

Concept Note: Global Conference on Green Development of Seed Industries

Proposal

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) would like to organize a global conference on green development of seed industries to provide a neutral forum for its members, partners, industry leaders, opinion leaders and other stakeholders to engage in focused dialogues on how best to make quality seeds of preferred productive, nutritious and resilient crop varieties available to farmers, especially in food insecure parts of the world that constitute the major focus of FAO's interventions.

Rationale

Globally, about two billion people lacked regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food in 2019 – barely 10 years to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030. This situation underscored a worsening trend of food insecurity and malnutrition which is mostly manifested in the Least Developed Countries and in the Small Island Developing States. It is likely that the world is not on track to achieve the SDGs - and in particular SDG 2 - in many countries. In addition, the 50 percent increase in food production needed to feed an ever-growing global population by 2050 may now be an underestimation, as the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly exacerbated food insecurity and malnutrition. FAO seeks to reverse these trends through its new Vision and next Strategic Framework¹ which, *inter alia*, will guide the Organization's work to leverage green innovation for the aspiration of 'better production'² needed to attain sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems globally.

Over 80 percent of our food is plant-based and, without good seeds, there can be no good crops. It is imperative, therefore, that the low adoption rates of improved crop varieties and the limited use of their quality seeds and planting materials in many parts of the world must be enhanced significantly. In particular, the current cultivars will have to be replaced by more intra- and inter-specific diverse ones which are productive, nutritious, stress tolerant and input use-efficient which, complemented by the requisite agronomics, will produce higher yields with fewer external inputs and a reduced environmental footprint.

While the pressures on the global food system are so enormous that they could derail the achievement of SDG 2, there are also significant advances in the science and technology of plant breeding and seed delivery systems that could mitigate them – yet are not used in the food insecure countries that are the main focus of FAO's work. Recognizing the pivotal role of the seed industry in the envisaged 'better production' aspiration of FAO's new Strategic Framework, the Plant Production and Protection Division (NSP) proposes an FAO-led "Global Conference on Green Development of Seed Industries", to be held at FAO headquarters on 4-5 November 2021. FAO, with an unassailable reputation as the global leader in evidence-based quest to abolish food insecurity and malnutrition, has an unequalled ability to convene the widest spectrum of stakeholders around common themes related to food insecurity and malnutrition. The Conference is a means for FAO to provide a neutral forum for its members, partners, industry leaders, opinion leaders and other stakeholders to engage in focused dialogues on how best to make quality seeds

¹ Strategic Framework 2022-31. 130th Session of the FAO Programme Committee, 22-26 March 2021. <http://www.fao.org/3/ne577en/ne577en.pdf>

² Medium Term Plan 2022-25 and Programme of Work and Budget 2022-23. 130th Session of the FAO Programme Committee, 22-26 March 2021. <http://www.fao.org/3/ne576en/ne576en.pdf>

of preferred productive, nutritious and resilient crop varieties available to farmers, especially in food insecure parts of the world that constitute the major focus of FAO's interventions.

Objectives

The objectives of the Conference are to:

- Increase awareness of the contributions of the seed industry to green innovation of plant production;
- Promote cooperation between sectors, especially for public-private partnerships;
- Foster priority setting and the targeted mobilization and pooling of scientific, technical and financial resources for strengthened seed systems; and
- Debate evidence and share updated knowledge about green development of the seed industry.

Expected Outputs

- A Communiqué aiming to increase awareness of the important contributions of the seed industry to green innovation of plant production;
- Identification of priority intervention areas where key stakeholders, including FAO, can support countries to strengthen their seed systems;
- Identification of potential actions and strategies that will best enable countries to assist their farmers, especially in food insecure regions, to increase their access to quality seeds of preferred productive, nutritious and resilient crop varieties;
- Increased recognition of FAO as a trusted convener of evidence-based discourse on the green development of seed industries;
- Proceedings of the Conference, including a compilation of key presentations, other information materials and a synthesis of the state of innovations that enable the green development of the seed industry.

Priority actions

In the lead-up to the Conference:

- Definition of the governance structures for the Conference, envisaged to consist of a Steering Committee, Scientific Advisory Panel and FAO Secretariat;
- Definition of an innovative and inspiring programme of keynote speakers, presenters, panellists and chairs covering the main conference topics;
- Develop a good communication and outreach strategy for the Conference, including development of the Conference website;
- Manage all of the necessary logistical issues, including participation and the envisaged hosting of the Conference in a hybrid virtual/physical format.

Following the Conference:

- Further in-depth engagement by FAO in the regions, sub-regions and countries regarding green development of the seed industries and the Conference's outcomes;
- Further engagement by FAO in key emerging thematic areas identified during the Conference;
- Presentation of the Conference's outcomes through an Information document to the 28th Session of the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG), which will take place in Rome in 2022 (dates to be decided), and to other relevant fora.

Programme layout

It is currently envisaged that the two-day Conference will take place as a hybrid virtual/physical meeting at FAO headquarters in Rome, consisting of plenary sessions with keynote speakers, a series of parallel sessions (with presentations and abundant time for discussions) and a high-level ministerial segment. Conference topics will encompass emerging technologies, including new plant breeding techniques; crop varietal development and adoption; conservation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; and seed production, quality assurance, seed trade and enabling laws and policies³.

³This concept note was prepared on 26 March 2021