The Access to Seeds Index, an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the government of the Netherlands, aims to encourage seed companies to step up their efforts to support smallholder farmer productivity. "By benchmarking seed companies, the index gives credit to companies that show leadership and encourages others to follow their example," says Ido Verhagen, executive director of the Access to Seeds Index. "It also provides valuable information for governments, research institutes and donors interested in building partnerships with seed companies."

**Western and Central Africa**
The regional seed sector in Western and Central Africa clearly has potential. Of the 22 selected companies, 17 originate from the region itself. An interesting finding is the countries with multiple companies represented in the benchmark, including Nigeria with five and Mali with three.

In early 2019, the first Access to Seeds Index for Western and Central Africa will be published. It will show which seed company can be named ‘leading in supporting smallholders in Western and Central Africa’. The selection of the 22 nominated seed companies was based on company business models, track record and regional presence. The selection process was overseen by a committee of seven experts from the region.

“Smallholder farmers need to not only produce more food, but at the same time adapt their agricultural practices to changing weather conditions caused by climate change. By improving access to quality seeds, seed companies can make a vital contribution in supporting smallholder farmers with overcoming this challenge,” says Verhagen.

**Improving the productivity of smallholder farmers is one of the main targets on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda.**
By measuring the seed industry’s performance, the Access to Seeds Index aims to contribute to achieving these goals.

**In addition to seed companies, seed cooperatives play a crucial role in this region.** In July 2018, the Access to Seeds Index launched an additional study on 54 seed-producing cooperatives.

**Eastern and Southern Africa**
The second Access to Seeds Index for Eastern and Southern Africa will expand its scope further into Southern Africa. Seven more countries are involved and, as a result, five more companies are included in the ranking; 16 of the 22 selected companies originate from the region itself. Another interesting finding is the countries with multiple companies represented in the benchmark, including South Africa and Uganda, with four each, and Kenya with three.

In early 2019, the second Access to Seeds Index for Eastern and Southern Africa will show which seed company is now taking the lead in supporting smallholders in Eastern and Southern Africa.

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**Regional index for Western and Central Africa.**

**Regional index for Eastern and Southern Africa.**