

## **Harmonisation of seed policy may lead to greater security and access lucrative markets**

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While many smallholder seed producers face trade difficulties due to various factors affecting the agricultural sector, the harmonisation of the seed policy in the SADC region seems to yield tangible results. These are in the form of greater cooperation, smoother regional integration and simplified regulatory processes and legislation.

The number of SADC farmers facing seed insecurity has not diminished to desired levels, but the initiative seeking to harmonise seed regulation has identified challenges in the way of greater economic and commercial integration between the 15 countries in the region.

These were some of the issues shared at a reflection workshop hosted by FANRPAN, stating that some of the seed security initiatives of the Harmonised Seed Security Project would pave the way for greater commercial cooperation between producers. It would also ensure that farmers have the right tools to be major players in the seed market.

Some of the aims identified by Dr Bellah Mpofo, Project Coordinator, was the integration of smaller seed markets into one larger SADC market.

"This would cater for small holdings and other players at the margins of the lucrative international market.

"In 1987 a study found that policy frameworks in various SADC countries differed at unfavourable proportions. There were seed shortages and it was difficult to move seeds from one country to the next because of overly complex regulatory issues. All 15 countries in the region had different laws and standards which fragmented the seed market as a consequence.

"The seed market became unattractive because of the standards, so now we need to make it more attractive for investors through harmonising policies and laws, providing easy access across the entire region building a bigger seed market," she says.

Another issue affecting seed production which is not mutually exclusive from the challenges associated with the rest of the SADC region is the US conglomerate, DuPont owned Pioneer HiBred's proposed take-over of Pannar Seed which is still being contested by the South African Competition Commission at the Supreme Court of Appeals.

Approval of the deal would split the seed market in South Africa between DuPont and Monsanto, another multinational US conglomerate. In addition, the deal would also see the establishment of a R60m research establishment for small holder farmers and producers.

"Although the deal would have an effect on small holder farmers and integration in the regions, most of the varieties produced by both companies are genetically modified (GM). GM seeds are not included in the SADC Seed Harmonisation system," says Mpofo.

Wynand van der Walt, a senior partner at Food N Crop Bio, a company that deals with biotechnology, legislation and seed industry issues says it is important for countries in the SADC region to embrace globalisation but not lose their heritage. He said many countries in the region did not have intellectual property rights on their plant varieties.

"The multi nationals spend more on research in one day than the entire SADC region in one year. That is why we need to protect our heritage and ensure that we negotiate partnerships where they can adapt to African conditions and technologies – we must learn to negotiate," he said.