DTMA and DFID win 2012 UK Climate Week Award

On 12 March 2012, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) won the Best Technological Breakthrough at the 2012 UK Climate Week Awards for its support to the DTMA project – an effective initiative in combating climate change. The award was jointly received by Wilfred Mwangi, DTMA Project Leader, Dan Makumbi, Maize Breeder and Allan Tollervey, Head, Agriculture team at DFID.

So far, the DTMA project has developed and disseminated 34 new drought-tolerant maize varieties to more than two million smallholder farmers in 13 project countries — Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe — who have obtained higher yields, improved food security, and increased incomes. These achievements are particularly notable since in sub-Saharan Africa, the frequency and severity of droughts has been increasing recently, affecting the production of maize – the main staple. For instance, in 2011 alone, more than 12.5 million people suffered the effects of drought and resulting famines in the Horn of Africa, with the drought being termed the worst in 60 years.

“DFID provided ten years of valuable support for CIMMYT’s mid-altitude maize breeding program for southern Africa, which focused on drought tolerance,” Mwangi said at the event.

Congratulations and thank you to all the DTMA teams, our partners and donors for this effort!


The DTMA Project Leader Dr Wilfred Mwangi, Maize Breeder Dr Dan Makumbi, Head, Agriculture Team at DFID Dr Allan Tollervey and an official from Nissan UK, one of the sponsors of the Climate Week Awards in Lancaster.
Bill Gates announces more funding for DTMA III at IFAD session

On 23 February 2012 during the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Governing Council Meeting in Rome, Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, spoke on “Sustainable smallholder agriculture: Feeding the world, protecting the planet.”

Gates urged the international scientific community to unite around a common global target for fighting hunger and reducing poverty, through sustainable productivity growth. “Investments in agriculture are the best weapons against hunger and poverty, and they have made life better for billions of people. The international agriculture community needs to be more innovative, coordinated and focused to really be effective in helping poor farmers grow more. If we can do that, we can dramatically reduce suffering and build self-sufficiency,” he said.

At the same time, Gates announced a further USD 200 million in grants from the Foundation’s agriculture program, which included USD 33 million for the DTMA project over the next four years. The new funding should enable delivery of enough drought tolerant maize seed to benefit 30-40 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, adding grain worth an annual average of USD 160-200 million in drought-affected areas. “In this phase, our focus will be on developing varieties with both heat and drought tolerance, and getting the seed of these varieties into farmers’ hands as widely, timely and affordably as possible,” says Wilfred Mwangi, DTMA Project Leader.

Empowering maize technicians in Zimbabwe

A maize technician training course was held at the Agricultural Research Trust (ART) Farm, in Harare, Zimbabwe from 12 to 15 March 2012. The course was organized by CIMMYT’s Zimbabwe office to upgrade the skills and knowledge of maize technical staff on implementing on-station and on-farm trials, seed production and the use of secondary traits in selecting superior genotypes under low nitrogen and drought trials. The participants were representatives from five seed companies in Zimbabwe and national agricultural research systems in Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland. They were sponsored by CIMMYT’s New Seed Initiative for Maize in Southern Africa (NSIMA) and Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa (DTMA) projects, and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)-Swaziland. The training covered practical sessions as well as theoretical lectures on seed production and breeding for biotic and abiotic stress. Giving the seed company perspective Lazarus Karori from Progene Seeds said: “I have never attended a similar training before, so it was very useful. I learnt how to implement field trials as well as principles of hybrid seed production.” CIMMYT thanks the course organizers and resource persons who were: Charles Mutimaamba, the Maize Coordinator from the Department of Agricultural Research and Special Services in Zimbabwe, and CIMMYT’s Peter Setimela, Cosmos Magorokosho, Amsal Tarekegne, John MacRobert, Jill Cairns, Sebastian Mawere, Pamela Chirwa and Oswell Ndoro.
Teams from Kenya and Uganda, winners of the 2011 Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa (DTMA) project excellence awards in eastern Africa, were feted on 1 March 2012 in Uganda. For the second year running, the Kenyan team, comprising the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) – Katumani, Kenya Seed Company, and Dryland Seeds Ltd, won the best dissemination team award while Uganda’s National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) won the best breeding team award. The teams, working as part of the DTMA project, were involved in developing and deploying varieties with increased drought tolerance in Uganda and Kenya. These awards were created to foster excellence and team work among national DTMA project partners. Each winning team received US $3,000, a plaque and certificates for each member of the team. The award ceremony was officiated by Dr Emily Twinamasiko, Director General of NARO, Uganda.

Congratulations to the winning teams!

The third phase of the DTMA project kicked off with an inception and planning meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya during 01 – 03 February 2012. The new phase is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (B&MGF) at US $33 million over four years. During the work planning process, project team members, partners and the new advisory board fine-tuned the work plans that will be crucial in achieving the project’s ambitious and important milestones. The focus will shift towards production and delivery of certified seed of new drought tolerant varieties to farmers, and will be complemented by communication and advocacy to promote the access to and uptake of these varieties by farmers. The phase III activities fall into four thematic areas:

- Product development and testing of high-yield DT maize germplasm;
- Product delivery – comprising production and promotion of high-yielding DT maize varieties;
- Enhancing impact – involving identifying and overcoming adoption constraints of new DT maize varieties and
- Project management and communication.

Members of the new advisory board are: Peter Freymark, Maize Breeder, Pioneer, USA (Breeding/Biotechnology); Dave Westphal, Senior Associate, Context (Seed Systems); Alfred Busolo, Deputy MD, Kenya Seed Company (Seed Systems); Edgar Rupende, Group Production Manager, SeedCo (Seed Systems); Augustine Langyintuo, Head, Policy and Partnership, AGRA (Socio-economics); Joe Devries, Director, AGRA/PASS and Brian Love, Programme Officer, B&MGF. Dave Westphal was elected the new advisory board chair.
The Sustainable Intensification of Maize-Legume based cropping systems for Food Security in Eastern and Southern Africa (SIMLESA) is a four year program (2010–13), being funded by the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) that was launched in March 2010. The project has adopted Mother-Baby Trials (MBT) as a way of evaluating new drought maize and legume varieties under farmer conditions. Farmers choose varieties that interest them from a central “mother” trial and test them out on their own farms in “baby” trials. In collaboration with IDEEA-CA, a farmers association organization, SIMLESA has been upsampling activities through MBT implemented using the farmers associations’ networks in and around Manica province in Mozambique.

A replication of the mother trial without fertilizer has been used to show the advantages of using commercial fertilizers. Within the foreseeable future, the use of improved varieties and the proper use of commercial fertilizers as well as the adoption of conservation agriculture practices, will significantly improve the livelihoods of resource-poor farmers. The trials have provided a voice for farmers as they grow new drought tolerant maize and legume varieties. As farmers experience these varieties in their fields, they influence seed companies to multiply varieties of their choice.

Marcello Chikukwa of Sussundenga district in Mozambique says, “It took me two seasons to appreciate the yields of the new hybrids. I was suspicious of the small plant size as compared to our local variety. But I realized that the local variety takes long to mature and had too much herbage and the stem was very tall but the yields were very low.”

In 2012, Tanzania has released seven new DTMA varieties. Suba AGRO has released four varieties, these are: SAH638, SAH636, SAH671, and SA523. Meru AGRO has released three varieties: HB405, HB513 and HB623.

Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, Melkassa has released two new DT maize varieties, these are MHI30 and MH138Q.

In Mozambique, in 2011, Instituto de Investigação Agrária de Moçambique (IIAM) released three new DT maize varieties. These are CZH 0524, CZH 0511, CZH 04008.

Congratulations to the DTMA teams in Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

Similar comments are becoming more common as farmers get exposure to new drought tolerant maize and legumes in combination with conservation agriculture. The implementation of the project also facilitates the seed road maps with seed companies and breeders to produce certified seed and run promotion activities. Dengo Commercial in Mozambique and other seed companies are participating in seed production and promotion of these new drought tolerant maize varieties. Although there has been erratic rainfall in some areas, the seed producers are confident that good yields are still achievable. Nine maize varieties and ten soya bean varieties are being promoted in three districts in Mozambique and six districts in Malawi. The Project Leader Mulugetta Mekuria accompanied by Peter Setimela, Isaiah Nyagumbo and the National coordinators made field visits in February and interacted with the farmers.