

New film aims to reduce grain losses

Bob Stanley

In Kenya, as in many other developing countries, huge quantities of grain are lost every year to the ravages of insects and rodents, or simply as a result of inadequate storage facilities.

When the Harvest is Over is a new film designed specifically to cut down these losses. It is a unique co-production of the Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture's National Agricultural Laboratory and the IDRC.

Maize is a major crop in Kenya, but losses due to insect damage alone are estimated to cost the country as much as 100 million shillings (\$12 million) each year. The majority of Kenya's farms are small, from two to four hectares, and most farmers still use traditional methods of grain storage. As part of a concerted effort to reduce the huge losses, the Ministry of Agriculture decided to make an instructional film that could be shown to extension workers, farmers, and grain store keepers throughout the country by means of mobile cinemas. The IDRC was asked to assist in the project.

In November last year Neill McKee, head of the Centre's small Audiovisual Unit, flew to Kenya. A script had been prepared in English by entomologist Christopher Warui, and a Swahili version by Suleiman Juma Hagamas, who also recorded the Swahili commentary. With McKee doubling as cameraman and producer, assisted by David Malunga, a sound technician from the Ministry's Agricultural Information Office, the team had the film "in the can" in just three weeks. Comments McKee, who has made numerous films in developing countries: "It was the best organized filming trip I have ever been on."

McKee edited the footage in Ottawa, a rough-cut version was sent to Nairobi for final approval, and the production was completed, in English and Swahili, before the end of January. The result is a 34-minute 16mm colour film that explains in simple terms the reasons for grain losses, the various ways they can be prevented, and the importance of taking these measures.

In the words of Christopher Warui's script: "The work only begins in the fields. Farmers must realize the importance of proper storage and handling of their grain. . . . that well preserved grain is more food for their families and more money in their pockets."

Soon that message will be getting across to farmers throughout Kenya as the mobile cinemas and the extension workers go out to the villages to show the important work that must be done — when the harvest is over.

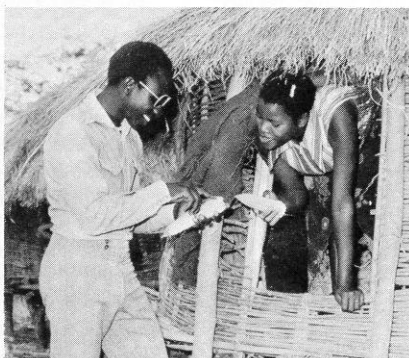
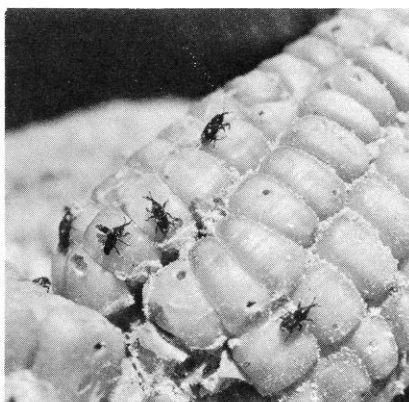


Photo: Neill McKee

Top left: Traditional storage — maize hung from a tree is exposed to insects, birds, and the elements. Above left: After drying in the fields, maize is dehulled in preparation for storage. Top right: Weevils are a common grain store pest. Centre right: Entomologist and scriptwriter Christopher Warui discusses grain storage with a village woman during a filming break. Above right: McKee and filming crew on location.