



POSITION STATEMENT

Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and allied Civil Society Organisations

Abidjan Workshop on the Seed Sector in West Africa

February 2026

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), together with partner civil society organisations and farmer networks across West and Central Africa, expresses deep concern regarding the ongoing Sub-regional workshop on strategic thinking about the seed sector in West Africa, being held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, organised by CORAF and FAO from 11 to 13 February 2025.

While we recognise the importance of regional dialogue on seed systems, the current process raises serious concerns about inclusivity, policy alignment, and the future direction of seed governance in Africa.

1. Exclusion of farmer organisations and civil society

The participant list of the workshop shows overwhelming representation from CORAF, research institutions, and technical agencies, with little or no participation from farmer organisations and civil society groups that have decades of practical experience supporting farmer-managed seed systems through seed fairs, community seed banks, participatory breeding, and local seed networks across West and Central Africa.

This exclusion undermines the legitimacy and quality of discussions. Any strategic reflection on seed systems must meaningfully include farmers and CSOs who sustain the majority of seed systems in the region.

2. Continued use of the term “informal seeds” contradicts continental policy direction

The workshop concept continues to frame farmer seed systems as “informal systems,” despite the clear policy shift underway at African Union level through CAADP/PDDAA 2026–2035 processes and the ongoing development of an AU Farmer-Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) policy strategy.

Strategic Objective 1 of CAADP explicitly promotes farmer-managed seed systems and climate-resilient indigenous seeds. Continuing to label these systems as “informal” undermines both their legitimacy and current continental policy direction.

Farmer-managed systems are not marginal or temporary arrangements. They are structured, knowledge-rich systems sustaining African agriculture and must be recognised as such.

3. Misframing of quality and certification of farmer varieties

We are equally concerned by continued discussions around ‘simplified certification

systems' for farmer varieties. Farmer seeds are not substandard seeds requiring diluted standards.

The emerging continental consensus is clear: same rights, but different regulations. Farmer-managed seed systems require certification and quality assurance approaches suited to their diversity and social function, not simplified versions of industrial seed certification systems based on UPOV and restrictive intellectual property regimes.

Certification systems must recognise diversity, adaptability, and farmer innovation, not impose industrial uniformity standards.

4. Farmer-managed seeds remain the foundation of African agriculture

Recent AU FMSS scoping studies show that 80–90% of seeds used by farmers in Africa come from farmer-managed systems, despite receiving minimal policy support or regulatory recognition.

Any regional seed strategy that fails to place farmer-managed seed systems at the centre risks undermining food sovereignty, resilience, and biodiversity across the region.

Our call

AFSA and allied organisations call on CORAF, FAO, ECOWAS and regional governments to:

- Ensure full and meaningful participation of farmer organisations and civil society in all future seed policy and strategy processes.
- Align regional seed strategies with AU and CAADP commitments recognising farmer-managed seed systems.
- Replace outdated language that delegitimises farmer seed systems.
- Develop regulatory frameworks that protect seed diversity and farmers' rights while ensuring appropriate quality standards.
- Support policies and investments that strengthen community seed banks, farmer seed networks, and participatory breeding.

Africa's seed future cannot be designed without Africa's farmers.

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