

Seed Sovereignty Now!

Strategic Work Plan & Funding Request – January 2025

The Challenge We Face

Access to high quality, locally adapted seeds and breeds is fundamental to organic, agroecological, and truly regenerative food systems. Seeds and breeds that are adapted to such production methods (as opposed to those that are designed for high chemical inputs or are of unproven safety) are an integral component of soil health practices and biodiversity stewardship. The seed sovereignty and/or livelihoods of smallholders, locally-based food systems and indigenous peoples is however existentially threatened by concentrated control of germplasm sources and supplies, and by politico-economic pressures from certain multinational companies whose intention is to control the agricultural supply from seed to final consumer. Compounding this threat is the widespread increase of disruptively accessible new genomic techniques (NGTs) available to even small entrepreneurs and breeders operating in an under-regulated (or completely unregulated) legal landscape without transparency, adequate risk assessment, or controls on environmental release, with accelerating proliferation under the false or unproven pretense of feeding the world. Agroecological producers worldwide are increasing their urgency for solutions that empower them to combine forces to resist and overcome these challenges. The challenge plays out in several dimensions: (i) farmers face different regulatory scenarios based on their country, which hinder to varying degrees (and for varying reasons) the availability of agroecologically adapted seed varieties to be developed, multiplied, and/or traded; (ii) farmers and farmer organizations are not well coordinated with each other, and/or with support organizations, researchers, and educational institutions – which impedes collective action on common problems and the development of common messaging, shareable solutions, and a succession plan for a new generation of economically viable breeders; and (iii) value chains are not well coordinated in the sense that interdependence across the chain is not routinely manifested, placing a disproportionate burden on the most upstream players – namely breeders and farmers – to provide the market and health benefits appreciated across the chain, while most consumers remain unaware of the importance that seed sovereignty and quality have on all people's lives.

Working Together on a Common Objective

The IFOAM Seeds Platform is a global network of agroecological/organic seed breeders and researchers, seed producers, farmers, seed companies, downstream value chain actors, and like-minded NGOs that works to increase biodiversity, quality, and supply of genetic resources in line with agroecological principles. The Platform originated in 2014 at the Organic World Congress in Istanbul, Turkey to advance efforts on seed quality, diversity, and accessibility. A central Secretariat coordinates the Platform, guided by a Steering Committee with a global representation and a breadth of experience and expertise. We activate our participants to collaborate with each other in local contexts through a concerted strategy that enables everyone to learn and share with each other, both within their geographical region as well as through resources shared globally. The Platform has expanded to engage actors from across the whole value chain, as well as organizations advocating for and supporting the interests of agroecological and organic farmers.

Organic principles and agroecology go hand in hand. The organic movement's adoption of Organic 3.0 readily and inclusively expands our reach to like-minded entities well beyond the market term "organic." Perhaps this is nowhere as easily manifest as in the area of seeds and related genetic resources. Agroecological, organic, regenerative, permaculture, and similarly aligned farming systems all face a common existential challenge that can be met regardless of whatever market claims or product labels farmers and their communities embrace. IFOAM itself has a broad network, but we know our agroecological allies extend well beyond our current formal affiliates. Our experience is of a clear, common interest and agenda; we intend to unite all such allies around this common theme, expanding our body of participants to any who align with agroecological principles and practices.

Our goal is to reach, both directly and through our constituent organizations, agroecological farmers, breeders, seed developers and traders of all ages, ethnicities, and production models that are aligned with the Principles of Organic Agriculture. Farmers, seed breeders, researchers, and entrepreneurs engaged in agroecologically-aligned local food systems will benefit from increased knowledge about, and availability of, seeds and breeds that perform better under their specific agronomic conditions.

Downstream value chain actors engaged in such food systems will also directly benefit from the improved quality and market opportunity afforded by the increased availability of agroecologically-produced goods. It is important to emphasize that the interest in the issue of seeds and genetics is accelerating among the agroecology and organic movement. In earlier years interest was more limited to seed producers, farmers, and researchers, but nowadays there is also heightened interest from the rest of the value chain and its support systems. This positions the topic to gain a scale of activity and impact not seen previously.

The IFOAM Seeds Platform is the coordinating entity that can foster greater mutually beneficial interdependence and harness these forces toward a fundamental change of the dominant paradigm. The Secretariat facilitates co-creation of messaging, position papers for advocacy, a research agenda, and highlighting of members' achievements to others in the network.

Strategic Work Areas

- (i) increasing membership, participation, learning and collaboration in our network;*
- (ii) coordinating research and education to solve technical challenges and enable a succession plan for new farmers-breeders, community seed banks, breeders, seed entrepreneurs and researchers in all localities;*
- (iii) facilitating market linkages so that breeders, seed producers, and agroecological farmers can connect with each other and with downstream value chain actors to manifest truly interdependent, economically fair, and durable business partnerships; and*
- (iv) advocating for policy reforms that protect the rights of indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers to seeds and breeds, and enable agroecologically compatible approaches to improving their quality and distribution. The ultimate goal is to shift the current global and country/region-specific balance of dominion over seeds and other genetic diversity towards putting genetic resources into more farmers' hands.*

Main Activities Planned for 2025

- Expansion by mapping of and direct outreach to allies – We are already aware of many like-minded organizations, enterprises, individuals who are part of the agroecology movement and/or*

want to support it. We intend to proactively reach out to them to engage their participation on the Platform. We are aware that our existing network constituents know of additional parties who would be interested in our work, so we also intend to expand our reach to such connections, with introductions facilitated by our current network members;

- *Engagement of the network on work agenda/priorities, agreed through direct conversations and emails, surveys, webinars, and other such communications;*
- *Scoping relevant country-specific regulations to assess and strategize with our Platform partners on technical and/or policy solutions that remove barriers to promoting agroecologically sound genetic resources. We shall establish working groups (both country-specific and cross-border, as befits the topic) to collaborate on meeting pertinent challenges;*
- *Broadening of our network and directory of educational programs, internships, mentors, and research opportunities, especially to attract and enable a next generation of seed breeders and entrepreneurs;*
- *Co-creating a common research agenda to solve technical problems faced by agroecological farmers and seed producers regarding access to suitable seed, planting stock, animal breeds, and related challenges. Examples may include but are not limited to effective and legally-acceptable phytosanitary treatments; agroecologically-compatible breeding techniques that engender ecological resilience, crop/variety diversity, and product quality; seed saving and care to protect quality, etc.*
- *Formal position papers (go to <https://seeds.ifoam.bio/index.php/key-resources/> for examples) and related public messaging that provides a common thread to inform and unify all stakeholders on shared objectives. These will be collaboratively developed and disseminated throughout the network. Topics may include but are not limited to raising awareness among producers and their respective organizations and communities through simple, easy-to-understand messaging around farmers' rights to seed, intellectual property, and short- and long-term solutions; and related advocacy messages that can be presented to governments.*
- *Maintenance and upkeep of our GMO Tracking database; development of risk assessment and risk mitigation guidelines for producers, downstream actors, and regulatory agents to help protect our sector from genetic pollution by unacceptable varieties;*
- *Building of downstream market connections to create value chain pull-through and interdependence, which benefits farmers, seed companies, and developers of improved varieties and promotes a culture and lifestyle that reflects organic principles.*

Expected Outputs for 2025

With full funding our 2025 plans include the following:

- *Expansion of the network – proactive engagement of entities aligned with agroecology who may be potentially interested in joining the Platform and reaping its benefits;*
- *Establishment and active use of an online directory through which all interested parties – breeders, farmers, seed companies, downstream value chain actors, researchers, educational institutions, students, regulatory agents – can register on the Platform, post links to relevant information, and search through filters in order to connect with each other and form relationships;*
- *Co-creation and dissemination of common strategies and messages related to scaling up interactions among Platform participants, and also advocacy guidance by and for the*

Platform's users that can be used to promote agroecological policy reforms;

- *Improvement of our digital media appearances and compatibilities;*
- *Expansion of an open-source library of unifying key documents and resources;*
- *Initiation of a co-creative, multistakeholder process to better elaborate agroecologically-compatible breeding practices, the ultimate output of which is a set of practical guidelines for producers (may take longer than 12 months to finalize);*
- *Establishment of a global research agenda to address common technical challenges.*

Urgent Policy Interfaces

We intend to impact two main policy areas:

- *Access to, development, and marketing of agroecologically-compatible seeds and breeds – Current policies and regulations regarding breeding techniques, phytosanitary restrictions, and marketing in many countries, especially in the developing world impose significant restrictions if not outright impossibilities to farmers to plant, save, improve and trade seeds (as well as other genetic stock) that are most suitable to their agronomic needs. We aim to address these multifaceted challenges on a country-by-country basis (rules vary by nation) by working with our constituents within and across borders to advocate for fairer, more sustainable solutions. In line with UN conventions (eg UNDROP, ITGRFA), agroecological farmers need more rights to save and trade seed without undue restrictions imposed by intellectual property rules. Labeling of seed in regulated national markets needs to change in order to allow producers to access suitable varieties. Research and field trials need to better allow breeding techniques to enable development of high-quality varieties in terms of ecological performance, yield, and product characteristics while respecting legitimate phytosanitary concerns and intellectual property rights.*
- *Control of genetic engineering – Agroecological producers' right to maintain their genetic resources depends on their ability to protect those resources from genetic pollution by inadequately regulated environmental releases of genetically engineered varieties. Associated limitations on genetic resources imposed by a proliferation of utility patents on lifeforms and genetic traits further threatens the availability and diversity of varieties usable by agroecological producers. We aim to educate and advocate for saner approaches to risk assessment, transparency, control, traceability, and labeling of such varieties.*

Long-term Changes We Envision

- *Improved knowledge, capacity, and access – Ongoing sharing of research, innovation, and knowledge across the network enables agroecological producers with both traditional and state-of-the-art technical knowledge that improves their ecological resilience, yields, and product quality. Included is succession planning to assure a next generation of farmers-breeders, breeders, seed producers, and seed traders.*
- *Policy reforms that enable agroecologically-compatible seed and breed development, multiplication, and distribution systems (markets, trading schemes, etc.) to grow, protected from unproven technologies and their respective genetic pollution.*
- *Value chain interdependence – Proactive enabling of actors across the entire value chain to engage with each other, from breeder/seed developer to final consumer, raises awareness about*

the fundamental importance of genetic diversity and quality to outcomes of sustainable farming, fair livelihoods, food security, and public and ecosystem health. Through a shift towards functional interdependence by building mutually beneficial, durable relationships between farmers and their communities/markets, we shall see the reduction of vulnerability of the livelihoods of indigenous and other agroecological producers and their communities. The building of mutually prosperous, transparent value chains based on sound agroecological principles – of which seeds, breeds, and other types of genetic resources are the foundation – will assure the pull-through to make primary producers' livelihoods improve.

How We Work and Communicate

The IFOAM Seeds Platform, as a global network, facilitates communication largely through digital means. We support our constituents on the ground to connect with convene with their local counterparts. We recognize that our “direct” participants also multiply and extend to other like-minded entities, some of whom join us directly. Our activities include:

- *Email listserv – The Secretariat facilitates a multilateral listserv, open to anyone who demonstrates alignment with agroecological principles. Messages are moderated to assure smooth and constructive exchanges.*
- *Digital media – Our [website](#) is an easy-to-navigate basic information hub for our network. It includes a targeted library of documents and videos. We plan technical improvements, enabled through donor funding, that include better compatibility with smartphones and tablets, the construction of our online directory, and further expansion of our digital presence to other platforms (eg LinkedIn) that can multiply our contacts.*
- *Webinars and other virtual events – We plan such convenings on topics of interest to the network, designed collaboratively with our constituents.*
- *In-person events and meetings – As schedules allow, the Secretariat or its appointed representatives attend in-person to help organize, inform, and advocate relevant parts of our strategy.*

Funding Needs

The objective of our global initiative is to strengthen indigenous peoples' and small farmers' ecological resilience, food and non-food production yield, quality, health, and income –in particular through increased sovereignty and autonomy of seed and animal breeds, and through the fostering of value chain interdependence to effect fair benefit sharing by downstream actors.

The funding we seek will enable the IFOAM Seeds Platform to fully act on Seed Sovereignty Now! Our mode of working is catalytic, activating our vast and growing network. Our budgetary requirements to manifest our workplan and strategy are relatively speaking low. In essence, our role is to:

- *Provide and coordinate thought leadership*
- *Facilitate network coordination, and*
- *Provide unifying services and messages.*

Our budget envisions staffing with a senior position General Secretary assisted by a junior Communications Specialist. Our constituents carry out the rest of the work on the ground in their respective areas as their respective budgets allow. Subcontracts are envisioned for a small amount of



IT developments (as mentioned under Outputs for 2025) to make our digital assets more accessible and effective. The Seeds Platform, as a Sector Body of IFOAM – Organics International, gets some administrative (fiscal management, email and website hosting) from the IFOAM – Organics International Head Office. Our experience has shown that our progress and growth is directly related to the time we can take to develop relationships with our constituents and reinforce their desire to participate because of the benefits that accrue to them from Platform. The Secretariat routinely maintains a strict log of hours spent per activity; our proposed budget foresees a 0.6-time staff equivalent for the Secretariat, administrative support from the IFOAM – Organics International Head Office, and necessary IT improvements to manifest our strategy.

The Secretariat has established metrics that will be further reviewed and then monitored ongoing to evaluate and improve performance of the Platform’s activities and address network members’ satisfaction.

We intend to monitor and report our effectiveness through updates obtained by our proactive outreach to constituents, as well as surveys of their opinions and outcomes resulting from the Platform’s activities.

End of document.