

**Regional Approach to Food Security in South Asia:
Operational Modality of the SAARC Seed Bank**

Discussant's Note

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1. Rationale and Purpose of SAARC Seed Bank

- Preamble:
 - Collective self-reliance in agriculture with respect to attaining seed security
 - Contribute to harmonized seed testing and certification and seed trade
- Objectives:
 - Provide regional support to national seed security efforts
 - Promote increase of Seed Replacement Rate (SSR)
 - Act as a regional seed security reserve
- Analysis:
 - Seed security not defined and inadequately addressed
 - Seed security = assured access primarily through self-production + additionally through purchase of seeds of desired type and quality
 - Over-emphasis on short-term seed security through external supply/ trading mechanisms
 - No consideration for long-term seed security through strengthening **local and national seed systems**
 - No consideration for the issue of **Seed Sovereignty**
 - Lack of clarity on the concept of seed bank
 - The concept appears to come from **Community Seed Bank** which focus on the whole seed systems: conservation/maintenance; production; and distribution
 - Without conservation/maintenance of seeds, it is just a seed business
 - Question is are we talking about SAARC Seed Bank or SAARC Seed Trading
 - Should it be a seed reserve or a dynamic seed system?
 - Emergency purpose (demand driven) or forced supply (supply driven)
 - Over emphasis on SSR
 - Focus on modern varieties – appears like seed program than seed bank
 - Undermining of local seeds and seed systems
 - One sided promotion of seed trading/ private sector
 - No role for farmers and farming communities other than recipients
 - Role of farmers/ farming communities and protection of their rights

2. Scope of the SAARC Seed Bank

- Coverage of crops and varieties
 - Basis for inclusion of crop species
 - Why limit crops species?
 - Why millets and vegetables important for food security of small holders excluded?
 - Even undermines provision of ITPGRFA
 - Basis of preparing a common list of varieties
 - How this will address diverse seed needs of farmers?
 - Why to limit the varieties – this will defeat the whole purpose
 - Danger of narrowing down genetic base and negatively impact genetic diversity
 - Kind of varieties not specified
 - Hybrid and transgenic varieties should not be included in the system as these are considered to decrease seed security
 - These varieties are well dealt by private sector and these varieties
- Seed information system
 - No consideration for establishment of seed information system
 - Sharing of information on genetic resource base of the region is important and should be part of the SAARC Seed Bank
- Scope for research and breeding
 - Materials allowed for research and breeding but no objective promotion of such activities (only mentioned in MTA); also requires to concept note
 - Research and breeding for commercial purpose requires written consent of provider (conflict with MTA 3.1)

3. SAARC Seed Reserve

- Requires establishment of **National Seed Bank**
 - Earmark agreed amount above any national reserve
 - Many create surplus/ non-demand if all countries produce and keep the serve for their national requirement
 - Whether countries would be able to maintain such a centralized physical seed bank/ seed reserve
- Demand assessment and supply mechanism
 - Mechanism to collect real demand; demand based on SRR may be problematic

- Seed production is a specialized process quite different than food production and involved, at least, 3 generation system with inputs from research system
 - Supply side is not clear – who will produce seed? Role of farmers and pricing mechanism
 - Supply (production and transport) could be expensive in the lack of decentralized seed production
 - Strict quality control and certification is likely to exclude local/ farmers' varieties
 - Seed vulnerability mapping may be required but not mentioned
 - What is seed allocated for SAARC Seed Bank remains without use/demand
- Access/ withdrawal
 - Priority for seed withdrawal for national need vs other SAARC countries

4. Operational Mechanism

- Institutional mechanism
 - Limited representation of farmers in Board, and no representation of CSOs
 - Private sector entrepreneurs/ traders shall transact all activities on behalf of provider(s)/ recipient(s)
- MTA process
 - Intellectual property rights (IPRs) issues
 - Access to without the need to track individual accessions and free of charge
 - But requires PIC for research and commercial application
 - Apply IPR consistent with relevant international agreements
 - Material under development at the discretion of developer, including farmers
 - Transfer may take long process due to need of quality assurance and certification mechanism
- Harmonization with national policies and laws
 - Seed Policy and Act
 - PVP and Farmers' Right Act
 - Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) Act

5. Some Suggestions/ Concluding Remarks

- The document is merely representation of political economy of seed business: basically an agreement for seed business than a real seed bank
- Need to bring in missing elements

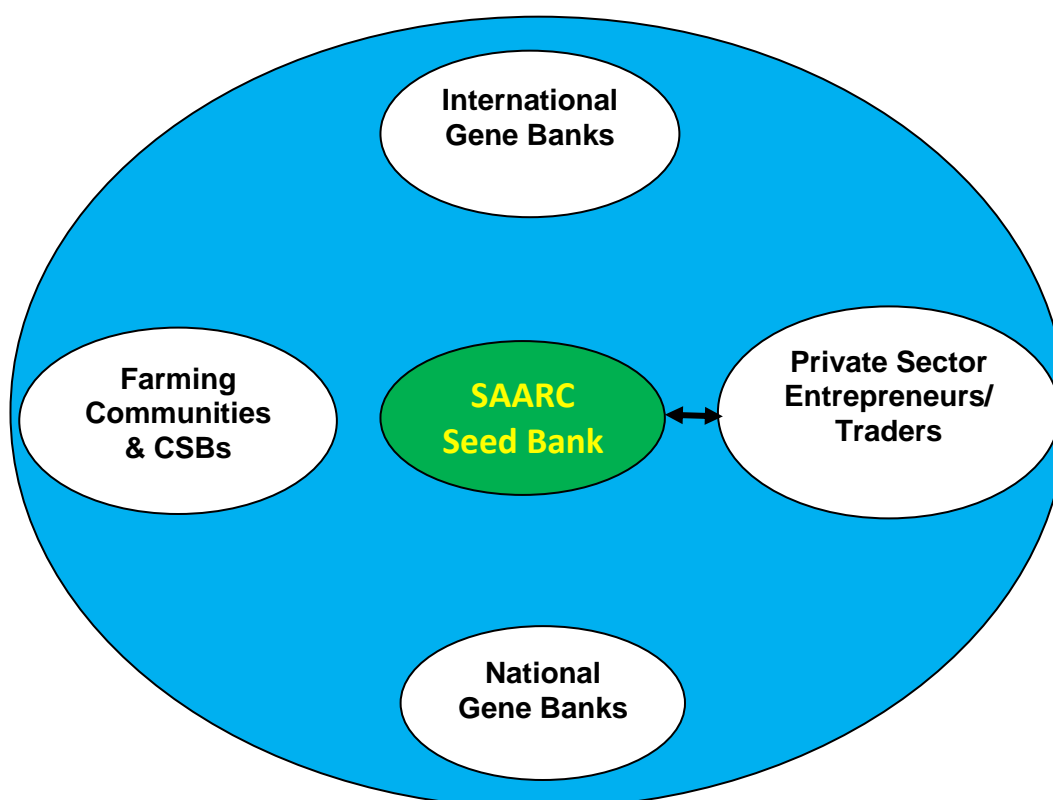


Figure: Context of SAARC Seed Bank (CSBs = Community Seed Banks)

- SAARC region has vast/rick wealth of genetic resources and has huge opportunity of benefit from sharing and using these resources
- SAARC Seed Bank should be used as a vehicle/ means for achieving:
 - Regional cooperation for conservation and use of PGRFA
 - Access and benefit sharing through regional ABS framework
 - Regional Conservation and Development Fund
- Strong need for review and amendment of the Agreement even before ratification by the national governments; otherwise most likely to fail and remain as a history

Thank You!

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