



AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION
FONDATION AFRICAINE POUR LES TECHNOLOGIES AGRICOLES

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AATF Receives US\$ 1 Million Boost for Agricultural Technology in Africa

Nairobi: Friday, 12 August 2011 - The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) has received a US\$1 million support package from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to facilitate the organisation's operations, which seek to boost agricultural output through greater use of science and technology.

The funds will mainly support general operations, resource mobilisation as well as monitoring and evaluation of various on-going projects, which aim at helping small holder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa improve their livelihoods and productivity through use of innovative technologies.

African leaders have identified use of technology in agriculture, the sector widely acknowledged as the continent's 'engine for growth', as the best bet for reducing poverty and combating hunger. Food security is a major challenge on the African continent. Food shortages, high food prices and related social unrest can very often lead to other problems, including political instability.

Through NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the African Union aims to help African countries improve economic growth through agriculture-led development.

One of the major approaches of AATF aims at promoting agricultural research and technology dissemination and helping farmers gain access to proprietary technologies that are donated by public and private entities on royalty-free humanitarian basis. These technologies have the potential to address some of the key productivity constraints that affect these farmers.

The costs of such technologies has been partly blamed for low uptake of useful technologies in Africa, but the AATF intervention is aimed at ensuring these technologies are affordable for smallholder farmers.

"The support from Gates Foundation will help AATF become a stronger institution and enhance its capacity to achieve its mission of helping African farmers improve their livelihoods through better agricultural technologies," says Dr. Jacob Mignouna, the Acting AATF Executive Director.

Through consultations to establish priorities and farmer demands, AATF projects aim at addressing the impact of climate change on crop productivity, loss of yield caused by pests and diseases, low soil productivity, poor plant breeding processes and low mechanization.

Based on the above priorities, AATF is working with various country institutions, both from government and private sector, in projects aimed at improving priority food crops in over ten African countries.

Currently, only about 20 per cent of cropland in Africa is sown with improved cereal varieties. Many new varieties of maize and rice have been developed, and are in use in some countries, but they must be adapted to Africa's environmental conditions, a core mission of AATF projects.

Such projects include the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project, which seeks to develop maize varieties that can withstand the drought periods that the continent continues to experience.

Other projects include *Striga* control in smallholder maize farms, development of *Maruca*-resistant cowpea varieties, improvement of banana for resistance to wilt disease and improving rice productivity in nitrogen and water-deficient environments. One of the latest projects is the biological control of aflatoxin in maize and peanuts.

"We are dedicated to ensuring that this new support will make us a more efficient and effective institution and will translate into faster progress towards ensuring that existing technologies get to farmers' fields," says Dr. Mignouna.

What is being done?

CAADP is pushing for substantial changes in how agricultural business is done in Africa. These include realising the CAADP agricultural goals across Africa while promoting agriculture as a priority for sustainable development.

Rwanda was the first country to sign the CAADP Compact in 2007. By May 2011, 26 countries had incorporated CAADP into their agricultural strategy by signing the CAADP Compact.

The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) is a not-for-profit organisation that facilitates and promotes public/private partnerships for the access and delivery of appropriate proprietary agricultural technologies for use by resource-poor smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa (www.aatf-africa.org).
