SEED SYSTEMS IN THE AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION:

DEEP DIVE ON GOVERNANCE, POLICY, AND BEST-PRACTICES

SUMMARY BRIEF

19 MARCH 2026

INTRODUCTION

On March 19th, 2026, the Agroecology Coalition convened a deep dive session on "**Seed Systems in the Agroecological Transition: Governance, Policy and Best Practices**", led by the Policies Working Group in collaboration with the Implementation Working Group. The session brought together Coalition members, practitioners, researchers, farmer organizations and civil society actors to examine the role of seed systems within agroecological transitions and identify opportunities for collaboration.

The session aimed to strengthen participants' understanding of the critical role of seeds in agroecological transitions, identify actions that Coalition members can advance collectively on seed systems, and contribute to broader discussions linked to the **International Year of the Woman Farmer**.

In her opening remarks, **Esther Penunia from the Asian Farmers Association (AFA)** emphasized that seeds are not merely agricultural inputs, but a foundational resource for family farmers alongside land, water, forests and pasturelands. She highlighted that access to diverse, affordable and locally adapted seeds remains essential for farmers' livelihoods, food security and climate resilience. She also **emphasized that farmers have historically saved, improved, exchanged and protected seeds, generating rich systems of knowledge and biodiversity stewardship**. However, these systems are increasingly undermined by formal seed regimes dominated by multinational corporations and regulations that restrict farmers' rights to save, exchange and breed seeds. Her remarks reinforced the **need for stronger collaboration to advance seed sovereignty and strengthen farmer-managed seed systems that are more resilient, equitable and aligned with agroecological transitions**.

In his presentation on seed governance, **Simon Degelo from SWISSAID** gave insights on the main factors for continued loss of seed diversity and the importance of farmer managed seed systems for agroecological transformation of food systems. He highlighted that in most countries worldwide the policy and regulatory frameworks one-sidedly focus on strengthening the formal seed system and breeders' rights, while neglecting or even criminalising farmer managed seed systems and violating farmers' rights. Furthermore, he shed some light on the problems, strict regulations for plant variety protection poses for farmers and how the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and trade agreements are being used to impose the laws developed in Europe upon states in Africa, Asia and Latin America. At the end of his presentation he also highlighted some positive developments like the recognition of farmers rights on international level, the **increasing awareness for the importance of Farmer-Managed Seed Systems (FMSS), the interest in participatory research and breeding**, and last but not least, the many farmers' groups and civil society engaged for seed diversity worldwide.

In her presentation, **Tabby Munyiri gave insights into the work of Seed Savers Network (SSN) Kenya,** connecting practical work to maintain seed diversity with advocacy work. She demonstrated how SSN works with community seed banks (CSB) to improve the **conservation and sustainable use of seed diversity**. She explained the barriers and sanctions farmers in Kenya face when they save, exchange and sell their seeds. She told of their frustration of not being heard by the government when making suggestions to improve the situation, and how this led to the idea to take legal action against Kenya's punitive Seeds and Plant Varieties Act. She explained how they secured some funding to engage an advocate and how they prepared the case together with farmers that finally was decided by the High Court of Kenya in their favor. Finally, she also shared about the ongoing process to amend the Seed and Plant Varieties Act and how SSN engages for achieving tangible improvements for farmer-managed seed systems.

The following sections summarize the key insights that emerged from each discussion group: policy, implementation and research.

I. POLICY

POLICY BEST-PRACTICES

- **Brazil**
  - Zero Hunger Policy putting right to food at centre.
  - Support of local market, encouraging local food consumption, with promising results.
- **Ethiopia**
  - Pluralistic Seed System development Strategy and Seed Law recognizing farmer seed rights to save, exchange and sell farm-saved seeds and exempts it from the obligation for certification (Seed Proclamation No. 1288/2023).
- **India**
  - Protection of Plant Variety & Farmers' Rights Act (2001) guaranteeing rights of farmers to save, exchange and sell seeds.
  - Exemption of farmers' seeds from obligation of seed certification.
- **Senegal**
  - DyTAES network (government/CSO) supporting agroecological initiatives and networks of actors in the country and leading drafting of National Agroecology Strategy, including provisions on support of FMSS.
- **Kenya**
  - Participatory process to revise current Seeds and Plant Varieties Act to recognize FMSS and allow sale of farm-saved seeds, final outcome expected at the end of 2026.
  - High Court ruling that suspended parts of the Seeds and Plant Varieties Act as it violates the right to food as granted by Kenya' s Constitution.
- **Republic of the Gambia**
  - National Agroecology Action Plan with operational charter including FMSS support (input by a representative of the National Alliance for Agroecology in Gambia).
- **Mexico**
  - Sembrando vidas, cosechando soberanía: these initiatives have seed savers in their own communities in seed banks.
  - Challenge: with changing governments, such initiatives might disappear, long–term sustainability beyond government support needs to be reinforced.
- **Philippines**
  - Farmer-scientist network - work towards participatory plant breeding, to elaborate cultivars that meet their requirements.
  - Plant Variety Protection Act balances breeders rights with farmers' rights.
- **European Union**
  - New EU Organic Regulation allows for the sale of Organic Heterogenous Materials without the need of certification and conformity with Distinctness, Uniformity, and Stability (DUS) criteria and ongoing process for a new Regulation on Seed Marketing.
  - Support for bioregional market creation and recognition of products made via FMSS (e.g. Italy).

PROMISING ADVOCACY APPROACHES

- **Creation and Documentation of Evidence**
  - Farmer-led advocacy, using evidence and documentation of best-practices.
  - Document evidence of importance of seed diversity and FMSS for food sovereignty, food cultures, healthy nutrition, climate change adaptation and agroecological transition of food systems.
  - Document evidence on effects of strict intellectual property regulation on plants (modelled after UPOV 91 patents) on farmers' rights and seed security.
- **Movement Building**
  - Strengthen, contribute to and (when not yet existing) build networks on local, national and regional level with allied CSO and farmers' originations for coordination and joint advocacy efforts.

- Strengthen and contribute to international seed networks like the European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity (ECLLD), Seed and Knowledge Initiative, Farmers Seed Network China, Oxfam Novib, Going to Seed, IFOAM Seed Platform to exchange knowledge on ongoing policy processes, share experience and coordinate for joint policy strategies. This is a basis to develop coordination strategies.
- Build capacity in FMSS movement around relevant legislation and international frameworks.

- **Policy dialogue**
  - Advocate for exemptions for small-scale farmers, from strict provisions and plant variety protection and seed trade regulation.
  - Highlight importance of FMSS for food security, resilience, income generation and economic development.
  - Shift narrative towards seeds as a resource of the community, rather than a commodity.
  - Leverage National Agroecology Strategies to support FMSS and climate and biodiversity plans (NDC, NAP, NBSAP) to incorporate FMSS support into national climate and biodiversity action.
  - Lobby to include FMSS in official development assistance (ODA) policies/principles and to avoid inclusion of UPOV provisions in bilateral trade agreements.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEED SYSTEM-RELEVANT POLICY REFORMS

Revise seed trade regulation to create space for FMSS and heterogenous seeds

- Exempt FMSS from obligation of seed certification and requirements for variety registration, like DUS.
- Allow for more diversity/heterogeneity in seed trade regulation (e.g. Organic Heterogenous Material in EU Organic Regulation).
- Recognize farmers' varieties and local communities as their stewards.
- Create registers for farmers' varieties that allow the registration of farmer-managed varieties thought a simple notification and registration mechanisms.

Revise intellectual property on seeds / plant variety protection to balance breeders' rights with farmers' rights

- Establish a sui generis Plant Variety Protection (PVP) framework that is tailored to national context and protects farmers' rights to save, use, exchange, and sell farm saved seeds as granted by ITPGRFA (Art. 9.3) and UNDROP (Art. 19.1.d).
- Stop patents on seeds that monopolize genetic resources.

Recognition and support for FMSS

- Ensure legal recognition of FMSS and their important role for the conservation of seed diversity / agrobiodiversity.
- Allocate government support for CSB and other forms of FMSS to strengthen their role for the conservation and sustainable use of seed diversity.
- Supporting seed network as an interface between ex situ and on-farm management.

Strengthen farmer's rights to seeds on international level and improve implementation on national level

- Ensure farmers are included in seed-relevant policy process to grant their right to participate in the making of decisions relating to seeds as granted by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) (9.2.c) and UNDROP (19.1.c).

- Strengthen United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) and ITPGRFA and frame the right to seeds granted therein as essential part of human rights.
- Ensure farmers' right to participate in the sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources (as granted in UNDROP Art. 19.1.b and ITPGRFA Art.9.2.b).
- Ban practice to push for strict forms of plant variety protection in line with UPOV91, through trade agreements or as conditions for ODA.

Facilitate markets for FMSS

- Remove legal barriers for the sale of FMSS.
- Recognize participatory guarantee systems (PGS) for seeds and other forms of intermediate seed systems, as alternatives to formal seed certification.
- Create opportunities to sell products from farmers varieties using their specific name and properties as a marketing point.
- Develop bioregional markets for trade of products made from FMSS.
- Link public (food) procurement mechanisms to create markets for products made from farmers' varieties.

Regulate genetically engineered plants

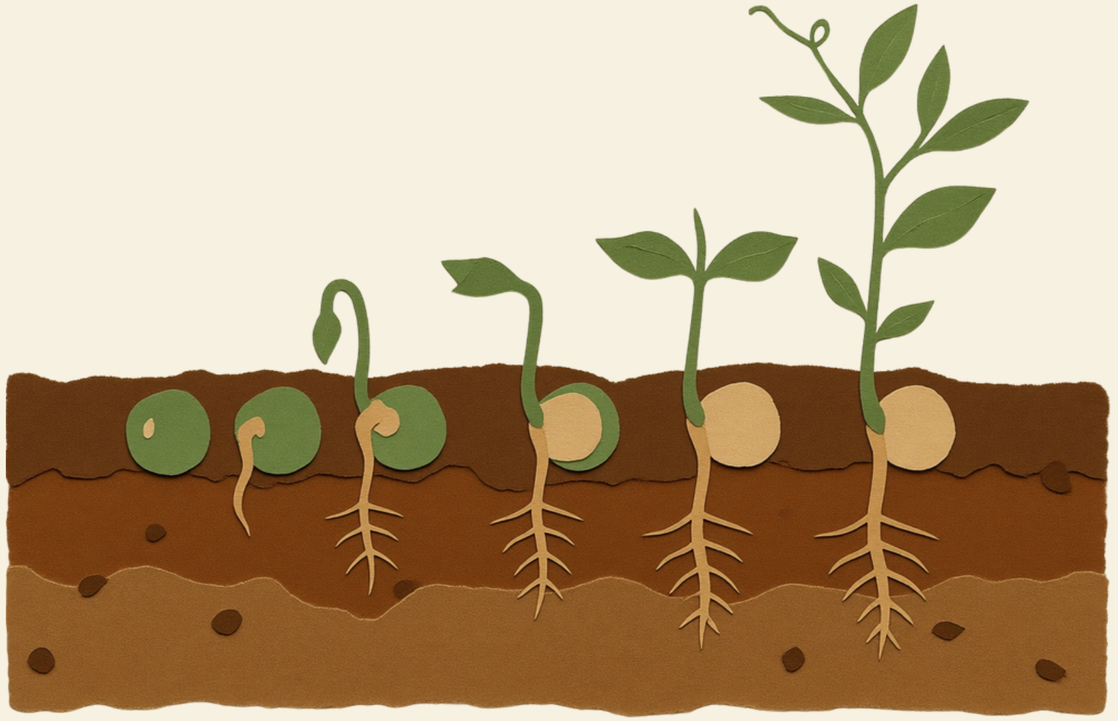
- Ensure effective regulation of genetically engineered plants including case-by-case risk assessment and clear labelling to allow for consumer choice.
- Allow farmers and consumers to participate in the making of decisions related to the authorization and regulation of genetically engineered plants.

Conserve Agrobiodiversity

- Conserve seed diversity as a common resource that is needed for food security, healthy nutrition, adaptation to climate change and agroecological transition of food systems.
- Develop and implement national plans for conservation and sustainable use of seed diversity as part of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) linked to CBD, National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the Global Plan of Action of FAO Commission for Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Readjust policies regarding seeds and food systems towards agroecology and FMSS

- Remove subsidies that support hybrid seeds and shift subsidies to FMSS.
- Support farmer-led research and participatory breeding approaches that breed for diversity rather than uniformity (e.g. evolutionary plant breeding) and bring together farmers and scientists.
- Ensure better linkages between national gene banks and interconnected networks of local seed banks.
- Ensure effective implementation of ITPGRFA and CBD on the national level, including obligations for access and benefit sharing, as well as rights of farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities.



II. PRACTICES

BEST PRACTICES

COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES

Community Centred Seed Systems - a decentralised approach to seed, making them accessible, affordable and available to all

- Establishing and maintaining community seed banks and seed houses layered with strong accountability.
- Developing local seed inventories, record systems.
- Facilitating seed fairs and indigenous seed markets.

Decentralised Exchange and Access

- Promoting seed sharing and a form of bartering.
- Enabling seed exchanges across villages, districts and regions.
- Strengthening farmer-to-farmer networks, integrating peer-to-peer learning horizontally.

Indigenous Knowledge and Agroecological Practices

- Using traditional storage methods - earthen pots, cool charcoal structures, neem leaves, locally constructed buildings(cool inside).
- Practicing local seed selection, regeneration and collection.
- Promoting community lead seed multiplication through a variety of locally led education initiatives.
- Integrating seeds into agroecological farming systems that connects the source to the production method enabling a systems approach.

Strong Community Governance

- Ensuring there is local leadership involved throughout the processes promoting the management of locally driven seed systems.
- Developing community-led governance structures for seed banks.
- Promoting of seed sovereignty where the community has control over seeds, seed types, diversity, how seeds are managed and their integration into farming systems.

Awareness and Narrative Shifts

- Raising awareness on the importance of indigenous seed diversity, its biological and genetic importance with the extension of how seed systems are connected to environmental and human health.
- Having education that involves the need to maintain indigenous seed systems and promote them for food security whilst understanding that they are not dependent on external/synthetic inputs.
- Shifting the narrative from seeds as a commodity to seeds as a ‘commons’.

METHODOLOGIES - IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS

Seed System Assessment

- Conducting local seed market assessments:
  - Seed sources and their locations
  - Gaps in access
  - What indigenous varieties are declining
- Identifying of entry points for community seed banks through the local leadership structure, diversity available within the local areas.
- Mapping the existing farmer groups, community seed banks, and seed stewards.

Establishment of Community Seed Systems

- Setting up seed banks/seed houses.
- Utilising low-cost locally available materials.
- Creating seed inventory and tracking systems.
- Developing local governance structures/rules for seed access, exchange, regeneration, safekeeping.

Strengthening Knowledge Systems

- Facilitating farmer-to-farmer learning sessions.
- Selecting seeds - how to identify healthy seed stocks.
- Storing techniques promoting locally known/available techniques.
- Regeneration cycles to ensure continuity of seed production and availability.
- Encouraging involvement of the entire community including participatory methods: important seed varieties/sovereignty/diversity/seed groupings.

Building networks and scaling locally

- Connecting seed banks across the communities.
- Facilitating cross regional seed exchanges.
- Supporting farmers organisations to connect with seed banks and collaborate.
- Promoting and engaging local leaders as seed system champions.
- Connecting locally driven seed systems to being cost effect and climate resilient.

Developing local seed economies

- Integrating and supporting for community seed enterprises.
- Promoting: seed sales, production, bio-safety handling/methodologies, diversity within the seed system, sovereignty.
- Encouraging diversified income streams linked to the community seed banks/seed systems.

Multi-stakeholder engagement

- Collaborating with government bodies, extension services, NGOs, research Institutions, and agroecology networks.
- Integrating local scientific organisations (CSOs) to connect research and implementation science - can they verify and support community-led seed system approaches through understanding what the weaknesses and strengths are.

Governance and Management Systems

- Establishing clear governance structures.
- Training of local leaders and groups in seed bank management, effective distribution systems, and succession.
- Ensuring transparency and co-management through the decision-making process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognise and protect farmer-led seed systems

- Legitimising informal seed systems without over-formalising them.
- Protecting of indigenous seed sovereignty and community rights.

Align policy with Adaptation, Food System, Agroecology and Biodiversity Goals

- Integrating systems into local, national, regional and global goals/frameworks:
  - National agroecological strategies
  - Climate Adaptation Frameworks - NDC's
  - National Biodiversity and Action Plans

Reform seed policies with sensitivity

- Addressing barriers that have become restrictive:
  - Restrictive seed certification systems
  - Hybrid/monoculture seeds
- Avoiding policies that reduce diversity, question indigenous seed diversity, increase farmer dependency and limit access to indigenous seeds.
- Supporting and/or integrating seed policies without undermining the diversity or autonomy for local seed systems.
- Working with relevant local authority but ensure there is autonomy and freedom to decide participation process.

Strengthen decentralised governance

- Empowering local leadership and community structures.
- Supporting bottom-up decision making systems to encourage and strengthen grassroot level approaches.

- Creating networks along the seed system space as a way to encourage seed system champions/local leaders/successful seed banks.

Investment into long term sustainable project that promote a system wide approach

- Encouraging shifting towards longer term project funding cycles that are continuous, adaptive, share knowledge and align with natural cycles and local regenerative processes.

Promote seed diversity as a climate adaptation and health strategy

- Positioning indigenous seeds as climate resilient, nutrient dense, climate adaptive and risk reducing.
- Affordable and accessible seed that require no synthetic inputs.

Support awareness and building the seed sovereignty movement

- Strengthening the narrative of seed sovereignty, seeds as a commons.
- Building and supporting a collective voice across communities and networks.

Enable sustainable financing

- Supporting community level seed enterprises - funding opportunities that can be linked to the development of community seed banks, sovereignty, food systems.
- Encouraging public private partnerships that protect the seeds rights and the community's right to locally led seed systems.
- Ensuring funding mechanisms do not compromise autonomy or sovereignty.

III. RESEARCH

Participants emphasized that **research** should move beyond conventional top-down breeding models, should not replace **farmer knowledge systems** and instead play a stronger role in strengthening **farmer-managed seed systems, biodiversity conservation, and enabling environments for agroecological transitions.**

RESEARCH BEST- PRACTICES

Participatory on-farm research

- Research processes should begin by identifying farmers' needs and challenges through on-farm trials and cultivar evaluation conducted directly in farmers' territories.
- Research should promote co-learning and co-creation, grounded in farmers' realities and designed as collaborative processes.

Participatory plant breeding

- Collaboration between researchers and farmers was identified as a key practice to develop locally adapted varieties and strengthen farmer autonomy in seed selection.

Selection in agroecological systems

- Seed selection processes should take place within organic and agroecological farming systems to ensure varieties are adapted to these production conditions.

Conservation of local genetic diversity

- This includes the systematic collection of landraces, stronger linkages with community seed banks, and governance models for seed multiplication and renewal.

Farmer knowledge integration

- Research should build on farmers' and indigenous knowledge systems and provide scientific validation and greater recognition to local agricultural practices.

Farmer-to-farmer learning mechanisms

- Seed fairs, farmer exchanges, and farmer field schools were identified as effective spaces for exchanging seeds, knowledge, and practical experience.

Training and technical support

- Training in seed multiplication, seed health and landrace maintenance.

Use of genetic resources

- Participants noted the need to improve farmers' access to national gene banks and increase farmer-level utilization of genetic materials.
- Genetic analysis was also mentioned as a tool to better understand relationships between landraces.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH THAT CAN BETTER SUPPORT FARMER-MANAGED SEED SYSTEMS

Strengthening markets for diverse seeds and products

- Research can help build value chains and connect farmers with markets, food businesses and consumers interested in agroecology.

Changing perceptions around seed quality

- Research can help address the perception that commercial seeds from large companies are inherently superior by demonstrating the benefits of seed diversity and locally adapted varieties.

Consumer awareness

- There's the need to strengthen awareness around seed origins, production practices, food safety, organic production and traceability.

Documenting traditional practices

- Research can help document cultural practices that have historically protected farmer varieties and contributed to long-term seed conservation.

Supporting local adaptation

- Participants highlighted the potential for research to develop composite crosses as starting material for participatory plant breeding in different regions.

Strengthening farmer autonomy

- Research should ultimately contribute to increasing farmers' capacity to manage, improve, conserve, and reproduce their own seeds.

Supporting policy advocacy

- Research can generate evidence to strengthen farmer-managed seed systems and expose structural barriers such as restrictive seed laws, intellectual property regimes and UPOV-aligned legislation.

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