

350 African researchers to benefit from training in how to tackle crop disease

UK-based Connected Virus Network and Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa - International Livestock Research Institute (BecA - ILRI) recently partnered to run a crop disease training course in Nairobi, Kenya, hosting 19 delegates from 10 African countries (Benin, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia).



Following participant feedback, the five-day course - "An introduction to virus and vector diagnostics" - which took place at BecA-ILRI Hub, will result in 350 more researchers across Africa learning new techniques that will help them tackle plant diseases that devastate crops.

Jacob Mignouna, director of BecA-ILRI Hub, said: "The training workshop had scientists coming from all over the continent to learn new technologies and new methods of virus detection.

"On their return home not only are they applying knowledge of the new methods to their own programmes, but they are also able to pass the information to their colleagues in their national programmes.

"This is the way we work, and we really appreciate the partnership that we have with Connected in the UK," he added.

Postive feedback

Members of the Connected management board are now actively looking to arrange further virus and vector diagnostic training for its early-career researcher members, following the resounding success of the course. "We have now been able to analyse feedback from delegates, and it is remarkably positive," says Prof Neil Boonham, Connected Network co-director.



“The feedback highlights the huge value of providing this sort of training to share and spread good practice in virus and vector diagnostics to help improve food production and food security in Sub-Saharan African countries.

“Vector-borne plant diseases contribute to food insecurity, hunger, and limited economic development. Tackling these diseases is the Connected Network’s mission and, if we are to succeed, scientists in Africa need to be able to detect the viruses and identify the insects that carry and spread the viruses that are responsible.

“So Connected, working with BecA-ILRI Hub, brought together a cohort of early-career researchers for a fully-funded five-day training programme to do just this.”

Boonham shared teaching duties during the week with Dr Goncalo Ramalho E Silva from the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich, UK.

Course content included:

- DNA barcoding sample preparation - DNA extractions on insects
- Polymerase chain reaction
- Electrophoresis and purification of DNA for sequencing
- DNA sequence analysis - clustering, database searching
- Isothermal amplification techniques - LAMP and RPA

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