Kenyan maize technicians trained

Between 17 and 21 May, 2010, the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) and the DTMA project organized a training workshop for 35 maize technicians, in Embu, Kenya. Course participants came from five KARI stations (Embu, Kakamega, Katumani, Muguga, and Mtwapa), seed companies, NGOs, and the CIMMYT field station in Kiboko. They got an opportunity to upgrade their skills and knowledge of field trial management, variety testing, registration, and release. Topics covered included breeding for abiotic and biotic stress, management of trials and nurseries, hybrid development, on-farm variety testing, seed production, variety descriptors, variety release and registration, and use of the CIMMYT Fieldbook (software for pedigree and data management). Course presentations were in the form of lectures, demonstrations, and practical sessions.

Wilfred Mwangi, associate director of the Global Maize Program (GMP) and DTMA project leader, urged the course participants to use the knowledge from the course to help the project achieve its aim of changing farmers’ lives by improving the yield of drought tolerant maize varieties in drought-stressed areas. “Over the past four years, CIMMYT and its partners have developed tools to help build individual capacity by taking technology to the farmers,” said Mwangi.

Christine Khalamua (pictured, left) from KARI-Kakamega was sure that the knowledge acquired would greatly benefit her work. “I have especially learnt a lot about randomization of trials,” she said. “The course covered all activities that maize technicians are involved in. It was very useful and has greatly helped us in understanding the work that we do,” added Fred Manyara, a participant from KARI-Embu.

Resource persons for the training were CIMMYT maize breeders Dan Makumbi, Peter Setimela, Stephen Mugo, and Joseph Beyene; CIMMYT research technicians Silvano Assanga, Haron Karaya, Andrew Chavangi, and Joseph Kasangye; KARI maize breeder Dr. James Gethi; and Dr. Evans Sikiyi, of Seed Traders Association of Kenya (STAK).

DTMA project at FARA African Agricultural Science Week

During 19 – 23 July, 2010, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) held an African Agricultural Science Week in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The event tackled key issues affecting African agricultural research and development in the face of climate change and the global financial crisis. FARA is a key umbrella organization for major agricultural stakeholders in Africa. At the meetings were more than 700 representatives, among them ministers of agriculture, researchers from international and national agricultural centers, policymakers, development partners, and partners from farmer and non-governmental organizations. The work of the DTMA project was found to be highly relevant as it addresses climate change.

The DTMA project was represented by Wilfred Mwangi, Project Leader and Anne Wangalachi, Science Writer. The project was showcased as part of CIMMYT initiatives in Africa under the ‘Market Place’ side event and the DTMA project’s progress in developing and disseminating new drought tolerant maize varieties was shown through poster displays, reports and leaflets; with a focus on getting seed into farmers’ hands (through the Innovation Learning Platform in Malawi) and the ‘crop insurance’ element of DT maize. Among the visitors was Rwandan Minister of Agriculture, Dr Agnes Kalibata, who was interested in DT maize technology and how it could be introduced and scaled up in her country. Other visitors to the exhibition booth were also interested in the DT maize technology, how to obtain seed, and community-based seed production; and project publications – the seed sector study and policy briefs, and the seed business management in Africa manual. French translations of some of the materials proved useful and popular.


Ghana passes a new seed law

On June 4, 2010, Ghana’s parliament passed the “Plants and Fertilizer Act of Ghana”, which will have positive impacts for the country’s seed industry, and the work of the DTMA project in Ghana and the greater West African region. The new Act is in three parts: the Seed Law, Fertilizer Law and Plant Protection Law. Through efforts coordinated by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and Ghana’s Millennium Development Authority (MiDA), various stakeholders were engaged in reviewing the new law. AGRA’s Policy Officer, Dr Augustine Langintuo, led these efforts and was co-author of a recent DTMA project report on the West African seed sector that provided useful insights in the revision of the Act, which repeals all previous seed, fertilizers and...
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DTMA project to begin radio extension partnership

More than 70% of smallholders in sub-Saharan Africa own a radio, and radio represents a very effective means of reaching farmers with agricultural extension messages. However, only 7% of radio airtime is devoted to agriculture, with a huge potential for more. These were some of the key issues raised by participants at a recent workshop organized by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Farmer Voice Radio (FVR) in Lilongwe, Malawi, for grantees to explore opportunities available for maximizing airtime with radio stations. Twenty-six representatives from 10 foundation grants across 17 organizations, including the DTMA project took part in the workshop. The project was represented by Jalic-Ulyn Rahar, CIMMYT Science Writer and Tom Mathinji, a radio journalist with the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, interested in the DTMA project and working with FVR in Kenya.

FVR is planning a series of radio programs whose focus is to be on the farmer, with content developed collaboratively by experts, farmers and radio extension officers. The DTMA project will participate through generating content, and providing expert interviews.

FVR is a consortium of radio broadcasters, agricultural experts, and farmers, established to provide a variety of agriculture-related radio programming, and serve as a megaphone for two-way extension priorities from content providers. Its 10-year vision is to reach 80% of sub-Saharan African smallholder farmers, with first in-depth work through a 3-year grant, in Malawi and Kenya, to implement and test the consortium. Further expansion to Ghana, Mali, Tanzania and Uganda is planned.

Country partner focus: Malawi

In Malawi, the DTMA project works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Chitedze Research Station, Seed Co, Demeter Seeds and non-governmental organizations.

In 2010, activities have focused on seed production and promotion of two new DT maize varieties – ZM 309 and ZM 523 – which are providing a niche market for improved open-pollinated variety (OPV) seed.

The DTMA project’s Innovation Learning Platform (ILEP) has provided an opportunity for many more farmers to learn about DT maize varieties from their peers through on-farm demonstration plots. The ILEP is led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and involves national maize breeders and extension agents, private and community seed producers, agro-dealers, grain marketing companies, micro-financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and farmers, who collaborate across the entire maize value chain (maize breeding to grain marketing).