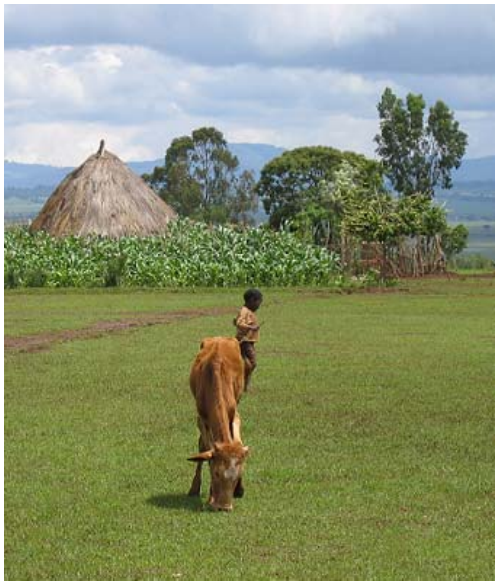
# AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY SECTOR UPDATE – DECEMBER 2006

## SECTOR OVERVIEW

At the forefront of food security humanitarian interventions, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance's (OFDA) agricultural initiatives address the immediate needs of affected populations and strengthen local capacity and resilience to disasters. Following a crisis, USAID/OFDA works with farmers to rehabilitate agriculture and facilitate economic recovery. Through the provision, targeting, and distribution of farming inputs, USAID/OFDA actively promotes farmer choice and human dignity.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, USAID/OFDA provided approximately $55 million for agricultural assistance and mitigation activities in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In addition to programming in livestock, fisheries, pest control, veterinary medicines, and seed system and agricultural inputs, USAID/OFDA provides technical assistance to strategically address agricultural sector needs worldwide.



*In Ethiopia, USAID/OFDA programs incorporate livestock and agriculture in livelihood diversification strategies. (Julie March, USAID)*

## FIGHTING THE SPREAD OF CASSAVA MOSAIC DISEASE IN EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Cassava is a critical staple in the diet of millions of Africans. This plant is drought-resistant, performs well in poor soils, and is the highest annual gross production crop in Africa. Cassava mosaic disease (CMD), a virus spread by whiteflies and replanted infected cassava, causes progressive yield decline in plants. This eventually leads to complete loss of harvestable roots. A particularly virulent strain of the virus is currently spreading across central Africa, threatening cassava production and food security in the region.

USAID/OFDA has been working with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) since 1999 to support increased access to and availability of disease-free and mosaic-resistant planting stock, and to disseminate information to farmers to combat the disease. In FY 2006, USAID/OFDA provided $575,000 for IITA programs in Kenya, Tanzania, and Burundi. In addition to monitoring the pandemic and multiplying and distributing 24 million disease-resistant stems of cassava, USAID/OFDA is supporting training and technology transfer activities.

## PILOTING PLAGUE PREVENTION AND PEST MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA

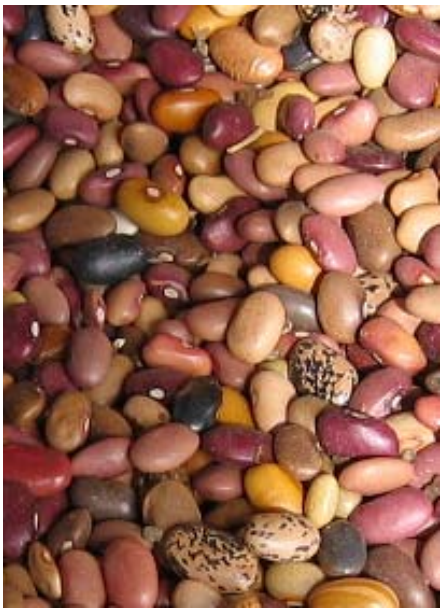
Emergency transboundary outbreak pests (ETOPs), including locusts, grasshoppers, armyworms, rodents, and quelea birds, jeopardize food security in developing countries by posing threats to crops and pastures. To mitigate and control the damage these pests can inflict on livelihoods and economies, USAID/OFDA provides technical, material, and financial assistance through the Assistance for Emergency Locust/Grasshopper Abatement (AELGA) project. Created by USAID in 1987, AELGA has provided more than $15 million, including $600,000 in FY 2006, to support efforts to develop and integrate safer, more affordable, and more effective pest management tools and policy.

During the 2004–2005 desert locust upsurge that affected more than 24 countries across Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean, AELGA played a key role in liaising between host countries and regional and international organizations. AELGA provided surge capacity and technical guidance, as well as coordinated a successful control campaign that treated more than 920,000 acres in 30 days in Senegal and Mauritania. In addition, through the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, AELGA works to strengthen the capacity of countries by training national staff in the identification, monitoring, prevention, and control of ETOP and obsolete and dangerous pesticides. AELGA also provides equipment and materials to affected countries.[1]

## Promoting Global Seed System Security Initiatives

One of the long-standing myths of disaster response in the agricultural sector is that food insecurity is analogous to seed insecurity. Research shows, however, that despite these crises many farmers are able to save seeds and prefer to plant familiar and well adapted varieties that they can access on their own.

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 2006, USAID/OFDA provided CIAT with nearly $350,000 to support ongoing research and the publication and distribution of best practices, needs assessment results, and other guidance materials. One such publication, the "Better Seed Aid Practice Briefs," presents strategies to sustain and strengthen seed systems during disaster response and recovery periods. In addition, the briefs provide up-to-date technical information on new seed varieties, agro-biodiversity protection, and market opportunities during periods of acute and chronic stress.[2]



*Local markets in Burundi display extensive seed diversity available to farming communities. (Julie March, USAID)*

## Workshops and Other Initiatives

On May 5, 2006, USAID and InterAction co-sponsored a workshop on agricultural recovery from disasters in Washington, D.C., outlining guidance for non-governmental organizations, practitioners, and donors. Workshop participants learned about the basics of seed security, seed assessments, and the most effective options available in delivering assistance in various disaster scenarios.

[1] For more information on USAID/ETOP, see http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/locust/
[2] A link to this tool can be found at http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/resources/.