

SEED ALLIANCE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES (SAWIB)

An FAO Initiative for Global Partnership on Seed Security

Good quality seed is a basic element of crop production and is the repository of genetic factors that set limit to crop productivity potentials even in the presence of other inputs. Overall, the food security of the world depends on easy access of farmers to seed suited to their agro-ecological conditions. In order to mitigate the changing global situation, including effects of climate change, soaring price of food and bioenergy, there is a need for improved productivity per unit area to feed the hungry world.

Unfortunately, seed is usually not readily available to farmers in most developing countries, mainly because of a lack of reliable local supply source. The reasons for this is a non-economic environment for seed enterprise resulting from the domino effects of a number of factors namely a lack of recurrent seed demand, poor crop produce price for farmers, and absence or highly limited activities related to crop value addition which can provide an incentive for more production and therefore more demands for quality seed. Therefore, the problem goes beyond seed production alone and cuts across chain crop post-harvest activities, such as supermarket chain of events to add value to primary crop produce.

In order to establish a sustainable seed supply and thereby facilitate food security of member countries, the Plant Production and Protection (AGP) started an initiative termed “Seed Alliance Without Boundaries (SAWIB)”. The initiative cut across the seed production, crop production and food industry domains and it will be at two levels – national and global. The objectives are to create a forum to bring together stakeholders from the private and public sector of developed and developing seed and food industries for dialog that will facilitate the: a) transfer of technological and entrepreneurial skills for sustainable seed production and distribution; b) linkage of seed sector with farmers or crop producers; and c) linkage of crop production to crop-value-addition industries. These linkages are essential to enhance sustainable use of plant genetic resources.

The SAWIB will enhance the synergy of the public-private sectors and comparative advantages of developed and developing countries to facilitate access to innovation and products of biotechnology for the seed industries and effect linkages amongst crop producers, agricultural inputs producers/suppliers, industrial consumers of raw agricultural produce and food industries. The collaboration will be mutually beneficial as it will help in exploiting the agro-ecological potentials of developing countries for off-season seed production of advanced seed industries. Overall, the initiative will facilitate the creation of seed industry that is market-driven in developing countries.

A first trial of this initiative took place in February 2009 with the visit of 10 seed stakeholders from Afghanistan, Iraq and Uzbekistan to India to dialog with stakeholders of the Indian seed industry. During this visit, which was co-organized by the agencies of India Agricultural Research Council and the National Seed Association of India, agreements were reached amongst these seed companies and visiting stakeholders to have joint trials in both India and visitors’ countries. In some cases, interest was expressed by Indian seed companies to establish seed production

sites in selected countries. Also, Indian seed equipment manufacturing company expressed interest to establish physical presence in some regions where FAO operates where there are investment-friendly environment. This visit is an initial first step in developing a global platform for this initiative and promoting similar dialogues in other regions of the world.