

[HOME](#)[SciDev.Net \(London\)](#)

## Africa: African Policymakers Urged to Speed Seed to Farmers

Lexy Abutu

23 November 2009

Abuja — African seed producers and researchers have called on policymakers to boost production of improved seed varieties and ensure that they are released to farmers more quickly.

At a policy workshop held in Abuja, Nigeria, stakeholders from industry and academia sought to unify the seed laws of different countries within West Africa to narrow the gap between supply and demand.

Recent studies by researchers at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) show that current demand for improved varieties of maize seeds far exceeds supply in the region.

According to one study, the average supply of drought-tolerant, improved maize seeds in the region accounted for only one third of the total demand- with less than 50 per cent in Nigeria and only 11 per cent in Ghana - from 1997 to 2007.

Tahirou Abdoulaye, an IITA agricultural economist who led the study, said that maize seed production in the region is too low and called for a favourable policy framework to attract the private sector to the seed industry.

According to an IITA press release, maize productivity has been under threat from both climate change-related drought and delays in getting improved seed varieties to farmers.

Solving the latter problem requires a more effective, streamlined seed sector, said Wilfred Mwangi, associate director for Africa in CIMMYT's Global Maize Program.

Shehu Ado, director of the Institute of Agricultural Research at Nigeria's Ahmadu Bello University, told SciDev.Net that the gap between supply and demand was not a result of legal issues or bottlenecks in the system but of the inability of seed companies to showcase their products at the grassroots level.

He said that seed companies in the region rely heavily on the government for bulk purchases. The government, in turn, delivers these seeds to farmers, creating a gap between farmers and seed companies.

This gap has created problems of credibility and confidence, Ado said, with some farmers complaining that hybrid seeds do not perform better than freely available conventional varieties. He argued that seed companies must campaign to educate farmers on the benefits of improved hybrid varieties.

But Nnimmo Bassey, chair of Friends of the Earth International, told SciDev.Net that narrowing the gap between supply and demand will not only keep farmers dependent on seed companies but could also weaken national laws that protect the environment, opening up the region to contamination and degradation.

The workshop was held last month (28 October).

Copyright © 2009 SciDev.Net. All rights reserved. Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com).

AllAfrica - All the Time

### Solar Energy Charity

Helping Relieve Poverty Through The Provision of Solar Energy. Join Us!

Public Service Ads by Google