generating, producing and distributing quality seeds of new varieties that meet the needs of all farmers, in a cost-effective way. It is well accepted that seeds are the most important element in crop production; they are the basic unit of plant propagation and as such a crucial component in agriculture.

Quality seeds are therefore known and accepted as being the prime input in agriculture, particularly in their role as exerting a profound effect on agricultural productivity, and ultimately making it possible to realize the goals of food and nutritional security, livelihood empowerment, and poverty alleviation. The critical role of seeds in agriculture renders it critical in the security of the nation and thus it has become clear from events in recent times that any nation that does not adequately position its seed matters relegates its food security fortunes into the hands of external forces.

RATIONALE

In 2015, the Rwanda seed industry players formed the National Seeds Association of Rwanda (NSAR) a professional association representing the seed players as an advocacy Institution that facilitates an optimum environment to bring value to all its stakeholders. It has over the years served as an effective voice to all its members in reference to the development, marketing, and movement of seed associated products throughout the local, regional, and international markets.

National Seed Association of Rwanda (NSAR) recognizes the importance of multi-sectoral engagement and co-ownership, in seed development and access to improved

seeds, and hence commends the public and Private stakeholder engagements, support and efforts that contributed to the successful launch and publication of the Private Sector Strategic Roadmap for Rwanda Seed Industry 2030 that was held at Marriot Hotel on 25th October, 2023.

The 7-year roadmap's intent will lead to the realization of;

1. Creation of the National Seed Certification System

The establishment of a rigorous quality assurance and certification system is vital to guaranteeing seed quality. The roadmap advocates for the creation of a National Seed Certification System to set standards, monitor seed quality, and enforce compliance. It is an example of how the government and the private sector can create a joint system where the government remains the controller and enforcer of the system, and the Private sector takes some of the implementing duties to ensure high quality of seed production. This will instill confidence in farmers and incentivise investment in seed production.

2. Vegetable seed production center in Rwanda

A detailed study was made to determine the feasibility of vegetable seeds in Rwanda, and showed that the climate is excellent for the production of tomato, pepper, eggplant, watermelon, and others. The strategy advocates for establishing a vegetable seed production center in Rwanda, as sufficient infrastructure to produce vegetable seeds is currently a challenge.

3. Combating fake/counterfeit seed

As in all African countries, fake and counterfeit seed is a concern. It is noted that there are several sources of counterfeit seed in the market namely imported fake seed, imported seed produced from stolen genetics, local-produced fake seed and seed produced from parent seed that does not conform to genetic purity standards. Even though the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA) is a strong enforcer of rules, it has become evident that additional resource capacity is needed.

4. Infrastructure development

Addressing the challenges in seed production requires upgrading and expanding seed processing facilities, storage warehouses, and distribution networks. Strategic partnerships between the government and private sector will be fostered to build modern infrastructure and improve access to quality seeds in remote areas.

5. Training and capacity-building

Efforts to strengthen the seed industry will be complemented by comprehensive training and capacity-building programmes for farmers, extension workers and industry stakeholders to enhance productivity and sustainability.

6. Protecting intellectual property rights

To foster a conducive environment for the seed industry's growth, the roadmap emphasises the need for policy and regulatory reforms. Streamlining seed registration processes, protecting intellectual property rights, and facilitating private sector participation will be prioritised to attract investment and spur innovation.

7. Public-private partnerships

Promoting public-private partnerships will be a cornerstone of the roadmap. Collaboration between the government, private seed companies, research institutions, and non-governmental organizations will facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources to drive industry advancements.

8. Climate change resistant varieties

The roadmap will ensure sufficient testing of new varieties is done to ready farmers for changes brought by climate change. Infrastructure investment is required to lessen climate change risk. Rwanda has no breeding facilities for private seed companies and because the local market is small, any company that uses Rwanda as a breeding station must develop products for the regional market. This in itself is an interesting opportunity to watch and pursue.

9. New investments needed

To drive innovation and adaptation of seeds to local agro-climatic conditions, the roadmap proposes increased investment in agricultural research. Collaborations between public research institutions, private companies, and international partners will be encouraged to develop new seed varieties with improved traits such as drought tolerance, disease resistance, and increased yields. New technology, new varieties, and advanced agricultural production techniques are critical for the sector's future development.

10. ISTA accreditation

The majority of neighbouring countries require an International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) certificate to import seeds. Rwanda is currently unable to meet this requirement and is thus excluded from entering those markets. ISTA quality results will assure the government, financial institutions, sector exporters, and the industry that Rwandan farmers are receiving high-germinating seed. ISTA certification will open doors for the industry to further development and trade opportunities, thus the private sector must be an active contributor and supporter to the government to obtain ISTA accreditation.

OBJECTIVE OF CONGRESS

NSAR's objective therefore in hosting this Congress is to support the development and establishment of a well-coordinated, comprehensive and sustainable private sector-

driven seed industry through systematic and strategic approaches. This would then mean continuously releasing and distributing new improved varieties of seeds for use by farmers, through supporting successful seed production, certification, marketing and seed security systems which will form the basis for food security and support the overall development of the agricultural sector as referenced in the roadmap.

It is in this view, that NSAR intends to host the **2nd Rwanda National Seed Congress** to share on the status report of its relevant strategic goals, Industry compliance/Self-regulation, enhancement of the regulatory environment (ISTA Accreditation, UPOV and OECD Seed Schemes), enhance mutual accountability and identify synergies, linkages and complementarities on the achievement of the overarching goals in reference to **Rwanda's strategic roadmap for seed industry 2030"**.

This event will lay a foundation towards continued progress and engagements in driving the 7year agenda for attaining food and nutrition security, reduce poverty, boost intra-African trade, and enhance resilience of production systems and future investments by starting with the right seed!

The event will overallly give reference to a continued sense of urgency for harmonizing Rwanda's seed policy instruments to enhance effective and efficient seed systems. It is encouraging to note that cross-border seed trade regimes have improved significantly over the years and hence a harmonized seed sector policy legislation and regulatory framework will be timely in addressing our current challenges and enhancing future actions to heighten the realization of **private Sector to commercialize and regulate seeds to boost Seed Trade**, not only in Africa but also export to the world. Large export opportunities are looming in the seed trade if regulated well.

OUTCOMES;

The envisaged outcomes from the congress will entail Rwanda's seed industry progress on;

- (i) A detailed implementation plan to implement the proposed updated regulations and infrastructure with clear timelines agreed by representatives of the major role players.
- (ii) A roadmap to enhance policy and regulatory framework for an efficient seed system with increased self-regulation, as capacity is created in private sector to implement.
- (iii) Strengthened seed production systems on various crops to increase genetic and seed quality, implement seed production system to enable eligibility to export seed.
- (iv) Development of quality assurance systems with improved stakeholder contributions, to not only ensure high quality seed to farmers, but also combat fake seed in the market.

- (v) Increase availability of high-quality seed presenting a better value proposition to farmers as systems are implemented.
- (vi) Stimulate new variety development by private and government institutions to address the risk of climate change.
- (vii) Crosscutting issues on environment, women and youth.
- (viii) Enhanced investors opportunities for a transformative seed industry and export opportunities not only in the region, but to the world.

VENUE, MEETING DATES, AND CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

The Conference is scheduled to take place at **Kigali Marriott Hotel** for two days from **29th – 30th July 2024**.

The 2nd National Seed Congress will bring together more than 500 people including more than 300 seed professionals, seed companies, plant breeders, researchers, policymakers, civil society, international organisations, financial institutions, development partners, government officials, youth, and students, from at least 20 countries both regionally and internationally.

It will involve plenary sessions, panel discussions, and breakout sessions. It will also include presentations and case studies from experts and practitioners in the seed sector. The sessions will be interactive, allowing for discussions, debates, and sharing of experiences and best practices.

The event will also include an exhibition showcasing innovative technologies and practices in the seed sector. This session is an exclusive chance for participating institutions to demonstrate and showcase their new innovative technologies for seed quality improvement starting from breeding, seed-producing, seed processing, and seed packaging. The forum will therefore help to prioritize actions required to strengthen the seed system in Rwanda and by extension Africa and to facilitate partnerships and collaborations among stakeholders in the seed sector.

For Registration, Sponsorship & partnership packages and other information about the congress, please visit the NSAR website: **www.nsar.rw**