

PROJECT TO CONSERVE INDIGENOUS CROPS LAUNCHED IN KENYA



Image credit: Flickr/ Stevie Mann, ILRI

Speed read

- The project is being implemented in seven nations in East Africa over four years
- It will help boost food security through use of technologies such as genomics
- An expert says it would help move the crops from gene banks to farmers

[NAIROBI] The second phase of a project to conserve the genetic resources of some indigenous crops and vegetables in eastern Africa has been launched in Kenya.

During the launch last month (12 November) scientists recommended conservation of the diversity of the crops' genetic resources to prevent climate change from making them become extinct.

The project is being implemented by the African Biodiversity Conservation and Innovations

Centre (ABCIC) in collaboration with the East Africa Plant Genetic Resources Network (EAPGREN), Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA).

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Dionysious Kiambi, African Biodiversity Conservation and Innovations Centre (ABCIC)

The second phase of the project has received US\$750,000 from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), says Dionysious Kiambi, ABCIC executive director. The first phase, which began in 2003 and ended in 2013, was also funded by Sida.

According to a statement from the ABCIC, the project will be implemented in seven countries over the next four years — Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda — and will involve indigenous crops, including banana, eggplant, cowpea and sorghum. The project was also launched in Uganda in August this year.

“The project will develop crop technologies with improved economic traits and this will ultimately lead to increased food security, improvement of livelihoods, household income generation and resilience of agricultural production systems,” the statement added, citing use of technologies such as genetic engineering and genomics.

Kiambi said: “East Africa is the centre of diversity, origin and domestication of many crops of global importance, hence the loss of these ... [crops] due to climate change requires urgent action to identify, document, conserve and promote their utilisation.”

Kiambi added: “The second phase in Kenya will include documenting the ... distribution of the

wild relatives of sorghum, cowpeas and forages in the Maasai Mara Reserve and the Mount Kenya National Park.”

Agriculture contributes 60 per cent of Kenya’s gross domestic product, said Joseph Mureithi, the acting deputy director-general for livestock at Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation, adding that genetic conservation will help create employment in the agricultural sector.

Mary Kamau, an extension training officer with Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, said Kenya has signed the Food and Agriculture Organization international treaty on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, which obliges parties to create policies, legislations and action plans to implement their commitment. The treaty will help the two entities collaborate in researching on plant genetic resources.

J. Gapusi, a researcher with EAPGREN, added that the project aims to move conserved plant genetic resources in the countries from gene banks, add value to them and promote their use to farmers.

Source : <http://www.scidev.net/sub-saharan-africa/conservation/news/conserved-indigenous-crops-launched-in-kenya.html>