

Strengthening Farmer-Managed Seed Systems: ABN Partners Engage with EALA Committee

On October 28, 2024, members of the African Biodiversity Network (ABN), including representatives from SEATINI-Uganda, TABIO, MEAP, AFRICE, NAPE, and BIBA Kenya, convened for a crucial dialogue with the East Africa Legislative Assembly (EALA) Committee on Agriculture, Tourism, and Natural Resources. This engagement focused on the findings of a joint study titled "Building Farmer-Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) and Preserving Indigenous Seeds in East Africa." This collaborative effort aims to enhance agricultural sustainability and food and seed security across the region.

The discussions underscored the critical importance of FMSS in East Africa, where an estimated 60-80% of seeds used by smallholder farmers are sourced from these systems. The study highlights the vital role farmer-managed systems play in conserving indigenous seeds and promoting biodiversity, which are essential for resilient agricultural practices.

“As ABN partners, we recognize that small-scale farmers possess invaluable knowledge about seed systems. They can identify which seeds are best suited to local conditions, thereby safeguarding food security and farmers' livelihoods,” emphasized Mr. Kafeero Herbert, Programs and Communications Manager at SEATINI-Uganda, during the presentation.

During the meeting, various representatives from ABN partner organizations presented case studies and key findings and advocated for policies that recognize and promote FMSS, uphold farmers' rights, and protect the region's rich biodiversity. The discussions were dynamic and focused, reflecting the urgent need for legislative frameworks that empower local farmers and respect their traditional practices.

Engaging with the EALA Committee was a strategic effort to influence the enactment of supportive policies that could significantly enhance the livelihoods of farmers throughout East Africa. By fostering dialogue between grassroots organizations and legislative bodies, ABN partners aimed to create an environment where farmer-managed systems are not only acknowledged but actively supported. The Chairperson of the Committee, Hon. Francoise Uwumukiza, stressed the need to align discussions with Agenda 2030 and the African Agenda 2063 to ensure that rural prosperity and agricultural transformation are achieved for all.

In addition, Ms. Peninnah Mbabazi, Program Officer for Trade Justice at SEATINI Uganda, emphasized that to preserve indigenous seed systems, the EALA Committee should examine the intellectual property policy landscape at both international and regional levels to inform policy development for preserving FMSS. Also Mr. Kureeba David the programme officer with National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) emphasized the need for enactment of pro-local communities' policies that do not compromise their indigenous/ peasantry farming systems as these modern methods come with a lot of challenges such as the excessive use of agrochemicals, which will result into biodiversity loss and the subsequent malfunctioning of environment and associated services.

This collaboration is vital for safeguarding indigenous seeds and empowering farmers, ensuring they have the rights and resources necessary to manage their own seed systems effectively. Integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary agricultural practices can lead to sustainable food production, enhance food and seed security, and contribute to biodiversity preservation. “There is a growing trend of farmer dependence on seed companies. Urgent action is needed for farmers to reclaim ownership and control over their seeds and establish seed banks. Furthermore, research on indigenous seeds must be prioritized to maximize production,” commented Hon. Dr. Gladness Salema, EALA representative from Tanzania, during the engagement.

This meeting represents a significant step toward fostering a more inclusive agricultural policy framework in East Africa. ABN partners remain committed to continuing this dialogue, advocating for farmers' rights, and promoting practices that protect the environment and support local communities. Future efforts may include developing further research and establishing learning centers to strengthen the case for promoting FMSS in the East African region.

Pictorial



This photo shows ABN members during the presentation and on the extreme right handing over copies of the study report to the Chairperson of the EALA committee on Agriculture, Tourism and Natural Resources



ABN partners together with the EALA committee members posing for the group photo after the meeting.



Immediate Left, Mr. Denis Tabaro, Executive Director, AFRICE who also represented the ABN General Coordinator together with other ABN members sharing a light together during the meeting



Cross section view of participants during the meeting with EALA ATNR Committee