

News from West Africa

Dissemination and end-of-project workshop on “Development of Sustainable Seed Systems in West Africa” held in Bamako, Mali

Funded by the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), the 4-year Groundnut Seed Project (GSP) entitled “Development of sustainable groundnut seed systems in West Africa” was concluded on 30 June 2007. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), as project executing agency (PEA), organized an end-of-project final workshop from 2 to 3 July 2007 at Bamako, Mali. The objective was to present the achievements of the project to a wide range of stakeholders.

Forty-six participants at the workshop were from various spheres, including research and development (R&D), development partners, farmers, representatives of farmers’ associations and community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private seed companies, processors and traders. Project results were presented during the different sessions, one of which focused on mechanisms to sustain successful interventions.

The project began on 1 April 2003 and concluded on 30 June 2007. ICRISAT in partnership with Institut d’Economie Rurale (IER), Mali, Institut National de Recherche Agronomique du Niger (INRAN), Niger, Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR), Nigeria and Institut Sénégalais de Recherche Agronomique (ISRA), Senegal implemented the project. Together with groundnut farmers and other stakeholders, these institutions have played a crucial role in the implementation of project activities.

During the four years, a very comprehensive and challenging program was implemented to support the development of sustainable groundnut seed systems in the region. Numerous obstacles were identified such as: limited farmer participation in the selection of new varieties; insufficient supply of breeder and foundation seed; inefficient seed production and uncertain seed demand; inadequate national variety release mechanisms; weak integration between the seed and the product market; and lack of an enabling institutional and policy environment.

Under the project, tools have been developed to overcome these problems. In the four project countries, possible solutions have been identified and tested in close

collaboration with the respective national agricultural research systems (NARS) and through partnerships with farmer associations, small entrepreneurs, NGOs, the processing industry and other stakeholders. Extensive training was provided and socioeconomic surveys and market studies undertaken.

Among the lessons learned were that the following areas would require particular attention:

- the role of revolving funds and access to credit for both, producers of foundation and breeder seed and community-based seed multiplication;
- remunerative and efficient seed marketing systems;
- appropriate national variety release mechanisms and facilitation of regional seed trade;
- scaling-up of measures to control aflatoxin contamination along the value chain;
- the use of contractual arrangements between groundnut producers, traders and processors, and;
- the establishment of sustainable national consortium to promote and coordinate further action in the groundnut sector.

Farmer participatory evaluation and dissemination of improved groundnut varieties boost uptake in West Africa

Farmer Participatory Varietal Selection (FPVS) trials were conducted in pilot sites of the GSP in 2003. Thirty-nine improved varieties (released and pre-released) from ICRISAT and national agricultural research and extension systems (NARES) partners were evaluated in over 200 FPVS on-farm trials in 45 locations in Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. The objectives were to identify farmers’ preferred traits and varieties and test a range of seed multiplication and delivery schemes. The farmers evaluated the different varieties under their own management practices and resources.

After two years of evaluations, five varieties were selected in Mali; four in Niger; and five (ICGV 86124, ICGV 89063, PC 79-79, H 75-O and 55-33) in Senegal.

Surveys conducted in 2006/07 revealed that more than 30 farmers’ associations and small-scale seed producers started producing and distributing seed of selected

varieties in the various locations. More than 150 t of seed of different classes that could cover 100,000 ha were produced. About 74% of the farmers in the pilot areas are using modern varieties, and about 67% of the groundnut area is planted with modern varieties. In locations where FPVS was limited to providing only seed for experimentation without ensuring seed supply, the proportion of the area covered with improved groundnuts was low (28%); whereas in locations where FPVS was implemented in conjunction with setting up institutions and institutional arrangements to supply seed to farmers, the uptake in areas around the pilot sites was estimated at 83%.

The major drivers of adoption have been identified to be the exposure of farmers to modern varieties through on-farm trials, the development and empowerment of farmers' associations and the involvement of small-scale

seed producers tasked at producing seed of preferred varieties and the involvement of research institutes at supplying breeder seed and/or foundation seed.

Adoption of modern groundnut varieties will be enhanced if governments and donors could invest more in the development of institutions and institutional arrangements that will deliver seed at affordable cost to the smallholder farmers. Arrangements have to be developed to ease access to credit to farmers and organize farmers through collective actions to benefit more from the sale of their products.

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