

meeting to expand and sustain African agriculture's success stories. AFDB and IFAD, in collaboration with the African Union and FARA, will co-convene a roundtable to reframe the regional R&D agenda as part of a RTDI in a new partnership. The meeting draws on case studies and success stories from development partners and existing RTDI to demonstrate expansion potential.

Outcomes

The virtual summit announced commitments from regional member countries, multi-lateral development banks and development partners to replicate success stories across 17 African countries and in priority commodities, revealing commitments to finance regional research for development connected to scaling up new technologies by RTDI.

A coalition of multilateral development banks and development partners has pledged over US\$17 billion in financing in a bold bid to address rising hunger on the African continent and to improve food security. In addition, 17 African heads of state signed on to the commitment to boost agricultural production by doubling current productivity levels through the scaling up of agro-technologies, investing in access to markets, and promoting agricultural research and development.

For more details of the communique, please visit [this link](#).

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Soybean Innovation Lab Works to Bring New Varieties from Trial to Market

One of the biggest challenges to successful soybean production in Africa is the availability of high-yielding soybean lines. To address this challenge, the Soybean Innovation Lab (SIL) designed the [Pan-African Soybean Variety Trials \(PATs\)](#), which operate in 24 countries across 113 locations, to quickly bring newly introduced, high-yielding varieties to the African soybean market (see map). A network of 59 public and private sector partners now supports these trials.

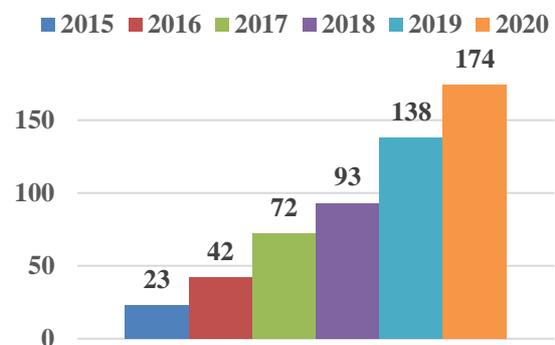
The slow pace of varietal release over the last 15 years limits farmers' abilities to access high-yielding and locally adapted varieties. The PATs, which began in 2016 at four locations within one country, specifically addresses this problem by speeding up the process from trialing through to commercialization by leveraging a seed catalogue of over 170 successful commercial varieties. The ever-growing PAT catalog of available varieties are

sourced from a network of private seed companies and public sector breeding institutions from Africa, Australia, and North and South America looking to serve the fast-growing African soybean complex.

Through the PATs, trial cooperators across 62 companies and organizations can engage in deep learning about soybean varietal performance while also producing the high-quality data they need to fast-track registration, often within 18 months. The PAT Advanced Pipeline is already full, with 60 varieties either registered or near registration across 11 countries.

The PAT Advanced Pipeline uses trial data to evaluate the performance of newly introduced materials not only against each other, but also against the local varieties currently available to farmers.

Key metrics inform the advanced pipeline, such as maturity, grain yield, and protein and oil concentration, to accumulate never-before-available information on varietal performance. These data provide transparency and head-to-head analyses of materials through a formal testing platform, leading to registration and commercialization of new varieties.



Network of pan-African soybean variety trials (top) and number of soybean lines tested (bottom).

As a result of the PATs, seven varieties have already been brought to market in Malawi, Uganda, Mali, and Zambia. Nine more are on the cusp of the registration process. The ever-growing PAT catalog of available varieties are sourced from a network of

private seed companies and public sector breeding institutions from Africa, Australia, and North and South America looking to serve the fast-growing African soybean complex. You can read more about all seven new varieties in the [2021 Activities & Impact Report](#).

Breeders and seed companies know that seed contracts and royalties are central to commercialization. The PATs provide public breeders with a new and critically needed revenue source for their breeding programs. Private breeders see new markets and a low-cost way to enter these new markets. Local seed producers see an opportunity to increase their own profitability while improving farmer productivity. Local farmers learn the value of fresh seed and a steady flow of new varieties to better meet their needs, fight disease and drought, and support increasing profitability from their operations.

For more information about the Pan-African Soybean Variety Trials Pipeline, contact Michelle da Fonseca Santos, Program Manager, soybeaninnovationlab@illinois.edu.

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Tool-box for Root, Tuber and Banana Seed Systems

The CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) launched a toolbox for working with root, tuber, and banana seed systems. The tools in this toolbox help scientists, policy makers and practitioners to study and improve these important, yet challenging seed systems and include methods, models, approaches, and information and communication technologies (ICTs). The toolbox aims to provide users with detailed information on how to use the tools to understand root, tuber, and banana seed systems, so that one can design, conduct, monitor and evaluate seed system projects. For more information visit this [website](#).

Africa's Evolving Vegetable Seed Sector: status, policy options and lessons from Asia

Authored by Schreinemachers and colleagues, a review article in *Food Security* highlighted the status of the vegetable seed sector in Africa and the policy options and lessons that could be learned from Asia's successful seed program.

Fostering better access to more nutritious foods across sub-Saharan Africa will be critical to ending hunger and malnutrition. In Asia, vegetable production and consumption have grown rapidly since the 1990s and the development of a dynamic vegetable seed industry, led by the private sector, played a pivotal role in this process. The availability of locally bred and adapted varieties facilitated the rapid expansion of production and increased the supply of affordable vegetables to consumers. In contrast, the vegetable seed sector in sub-Saharan Africa has been slow to develop and has received little attention in the development agenda.

Drawing from Asia's experience, this paper outlines a four-point strategy to accelerate the vegetable seed sector in sub-Saharan Africa. First, there is a need to strengthen the technical capacity of African seed companies to allow them to develop varieties that are well-adapted to local conditions and consumer preferences. Second, seed regulations, originally designed with food grains in mind, should be reviewed and revised to facilitate domestic vegetable breeding research and seed production. Third, more farmer extension is needed to exploit improved varieties together with good management practices. Fourth, vegetable marketing systems should be strengthened to reduce risks to farmers and traders. Investment in these four areas will help energize private sector investment in the vegetable seed sector. Asian experience suggests that investment in locally adapted vegetable varieties is a critical step in improving productivity, availability and ultimately consumption of nutritious vegetables.

Details of this article are available at this [link](#).

Modernizing the Regional Catalogue of Crop Species and Varieties

Experts from several regional and international organizations met in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 1-5 February 2021, for a technical meeting. Their overarching goal is to modernize West Africa's Regional Catalogue of Plant Species and Varieties' electronic data platform.

Organized by Conseil Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricoles (CORAF), the meeting will enable actors to develop the terms of reference and establish a roadmap for the modernization of the data platform of [West Africa's Regional Catalogue of Plant Species and Varieties](#). They will also define the modalities for extending the list of plant species to other crops of economic and food security importance in the regional catalogue.