Promoting Better Plant Varieties Development in West Africa

Seed companies and actors of the public agricultural research systems from 9 countries in West Africa were trained on plant variety protection systems as part of the overall implementation of a Plant Variety Protection System (POV system), by experts from Switzerland, France and Canada.

Held in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d’Ivoire, from September 9 to 11, 2019, this capacity-building activity brought together private seed companies, public and private plant breeders and leaders of national public organizations currently working or expected to work in the field of plant variety protection in the near future and also experts from the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), the African Intellectual Property Organization (OAPI), the National Interprofessional Group of Seeds and Plants of France (GNIS) and the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA).

The protection of the rights of breeders of new varieties is an important trigger for the development of better plant varieties. Intellectual property rights on a variety gives the breeder (research organization) exclusive rights to decide how to exploit and disseminate this innovation in the most appropriate way.

“If properly implemented, the plant variety protection system can be an important tool to encourage the creation and dissemination of new plant varieties, improve farmers access to innovation and more variety diversity and make a significant contribution to food security and genetic diversity,” says Dr. Yacouba Diallo, the agri-input Specialist at CORAF.

Many African countries have begun to establish or consider the introduction of a POV system. To this end, they have chosen to base their POV system on the UPOV Convention of which OAPI is a member, in order to establish an effective and internationally recognized system.

With financial support from USAID, CORAF, through the Partnership for Agricultural Research, Education and Development (PAIRED) program, is working to strengthen human resources and organizational capacity to implement the POV system in West Africa. The objective of the Abidjan training session was to provide practical skills for the effective implementation of the plant variety protection system in each country. In addition to the African
public and private sector, speakers from Europe and Canada took the opportunity to share their experiences during the workshop.

CORAF, through PAIRED, intends to promote an innovative program funding system of varietal selection with the aim of developing new genetic materials to meet the varied needs of small farmers. Innovative plant breeding produces excellent genetic materials that have, for example, high yields and can be tolerant/resistant to the effects of climate change, drought and flooding, and diseases and pests. It can also help to improve the low nutritional value of some crops.

At the end of the workshop, action plans for the implementation of the POV System per country were developed and prioritizing successful models of public research partnership and private seed companies.