

A quarterly newsletter of the African Agricultural Technology Foundation



**Herbicide Resistant Sorghum to Control Striga in Sub-Saharan Africa ..... 2**



**Taiwan and AATF Host Banana Tissue Culture Training for Great Lakes Region ..... 3**



**Meet new AATF Board Members ..... 4**

## WEMA Stakeholders Pledge Country Support



### WEMA regional meeting participants

Members of parliament from Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda pledged their support for the WEMA project during a two-day regional meeting attended by 70 stakeholders in Johannesburg, South Africa in April. The members of parliament said they would help the project address issues that could affect its progress in their countries. The parliamentarians, who led their country delegations to the meeting, commended the collaborative spirit of the project saying that it is an exemplary public/private partnership.

They were impressed by the progress made by the project in its first two years and the level of involvement and participation of various stakeholders that has ensured transparency and information sharing.

Hon Lulu Johnson, the Chairperson of Portfolio Committee, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, South Africa, said that food security is still a challenge for many poor households in South Africa despite the country being a maize exporter. He challenged researchers and scientists to find ways of ensuring that the smallholder farmers in South Africa who are still food insecure are able to grow their own food.

Hon Lastus Katende, a member of Uganda's Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, Animal Industry and

Fisheries, said the WEMA project was in conformity with Africa's goals and the millennium development goals that aim at addressing food security constraints.

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Science and Technology in Kenya, Hon Dave Koech, said that Africa needs to develop drought tolerant and high yielding crops but noted that there are challenges related to acceptance of genetically modified crops. He advised that communication and information sharing is important in providing the public with the answers they seek. He went on to say that researchers should allow enough time in doing their work to ensure attainment of good science.

From Mozambique, Hon Francisco Mucanheia, President of the Commission on Agriculture and Local Power, Assembly of the Republic of Mozambique, said his country is committed to the WEMA project since its mission, vision and values are important to the country. He went on to say 'as one of the key players in the project, we are interested in developing agriculture in ways that will raise productivity.'

Hon Kidawa Saleh, the Vice-chair of the Tanzania Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, Livestock and Water, pledged her support in mobilising and sensitising other legislators and committees on the WEMA project and on the need to enact biosafety laws. 'Legislators have been

empowered to lobby government,' she said, pointing out that poverty and low productivity of smallholder farmers due to drought should present an opportunity for legislators to act.

### Visit to Bt maize farmer

The WEMA regional stakeholders meeting participants visited Mr Molatsi Musi's Bt maize farm in Johannesburg. Mr Musi shared his experiences and challenged the stakeholders to advocate for a conducive biosafety environment in their countries to enable their own farmers plant high yielding maize varieties produced from biotechnology so that Africa can feed itself.

The President and Chief Executive Officer of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), Dr Shadrack Moephuli, officially opened the meeting. He lauded the focus of WEMA on drought tolerance saying South Africa was prone to periodic drought and 'water use efficient varieties are a matter of national priority'. He however noted that the goals of the project cannot be achieved without the appropriate policy and regulatory environment and an implementation platform. He said collaboration with diverse sets of partners provides an ideal environment for success with limited resources.

### Attendance

The WEMA regional stakeholders meeting was organised by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) in collaboration with the ARC, South Africa. It was attended by representatives of national biosafety institutions; government officials from ministries of agriculture, media representatives, farmer groups, seed companies and biotechnology communication organisations. It will be held every two years and will complement the annual country stakeholder meetings.

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