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OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY SECTOR UPDATE APRIL 2008

SECTOR OVERVIEW

USAID/OFDA agricultural initiatives address the immediate needs of affected populations and strengthen local capacity and resilience to disasters. Following a crisis, USAID/OFDA often works with farmers to rehabilitate agricultural infrastructure and facilitate economic recovery through the restoration of agricultural livelihoods.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 and to date in FY 2008, USAID/OFDA has provided approximately $64 million in agricultural assistance throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In addition to livestock, fisheries, pest control, veterinary medicines, and seed system and agricultural input programs, USAID/OFDA provides technical assistance to strategically address agricultural hazard reduction needs worldwide.

Tanzanians participate in a video production training program to educate communities on cassava mosaic disease (CMD) transmission and prevention. Courtesy of ITTA.

USING FILM TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF CASSAVA MOSAIC DISEASE IN EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Cassava is a critical staple in the diet of millions of Africans, characterized by its drought-resistance and ability to perform well in poor soils. It is the highest annual gross production crop in Africa. Cassava mosaic disease (CMD) is a virus spread by whiteflies and replanted infected cassava which causes progressive yield decline in plants, eventually leading to complete loss of harvestable roots. A particularly virulent strain of the virus is currently spreading across central Africa, threatening cassava production and regional food security.

USAID/OFDA has been working with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) since 1999 to increase access and availability of disease-free and CMD-resistant planting stock and to disseminate information to farmers to combat the disease. In FY 2007, USAID/OFDA provided nearly $640,000 for IITA programs in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, including support for the development and distribution of participatory videos to raise awareness of the CMD pandemic and mitigation efforts in East and Central Africa. Under the participatory video approach, local farmers direct, film, and supervise video production to present information about CMD transmission and control strategies to their peers. IITA plans to distribute video messages together with local language cassava training sheets to CMD-affected villages and surrounding areas at risk in the four targeted countries.

MITIGATING PESTICIDE-RELATED HEALTH RISKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

In recent decades, pesticide use in developing countries has significantly increased, contributing to improved food security and economic development. However, increased use has as also led to rising health risks and environmental pollution. Although developing countries account for less

than 25 percent of global pesticide consumption, more than 50 percent of pesticide-related illnesses and 72 percent of pesticide-related fatalities occur in developing countries, where the continued use of banned pesticides and the presence of hundreds of thousands of tons of obsolete, unusable, and dangerous pesticides present significant health and environmental risks.

Past examples of typical poor pesticide storage and management practices in Mozambique. Photos by Yene Belayneh, USAID, and S. Coelho.

In an effort to coordinate and promote the appropriate use, handling, and management of pesticides in developing countries, USAID/OFDA is working with relevant national ministries to develop a pesticide stewardship network and training program. The purpose of the stewardship network is to engage governments, public interest groups, development partners, the private sector, and other stakeholders in the implementation of safe pesticide use strategies to reduce human health risks and environmental pollution. USAID/OFDA is coordinating a pilot workshop in collaboration with the Tanzania Ministry of Agriculture in April 2008 to include participants from Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda.

Promoting Global Seed System Security Initiatives

One of the long-standing myths of agricultural disaster response is that food insecurity is analogous to seed insecurity, frequently resulting in seed input programs. However, research shows that many farmers are able to save seeds during a crisis and prefer to plant familiar and regionally adapted varieties following an emergency.

Since 2001, USAID/OFDA has collaborated with the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to improve the efficacy and cost efficiency of seed-based responses to agricultural disasters. In FY 2007, USAID/OFDA provided nearly $410,000 to support ongoing seed assessment training in Africa and Europe and the development and field testing of the Seed System Security Assessment (SSSA) guide. The guide highlights improved assessment methodologies for use during chronic and acute agricultural emergencies, enabling non-governmental organizations and donors to more accurately target assistance to beneficiary populations. In the final stages of editing, the SSSA is scheduled for publication and release in 2008.

Workshops and Other Initiatives

- In March, a USAID/OFDA agriculture and food security advisor traveled to Kenya as part of the post-election violence Disaster Assistance Response Team to analyze the internally displaced person situation, evaluate USAID/OFDA-funded partners, and coordinate U.S. Government assistance programs.

Upcoming Sector Activities

- Between April 22 and 24, the USAID/OFDA Director and two USAID/OFDA food security and agriculture advisors are scheduled to attend the International Symposium on Agroterrorism (ISA) in Kansas City, Missouri. The ISA brings together government, private sector, and academia representatives to address efforts to protect the global food supply from terrorist incidents and threats.