



*Introduction by Ido Verhagen, project manager Access to Seeds Index  
Side event to the 38th session of the FAO Conference  
'Introducing the Access to Seeds Index Initiative'  
Rome, FAO Headquarters, Tuesday 18 June 2013, 12:30-14:30 (Iran Room)*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce you to the Access to Seeds Index.

Last April we presented to initiative to launch the Access to Seeds Index to the National Representatives at FAO.

It is a great honour to be back today at the Ministers Conference of FAO.



Let's begin with these farmers and their story. You can see that they are smiling.

This is Kano, Northern Nigeria. It shows a field full of cowpies, an orphan crop, extremely popular in Nigeria and Niger. It's actually a demonstration field, which allows farmers to look at new varieties. The women are interested, and rightly so.

Regional smallholder farmers using seeds from their local seed systems achieve yields of up to 1 ton. But if quality seeds and cutting-edge technology are used, like in this field, yields can quadruple and reach 4 tons.

Using an improved variety can make just the difference between being able to feed your children, or also earning some money to send them to school.

Well, getting access to these improved varieties would make me laugh.



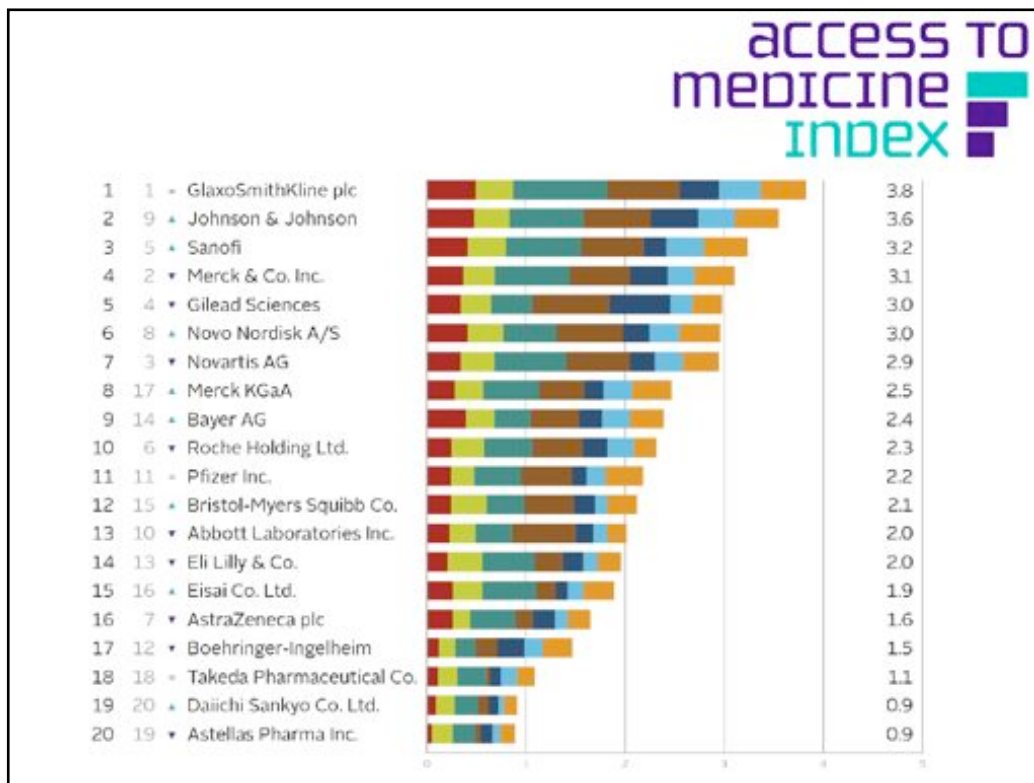
Unfortunately, this rarely happens. In a recent report on the post-2015 development agenda, just published three weeks ago, the UN High Level Panel says there is a major gap between crop cultivation in the developed world and that in the developing world.

In the developed world, food production tripled, thanks in part to high-yield crop varieties. In the developing world food production lagged behind. So here we are: we have all the knowledge in the world to boost food production, but we just seem to be unable to get to those who need it the most.

So thinking about the 9 billion mouths we have to feed. And the 50% rise in food production it requires. The question becomes relevant: can we bridge this gap?

I believe we can.

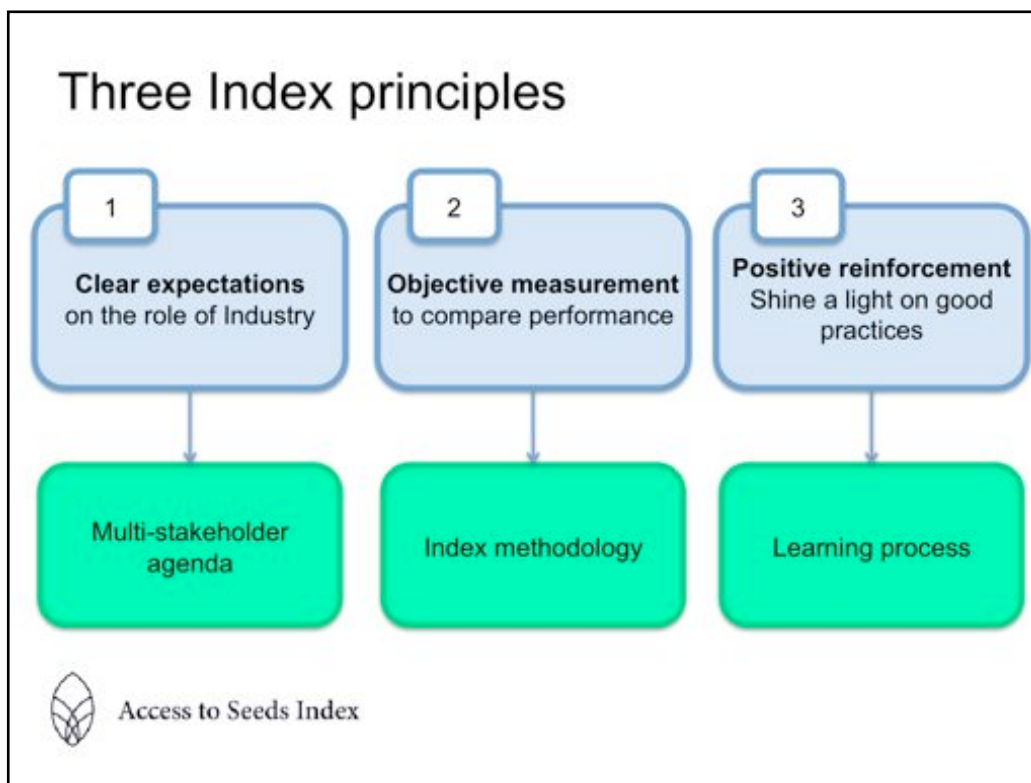
Throughout the seed industry, several initiatives can be identified where the industry seeks ways to interact with smallholder farmers and local seed systems. It is rather scattered and lacks focus and therefore impact. Wouldn't it be interesting to create more transparency on these efforts, learn from them and scale them up?



This is where we draw inspiration from the Access to Medicine Index, an initiative founded by Wim Leereveld and funded by the Bill & Melissa Gates Foundation.

This index has successfully encouraged the pharma industry to raise their contribution to the world's health needs. Their success tells us that our index can be the catalyst that helps the industry bridge the gap.

The Medicine Index taught us two other things. First, that what gets measured, is what gets done. Second, that companies are willing to contribute to social change, if they at least get the credits for it.



I see working with an Industry Index as the Next Step in Corporate Social Responsibility. It is about mobilizing and orchestrating the potential of an Industry for social change. How do we do that?

The first is clear expectations. If we want something from the industry, we better be clear about it. So we begin by asking: what do we expect from the industry? What role do we see for it? It doesn't help when every stakeholder group has its own individual wish list. We ask and answer such questions through a multi-stakeholder dialogue, resulting in a balanced stakeholder agenda.

The second principle objective measurement and comparison. The methodology underpinning the index should clearly measure the performance of the industry and allow us to identify leaders to trigger competition.

The third principle is positive reinforcement. The index does not seek to blame and shame, but to shine a light on good practices. This will encourage companies to learn from and emulate their peers, which creates an industry-wide race to the top. (In some pharmaceutical companies, the position in the Access to Medicine Index is already part of the remuneration policy.)

To facilitate a learning process the Access to Seeds Index will be repeated every two years. It allows us to learn from each index and refine the methodology. It allows companies to improve their position in the Index. No one wants to be at the bottom of the list. And when on top, you want to stay there. Companies can do that either by improving their performance or creating more transparency.



Which companies do we plan to include in the Access to Seeds Index?

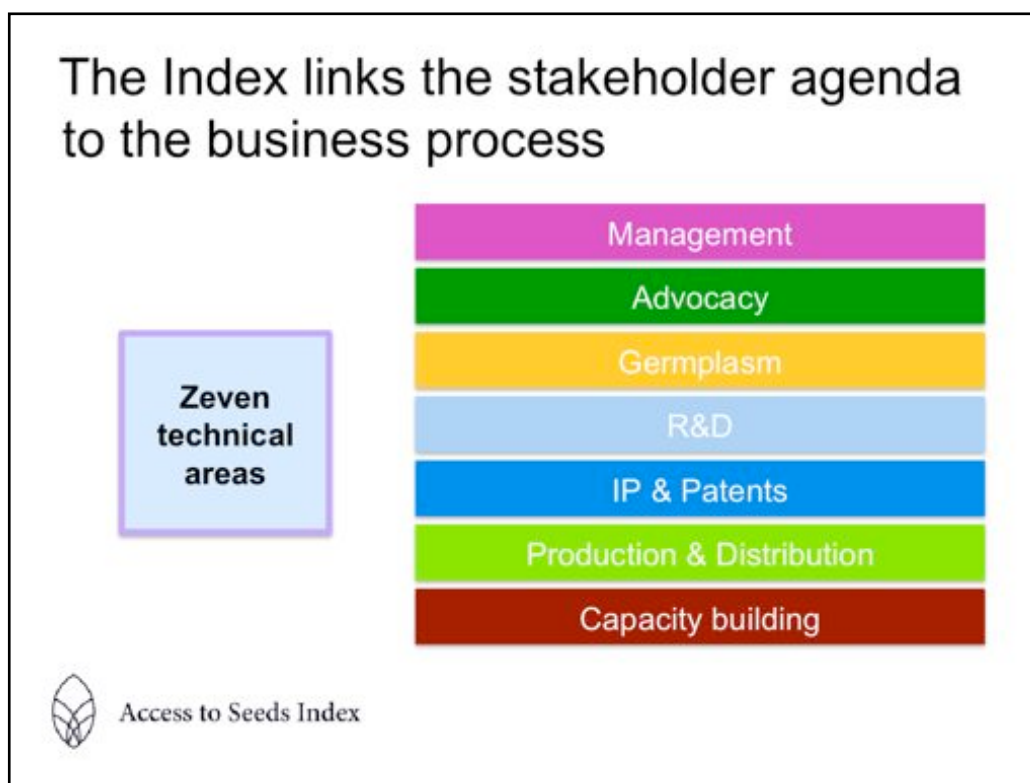
The seed industry can be described as a small group of large firms and a long tail of smaller companies, which include niche players, regional champions and national seed companies.

For the first edition of the Index we plan to focus on the top 15 companies. As the UN Panel also describes, large international operating firms have a specific role to play in new global partnerships.

Large firms have the money and expertise to build the infrastructure that will allow all people to connect to the modern economy. Big businesses can also link microenterprises and small entrepreneurs with larger markets. When they find a business model that works for sustainable development, they can scale it up fast, using their geographic spread to reach hundreds of millions of people.

But in the seed industry also the smaller players play a significant role in bridging the gap with smallholder farmers and remote rural regions. We will therefore also provide a platform for smaller firms, as we can also learn from their best practices.

As the Index is an evolving concept, this platform for smaller players might result in spotlight indexes for regions or specific crops in later editions.

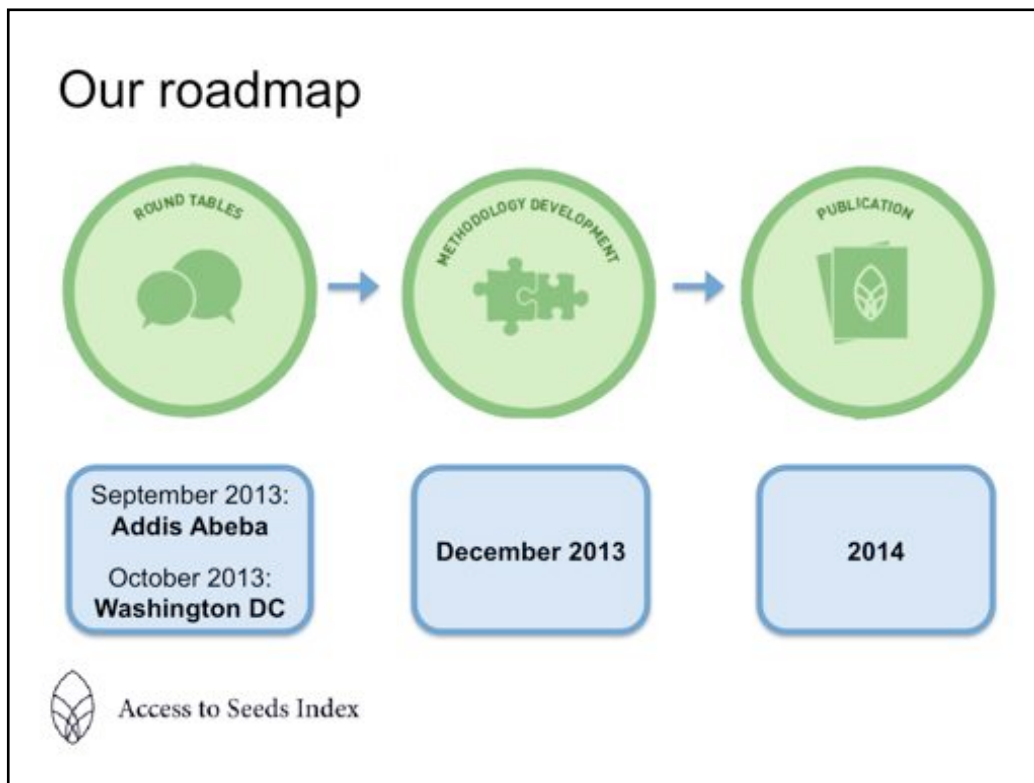


So what could this Access to Seeds Index look like. This is currently the topic of a multi-stakeholder dialogue. This slide shows a work in progress, but for now we are looking at several technical areas.

The technical areas have been picked to represent the business process most commonly followed by companies. This means we link the needs of farmers and the expectations of society with the actual way in which companies do business. So, we focus on areas such as:

- Management. An indicator could be: do you have a strategy for contributing to agriculture for development. Is this a board-level priority, or an operational, department-specific issue?
- Advocacy: Do you play an active role in breaking down barriers? Do you play a leading role in the industry to promote change?
- Germplasm: Where do you get your genetic material? Do you only use public gene banks, or do you also donate seeds to gene banks?
- R&D. Do you focus on orphan crops? Are you developing varieties that fit local production conditions?
- Distribution. Can you reach smallholder farmers in remote areas? Do you sell the product at affordable prices?
- Capacity building: do you promote the adoption of new technologies by smallholder farmers?

To be clear: our goal is not to tell companies HOW to do something, we tell them on WHICH areas we would like to see them act and leave the rest to their creativity.



Finally, a general overview of our planning. This year we are developing the index methodology. The publication of the first Access to Seeds Index is scheduled for 2014.

Currently, we are holding the stakeholder consultations, which includes two roundtables. One in Ethiopia with farmer representatives from Asia, Africa and Latin America. And another in Washington with the industry and investors. By December the methodology will be finalized and I will be happy to come back to you and present it.

Since in this hall I think we are all stakeholders, we welcome also your feedback and input for the Access to Seeds Index.

Thank you.

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