

# BiosafeTrain News

Issue 3,

September-December 2007



**Editor: Joy Owango**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is evident that developing countries are not willing to take over other countries' data and risk assessment. Existing laws mostly specify in-country assessments that need significant research and this was made clear at the stakeholders' workshop on the Biosafety Bill held in July in Kenya. The workshop brought together farmers, researchers, legal advisors and legislators in the country.

Though several amendments were made to the Bill, the participants at the workshop made it clear that the assessment of GM plants and the building of legislative framework should be supported by research activities.

Speaking of research, Leatitia William, one of BiosafeTrain's fellows and a MSc student from the University of Dar-Es-Salaam has completed her research and is currently writing her thesis. She is the second BiosafeTrain supported student to reach this stage.

At this rate it looks like BiosafeTrain will soon be providing expertise in risk assessment to the waiting biosafety stakeholders in the region.

Our presence is increasingly being felt and appreciated as we are getting more invitations to give talks about our projects and research in the existing biosafety forums and also getting invitations to offer training in biosafety risk assessment in the region.

See more details inside.

*Joy Owango, Editor.*

*Contact: [joy.owango@agrsci.dk](mailto:joy.owango@agrsci.dk) – [www.biosafetrain.dk](http://www.biosafetrain.dk)*

## PEOPLE & CHANGES

### **BiosafeTrain Proposal for Phase 2 approved**

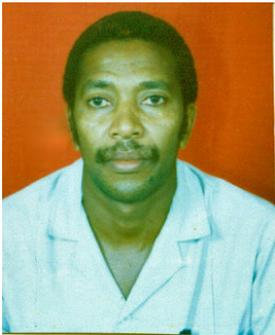
Danida has approved BiosafeTrain's proposal for phase 2 which will begin 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007 and last until December 2010

Phase 2 of the project will be focused on finalizing infrastructural plans at the Universities of Nairobi and of Dar-Es-Salaam, getting new postgraduate and doctorate students through fellowships offered by the project, gaining more access to using other relevant project outputs after they have finished (like GMO-ERA), increased efforts in communication and publicity, training of relevant institutions in the region on biosafety risk assessment and continuing to create alliances with partners in the region who are active in biosafety.

### **Student spokesperson**

Ms Joy Owango, who works as communications manager for BiosafeTrain was nominated by the steering committee to be the 'student spokesperson'. It is expected that students can contact Joy with any potential problem, and Joy will also make efforts to be informed about the students' progress and work conditions. Joy's role will be to act as a liaison between the students and their supervisors, the project partners and their respective heads of departments in their training institution.

### **Dr Godliving Mtui joins the BiosafeTrain Steering Committee**



Dr Godliving Mtui, the Head of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology from the University of Dar-Es-Salaam has joined the BiosafeTrain Steering Committee. Dr Mtui will be an observer on the committee meetings and the overall project activities in Tanzania.

*Dr Godliving Mtui*

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

### James Kanya gets 3 month DANIDA fellowship



James Kanya, a PhD student from the University of Nairobi and a BiosafeTrain fellow has got an additional Danida fellowship to study Plant Genomics at the University of Copenhagen for three months from August to November this year. “Other than studying, I’ll make time to work on the preliminary data analysis of my research, related to the maximum distance rice pollen grain can travel, seed germination and morphological differences,” said the excited 2<sup>nd</sup> year student.

*James Kanya, PhD student*

James says he will also take this opportunity to work on the writing of his thesis, since he will have more access to journals and can interact more closely with his Danish supervisor. In addition to this he will take the opportunity to get more information on the latest technology on lab techniques on micro satellites. He is expected to be in Denmark from mid-August to mid-November 2007.

### **BiosafeTrain holds a course on Data Analysis for Biosafety Risk Assessment, 2-6 July 2007 in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania**

BiosafeTrain held a five day course on Data Analysis for Biosafety Risk Assessment, at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam’s Continuing Centre for Education, Tanzania. The course was designed to teach participants basic skills on how to treat scientific data to draw balanced conclusions regarding the biosafety and ecological risk assessment of Living Modified Organisms (LMOs). This was done through lectures, computer demonstrations, group work on case studies, and discussions. The 20 participants, including nine BiosafeTrain-supported students, learned about data exploration and analysis, the use of population genetics and ecological analysis software and were trained in elements of scientific communication.

The workshop was combined with the yearly Students’ Workshop where all students made presentations and discussed each other’s experiments and results. This was the third such workshop, and as usual, it generated lively discussions.

## **Leatitia William and Christine Munduru visit Denmark**

Leatitia William and Christine Munduru, BiosafeTrain-supported MSc students from the University of Dar-Es-Salaam and Makerere University, respectively, will be leaving for a one-month stay in Denmark. Both students have completed their research and are currently working on their Thesis. The month-long stay will allow them to interact with their Danish supervisors, have easy access to the literature and complete the writing of their Thesis. They are due to graduate early next year.

## **BIOSAFETRAIN IN THE REGION AND WORLD-WIDE**

### **Steering Committee meeting held in Dar-Es-Salaam, 6-7 July 2007**

The BiosafeTrain steering committee held its meeting in July at the Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, University of Dar-Es-Salaam. The objective of the meeting was to take stock on the project's infrastructural, training and financial management aspects. Out of the new partnerships created between BiosafeTrain and other biosafety projects in the region, we have been invited to offer training in risk assessment, plus we are scheduled to give talks to various biosafety forums.

### **BiosafeTrain invited to provide resource persons for Risk Assessment workshop organized by the African Union 23-25 August 2007**

A risk assessment workshop will be organized by the African Union and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23-25 August 2007. The two organizations have three planned risk assessment workshops this year one in August which will be followed by further regional workshops on the continent.

### **BiosafeTrain to give a talk on Biotech Talk Forum, Nairobi**

BiosafeTrain was invited to the monthly Biotech talk forum in Nairobi, organized by the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB) and the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA). The forum meets every last Thursday of the month and is a platform that brings together stakeholders in biosafety and biotechnology, enabling interactions between scientists, journalists, the civil society, industrialists, lawmakers and policy makers.

### **BiosafeTrain at 8<sup>th</sup> African Crop Science Society Conference, El-Minia, Egypt**

Dr Gabor Lovei, BiosafeTrain's project leader will be a plenary speaker at the 8<sup>th</sup> African Crop Science Society Conference to be held in El-Minia, Egypt

27-31 October 2007. The title of his talk will be, *Why are biosafety tests of genetically manipulated plants necessary in the developing countries?* The theme of the conference is “crop research, technology dissemination and adoption to increase food supply, reducing hunger and poverty in Africa,.,

The general topics to be covered at the conference include: agronomy, horticulture, crop improvement and physiology, post harvest handling and food sciences, crop protection, rural socio-economics; and agricultural extension and education, agricultural economics, agricultural microbiology, crop genetics and biotechnology, agricultural chemistry, integration of livestock in crop production, soils and agricultural engineering sciences, water sciences, environmental sciences, biodiversity and natural resources management. Several BiosafeTrain students are also expected to participate and present posters displaying their work.

### **BiosafeTrain to train Kenyan National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) field inspectors**

BiosafeTrain will conduct a six day training on biosafety risk assessment for the NEMA field inspectors in 5-11 November 2007. NEMA's deputy director in charge of Environmental Education Dr Ayub Macharia Ndarunga, felt this was an essential course for the organization's field inspectors, as it helped in building capacity in fulfilling their mandate. NEMA's mandate is to exercise general supervision and co-ordination over all matters relating to the environment and to be the principal instrument of the Government in the implementation of all policies relating to the environment. This will be the first of a series of courses that BiosafeTrain will be offering NEMA. The course will run in early November, and have both Kenyan and Danish resource persons.

### **International workshop on GM environmental impact, Copenhagen, Denmark 29-30 November 2007**

BiosafeTrain has obtained financial support from the Danish Development Research Network ([www.ddrn.dk](http://www.ddrn.dk)) to hold a 2 day workshop in Denmark, on *Environmental consequences of growing GM crops in the developing countries.*

The workshop's objective is to present a state-of-the-art of GM environmental impact knowledge with specific relevance to the developing countries, and to identify and discuss the main points of uncertainty.

The expected participants include researchers in the GMO area, development professionals, NGOs active in the developing countries, regulators,

representatives of the private sector (firms producing GM crops), and students.

There will be several invited speakers from the USA, Switzerland, South Africa, and China.

### **IMPRESSIONS FROM THE COURSE ON DATA ANALYSIS FOR BIOSAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT, 2-6 JULY 2007 IN DAR-ES-SALAAM, TANZANIA**



*The attendants of the course held in the University of Dar-Es-Salaam's Continuing Centre for Education*



*Simon Byabagambi a PhD student and one of BiosafeTrain's fellows from Makerere University presents his research to the course participants.*



*Dr Mugassa Rubindamayugi, BiosafeTrain's Tanzania representative, being interviewed by the press during the course.*



*Left- Right. Dr. Gabor Lovei project leader BiosafeTrain, Prof. Makenya Maboto deputy vice chancellor and Dr. Godliving Mtui head of department Molecular Biology and Biotechnology University of Dar-es-salaam discuss during the course.*



*Participants go through practical lessons during the course. The participants learned data exploration and analysis, use of population genetics, ecological analysis software and scientific communication.*