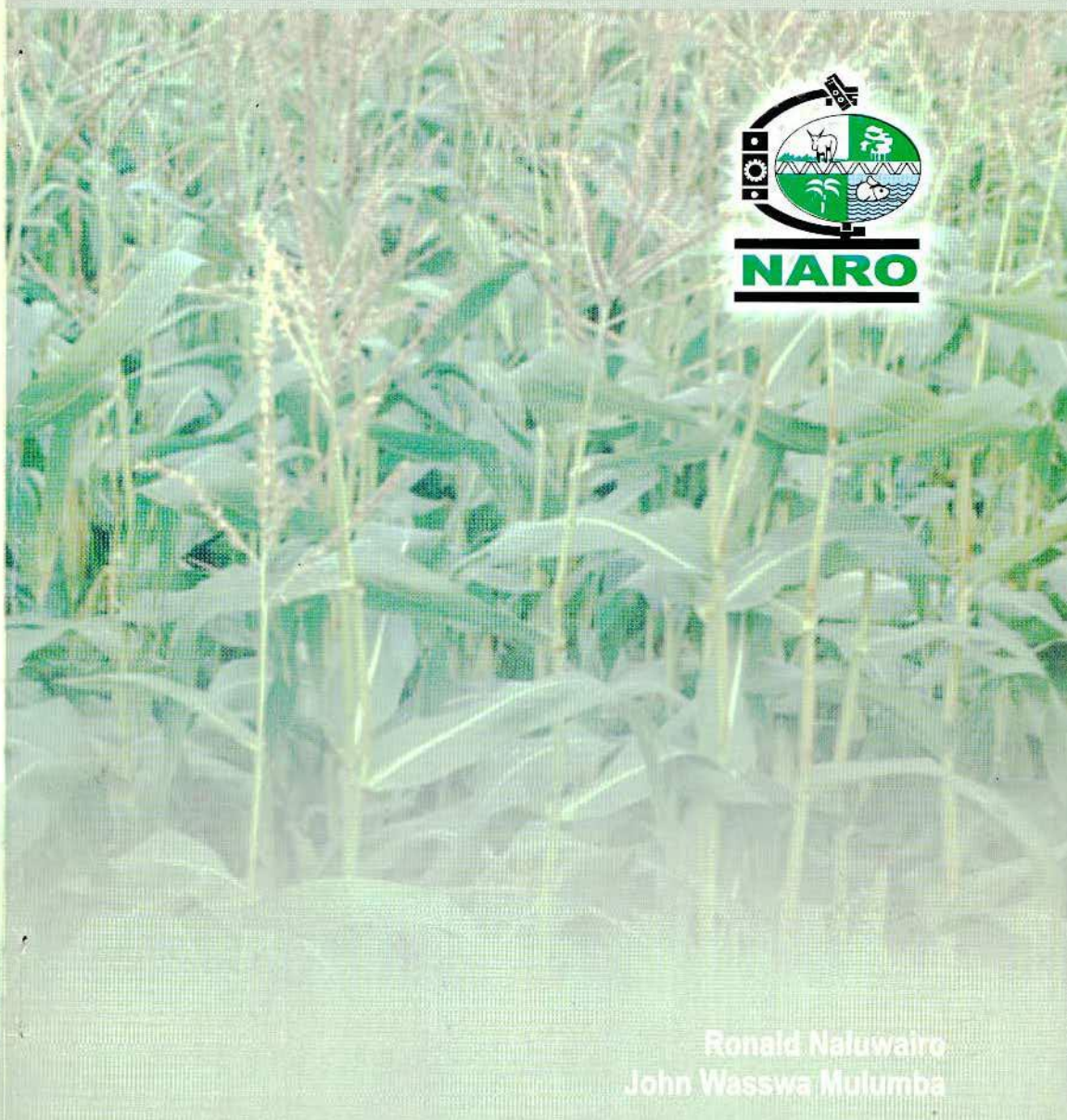
Towards a National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in Uganda

The Need and Justification



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About the cover pictures:

The cover page picture is a local maize field

The inside back cover picture is a group photo of some of the Stakeholders who attended the last National Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop on the draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

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Acknowledgment

The process of developing the National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture started way back in 2004 when the Top Management of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) instructed the National Agriculture Research Organization (NARO) to lead the process.

NARO constituted a Multi-Sectoral National Taskforce to spearhead the process. The Taskforce was composed of representatives from the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST), the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Plant Protection Division of MAAIF, Uganda National Farmers' Federation, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), NARO, the Ministry responsible for Environment and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs.

We are indebted to the members of the National Taskforce especially Hon. Dr. Lastus Serunjogi, Dr. David Hafashimana, Dr. Charles Mugoya, Dr. Robert Karyeija, Mrs. Fiona Bayiga Bakibinga and Mr. Richard Bakojja for the great work they did in spearheading the development of the draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture which is the subject of this policy briefing paper. Special thanks go to Dr. Dennis Kyetere, Director General; NARO for his intellectual and technical guidance to the National Taskforce. Dr. Kyetere also played a central role in kick-starting the Taskforce's work.

In a special way, we want to thank the Genetic Policy Resources Initiative (GRPI) of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) for the enormous support to the policy development process, including providing the funds that have made the production and publication of this brief possible.

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1. Introduction

Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture constitute one of the most important resource for achieving many of Uganda's major development goals including poverty eradication, food security and rural transformation. These resources provide the major raw material for the different agricultural enterprises which are the backbone of Uganda's economy. Over 80% of the rural populace in Uganda depend on these resources for their livelihood including meeting their food, animal feed, heath and cultural needs. Plant genetic resources-based activities also provide the bulk of employment opportunities to rural communities and thus constitute the main source of income for the majority of the people in Uganda. These resources also contribute the greatest portion to Uganda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provide significant educational, environmental and scientific benefits. Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and the associated knowledge about them, provide the essential building blocks to boost productivity whether through modern crop improvement and modern biotechnology or by farmers' traditional methods.

Although Uganda is still acknowledged as being richly endowed with biodiversity (a significant part of which is plant genetic resources for food and agriculture), it is also a fact that these resources are getting eroded and lost at a very alarming rate. This is taking place at a time when Uganda's population growth rate is also rising at an equally alarming rate of 3.2% per annum-one of the highest in the world. This rate is moreover estimated to double in next few years.



The implications of this situation are severe. To feed a population growing at the above rate requires an astonishing increase in food production. Unless clear and coherent interventions are put in place to address and mitigate the

causes of genetic erosion and loss of Uganda's plant genetic resources, Uganda will have less food to feed its growing population each year that passes. There will also be few raw materials for the agro-processing industry, reduced exports and foreign exchange and fewer employment opportunities in the agriculture and industrial sectors. This would lead to Government failure to meet its major development goals including poverty eradication, food security, and transformation of rural households.

It is for this reason among other things that a National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture has been developed as a pro-active step. The focus is to outline a set of coherent and streamlined policy interventions, actions and measures that Government in partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders will undertake both in the short and long-term to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and to maximize their potential in national development while ensuring equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of these resources.

This policy briefing paper has been prepared to provide the primary justification of the need for a specific national policy on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. It is also intended to explain and expound on the meaning of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and provide a snap short of the draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.



2. An Explanatory Note on the Meaning of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture are defined by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture as those plant genetic resources of actual or potential value to food and agriculture. They are the raw materials for continuous scientific improvement of crops and forages. They are the farmers' most essential input into agriculture. They include modern varieties as well as farmers' varieties of crops and their wild relatives, forages and other wild plant species that are used for food or feed.

"Potential value for food" refers to those species whose value as food is not yet fully appreciated. For example the underutilized species like the indigenous fruits and vegetables. "Potential value to agriculture" refers to those species whose role other than for food or feed in the agricultural production system has not been fully scientifically investigated and appreciated. They include those species used in pests, diseases and weed management, soil conservation and fertility replenishment and those species which ensure continuous availability of pollinators which are critical for food production.



By the very definition of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, plant genetic resources for purely medicinal or other value unrelated to food and agriculture are excluded. However, to the extent that those plant genetic resources also have actual or potential value to food and agriculture, they would be covered by the definition.

3. The Need and Justification for a National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The need for a national policy on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture is dictated by four major factors:

3.1 The Need to Ensure Availability of these Resources for the Present and Future Generations

There are many factors leading to genetic erosion and loss of Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. They include both man made and natural factors. These factors include; ecosystem destruction or interruption due to change in land use, natural disasters; climate change; pests and diseases; changes in eating and use habits, inappropriate agricultural practices; and introduction of new high yielding varieties and invasive species.

Increased food production will depend on how we harness the resources that we have. With the current rates of genetic erosion and loss, unless serious well thought out interventions are made, Ugandans will be condemned to serious hunger and the suffering that flows from it, in not so long a time from now.

Major Challenges in the Management and sustainable use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

- Balancing conservation concerns and use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- Equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- Effective involvement of stakeholders in decision making processes regarding the management and use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- Coordination and administration of activities related to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- Protection and Promotion of traditional and indigenous knowledge systems in the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- Valuing Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- Data collection, storage and access
- Capacity to conserve, manage and optimally utilize the resource
- Adequate investment in programmes and activities relating to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Other than the genetic erosion and loss of Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, the country also faces many other challenges in the management and sustainable use of these resources as summarized in the box above. Coupled with the limited information and research on these resources, their present as well as future availability cannot be guaranteed.

The primary justification for the National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture therefore lies in the need to address and mitigate the causes of genetic erosion & loss and deal with the challenges of sustainable use and management of these resources in a clear, coherent and streamlined manner to ensure their continued availability to meet the needs of the present and future generations.

3.2 The Need to Harness the Full Potential of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in National Development

It is apparent that if plant genetic resources for food and agriculture are given the necessary policy and political attention, they can play even a bigger role in Uganda's development. To achieve this, the concerns and



challenges facing the conservation, use and management of this resource have to be addressed as an integral part of the national development plans and priorities. The draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture provides a coherent and streamlined framework for integrating issues of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in Government's overall development agenda and programmes.

3.3 Need to Fulfil Uganda's Incurred International Obligations and Benefit from the International Regime Governing Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Uganda is party to key international instruments governing access, conservation, use and management of biological resources which include plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. In particular, Uganda is party to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture which obliges Member States to put in place legal, policy and administrative measures for the conservation, sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Uganda is therefore obliged in keeping with the fundamental principle of international law *pacta sunt servanda*, to fulfill its obligations and commitments under the treaty in good faith. The National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture constitutes the key instrument for domestication of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in Uganda.

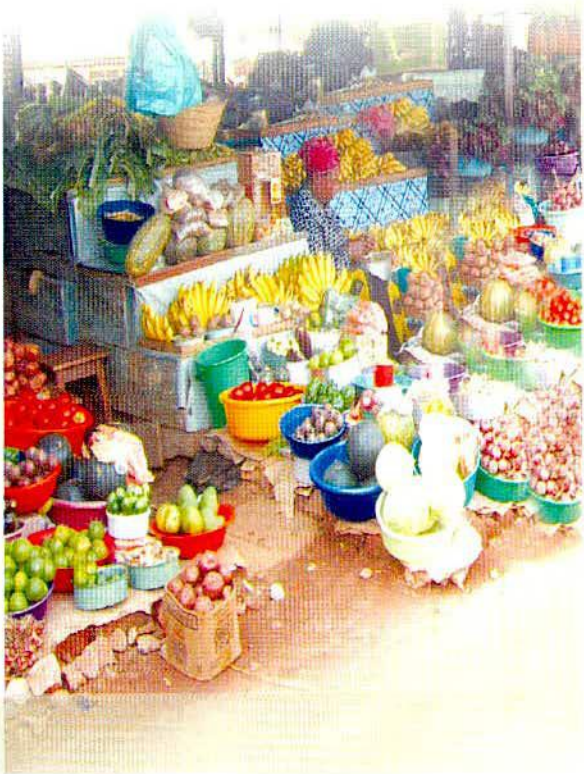


By fulfilling its commitments under the international regime governing these resources, Uganda will also be positioning itself to take advantage of the enormous

opportunities that the regime provides to its members including access to funds from the Crop Genetic Diversity Trust and other international funding mechanisms, and the benefits that will flow from the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit Ssharing including capacity building, exchange of vital information and research findings, access to and technology transfer, and sharing of the monetary and other benefits of commercialization.

3.4 Tool for Mobilization and Directing Investments in Priority Areas

One of the major challenges facing the conservation, sustainable use and management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in Uganda is the inadequate funding which negatively affects all activities and initiatives in this field. The percentage contribution to GDP and the percentage of Uganda's population directly benefitting from plant genetic resources for food and agriculture is a clear justification for increased investment in this area. Unfortunately, due to pressing problems, Government has not always been able to allocate enough resources to the Agriculture sector in general and plant genetic resources for food and agriculture activities in particular. The National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture will not only act as an investment mobilization tool for the sub-sector but will also be used in directing investments to key priority areas identified therein.



4. Snapshort of the Draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

4.1 Vision, Mission and Policy Objectives

The Vision for Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture sub-sector is a diversified and secure base of the resource, managed and sustainably utilized for the benefit of all Ugandans, especially the poor vulnerable farmers in rural areas.

This vision flows from, is informed by and complements Government's overall national development policies, plans and frameworks in the agriculture sector including the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), the National Agriculture Advisory Services (NAADs) and the Rural Development Strategy (RDS).

Mission Statement

To ensure the conservation, management and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture while optimizing their full potential in contributing to government's major development goals of poverty eradication, food security and improvement of rural peoples' livelihoods.

The Vision embraces the following dimensions which constitute the policy objectives.

- A well coordinated, streamlined and functional national institutional framework for the conservation, management and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- To ensure increased contribution of Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture to national GDP and the poverty eradication goal.
- To optimize contribution of Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture to food security and livelihoods of the people.

- To ensure a diversified resource base of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.
- To contribute towards achieving an enlightened and empowered constituency of farmers effectively participating in decision-making processes relating to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- To ensure equitable sharing of benefits arising from the productivity and profitability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

4.2. Policy Areas, Statements and Strategies

The draft policy instrument identifies twelve (12) major areas in the conservation, management and use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in Uganda that require policy intervention. These include: plant genetic resources for food and agriculture *in-situ*, plant genetic resources for food and agriculture *ex-situ*, production and utilization of Uganda's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, community management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, farmers' rights and traditional knowledge systems, plant genetic resources for food and agriculture on Government land, plant genetic resources for food and agriculture on private land, education, training and research on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, international access and exchange of germplasm, access and exchange of germplasm at the national level, documentation, information management and public awareness, and plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in civil strife and natural disasters.



For each of the policy area identified, there is a policy statement signifying

Government commitment to improve that area. Of particular importance, the policy document identifies the necessary actions and strategies for achieving the objectives of each policy area. All these strategies and actions contribute to achieving the overall policy's objectives, mission and vision.

4.3. Guiding Principles

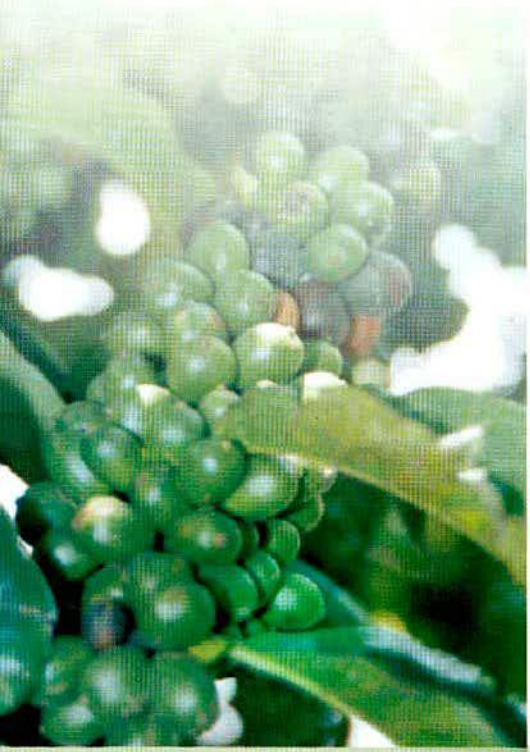
The draft national policy document identifies ten major principles to guide its interpretation and implementation process. The principles are summarised below.

- Sustainable Development
- Equitable Sharing of Benefits
- State Sovereignty
- Precautionary Principle
- Good Governance
- Food Security
- Poverty Eradication and Improved Rural Livelihoods
- Gender & Equity Considerations.
- International Commitments
- Cultural values and respect for Traditional Knowledge



5. Conclusion

Although Uganda's current agricultural policy and legal framework is good, it is too general to address most of the challenges faced in the conservation, management and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Guided by the general policy and legal framework for agricultural sector development in Uganda, including the PEAP, PMA, NAADS and NARs, the draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture seeks to address specific issues relating to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. The draft policy document provides pro-active strategies and interventions for addressing the genetic erosion and loss of these resources to ensure their continued availability to meet the needs of both the present and future generations. It provides mechanisms for increasing food production and maximising the full potential of these resources in national development.



There is no doubt that the draft policy instrument once approved and properly implemented, will significantly contribute to achieving the objectives of PEAP and PMA and accelerate the transformation of rural agricultural households. In our individual capacities, we owe it to ourselves, our country and posterity to ensure the quick approval and a cautious but expedited and effective implementation of the National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Stakeholders:

Photo of some of the Stakeholders who attended the last National Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop on the draft National Policy on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.



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