

A group of experts gathered have called on researchers and governments to adopt genome editing as a possible technology that can contribute immensely in food security in Africa.

While deliberating on the potential of new seed production technologies earlier this month at the 23rd African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Annual Congress in Dakar, Senegal, the experts noted that the continent was still lagging in seed trade due to technological challenges and unkind seed laws and policies.

They noted that given the low production of certified seed in Africa, genome editing, and biotechnology would largely help in fighting climate change and other factors facing agriculture.

The congress which gathered top seed traders and producers covered a wide spectrum of issues in the seed value chain. This year, the forum also addressed regional and international seed issues that have scientific and technological implications on seed production and trade.

These include biotechnology, plant breeding innovation, seed treatment, phytosanitary measures, strengthening vegetables production through quality seed trade in Africa and update on technologies for African agricultural transformation, according to the statement issued by the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) Secretariat.



Promotion of gene editing, the gathering heard is in line with AFSTA's five-year Strategic Plan with a view to meaningfully contribute to the promotion of the transformation of agriculture into an attractive, modern, and sustainable livelihood option for communities throughout the Continent.

Commenting on the move, Dr Kulani Machaba, President of AFSTA said: "The AFSTA Congress continues to grow year after year because we, the seed people, ably use it as a forum to sow and grow relationships, which have led us to harvest prosperity in our work as we promote quality seed trade in Africa."

"We need to hear from farmers how we can continuously and sustainably bridge the gap between seed companies and the farming community, now more pronounced mainly by the negative impact of climate change," Dr Kulani said.

According to experts, there is need to expedite seed regulation harmonization programme in the Africa to help increase access to quality and improved seeds by farmers and boost production.

Delegates at the forum called for concerted efforts in the protection of seed varieties and fight against “fake” seeds.

The Congress comes at a time when experts say that the fight against climate change will worsen existing inequalities within the global trade systems, and the seed sector will not be spared.

Analysis shows that only few commercialized genome edited products have reached the market yet, making it a challenge to quantify the economic, environmental and nutritional benefits in Africa.

Currently, genome editing projects for improvement of plants are ongoing in three East African countries. These include Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, featuring eight research scientists.

AFSTA is a not-for-profit membership association which champions the interests of private seed companies in Africa. It is registered in Kenya as an International Organization. The association was started in 2000 in Pretoria, South Africa and it meets annually around the first week of March. It has 120 members of which 27 are African national seed trade associations.