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Council calls for improved seed supply system

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he National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC), an agency of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, has called for the establishment of improved seed supply system.

Chief Oluwakemi Shobowale, the council's Executive Director, made the call in Abuja at a workshop on "Characterising Seed Demand in Nigeria: Constraints, Opportunities and Challenges."

Shobowale said the seed supply system should take into account the need for seed quality control which, he said, should involve monitoring of all stages of seed production and testing as well as the enforcement of national seed laws.

"Seed quality, control to a large extent, depends on the capability and effectiveness of the regulatory organ of the national seed system," he said.

According to him, the system should also take care of the interest of all stakeholders in the formal and informal seed sector. He added that it should also influence the demand and adoption of improved seeds.

Shobowale said the workshop had implication for seed security, a fundamental issue for achieving national food security.

"It is an undisputed fact that quality seed is the most important input in boosting agricultural production," he said.

He observed that farmers could not access the crop establishment potential of the seed they buy prior to purchase.

"They depend on information provided by the seed producer or a third party which is usually the certification agency," he said.

In his remarks, Mr James Sackey, Programme Leader, International Food Research Policy Institute (IFPRI), called for a systematic review of farmers' seed demands in Nigeria.

He urged participants to utilise the information gathered at the workshop to re-structure the nation's seed sub-sector and seed supply mechanism.

The one-day workshop was organised by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and NASC.

Shobowale assured farmers that NASC will collaborate with the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to monitor the quality of seed sold to them in the various seed markets across the land.

NASC, an arm of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, is the specialised agency of the Federal Government saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the development of the seed industry.

The aim is to ensure improved quality seed production, availability, access and affordability of improved seeds to farmers.

"The move is to ensure that seed packages sold to farmers are of top quality, and when they are not of top quality, the packages will be withdrawn from the shelves," he said.

He said the decision to employ the services of NSCDC in the monitoring exercise was due to the fact that the council is relatively young and possess the required workforce needed to monitor the various seeds markets.

"With the support and collaboration of the NSCDC we will be able to effectively monitor the quality of seeds sold to our farmers," he said.

Shobowale said the council will train men of the NSCDC that will be engaged in the monitoring to enable them ascertain the attributes of good seeds.

He said enforcement officials of the council raided seed markets in Ilorin and Offa in Kwara State a few weeks ago to "clean the markets of fake seeds."

Shobowale said the council would not relent its efforts to ensure the country is rid of fake seeds, adding the council plans to embark on similar exercise in other parts of the country.

Also the Head, Seed Quality Control, National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC), Mr Femi Olonlua, identified non-adherence to statutory roles and responsibilities by stakeholders as a serious factor mitigating against the implementation of the national seed policy.

In a paper he presented at a workshop in Abuja, he said inadequate funding of the seed sub-sector, compared to the attention given to other inputs, such as fertilisers, was another factor militating against the implementation of the policy.

The theme of the workshop, jointly organised by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and NASC, was: "Characterising Seed Demand in Nigeria: Constraints, Opportunities and Challenges."

Olonlua said the political will required to restructure and reinvigorate the system by the government, should be addressed along with the untimely release of fund and inadequate human capacity building.

He said inadequate capacity building had resulted in the dearth of skilled professional seed technologists in the sub-sector.

"The non appointment of extension officers and qualified graduates for seed certification, quality control and seed law enforcement also had serious impact on the implementation of the national seed policy," he added.

The NASC boss said dearth of plant breeders in agricultural research institutes was also contributing to the non implementation of the policy.

He said the establishment of NASC was a "giant step" by the Federal Government to address most of the challenges and reposition the national seed system.