

New report shines light on the role of farmers in saving Africa's seed diversity

An analysis on the role of small-scale farmers in saving Africa's seed diversity has been compiled and co-published today by GRAIN, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) together with research partners from Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe¹.

The report titled, **“The real seed producers: small-scale farmers save, use, share and enhance the seed diversity of the crops that feed Africa,”** outlines the battle over seed, agricultural resources, environmental degradation and their impact on local seed and food systems. It shines a light on farmer managed seed systems (FMSS) and their place on the continent and reveals that small-scale farmers are the real custodians of seed on the African continent and that

“...protecting and preserving farmer managed seed systems should be the core business of any government in Africa because any attack on our seed sovereignty is a clear attack to food sovereignty of any nation,” states Andrew Adem (ESAFF Uganda)

FMSS are not one-size-fits-all; they vary from community to community, are culturally appropriate, practical, customary and inclusive and they produce biodiverse and ecologically resilient seeds. Most importantly, they are centered around community values of selecting, exchanging and sharing seed, and sharing knowledge about planting, cultivating, harvesting and processing.

There are many initiatives promoting the diversity of farmer-managed seed, but the report also notes worrisome developments. Policy makers in many African countries, are often seduced by the grand narrative and propaganda purveyed by corporate interests. The result is that governments are joining regional agreements on intellectual property, trade and seed which only benefit corporations and the industrial seed system.

Further, small farmers are becoming vulnerable to different environmental hazards, but the corporate lobby for industrial seeds and commodity plantations is relentless, as one Ethiopian farmer aptly stated,

“I can observe that my friends are becoming dependent on government [industrial] seed supply. They are also losing their seed diversities and they are vulnerable to different environmental hazards, due to weak ability of ‘improved’ seeds to cope with the changing environment.”

¹ Research was carried out by the following country partner organisations: Centre d'études et de formation pour le développement en Afrique (CEFRORD) – Mali; Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT) and Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity Conservation (ZAAB) – Zambia; Association Sénégalaise des producteurs de semences paysannes (ASPSP) – Senegal; Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF Uganda) – Uganda; Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF) – Zimbabwe, and Fassil Gebeyehu Yelemtu (PhD) – Ethiopia.

For millions of African small-scale producers, diverse farmers' seed varieties are crucial to food sovereignty, nutrition, enhancing biodiversity and agroecology, and sustaining livelihoods in rural and peri-urban areas. If these seeds are so "backward," what moves farmers to keep preserving and planting them? This report provides answers to this and other questions.

The report is available in English and French at: <http://www.grain.org/e/6035> and https://afsafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/EN_The_real_seed_producers.pdf

Media contacts:

AFSA:

Million Belay
million.belay@afsafrica.org

GRAIN:

Susan Nakacwa
susan@grain.org