

New sorghum varieties panacea to food crisis



Striga is one of the most serious constraints to cereal production in Africa
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More than 50 varieties of drought and *Striga* resistant sorghum are being hailed by scientists as a panacea to the drought that continues to ravage the Eastern and Horn of Africa region. "We are at the tail-end of developing technologies that offer hope for problems that have been very serious sorghum production constraints in East and Central Africa," says Africa Biodiversity Conservation and Innovations Centre (ABCIC) executive director, Dr Dan Kiambi. "In a year's time we should have products ready for farmers."

With funding from the Association for Strengthening Agriculture Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), ABCIC convened a regional research dissemination workshop to share their joint findings with national agricultural research organisations. The new varieties have

been tested in Kenya, Eritrea and Sudan and are set to be released to Rwanda, Tanzania, South Sudan and Uganda in 2012. Sudan is due to be the first country to release the new drought tolerant and *Striga* resistant varieties in December 2011.

In the Horn of Africa, *Striga* destroys about US\$2.89 billion of maize and sorghum every year, with sorghum suffering 86 per cent of this loss. "*Striga* is second only to drought as a factor reducing the yield of staple food crops in Africa," Kiambi adds. "It is one of the most serious constraints to cereal production in Africa, sometimes causing up to 100 per cent yield losses on farmers' fields."

In East and Central Africa, sorghum is ranked as the second most important food crop, grown on more than ten million hectares. Sorghum is especially important in drylands as it is able to tolerate arid conditions.

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