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The alarming food crisis in the country has seen researchers come up with a study to improve food production. Others have developed biosafety measures to control pests that attack food crops by introducing preventive measures through the introduction of training in research institutes.

The Danish Government through the BiosafeTrain project funded a training dubbed "BiosafeTrain Greenhouse extension", which was launched two weeks at the Kari headquarters. The project's objectives are to build human resource and infrastructure to cope with challenges of introducing genetically modified crops to East Africa.

The project also aims at developing a research structure that will address biosafety concerns locally including environmental impact assessment of genetically modified organisms and testing and revising suggested standard procedures used in this area.

The construction of the greenhouse began in August 2006, and completed in June 2008 at a cost of about Shs 3.2 million. The basic structure of the greenhouse is identical to the four existing greenhouse units (apart from the headroom), but has modifications necessary for isolation of insect handling.

The Danish Government also financed the purchase of cages used for non-target assessment trials. The whole project started in December 2004 and is currently in its first phase.

The project has funded one PhD fellow under Kari who is almost through with his studies in the area of biosafety. The project has also offered courses in Risk Assessment of Genetically Modified Organisms to the National Environmental Management Authority and has plans to offer more courses in the area of biosafety to relevant institutions.

A rapidly increasing population and low agricultural production in the developing world poses great challenges to food sufficiency and environmental conservation.

Current food production methods need to be reviewed and improved on to effectively address food security. Biotechnology has the potential to effectively contribute to the solution of these challenges through biotech crops that are resistant to pests and diseases and environmental stress, produce high yields and have high nutritional content.

These advancements have taken place in other countries such as USA, Australia, India and China and necessitate human and infrastructural capacity building in biotechnology and related fields.

Requirements for funds for capacity building and strengthening of biotechnology governance and regulatory framework have been a great challenge, especially to developing countries, hence the reason why the contribution made by the Danish government through the BiosafeTrain project is highly appreciated.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Biosafety Protocol) under the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) identifies the need in both developing and developed countries for comprehensive, transparent, scientific methods, that would be used in pre- and post-release testing and monitoring of transgenic plants to ensure their environmental safety and sustainable use.

Capacity building and policy development in the area of biosafety in developing countries must be addressed; Article 22 of the Biosafety Protocol recognises that capacity building requires significant investments.

Many countries may, however, not be in a position to make independent risk assessments on biosafety. The completion of the greenhouse extension is a great achievement that will go a long way

Danish govt hastens the introduction of GMOs in East Africa



Participants at a workshop held at Kari view some of the GMO crops in a greenhouse

in enhancing research on local assessment of GMOs on non-targets and building capacity in the area of biosafety.

Food safety being a major concern in Africa, there is need for tools to increase crop production in the country. Gene technology may be one of the many tools to be used. Lack of capacity to assess the agricultural and ecological impacts of introducing GM crop is one of the obstacles vividly demonstrated by the GM-maize food aid crisis in Southern Africa.

The long-term vision of the project is to build capacity that can cope with the challenges of introducing genetically modified crops into the

region before developing a platform for training in biosafety impact assessment of the transgenic plants.

The organisation also intends to improve existing infrastructural capacity by upgrading current biosafety facilities, test and revise suggested standard procedures from GM plant biosafety, developing a research agenda adapted to local conditions and generate new knowledge in order to realise the agenda.

In the current situations, people should have knowledge on biotech in order to reduce the cost of food production and improve living standards.