

SeedNL Annual Event

Conference communiqué 2022

Introduction

SeedNL is a Dutch public-private partnership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, seed association Plantum and the Dutch Potato Organisation to provide farmers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) with access to quality seed. In this way, it aims to raise productivity and household incomes contributing to the realization of SDG 2: zero hunger. The theme of the first SeedNL Annual Event was *'Public-Private Partnerships for Change.'* The theme resonates the Dutch Foreign trade and development cooperation policy, which stresses the importance of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), both as an instrument to “solve global challenges together” and to make Dutch public and private sector investments more sustainable.



Public-Private Partnerships for Change

PPPs can be conceptualized at different levels; at the global level, multilateral organizations, governments, NGO's and the private sector may work together to build alliances; at national level, seed sector platforms may be organized to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders and at project level, public sector breeders may work with private seed companies and NGOs, to ensure quality seed of the best adapted varieties are accessible to farmers. PPPs can also be categorized according to different themes or 'focus areas.' SeedNL has five focus areas: research and development (R&D), project design, project implementation, enabling environments and global partnerships.

On the following pages, key takeaways and lessons learned from each break-out session are summarised. These findings can become the basis of new activities for SeedNL. Some include a direct call to action: development of farmer breeding schools, expansion of seed platforms including the international projects rather than only the Dutch, extending timelines for potato projects considering the slow multiplication process, and strengthening national seed trade associations to improve private sector representation and business climates. Only a few examples of a very fruitful day of dialogue and discussion.

Research and development

Realizing inclusive R&D: the role of smallholder farmers in plant breeding

Hosted by Oxfam Novib and Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

KEY QUESTION

What are the pros and cons of involving (smallholder) farmers more directly in plant breeding?

KEY TAKEAWAY

To tackle food insecurity effectively, halt (agro)biodiversity loss, and increase communities' climate resilience, all stakeholders need to be involved, with farmers being recognized as key players in improving, developing and safeguarding plant genetic resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

- As 80% of seeds are traded and sold through 'informal' farmer seed systems in LMICs, all participants agreed on the need and necessity to broaden the scope of policies to involve smallholder farmers more closely in plant breeding.
- Working more closely together with farmers in developing new plant varieties is not of equal interest to all private sector actors, as most participatory plant breeding focuses on (improving) field crops whereas (Dutch) seed companies often focus on specific vegetable varieties.
- Mainstreaming participatory plant breeding approaches requires institutionalization of the approach within relevant government agencies. When farmer seeds are formally approved and become available, farmers are expected to easily adopt them their popularity.
- Country-specific rules and regulations have been hampering private sector access to markets. Intensifying collaboration with communities has only been possible for few breeders.
- Breeders need to be rewarded for their efforts through some form of Intellectual Property Rights. Farmers could benefit from the use, exchange and selling of their own seeds while also benefitting from new improved varieties developed and sold by breeding companies.
- There is potential to expand collaboration between the private sector, public breeders, and other government agencies. The idea to expand farmer field schools into 'breeder field schools' for awareness raising and education purposes, was coined.

Identifying common values of public and private actors to underpin R&D partnerships

Hosted by HZPC and Utrecht University

KEY QUESTION

What are key success factors of a fruitful R&D public-private partnership?

KEY TAKEAWAY

The most important output of a public-private partnership, especially in R&D, is the relationship which the partners have built.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Trust is key and an individual or second agenda is detrimental for the success of the public-private partnership. Trust is often built on personal relationships and informal discussions and requires time and effort. It enables that both parties share more relevant information because they see that they will mutually benefit from this.
- The performance indicators and expected results must be well-defined beforehand and must be agreed upon by all partners.
- In R&D partnerships, the Intellectual Property Rights arrangements must be crystal clear: there should be perfect clarity on freedom to operate and publish results.
- There is always a balance in terms of give and take. Both parties must invest in the partnership in terms of resources and both parties may also gain from the partnerships. These contributions should be visible.
- Strong partnerships may be legacy driven based on the mission to make a change. Partners have a common goal to create impact and build heritage together.



Project design

Defining lessons learned in programmatic seed sector development

Hosted by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and RVO (Dutch Enterprise Agency)

KEY QUESTION

What are critical success factors when jointly developing seed (and horti-) projects?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Public-Private Partnerships do not have to be a single project. In Nigeria, it is a combination of interventions that complement, strengthen, and build on each other. Not all public and private stakeholders are involved in each project, but they are invested in the overarching partnership. This approach requires a certain attitude of partners and a support structure such as a platform or core group to coordinate and facilitate.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Effective project design requires research studying local context and needs. This analysis must move beyond technical content and also map the political economy, who are 'movers and shakers.' A roadmap can then be designed based on a multi-stakeholder process to realize long-term and integrated programming. In the end, one can determine the role of the Netherlands.
- Not everything will succeed: that is okay. Do make sure to conduct an impact assessment and learn. Project designs should leave room for experimentation and adjustments based on new insights or gaps identified along the way. Moreover, lessons learned can be taken in account in other ongoing and future interventions.
- Focus and persevere! Seed or horti-sector development and system change will require focus of attention and resources. Also, it takes a long time to realize impact and commercial success getting companies involved. Embassies should not work on too many trajectories at the same time and should commit for a long period of time. Continuity and a long-term approach are key.
- The keynote of Agnes Kalibata of AGRA triggered a discussion as she stated that Rwanda does not wish to remain a recipient of seed imports forever. In Nigeria, local stakeholders have also questioned the lack of local(ly owned) breeding stations and seed processing facilities. It would be useful to learn how to communicate about this sensitive subject and work towards a shared long-term perspective.
- The Netherlands-Nigeria Seed Partnership only includes Dutch interventions at this point. A next step could be to invite international organisations (WB, GIZ, EU, AFDB, FAO) and works towards a more integrated approach building linkages with water and climate or cross-cutting themes like youth and gender.

Facilitating seed sector transformation through roadmaps

Hosted by WCDI and SWR Ethiopia

KEY QUESTION

How can roadmaps support an integrated and multi-stakeholder approach to seed sector development?

KEY TAKEAWAY

There is no one size fits all for a transformation or national seed road map, as the process and outcome must be tailored to a specific context. Stakeholders in each country will likely envision different development trajectories for the seed sector. Even if similarities exist for end goals, the context within which transformation documents are developed and implemented will differ.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Roadmaps can either result from a long process during which a development programme (Ethiopia) worked in various areas on systemic change in the seed enabling environment, can be part of a landscaping and scoping process designing an investment strategy (Nigeria), or can be a tool embedded in a larger seed project to develop a national strategy (Sahel). In Ethiopia it took more than 8 years to work towards the concept of transformation, in Nigeria stakeholders agreed to work with a road map from the very beginning.
- Seed roadmaps always require clear commitments from the Dutch and country stakeholders. At minimum, the local government must be convinced about the need for transformation of the seed sector and own the process of change that may be guided by a transformation document or a national seed road map. The Dutch government should be able and willing to support future development intervention to implement the roadmap.
- Before transformation, stakeholders must develop a shared perspective on the seed sector. In Ethiopia this required consolidation looking at past achievements and solutions for remaining challenges. In Nigeria and the Sahel countries, it required an intervention approach designing a transformation and guiding document before starting any interventions.
- What is the right moment for the Dutch private sector to get involved in the transformation or road map process? Again, there is no fixed timeline. When Dutch stakeholders are involved, it requires transparency about their role, and it is necessary to legitimize their contribution beyond business interest: what is the aim and how do they contribute to food system outcomes (i.e., food security, nutrition, climate change adaptation, inclusion, and employment), in addition to promoting private sector development?

Project implementation

Developing guidelines for potato seed sector development projects in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

Hosted by NAO and WCDI

KEY QUESTION

What are key success factors for potato (seed) sector development projects?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Public and private sector actors can work together when acknowledging their own strengths, weaknesses, as well as, their differing mandates, and objectives. When PPPs are pursued, joint commitments and trust are crucial factors for success. Open communication and trust will improve the functioning and enhance the impact of a programme.

LESSONS LEARNED

- There is a need for a joint vision of stakeholders and shared understanding of the bigger picture. In that regard, developing a road map including scenarios to reach this vision can help both donors and implementing partners. They can design smaller, targeted projects, which contribute to objectives fitting the broader sector vision.
- An integrated set of activities, for example the combination of capacity building of farmers with interventions focused on the enabling environment, are more likely to achieve systemic change. Addressing bottlenecks is “what moves the needle” for systemic and sustained change, although almost always proving a difficult endeavor.
- Potato sectors do not exist in a vacuum. Context changes over time, and hence, programmes need to be flexible adapting to external circumstances. If project partners do not have flexibility, they are unable to change course taking on new activities, which were not planned at onset, but turn out to be instrumental.
- Experience has shown that development of the potato sector takes more time than, for instance, development of the vegetable seed sector. This is related to the need for local seed production, with a low multiplication rate and high amount of working capital required. Projects tend to end after 3–5 years, which is too short to complete a transformation process. Can this be considered in project design processes?

Supporting development of the local private seed sector

Hosted by AGRA and IFDC

KEY QUESTION

How can we support the private sector to become more engaged and develop better strategies to provide farmers with quality products and services?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Public and non-governmental actors cannot predetermine everything for the private sector as there must be room for strategy development. Private sector actors should be encouraged to run their own business contributing to realization of development goals, though aligned with shared objectives reaching small-holders.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The public and private sector are complementary powers. The public sector should not engage or compete in domains best suited for the private sector and vice versa. Both public and private sector actors have comparative advantages and needs each other.
- Similarly, the local and international private sector complement each other focusing on different market segments and crops. The international private sector has strong technical expertise, and high-end products, and services. The local private sector has strong market intelligence, ability to do last-mile distribution and a higher risk appetite.
- Public sector actors should create a supportive enabling environment and regulatory certainty. Room exists for private sector actors to take on a vital role when public sector actors do not overstep their mandate.
- There should be frequent engagement and exchange. Active and effective national seed trade associations which can identify and articulate issues hampering industry development.



Enabling environment

Implementing Public-Private Partnership projects to strengthen seed regulatory systems

Hosted by Naktuinbouw and SeedNL

KEY QUESTION

What are strengths and weaknesses of a PPP-approach to strengthen enabling environments for smallholders?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Trust must exist among the different project partners and building trust is easier said than done. Moreover, clarity must exist regarding project objectives: all stakeholders engaging in project focused on seed regulatory systems should be on the same page acting without hidden agendas or misunderstandings regarding the envisaged outcome of the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The private sector can be risk-averse when it comes to public-private partnerships, certainly when it comes to seed regulatory systems project components. Subsidies may be helpful to run successful projects. Both the Seed Laws and the Plant Variety Protection Toolbox are funded by public money, but the private sector contributes in-kind. In this way, all partners contribute to the project.
- The primary beneficiaries of seed regulatory project should, in principle, be farmers, and mostly smallholder farmers. The public and private sector can be secondary beneficiaries as, otherwise, they might not engage in the project. Overall, it must be a win-win for all involved.
- Both larger and smaller Public-Private Partnership projects can improve seed regulatory systems. For unknown areas, starting small with flexible instruments like the toolboxes makes most sense as it allows for a quick and more 'experimental' intervention.



Realising a conducive regulatory environment for potato seed sector development

Hosted by KIT and WCDI

KEY QUESTION

What is the most effective approach to address regulatory constraints in the potato (seed) sector?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Most lessons learned about regulatory challenges in the potato sector seem rather basic and obvious. Still, the fact that they are listed means that they remain relevant, and we need to be reminded of these basic and obvious lessons.

LESSONS LEARNED

- One should not push for changes, which the local sector does not want. It is important to first identify shared goals generating local buy-in for interventions. Moreover, a desired change by a single actor should never be the starting point of a project. Finally, it is not desirable to use hardware grants to push regulatory change because this does not mean there is local support.
- The focus should be on regulatory changes based on a broader and shared objective of improved local sector performance. If the local sector works well, demand is created for quality seed and international business interests will also be catered for.
- It is extremely important to build relationships of trust with the local sector: public and private partners.
- Collaboration between and representation of local private sector actors should be strengthened. The local private sector is likely better positioned to promote regulatory change than foreign actors. Well-functioning private sector associations can serve as a platform.
- Investments in capacity building of local decision makers are important to facilitate sound policy making and implementation of policies.

Global partnerships

Developing seed company strategies to target smallholder farmers

Hosted by EASI Seeds and Access to Seeds Index

KEY QUESTION

What are the most effective ways to reach smallholder farmers and what activities can companies organize to improve adoption of quality seed?

KEY TAKEAWAY

There is an opportunity for the private sector to place smallholder farmers at the core of their business model as the market potential is enormous. Demand for high-quality (hybrid) seed is growing among smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, many seed companies are still unsuccessful in reaching smallholder farmers.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Distribution network can be based on local networks and contacts to keep operational costs low while ensuring connectedness with the farmers and supply chain partners. Moreover, it is essential to respect existing, functional distribution networks to successfully reach smallholders and not trigger pushback. Agility and flexibility are important while keeping corporate standards and operational procedures in place.
- Seed company board members should have objectives, targets and incentives to increase smallholder farmers' access to seeds and ensure effective delivery. Targets will result in relevant company strategies and initiatives.
- Working in public-private partnerships and partnering up with other (seed) companies is key. EASI Seed's participation in the Ethiopia Netherlands Seed Partnership offers an example of how public-private partnerships leverage seed distribution and extension uptake. EASI worked with ENSP to roll out their last-mile distribution network to reach farmers through agripreneurs, offer trainings and organize local demonstrations.



Launching the Seeds-for-Food Coalition*

Hosted by Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT)

KEY QUESTION

What can be the added value of the Seeds-for-Food Coalition and what catalytic actions should the Coalition take?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Smallholder farmers use a diversity of seeds from a diversity of sources, depending on the farmer's individual needs and preferences. Smallholder farmers value and combine the use of traditional and commercial varieties. A seed-focused coalition is necessary to foster local and global awareness, to overcome polarization between different groups and to mobilize joint actions to support seed systems.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Initiators were unified based on two principles. First, food systems transformation needs to go hand in hand with equitable and sustainable seed systems. Second, the initiators of the Coalition strongly believe in multiple solutions for enabling farmers with seed choice and access.
- The Coalition can add value by providing a systems perspective, including the formal and farmer seed systems, and further advancing seed choice and access for smallholder farmers. In this way, it will respond to the need of farmers to establish collaborative linkages between farmers, researchers, policy makers, and the seed industry.
- The Coalition should prioritize expansion of membership from the South to realize a joint and Southern-led agenda setting. The focus will be on a limited number of partner countries with varying views of seed sector development.

* The Seeds-for-Food Coalition is a public-private-civic partnership initiated by the Netherlands government, International Seed Federation (ISF), Plantum and UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) Food Champion, Andrew Mushita of CTDT in Zimbabwe.



Poem by Onias Landveld

*This is how you make a sustainable crop.
It starts with a seed,
Painstakingly sourced, researched and bioengineered.
Inspected by expert hands,
sorted with care and stored with hope
and expectations for a new generation.
It thrives when there is vision,
So that out of one's own community comes the creativity to build an industry
To support local farmers and businesses.
It can grow when one recognizes the existing infrastructure.
Has the foresight to see the value of existing practices.
When one looks beyond the obvious constraints of small farmers,
And is willing to invest.
Make strong partnerships, where profit for both sides is a given.
It has a chance to complete its life cycle when everyone has a place in the process
When the PPP is in balance, we strengthen the whole chain.
No one is shut out we all need to integrate.
Our stability is a fragile thing.
Depending on unsustainable systems,
to feed us as humanity is burning the candle on both sides.
Make a difference through global thinking,
Reach out to each other.
We cannot do it alone.
So give farmers the respect and a choice in products.
It is time for a new way.
Because tradition is what it always has been.
The transference of customs from generation to generation.
But that is using instruments from the past.
Some of us will not go back to the old way of farming.
Not after using school to escape, it's back breaking work.
So we need a new way of farming for this generation,
Digital solutions, making agricultural sexy,
And here speed is the key. Because only 8 years... until the deadline for the SDGs.
See time waits for no man.
So perhaps we are better suited if more farmers were female.
Put them in rotation, make them part of our legacy,
And then we will see what success looks like,
With tailor-made solutions, demonstration projects, and a voice in the board rooms.
And then... after all that hard work... you will have a plentiful harvest.*



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Photos from SeedNL Annual event
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