

NEED FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND GLOBAL COOPERATION

Communication from Pakistan

The following communication, received on 13 September 2012, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Pakistan.

1. Stem Rust is an old disease of wheat which has the potential to destroy large fields of wheat in a short span of time. Its infestation has re-emerged after it remained dormant for a period of fifty years. The disease has been in progression during the last few years and is a potential threat for wheat growing countries. Being a viral disease, the causal organism keeps itself mutating hence resulting in a sudden breakdown of the newly developed resistant cultivars against previously known species. Eight different strains of virus causing the disease (Ug-99) have now been identified. This necessitates monitoring of the disease (sustained surveillance) across the affected areas to timely identify the new mutant form and effectively develop its management strategy including developing new resistant germplasm/varieties. Thus, tagging of the causing (gene) as well as of resistant genes is a continuous practice.

2. According to FAO estimates, Ug-99 could reduce global wheat production by 60 million tonnes. A failure of this magnitude would further inflate the prices of other foods.

3. The current spread of a highly virulent pathogen of Ug-99 is a challenge for many developing countries. On the one hand this challenge has generated high level of global cooperation but many poor and developing countries are struggling to have an effective national surveillance and research system. While ICARDA, CIMMYT, FAO, the Borlaug Global Rust initiative (BGRI) Programme and several other organizations are involved in Ug-99 surveillance, developing Ug-99 resistant varieties and its multiplication and distribution of seed to poor farmers, the role of IPPC in global surveillance has been minimal due to limited resources. Therefore there is a need to allocate resources for a coordinated global surveillance and stem rust tracking system, based on developing strong national surveillance capacity.

4. The spread of this pathogen in wheat growing areas of Africa, West Asia, Middle East, East Asia, South Asia and Central Asia could have serious implications on food security. Therefore resource allocation by donor countries and technical assistance for its surveillance and allied research activities is very important.

5. Though Pakistan is already an active partner to the BGRI programme, there still is a need to strengthen the national surveillance and coordination system with the aid of international stakeholders. Pakistan reiterates its commitment to the BGRI programme as this will not only address the food security issue for 180 million people of Pakistan but will also ensure future food security sustenance in this country. A regular update from IPPC on the status of Ug-99 would be useful for Members.
