

Combating poverty with data management

In south-eastern Kenya, in Katumani, scientists of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) have developed drought-tolerant beans – using conventional breeding techniques.

The organisations CIAT-Africa, Leldet Ltd., DSL Seeds Ltd., KARI and FIPS now work together in assessing how they can best make the improved seed known to farmers in a variety of regions in

New bean varieties in Kenya, CIAT.



Photo: CIAT

Kenya and Ethiopia. As a first step the scientists are gathering information on existing seed outlets and on the transport networks in the respective regions. Following data analysis the experts will make recommendations for future seed outlet locations. They will also distribute maps showing the locations of existing seed outlets to extension agents and farmers. Subsequently they plan to test whether mobile phones can be used to disseminate information on seed outlets and to provide feedback to the scientists on the growth of the improved bean seed. The project is called “Nodes of Growth”. It is one of five so-called Quick Win Projects of the Agricultural Geospatial Commons (AGCommons) Programme (see Box) which commenced in October 2008. It is under the administrative oversight of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

With this programme, CGIAR in partnership with the company CH2M Hill Ltd. and the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC), aims to design and develop a comprehensive programme to provide smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and other agricultural stakeholders with access to geospatial data, services, tools, and methodologies to help them make more informed decisions. (ib)

More information:

www.agcommons.org/

Quick Win Projects:

1. *Community-level Crop Disease Surveillance*
Implementing organisation: Grameen Foundation and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA)
2. *Nodes of Growth*
Implementing organisation: CIAT-Africa, Leldet Ltd., DSL Seeds Ltd., KARI, FIPS Africa
3. *Roads Data Development in Ethiopia*
Implementing organisation: iMAP, CIESIN, and RCMRD
4. *Africa Trial Sites Catalogue*
Implementing organisation: CIAT, ICRISAT, CIMMYT, IITA
5. *Seeing Is Believing*
Implementing organisation: ICRISAT

India: Bt Brinjal to hit market

A genetically modified aubergine variety – Bt Brinjal – is all set to be introduced in the Indian market before year-end by a Maharashtra-based company, reported the Times of India in June 2009.

The BT Brinjal variety, awaiting central government clearance for commercial release, will be the first Fruit and Shoot Borer (FSB) resistant veg-

etable biotech crop to benefit farmers who face nine percent losses in fruit damage and up to 70 percent in commercial plantings in India, sources at Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Co, which is developing the BT brinjal, said. Brinjal is grown on nearly 550,000 hectares in India and is an important cash crop for more than 1.4 million small, marginal and resource-poor farmers, the sources said.

BT Brinjal was found effective against FSB, with 98 percent insect mortality in Bt Brinjal shoots and 100 percent in fruits, compared to less than 30 percent mortality in non-BT counterparts, the sources claimed. Multi-location research trials confirmed that it required on an average 77 percent less insecticides than non-BT counterparts to control FSB and 42 percent less for control of all insect pests of brinjal. (Times of India)

New alliance: Agrinatura

Since the Science Forum 2009 of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research held in mid-2009 in Wageningen, the Netherlands, a new alliance of universities and research institutes is pressing ahead: Agrinatura.

Agrinatura is The European Alliance on Agricultural Knowledge for Development, encompassing 36 universities and research organisations from 19 European countries working with agricultural research, education, training and capacity strengthening for development. It aims to be the major institutional voice in Europe and the main gateway between Europe and developing and emerging economy countries in the field of agricultural research and education for development.

Agrinatura was formed by Natura, the former association of European

universities dealing with agricultural research and education for development, and Ecart, the consortium of European institutions working in agricultural research for development, in order to capitalise on their respective strengths and expertise.

Agrinatura has two pillars – an Association, open to all European agricultural research and education organisations, and a European Economic Interest Grouping (Agrinatura-EEIG), as its operational arm. Its goal is to make substantial European contributions to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Paris Declaration. *(Agrinatura)*

More information:

www.agrinatura.eu

Read more about the Science Forum 2009 on page 5.

Rust-resistant soya for Africa

A soya variety resistant to Asian rust disease, tagged TGx 1835-10E, has been bred by scientists at International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and further developed in collaboration with the National Cereals Research Institute (NCRI) in Nigeria. Its release for general cultivation was approved in December 2008 and notified in June 2009 by the Nigerian National Variety Release Committee.

The rust-resistant soybean is the first of its kind to be made available for cultivation not only in Nigeria but also in West and Central Africa and has the potential of increasing soybean production in rust-prone areas of the region. According to the scien-

tists the soybean is also high-yielding, early-maturing, has good promiscuous nodulation character, and resists pod shattering and other prevalent diseases. It can be used for direct cultivation in tropical Africa or as a source of resistance genes in soybean breeding programmes. It was previously released in Uganda, and has already shown excellent performance in trials carried out in southern Africa suggesting that it is a well-adapted variety. It has resistance genes that are effective against all currently known types of the rust fungus in Nigeria.

The Asian soybean rust is a fungal disease that can wipe out as much as 80 percent of infested crops. *(IITA)*

Imprint

Rural 21 –

The International Journal for Rural Development

Published by:

DLG-Verlags GmbH
Frankfurt, Germany

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Printed by:

GREISERDRUCK GmbH & Co. KG
Karlsruher Straße 22
76437 Rastatt, Germany

Rural 21 is published six times per year. The subscription rate is 47.– Euro (Germany), 51.– Euro (international) and 8.– Euro per issue, plus postage. All rights reserved. The contents may not be translated, reproduced in whole or in part, nor may information be passed on to third parties without permission of the publisher. Please direct all correspondence to the editor in chief.

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