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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World Food Day 2015

Pigeonpea – a life changer for Malawi’s drought-stricken farmers

Malawi | Hyderabad , India (16 October 2015) — Be it in India or Africa, there is the same problem of youth wanting to leave the farms and have other careers. Attracting youth to agriculture has become an issue on the government agenda in both the continents if they are to be able to feed their growing populations.

In Chambogho in Karonga district in North Malawi, 31-year-old John Msuku and his family insist pigeonpea has transformed their lives. When John first left school, he rushed to the southern city Blantyre to find a ‘proper job’. “My parents wanted me to stay and make a living out of fishing like them. But they had always struggled and I wanted a career where I would not be poor.”

Like so many other young people craving the urban dream, John failed to secure a steady income in town.

He decided to come back home and try his luck at farming. “I had never thought of agriculture having a business potential. I always saw it as being something you did just to survive, not to get rich,” he says. “I am happy to admit now I was wrong. Hard work and making the right choices has meant farming has brought us fortune and a good life.”

It was access to good pigeonpea seeds that got John into farming. Pigeonpea has proved to resist El Nino’s disastrous effects. The drought at the end of 2014 followed by floods has wreaked havoc with crop harvests this year.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has estimated that cereal harvests have decreased by up to 27% compared to last year and the UN World Food Programme recently announced that 2.8 million people in Malawi will face hunger in coming months due to food shortages.

However pigeonpea and beans have seen a slight increase despite the chaotic weather. This stresses the need for greater diversification on farms to boost food security.

ICRISAT has been working with smallholder farmers in Malawi to do just that. In partnership with the Malawi government, their seed production and distribution program has benefited 2.2 million families since it started in 2008.

This story first appeared on the Thomson Reuters Foundation website. Read the full story here <http://www.trust.org/item/20151009123820-sbq6o/>

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About ICRISAT

The **International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid-Tropics** (ICRISAT) is a non-profit, non-political organization that conducts agricultural research for development in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa with a wide array of partners throughout the world. Covering 6.5 million square kilometers of land in 55 countries, the semi-arid tropics have over 2 billion people, and 644 million of these are the poorest of the poor. ICRISAT innovations help the dryland poor move from poverty to prosperity by harnessing markets while managing risks – a strategy called Inclusive Market- Oriented development (IMOD). ICRISAT is headquartered in Patancheru, Hyderabad, Telangana, India, with two regional hubs and six country offices in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a member of the CGIAR Consortium.

About ICRISAT: www.icrisat.org; For ICRISAT's scientific information see: <http://EXPLOREit.icrisat.org>

CGIAR is a global agriculture research partnership for a food secure future. Its science is carried out by 15 research Centers who are members of the CGIAR Consortium in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations.

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