

# Understanding and guiding effective seed sector platforms

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# Study report: Understanding and guiding effective seed sector platforms

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# 1. SeedNL and the support to seed sector platforms

## Seed sector platforms

Sustainably increasing the access and use of quality seed by farmers in low and middle income countries is a complex and multi-faceted challenge. A diverse array of stakeholders, each with distinct, yet overlapping priorities and capacities, must engage in new and dynamic collaboration modalities to strengthen seed sector performance. Multiple initiatives, supported by national and international donors and partners, invest in the formulation and implementation of seed sector platforms; multistakeholder bodies and processes with their own goals and ways of working.

Fundamentally, seed sector platforms are forums where stakeholders come together to contribute to and learn about developments in the seed sector. There is an entire spectrum of seed sector platforms; operating from local to national and even international levels, operating as part of or independent from larger sector development programmes, and operating toward either fixed and defined or open and more generic targets. Such platforms are not a new modality for stakeholder engagement and are not specific to the seed sector. Innovation or research platforms, learning labs or networks, communities of practice, multistakeholder partnerships are all vehicles in which stakeholders of one or more 'sectors' are united and guided to exchange, co-create, strategise or deliver impact.

## Why was this publication developed?

SeedNL is a Dutch public-private partnership which aims to strengthen the seed sector in developing countries, providing access to quality seeds for all farmers towards increasing agricultural productivity and farmers' income. The partnership is comprised of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch branch association for planting materials Plantum, and the Dutch potato organization NAO.

Across its portfolio of activities, SeedNL has been supporting the establishment of seed sector platforms. As part of wider sector development programmes, platforms have been instrumental to bring stakeholders together and contribute to building connection and achieving project and sector ambitions. SeedNL is also supporting the development of platforms outside of larger programmes, with the aim to lay a collaborative foundation for future seed sector development or transformation.

With the aim to learn from these experiences, SeedNL commissioned Wageningen University & Research to work with partners involved in seed platforms to develop key insights to guide future strategies and decisions on support to seed sector platforms. Further, the study should enable the elaboration of evidence-based guidance to ensure current and future platforms are effective in their performance.

A series of interviews with partners engaged in seed and/or horticulture sector platforms from Ethiopia, Ghana, Myanmar, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, supported by expert consultations and a literature review, shows that when adhering to a number of identified success factors, such sector platforms have the ability of being critical to achieving desired impacts on seed sector performance.

## Guidance to support more effective seed sector platforms

The knowledge derived from the study gives impetus to ensuring platforms are justified facilitating and/or working as a result of a good quality sector assessment, are formed around urgent and shared priorities, are inclusive and governed in a transparent manner, and are complementary to – rather than in conflict with – existing coordination bodies.

Further, the evidence and experiences shared during the study enable the elaboration of evidence-based guidance which provide direction in thinking and action to ensure seed sector platforms are sufficiently mandated, appropriately governed, cognisant of power and inclusion dynamics, conducive to innovation and mindful of the sustainability of their deliverables.

For SeedNL and other initiatives considering whether and how to support seed sector platforms, the study's findings confirm that such investments are valued and important to build connection and trust, to co-create and share knowledge and to collaboratively work on key sector challenges. The study shows that without these platforms, many of the gains in the participating countries would not have been achieved.

This publication presents reflections and insights that can support decision-making and strategies around initiating seed sector platforms. Moreover, it concludes by translating the findings of the study into guidance and tips for professionals who may adopt the role of facilitating the initiation and implementation of the platform.

## Contents of this document

This report and the study underpinning it build on a body of existing knowledge and evidence around the value of multistakeholder platforms. **Section 2**, unpacks these experiences and perspectives and highlights the rationale, unique benefits and diverse forms of these platforms. **Section 3** details how these experiences framed the approach to the undertaken study, and how a carefully considered multistakeholder process is at the core of platform initiation and implementation. This analysis enables the elaboration of key dynamics which guided the design of the study and interviews with case representatives.

**Section 4** presents detailed stories of each of the studied seed and horticulture sector platforms, zooming in key lessons from each case in relation to the identified key dynamics on which to analyse platforms. **Section 5** answers the question on when it makes sense to invest in seed sector platforms, and when not. The section gives attention to certain preconditions which should be present in some form or level, before it is wise to invest in initiating a platform.

**Section 6** brings all of this learning together and presents six distinct recommendations to guide the effective design and implementation of seed sector platforms. However it firstly discusses the fact that such recommendations are heavily context dependent, and that decisions and strategies on achieving impactful platforms commonly rest on skilled and attentive platform facilitators, a key role which the section also explores. To that end, each of the six recommendations are supported with specific '*tips for platform facilitators*', to assist facilitators' thinking and action.

## 2. Multistakeholder platforms for guiding seed sector development

### Multistakeholder collaboration for complex sector issues

Strengthening seed sectors to a level where they can sustainably achieve shared sector ambitions is a complex challenge. Different stakeholders have diverse and often competing priorities and commonly, the institutions responsible to deliver necessary change have limited capacity to satisfy these multiple demands. Moreover, the specific needs of marginalised groups operating outside of formal systems are sometimes unaccounted for in sector development strategies.

In efforts to overcome these shortcomings, research and development programming has in the last decades focused on ensuring multistakeholder engagement in one form or another, ranging from single-event consultations and workshops, to formal multistakeholder partnerships. Across the spectrum of such engagement, there exists an entire vocabulary of terminology and framing for modalities in which stakeholders come together, discuss, share, learn and plan for the future.

### Sector platforms as multistakeholder processes

The specific framing of 'platforms' has seen increasing attention and use. In the work of Wageningen University & Research on multistakeholder partnerships, platforms are seen as spaces where stakeholders can learn together in an interactive way, where people can speak and be heard, and where everybody's ideas can be harnessed to drive innovation and find ways forward that are more likely to be in the interests of all (Brouwer et al., 2019). Similarly at CGIAR, multistakeholder platforms are seen as purposely organized interactive processes which bring together a range of stakeholders to participate in dialogue, decision making and/or implementation, with the aim to address a common problem or achieve a common goal. Such platforms are thought to help reach participatory agreements with outcomes that are more equitable and effective than those reached through 'business as usual' approaches (CIFOR-ICRAF, 2023).

From these definitions, some common characteristics and purposes of multistakeholder platforms are evident:

- **Governance and coordination:** Platforms can be seen as a form of network governance involving public, private and civic organisations who agree to work together. In this sense, platforms enable the discussion of experiences and wishes on specific topics towards common agreement on potential solutions and strategies. Platform discussions and interactions offer the opportunity to shape and contribute to decision-making and the management of implementing agreed actions.
- **Building connection and trust:** Platforms can give stakeholders not only an opportunity to be heard, but an opportunity to hear from others who they may not normally be able to. In this way, platforms can support the development of better understanding and deeper relationships. Enabling such trust-building is essential in order to arrive at agreed strategies which rely on the investment and/or behaviour change of a platform's participants. To achieve worthwhile connection and meaningful trust, it is also important that platforms are inclusive of the diverse stakeholders and interests within the sector.

- **Access to resources:** As a space for diverse people and organisations who may otherwise have no opportunity to structurally come together, platforms enable the accessing and exchange of unique capacities, including expertise and experiences as well as financial, technical, social and political capital. When pooled, these collective resources can strengthen the position and outlook of all members. Further, the active participation of stakeholders in a platform can be an investable proposition in itself; a functioning platform can seek out its own funding support from donors.
- **Incentivising, validating and scaling innovation:** Platforms almost ubiquitously offer a structured and facilitated space for participating stakeholders to share their own experiences, approaches and innovative solutions to specific shared challenges. In this way, platforms enable learning as to what works, and under what conditions. Through discussions within platforms, other stakeholders can pose questions and seek whether contextualisation of these innovations is possible for their own circumstances. Such interactive validation and contextualisation can be seen as processes of ‘co-creation’ in which given social or technical innovations are strengthened to more applicable and valuable for multiple stakeholders.
- **Increasing sustainability of outcomes:** In the same manner, innovations and outcomes that are co-created by multiple stakeholders in a platform have a higher likelihood of being sustained. When a platform’s stakeholders co-create a solution, strategy or product, that is tailored with their own need in mind, they generally feel as its owners, and responsible to see it succeed in its aims. In this way, this feeling of ownership of an outcome encourages platform members to strive to see it continue. Naturally, financial sustainability of not just the platform’s achievements, but also the platform itself is a key issue. Stakeholders’ desire to see a platform sustained is connected to how the platform may be funded; in the absence of funding from a specific developmental budget, it is common that platform functioning and buy-in changes, also having knock-on effects on how a platform’s outcomes are sustained.

### Platforms as opposed to other modalities of stakeholder engagement

Given these characteristics, platforms offer an appropriate space for complex systemic issues to be discussed and addressed. Yet this is not to say that platforms are the only modality under which specific issues that affect the performance of a sector can be tackled. From local to international levels, different modalities of engaging stakeholders and experts are shown to have their own value.

While there are many different framings for these modalities, here we will explore and compare some common formats and processes that seek to learn from and connect stakeholders towards solutions or strategies for (parts of) a sector:

- **Field days, fairs and demonstrations:** With the goal of showcasing specific innovations, approaches, techniques or products, many initiatives and organisations invest in these types of moments. Such events enable different stakeholders to come together to learn about and validate potential solutions for challenges they face. They also enable stakeholders to meet each other and form connections. There are commonly short presentations and/or discussions with invitees having the space to ask questions and hear from experts. While these are valuable occurrences, this type of event does not commonly draw in policymakers and so the connection to larger sector issues and developments is less effective.

- **Workshops, conferences, forums:** From regional to national levels, these types of dialogues see a normally healthy engagement of policy, civil society and knowledge institutes and on some occasions good representation from commercial companies. Such events, when designed and facilitated in a conducive manner are also supportive of scaling innovation and are more likely to contribute to policy or strategy development. Yet commonly, farmers and farmer organisations are less represented and so the connection of shared insights to on-the-ground realities can be limited.
- **Participatory research and extension services:** Within many public organisations, specific positions exist to facilitate engagement with different stakeholders. Extensionists and researchers are tasked to understand prevailing challenges and opportunities and develop knowledge products and strategies to advance the sector. Such staff are commonly responsible to organise interactive events to share with stakeholders, either in the field or in workshops in conferences. For extensionists in particular – noting that extensionists may hold other roles including researcher, trader or even nodal farmer – their close connection to farmers among, other stakeholders, engenders more trust and useful relationships in the sector.

When comparing these types of stakeholder engagement to sector platforms, it is useful to note that for many seed sector platforms, the above engagement modalities are commonly specific activities that platforms support and facilitate; they are things that many platforms do. However in the absence of an overarching platform, these activities are less likely to lead to sustained change in the sector.

Bringing people together for these activities is valuable; there are opportunities to learn about useful options and to share opinions and experiences. It is though, the added level of having an ongoing multistakeholder platform that – ideally – carries this momentum from these events forward to action at sector level, enabling takeaway lessons to reach different audiences and to stay on the agenda.

### Multiple forms and levels of platforms

While this publication deals primarily with national-level seed sector platforms, it is important to recognise that framing a platform in this way is a deliberate decision. Platforms of different structure and composition can be found from local to international levels. Some platforms deal with specific technical issues, some have only public or civil organisations and some prioritise local issues over global trends.

The following are examples of multistakeholder platforms with different characteristics, scale and scope:

- **Community Seed Banks:** CSBs are farmer-managed organisations primarily tasked to manage and conserve local agrobiodiversity. Yet CSBs increasingly serve as platforms to promote knowledge and skill sharing, facilitate capacity building and to represent their members' views and interests also at national level and to lead community action and social development activities. Further, some CSBs become private seed producers in their own rights and provide specific services to their members, for example the provision of credit. And as local 'platforms' for dialogue, CSBs are noted as contributing to peace and security outcomes (Vernooy et al, 2024). With farmers being the vast majority of members, CSBs are not as such, sector platforms, and are not multistakeholder, in the wider sense. Yet at the local level, they provide a space for learning and decision-making and presenting agreed upon outcomes towards higher-level sector development.
- **The ISSD Africa Community of Practice:** ISSD Africa is an action research platform aimed at co-creating knowledge, scaling its members' innovations and informing policy development. It operates at the international level, enabling lessons to be shared across international borders. The CoP is currently comprised of four distinct multi-annual action research projects, each led by a set of African and international partners. Yet none of the active members of the CoP are from the private sector, and

contributions from farmers remains low, mostly at consultation level. The CoP emphasises learning and informing strategy on specific issues, and does not engage in sector development directly. As a platform for exchange, the vast majority of its members are 'practitioners' who seek innovations and solutions to apply in their own context. And even though the platform is not rooted in any specific country it contributes to national sector development through using its budget on the participation of national policymakers and international policy networks in its knowledge events. Whereas in the past, ISSD Africa took a broad lens on seed sector issues, the current CoP focuses specifically on advancing the Nexus of Humanitarian, Development and Peacebuilding interventions (HDP-Nexus).

- **The Africa Seed & Biotechnology Partnership Platform:** The ASBPP is implemented by the African Union Commission. It is a pan-African platform of practitioners and policymakers with the aim to strengthen the implementation, at national level, of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The platform covers a wide array of key seed sector development topics and organises specific working groups of members on these topics. There is a more active Steering Committee that meets at least once per annum and a General Assembly which occurs every two or three years. While the platform enables sharing and learning, and the development of knowledge-focused resources, it prioritises supporting policy development and implementation.
- **Innovation platforms:** Many initiatives form multistakeholder platforms around specific issues and more commonly are known as 'innovation platforms'. Such platforms share similar objectives around knowledge sharing and creation and solving prevailing concerns of participating stakeholders. And correct initiation and implementation of innovation platforms also involves giving attention to inclusion, power, governance and stakeholder dynamics (Posthumus & Wongtschowski, 2014). In this light, innovation platforms can be seen as analogous as sector platforms. The main difference for sector platforms is the framing of the platform at sector level, rather than on specific issues. For example, this study explores platforms which predominantly give space for seed sector stakeholders to bring their own experiences and issues. They do not for example only address PVP. The framing of innovation platforms as dealing with more specific issues also implies that within a seed sector, such platforms may exist for specific issues. What is noted through the study is that sector platforms commonly have working groups or roundtables to deal with more specific topics, in place of innovation platforms.

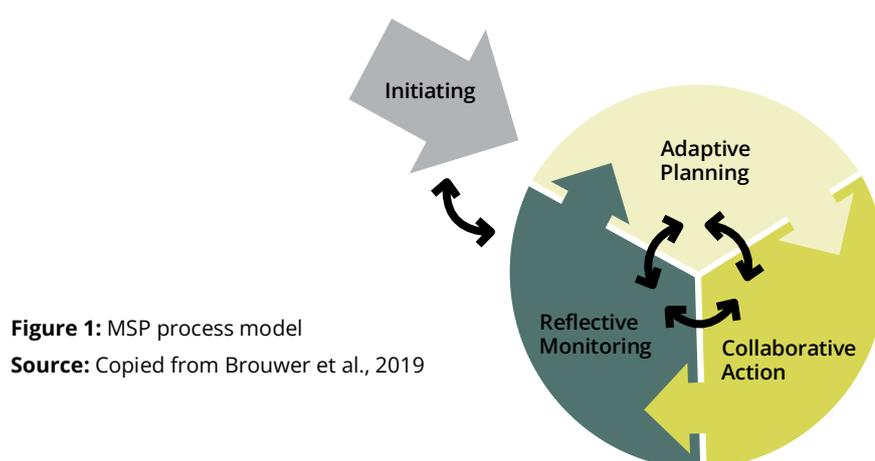
What these few examples show is that there is already a widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of investing in the various types of platforms as means for boosting collaboration and knowledge generation for achieving diverse and shared ambitions. Platform framing, scale and composition may vary, but fundamentally, seed sector platforms build on existing knowledge that these constructs are valid mechanisms to achieve change on complex, often systemic issues.

### 3. Approach of the study

#### Studying platform effectiveness across process phases

Moving forward with an understanding of seed sector platforms as a form of multistakeholder process enables benefitting from the body of knowledge on how these processes can and should perform effectively. At the beginning of the study, a quick-scan of existing knowledge resources and discussions with experts guided attention toward one model in particular to support framing valuable research questions.

Within the MSP Guide of Wageningen University & Research, - which defines and frames MSPs as Multistakeholder Partnerships - the MSP Process Model is an oft used construct to understand the different phases and performance dynamics of MSPs. The model is built around four distinct phases which can be expected to be encountered, while recognising that almost all multistakeholder processes are unique and follow their own path and logic.



**Figure 1:** MSP process model  
**Source:** Copied from Brouwer et al., 2019

- In the **initiation phase** of an MSP, either individuals or groups of stakeholders recognise that collaboration of some sort is needed to address a shared issue or to capitalise on an opportunity. While there is no single right way to start an MSP, it is critical here to already ensure that the process is as inclusive as feasible, is not overly exclusive of certain stakeholders, and for sure does no harm by its formation. It is in this early stage that a preliminary agreement on the framing of stakeholders' shared issue(s) and an agreed purpose or targeted outcome of the process is formed.
- In the **adaptive planning phase** of the process, stakeholders work together to advance their understanding of the problem and start discussions towards potential strategies and actions toward an emergent vision for the future. Here, some form of analysis or assessment is common. The process and/or platform begins to confirm its structure and ways of working to ensure transparency and be reflexive to experiences and emerging insights.
- With the foundations of the process now in place, the **collaboration action phase** starts. Strategies and ideas are put into practice and agreed activities by various stakeholders are underway. It is in this phase that the true commitment of stakeholders to the process becomes clear and commonly, agreed governance mechanisms are called into effect to manage progress. Not all processes or platforms – either by design or due to encountered challenges – reach this phase of the process; there are commonly operational, capacity or financial bottlenecks that impact the realisation of stakeholders' ideas.

- With action and often more intense stakeholder engagement underway, **reflexive monitoring** of progress is an essential, but often overlooked, phase of the process. How are stakeholders responding to developments and changes caused by the collaborative process and its activities? Do stakeholders feel their own unique needs are being addressed? And are the benefits of the process experienced in a more or less equitable manner? And why is this? Here it is important that the facilitator, coordinator or manager of the MSP is active to observe, question and learn from members insights and feelings. This is critical not just to the sustainability of activities' outcomes, but also for the process itself.

### Recognising the phases of the MSP process model in our collective experiences

For the purpose of this study, we used the MSP process model to guide the framing of research and interview questions. For the authors and involved experts, the model points to moments which are immediately recognisable in collective experiences around forming, contributing to and maintaining these sector platforms. In all of the sector platforms analysed in the context of the study, different trajectories, but with common features, were followed to initiate the sector platform. It is important to note that the vast majority of processes associated with the establishment and operation of sector platforms benefitted from funding from international funding partners. Such funding was instrumental to cover the costs of platform events and activities, but also to cover the fees for facilitators to mobilise and manage platform processes and events.

To initiate the process towards sector platform establishment, some form of dialogue between stakeholders took place on "burning issues" in the sector and motivation to work together to solve these issues became apparent. Where in some cases, existing modalities for bringing stakeholders together may have been present, but not operating optimally, other cases showed a lack of such a space.

This is not to say that there was no public body attempting to coordinate developments in the sector; rather multiple stakeholders sought the **mandate** and cooperation with such bodies to more actively contribute to advancing the sector. With the motivation for multistakeholder engagement clear, coordinating bodies supported sector assessments which would underpin the purposes and topics that potential platforms could work to address. In some cases, as in Nigeria, the formation of a multistakeholder platform was a direct recommendation derived from the assessments.

With acceptance of the need and benefits of platforms secured, discussions took place on the membership and **governance** structures of emerging platforms. Here too, securing the buy-in of coordinating bodies and the granting of mandate to the platform to deliver outcomes for the sector was key. More consultations, commonly through external facilitators, enabled greater involvement of additional stakeholders, ensuring the platform was **inclusive** of the diverse stakeholders and their needs from across the sector.

With the right stakeholders onboarded, platforms made agreements and collaborative strategies to implement recommendations from previous assessments as well as newly agreed priority actions. Efforts were made to enable to members to share their experiences around the given issues, as well as any solutions and **innovations** they had developed. In this way, the platforms became a space for learning and recognition.

Building on these lessons and innovations, platforms collaboratively engaged in piloting, communication and knowledge development activities towards outputs and outcomes that were endorsed by platforms' members. These interactive processes ensured that the platforms were more likely to contribute to the **sustainability** of innovations and outcomes, and the platform itself.

## Key topics to shape the exploration of platform effectiveness

From this narrative of collective experiences, some key topics that determine the effectiveness of sector platforms emerged and were adopted as suitable to structure the study's interviews:

**Mandate:** Under this topic, the study would explore the origins and ideas to formulate a platform. The study would look at how the objectives and ambitions of the platform were agreed upon, whether other modalities of stakeholder engagement were considered, how the proposed platform related to existing coordination mechanisms and from which body the platform received authorisation and support to produce outcomes which would impact the performance of the sector.

**Governance:** The literature shows that transparent and clearly structured governance mechanisms are essential for multistakeholder platforms. Through interviews, the study should learn how sector platforms are governed, what specific rules, processes and functions exist. Further, the study would look at how decisions are made and communicated and how progress and members' experiences and perspectives are monitored and learned from.

**Inclusion and power:** Who joins the platform and in what role shapes how the platform understands issues and decides upon actions. The study would look at how specific stakeholders were invited to participate and how the organisers were sure these are the 'right' people. Further, the study would unpack how the platform treated any power disparities across members, how trust was fostered across stakeholders, how stakeholders were enabled to shape the agenda and how roles and functions within the platform were assigned.

**Innovation:** From the literature, it is clear that platforms should support the validation, contextualisation and scaling of innovations that can potentially solve sector issues. In fact many platforms are styled as 'innovation platforms' with the specific aim of enabling collaborative knowledge sharing and development, albeit not specifically around a given agricultural sector or national context. The study would seek examples of how platforms succeeded in the co-creation and/or scaling innovative solutions across stakeholders, and what processes made this possible. The study would also explore whether and how the platform was receptive to innovations from outside the platform and how this impacted its effectiveness. And the study would seek examples of whether these processes of innovation were conducive to supporting policy development and/or implementation. As a process of learning, the study would also gather reflections on when the support of innovation did not work as intended or hoped.

**Sustainability:** As mentioned, many sector platforms operate through funding provided by (inter)national funding streams, commonly as part of wider sector development partnerships or programmes. A key dynamic during preliminary discussions in the study, and in the literature, is the need to consider financial sustainability. To this end, the study would explore decisions on the intended lifespan or endpoint of the platform and whether this was tied to specific project cycles or not. The study would unpack funding arrangements for given platforms and how these shaped the decision-making on activities and targeted outputs. And the study would explore what strategies were crafted to ensure platforms, and their outcomes, are sustained by regulatory or coordinating bodies. The study would also explore whether and how professional capacities were strengthened in an effort to sustain the operation of the platform.

## Lessons from hindsight

The study would see detailed discussions with representatives from some ten platforms across multiple countries. Interviewees are experienced professionals in the seed sector and have been heavily involved in the given platform. The interviewees are therefore well-equipped not only to share the stories of their platforms, but also what they themselves have learned from the processes.

To that end, the interviewees would also be asked to reflect on their experiences, identify potential changes in the approach with hindsight, and consider how these changes might have affected the outcome. Interviewees would also be asked what they would recommend as essential for peers considering investing in a platform. Specifically, the interviewees would be asked:

- Looking back, did the platform achieve its objectives?
- Could objectives have been achieved in another way, without the platform?
- What are unique/memorable specific successes of the platform and what lessons can be drawn from this?
- Conversely, what did the platform fail to achieve, and what was learned?
- Looking back, what would you have done differently?
- If you had a key message for anyone setting up a seed sector platform, what would it be?

## 4. Description of the platform cases explored during the study

### Overview of case studies

The core of the study was to explore and learn from the experiences of partners engaged in seed sector platforms. To complement the experiences of partners working in seed sector platforms, lessons were also drawn from partners working in horticulture sector platforms. The study and discussions with representatives of the platforms would enable the identification of key lessons on what made the platforms effective or not, and what lessons interviewees could share to guide future decision-making on the formation and implementation of platforms.

Table 1 shows an overview of the platforms explored during the study. For all platforms, the dynamics around mandate and purpose, governance structure, considerations on inclusiveness and power dynamics as well as contributions to sector innovation and sustainability aims were explored. What follows are descriptions of the studied platforms according to these dynamics.

Quotes from interviewees capture the unique characteristics and insights on each platform's performance. Each case study presents three key lessons learned. While many lessons overlap across platforms, we strive to minimize redundancy and emphasize those that are most distinctive across all case studies. While most lessons are broadly applicable across various contexts, some are more context-specific.

**Table 1: Overview of studied sector platform cases**

Country	Platform name	Sector focus	Scope	Status <sup>1</sup>	Connection to initiative <sup>2</sup>
<b>Ethiopia</b>	National Seed Advisory Group (NSAG)	Seed sector	National	Inactive; being replaced by a MoA steering committee and technical committee	ISSD Ethiopia II
<b>Ethiopia</b>	Regional Seed Core Groups (RSCG)	Seed sector	Regional <sup>3</sup>	Some inactive, others minimally active; currently being reestablished as Regional Seed Units	Partnerships and Innovation Project; ISSD Ethiopia I & II
<b>Ghana</b>	Horticulture Business Platform	Horticulture sector	National	Less active after conclusion of programmes	GhanaVeg, HortiFresh
<b>Myanmar</b>	National Seed Platform	Seed sector	National	Inactive	ISSD Myanmar
<b>Nigeria</b>	National Seed Platform	Seed sector	National	Active	CSP Nigeria
<b>Rwanda</b>	Rwanda Horticulture Working Group (RHWG)	Horticulture sector	National	Less active after conclusion of programme	HortInvest
<b>South Sudan</b>	South Sudan Seed Hub (S3H)	Seed sector	National <sup>4</sup>	Less active after conclusion of programme; currently being reactivated under other initiative	FNS-REPRO
<b>Tanzania</b>	Tanzania Horticulture and Potato Seed Platform (THPSP)	Horticulture and seed sectors	National	Active	No overarching initiative
<b>Uganda</b>	National Seed Platform	Seed sector	National	Inactive	ISSD Uganda; ISSD Uganda Plus
<b>Uganda</b>	Regional Seed Platforms	Seed sector	Regional <sup>1</sup>	Inactive	ISSD Uganda; ISSD Uganda Plus

**Notes:** 1) Status as of December 2024; 2) Interviewees have been connected to these initiatives; often also other initiatives and organizations were involved in platform management; 3) Regional in these cases means at sub-national level; 4) National with outreach to countries in the region. Acronyms: CSP: Collaborative Seed Programme; FNS-REPRO: Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme; ISSD: Integrated Seed Sector Development; MoA: Ministry of Agriculture.

## 4.1 Ethiopia: National Seed Advisory Group

In Ethiopia, the 2013 national seed law did not permit the establishment of a formal structure for seed sector coordination, such as a Seed Board. Instead, a more informal body, the National Seed Advisory Group (NSAG), was established to fill this gap. The NSAG's primary mandate was to advise the Minister of Agriculture (MoA) on matters related to seed sector coordination, including policy development and regulation. The NSAG's exclusive focus on seed-related issues distinguished it from the Agricultural Development Partners' Linkage Advisory Councils (ADPLACs), multistakeholder innovation platforms addressing broader agricultural concerns without giving adequate attention to the seed sector.

Initially, the NSAG consisted mainly of MoA department heads and was chaired by the State Minister. However, this composition limited the group's potential for fostering innovation in the seed sector. Concerns about conflicts of interest with departments in the Ministry prompted a restructuring of the NSAG to create a more independent advisory body.

The revised group included eight senior seed experts from outside the MoA, drawn from prominent Ethiopian organizations and international development partners. Members included manager of Bilateral Ethiopia Netherlands Effort for Food, Income and Trade (BENEFIT), which also served as chair, the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) as secretary, the Ethiopian Seed Association (ESA), FAO, ICARDA, CIMMYT, GIZ and ISSD Ethiopia, with the latter providing additional secretarial support. These members were nominated on an individual basis. The NSAG operated without dedicated public funding.

The NSAG operated mainly as a responsive body, addressing specific assignments from the Minister and, later, the State Minister for Agriculture. Experts convened monthly to deliberate on an ad hoc list of issues, providing the Ministry with support in policy and law revision, strategy development, and document preparation. The body also prioritized and added its own issues to the agenda. When specific issues required detailed attention, small teams were formed to address them.

Over its five-year tenure, the NSAG delivered significant results. Discussions within the group were often reflected in the final documents. One of NSAG's key achievements is successful advocacy for the establishment of an independent national regulatory authority. The group also developed the seed policy, seed law, the government's seed programme and finalized the Ethiopia Seed Sector Transformation Agenda (MoA, 2019).

*"It's important to invest in building the team's capacity in smart process design, process management, and strategic thinking to avoid 'hitting the wall'."*

**- Mohammed Hassena, Stichting Wageningen Research Ethiopia**

A change in leadership at the Ministry in 2023 marked a turning point, as the new administration no longer valued the NSAG's contributions. Diverging perspectives emerged between the new Minister and the former NSAG on priorities for improving seed sector performance. As a result, the NSAG was replaced by a steering committee composed predominantly of government officials, supported by a technical committee that included some former NSAG members. The new technical committee also incorporated department heads from various government offices. Unlike the NSAG, which emphasized systemic issues and sector coordination, the current committee focuses primarily on achieving seed production targets.

*“For future external advisory groups, it is advised to have more frequent interactions with government officials—both formal and informal—to gain valuable insights and deepen understanding of the political agenda.”*

**- Mohammed Hassena, Stichting Wageningen Research Ethiopia**

Currently, the Ethiopia Seed Partnership, as a member of the technical committee, leverages this platform to raise issues that extend beyond seed production targets. For example, with full backing of the technical committee, the programme recently started to work on seed sector coordination and a seed dashboard. This will systematically change how the seed sector operates and also help to attain the seed production targets focused on by the steering committee.

### **Three lessons from the National Seed Advisory Group in Ethiopia:**

- Changes in political leadership can lead to shifts in interests, expectations, and mandate of a platform.
- Advancing an innovation agenda requires the capacity to develop a well-thought-out process and manage it carefully throughout.
- Even as an informal body, an independent advisory group can successfully push seed sector innovation onto the political agenda.

## 4.2 Ethiopia: Regional Seed Core Groups

During its implementation across four regional states in Ethiopia, the Local Seed Business Project encountered challenges stemming from bottlenecks that could not be resolved at the local level. Meanwhile, seed sector coordination in the regional states was limited to demand estimation and seed allocation. To address the gap, the Partnership and Innovation Project established Regional Seed Core Groups (RSCG). Consisting of key decision-makers representing diverse stakeholder groups in the regions, RSCGs emerged as a logical modality to foster collaboration for achieving institutional breakthroughs in the seed sector.

The core groups were officially endorsed by the Bureaus of Agriculture (BoA), the primary decision-making authority on seed sector issues in the region. The RSCGs aimed to drive systemic change by: (i) encouraging contestation to challenge existing perspectives; (ii) facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, and (iii) resolving persistent "sticky issues" through innovative projects.

The Deputy Head of the BoA typically chaired the RSCG; the Deputy Chair varied by region and was agreed upon collectively by core group members. The Partnership and Innovation Project, and later ISSD Ethiopia, served as the secretariat. Decisions regarding the agenda and resource allocation for studies and innovation pilots were made collectively by core group members. RSCG members usually had decision-making positions within their respective organizations. Core groups operated under a clearly defined terms of reference and convened quarterly meetings. Participants left each meeting with clear decisions and assigned tasks, which they were expected to report on during the next meeting. Achievements and updates were shared during larger annual gatherings.

*“Effective platform governance benefits from stakeholder participation but needs to recognize hierarchy. The Bureau of Agriculture was invited to chair, which was strategic recognizing that its decisions would never be contested openly and that decisions had a higher chance of being implemented when endorsed by the Bureau.”*

**– Gareth Borman, SeedNL**

Each RSCG consisted of approximately 12 members, representing government, industry, research and civil society. Inclusivity, and specifically inclusion of non-state actors, was actively pursued. While the RSCGs were intended to provide spaces for contestation and open discussion, the significant political authority of the BoA, which led the group, often caused other members to hesitate in openly voicing challenges or opposition. Therefore, coalitions were often built bilaterally outside the group meetings, enabling members to present a stronger, united stance during formal discussions with the BoA (Borman et al, 2022).

*“It is important to invest in social capital, and to build strong coalitions to foster collaboration and drive collective action.”*

**– Gareth Borman, SeedNL**

ISSD Ethiopia, played a crucial role as the platform facilitator. Sector transformation was pursued through evidence-based approaches, actively challenging the status quo while carefully navigating vested interests within the existing system. Trust and mutual understanding were strengthened by providing access to information, helping to frame problems and solutions, supporting evidence generation, and demonstrating the tangible benefits of collaboration. Engaging with the organizations of core team members through pilot projects contributed to building trust.

*“Navigating the platform effectively demands a deep understanding of problems, compelling arguments, and robust evidence—requiring you as facilitator to be among the most knowledgeable in the room.”*

**– Gareth Borman, SeedNL**

RSCGs were provided budgets to pilot innovations and demonstrate "proof of concept" for proposed solutions. This allowed experimenting with new approaches beyond the constraints of existing systems. Successful studies and pilots, generating an evidence-base, helped to secure buy-in from key stakeholders to change practices and regulations. Each region had the flexibility to tailor its platform to address its unique needs.

The RSCGs engaged a wider audience through an annual regional workshop, for sharing outcomes and exploring scaling opportunities. As a group of regional seed sector decision-makers, the RSCG played a pivotal role in advancing the scaling of successful innovations. Their efforts included facilitating endorsements of changes; design of new directives; adoption of revised responsibilities; and implementation of new operational structures.

Leveraging knowledge, evidence, and expertise, the RSCGs reshaped politically-driven agendas, changing power dynamics in the sector, for instance (i) direct seed marketing: transitioning from politically-driven seed allocation and distribution to a market-oriented seed supply system; (ii) establishment of seed regulatory authorities: separating seed supply and seed quality assurance roles to eliminate conflicts of interest; (iii) and the formation of the RSCGs itself: creating spaces for collaborative, rather than exclusively hierarchical modes of governance.

The RSCGs were originally intended to endure and continue beyond the scope of ISSD Ethiopia. However, this was unsuccessful. At the same time, there came a point when all major challenges had been addressed, and the influx of new, innovative ideas slowed down. Currently, the group in Amhara continues and supports collective decision-making, while in Oromia, the group is still convening on an ad hoc basis to address specific problems. However, it is fair to say that these groups no longer drive seed sector innovation. Building upon the opportunity created by the 2023 Seed Proclamation (Ethiopian Seed Law) for establishing coordination structures, the Ethiopia Seed Partnership (the successor to ISSD Ethiopia) is in the process of re-establishing the core groups.

### **Three lessons from the Regional Seed Core Groups in Ethiopia:**

- Platform meetings should be complemented by bilateral discussions and negotiations to build trust and resolve specific issues.
- Effective platform governance requires a blending of collaborative and hierarchical modes of governance.
- Trust is the foundation to a successful platform, built on access to knowledge, financial resources, and strong social relationships.

### 4.3 Ghana: Horticulture Business Platform

The Horticultural Business Platform in Ghana was established with the objective to identify and address challenges in the horticultural sector. It aimed to create a space where key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors could meet to initiate, collaborate and solve sector-related issues. The platform was initially supported by the GhanaVeg project, later by HortiFresh, and eventually taken over by the Ghana Netherlands Business and Culture Council. While it first operated at a national level, it was later expanded to regional levels to better address regional needs.

*“The platform was at the heart of the GhanaVeg and HortiFresh projects—it brought everything together. It proved to be a valuable tool for connecting stakeholders and sharing project results.”*

**- Irene Koomen, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

The governance of the platform was overseen by the GhanaVeg/HortiFresh project, which served as the secretariat, organizing and facilitating quarterly meetings attended by 100 to 200 participants. While the platform did not have a formal structure or Terms of Reference, it operated effectively through a flexible, ad hoc approach, driven by the consistent involvement of key "horticultural sector champions." Communication was maintained through bi-monthly newsletters. Progress was tracked using key project indicators, such as attendance at meetings and the number of business deals facilitated. The Embassy of the Netherlands (EKN) in Accra, as the donor of GhanaVeg/HortiFresh, played an active role in the platform's activities.

Membership in the platform was largely inclusive, with open invitations encouraging broad participation. Representatives from the seed sector, including Dutch seed companies, also took part in platform meetings. In addition to the general meetings, smaller roundtable discussions were organized around specific topics, with participants invited based on their expertise and relevance. Engaging farmers proved to be challenging, but the platform addressed this by establishing regional clusters focused on specific crop groups. These clusters brought together local stakeholders, including farmers, extension services, and local government representatives, to foster more targeted collaboration.

*“It was only in the last couple of years of HortiFresh that we started organizing regional platforms—before that, everything was centred around the capital, Accra. In large countries especially, it's crucial to ensure broad geographic coverage.”*

**- Irene Koomen, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

The platform played an important role in fostering innovation within the horticultural sector. A dedicated budget was allocated to address specific challenges and develop new coping strategies. The GhanaVeg/HortiFresh projects issued calls for proposals to support relevant innovations, and the platform provided opportunities for members to share their progress and learn from one another's experiences. Participants also had the chance to showcase their produce, adding energy and vibrancy to the events.

Although the platform did not directly contribute to policy formulation, it succeeded in raising awareness of sector issues among policymakers, who actively participated in the meetings. Additionally, the platform developed and published policy briefs to highlight important policy matters. Regional clusters were equipped with their own financial resources to support the development and implementation of their specific plans.

Sustainability was a key consideration for the platform. Initially, it was envisioned that a newly established Horticultural Development Authority would take over the platform's functions once the GhanaVeg and HortiFresh projects concluded. However, the authority was never fully operationalized. Ultimately, the Ghana Netherlands Business and Culture Council assumed responsibility, and the platform continued to operate with support from EKN Accra. While the frequency of meetings decreased, an annual horticultural fair is still held, with attendees required to pay a fee to participate.

*"We had big ambitions with our plans to support the establishment of a horticultural development authority, but it simply needed more time than we had. This impacted our plans to institutionalize the platform."*

**- Irene Koomen, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

### Three lessons from the Ghana Horticultural Business Platform:

- Roundtables and working groups linked to a platform are an effective way to collaborate with stakeholders on specific topics and drive progress.
- Sector development needs to account for geographic coverage and relevance for farmers' realities
- For successful platform institutionalisation, sector leadership by a national partner needs to be supported from the very beginning.

## 4.4 Myanmar: National Seed Platform

The National Seed Platform in Myanmar was established to address key challenges within the country's seed sector. Endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation (MOALI), the platform aimed to oversee the implementation of Myanmar's National Seed Road Map (NSRM) and its associated action agenda (MOALI, 2016 and 2017; link). This roadmap outlined 17 prioritized action areas designed to enhance the performance and sustainability of the seed sector; the action agenda, specifies sets of activities for each action area, and assigned clear roles, responsibilities, and timelines to various stakeholders. Another network existed, i.e. the Vegetable Sector Task Force (VSAT), however, with a much broader mandate in horticulture. VSAT, along with other partners, played a key role in the development of the NSRM. The seed platform was approved and endorsed by MOALI.

The platform's governance was structured through a secretariat comprising nine representatives: three from different units within the Ministry, three from national and regional seed associations, and three from development partners (including ISSD Myanmar). Notably, all members were Myanmar nationals. While the secretariat was initially expected to convene quarterly, challenges in coordinating meetings led to its size being reduced. The streamlined secretariat, now consisting of representatives from MOALI's Seed Division, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and ISSD Myanmar, met more frequently and operated more effectively.

The secretariat organized biannual platform meetings to engage its 65 members, who were equally drawn from the public sector, private sector, and NGOs or development partners. Decision-making occurred within working groups during these meetings, and information was widely shared through email, the ISSD Myanmar website, and, for policy and regulatory matters, via the Myanmar Seed Portal. The platform operated under established Terms of Reference (ToR), ensuring structured and inclusive participation.

Inclusivity was a central tenet of the platform's operation. Membership was designed to balance representation across government, private sector, and non-government/development partners. Invitations to new stakeholders were extended as their relevance to the seed sector grew, and the government often included additional participants beyond the official list. Different stakeholders took the lead on various agenda points during the platform meetings, which fostered the sense of ownership. Meeting agendas always balanced public and private interests; and its structure empowered both the government and private sector stakeholders to collaboratively drive sectoral transformation. To further support inclusivity, Burmese translation was consistently provided during meetings to ensure comprehensive participation, especially from government staff. The inclusive approach fostered trust and collaboration, allowing for transparent discussions and balanced decision-making.

Innovation in Myanmar's seed sector was actively supported by the platform through fostering discussions and sharing insights on innovative practices. While the platform itself did not fund studies or pilot projects, it facilitated the prioritization and coordination of innovative actions identified in the NSRM. Partners implemented studies and innovation pilots using their own resources. The platform also enabled international knowledge transfer, inviting experts to inspire and inform local stakeholders.

*"The platform's agenda was guided by the National Seed Roadmap and Action Agenda, which had support from many seed sector stakeholders. By connecting the platform to other programs and projects, we kept it action-focused and avoided it becoming just a 'talk shop'."*

**- Abishkar Subedi, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

The platform's agenda was initially shaped by studies and the outcomes of partners' innovation pilots aligned with NSRM action areas. This reflected both the urgency of advancing seed sector development and the stakeholders' willingness to share new developments. Over time, the focus shifted increasingly toward seed regulatory reform, driven by the need for multistakeholder engagement in the context of IFC's seed regulatory reform project. It is important to note that a thorough process of study, pilots, and multistakeholder engagement preceded the presentation and discussion of regulatory reform proposals during platform meetings, where decisions on go/no-go were made. The regulatory reforms and institutional changes discussed and endorsed during platform meetings had far-reaching impacts, benefiting stakeholders both within and beyond the platform.

*"The platform played a key role in supporting seed regulatory reform in Myanmar. In a platform meeting, we discussed, improved, and endorsed 12 reform proposals. At the next National Seed Committee meeting, nine were fully approved, one was partly approved, and two were rejected.*

*Approved proposals were immediately implemented by MOALI."*

**- Abishkar Subedi, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

ISSD Myanmar's international experts invested in building the capacity of local staff to coordinate and facilitate the platform. While the ISSD Myanmar coordinator struggled to meet expectations, the manager of MOALI's Seed Unit excelled in the role.

*"It is not easy to manage and facilitate a multistakeholder platform. The platform coordinator needs certain capacities, or willingness to invest in strengthening his or her capacities. We learned that carefully selecting and supporting capable leadership is important."*

**- Abishkar Subedi, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

The platform's purpose was to monitor the implementation of the NSRM and associated action agenda, which ran 2017-2020; a total of seven meetings were organised. The period fully overlapped with the ISSD Myanmar programme and IFC's regulatory reform project; it is those two organizations who covered costs of platform meetings. Although discussions were initiated with MOALI to sustain the platform beyond its initial timeline, the military coup in February 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted these efforts, halting further operations and meetings.

### Three lessons from the National Seed Platform in Myanmar:

- Strong management is crucial for a platform's effectiveness, requiring a skilled and capable coordinator/facilitator.
- Connecting a platform with ongoing initiatives, projects, and programmes ensures it remains action-oriented and impactful.
- A platform's impact can endure even if the platform itself does not remain operational.

## 4.5 Nigeria: National Seed Platform

The National Seed Road Map (NSRM) of Nigeria (NASC and SEEDAN, 2019) provided a multi-year strategy for seed sector development, serving as a guide for the government, stakeholders, and development partners to foster sector growth in a coordinated, aligned, and structured manner. It outlined strategic innovation pathways for 22 topics prioritized by Nigerian seed sector stakeholders.

Acknowledging the sector's fragmented and inconsistent coordination, one of the topics emphasized strengthening sector governance by enhancing the capacity of the National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC) to better coordinate the sector. The establishment of a National Seed Sector Platform was one of the activities recommended to support this effort. The platform's purpose was to provide a structure for seed sector stakeholders to discuss, elaborate, and monitor activities tied to the implementation of the NSRM, driving the transformation of the seed sector.

The Collaborative Seed Programme of Nigeria (CSP Nigeria) operated under the Nigeria-Netherlands Seed Partnership, a flagship of SeedNL. CSP Nigeria took on the task of initiating and guiding the National Seed Sector Platform. As a key partner within CSP Nigeria, NASC has been leading the platform in close collaboration with the Seed Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria (SEEDAN), Sahel Consulting and Wageningen University & Research (WUR), who together served as the platform's secretariat.

The secretariat supported a platform core group to hold quarterly meetings to deliberate on key issues and set the agenda for the quarterly platform meetings. This core group included representatives from around ten key seed sector stakeholders, spanning the public sector, research institutions, private sector, civil society, and farmer organizations. While core group meetings were primarily held in person, the broader platform meetings were conducted online, allowing for inclusive participation by a wide range of seed sector stakeholders—often exceeding 200 participants—including international partners. In addition, platform sessions were held as part of the annual Seed Connect conferences.

The platform is generally recognised as an instrument for fostering of relationships, awareness and collaboration in the seed sector in Nigeria. The early inclusion of the private sector through the representation of SEEDAN was seen as key to the success of the platform. The open and collaborative modes through which NASC, SEEDAN, Sahel Consulting and WUR have engaged in the platform has set the tone for how partners want to work together and why the platform has been successful to support the recent advances in the sector.

*“The platform’s collaborative approach ensures that power dynamics are not a barrier to progress. Its neutrality and inclusivity build trust, and have been key to its success.”*

**– Adigun Stephen, Seed Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria**

The platform served primarily as a convergence point for stakeholders to showcase and exchange ideas and innovations. Platform meetings were centred around specific, agreed-upon focus topics and featured presentations where various partners shared insights and lessons learned. These topics included areas CSP Nigeria was actively working on, as well as other relevant topics addressed by partners. Attendees were encouraged to ask questions and engage with presenters, often followed by interactive panel discussions involving a diverse range of stakeholders. This approach ensured the platform provided dedicated attention to sharing, validating, and scaling innovations.

The platform secretariat has been managing the NSRM dashboard, which tracks performance across all 22 NSRM topics over a five-year timeline. It utilized data from existing sources, supplemented by contributions from Nigerian seed sector experts, and was updated annually. NASC management indicated they regard the

dashboard as a vital tool for providing a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of seed sector performance and has expressed a strong commitment to its ongoing maintenance.

*"The launch of a live dashboard to track the progress of the National Seed Road Map shows how technology and data-driven approaches can make it easier to measure outcomes and improve transparency. This is a game-changer for all seed sector stakeholders."*

**- Osundiya Olusegun, National Agricultural Seeds Council**

The sustainability of the platform has been given attention, especially as CSP Nigeria nears conclusion in 2025. Sahel Consulting provided training and coaching to NASC colleagues on how to operate the online platform meetings and communication tools, giving NASC colleagues confidence in their ability to organize future platform meetings. Additional encouragement has seen the platform being utilised by external initiatives, for example in the recent online event showcasing learning from the BASICS-II programme. The process of rebranding the platform to remove its association with CSP Nigeria is currently underway. Yet just how funding will be secured to maintain the platform and in particular, the core group, at NASC remains an ongoing discussion.

*"Although the platform has opened the door by inviting external projects to use this convening space, there is however a need to take a more proactive approach to bring in more partners and secure its long-term operation under NASC's national leadership."*

**- Adigun Stephen, SEEDAN**

### Three lessons from the National Seed Platform in Nigeria

- For a platform to be sustainable, it should be seen as more than an outreach tool for a single project or programme.
- Online webinars and tools allow a platform to reach a wider audience than with face-to-face engagement, though opportunity for interaction is less.
- A performance indicator dashboard allows for tracking progress and enhancing transparency in seed sector development.

## 4.6 Rwanda: Horticulture Working Group

Under the mandate of the Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, the Rwanda Horticulture Working Group (RHWG) was established in August 2015 as a multi-stakeholder platform to tackle challenges and opportunities in the horticulture sector. The group aimed to contribute to the Rwandan government's strategic agricultural transformation goals. Initially led by the National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB) and financially supported by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the RHWG focused primarily on addressing export-related barriers to sector growth.

At its outset, the platform lacked a structured approach. As multiple stakeholders called for a more active public-private dialogue—addressing not only export challenges but also domestic issues hindering horticultural sector growth—the launch of HortInvest created an opportunity to strengthen the platform. In 2018, NAEB formally requested support from the programme to enhance the platform's functionality. This request was strongly backed by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), the enabling partner for HortInvest.

HortInvest facilitated a series of in-depth consultations and discussions, including a review with members of the former working group, to redefine the platform's structure, objectives, and membership. The platform's purpose was established as a forum for public and private horticultural sector stakeholders to collaboratively develop a shared vision, address bottlenecks hindering sector transformation, strengthen the enabling environment, and enhance market orientation.

The RHWG was governed by an Executive Committee, initially chaired by NAEB and co-chaired by the private sector organization Garden Fresh. However, to enhance effectiveness, the leadership roles were later reversed, with the private sector taking the chair. To further support the committee, HortInvest provided funding for an external facilitator—a senior, well-connected, and widely respected person, trusted and a neutral person. Additionally, the NAEB funded and managed a small secretarial unit to support the platform's operations.

*"The mid-term review of HortInvest, which looked at how the platform was functioning, recommended: switching the leadership from the government to the private sector, bringing in a dedicated senior facilitator, and request NAEB to fund and manage the secretariat. These changes helped improve the platform's performance."*

**– Edwin van der Maden, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

A Technical Advisory Committee was also established, along with specialized clusters focusing on key topics. To guide the platform's activities, a Terms of Reference was developed, which was periodically reviewed and updated throughout the HortInvest programme to align with emerging needs and priorities.

At the start of its involvement, HortInvest conducted an inventory of public and private organizations relevant to the platform. The RHWG had 40–50 members with varying levels of engagement, though participation in platform meetings remained open to all interested parties. The transition of leadership from the public to the private sector led to a noticeable increase in private sector interest and participation.

With cluster representation in the Technical Advisory Committee, members felt their interests were well represented. This structure ensured the platform remained highly inclusive, accommodating stakeholders involved in both domestic and export markets.

The platform's primary purpose is to drive progress on critical sector challenges. The RHWG identified key issues and priorities, and smaller clusters developed targeted action plans. The clusters were responsible for reporting their discussions and recommendations to the broader RHWG. The involvement and expectations of EKN played a significant role in fostering the development of clear, actionable recommendations.

HortInvest provided financial support for the RHWG's governance structure, meetings, and smaller activities such as field excursions. However, the programme did not allocate a budget for implementing action plans, expecting funding to come from other organizations with a vested interest in the issues at hand, including contributions from RHWG members. While the platform successfully facilitated breakthroughs in areas such as finance—including smallholder access to micro-loans—and improved access to inputs like quality seeds, not all challenges could be fully addressed.

*"The platform successfully facilitated dialogue, with concrete results in some areas, such as smallholder farmers in Rubavu gaining access to seasonal digital micro-loans. However, in other areas, a lack of financial resources prevented follow-through on actions."*

**- Edwin van der Maden, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

In terms of sustainability, the goal was to continue the platform's operations beyond the HortInvest programme. However, this did not materialize, and with the programme's conclusion, the RHWG became inactive. While the platform was successful in fostering connections and generating clear, actionable recommendations to strengthen the sector, a stakeholder survey revealed that these actions lacked sustained support. As a result, the impact on sector challenges was more limited than expected, which reduced the perceived value of continuing investment in the platform.

### Three lessons from the Rwanda Horticultural Working Group:

- Regular monitoring and evaluation of a platform's functionality is important for improving its structure and operations.
- A platform facilitator must be trusted by stakeholders, which requires careful consideration of their seniority, connections, respect within the sector, and neutrality.
- Collaborative development of action plans is not followed by their implementation if members are not enabled to make the necessary investments.

## 4.7 South Sudan: Seed Hub

The South Sudan Seed Hub (S3H) was conceived as a response to the pressing challenges in South Sudan's agricultural and seed sector. Initiated by the University of Juba in collaboration with Wageningen University & Research (WUR) under the FAO-managed Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Program (FNS-REPRO), the platform's objectives were: creating a space for knowledge exchange, providing seed sector expertise, serving as a repository of seed-related information, enabling strategic partnerships, and the collaborative prioritization of actions. The intention was also for S3H to connect South Sudanese experts with their regional counterparts; first to foster the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and second, to better benefit from seed sector infrastructure of neighbouring nations, especially for South Sudan's remote regions bordering those countries, and depending on them for seed security.

Another seed forum existed but was exclusively open to seed companies, focusing primarily on connecting seed demand with supply. The need for a platform to facilitate information and experience sharing became evident during the first S3H meeting. It was revealed that two organizations were working on a national seed policy, while another was developing a national seed law. These initiatives were unconnected and lacked coordination. The Netherlands Embassy (the funder of FNS-REPRO), along with other donors and key seed sector stakeholders, greatly supported the seed hub initiative.

Platform governance was anchored at the University of Juba, with strategic and financial support from WUR, FNS-REPRO, and ISSD Africa. The initial governance structure decided during the first meeting saw agreement on the establishment of a secretariat at the Orange Knowledge Centre of the University of Juba and an advisory committee comprising key seed sector stakeholders. This structure was designed to ensure effective coordination, decision-making, and dissemination of outcomes, supplemented by publications and an online platform.

The S3H addressed stakeholder inclusion by compiling a comprehensive list of seed sector actors, with input from multiple partners to ensure representation from policymakers, practitioners, and regional experts. The inaugural meeting brought together 51 stakeholders, including eight regional experts from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda, showcasing the platform's commitment to diverse engagement. This broad participation helped build trust in the emerging platform.

Trust was further strengthened through the presentation of "evidence", such as seed sector studies, sharing on-the-ground experiences, and collaboratively developing actions. Regional experts openly shared challenges faced in improving their own seed sectors, adding credibility and inspiring South Sudanese stakeholders. The University of Juba's role as a neutral facilitator was particularly appreciated by all members.

The interviewees reflected that the advancement of the seed hub platform struggled due to the complexities of fostering openness in a sector with deeply rooted vested interests. The challenge of maintaining momentum around the platform is attributed in part due to a single powerful actor sidelining the platform and its members and pursuing the development of the national seed policy independently. This occurrence highlighted the need for early identification of supportive stakeholders and managing dynamics with powerful actors.

*"Not all stakeholders are willing to share their approaches, activities, and programmes in the public domain of the Seed Hub. With stiff competition for funding, some actors may even undermine others to secure their own agenda and interests."*

**- Gerrit Jan van Uffelen, Wageningen Social & Economic Research**

The platform's agenda was shaped by a study on bottlenecks in the seed sector, which identified and prioritized ten strategic innovation pathways to build a robust, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient seed sector in South Sudan. These pathways were discussed, finalized, and endorsed by stakeholders during the seed hub event (Policy brief, van Uffelen et al., 2023a). At the same event, stakeholders also reached consensus on key outcomes, priority actions, policy implications, and stakeholder involvement for each pathway (Call to Action, van Uffelen et al., 2023b).

Regional experts enriched the event by contributing innovative approaches, which were then tailored to the South Sudanese context. A standout example of regional knowledge sharing was an exchange visit to Uganda, where South Sudanese experts gained insights into farmer-managed seed systems. This directly supported the platform's action agenda of strengthening local seed businesses. Furthermore, the S3H's online presence facilitated the wider dissemination of innovations and knowledge, extending its impact beyond immediate members.

*"One of the biggest successes of the South Sudan Seed Hub is that we got to learn from experts from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda. They showed us ways to improve our seed sector and shared important lessons, including the challenges and mistakes they faced in their own countries."*

**- Tony Ngalamu, University of Juba**

Sustainability of the platform was envisioned to extend beyond the FNS-REPRO program, with the operational website serving as a continuing resource. However, the platform's activities stalled after the first major event. Ongoing and future activities of the platform remain tied to sporadic engagement and funding from international development partners and initiatives. One example is the upcoming action research activities of the ISSD Africa CoP in relation to the S3H being a potential example of a platform serving as a 'HDP-Nexus governance mechanism'. Realizing the contribution of seed security to food security, the new Dutch-funded initiative Accelerating Resilient Food Systems in Africa has agreed to organize a next seed hub event.

*"The seed hub has great potential to support joint and constructive programming in the seed sector and food systems, in line with donor efforts. But the timeframe was just too short to achieve this."*

**- Tony Ngalamu, University of Juba**

### **Three lessons from the South Sudan Seed Hub:**

- Including regional experts in a national platform and facilitating South-South knowledge supports sector innovation.
- In fragile contexts with limited resources, a platform serves as a critical tool for joint programming and minimizing duplication of efforts.
- Some stakeholders are reluctant to share their activities, results, and challenges openly; vested interests must be taken into account.

## 4.8 Tanzania: Horticulture and Potato Seed Platform

The Tanzania Horticulture and Potato Seed Platform (THPSP) was initiated in October 2023 with the overarching aim of strengthening sector coordination and information sharing towards addressing prevailing horticulture seed sector issues towards a more conducive business environment. The platform was seen as a mechanism to share information and strengthen coordination of actors and activities.

The platform arose in response to a series of consultative processes beginning with a Horticulture Seed Conference in 2022. This enabled sector actors to sit together with the government and discuss issues impacting business in the sector. In 2022 and 2023, a series of interviews and visits, supported by an external consultant from the Ethiopian Seed Partnership, culminated in a roundtable meeting in which partners endorsed the idea of forming a platform.

The platform is fully market-driven and led by the two private sector associations. The platform is chaired by the Tanzania Seed Trade Association (TASTA), with the Tanzania Horticultural Association (TAHA) serving as vice-chair. Day-to-day platform activities are managed by a platform coordinator, based at TAHA. Private sector leadership appeared key for open discussion of sector issues.

Under the platform, members come together in three distinct technical working groups focusing on: domestic seed production, i.e. indigenous vegetable seed category; imported seed for local use category; and seed multiplication for export market category. TAHA and TASTA utilise their own communication channels and in this way use their convening power in the sector to advance the platform.

The platform coordinator at TAHA is responsible for coordinating platform members by collecting and gathering ideas for projects and activities; organizing quarterly platform meetings; identifying, analysing and documenting policy, regulatory and business issues affecting stakeholders; organising capacity building sessions; and, representing the horticulture seed sector in public-private dialogues.

The platform is comprised of seven key members representing the various industry stakeholders; TAHA, TASTA, the Ministry of Agriculture, the South Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT), the Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI), the World Vegetable Centre and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN). Citing capacity challenges and in support of private sector leadership for this fast growing sector, the Ministry of Agriculture welcomed TAHA and TASTA leadership of the platform. Individual members were selected based on their progressive attitude and commitment to advancing the sector.

*“Having the private sector leading the platform is important for having open discussions about sector issues. But it’s also important to involve the government to ensure support for policy and regulatory topics.”*

**– Jerry Moshi, Tanzania Horticultural Association**

The platform is set to address ten recognised sector issues including: tax, policy and regulatory issues; limited capacity of accredited laboratories; local seed marketing and promotion as well as certification capacities; seed potato multiplication challenges; and, the impacts of climate change. In 2024, several events were organized, responding to stakeholder demand including on tax issues, updates on regulatory changes, and a seminar on the safe use and handling of pesticides. The platform has seen success in contributing to a number of sector reforms, which attracted business investment of for example, Rijk Zwaan and Enza Zaden.

It has become a trustworthy body that the Ministry of Agriculture consults when it comes to horticulture seed sector development. Platform members are seen as trustworthy ambassadors in various Government Ministries to consult on seed-related issues. However, not all policymakers in key ministries are aware of the significant impact of the horticultural sector on the country's economy and citizens' livelihoods. Additionally, frequent cabinet reshuffles and changes in decision-makers hinder continuity in the platform's efforts to support sector development.

*"The Ministry appreciates the platform. However, frequent staff changes mean that we constantly have to explain the purpose of the platform and advocate for it as an important way to address sector challenges."*

**- Theo Mutabingwa, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Dar es Salaam**

With support from SeedNL, funding to initiate the platform was secured from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). This support enabled the establishment and launch of the platform, and supports the secretariate to organise meetings until mid-2026. However, there is clear demand for a longer-term trajectory for the platform.

Currently however, the available funding does not enable action on the recommendations of the platform. When action plans or ideas are agreed, platform members must seek alternate sources of funding to realise these ambitions. This is seen as one of the larger challenges of the platform; without sufficient funding to act on the platform's recommendations, the prioritisation of activities and topics is complex. For example, different stakeholders wish to see more action on soft skills, while others seek investment in infrastructure, for example storage facilities. The platform had secured small projects under the PVP Tool Box to address plant variety protection.

### **Three lessons from the Tanzania Horticulture and Potato Seed Platform:**

- Solving sector challenges requires joint private sector and government leadership.
- Government leadership changes and awareness gaps must be addressed to ensure consistent support for sector development.
- A platform can drive seed regulatory reform, fostering increased business investment.

## 4.9 Uganda: National Seed Platform

The National Seed Platform in Uganda was established as a collaborative effort to tackle key challenges in the seed sector. Led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), in partnership with the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), the Seed Trade Association, the ISSD Uganda programme, USAID and other development partners, the platform's objectives were to facilitate information sharing among stakeholders, build consensus on sector challenges, and agree on actionable solutions.

The platform emerged as a strategic response to address the need for collective problem-solving among sector stakeholders, complementing bilateral dialogues in a broader, more inclusive forum. Its establishment filled a void left by an inactive seed platform mentioned in the draft seed policy, positioning itself as a key facilitator in advancing Uganda's seed sector. While its mandate was limited to facilitating information sharing and fostering collective agreement, the platform played a pivotal role in building stakeholder consensus on contentious issues in the draft Uganda seed policy, ultimately contributing to its approval.

*"Platforms are key to building consensus on contentious issues that affect the whole seed sector —issues that can't be solved through bilateral engagements alone. The Uganda platform played a key role in bringing all stakeholders on board to develop an inclusive seed policy."*

**- Patrick Oyee, ISSD Uganda**

The governance of the platform was spearheaded by ISSD Uganda and USAID, with ISSD Uganda managing the secretariat. Ideally, governance oversight would have been provided by government bodies and the Seed Trade Association; however, due to a perceived lack of facilitation, this role remained unfulfilled. In the early stages, the platform established issue-specific working groups or task forces, composed of expert members nominated for their expertise on the topic at hand. The secretariat ensured that these groups included diverse perspectives.

The working groups presented their findings and recommendations during national platform meetings, which consistently engaged around fifty stakeholders. These meetings were held annually or more frequently as needed. Decisions were made and communicated during these sessions, often building on the preparatory work carried out by the working groups or task forces.

The national platform operated under a single guiding principle: inclusiveness. Its goal was to create a space where all perspectives could be heard, a foundation considered essential for securing stakeholder buy-in. Participants were carefully selected to represent all key stakeholder categories, with individual selection based on factors such as position, authority, influence, status, and available resources. Building trust in the platform among members was initially challenging, as some stakeholders were suspicious of ISSD Uganda's intentions. However, partnering with USAID together with other development partners and working closely with the regulator helped address these concerns and foster greater confidence in the platform's objectives.

*"A seed platform should be as inclusive as possible. It's important to listen to dissenting voices and consider their views, even when it's challenging— don't shut out perspectives just because they're hard to accept."*

**- Patrick Oyee, ISSD Uganda**

The platform played a pivotal role in supporting and scaling innovation by providing a space to share and validate new ideas. Many of these ideas required further refinement in other forums and subgroups before being implemented. The formulation of Uganda's new seed policy, as supported by the platform, exemplified the scaling of innovation to broader stakeholder groups. Beyond fostering connections and trust among stakeholders, the advancement of the national seed policy was widely regarded as the platform's greatest achievement.

The platform was envisioned to continue to operate beyond ISSD Uganda's involvement and funding, with leadership expected to transition to MAAIF. To support this vision, ISSD Uganda focused on capacity building and providing coordination support, particularly within MAAIF, the regulatory body, and the Seed Trade Association. However, the platform eventually became dormant due to resource constraints and the lack of pressing sectoral issues to address. Its structure was briefly reactivated in response to the EU's ban on vegetable exports, demonstrating that critical challenges within the sector could reignite collaborative action when the need arose.

*"The platform functioned effectively while we were focused on the seed policy, but enthusiasm went down once the task was completed. Seed platforms only work if there are 'burning issues' to drive action; without those, they're likely to become dormant."*

**- Patrick Oyee, ISSD Uganda**

### **Three lessons from the National Seed Platform in Uganda:**

- A platform is vital for building consensus and acceptance on complex or contentious issues.
- Including dissenting voices, rather than ignoring them, leads to more effective and lasting outcomes.
- Interest in a platform tends to decline once the main issue that drove its creation is resolved.

## 4.10 Uganda: Regional Seed Platforms

The regional seed platforms in Uganda were established with the primary objective of bringing together key stakeholders to raise awareness of sector issues. These platforms served as a space to share insights, understand diverse perspectives, and discuss solutions. The establishment of regional platforms by ISSD Uganda proved easier than setting up the national platform. Regional platforms were able to leverage the programme's field activities, outputs, and pre-existing relationships. Stakeholders such as government bodies, seed businesses, and farmers already trusted ISSD Uganda due to its previous successes in addressing local seed sector challenges. While there were regionally operating value chain platforms, such as the Uganda Oilseed Subsector Platform (OSSUP) in Lira district, no regional platforms specifically focused on seed issues were operational prior to this initiative.

The platforms were governed by executive committees comprising five to eight members, elected by the broader platform membership to ensure representation from various stakeholder groups. ISSD Uganda managed the secretariat, which supported platform operations and facilitated agenda development through bilateral engagements with committee members. The executive committee held quarterly meetings; their decisions were then communicated to members during annual large-scale meetings and through follow-up emails. Additionally, a WhatsApp group facilitated efficient communication among executive committee members.

The platform operated on the principle of inclusiveness, striving to ensure representation across diverse stakeholder groups and incorporating a wide range of perspectives. Over time, platform membership evolved from an initial fixed group of 50–70 stakeholders to include additional participants, such as seed traders, to better reflect the sector's diversity. Issues of power dynamics within the local sector were also carefully addressed, with deliberate attention given to factors such as position, authority, influence, status, and access to resources. The platform's credibility was anchored in the reputation of ISSD Uganda, established through pre-existing collaborations in the region. To promote effective and equitable governance, the executive committee assigned roles—including Chair, Co-Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary—ensuring a fair distribution of responsibilities and decision-making authority.

*"ISSD Uganda proved its value through hands-on work in the seed sector, showing real commitment to its growth. This built trust and allowed them to effectively lead the regional seed platforms."*

**- Fiona Ibudi, ISSD Uganda**

The platforms aimed to drive innovation in the seed sector by promoting awareness of innovative practices through, for example, demonstrations held in easily accessible community spaces, such as churches. They also provided funding to support the validation of such approaches, with results and lessons learned shared during platform meetings and via diverse communication channels.

The regional platforms were particularly successful raising awareness about Quality Declared Seed (QDS). This was a highly contentious issue, with stakeholders holding diverse and often conflicting perspectives. The platforms played a pivotal role in fostering understanding, promoting dialogue, and finding common ground among stakeholders.

*“The regional platforms played a key role in making the QDS system a success. Now, it’s fully understood and accepted by everyone, including local governments. Even though there was some pushback at first, especially from seed companies worried about market share, the process brought everyone on board.”*

**– Fiona Ibudi, ISSD Uganda**

Other notable achievements scaling innovations include the establishment of seed bylaws in the West Nile region and the refinement and dissemination of climate-smart agricultural practices, which were developed as part of a PhD research project. Furthermore, the regional platforms played a crucial role in shaping national policy by contributing insights to the National Seed Platform, and vice versa. They also supported the national platform by facilitating the dissemination of a simplified version of the new seed policy.

In terms of sustainability, ISSD Uganda provided funding for organization of meetings and anticipated that stakeholders, such as the Zonal Agricultural Research Institutes (ZARDIs), would take over these responsibilities after the programme concluded. However, investment in capacity building to support this transition was limited. The investment in this issue likely came too late and was insufficient, ultimately leading to the regional platforms becoming inactive.

*“For sustainability, more effort should have gone into securing solid organizational rather than individual buy-in. Even though the platforms didn’t last, their contributions like the QDS system and the seed policy, are here to stay.”*

**– Fiona Ibudi, ISSD Uganda**

### **Three lessons from Regional Seed Platforms in Uganda:**

- Inclusivity is crucial for addressing diverse perspectives and ensuring balanced representation.
- Engagement in on-the-ground activities helps build trust and foster collaboration within a platform.
- Securing institutional buy-in, rather than individual buy-in, is key to ensuring a platform's sustainability.

## 5. When does it make sense to invest in seed sector platforms?

While the main objective of the study is to provide guidance to make seed sector platforms more effective, the study should also inform when it makes sense – or not – to actually invest in a platform in the first place. SeedNL for example wants to be sure that supporting platforms is a valid and valued trajectory to invest in, but also what conditions might be observed to be confident that such platforms are the right form of mechanism to support.

Across the literature and interviews, some considerations are immediately obvious; there should be some level of motivation and perception of benefit for people to work together in an ongoing manner, and there should be some level of funding so that actual action can take place. Yet the study showed that multiple other factors are important to consider. The below can be seen as a set of considerations that should be explored at least to some acceptable level before deciding to invest in seed sector platforms.

### **Evidence-based and endorsed rationale for a platform**

The study shows that forming the platform is never the first step. In almost all cases, the rationale and motivation to create a platform was confirmed in some form of action research or sector assessment. In Nigeria for example, the seed sector assessment found that stakeholders were not satisfied with the degree of inclusion and coordination of the many issues in the sector. That assessment resulted in the National Seed Road Map (NSRM), which outlined the formation of the National Seed Platform as one of the twenty-two action pathways that should be undertaken to transform the seed sector. Through discussions with stakeholders and partners, the Collaborative Seed Programme prioritised this action pathway and invested in formulating the platform. The platform was instrumental then to fostering connection across stakeholders which enabled concerted action on the other action pathways of the NSRM.

### **Urgent shared issues requiring multistakeholder connection and action**

For a platform to be a useful mechanism to invest in, it should be purposed at addressing pressing issues which impact the often diverse priorities of stakeholders. Commonly, in the absence of wider sector development or transformation initiatives, or a coordinating body or structure for the sector, many stakeholders don't have regular contact or awareness of each other. Yet within a sector, different issues impact stakeholders in different ways and commonly, sector level challenges cannot be addressed by any one single stakeholder. Most stakeholders will realise that such challenges require action by multiple groups, and that they themselves have an interest to contribute to any proposed change.

### **Recognised benefit of pooling stakeholders' distinct resources**

On the same line, platforms make sense when stakeholders accept that they themselves cannot achieve their desired change due to limitations in their capacities. Some stakeholders may have technical knowledge, but no financial capital to implement solutions. Others, perhaps in the private sector may be able to leverage finance, but need regulatory change and support for the removal of specific bottlenecks. Also under this condition, it is clear that in most cases where a mandated body or mechanism to coordinate the sector already exists, this body needs to embrace the reality that they require the capacities and resources of sector stakeholders to achieve their aims, especially on the implementation of policies. In cases where no such body exists, it rests on stakeholders themselves to volunteer their various forms of social, financial, technical and political capital as contributory to the aims of the platform.

### **In support of a wider sector development or transformation initiative**

In many, but not all, cases, the sector platform arose as a mechanism to support the activities and objectives of wider sector development or transformation programmes. As above, in Nigeria the formation of the platform was a goal in itself, yet for most others, platforms were a means to an end. Platforms were created as a means to secure stakeholder buy-in and ownership of programmes' activities, as a means to scale innovations, learning and outputs and as vehicles to inform and direct programmes' activity planning.

Platforms were fundamental to fostering a notion of the sector for some stakeholders and the space in which connection was formed. Without this, the targets of the development programmes could not be met as effectively. Yet this is not to say that the existence of such programmes is essential when considering a platform; in Tanzania, the platform is not directly tied to one development programme. Rather it is a collaborative foundation through which sector strategies and future programming may be discussed by national and international stakeholders and partners.

### **When not to invest in platforms: lack of motivation to adapt and compromise**

It is too simple to say that if the above considerations are not present then no investment in a platform should take place. This is not the case. Rather, the study shows that attention to these factors is important to address during the discussions – and any sector assessment - on whether a platform should be initiated.

However it is clear from the study that platforms do inherently need to capitalise on stakeholders' motivation to work together, to invest their own various forms of capital and to recognise that their needs cannot be met by their own actions alone. In essence, platforms can only be effective if stakeholders are willing to compromise. And if an assessment shows that the issues that stakeholders hold as key for them do not require collaborative action or changes by other stakeholders, then a platform may not be the right way.

In addition, if the issues at play in the sector are too highly sensitive and politically charged, an open multistakeholder space may cause some stakeholders to refrain from active participation and commitment, with reputational risk at personal and institutional level playing a role.

In such cases, it may be wiser to follow a trajectory of bilateral consultations through a trusted neutral party. Here international facilitators are often of use and can bridge pre-existing issues of trust and resentment between national stakeholders.

## 6. Guidance for the effective initiation and facilitation of seed sector platforms

While the studied cases highlight multiple diverse important insights and experiences, they also show consistent lessons on a number of key elements. And across all cases, the clear takeaway is that creating and maintaining effective multistakeholder platforms is no easy task, and one which requires careful and constant consideration of prevailing stakeholder dynamics in the sector. For those practitioners playing a leading role in initiating seed sector platforms - either from within or external to the sector - inclusive and active facilitation and giving sufficient space to shared learning is essential.

**Section 2** of this publication unpacked seed sector platforms as a form of multistakeholder process which supports the building of partnerships to advance seed sector development. The common purposes of multistakeholder platforms were identified as providing governance and coordination, enabling connection and trust-building, supporting the pooling of different forms of resources, supporting the co-creation and scaling of innovation and increasing the sustainability of targeted outcomes and outputs.

Building on these features, **Section 3** reflected on the common phases which multistakeholder processes and platforms evolve through. This enabled the identification of key topics which must be addressed by those thinking about, or planning for, the initiation of seed sector platforms, namely; purpose and mandate, governance mechanisms, inclusion and power dynamics, the support to innovation and the sustainability of outcomes.

The study of experiences from seed and horticulture sector platforms as summarised in **Section 4** confirmed that developing strategies to address these key topics will enhance the effectiveness of the platform. Conversely, the cases also show what can happen when these topics are overlooked, partly or wholly.

And in **Section 5**, some foundational considerations around stakeholder dynamics, the enthusiasm to pool resources and the existence of wider sector development initiatives suggest that initiating seed sector platforms may not always be the most effective approach, and alternative strategies may yield better results.

### Translating lessons from the study into guidance

This section brings these different insights, lessons and topics together, translating them into clear, actionable guidance on the effective initiation and facilitation of seed sector platforms. The guidance revolves around six distinct recommendations:

1. Purpose the platform on evidence-based and shared priorities
2. Secure a clear mandate to influence seed sector development
3. Prioritise inclusivity and facilitate equitable engagement
4. Build trust and ownership through transparent governance
5. Facilitate effective knowledge sharing, co-creation, and scaling of innovation
6. Leverage diverse forms of capital for platform sustainability

## Contextual factors impacting the guidance

It is firstly important to note that the applicability of this guidance is highly dependent on important contextual issues and needs to be tailored depending on the type, level and mandate of a platform. For example, the NSAG in Ethiopia did not need to be overly concerned with the wide inclusion of distant stakeholders; rather the platform aimed to be a comparatively small grouping of high-level representatives who could give advice to the Minister. There is therefore not a 'right' or 'wrong' level to which the guidance should be considered. Rather, the guidance is intended to help navigate early thinking and conceptualisation of a platform

The available financial resources for a platform will also have an impact on how the guidance can be applied. The recommendations implies additional steps that need to be taken, and this implies material and personnel costs. Setting the duration, deliverables and scope of a platform should take place with budget limitations in mind, not least to manage the expectations of stakeholders.

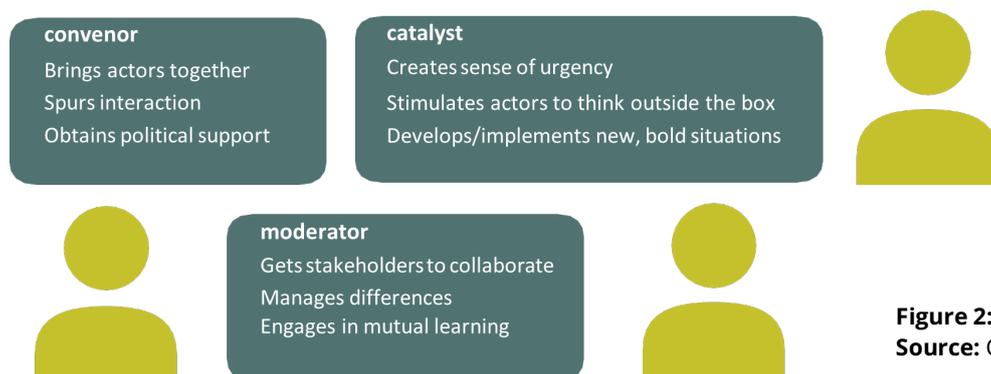
In addition, the reality is that all seed sectors and thus platforms are impacted by power issues. And whether we like it or not, powerful actors who set themselves against a platform will commonly succeed. Such powerful actors unfortunately often need to be accommodated, and their demands on how platforms are initiated and implemented may compete with or contradict the guidance presented here, particularly on the ambition for platforms to be inclusive.

In a similar fashion, the sustainability of a platform - and thus the platform's planning to sustain itself and its outcomes - is often be determined by entities and developments outside of the platform. The recommendation is for pragmatism in how the guidance is applied, recognising that ultimately the decision on a platform's longevity may always be uncertain.

## The role of facilitating seed sector platforms

It is also important to look at who this guidance is intended to be used by. The experiences and lessons of partners who contributed to this study have shown the importance of good governance arrangements and practices for effective seed sector platforms. These insights also show the key roles of individuals who mobilise and support the initiation and implementation of platforms. These individuals foster trust and understanding across involved stakeholders and play an ongoing role the platform. These people are fulfilling the role of platform facilitator. In some cases, these facilitators are respected neutral people within the local or national seed sector. In other cases, the facilitators may be international staff connected to a funded development programme. Platform facilitators play an important role in supporting stakeholder dynamics; encouraging participation, monitoring perceptions and when needed, mediating conflicts.

According to the MSP Guide of Wageningen University & Research, a facilitator is rarely one person, but rather a set team of people who subtly or explicitly adopt the responsibility to facilitate the platform's advancement. In doing so, they address three key roles; convenor, catalyst and moderator:



**Figure 2:** The three roles of a facilitator  
**Source:** Copied from Brouwer et al.,2019

## Finding the right platform facilitator

Given the different stakeholder dynamics and power issues in a seed sector, arriving at the right facilitator for a platform can be a sensitive and risk-loaded process. Normally, different people have been involved to bring the discussion to a point where there is agreement that a platform will be initiated. But these people may be key stakeholders with their own interests and so may not be seen as neutral by others in the sector. Some key factors can help guide to choosing the right facilitator:

- **Single or multiple facilitators:** Depending on the purpose and scope of the platform and its expected size in terms of members, budget and activities, a single person could suffice. It may however be necessary to have multiple people, especially if there are multiple working groups and a wider range of platform activities. In such cases, having a secretarial support unit is also useful. It may also be the case that the facilitator role is rotational; different people can hold the role, however informally, for a fixed period before handing it over. In such cases, specific care is needed to ensure that these different facilitators have the necessary capacities and can communicate well with each other to ensure continuity.
- **Insider or outsider:** While someone from within the sector likely has a more in-depth knowledge of the history, context and relationships of stakeholders, they likely have their own biases, histories and socio-political considerations. This is not always an issue; such persons may have crafted a trustworthy reputation that can be built upon. Yet there is also a risk that an insider may be seen as too closely connected to or biased towards specific other stakeholders. In contrast, an outsider can be seen as neutral. However outsiders generally will have a less nuanced understanding of the sector and must work to build trust across all stakeholders. But outsiders can present an opportunity for generating a common and unbiased foundation on which the platform can start.
- **Content expertise:** Whether facilitators need to be experts in seed sector issues is also important. It is rare that any single stakeholder – including facilitators – should be considered an expert on all sector issues. And any platform facilitator should ultimately enable the sharing of other stakeholders' own expertise, but some basic understanding of the issues on which the platform is mandated to address should be expected.
- **Facilitation capacities:** Platform facilitators may not need to be content experts, but they do need to have a high level of competency in the techniques of facilitation. An effective facilitator should be aware of and competent to manage stakeholder dynamics in interactive processes, holding a clear vision of the process and prioritising collective learning. Good facilitators also should have a high degree of motivation to support other stakeholders, even at the expense of their own ambitions, implying they also need to be aware of their own biases. Effective facilitators emphasise the building of trust, not just in themselves, but towards all stakeholders. They should be effective and clear communicators who can speak directly to the different types of stakeholders.

# Recommendations for the effective initiation and facilitation of seed sector platforms

## 6.1 Recommendation 1: Purpose the platform on evidence-based and shared priorities

The specific issues which the platform should address need to be grounded in the needs and priorities of stakeholders. This requires some form of analysis, however formal or informal. Achieving this understanding may rest on a series of bilateral consultations, a multistakeholder meeting, or the execution of a more structured seed sector assessment towards a national sector development strategy. The decision on which trajectory to follow to achieve this understanding is inherently connected to available time and resources and whether the initiation of a platform is tied to a wider sector development initiative (De Boef & Thijssen, 2023). Whatever trajectory is selected, some common generic questions should be addressed:

1. **Who are the stakeholders** that can readily contribute to the identification of prevailing key issues in the sector and what roles do they play in the sector? The initiation of a platform likely will rely on the input of a selected few key actors, before engaging with a wider array of stakeholders. These key actors should have a broad understanding of sector trends, issues and developments. Since the platform is not yet operational, they may need to contribute their own resources to participate in early-stage discussions.
2. **What are the specific ambitions** of each of these stakeholders, for themselves and for the wider sector? Effective platforms meet the specific needs and motivations of their key members. Getting early insight into these ambitions will help to shape a platform that is embraced and supported early on. It is important here to recognise the intrinsic motivation of stakeholders for the sector to succeed. Governments often set high-level policy goals, such as improving food security and livelihoods. The platform also needs to recognize and align with these broader ambitions (Borman et al., 2022).
3. **What challenges** do the key stakeholders encounter that hamper them from achieving their ambitions? Stakeholders should be encouraged to be open about the challenges they encounter while fostering a constructive environment rather than a culture of blame. Any analysis or assessment should identify and elaborate specific challenges, but while framing these as sensitively and neutrally as possible. It is important to acknowledge and create space for diverse paradigms.
4. **What opportunities** do stakeholders put forward to improve the performance of the sector? Stakeholders will always have their own ideas as to what needs to change for their own ambitions to be realised. And stakeholders will be involved in their own initiatives or processes to make this happen. The process of framing the purpose of the platform needs to be aware of these opportunities and how the platform can explore and potentially build upon these ongoing or potential openings.

## Examples

In Nigeria, the government commissioned an in-depth seed sector assessment to guide the development of a national seed road map. This assessment utilized multiple tools, focus group discussions, and a multi-stakeholder workshop, which prioritized 22 key topics for action. For each topic, the road map outlined a strategic innovation pathway. The establishment of a sector platform was specifically recommended as part of the innovation pathway to enhance seed sector governance and coordination, providing it with a strong mandate.

In Tanzania, the proposal to initiate a platform to specifically address issues hampering horticultural seed business was explored through a series of bilateral consultations managed by an independent consultant. This process led to a roundtable discussion in which findings were shared and major stakeholders agreed on and endorsed the proposal and its objectives.

### Tips for platform facilitators:

- Start with searching for existing information and reports from previous assessments, projects and sector performance data. A great source are the country reports and dashboards developed by The African Seed Access Index (TASAI, 2025).
- In case of information gaps, decide what type of assessment is relevant and feasible through agreement with key stakeholders, including any donors, who have already expressed the demand to collaboratively work on seed sector issues. Confirm with these stakeholders that they are committed to contribute to the process, actively engage in discussions, and validate its outcomes.
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis in order to identify appropriate representatives to adequately assess their perceptions of emergent key issues.
- Agree on a clear timeline through which at least a working understanding of the main issues can be developed. The assessment process should not be open-ended. A clear timeline helps stakeholders understand the process, clarify their roles, and determine when next steps can be planned.
- Plan a communication session or modality with key stakeholders to present the initial understanding of the issues that the platform may address. Approach this 'event' with the aim to seek validation and enhancement of the assessment's outcomes; presenting these preliminary results offers an opportunity for further learning and reinforcing the platform's underpinning.

## 6.2 Recommendation 2: Secure a clear mandate to influence seed sector development

The study shows that having a mandate from a governmental body is important to ensure the platform's outputs and recommendations are valued, meaningful, and given proper attention. Yet the study also shows that securing—and maintaining—a mandate is no small task. The specific nature of a mandate may vary from case to case, but generally, it refers to the public endorsement of the platform's existence, its activities, targeted outcomes, timeline and the recognition of the contributions of its members.

Not all seed sector platforms explored in the study sought to have higher-level government leadership, but all sought governmental buy-in, support and participation in one way or another. Securing endorsement of the platform, at an early stage, is crucial to increase the likelihood that any seed policy or regulatory recommendations from the platform are not only heard but also considered, if not accepted.

While platform objectives and targeted outcomes may evolve over time, clearly defining its responsibilities—and those it does not hold—helps build trust with public bodies responsible for sector coordination. The goal is to give confidence that the platform supports, rather than replaces, the role of such bodies. This also implies being clear on the platform's vision, including whether it has the ambition to continue beyond the life cycle of any broader programme or initiative, and how it plans to sustain and embed itself in the sector in the long run.

Securing a mandate from a relevant Ministry or public body is also essential for the credibility of the platform among other stakeholders, particularly the private sector. These stakeholders need assurance that their own investments in the platform—whether financial, social, or political—are recognised and valued by the government, and that the platform's activities are authorized to contribute to shaping the sector.

The study clearly recommends to seek an institutional mandate, rather than relying on specific individuals, who may not hold their positions long-term. Multiple cases saw the need for continuous explanation and justification of platform's role in order to maintain government support, sometimes without success.

Finally, once a mandate for the platform is secured—possibly only after it has already been initiated—it is crucial that this mandate is clearly communicated to and accepted by the platform's members.

### Examples

In Ethiopia, the NSAG initially enjoyed strong support from the Minister of Agriculture, who used the platform as a means to seek advice and guidance. But as new Ministers assumed their roles, the platform's mandate to fulfil this function was not adopted, causing the rationale for the platform to weaken.

In Tanzania, the Ministry of Agriculture fully supported adopting a membership position within a platform under private sector leadership. This decision was in part due to capacity limitations, but the Ministry also recognised the capabilities of the sector associations to effectively manage the platform and granted them the mandate to do so. However, staff changes across various departments meant the platform coordinator regularly had to consistently invest time in explaining the platform and securing continued support from new staff members.

In Uganda, the national platform was entrusted to support the advancement of the new national seed policy. However, once this longer-term activity was completed, both the platform's mandate and governmental buy-in diminished, and the broader rationale for maintaining the platform faded.

## Tips for platform facilitators:

- As a natural starting point, be sure to identify and include relevant Ministries and public bodies responsible for coordinating the seed sector in any assessment. These bodies may even be among the first once to be consulted in any assessment. In preparation for such a consultation, it is important to familiarize yourself with existing policies, laws, guidelines and other frameworks designed to coordinate and regulate the sector. These mechanisms serve as the foundation for the strategies, activities, and decisions of coordinating bodies.
- Approach discussions about securing a mandate with an open mind. In any sector, power dynamics and political sensitivities underpin and often constrain perceptions of the role of multistakeholder platforms. Individual representatives are likely shaped by institutional realities that affect how they respond to the idea for a platform and their role within it.
- In a similar fashion, be transparent about the fact that certain aspects of the platform—such as its specific outcomes, timeline, and endpoint—are still undecided. It is important to listen to the wishes of coordinating bodies when making these decisions.
- Ultimately, a key question to engage coordinating bodies when seeking a mandate could be: "How can this platform support your goals and ambitions for the sector?"

## 6.3 Recommendation 3: Prioritise inclusivity and facilitate equitable engagement

Effective seed sector platforms must strive to meet the diverse needs of their members and the wider sector. This can only be achieved through active engagement with stakeholders and understanding their different perspectives and experiences of prevailing sector issues. Platforms therefore need to allocate dedicated time and resources for enabling stakeholders to be heard, starting with defining the platform's purpose and continuing through to the delivery of final outcomes.

Not all platforms target wide stakeholder engagement across the sector. In Ethiopia, for example, the NSAG was a relatively closed group of senior representatives. However, they were selected for their deep understanding of sector trends and issues, and their legitimacy in representing the different interests of the stakeholder groups that their organisations serve. The same is true for many cases; representatives of stakeholder categories were invited to hold membership positions based on their power to speak on behalf of others.

So inclusivity does not mean inviting everybody to participate in all platform meetings or activities. Rather, it requires ensuring that platform membership, and agenda-setting are intentionally designed to include all stakeholder categories – and that those invited are trusted to represent their group respectfully and effectively. Achieving true inclusivity is challenging and often involves compromises. In Ghana and Rwanda, for example, the study shows that engaging farmers in platform activities proved difficult and fell short of interviewees' expectations. A key takeaway from these cases was the need for greater efforts to include farmers more meaningfully. Beyond these specific cases, a common oversight in platform formation is the lack of attention to marginalized groups, including women and youth, particularly those in last-mile communities who are disconnected from formal seed systems. These farmers and seed users have distinct capacity gaps, needs and circumstances, which many platform agendas overlook (CIFOR-ICRAF, 2023).

Inclusivity does not just stop at identifying members. Once in a platform, prevailing power disparities must be managed by a platform facilitator/coordinator. Mechanisms must be found to ensure that all members have an equal chance to contribute to the platform's agenda, decision-making and governance processes. Further, outputs of the platform must be acceptable and usable by its members and should be tailored to their different capacities and needs.

Platforms are spaces for dialogue and this implies the presence of differing, often competing opinions and perspectives. Platform facilitators should embrace such dissention as an opportunity for learning and valuable exchange. The platform can only be effective if dissenting voices are treated with mutual respect and given the opportunity to share concerns and disagreement. Ideally, special attention is given to address capacity gaps that prevent equitable contributions; a simple example of which is language. Commonly, platform events that are connected to wider initiatives with international partners are held in English; and this can present barriers for local actors, including farmers, from benefitting fully from the opportunity that the event provides. Additionally, some platform members may not themselves be able to incur any costs to participate actively in the platform. Consideration on financial disparities that impact inclusiveness is essential.

Ultimately, the responsibility of ensuring the inclusiveness of the platform will be a constant task of the platform facilitator. The overarching recommendation is to set inclusivity as a goal in its own right for the platform and the sector, not as a means to an end.

## Tips for platform facilitators:

- Map stakeholders within the sector through a stakeholder analysis. There are a range of tools to support this; the tool used should align with the platform's scope and scale. Pay special attention to identifying associations that represent specific stakeholder categories.
- Conduct a specific analysis of marginalised groups within existing sector processes. Identify whose voices and presence have been overlooked. Use appropriate methods to deepen the understanding of their situation and the barriers that have thus far prevented their active contribution to discussions on seed sector development.
- In shaping platform agendas, give each member equal opportunity to have their issue addressed. While not every issue can be discussed at every platform meeting, the facilitator should ensure that concerns and needs are acknowledged and addressed in other ways or at future meetings.
- Maintain regular bilateral communication to check-in with platform members on their experiences and satisfaction with the platform. Discover if they feel the platform is beneficial to them, whether they feel heard and have the confidence to share their issues and ideas. As a facilitator, it may be difficult to encourage some stakeholders to share dissent, concerns or worries, and there is no simple solution. But continuous efforts to support members will foster trust and engagement.
- In shaping platform events and activities, be mindful of capacity challenges, for example on language and financial resources. Allocate a portion of the available budget to ensure equitable contribution, so financial costs do not become a barrier to participate in a platform.

## 6.4 Recommendation 4: Build trust and ownership through transparent governance

For platform members to commit to and have trust in the platform, they need to feel some level of ownership of the platform's processes, and the ability to shape those processes. This need is fundamental when considering how the platform is governed; what rules, roles, structures and decision-making processes does the platform enable and adhere to. Seed sector platforms are spaces where critical issues affecting stakeholders are discussed and advanced, so platform governance should also be transparent and facilitate honest engagement and accountability.

### Governance structures and roles

In all of the platforms explored in the study, different levels of attention were given to multiple forms of governance arrangements and processes, yet each platform treated the need for effective governance in different ways. While each platform had some sort of Chair position, sometimes with a co- or vice-Chair, some platforms also had smaller groups of stakeholders adopting a joint governance role. In Nigeria for example, a 'core group' of stakeholders had a specific task to shape platform processes and identify key topics and trends for discussion. A similar structure was also seen to be effective in the Rwandan platform, the RHWG, with an Executive Committee comprised of public and private key members. In Myanmar, a 'secretariat' comprised initially of nine Myanmar nationals from the public and private sector, was later amended to include international representatives. The secretariat led consultations with members to frame agendas and meetings, with support of ISSD Myanmar. In other platforms the secretariat function was supportive of more formal leadership and coordination roles and handled secretarial functions only. The study indicates that the approach of having a smaller group of senior representatives to guide and oversee the platform, supported by a secretariat, is widely accepted and recognised as an effective governance model.

Deciding on the most appropriate governance structure and processes should, where feasible, be a multistakeholder decision. Platform members should have the opportunity to agree to the formation of any group designed to govern the platform that they commit their resources to. Without this, it can be expected that decisions the platform may make are more vulnerable to questions of legitimacy.

### Managing conflict

Effective governance is not just about setting an equitable agenda and managing meetings. As stated, platforms are spaces with diverse interests are shared and debated and as such can lead to tensions, competition and even conflict. Rules of engagement, even implicit understandings of how partners should engage in the platform, need to be maintained and enforced to some degree. This is particularly important when decisions are needed on prioritisation of investments and activities. While tensions were discussed in some of the interviews, no explicit examples of conflict in the platforms came to the fore, demonstrating that the platform leadership and any of the platform facilitators were able to navigate such circumstances.

### Learning from platform progress

A further function of platform governance, and an essential mechanism to imbue trust and accountability, is the monitoring and evaluation of progress and outcomes. Platform effectiveness in achieving its aims is not assured from the start. As the study has shown, various disruptions and bottlenecks impact commitment to the platform over time, impacting the implementation of activities and agreements.

Platform members may not work closely and communicate regularly outside of the platform, so the sharing of progress and lessons learned may be inconsistent. Different platforms from the study treated this need to monitor and evaluate (M&E) differently, and this often depended on how close the platform was connected to seed sector development programmes which had specific indicators for platforms. In Ghana, for example, the GhanaVeg programme had specific indicators around platform meeting frequency and attendance.

In Nigeria, alongside these types of indicators, the platform secretariat maintained a dashboard tracking progress on the 22 topics of the National Seed Road Map. This tool serves as a means to measure outcomes and enhance transparency and is highly valued by the sector's coordinating body and other stakeholders. However, it is important to note that progress in sector development cannot be automatically attributed to platform performance.

While meeting frequency and attendance numbers show a platform's activity level, they say nothing about the levels of intrinsic value that key sector stakeholders place on the platform, and the satisfaction and benefit they derive from participating. For all platforms, gathering such information remained primarily a function of platform coordinators or facilitators and was achieved through bilateral discussions in which members could reflect and share their insights and any concerns.

Ultimately, what makes platform governance effective is the initial agreement of members on how the platform should be governed, and the continuing efforts of platform leadership and facilitators to communicate regularly and transparently with members. And when needed, to take informed and transparent decisions to mediate and moderate.

### Tips for platform facilitators:

- Appropriate governance mechanisms may emerge or gain acceptance during the analysis or assessment conducted while conceptualizing the platform—or they may not. The governance of the platform will be closely tied to its mandate, which is granted by a governmental or sector coordinating body. In preliminary discussions, it is crucial to seek input from representatives on what form of governance they consider appropriate and who should hold leadership positions within the platform.
- Regardless of the outcome of such discussions, it is important to validate the initial idea with prospective platform members. Ask them who they believe is best suited to fulfil the role and whom they trust to hold it. It is also opportune to ask prospective members what role they would be willing to play, or not, in the platform's governance. Many stakeholders may opt not to hold such a role, but will appreciate the opportunity to say so.
- As with many factors around multistakeholder platforms, context is important. It may not be suitable or acceptable to have a formal Terms of Reference, or Rules of Engagement for the platform, but some boundaries and norms should be shared with early platform members. This will help them to understand the boundaries of the platform and their roles in it. It is recommended to share this information – and seek input and agreement in a collaborative manner – in the first platform meeting at the latest. Such terms should cover, explicitly, all roles, from Chair, to general member.
- Not all platforms start with clear action plans or agendas; often their purpose is to develop these over time. As a result, having a set of indicators to define and track progress may not always be feasible. If the platform part of a wider programme, there may be existing indicators for quantitative monitoring (e.g., frequency of meetings, participant numbers), which can serve as a practical starting point. Qualitative monitoring of members' perceptions is more challenging and typically relies on bilateral consultations. Other options include annual anonymous surveys, allowing members to share their reflections, rate their satisfaction, and assess the perceived benefits of the platform.

## 6.5 Recommendation 5: Facilitate effective knowledge sharing, co-creation, and scaling of innovation

All platforms in the study prioritised the co-creation and sharing of knowledge and scaling of innovation; aligning to the literature that fundamentally, multistakeholder platforms are an effective vehicle for this purpose. The modalities of sharing and co-creation and the definitions of innovation differed, yet all platforms were geared towards generating and implementing 'solutions' in one way or another.

So the underlying recommendation here is to choose the most appropriate modalities for co-creating and sharing knowledge and scaling innovations. Such modalities must also suit stakeholders' capacities, in light of the previous recommendations around the platform's objectives and mandate, as well as considerations on inclusion and stakeholders' diverse capital. Stakeholders join seed sector platforms in an effort to overcome challenges that hamper their businesses or sector ambitions. They have different forms of knowledge ranging from lived experiences to formal technical skills. Each has value and through the platform, each should be heard and incorporated into the platform's thinking.

### Facilitating knowledge-sharing

Every platform in the study gave space for knowledge sharing, within the platform, and to external seed sector stakeholders. And in many platforms, knowledge sharing formed the basis of the most central platform activities. In Nigeria for example, every online platform meeting, invited speakers would share presentations of their work and insights, with these being discussed by platform members, audience members and invited panel speakers. In Tanzania, the platform specifically invested in capacity building events on regulatory and pest related issues. These examples show that seed sector platforms are valid vehicles to identify knowledge and knowledge resources that are of benefit to stakeholders, and to efficiently mobile means to share this knowledge.

Facilitating knowledge-sharing should be an equitable process; platform facilitators should respect the various forms of knowledge and give space for these to be shared. Further, facilitators should be on hand to support members who require assistance to share their knowledge. In Uganda, the ISSD Uganda team would organise the knowledge-sharing events and guide participants through a facilitated interactive process. This support can also imply helping stakeholders and members to develop PowerPoints or posters for knowledge sharing events.

### Promoting knowledge co-creation

Co-creation means developing new knowledge through collaborative interaction, sharing, contextualisation and validation. In Uganda for example, the regional seed platform members discussed the new seed policy and through these discussions, new knowledge was created as to what the policy actually means for local stakeholders and how they might align with it. In South Sudan, the Seed Hub platform enabled regional exchange on pressing seed sector issues in South Sudan, creating new understanding for South Sudanese stakeholders on opportunities for tailoring best practices in the region to their own context. The discussions fed the elaboration of a call to action on ten evidence-based strategic pathways for seed sector development in South Sudan.

Knowledge co-creation encourages stakeholders and members of a platform to bring their own experiences and knowledge to the table. For a platform facilitator or coordinator, the opportunity is to build on the unique capacities of members towards creating new solutions, or strategies for the sector. This requires an active effort to facilitate dialogue and respectful engagement between stakeholders. A common further task for platform facilitators is to record and disseminate new knowledge outcomes or products for validation and acceptance.

## Scaling innovation

Innovation is a broad term, which generally means new knowledge, solutions, approaches and tools. It can be intangible, like knowledge, or tangible, like technology. The underlying point is that platforms are seen as a vehicle to bring new information to a wider range of sector stakeholders who can use it for their advantage. Across all of the platforms in the study, the scaling of innovation was a key aim for the platform. Sometimes this was 'scaling up'; bringing lessons and solutions to higher institutional sector levels. Sometimes this was 'localising innovation' taking higher-level knowledge, science, policy or regulation and making it applicable at a practical, field or local level. Most commonly, this is about 'scaling out' enabling direct adoption and replication by similar stakeholders.

Scaling up can be seen in the platform processes in Ethiopia, in which NSAG members fundamental task was to bring sector experiences and ideas to the Minister for consideration at policy level. In Uganda, the main achievement of the national seed platform is its contributions to the formulation of the National Seed Policy. Localising innovation is exemplified again by the work of regional platforms in Uganda which helped local stakeholders understand what the new policy meant for their work. And scaling out can be exemplified again through the South Sudan Seed Hub enabling regional exchange, facilitating what works in other context to be contextualised for South Sudan.

Achieving effective scaling of innovations is inherently related to knowledge sharing and communication. Effective scaling requires a dynamic approach where knowledge about what works (and what doesn't) is continuously harnessed through monitoring, evaluation, and training. A networked approach to innovation enhances scaling by leveraging knowledge-sharing mechanisms, partnerships, and alliances (Wigboldus & Brouwers, 2016).

As such, the degree to which this scaling happens rests on the leadership and facilitators of the platform. Their skills to craft the correct forms of knowledge products and key messages are needed to ensure that innovation is framed and presented in a usable manner that meets the specific needs and functions of its intended recipients. So when innovations need to be scaled up for consideration at policy level; a policy brief may be a suitable format. Or when the platform wants to support farmers' learning of a new variety or agricultural practice; a demonstration field day is likely the most suitable format.

Effective seed sector platforms are intrinsically linked to knowledge-sharing, co-creation and scaling of innovation. But fulfilling these tasks can be overlooked, or completed in an unequal manner. Doing so risks missing opportunities to forge connections between stakeholders and learning valuable insights and ways forward. Ensuring this does not happen is one of the fundamental reasons to have a quality platform facilitator who pays attention to these knowledge dynamics.

## Tips for platform facilitators:

- Take a wide view and interpretation of what knowledge actually means for the platform. The objective of the platform effectively comes down to solving stakeholders' issues. And stakeholders may have different knowledge on those issues, based on how the challenge affects them, what solutions they use, and what strategies or options they foresee. Be sure to give space in platform meetings and processes for these different types of knowledge to be captured.
- Different stakeholders can share their knowledge in different ways. Whereas some will be able to craft presentations or knowledge products, others may feel more comfortable to tell stories or share experiences in small discussion groups. Not all members have the capacity to share their knowledge in ways for other members to comprehend it well. An effective platform facilitator has the skills and motivation to help stakeholders and members share their knowledge in ways that others can easily understand and use it. This can mean helping people make slides, or making slides for them. It can also mean that during live events, the facilitator listens to and summarises what some speakers are saying. Or it may mean helping translation across languages, or paying for an interpreter.
- The platform facilitator is responsible for capturing or recording knowledge that is shared, and making it available later for others to benefit from. This can be through making minutes of discussions, reporting from live events, or even making materials such as flipcharts available during events.
- This work implies creating knowledge products; so as facilitator, it is important to have an overview of what type of products suit what type of knowledge and the specific needs and preferences of audience members. This is essential when trying to scale innovation; the question is never 'what do I want to say', but 'what do they need to hear and how do they like to hear it'.
- Platform members should be recognised for the knowledge and innovation they share and contribute to. It is imperative to explicitly acknowledge those stakeholders who invest their time and capital into sharing knowledge.

## 6.6 Recommendation 6: Leverage diverse forms of capital for platform sustainability

The ability of a platform to reach its ambitions and specified objectives rests on the motivation of its members to contribute their time, energy and various forms of capital to it. This encompasses social and political capital—such as members' reputations, relationships, and agency—along with technical capital, which includes their knowledge, skills, and physical assets. Additionally, it involves financial capital, covering both their professional time and monetary investments in their own activities as well as in the platform.

### Social and political capital

If and when a platform sets itself towards influencing seed sector development in one way or another, the platform will have to engage with social dynamics and political realities that are ubiquitous in seed sectors. Stakeholders have their own positions and reputations in their organisations, companies and communities, and as a member of the platform, they are commonly asked to represent the interests of their peers. Building on the existing social and political capital of members is one of the rationales to invest in platforms in the first place; as mechanisms to deepen understanding of sector issues and create suitable strategies that wider stakeholders can support. Their connection to and understanding of the common needs of their peers is an opportunity to connect to on-the-ground relationships and realities, and offers opportunities to streamline communication and the scaling of outcomes and innovations. In essence, the platform is using the good name of its members for the platform's ambitions.

Some members may participate in a platform as it increases – or is perceived by them to increase – their power or position in the sector. Others will join with a sense of pride at being considered and invited. But participating in a platform does not come with its own risks. Through their membership in the platform, members are tying themselves at least to some degree, to the outcomes of the platform. And if those outcomes are not what stakeholders wanted or are satisfied with, their reputation or legitimacy may be perceived to have weakened. The study shows, for example in Ethiopia, Myanmar and Tanzania, that the political capital of higher-level Ministerial representatives was instrumental in securing a mandate for the respective platforms. Yet as successive replaced staff came on board, more effort, sometimes without success, was needed to secure the political capital of public representatives for the platform. And in South Sudan, the decision of one powerful international actor to sideline the platform and independently pursue the development of the seed policy demonstrated a desire to use their own political capital not for the platform, but for their own ends.

While platforms should try to build upon the connections and reputations of their members, this should be done with care. Members' social and political capital was earned by them and is theirs to protect. It is again important therefore that platform governance and facilitation is mindful of these implicit social, reputational and relational concerns; and recognises these as factors which can explain commitment to platform activities and the adoption of platform outcomes. Doing so is critical to sustain positive and active engagement in the platform.

### Financial capital

In initiating the platform and making decisions on activities and meetings, it is imperative to account for the differing financial capital of members, and strategize to leverage their financial capital where possible. This enables sharing the burden of platform costs as equitably as possible and promotes buy-in to sustaining the platform. Naturally, members who are inclined to invest their own resources need to trust that this investment is recognised, appreciated and is used wisely in accordance with their own aims.

Financial capital is not just about money to invest in platform activities; participating in a sector platform may mean incurring costs for members, even if this is only for travel to attend platform meetings, or dedicating their professional time to platform activities. In this light, some platform members will have more financial resources than others, and this will vary wildly depending on the type and context of the platform.

This is especially true in those cases in which platforms are tied to, or an activity of, a wider sector development programme and which seek to involve local actors, including farmers and local seed producers. Where it is possible, the underlying funding which is available to support the platform's activities should be used where needed to cover the costs of members' participation; members who cannot afford to contribute on their own costs should not be excluded or disadvantaged for that reason alone.

This implies that platform coordination should maintain a budget to be able to offer to support participation. In many of the cases in the study, sector development programmes, or development partners including Embassies or SeedNL, provided specific budget to cover platform costs including secretarial functions and event attendance. In Tanzania for example, the entire funding from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) was for such costs; not for implementing recommendations of the platform. And in Myanmar, the funding in support of the platform was used to even pay for international knowledge exchange at platform meetings.

### **Technical capital**

Stakeholders hold positions in platforms due to their role in the seed sector; in production, marketing, regulation, coordination, quality assurance etc. Each is likely a recognised expert in their respective field and knows – or has their own opinion on – the prevailing issues and potential solutions. This expertise and insight is essential to recognise and utilise in the platform's interactions. Platform decisions and activities may call for members to contribute expertise to knowledge products and events, as well as the use of their physical assets during pilots, demonstrations and other practical activities.

Building the platform on members technical capital helps to ensure the quality of the platform's processes and outputs and sustains the reputation and position of the platform in the sector. In Nigeria for example, every national platform meeting gives space for the sharing of expertise and reporting on specific activities of platform members or partners. This means that audience members come to the platform to learn information from reputable sources, and enables the platform members to profile themselves at the same time. This supports wider sector trust and confidence in the platform, sustaining the perception of the platform as a useful mechanism to engage with and support.

The study has shown that platforms leverage different forms of capital in different ways. It is noted that many of these experiences rely on the existence of well-funded, internationally-supported sector development programmes. For platform coordination and facilitation, it is however clear that the different forms of capital should not be overlooked. Members should be appreciated and publicly recognised for contributing their time and knowledge to the platform, and appreciated for their efforts to use their position in the sector to advance the aims of the platform.

## Tips for platform facilitators:

- Stakeholders are very different from each other, and the forms and levels of capital that can be leveraged from each stakeholder are also different. Yet all have value and meaning. It is important to express recognition and gratitude regularly to members who contribute knowledge, time and money. This should be done explicitly so that other stakeholders also see these contributions. In products and events of the platform, be sure to share words of thanks to members who have contributed what they can.
- Be constantly mindful of the costs that members may incur for their contributions. Where possible, prioritise the covering of costs of attendance in platform meetings in any available budget. While there may be an assumption that some members can cover their own costs, this may not be the case. Offer equal financial support to members, some of whom may not like to admit they need it.
- Members carry their own reputations and relationships with them. It is part of their identity and the reason they are invited to represent the interests of their peers. Through bilateral discussions, regularly check with members on how they feel the platform is perceived by their peers. It may also be beneficial to periodically elicit whether they are happy to continue to be in the platform, or whether they perceive risks for themselves.
- Look and listen for signals, however implicit. Money and reputation are important, and some members may be afraid to express negative feelings; and even in bilateral discussions, they may not want to share. Cultural dynamics are also at play here commonly. As a facilitator, it is important to seek signals of dissatisfaction or worry and to subtly manage towards a resolution.

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