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Governance Challenges in the Liberalisation of the Commercial Maize Seed System in Africa: A Case Study of Ghana

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Abstract

The liberalisation of African commercial seed systems has largely been seen as an essential means of improving agricultural productivity. Nonetheless, upstream activities such as varietal development and source seed production principally remain the domain of public sector agencies with wide reaching implications for varietal adoption and seed quality. The paper analyses the governance challenges in the transition towards a more effective privatized maize seed system using Ghana as a case study. Ghana recently passed a new seed law that aims to give the private sector greater opportunities in the seed value chain. Similar to most African countries, maize is the predominant crop in Ghana's commercial seed system in terms of volume of seed production. However, there has been a chronic lack of varietal diversity as an open pollinated variety released in 1992 called Obatanpa, continues to overwhelmingly dominate commercial seed production. The paper uses a participatory mapping technique known as Process Net-Map and in-depth interviews with different stakeholders to investigate the institutional bottlenecks that result in the observed lack of varietal diversity. The empirical evidence reveals the problem of limited involvement of poor farmers by the public research institutes in setting breeding priorities, making varietal development a “hit or miss” exercise. Restricted private sector participation in source seed production has also led to a limited number of varieties made available by the public sector for commercial seed multiplication. Furthermore, mandatory seed certification by an under-resourced public regulatory body has proved ineffective in ensuring high seed quality. Overdependence on a weak public extension system to promote improved varieties has also contributed to the enduring problem of low adoption rates. The study concludes that commercial seed sector development is dependent on increased private sector involvement at all stages of seed production, with the public sector concentrating more on an oversight role.

Keywords: Agricultural innovation system, Ghana, governance challenges, maize seed system, seed production, varietal development