

National Seminar on Regulations and Governance Issues in India's Seed Sector

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Preamble

India has a very mature and vibrant seed sector with a wide network of public and private sector enterprises working closely together to make quality seeds available to farmers at affordable prices, ensuring seed security in the country. Ranked fifth in the global seed trade with a reported turnover of more than USD 6 billion, India is likely to double this figure by 2028 due to a healthy growth rate (CAGR) which is already faster than the global rate. With improved seed replacement rate (SRR) of major food security crops, better variety replacement rate (VRR) in most crops and a declining informal trade of farm saved seed (FSS), the industry is showing a strong upswing in its growth. Much of this progress can be attributed to the continued scientific contributions of both the public and private sector which were assisted by the enabling policies of the government.

The Indian seed sector is governed and regulated by a plethora of laws implemented by multiple agencies. The success of the green revolution led to the introduction of seed laws with the launch of The Seed Act 1966 (and its derivatives like Seed Control Order, 1983, New Policy on Seed Development, 1988, National Seed Policy, 2002, Seed Bill 2004/2014). This seed regime was further strengthened with the enactment of the Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Act (2001) and the Biodiversity Act (2002), and its regulatory teeth were sharpened with the added provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Essential Commodities Act (1955), and the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) Bill 2013.

Today, however, the multitude of rules and regulations have started hampering the growth of the sector in terms of enabling farmers easier and better access to new technologies. Poor coordination between the central and state implementing agencies, continued uncertainty about use of genetically modified (GM) crops, wide varietal mismatch, no clear guidelines on access and benefit sharing, and lack of har-

monization of different legislations at times lead to knee-jerk reactive regulatory changes and short-sighted, unjustified procedural hurdles. The need for a stakeholder-friendly regime to promote efficient growth has thus become apparent. The new seed regulatory regime should be robust, promoting innovations to attract new investments in the sector and having an inbuilt scope for adopting science-led developments for faster growth of new technologies. It is critical to bridge the knowledge gaps and encourage science-based policy making for a dynamic and sustainable seed system.

National Seminar

Recognizing the irrefutable role of the seed industry in a country where agriculture serves as the backbone of the economy, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in partnership with ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (ICAR-NIAP) and Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII) with support from the One CGIAR Initiative on Seed Equal convened a two-day National Seminar from September 26 - 27, 2023 titled 'Regulations and Governance Issues in Indian Seed Sector' in New Delhi. The objective of the seminar was to gather updated information on the status of seed legislations in the country and their effect on the growth of the public and private sector; provide a multi-stakeholder forum for informed discussions on governance and regulatory issues in Indian seed sector and ways to make the sector more vibrant to ensure India's nutritional security and sustainability of its food system. Reinforcing the need for enhanced synergy between public and private sectors, a total of 107 eminent agriculture experts representing diverse stakeholders including researchers & scientists, policy makers, senior seed industry professionals, industry associations, farmers' organizations, etc. came together to deliberate on the issues and make suitable recommendations for developing a conducive environment for the growth of the sector.

Major Recommendations

The two-day deliberations reviewed and analyzed the status of the seed legislations and regulatory scenario. Recognizing that the focus should be on making the best quality seed containing new technologies available to the farmers in the shortest possible time, the following recommendations were put together to enable the sector's growth:

- ▶ Revisit all regulations and align them with the changed scenario with the development of the seed sector. All new laws and guidelines should have a timeline for review and revision, if necessary.
- ▶ Harmonize licensing rules and guidelines between center and states to overcome existing discrepancies and bottlenecks responsible for poor adoption.
- ▶ Develop a system for regular updating of technology information for all regulators, including judges hearing cases related to violation of regulatory process.
- ▶ Harmonize various Indian regulations and align them with international regulations and benchmark.
- ▶ Harmonize the plant quarantine processes with regional and global benchmarks.
- ▶ Align the pest risk assessment (PRA) guidelines with the importing nations' requirements.
- ▶ There is urgent need to step up seed research to help farmers tackle existing and emerging challenges.
- ▶ Develop a national register of varieties and a database for varietal fitment.

- ▶ Implement a robust compensation policy for farmers to deal with poor quality seed supply.
- ▶ Decriminalize the failure of seed quality in the field.
- ▶ Registration of all seed varieties should be made mandatory for improving the quality of seeds.
- ▶ Mainstream the new crop varieties with biofortification and climate resilience, to help improve the seed replacement rate (SRR) and variety replacement rate (VRR), particularly in the resource poor demography.
- ▶ Additional testing of varieties by states of notified varieties should be avoided as it delays the introduction of a new variety.
- ▶ Implement the digital seed traceability system across the nation.
- ▶ Make seed health an essential thrust area in seed quality certification.
- ▶ Follow a market driven value-based price discovery mechanism.
- ▶ Develop a predictable science based and harmonized regulatory framework for development and introduction of genetically modified (GM) and gene edited (GE) crops.
- ▶ Provide accreditation to all research-based seed companies (with DST registration) and leverage their strength to accelerate the development and introduction of new technologies and varieties.
- ▶ Remove regulatory hurdles to improve ease of doing research and accelerate innovations to efficiently partner with the government in achieving the national goals.
- ▶ Treat the seed industry as a partner with the government and ICAR etc. and include private sector representatives in the research planning by ICAR and SAUs to guide on the market dynamics.
- ▶ Make efforts of bridge trust deficit between public and private sector for developing a robust public – private partnership in technology development.
- ▶ Restore the earlier (till 2016) implemented 200% income tax deduction on R&D expenditure by seed companies.
- ▶ Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) and National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) to work with states and industry associations to build capacity for law enforcement.
- ▶ Make available all accessions of the 64 crops listed in Annexure 1 of the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food & Agriculture (ITPGRFA) for exchange and exemption from Biodiversity Act (BDA).
- ▶ Develop clearcut guidelines for payments under Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) mechanism for seed sector. To avoid multiple payments, bring all payments under ITPGRFA under the supervision and control of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.
- ▶ Develop a reform agenda for informal seed sector.

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