Small sticks against cutworms in tomato

Recognize the problem
Cutworms ("sota" in Swahili) are 2 to 4 cm long larvae, and dark grey-brownish (= soil colour). They are about 0.5 to 1 cm thick and soft. The older thus bigger larvae can cut and chew young tomato stems quickly. Under a freshly cut seedling, you can often find a cutworm larva in the soil.

Background
Cutworm larvae live in and on the soil surface. During the night and early mornings they search for stems of tomato seedlings, particularly after transplanting. They eat on the stems at ground level and cut it. Serious problems occur in the dry season. Chemical control of larvae is possible, but too late to prevent the cutting. As an adult, cutworms are moths.

Management
- If you saw serious cutworm damage in the previous seasons, then you have to act this season.
- A day after transplanting of seedlings, insert two dry wooden sticks next to the seedling stems. Sticks should be of about an adult finger thick, and about 30 cm long. The sticks will confuse the arriving cutworm larvae, so that they rarely find the tomato stems.
- Place sticks next to and in contact with stems of all seedlings.
- Then, check once per week your field. Only few cut seedlings should be found.
- At very high pest densities, still cutting of seedlings occurs. You can then search for the larvae in the upper 5 cm of soil and collect them. Then you can re-transplant.
- In addition, it also helps inserting thick one meter long wooden sticks randomly across the field to attract birds. They sit on the sticks, see cutworm larvae easily, and can catch and eat them.

Scientific name(s) > Agrotis spp.

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda

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