

## Media workshop in Western Uganda: Strengthening Understanding of Biotechnology among Stakeholders in Uganda

This workshop was organized by Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) a USAID funded project and Uganda National Council on Science and Technology (UNCST) on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> day of May 2007 at Lake View Hotel, Mbarara. The aim of the workshop was to strengthen the capacity of journalists and extension workers to communicate and advise on biotechnology in a more confident and credible manner to the public. The workshop targeted 50 participants including journalists, extension workers and farmer leaders from Mbarara, Bushenyi, Ntungamo, Rukungiri, Kisoro, Kabaale, Kasese, Kabarole, Bundibugyo, Kyenjojo, Kibale, Hoima, Masaka and Rakai districts.

During the workshop participants were equipped with knowledge on biotechnology and skills of communicating biotechnology. This was opportunity for media to interact with scientists (including extension workers). Participants visited the Mbarara Agricultural Research and Development Centre (ARDC) where they were shown the banana germplasm conservation field. This helped to clear one of their major concerns, which was loss of biodiversity due to biotechnology adoption.



Some of the participants answering a quiz during the workshop



Participants in the Mbarara ARDC: Banana germplasm conservation *ex situ*

During the workshop, Dr. Yona Baguma informed participants that NARO was going to import some GM bananas from Belgium that will arrive in Uganda next week. These GM bananas were transformed by a Ugandan, Geoffrey Arinaitwe, during his PhD studentship at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL) in Belgium. The banana cultivars are not Ugandan so we are import the technology which will be tested under confined field trials in Kawanda to see if it works in Uganda. If it works then we shall transfer the technology to the popular East African Highland banana cultivars. Uganda has the capacity to do this technology transfer. The technology being imported is that of resistance to Black Sigatoka a fungal disease of banana.

At the end of the workshop, participants recommended that PBS/UNCST work closely with media to develop strategies to improve biotechnology information dissemination. They suggested that one strategy is to target the heads of the media houses for sensitization because they influence what is communicated. Another recommendation was that secondary teachers should be targeted because this science needs to be introduced to the future generation.