



The way forward

Implementing the agreement

Countries in West Africa will now have to apply the harmonized regulatory framework at the national level, particularly for seed quality control, certification and variety release.

The priority activities that need to be undertaken are **to create a national seed committee, to put national seed regulations in compliance with the regional agreement and to strengthen the seed certification and variety release system.**

Conditions for continued success

- ⊙ **Participation** by all stakeholders – private and public-sector organizations, governments, agricultural researchers, seed producers, seed dealers and farmers;
- ⊙ **Capacity-building** programmes where needed to help countries to implement the agreement;
- ⊙ **Step-by-step** development and implementation;
- ⊙ **Political will** in all countries in the West Africa region;
- ⊙ **Agricultural policies** that are clearly articulated;
- ⊙ **Leadership by regional economic organizations** across West Africa; and
- ⊙ **Funding** that is adequate and secure.



Steps for implementing a seed regulation harmonization process

- ⊙ Analyse the seed industry development and trading at both national and regional level;
- ⊙ Identify gaps and the regulations to be harmonized;
- ⊙ Draft harmonization standards and bring together all relevant stakeholders to agree on regional standards
- ⊙ Adopt policies for implementation; and
- ⊙ Apply the harmonized regulations.

The essential requirements for success are
POLITICAL WILL
REGIONAL LEADERSHIP
 and
FULL PARTICIPATION BY ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

Technical issues that can be addressed through regional harmonization of seed regulations include:

- ⊙ **Seed quality assurance**
regional seed certification to allow seed certified in one country to be commercialized in another.
- ⊙ **Variety release**
common regional standards and procedures for testing and releasing varieties.
- ⊙ **Plant quarantine and phytosanitary measures**
phytosanitary measures such as a common list of plant quarantine pests to facilitate trade of seeds and planting material.
- ⊙ **Plant variety protection**
regional plant variety protection to provide incentives to plant breeding, give farmers access to more varieties and reduce the costs of protection.
- ⊙ **Biosafety**
regional biosafety measures to improve access to biotechnology.



HARMONIZED SEED LEGISLATION IN WEST AFRICA

Increasing food production by improving farmers' access to high-quality seed of improved varieties through facilitated cross-border seed trade



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The need for harmonization

In recent years, public sector has stopped seed production in many West African countries, for the main food crops. The management of seed production and supply has proved to be more efficient when managed by private companies – but in practice, in West Africa, there is little involvement of the private-sector. The main reason is that, for the major food crops in the region, farmers mainly use part of their harvest as seed, thus resulting in limited effective demand of certified seed.

Different seed related regulations in each country of the region have also been limiting factors in cross-border seed trade.

Nevertheless, small-scale seed enterprises are now emerging and providing quality seeds to farmers. Having access to a regional seed market with fewer barriers to seed trade would strongly contribute to their development.



Regional agreement

Since 2002, the 17 member states of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) have been working on a **regional agreement aimed at facilitating cross-border trade in seeds.**

This agreement was adopted by the ECOWAS Council of Ministers on 18 May 2008 in Abuja, Nigeria.

Outcomes of the regional agreement

- ⊙ **Harmonized regulations** govern variety release, quality control, certification and production.
- ⊙ **A regional structure** – the West African Seed Committee (COASEM) – facilitates implementation of the harmonized regulations.
- ⊙ **Reciprocal recognition** of national certification standards and labelling brings **greater flexibility** for the movement of seeds across borders.
- ⊙ **A regional catalogue** – the *West African Catalogue of Plant Species and Varieties* (COAFEV), developed with the support of FAO, lists the varieties whose seed may be marketed in member countries without further restrictions.



- ▶ Seed of any variety registered in one country can be produced and commercialized in all
- ▶ Seed produced, controlled and certified in one country can be commercialized in all, without additional certification



A fruitful partnership

The process leading to the regional agreement was facilitated by a collaborative partnership under the leadership of UEMOA, ECOWAS and CILSS.

These organizations were supported by:

- ⊙ FAO and IFDC, which provided technical and financial support;
- ⊙ the French Ministry of Agriculture, which provided funding; and
- ⊙ technical partners: WASNET, AFSTA, IITA, ASN, WARDA and GNIS.

Bright outlook for seed trading in West Africa

Free movement of improved varieties and good quality seed across borders will contribute to:

- ⊙ increased access for farmers to high-quality seed of improved varieties at affordable prices;
- ⊙ the expansion of private enterprise as the seed market develops;
- ⊙ provision and utilization of diverse genetic materials contributing to climate change adaptation;
- ⊙ increased exchanges of improved germplasm, helping to increase biodiversity;
- ⊙ more employment, improved income-generation and food security and reduced poverty.