

Case Study # 5: *Fostering Innovation*

Development Entrepreneur Becomes USAID Advisor

USAID and USDA support of Dr. Gebisa Ejeta's education and research has been more than repaid through the World Food Prize winner's accomplishments and his current role as a key advisor on food security.

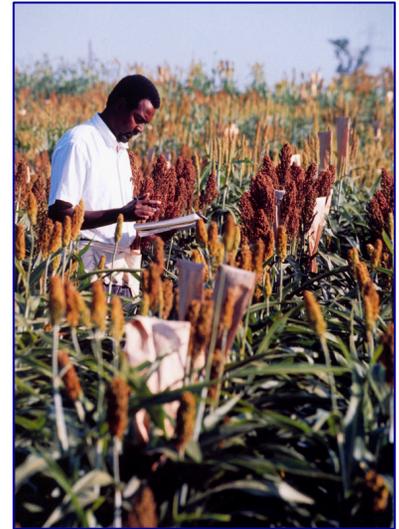
Growing up in a tiny rural village in Ethiopia, no one would have predicted that Dr. Gebisa Ejeta would one day change the face of chronic hunger and food security. Dr. Ejeta's education – from high school in Ethiopia through graduate school at Purdue University – and most of his 31 years of research have been supported by USAID and USDA. His work on developing drought and parasitic weed-resistant sorghum varieties has improved the supply of food for hundreds of millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa. On October 15, 2009, Dr. Ejeta, Distinguished Professor of Agronomy at Purdue University, was awarded the 2009 World Food Prize for his accomplishments.

Striga is a parasitic weed that was devastating crops in Africa, particularly maize, rice, pearl millet, sugarcane, and sorghum, and thus severely

"I believe that the respect for agricultural sciences in developing countries needs to be strengthened. It builds economies and can be a tremendous vehicle for change, but that has to be a sustained area of support."

Dr. Gebisa Ejeta

limiting food availability for millions. With financial support from USAID's Sorghum, Millet, and Other Grains Collaborative Research Support Program (CRSP) and its predecessors, Dr. Ejeta developed a Striga-resistant sorghum variety that not only helped control Striga, but also adapted to different African ecological conditions, including severe drought. Based on his research, a successful pilot program was launched to widely distribute the new seed variety in several African countries, resulting in yield increases of up to four times that of standard varieties of sorghum.



One of Dr. Ejeta's top priorities is mentoring African students. He has trained 30 doctoral and 10 post-doctoral students in the U.S. and in Africa and has been involved in a University of Wisconsin program that trained 220 African Ph.D. candidates over the past 10 years. Dr. Ejeta says that he values mentoring because he received so much support during his own education.

From his early academic achievements to his historic breakthroughs in the science of plant genetics, and from the training and empowering of farmers to inspiring young scientists, the U.S. government has been intrinsically tied to the ground-breaking work of Dr. Ejeta. Dr. Ejeta currently advises USAID on how to build agency strengths and restore research capacity in order to share the benefits of research and innovation around the world.

Dr. Ejeta's story demonstrates how investments in innovation can provide returns for millions in need. To help spur the next Green Revolution, Feed the Future will make investments in development entrepreneurs – people who generate bold ideas, turn need into opportunity, and work to translate innovation into benefits for the poor and hungry. Coupled with investments in institutional capacity and local adaptation, research and innovation can address some of the fundamental constraints that give rise to food insecurity.