

Development of Seed Potato Inspection and Certification Protocol for Rwanda

Background to review of seed regulatory framework in Rwanda

Upon request from the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, MINAGRI, Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (SFSA) provided technical assistance in 2015 to review the 2007 Seed Policy, finalize the review of the seed law and develop regulations to implement the revised law. The main policy action was to increase private sector participation in Rwanda's seed market through developing a conducive regulatory framework, where the private sector is the main player in the seed while the public sector plays a regulatory and supportive role.

In addition, the reviewed seed law and regulations were aligned to regional harmonized seed regulations including COMESA Seed Trade Regulations, ARIPO Plant Variety Protection Protocol, and the EAC seed and plant varieties that was law that was under development, which are key to facilitate seed trade among the member states, to which Rwanda is a member.

Further, the review provided for restructuring of the institutions that regulate the seed industry in order to improve on the effectiveness and efficiency of quality management and implementation of the seed policy and the regulatory framework. The seed policy was approved in 2015, the law governing seed and plant varieties published in 2016, while the regulations were published in 2017 and 2018. This was through the initial support by SFSA and later by IFC of the World Bank group.

In terms of institutional restructuring, the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA) was established to facilitate trade through promoting healthy competition in the economy by enforcing standards and regulations, prohibiting unfair business practices as well as ensuring consumer protection in the scope referred to in the law N° 31/2017 of 25/07/2017 establishing RICA. The authority merged different inspection responsibilities that were previously housed in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MINICOM), Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) and the Rwanda Standards Board (RSB). Before the separation, RAB was involved in variety development, seed production, seed certification, seed importation and distribution, which was a clearly a conflict of interest.

Current situation

The seed system in Rwanda is still not developed and will need support to function efficiently. There were very few qualified seed inspectors, only 8 under the previous seed service in RAB who covered all crops. After the transfer of the inspections service to RICA the number has decreased even further due to some staff members either remaining in RAB or having their designation changed. This lowers the quality and efficiency of inspections and ability to meet the demand of the expanding seed industry. In an effort to address this shortage, the Ministry of Agriculture is training private agronomists to become inspectors. Some of them will be absorbed as government seed inspectors while the rest may be used by cooperatives and private companies as internal inspectors. RAB is also scaling the training of sector agronomists and inspectors for seed quality control.

The second constraint facing the inspection is the lack of detailed inspection protocols and procedures required to carry out inspections for key crops. Given the fact that the laws and regulations were recently enacted, and the fact the service is still young, it is urgent to support the development of these crop specific inspection protocols and standards, support training in inspection and for facilities to efficiently fulfill their mandate. The Rwanda Standards Board is responsible for the coordination of the development and is the custodian of all standards including seed quality standards for crops in Rwanda.

Seed Potato inspection and certification protocols in Rwanda

Seed potato production is complicated due to the physiology and nature of the potato, the low multiplication factor resulting in the need of many generations (7) of multiplications, to get adequate quantities of seed for farmers. This must be done under strict conditions for managing diseases and ensuring genetic purity. This compares unfavorably to other crops like cereals which may need 2 or 3 generations or seasons to have seed in adequate quantities. Special detailed protocols for the potato are therefore required.

In an effort to support the potato certification CIP organized a workshop certification and quality control of potato planting material workshop in October 2019 in Kigali. The meeting brought together officials from the International Potato Center, Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB), Seed Potato Fund (SPF) and One Acre Fund. The main objective was to brainstorm on how the production of seed potato and the ware potato in general could be supported particularly in the development of the protocols, standards and procedures and disease diagnostics.

It was also important to note that there were several new initiatives and investments in the potato seed supply chain in Rwanda, including the AGRA-funded project, work by One Acre Fund and the Delphy-led project on the potato value chain. It was important to review the situation and discuss how to ensure that availability of high and good quality potato seed supply of seed, to be included in the various initiatives working on potato such as the Dutch initiative-led by Delphy, the Seed Potato Fund, Winnaz, AGRA, Hortinvest and Hinga Weze-CNFA, and One Acre Fund.

It was noted that Rwanda is targeting at least 25% of ware potato production land to be planted with certified potato seed every season. To plant this 25% of land it will need 31,250 metric tonnes of seed every season. This requires over 2000 ha for production of certified seeds.

Upon request from the Director General of RICA to CIP for support in in early December 2020 (as attached) another meeting was arranged in Kigali on December 18, 2020, to specifically discuss on:

1. The Role of RICA in the seed potato certification process
2. Presentation and discussion of seed Potato certification issues
3. Proposal for development of seed potato inspection and certification protocol
4. Formation of a task force to develop the protocol
5. Way forward

Due to the upsurge of the Covid-19 situation, the meeting was held virtually but some of the contact activities planned could not be undertaken due to the lockdown imposed at that time. Participants included experts and representatives from One Acre Fund, SNV, the Netherlands Embassy Rwanda, SPF Igikega, Rwanda Standards Board, RICA, Delphy-SDGP, CIP, RAB, Potato stakeholders Platform.

1. As a way forward a task force was formed comprising the following institutions RSB, RICA, RAB, SPF Igikega, Potato Platform, The Dutch Embassy, and CIP
2. A Road map and timeline for this advisory service support was agreed as:
 - First draft shared mid-January 2021

- Revised draft mid-February 2021
- Stakeholder validation end of February 2021
- Piloting of the protocol from March 2021

3. It was agreed that

- RICA would share the draft procedures that they have prepared with CIP. Since the drafts are in Kinyarwanda, RSB was requested to support in the translation, to assist CIP in developing the draft.
- CIP would then share the draft with RICA and RSB by mid-January
- CIP would then incorporate comments by end of January and share the draft with the task force
- Then share the draft with stakeholders mid-February
- Plan for validation workshop end of February
- Pilot the protocols early March

Progress to date

- Due to some challenges RICA was not able to share the draft procedures that they had prepared in Kinyarwanda, CIP as they not able to get them translated. However CIP developed a draft and shared with RICA in early January.
- Due to the lockdown they were not able to meet or review it immediately. However they were able to return the copy with their comments on 12th of February
- CIP reviewed and returned the document to RICA on the 16th February 2021
- RICA has had difficulties since they have only two inspectors who have some knowledge on potato. Unfortunately the one has been unwell and away from work. The remaining one is very busy with inspections and other duties and unable to handle the review.
- Additionally the institution embarked on the development of the standard operating procedures which would assist in the development of the required protocols. This has now been finalized and they have shared the seed potato SOP. Since it contains information that was in their drafts, we have agreed that CIP will incorporate the information into the draft to be shared with the wider stakeholders
- The draft will be re done and the structure reviewed, to be specific to the Rwanda situation. It should be shared by mid May 2021.
- A virtual meeting will be arranged once they have their inputs. They however would have preferred a physical meeting.