# Participants' Joint Statement

## Looming crisis

The food security and livelihoods of millions of people in 15 countries who cultivate banana and plantain in 4.5 million ha in sub-Saharan Africa are under severe threat from two diseases:

- ***Banana bunchy top disease*** (BBTD), present in 11 countries (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Malawi, Rwanda, and Zambia), has gained international notoriety because, once established, it spreads rapidly and is almost impossible to eradicate.
- ***Banana bacterial wilt disease*** (BBW, also known as banana Xanthomonas wilt or BXW), first recognized in Ethiopia, is already devastating production in the Great Lakes Region of DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Both diseases can rapidly kill banana plants or virtually eliminate production of any consumable fruit causing losses of hundreds of millions of US dollars each year.

There are no disease-resistant varieties, and pesticides for controlling insect vectors are ineffective against disease spread. In the case of BXW, farmers can protect their crop by following field sanitation practices such as the use of clean cutting tools and planting materials, and removal of male flower buds.

For both diseases, once plants become infected the only strategy to prevent further spread in the field is to uproot, chop, and sun-dry diseased plants and to replace them with clean planting material.

## Responding to the crisis

In response to increasing concerns about these two diseases, an international workshop was convened by the Southern African Development Council (SADC) with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), and Bioversity International from 24 to 28 August 2009, in Arusha, Tanzania.

Experts from 15 sub-Saharan Africa banana and plantain-growing countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, DRC, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) and also from Australia, India, and United Kingdom evaluated the current status and scientific knowledge on BBTD and BXW.

Participants recognize the need to plan strategies to manage the diseases in countries where they are already established and to prevent spread to those that are not yet affected.

Urgent action by national research organizations and governments in sub-Saharan Africa, international research organizations, and development partners is necessary to avert or reduce the impact of the looming crisis.

## Recommendations to combat threats

In countries where production systems are already affected, active management and control programs must be urgently supported to mitigate the impact of the two diseases.

Arrangements must be made to provide safe replanting material on a sufficient scale to encourage farmers to take the necessary action to destroy diseased plants so as to safeguard and sustain production.

To prevent infection and further spread of these diseases, unaffected countries need to increase vigilance to take preemptive action to destroy infected plants as soon as they appear. Monitoring strategies, capacity to recognize the diseases and to deploy rapid eradication responses are vital.

Farmers must be sensitized to the importance of these diseases and mobilized to report and combat them at the first sign of appearance. Large-scale community-level action will be needed, supported by local and national governments and subregional organizations.

Countries with banana and plantain production—whether at commercial or subsistence level—should allocate funds to put in place:

- **large-scale campaigns** for disease awareness, surveillance, training of sufficient staff in field disease recognition, and laboratory diagnosis, and the production and distribution of clean planting material to respond to any disease outbreaks.
- **community-level measures** to support actions in response to the diseases, helping to ensure local adherence to recommended practices.
- **reporting and communication systems** to ensure an early and appropriate reaction once the diseases have been recognized at field level, and to monitor the success of eradication and management practices.
- **improved arrangements for production of clean and quality planting materials** through training and facilities, and ensure that these are made available on a sufficiently large-scale to farmers.
- **national contingency plans** developed with the involvement of all concerned with banana disease management, including the creation or strengthening of national task forces to ensure country preparedness to implement disease eradication campaigns and monitor the impact of these efforts.
- **other longer term programs** to improve field practices for disease eradication (for countries where invasion is recent) and management (where diseases are already established); and also to include information sharing, and update of policy frameworks, such as plant health/quarantine legislation.

These actions are essential and need to be deployed as a matter of urgency and then sustained.

International research and development partners, regional, and subregional organizations and the national authorities must affirm their commitment to collaborate on regional responses to banana diseases, to ensure coordination of activities and optimal use of resources to provide technical advice, develop sustainable new technologies, and deploy eradication and management practices across sub-Saharan Africa.

## Future prospects

Building on the on-going regional efforts, FAO, IITA, and Bioversity International will work with relevant regional organizations, such as SADC and ASARECA, to further develop a **banana disease management framework** for sub-Saharan Africa.

A high-level meeting will be convened early in 2010 to endorse the framework and take steps towards operationalizing it.

The aim of this framework is to support effective networking and coordination for information gathering and sharing, and to identify national needs and gaps in funding. It will support efforts to increase awareness and raise funds so that disease eradication and management activities contribute to a common goal.

For further information, visit:
**www.bananadiseasesframework.org**

**Arusha Workshop Participants'**

*Organizing Partners*