

Plant Variety Release and Registration Process in Nigeria

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Nigeria, being one of the most populous countries in Africa, has a diverse agricultural landscape. The country recognizes the importance of promoting agricultural productivity, ensuring food security, and fostering economic growth. One of the ways to achieve this is through the development and release of improved plant varieties that are suited to the country's diverse agro-ecological zones. The process of plant variety release and registration in Nigeria is a crucial step in making these improved varieties available to farmers.

1. Regulatory Framework: The National Centre for Genetic Resources and Biotechnology (NACGRAB) is the primary institution responsible for the release and registration of new plant varieties in Nigeria. Established in 1992, NACGRAB operates under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The centre ensures that new plant varieties meet specific criteria before they are released and registered for commercial production.

2. Application for Testing: Before a new plant variety is released, it must undergo multi-locational and on-farm adaptive trials. Breeders or institutions that have developed a new variety must submit an application to NACGRAB. This application includes details about the variety, its origin, breeding method, and any other relevant information.

3. Conduct of Trials: Upon receiving the application, NACGRAB coordinates with relevant research institutes to conduct trials. These trials are carried out in different agro-ecological zones to assess the adaptability, yield potential, disease resistance, and other agronomic traits of the variety. The trials usually last for a minimum of two years.

4. Variety Release Committee: After the completion of trials, the results are presented to the National Variety Release Committee (NVRC). The NVRC is a body of experts from various agricultural research institutes, universities, and the private sector. This committee evaluates the performance data of the new variety and makes a recommendation on its release.

5. Release and Registration: If the NVRC is satisfied with the performance of the variety, it recommends its release. Once released, the variety is registered and added to the National Variety Register. This register is a comprehensive list of all plant varieties that have been officially released in Nigeria. The registration provides legal protection to the breeder and ensures that farmers have access to genuine and quality seeds.

6. Seed Certification: After registration, the seed of the new variety must be certified by the National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC). NASC ensures that the seed meets the required quality standards in terms of purity, germination, and health. Only certified seeds are allowed for commercial production and sale.

7. Intellectual Property Rights: Nigeria is a signatory to the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). This means that breeders have the right to protect their new varieties under the Plant Variety Protection (PVP) system. PVP gives breeders exclusive rights over the production, sale, and distribution of their varieties for a specified period.

8. Challenges and Opportunities: While Nigeria has a structured process for plant variety release and registration, there are challenges. These include inadequate funding for research, limited capacity for conducting trials, and issues related to seed distribution and accessibility. However, with the increasing focus on agricultural development, there are opportunities for strengthening the system, promoting public-private partnerships, and ensuring that farmers have access to improved and resilient plant varieties.

Conclusion: The plant variety release and registration process in Nigeria plays a pivotal role in promoting agricultural productivity and ensuring food security. By ensuring that only improved and adaptable varieties reach the farmers, Nigeria is taking steps towards sustainable agricultural development. As the country continues to face challenges related to climate change, population growth, and economic diversification, the role of improved plant varieties becomes even more critical. It is essential that all stakeholders, including the government, research institutions, and the private sector, collaborate to strengthen the plant variety release and registration system and ensure its effectiveness in meeting the country's agricultural goals.

A plant breeder using the Portal to Register Her/ His variety

Here are the steps a breeder would need to follow to apply for plant variety release using the portal:

1. **Register on the portal** - Create a user account by providing your contact information and credentials as a breeder.
2. **Fill application form** - Log in to your account and fill the online application form for variety release. Provide details like crop species, variety name, parental lineages, key traits, institutions involved etc.
3. **Upload trial reports** - The application needs to be supported by detailed reports of multi-location field trials conducted over at least 2 seasons showing the performance of your variety. These include:
 - Multi-location yield trials
 - Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) testing
 - Agronomic data evaluation trials
 - On-farm demonstrations
4. Upload PDFs of all trial reports generated as per prescribed formats given on the portal.
5. **Pay application fees** - Pay the prescribed application fee online through payment gateway integrated in the portal.
6. **Track application status** - You can track and view the status of your variety release application in real-time through your portal account. It shows which stage the application is at.
7. **Respond to queries** - Check regularly for any queries or additional data required by the approval authorities. Respond via the portal or e-mail as per instructions.
8. **Attend meetings** - If called for, personally present the performance data and merits of your variety before the Variety Release Committee. Justify why it should be released nationally.
9. **Download release certificate** - If your variety gets approved for release, download the variety release certificate from your portal account once it is issued.
10. **Updates and renewals** - Log in periodically to your portal account to file any updates or renewals related to the released variety as per regulations.

By adhering to these steps and guidelines, you can effectively use the portal for accelerated release of your crop variety. Let me know if you need any clarification on the process.

Flowchart

