Maize Stalk Borer (Nkongwa)

Recognize the problem
Maize stalk borer also known as Nkongwa in Kinyarwanda is an insect which attacks maize. It makes holes on the leaves and moves into the stem. You can often see lumps of chewed plant material (frass) left by the insect. The leaves turn yellow and the plant dries. The plant might not grow to full size. Sometimes young leaves which are damaged by stalk borer can be pulled off easily. If the stem is split open, the stalk borer can be seen inside.

Background
The stalk borer is an insect which attacks maize and sorghum. The adult (a moth) lays eggs on the leaves and the hatched caterpillars then enter the stem. The caterpillar which is cream in colour with a dark brown band around the body causes most of the damage. Damaged grains can be easily attacked by other diseases. The crop is more susceptible when grown by itself and on poor soil.

Management
- **Crop rotation:** Plant maize one season, a legume the next season and a tuber crop after that. This will stop the spread of the insect. Using the legume also improves the nitrogen of the soil, which is good for the plant.
- **Improve soil fertility:** Increase nitrogen level in the soil by applying farm yard manure or green manure at the base of the plant.
- **Monitoring of the stem borer:** Do regular checks for the insect because control is easier if you spot it earlier on.
- **Neem powder:** Apply 10 g of neem powder for every 20 plants. Repeat 8 to 10 days later if there has been rain.
- **'Push-Pull':** Plant Napier grass (Urubingo) around your garden and Desmodium legume between rows of your crop. The legume will push away the insect from the field, while the napier will attract it away from your crop.
- **Clean field:** Destroy leftover plant material after harvesting or feed to animals; plough and harrow the soil before planting.

When using a pesticide, always wear protective clothing and follow the instructions on the product label, such as dosage, timing of application, and pre-harvest interval.

**Scientific name(s)** > *Busseola fusca*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Ghana, Rwanda

Authors: Beatrice Uwumukiza, Aguyoh Nyamori, Giselle Ingabire
Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), PO Box 621 Kigali
tel: +250 (0)78 884 8410 email: buwumukiza@gmail.com

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