

BiosafeTrain News

Issue 1,

February-May 2007



Training for Biosafety

Editor: Joy Owango

Dear Colleagues

Welcome to the first of BiosafeTrain's quarterly newsletter, *BiosafeTrain News*.

BiosafeTrain is a collaborative project on biosafety with scientists from the University of Nairobi and Kenya Agricultural Research Institute in Kenya, Makerere University in Uganda, University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, University of Aarhus, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (the former Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences) and the University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Life Sciences (the former Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University) in Denmark.

The programme is an Enhancement of Research Capacity (ENRECA) project, funded by DANIDA. The project started in December 2004 and currently Phase 1 (3 years) is ongoing.

As food security is a major concern in Africa, there is an urgent need to increase crop production on this continent. Gene technology may be one of the many tools that can be useful. BiosafeTrain's long-term vision is to build capacity to cope with the challenges of introducing genetically modified crops to East Africa by developing a platform for capacity building on biosafety impact assessment.

BiosafeTrain News' main purpose is to keep you informed on BiosafeTrain's activities and relate this to what is happening in gene technology in East Africa.

For more information and suggestions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us on

biosafetrain@groupcare.dk, www.biosafetrain.dk or joy.owango@agrsci.dk.

Joy Owango, Editor.

PEOPLE AND CHANGES

New Project Logo



Now we have a logo for the BiosafeTrain project (see on the welcome page). The abstract image reflects the colours of plants (green) and earth (terracotta), and the moving line may be associated with uncertainty/seeking a balance with respect to transgenic plants. The logo was designed by David Theuri Murage, a young Kenyan designer, who has fifteen years experience in visual communications for organisations in Kenya.

David Murage

Project website

The BiosafeTrain website is expanded and has more content about the project. Under the "Young scientists" folder, interviews of student fellows of the BiosafeTrain projects from Kenya Uganda and Tanzania are published.

For more, log on to www.biosafetrain.dk.

Communications Manager for BiosafeTrain



Ms. Joy Owango

Joy Owango joined as Communications Manager on 1 December 2006. Joy has extensive experience in communication, written and electronic, in the region. Some of her tasks are to improve the information flow and increase the presence of the BiosafeTrain project in the East African region, on the continent and also internationally. She will also write about the project for electronic forums, local and international newsletters, funders and colleagues in the scientific field, and manage information flow among professional organisations and possible funders (GEF, Biosafety Clearing House, DANIDA), scientists, media, and the public.

New colleague from KARI



Dr. Ruth Amata (photo above) joined the core group to replace Dr. Elijah Ateka who left Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) for a job at Jomo Kenyatta University. Ruth has a PhD in plant pathology from the University of Sydney, Australia, and works in the Biotechnology Centre at KARI. She first took part at the Steering Committee meeting in Zanzibar, December 2006. We welcome Ruth to the Project, and are looking forward to work with her. We also thank Dr. Ateka for his input and wish him well in his future career.

Dr. Ruth Amata

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

BiosafeTrain students get training in scientific communication and publishing

Ugandan students Christine Munduru, Gerald Kyalo and Simon Byabagambi took part at TCC (Training Centre in Communication) Scientific Communication and Publishing course held at Makerere University in October 2006. Kenyans Serah Njeru, James Kanya, Dennis Obonyo, Jane Tei M'Ringera took part in the same course held at the University of Nairobi in December 2006.

2nd BiosafeTrain Student Day held in Nairobi, 23 September 2006

The day before the first biosafety training course, the BiosafeTrain Project had its second Student Day, where all 10 fellowship holders gave a presentation about their progress. The first who is expected to finish is entomology student Christine Munduru, from Makerere University, Uganda. She plans to submit her MSc Thesis early in 2007.

New student project starting



Andy Howe

MSc student Andy Howe (University of Copenhagen) got a DANIDA MSc fellowship to work with the BiosafeTrain on a field project in Uganda. Andy's project title is "Investigation of predation pressure in Ugandan cotton fields". The project will measure predation pressure using a dummy prey, green clay 'caterpillars'. These will be modelled on pest larvae and glued to the upper surface of cotton leaves. Predators attacking these "model caterpillars" will leave signs but are unable to carry off their "prey". Andy will compare predation rates in four different cotton regimes: mono-crop (cotton only) sprayed with pesticide, cotton interplanted with legumes, sprayed with pesticide, and the same pair of mono-crop and intercrop without pesticide treatments.

Andy plans to start in the spring 2007, and will work on the project during the year, with two planned field visits. The project will be co-supervised by Gabor Lövei.

First biosafety course held in Nairobi

The first training course on biosafety was held in Nairobi, between 25 - 30 September 2006, with the involvement of East African, Brazilian, American, and Danish resource persons. This was one of the activities in co-operation with GMO-ERA project. There were 16 participants from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania; the (very quiet) venue was the Anglican Church Guest House. The course concentrated on environmental impacts and gene flow, but legal, social, and ethical aspects of GMO growing were also discussed. The participants made a field visit to the GMO glasshouse at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute in Nairobi. One of the highlights was a live videoconference link to the US, during which Dr. John Fagan, Chief Scientist at Genetic-ID, a firm specialising in GMO detection, gave an in-depth presentation of the theory and practice of detecting GMO in food, shipments, etc.

The course discussions were very vigorous, and the participants were very active, in spite of the long hours and heavy information load. The evaluation of the course was very positive, which augurs well for the future development of the project.

GM biosafety course in Niger



Participants of the biosafety workshop in Niamey, Niger, November 2007.

Within the framework of co-operation between (the former) DIAS and AGRHYMET Regional Centre, the BiosafeTrain Project held the first ever GM biosafety course in the country of Niger, at the AGRHYMET Headquarters, Niamey, between 3-7 November 2006.

AGRHYMET was established after the serious droughts of the 1970ies in the Sahel, and is an inter-country institute serving 9 Sahelian countries. Part of AGRHYMET's activity is capacity building and they possess a well-equipped training laboratory which was used for the course.

AGRHYMET provided the logistical background and selected the participants. There were 14 participants from 6 Sahelian countries: Niger (Agali Alhassane, Seydou Traore, Ibrahima Soutey, Alomatou Abdou, Amadou Bocar Bal), Chad (Kossadoum Mbanguerngaye), Burkina Faso (Souleymane Traore, Mariam Some), Guinea Bissau (Luis A. Tavares, Maria R. Evora), Mali (Siaka Demele, Pefoungo Komate, Aminata Goro, Hamidou Coulibaly), Senegal (Amy Sal), and Gambia (Adama Cham, Joko Sanyang) . The teaching was done by Drs. Thure Hauser (KVL), Mugassa Rubindamayugi (Univ. Dar-es-Salaam) and Gabor Lövei (BiosafeTrain, DIAS). The short course concentrated on environmental impacts but legal, social and

health aspects were also briefly covered. The course was very well received and further courses are suggested that will increase the number of people informed about GM biosafety aspects in the region.

Glasshouse building at KARI, Nairobi

The new insect-proof glasshouse block at the Kenya Agriculture Research Institute (KARI), an important part of infrastructural development supported by BiosafeTrain, is at the tendering process stage. Building is expected to start in March 2007.

Co-operation between KVL- Cassava group and BiosafeTrain

The KVL Cassava group has for several years developed protocols for transformation of cassava, and developed transgenic lines of African origin with low levels of cyanide content. Eventually these will be tested for field performance in Nigeria, but may take several years due to legal complications. BiosafeTrain is focusing on East Africa, and has a well-developed network, including contacts to GM advisory boards and competent authorities. We are now discussing a co-operation on field testing of the most promising lines.

BIOSAFETRAIN IN THE REGION AND WORLD-WIDE

Steering Committee meeting held in Zanzibar, 6-9 December 2006

The BiosafeTrain Steering Committee held its yearly meeting in last December. The objective of the meeting was to summarise the progress on the project's infrastructural, training and other activities. A set of new task list and timelines was given to the partners to finish their projects. New partnerships between BiosafeTrain and existing biosafety projects were discussed. The BiosafeTrain communications strategy was also introduced at this meeting.

BiosafeTrain invited to co-organise UNEP GEF GM capacity building meeting, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, April 16-18 2007

BiosafeTrain has been invited as co-organisers of the Second International Meeting of Academic Institutions and Organisations involved in Biosafety Education and Training, in Kuala Lumpur. The overall objective of this conference is to contribute to the enhancement of long-term education and training in biosafety in order to strengthen human resource capacities for the effective implementation of the Cartagena Protocol, particularly in developing countries. Participants at the meeting will discuss ways and means of implementing the above-mentioned COP-MOP decisions regarding measures for enhancing formal biosafety education and training.

The meeting is expected to produce a report for consideration, as appropriate, by COP-MOP 4 and relevant institutions and donor agencies, to promote academic training in biosafety in developing countries.

The meeting is organized by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL), the Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences (BiosafeTrain Initiative), the Biosafety Interdisciplinary Network (RIBios) based at the University of Geneva, the Norwegian Institute of Gene Ecology (GENOK) and the University of Malaya.

A total of up to 70 participants have been invited, including 25 sponsored participants from developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The participants are representatives of academic institutions, regional centres of excellence and international organizations that are currently offering or plan to offer biosafety education and training programmes.

GMO-ERA evaluated by the SDC

Our sister project, GMO-ERA was evaluated by the Swiss Development Agency. As we have a formal co-operation with GMO-ERA, evaluation team member Guido Beltrani interviewed project leader G. Lövei on 19 November 2006. The evaluation was circulated for comments in January 2007. One of the recommendations was that the project should develop closer co-operation with developing country scientists and regulators, and formalise co-operation with other projects the way we did. This is an indirect way of endorsing our activity and approach to co-operation.

BiosafeTrain & GMO-ERA co-operate in teaching tool development workshop, Campinas, Brazil, 5-9 February 2007

The Brazilian team of GMO-ERA organise the third workshop on developing the training tool for biosafety training-of-trainers. This took place in Campinas, near Sao Paolo, 5-9 February 2007. As an ongoing co-operation activity, Gabor Lövei of our BiosafeTrain team will participate to further assist in the development of teaching modules on ecological impacts and consequences of gene flow. These have been successfully trialled at the Nairobi course in September 2006, and have undergone further development since.

GMO ASPS meeting in Kampala, Uganda

DANIDA Agricultural Sector Program Support, Kampala, Uganda, organised a one-day workshop on "Transgenics in Uganda: Monitoring Biosafety to support Positive Outcomes for Farmers, industry and environment." The half-day meeting was held at Kampala on 30 November 2006. Participation was by invitation, and representatives from all major players in the GM area in Uganda, including the Parliament, the National Council for Science and Technology, National Agricultural Research Organisation, Ministry of Agriculture, Seed Growers Association, the Cotton Development Association, ASARECA, DANIDA ASPS, USAID, Makerere University, FAO, European Union, were present. Presentations on the legal status and policy related to GM crops, the attitude of the major producer groups, and the plans were presented and discussed. The BiosafeTrain Project had a very impressive presence at this meeting. Gabor Lovei and Richard Edema introduced the project. All three students, Gerald Kayo, Christine Munduru and Simon Byabagambi presented their projects and results in a short talk and also on a poster. The participants were very impressed by the project and by the students' work, and most questions were addressed to them. We thank Chief Advisor Warwick Thompson for giving us the opportunity to present our work at this meeting.