



The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Harmonized Seed Regulatory System (HSRS)

Enhancing availability of high quality and certified seed varieties to farmers in the region

Introduction

Malawi is one of the 16 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States. Due to the diversity of national seed regulatory systems amongst Member States, farmers continue to be seed insecure; seed markets are segregated, small, and difficult to

The SADC region harmonized its seed regulatory systems to remove technical or non-tariff barriers to facilitate seed movement in the region and ensure both agricultural growth and regional seed security

access. Variations in national standards for seed certification and quality control, and quarantine and phytosanitary measures for seed, complicate the trading of seed between countries and make it difficult for the efficient movement of seed in the region. As a result, new and existing seed entrepreneurs are discouraged from investing in the market. Furthermore, limited availability of seed varieties, as a result of lengthy variety testing and release procedures in most Member States, hinder growth in seed business competition and farmers' choices to improved seed varieties.

In early 2000, the Permanent Secretaries for Agriculture from the SADC Member States called for harmonization of seed regulatory system as a precursor for food security and poverty alleviation in the region. The primary objective of the HSRS is to integrate the smaller and isolated national seed markets into one larger SADC seed market, resulting into the

promotion of entry of new improved varieties in the region as well as ease the movement of quality seeds from countries with surplus to countries in deficit. This is expected to create an attractive seed market for both national and regional seed suppliers.

The harmonized seed regulatory system focuses on three critical areas

1. Seed variety testing, registration and release
2. Seed certification and quality assurance
3. Quarantine and phytosanitary measures for Seeds

1. Seed testing, registration and release

For a seed variety to be released, it needs to be tested for at least three seasons in different agro-ecological zones in most SADC Member States, including Malawi. For the same variety to be released in another Member State, it has to be re-tested for about the same period, hence lengthening the seed variety release process and availability of high quality seed to farmers. The harmonized variety testing and release system therefore ensures that the lengthy variety testing and release procedures are reduced, as it allows for seed varieties tested and released in at least two SADC Member States to be commercialized in all countries in the region, as



long as they have the recommended agro ecological zones. The seed variety has to be registered in the SADC Seed Variety Catalogue to be marketed in the region.

2. Seed certification and quality assurance (SCQA)

Due to diversity of SCQA standards in SADC, it is difficult to move seed across the region and later only to the intended beneficiaries. beneficially. Minimum field seed certification standards are different and the seed consignments need to be re-tested to ensure that they meet the minimum seed quality requirements of the importing Member State. With harmonized SCQA standards, seed consignments don't need re-testing, unless seed quality is compromised in transit. The seed is distributed to intended beneficiaries based on the accompanying SCQA certificates, thereby ensuring timely provision of seed for planting with the first rains.

Table 1. Example of SCQA standards for Malawi compared to SADC for selected crops

Species	Malawi Seed Standards				SADC Seed Standards			
	Max. % off-types/ 1,000 Plants in field		Min. Germination %		Max. % off-types/ 1,000 Plants in field		Min. Germination %	
	B	C	B	C	B	C	B	C
Maize (H)	0.1	0.1*	70	90	0.1	0.2	90	90
Maize (OPV)	0.1	0.5	90	90	0.5	1.0	80	90
Soybeans	0.1	0.2	75	75	0.2	0.5	70	70
G/nuts	0.1	0.2	75	75	0.2	0.2	75	75
Phaseolus beans	0.1	0.2	75	75	0.1	0.2	70	75

B – Basic seed; C – Certified Seed

*Highlighted figures are different between SADC and Malawi. Malawi will align to SADC standards

3. Quarantine and phytosanitary measures for seed (QPMS)

Seed consignments moving across the SADC region are re-tested at the port of entry for pests of economic importance to ensure that new pests are not introduced into the



importing country. This process delays seed movement and makes it costly. The SADC QPMS, therefore, is intended to reduce seed-related costs and promote faster and safer seed movement by harmonizing standards and pest lists for seed moving within and outside the region, taking into consideration international agreements. The harmonized pest list only contains seed borne pests of economic importance, not common in the region. Use of the common pest list will reduce the time it will take for a seed lot to reach a Member State, as re-testing will not be necessary, unless there is potential for new pest introduction. Clearance of seed lots at entry points is expected to be faster, as fewer pests will be tested.

Why the HSRS is important to Malawi

With the HSRS, seed production and export quantities are expected to increase significantly, contributing to foreign exchange earnings

Malawi has a viable seed system for major crops and has the conducive environment to produce surplus seed for the export market to get the much needed foreign currency. For instance, in 2016/2017, Malawi produced over 23,000 Metric tons of seed, out of

which 39% was exported to the region, contributing over 20 million dollars in foreign currency. With the HSRS, seed production and export quantities are expected to increase significantly, contributing to foreign exchange earnings. On the other hand, the country will benefit from seed varieties of some high value crops such as sesame and vegetable crops

released in the region, which do not have well established crop improvement and seed systems for improved livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Other benefits of HSRS to Malawi

1. Increased investments in the seed sector as more superior seed varieties and markets become available.
2. Increased seed production and accessibility to a wider portfolio of seed varieties
3. Increased farmers' accessibility to high quality seed of various seed varieties as a result of increased competition in the seed sector.
4. Increased employment opportunities as a result of increased seed production.
5. Seed exports and imports will be relatively cheaper as seed re-testing requirements are reduced.

What Should Malawi do to Benefit from HSRS?

1. The Seed Policy, Plant Breeder's Rights, Seed Act and Seed Regulations, including





- pest lists, should be aligned to the HSRS and produce seed according to regionally set standards;
2. There is a need to develop human as well as infrastructural capacity by all stakeholders to capably implement the system;
 3. Seed variety holders or their agents are encouraged to register varieties in the SADC Regional Seed Variety Catalogue and should pay registration and annual maintenance fees for the variety to be traded under the system;
 4. All players in the seed industry, including the Seed Trade Association of Malawi (STAM) and farmers, need to be conversant with the system for smooth implementation. Therefore, awareness creation of the HSRS is critical.

Progress Malawi has made on HSRS

1. The Technical Agreement of the SADC HSRS was signed;
2. The new National Seed Policy, aligned to the HSRS, was developed and approved;
3. The Seed Bill, aligned to the HSRS, has been drafted. The Bill awaits review by senior management and stakeholders in the seed industry through a national validation workshop before submission to the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC);
4. Capacity building of all government staff responsible for implementing the system has commenced.
5. Awareness creation to STAM members and other stakeholders has been initiated.

For more information on the SADC Harmonized Seed Regulatory System, visit the website of the SADC Seed Centre

<http://sadcseedcentre.com/>

