



AG SECTOR COUNCIL | DISCUSSION SERIES

# **THE INFORMAL SEED SECTOR: A BEHIND THE SEEDS LOOK**

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**CHAT TRANSCRIPT**

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## PRESENTERS

Karl Zimmerer, The Pennsylvania State University

Victor Afari-Sefa, AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center

Tashfiq Ahsan, Swisscontact – Katalyst

Md. Mehedi Hasan, Swisscontact – Katalyst

Mark Huisenga, USAID Bureau for Food Security (Introductions)

Julie MacCartee, USAID Bureau for Food Security (Moderator)

## Transcript

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Hello Everyone

**Tashfiq Ahsan- Katalyst:** hello Victor

**Victor Mbamba:** Hello victor

**Richard Tinsley:** dick tinsley from colorado state university.

**USAID Agrilinks:** Good morning everyone!

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Good morning. Ayurzana Puntsagdavaa: hello

**Ayurzana Puntsagdavaa:** yes I hear you

**Georges BAZONGO:** Morning all.

**Nathalie Me-Nsope:** hello, Nathalie, GCFSI/MSU

**Rodrigo Ortiz:** Rodrigo Ortiz from the AgResults Program, good morning

**USAID Agrilinks:** Welcome everyone!

**USAID Agrilinks:** Thank you for joining us

**USAID Agrilinks:** Please continue to introduce yourselves!

**USAID Agrilinks:** We will be starting in about 5 minutes!

**Diana McLean:** Good morning all. Diana McLean here from the Cornucopia Group, Canada

**Paul Bordoni:** Paul Bordoni, Bioersivity International/University of Cape Town

**Georges BAZONGO:** Georges BAZONGO, Agronomist working for Self Help Africa as Agriculture Advisor based in Ouagadougou Burkina Faso

**Doudou Ndiaye:** Regional Agriculture Specialist, Sahel regional Office, USAID/Senegal

**madhav subedi:** good morning here from Nepal

**USAID Agrilinks:** Good morning! Welcome!

**ROD Dubitsky:** Rod Dubitsky from Brac. Don't hear any audio yet

**Chifundo Kapalamula:** Value Chain Officer at Feed the Future Malawi-INVC

**Saad Cheema:** I am Saad Javed Cheema

**Saad Cheema:** from Pakistan

**Victor Mbamba:** Value Chain Officer from Feed the Future Malawi Integrating Nutrition in Value Chains project.

**Saad Cheema:** working for The Agribusiness Project USAID

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Welcome everyone. We are starting the event.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Please introduce yourself here as you join the webinar.

**Arlie Reeves:** Good morning -- Arlie Reeves here from Washington state. I'm a graduate student at Northeastern University. I also raise cattle, and am very interested in this topic today! Glad to be here.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** If you have questions as the presentations progress, please type them here. I will collect them to be asked during Q&A.

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Thanks to everyone for joining. Julie MacCartee from USAID is introducing the programme

**Theresa McMenemy:** Project Officer for the Agriculture and Nutrition Linkages team of the SPRING Project, based in Arlington

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Welcome Arlie. It's always nice to see graduate students joining our events.

**madhav subedi:** good morning every one i am madhav subedi from Nepal currently studying agricultural science in my undergraduation.

**Joshua Reed-Diawuoh:** Good morning, Joshua Reed Diawuoh from the AgResults project based in DC

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Welcome Theresa and Madhav

**Angela Muriuki:** Greetings from AGRA Nairobi

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Mark Huisenga from USAID is outlining today's agenda

**Wilm van Bekkum:** georges Bazonga

**Sandrine Chetail:** Sandrine, Director Agriculture for Mercy Corps

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Welcome Sandrine. We hope you find this event helpful.

**Georges BAZONGO:** Wilm

**Edward Merrell:** Will copies of the speakers' slide decks be available after the presentations?

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** All presentation slides will be available for download from the event page: <http://agrilinks.org/events/informal-seed-sector-behind-seeds-look>

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** If you're just logging on, Karl Zimmerer just began his presentation

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Kindly introduce yourself and tell us your company/NGO/affiliation

**a Sidhu:** echo importance of agricultural biodiversity

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** We will be tracking questions for QA

**Thomas Dubois:** Thomas Dubois, regional Director, AVRDC

**Angela Muriuki:** Angela Muriuki, ICT4Ag associate, AGRA

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** If you have any technical issues, please private chat me. Thanks

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Welcome Thomas and Angela.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Please remember to type any questions you would like asked during the Q&A session here.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Is anyone currently working in the informal seed sector?

**Stephanie White:** re question about informal seed systems, we at MSU GCFSI are preparing for this work.

**Stephanie White:** (i.e. working in informal seed systems)

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** That's great to hear Stephanie. Are you focusing on a particular crop or region?

**Stephanie White:** Malawi and pigeon pea.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Just in time for the year of pulses!

**Georges BAZONGO:** In Burkina Faso and Togo, Self Help Africa is working to combine formal and informal seed system

**Georges BAZONGO:** Around maize, sorghum, millet and soya.

**a Sidhu:** already being done in Ethiopia and Costa Rica (bioversity international)

**a Sidhu:** done\*

**Colin Khoury:** Hi, I'm interested in successful experiences of coexistence between survival (or better, support for) informal seed systems in biodiverse countries, and seed laws (TRIPS etc implemented on the national level). I am seeing vast negative impacts on informal systems due to these overly restrictive laws, and mostly see informal systems survive simply due to lack of full compliance of countries in implementing their seed laws. But I've heard of some regions where there is more active work on coexistence, particularly in S Asia?

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Thank you for your question Colin. I will pose this to our speakers during the Q&A session.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** If anyone online has information or experiences related to Colin's question, please feel free to share here.

**a Sidhu:** YEs to colin. Bioversity and other partners have been investing time in <http://www.planttreaty.org/> to strengthen the policy framework around seed systems (The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture)

**maria scurrah** : what proportion of food in a country really comes from this sector

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC)**: Victor is joining us via phone from Tanzania!

**Georges BAZONGO**: Maria, in Burkina Faso, around 70% of the food come from this system.

**Willem Heemskerk**: Willem Heemskerk of KIT Amsterdam of the Integrated Seed Sector Development programme (ISSD): [www.ISSDseed.org](http://www.ISSDseed.org)

**USAID Agrilinks 2**: Welcome Willem. What kind of work is ISSD doing with the informal seed sector?

**USAID Agrilinks 2**: \*kind

**Willem Heemskerk**: ISSD programmes in various countries support farmer led seed systems notably what we call intermediate seed systems (guaranteed or quality declared seed production and marketing) and informal seed systems (referred to as Farmer and Community based seed systems involved in trusted seed production and distribution).

**Stefan de Haan**: Seed laws are not frequently enforced at ground level. There are differences by species, country and type of farmers. Classical read: Robert Tripps "Seed Provision and Agricultural Development"

**Chifundo Kapalamula**: What is QDS?

**Thomas Dubois**: QDS = quality declared seed system

**USAID Agrilinks 2**: Is lack of enforcement of seed laws generally considered to be beneficial or harmful to the informal seed system?

**Srinivasulu Rajendran**: Quality Declared Seed

**Nathalie Me-Nsope**: Karl, very interesting point you mention about connecting or mapping seed networks across communities. This will be very useful in our work on informal seed systems in Malawi. Thanks

**conny almekinderss**: We are now just looking into experiences with farmer cooperatives producing seed in Ethiopia, they show that the enforcing of the so called social certification, ie at community level is also very dubious: farmers do not easily 'sanction' their fellow farmers.

**Nathalie Me-Nsope**: Victor, what are some of the major challenges you've observed with community based seed systems and how do these compare to the farmer based seed enterprises

**Willem Heemskerk**: QDS is: Quality Declared Seed (locally produced by farmers and quality controlled often by district officers). Mostly cheaper than certified (less transport and inspection costs) and better adapted to local farmers demand.

**Nathalie Me-Nsope**: Sorry, I meant community seed production systems

**Paul Bordoni**: Quality of seed is a fundamental element for a seed system that works, but it seems that the informal seed sector is being formalized, also at QDS level. Might give work to some but put an additional burden on many financially resource poor farmers (?)

**USAID Agrilinks 2**: Thanks Nathalie. I will save this question for Victor when we go to Q&A

**Willem Heemskerk:** QDS systems are in fact become formal at a different level, next to these there will still be informal seed systems not based on seed enterprises (MSMEs) as such

**Stephen Mink:** Victor, could you explain in some more detail what you see as more favorable "seed policy and regulatory environment" (bullet on one of your slides)?

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Next week we have a special webinar on e-verification of agricultural inputs. Is the informal or QDS system ready for this type of verification for seeds?

**Willem Heemskerk:** Informal systems not, but I would say QDS systems yes.

**Willem Heemskerk:** Note that QDS seed in Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique have official labels and are in that sense formal but stopping short of being fully certified.

**Georges BAZONGO:** For it's the QDS system ready for this verification as you will master all the process and the input suppliers.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Willem, are farmers confident in the QDS labeling or do they prefer to either save their money or splurge on fully certified seed when they are able?

**Georges BAZONGO:** Read "For me....."

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Thanks again to Mehedi and Tashfiq for joining us from Bangladesh!

**Willem Heemskerk:** QDS sales are more based on trust (Local Seed Businesses known by farmers) than on the actual label. The label is mostly more for official reasons (such as allowing agrodealers to sell).

**Stephen Walsh:** Interest to learn to what extent seed quality activities and efforts are embedding the capacity and control at the seed merchant and seed producer level versus more semantic level changes of continuing to see 'quality' as something that can be policed in the seed system by more inspectors or more flexible certification schemes (QDS).

**Willem Heemskerk:** Stephen Walsh this is a very important point. As the formal inspection part is increasing costs and is not so important for farmers (so far).

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Natalie, one of the major challenge of the community seed systems is getting them institutionalized and making them sustainable

**Georges BAZONGO:** As far as QDS is based on the germination test which could be done by the kind of lead farmer if they benefit on training. This test can be done at the farm.

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** they need to be somehow linked to formal systems

**Willem Heemskerk:** Can we see the presentation again

**USAID Agrilinks:** thank you everyone, we will try to get to as many of your questions as we can!

**Stephen Walsh:** Ultimately, quality is about price differentials that the consumer (farmer) actually pays. These valuations get muddled quickly with large institutional buyers procuring on behalf of the farmer.

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** The webinar, presentations and audio will be archived and available for viewing in about a week (Willem)

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Also, if you click the "downloads" pod (under presenter picture) you can download the presentations

**Willem Heemskerk:** Victor yes. Links between different seed systems are important to move towards an Integrated Seed Sector for the benefit of the farmer.

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Stephen, favourable policy in this aspect can include further decentralizing seed regulatory laws, provision of more inspectors to assist smallholders in the certification process. Our empirical study shows that farmers who get better access to certified seed can increase their income by 2.3 times

**Willem Heemskerk:** KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC): I see articles under downloads but not presentations

**Stephen Mink:** Victor, thanks for response. By decentralization do you mean to allow variance and implementation below the national level? In the other direction, ECOWAS in W. Africa is struggling to implement a regional (multi-country) common regulatory framework so as to simplify and facilitate cross-border commerce in seed.

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Willem: see my private chat to you. Thanks

**Willem Heemskerk:** Informal seed systems are also important for the distribution of new/modern or other superior varieties.

**Georges BAZONGO:** With the decentralization policy and the fact that the seeds are promoting according to the agro ecological zone, I think that each Region can adapt the national policy to his realities.

**Richard Felsing:** Q for Karl Zimmerer: What factors push-pull the circulatory systems within local smallholder networks and across scales?

**Georges BAZONGO:** Agree with you Willem, that is what we are doing here to increase the number of improved seeds users.

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** As we begin to wrap up, I want to thank everyone for joining and participating in today's event. Please take a minute to complete the polls before you leave the webinar.

**Richard Felsing:** Beyond market return, what motivating factors or systemic characteristics drive seed diversity circulation within and across systems?

**Willem Heemskerk:** Male and female farmer preferences: Taste, cookability, storage, labour costs etc.

**Georges BAZONGO:** adaptation to the rainy season

**Tashfiq Ahsan- Katalyst:** just to add to the questions answer

**conny almekinderss:** following up on Richard Felsing: and why would/could crowd-based approaches provide more effective drivers than 'research-driven' approaches

**Tashfiq Ahsan- Katalyst:** in bangladesh there is a regulatory body but that mainly looks into the quality for notified crops

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Seed certification is usually conducted along various nodes of the value chain, pre-planting, after planting and laboratory test after harvesting and processing

**Tashfiq Ahsan- Katalyst:** such as rice jute potato etc

**Georges BAZONGO:** Conny, it's the costs and the accessibility of the information.

**Tashfiq Ahsan- Katalyst:** primarily at the post-harvest level

**USAID Agrilinks 2:** Thank you everyone. We will keep the chat space open for a few more minutes. Please check back to the event page for the slides and a transcript of the event: <http://agrilinks.org/events/informal-seed-sector-behind-seeds-look>

**KDAD AV Tech (Washington DC):** Thanks everyone. We'll leave the room open for another 10 minutes or so

**Tashfiq Ahsan- Katalyst:** thank you very much for hosting this and special thanks to the participants

**Mehedi Hasan- Katalyst:** Thank you everyone for attending the seminar

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Okay, thanks a lot for making this happen. Was a tough one for me but guess better than not

**Richard Felsing:** why wouldn't crowd-driven mechanisms outperform research-based approaches? The former contributes labor, knowledge, money; the latter extracts data and knowledge.

**Victor Afari-Sefa:** Stephen, decentralization should be at both levels. At the regional level, we need to pursue the seed harmonization policies. At the national level, more autonomy should can be given to the districts so as for them to reach communities much easily