

US-Africa Connections: A Workshop to Explore Basic Science Research Collaborations for Agricultural

June 18-23, 2009

Nairobi and Naivasha (Great Rift Valley Lodge), Kenya

The Biosciences eastern and central Africa-International Livestock Research Institute (BecA) Hub and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) convened this conference to foster collaborations between US and African scientists. Given the scientific research already underway in both places, US-African partnerships are a strategic mechanism to harness science to improve the livelihoods of Africans.

The Science & Technology program for Agricultural Development at BMGF and the BecA Hub share a common goal of exploring ways in which the advanced sciences can be applied for the benefit of smallholder farming families in African countries. This conference helped catalyze many partnerships between high-caliber US and African scientists. It also afforded an opportunity for scientists from the United States to get acquainted with scientists with similar interests in sub-Saharan Africa, and vice versa. Scientists were given the opportunity to describe their own areas of expertise and to explore with other workshop participants how various collaborations could contribute to the advancement of agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa.

The workshop was timed to coincide with the opening of a new program called BREAD (Basic Research to Enable Agricultural Development) that is jointly funded by BMGF and the US National Science Foundation (NSF). BREAD provides one possible source of support for US-African scientific collaborations. Various other funding opportunities were discussed, and can be found elsewhere on our website (see Capacity Building à Funding Opportunities).

The 23 African and 23 US participants were carefully selected from a large number of applicants, with an emphasis on scientific excellence and common interests. They represented nine countries, and included researchers from universities, research institutions and national programs. Visits to local Kenyan farms (run by women) set the scene, since this was the first visit to Africa for many of the US participants. Discussions amongst the group as a whole and in smaller focus groups were enlightening, yielding new insights from a wide range of perspectives.

Based on participant feedback, the workshop was a resounding success: 95% gained new insights into how their research skills and aspirations might fit into advancing agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa (including both US and African participants); 98% said they identified new potential research partners; and 100% would recommend organizing similar workshops in the future.

To stay abreast of similar workshops and opportunities, register to receive BecA Hub email updates (contact Rachel Njunge at r.njunge@cgiar.org).

Top picture taken by Michael D. MacNeil. From the back L-R: Row 1: Kassahun Bantte Bisetegn, Cisse Ndiaga, Joseph Onyeka, Rebecca Nelson, Bryon Sosinski, Jesse Machuka, Sanjay Vashee, Stephen Kresovich, Peter Sseruwagi, Lava Kumar, Greg Martin, Bongani K.Ndimba, Michael Timko, Won-Bo Shim, Bill Golde, Jagger Harvey, Andrew Paterson, Jorge Dubcovsky, Jean Nguya Maniania, Rusty Rodriguez, Max F. Rothschild, David Bergvinson, Steven Runo, Steve Kemp, Larry Beach, Kathy Kahn, Floyd Dowell, Mark Westgate, Marty Williams. Row 2: Hanu R. Pappu, Shane Murray,

Leena Tripathi, Segenet Kelemu, Joseph Ndunguru, Kan Wang, Debby Delmer, Neelima R. Sinha, Esayas Gelaye Leykun, Willis O. Owino, Kassa Semagn. Front Row: Santie de Villiers, Jan Leach, Rachel Njunge, Jeanne Bridgman, Val Aloo, Kassahun Tesfaye, Lauren Kitchen, Morris Agaba, Mabel Jendeka Mahasi, Maria Monteros, Rob Skilton, Vish Nene, Karen Ann Cichy