

Contribution of the seed sector to the Food Systems summit

The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) aims to launch bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food systems. Food systems have the power to bring us together in regard to our diversity as young people, indigenous people, families, communities, non-governmental actors, private sector and nations. 718 million people living in extreme poverty starkly illustrates that our food systems need to accelerate the transformation to healthier, more sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems¹. Environmental degradation, food waste and malnutrition further demonstrate the need for a transformative agenda. In addition, climate change emphasizes the urgency of such transformation.

A transformative agenda for sustainable and equitable food systems needs to go hand in hand with equitable and sustainable seed systems, because seeds and food are intrinsically linked. In a continuous cycle, we grow our food from seeds, and we get our seeds from our food.

Initiated by the Netherlands, The International Seed Federation and Plantum, we are a group of individuals and organizations who have actively consulted with a diversity of stakeholders on a world- wide basis in preparation for the food systems summit. We come from public institutions and private sector, farmers, and civil society organizations. We bring a diversity of perspectives and expertise and we are united in our belief that seeds are an important part of the solution towards transforming food systems. In this paper we present a common proposal for joint solutions and actions to draw in more institutions and countries.

Constant innovation and access to a diversity of good quality seeds, of the right species and varieties, are a prerequisite for all food production, and therefore, essential for nutrition and food security. Combined with more sustainable agricultural practices, a diversity of good quality seeds contributes to increased and more stable yields as well as better-quality products. Moreover, the diversity of good quality seeds is one of the key pillars in making agriculture more sustainable and in mitigating and adapting to climate change, e.g. tolerance to extreme temperatures and saline soils. In addition, resistance to pests, diseases and drought can increase sustainability with a reduced footprint as an additional step towards the preservation of biodiversity. Access to the right species and varieties is crucial to fulfil local dietary diversity and culinary preferences. And finally, a secured availability of healthy quality seeds is essential for all farmers, irrespective of their farming system.

Plant genetic resources are the basis for resilience and sustainability of our seed systems; while a vibrant and inclusive seed sector contributes to innovation, improved livelihoods, and economic development. The seed value chains, comprising of public and private actors, farmers, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), need to work together towards solutions to ensure accessibility and availability of quality seeds to contribute to the achievements of the SDGs. When building a sustainable and equitable seed system, it is critical to offer a diverse set of quality seeds to farming communities. Various technical, institutional, and socio-economic challenges must be overcome to do so. Joint solutions need to be identified depending on the type of farmer,

¹ Poverty and shared prosperity 2020. Reversals of fortune. Report of The World Bank Group 2020. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34496/9781464816024.pdf>

their physical environment, economic status, household needs and market opportunities. There is no one size that fits all.

Indeed, this means that a sustainable and equitable seed system must compose a diversity of solutions (or layers), to ensure the contribution of seed to help achieve the SDGs. This requires multiple stakeholders to work together in a seed sector, recognising each other's strengths and challenges. It is therefore important that we respectfully and creatively remind all contributors of their shared values and goals, and the need to work together on the same side of the hedgerow.

Therefore, we believe that it is necessary and urgent to work collaboratively on:

1. **Networks and new initiatives.** Establish or enhance seed value chains where various initiatives and stakeholders can connect, share, and grow together. Build bridges between the diversity of stakeholders and encourage them to jointly commit to sustainable development.
2. **Knowledge sharing.** Strengthen the capacity of relevant stakeholders in the private and public sector to support the development of the seed value chain and associated decision support tools. Scale the transfer of technology and expertise in partner countries, supported through formal education, E-blended learning platforms and farmer field schools.
3. **Capacity development.**
 - a. Strengthen the capacity and understanding of the importance of seed choice and diverse forms of cultivation and agronomic practices, including participatory variety selection and breeding.
 - b. Provide training and information on seed management, including the optimal use of high-quality seeds, to enable farmers to increase productivity while promoting seed systems adapted for local context and opportunities.
 - c. Support farmers to anticipate and plan actions for disaster and risk management in the context of climate change.
4. **Enabling environment.** Support the development of an inclusive (diversity of varieties, including farmers varieties) and enabling environment, that includes seed legislation, variety release, plant variety protection, phytosanitary regulations, seed import, agricultural finance, and agricultural advisory and extension services. Supporting the participation of farmers in decision making.
5. **Development of a framework for constructive and inclusive discussions, among multiple stakeholders** to progress towards an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable seed systems that support choice for farmers to meet their diverse needs and preferences.

In the global south, there are many examples that demonstrate that smallholder farmers have a role in conserving and improving seeds through engaging in Participatory Varietal Selection (PVS), Enhancement (PVE) and Breeding (PPB).

The overarching aim is to create an inclusive framework to contribute to food and nutrition security and in order to improve livelihoods and the environment. Each solution on its own cannot solve all challenges, so trade-offs must be made. Understanding these trade-offs is important. An inclusive framework will be essential to build and enhance sustainable seed and food systems, ensuring that resources, including (agronomic input products, water, and

energy) are used wisely taking into consideration socioeconomic and environmental aspects of food and nutrition security.

The above discussions and recommendations are a first step towards reaching out to a wide range of individuals, institutions, and countries. We wish to form an international and multi-stakeholder coalition to move forward together and work on complementary approaches for the transformation of an equitable and sustainable seed system to contribute to the transformation of the food systems. As leaders in nutrition and food security, we want to promote debate and civic engagement. It is our responsibility to align and mobilize a diverse group of people to accomplish shared goals and provide quality seeds to all farmers, specifically those in mid and low-income economies. Let's look towards joint and diverse solutions, leveraging our diversity whilst respecting our differences. Let's bring people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities together in one seed systems partnership, reminding them of their common identity and beliefs, and the fact that despite their differences they are, together, part of something special.