

High cost of release, lengthy processes hamper availability of foundation seed for companies, says report

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Sorghum cultivation in a farm. The country's seed sector is not entirely satisfied with the number of breeders it currently has. FILE PHOTO | NMG

In Summary

- Most seed companies, according to the report, take up to 36 months to realise a variety, and sometimes this duration persists to 60 months.
- The basic seed shortfall however demanded sourcing of foundation seed for beans from outside Kenya, in countries like Mexico, Brazil, and the USA.
- In a speech read on his behalf during the launch, Agricultural Research PS, Prof Hamadi Iddi Boga acknowledged the challenges in the seed sector but also pointed out the significant strides being made.

Inadequacy of foundation seed for non-maize crops such as beans, cowpea, and sorghum, still impedes on seed merchants' efforts to produce these seeds according to latest findings by The African Seed Access Index (TASAI).



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This in turn contributes to an apparent insufficiency

of the seeds for farmers.

Small seed companies, the seed index says, are the most affected by this shortage which is largely attributed to lengthy and costly seed certification and release processes.

Most seed companies, according to the report, take up to 36 months to realise a variety, and sometimes this duration persists to 60 months.

Lack of adequate demand forecasts, insufficient land for, as well as limited irrigation use in seed production, have also been cited as other factors contributing to the seed insufficiency.

According to TASAI's regional coordinator, Mainza Mugoya, who co-authored the seed access report, the cost of variety release in Kenya, is notably higher than in several African countries.

“Several companies also view the process as being too-time consuming and bureaucratic, necessitating a complete overhaul,” he said during the launch of the survey.

For local seed producing companies, the primary sources of foundation seed for the three crops, as well as maize are Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (Kalro), universities in the country, other private companies, and CGIAR centres, such as the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) for maize and the International Centre for Research in the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) for sorghum.

SIGNIFICANT STRIDES

The basic seed shortfall however demanded sourcing of foundation seed for beans from outside Kenya, in countries like Mexico, Brazil, and the USA.

The country's seed sector, according to researcher and also co-author of the report, Dr John Mburu, is also not entirely satisfied with its number of breeders which currently stands at 60, according to statistics by the Plant Breeders Association of Kenya. Only 34 of these are active breeders of the country's priority crops.

“Just 53 percent of seed companies feel satisfied compared to 88 percent in South Africa. The companies are most satisfied with maize breeders, with those of the other crops; despite being ‘fair’ are still unsatisfactory,” said Dr Mburu.

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Private breeders such as Quali Basic Seed, focused on production of basic seed for maize, started operations in 2017 and supplies foundation seed to seed merchants in Kenya, which is a positive step in enhancing access to early generation seed of new maize varieties for companies without parent seed production programmes.

In a speech read on his behalf during the launch, Agricultural Research PS, Prof Hamadi Iddi Boga acknowledged the challenges in the seed sector but also pointed out the significant strides being made such as in import and export processes of certified seed, seed security labelling, authorisation of private seed inspectors and analysts, seed demonstrations and field days and the role of the Seed Trade Association of Kenya (STAK) in linking the private sector industry to the government and other actors.

“Inadequate farmer awareness on seed security labels however needs to be comprehensively addressed to foment the fight against counterfeit seed,” said the PS.

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