

FMSS are commons, not markets

This factsheet is the third of five highlighting key advocacy messages addressing gaps in the African Union's draft Farmer Managed Seed Systems Policy 2025. For full context, read it alongside the complete document available [here](#).

Farmer Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) are community-based seed systems led by smallholder farmers, especially women. They provide more than 80% of Africa's seed and are central to seed and food sovereignty. FMSS are:

- Rooted in traditional knowledge and cultural practices.
- Biodiverse, resilient and cost-effective.
- Adapted to local agroecological conditions.
- Vital for climate adaptation, food security and ecosystem restoration.

Core message

The AU FMSS policy must include safeguards to prevent the corporate capture of FMSS, ensuring they remain in the hands of farmers and communities.

Without explicit protections, commercial interests may dominate seed systems through intellectual property laws, restrictive standards and top-down interventions, sidelining farmer innovation and control. The policy must:

- Explicitly prohibit the privatisation of FMSS seed varieties and knowledge.
- Strengthen legal protections for collective rights and customary seed practices.
- Reject exclusive reliance on IP regimes that benefit multinational seed companies.

Call to action

- Include clear anti-capture language in the policy text.
- Ensure that any partnerships respect farmers' autonomy and collective rights.
- Recognise seed as a commons—not as a commodity.

Link to key frameworks

- **UNDROP Articles 19 & 20** – Farmers' rights to seed and biodiversity.
- **Africa's Model Law** – Collective rights and protections against biopiracy.
- **CBD & Post-2020 GBF** – Equitable benefit-sharing and protection of traditional knowledge.
- **Agenda 2063** – Food sovereignty and inclusive innovation.

Common objections & responses

- **Private sector brings innovation:** But FMSS are themselves innovative and resilient.
- **Intellectual property rights are needed to incentivise R&D:** Farmers already innovate without patents or royalties.
- **Corporate partnerships boost scale:** But they often marginalise smallholders and reduce diversity.

Case studies

Case studies of agroecological FMSS prove the viability and scale of this system. Read the full document [here](#) to find a range of case studies providing the evidence for FMSS based on agroecological principles and practices.