



Belgium and INIBAP - a long and fruitful story

October 2003

The creation of INIBAP
 Belgium's involvement with INIBAP, the International Network for the Improvement of Banana and Plantain, began in the early 80s when it played a critical role in developing the concept of an organization that works through networking. The Belgian government was among the first six to ratify the agreement establishing INIBAP. Belgium was also one of the first signatories of the Establishment Agreement conferring on IPGRI an international status. IPGRI's signature of a Headquarters Agreement with the government of Belgium, on 15 October 2003, further strengthens its link with the country, especially in the framework of INIBAP, which now operates as a programme of IPGRI.

Government of Uganda and the Rockefeller Foundation, to implement a portfolio of projects. The importance INIBAP attributes to its work in Africa, which hosts two of its four regional offices, is in step with Belgium's interest in the region.

Belgium is also providing support specifically for the maintenance of the International *Musa* Germplasm Collection established at the INIBAP Transit Centre (ITC) located

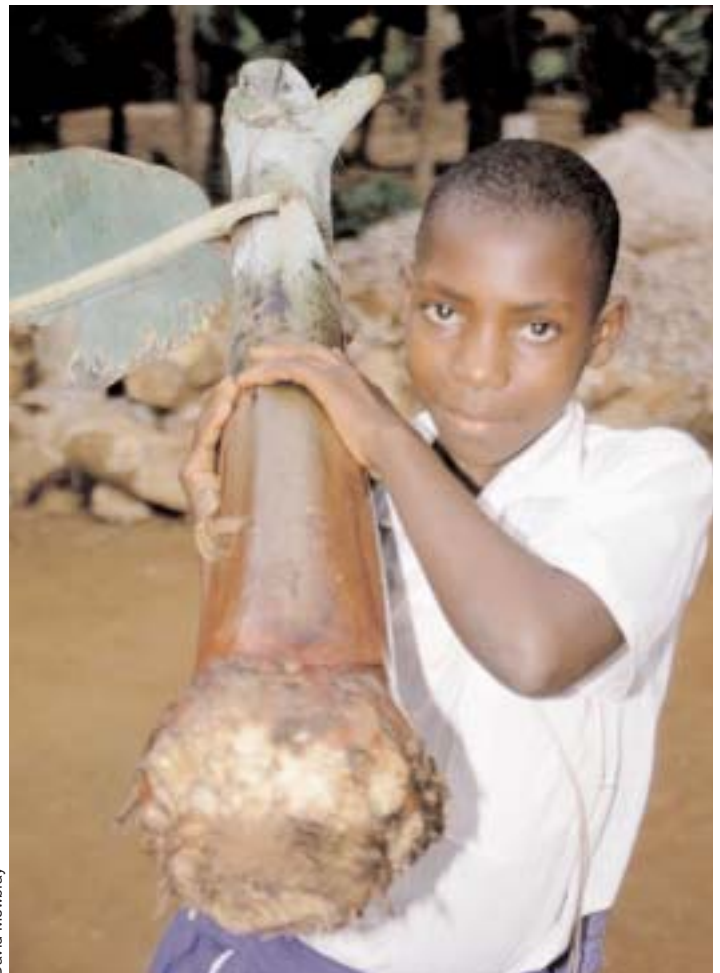
at the *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*. With over 1100 accessions, including wild species as well as local and improved varieties, the ITC hosts the world's largest collection of bananas. The ITC conserves banana accessions 'in trust' for the global community, under the auspices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The staff sends an average of 6 accessions per day to researchers and growers around the world.

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Number 1 donor
 The Belgian government has always been INIBAP's main donor, currently providing about 20% of its \$US6 million budget. This strong support has been vital to attracting other donors and spurring the growth of *Musa* (banana and plantain) research. For example, Belgian funds for the operation of INIBAP's two regional offices in Africa have allowed the programme to mobilize close to \$US1 million in additional funding from donors like the UK Department for International Development, the European Union, the



David Mowbray



INIBAP is a programme of the International Plant Genetic Resources

Institute (IPGRI) a center of

FUTURE HARVESTSM



Rob Stevens

The *Musa* collection has also attracted the interest of other donors such as the Gatsby Foundation and the World Bank.

Belgians galore

INIBAP spends about 20% of its budget in Belgium, which amounts to approximately 4% of IPGRI's budget.

One in four of INIBAP's staff is of Belgian origin. They are dispersed on the four continents where INIBAP has offices, including six in Belgium.

Moreover, two of the three former directors of INIBAP are Belgian. Together they steered the programme for 12 of the 18 years of its existence. From 1995 to 2002, Luc Sas, also Belgian, has been Chairman of the INIBAP Support Group. He is now its Vice-Chairman.

Centre of excellence

Belgium is a world leader in banana research. Its expertise is particularly strong in germplasm conservation, plant pathology and biotechnology. More than 50 people working in Belgian universities conduct

research on banana in partnership with INIBAP and organizations in the South.

Thanks to the research carried out by Belgian scientists, an innovative cost-effective method has been developed to store accessions at ultra-low temperatures. This allows recalcitrant seeds or vegetatively propagated species such as *Musa* to be securely conserved for the indefinite future. The

ITC holds the most comprehensive CGIAR collection stored under these conditions.

Belgian institutions are helping other CGIAR Centres to conserve vegetatively propagated crops. They also plan to keep the duplicate, or 'black box', collections of species such as cassava, yam, potato and sweet potato for long term conservation.

With capacity building an important part of its mission, INIBAP has trained more than 125 scientists from developing countries through Belgian partners.

Peer recognition

Since IPGRI and INIBAP joined forces, IPGRI has undergone two external reviews. In 1997, the Panel commended INIBAP for its achievements and cited its original *modus operandi* as a model: "*The 'INIBAP experiment' is judged by this Panel as a success and the Panel commends the INIBAP modus operandi to the CGIAR System.*" In 2002, the Panel was also

impressed with the contribution of INIBAP to IPGRI's research.

In 2000, a Centre commissioned external review was similarly very supportive of the networking *modus operandi* of INIBAP and highlighted its cost effectiveness in relation to other CGIAR Centres. The review panel stressed the critical responsibility of INIBAP in the maintenance of the *Musa* collection and the distribution of germplasm from the ITC.

Belgium's commitment to international agricultural research and sustainable development is not only demonstrated by its support of the *Musa* programme but also by its contributions to CGIAR Centres. As Prince Laurent of Belgium, Future Harvest ambassador, stated at an international symposium on bananas held in Belgium in September 2002: "There is no hope of reversing environmental degradation and poverty and sustaining humanity without the interdisciplinary cooperation of scientists committed to sound farming that protects the environment."



Max Rues