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Actor Configuration, Constraints and Opportunities in the Forage Seed Value Chain in Kenya and Uganda

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Abstract

Dairy production in East Africa is crucial for rural development, poverty reduction, food and nutrition security. Dairying has increased recently due to the high demand for milk and value-added milk products by a growing population and an expanding urban middle class. The sector contributes to more than 9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in Kenya and Uganda. However, sub-optimal feeding forms a major constraint for further growth and development of the dairy sector. As feeding represents 65% of production costs, improved forage productivity will greatly increase milk production efficiency and thus reduce the production costs and price of milk. Currently, farmers mainly rely on grazing poor pastures, feeding crop residues and collected feeds. As a result of a poorly functioning forage seed value chain, promising and demanded species and varieties which provide for high quality forage for Kenya and Uganda, remain under-utilised. To promote forage production, a study was conducted to assess constraints and opportunities of forage seed production in Kenya and Uganda. The study used desk reviews and key informant interviews with sellers of forage planting materials and seed companies with a samples of 15 seed companies/entities to assess existing production and marketing business models for different forage species considering the biophysical and socio-economic contexts in Kenya and Uganda.

Preliminary findings from the key informant interviews indicates that more than 50% of seed transfer/sale to farmers is conducted through the informal sector. The most commonly traded propagation materials are grasses and leguminous forages. The seed quality certification standards are limited more to large-sized companies and thus, small-mediums sized companies often trade in uncertified seeds/planting materials. The study concludes that in order to create demand for improved forages, there is need to raise awareness and improve knowledge through innovative promotion pathways for the forages and extension among farmers. There is need to develop the nascent informal seed sector by supporting and developing quality declared seed standards. This will increase seed availability and reduce cost of seed for smallholder farmers. There is need to harmonise seed policies in Kenya and Uganda that allows smooth importation of forages seed.

Keywords: Business models, forage quality, forages, livestock productivity, seeds systems