

# Lack of information to blame for food insecurity

BY MILDRED BARASA

POOR access to knowledge and technologies is the main constraint to development in Africa.

It is for this reason that Plant Resources of Tropical Africa (Prota) has decided to "unlock the potential of African plants by providing the much needed information".

Prota synthesises and distributes information on the approximately 8,000 useful plants of tropical Africa.

Dr Elizabeth Omino, who heads Prota, says focus should be on Africa due to a number of reasons, among them, that Africa holds an estimated 25 per cent of global biodiversity, in terms of ecosystems, species and genetic variety.

"There is danger of extinction, due to population pressure leading to habitat transformation, over-exploitation, alien invasive species, pollution and climate change," says Omino.

During the just concluded second Prota/CTA international forum, Omino said of the 150 food types eaten by man, 115 are indigenous African.

Dr Sloans Chimatiro of Agriculture unit, at the

New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) secretariat said that accelerating agricultural growth in Africa is therefore crucial not only for achieving food security and reducing hunger but also generating employment and trade.

"The African Heads of State and governments have endorsed the comprehensive African Agricultural development programme as a framework for the restoration of agriculture growth, food security, and rural development in Africa," said Chimatiro.

He said that at the AU summit in July in 2003 they committed themselves to substantially increasing their national budget for agriculture.

He told the more than 150 participants that Nepad had ushered in the dawn of a new Green Revolution in Africa by placing agricultural development at the top of their agenda.

He praised Prota's efforts to synthesise and distribute information on useful plants of tropical Africa, saying access to data on plant resources ecosystem management should be improved to enhance rural and agricultural development.

Prota aims to correct poor strategies for research that result in duplication, narrow scope and identification of research gaps.

Omino said more than 70 per cent of the useful plant varieties are underused, and that none of the countries in tropical Africa has a complete overview of their useful biodiversity.

Chimatiro said to boost Prota's efforts to poverty and hunger reduction in Africa, Nepad is calling upon it to undertake the following:

To align with the agricultural development frameworks, which the African Heads of States and governments endorsed.

To harmonise its strategies in line with sub-regional initiatives using the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme.

To support sub-regional organisations and national governments in enhancing development partner financing and technical assistance.

To co-ordinate with on-going regional programmes using the current data base as a bench mark for guiding scientists into areas which require more research.