



HARRIES, CORTES DEVELOP MANUAL, WEB-BASED CATALOG FOR SEED VARIETY RELEASE IN AFRICA

by Regina Hendrickson

Iowa State University Seed Science Center Scientists Adelaida Harries and Joe Cortes continued their work to promote quality seed in Africa this past year by facilitating the establishment of a procedure manual and web-based variety catalog for regional seed variety release in East Central, Southern, and Western Africa.

In the United States seed companies make their own decisions about what varieties to release based on their own testing. However, in Africa there is a government variety release system. The government of each individual country must test and approve or reject new seed varieties in a process that can take up to three years.

“The process of testing of a seed variety for marketing in a country is called a variety release system,” said Harries. “But in Africa it differs from country to country. That is why we have been working with three African regions—East Central, Southern, and West Africa to harmonize their variety release system at the regional level.” Harries explained that in West Africa the governments have agreed that a seed variety released in one country can be included in a regional catalog and marketed throughout the entire

region. In Southern Africa countries, however, officials have proposed that if a seed variety is tested and approved in two countries that it can be registered and marketed in the region through the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) variety release system. Although Harries says East Central Africa is still working on the harmonization of their seed variety release system, a regional catalog exists with national seed varieties registered for each country.

Harries and Cortes have recently developed a Procedure Manual for Seed Variety Registration for each of the regions. The manual includes testing protocols for conducting distinctness, uniformity, and stability characteristics and value for cultivation and use tests for selected crops.

In addition, the team has also worked with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to create a web-based database for each regional seed variety release catalog.

“The database was designed to serve as a means to harmonize the regional catalogs and to promote seed trade among the regions,” said Harries. “It will also help to improve the seed variety catalogs of individual countries within each of the three regions.”

Left: Adelaida Harries (third from left) poses with attendees of a workshop held in Ethiopia last June to discuss a web-based catalog for seed variety release systems.

In June of 2007, Harries and Cortes participated in a three-day workshop held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, organized by ILRI and supported by ICRISAT and Iowa State University. The purpose of the workshop was to review and make recommendations on the database. Nine experts from East Central, Southern, and Western Africa attended the event. They included representatives from the East African Seed Committee, the Southern Africa Development Community, the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the African Seed Trade Association, the Sustainable Commercialization of Seeds in Africa (SCOSA) Project, Iowa State University, and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The group discussed management of the database and catalog in each region. It is expected that the database will be available for use in early 2008.

In the past two years Harries and Cortes have facilitated over 10 workshops in Southern Africa and have facilitated technical agreements between the 14 member countries of the SADC to improve seed policies and regulations and to reduce seed trade barriers in the regions. They have plans to return to Africa several times in 2008 to continue work on this project and additional ones in West and East Central Africa.