



SUCCESS STORY

Supporting dreams, working toward food security

by Miriam Rich

The IPM CRSP makes a difference in the lives of two scientists. Read the stories of Kenyan researcher Sylvia Kuria and Ghanaian plant breeder Michael Osei.



Sylvia Kuria hopes to one day shape agricultural policy for Kenya. The training she is receiving from the program will help her achieve this goal.



As a researcher with CSIR-Crops Research Institute in Ghana, Michael Osei is helping farmers produce healthy, marketable produce.

INVASIVE PESTS. BIOCONTROL AGENTS. SMALLHOLDER FARMERS. All of these are things we think of when we consider integrated pest management in the developing world. But what about life-changing financial support that can help a person realize their career dreams? Not so much.

And yet, the Integrated Pest Management Collaborative Research Support Program (the IPM CRSP, but soon to be known as one of the Feed the Future Innovation Labs in Collaborative Research) provides just this kind of support for many young scientists around the world.

Take Sylvia Kuria and Michael Osei.

RESEARCH SCIENTIST SYLVIA KURIA

Kuria, a research scientist from Kenya, speaks passionately about the importance of growing healthy plants in her home country. “In Kenya, horticulture is the most valuable agricultural sub-sector,” she says. “It plays a major role in meeting people’s domestic [consumption] needs. It also employs four million people who produce crops for the export sector.”

Kuria is employed as a research scientist at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute. She is also pursuing a master’s degree in plant pathology at Makerere University in Uganda. The funding for her graduate degree comes from the IPM CRSP, itself funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Kuria explains that the challenges that Kenya faces when the horticulture sector is threatened are no small matter. Whether the threats are due to a pest or restrictive legislation from the European Union (an importer of produce), people’s livelihoods are at stake. By helping local businesses develop biocontrol methods, and by helping small-scale farmers embrace these same techniques, Kuria is hoping she can help foster positive growth. With integrated pest management practices, she says, come not only higher yields, but also “better



Researcher Michael Osei with IPM CRSP director Muni Muniappan.



Bags of pseudomonas, an eco-friendly biopesticide, line a table at TNAU. Workshop attendees toured TNAU's department of plant pathology to learn about pseudomonas production.

health and safety of workers due to the decreased use of pesticides on crops.”

Once she obtains her degree, Kuria hopes to return to Kenya, advancing to positions of increasing responsibility and helping to set policy for her country.

PLANT BREEDER MICHAEL OSEI

Michael Osei works as a plant breeder at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research-Crops Research Institute in Kumasi, Ghana. Farmers in Ghana, he says, face numerous pest problems. “Fruit flies are a serious problem—on mangoes, citrus, and melons. Aphids on cabbage are a problem. And, there is the tomato fruit borer.”

While Osei’s research on the discovery of new tomato virus strains has won him runner-up in the National Best Young Scientist award in Ghana, he does not rest on his laurels.

He, along with Kuria and six other researchers from developing countries, attended a workshop on the production of biocontrol agents in Coimbatore, India, in late January. The event was held at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and co-sponsored by TNAU and the IPM CRSP. The attendance of the eight young researchers was funded by the IPM CRSP, managed by Virginia Tech.

FUNDING A NEW GENERATION OF SCIENTISTS

Muni Muniappan, director of the IPM CRSP, sees this kind of

training as an investment in the future. “It is imperative that a new generation of scientists are trained to deal with the new range of challenges, such as climate change, faced by today’s farmers.” The program is doing just that — providing both long-term (advanced degree) training as well as short-term training, building capacity for the future by investing in people like Osei and Kuria.

The road ahead in growing food for the world’s millions will not be easy. But training is part of the answer. And Osei might remind us of a Ghanaian proverb. “If things are getting easier, maybe you’re headed downhill.”

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