Recognize the problem
The African maize stalk borer (*Funza* in Swahili) is a major pest of maize mostly in the highland parts of Tanzania. It is a light brown to nearly whitish caterpillar that grows up to 4 cm long. The caterpillars first feed on young leaves, which creates holes. When infestation is heavy, the plant growing point can be damaged resulting in dead leaf hearts. Then, the borers make a hole into the stem and feed inside these stems, which disrupts nutrient and water flow in the plant. The plants become stunted and produce maize cobs that are up to 30% smaller.

Background
The stalk borer usually attacks maize when it is 30 cm to 1 metre tall. The adult borer moths lay eggs in batches of 30 to 50 onto leaves. Eggs hatch into tiny caterpillars after 10 days. The caterpillars bore into maize leaves and stems and live and grow there for about a month. They pupate inside the stem when the moth emerges. If any pupae are still in the stems at the end of the rainy season they will remain dormant inside the dry stems and stubble until the next cropping season. Intercropping maize with cowpea reduces stem borer infestation. This is because the stalk borer moths will also lay eggs on cowpea, which the hatching caterpillars cannot feed on, and so they will die. Cowpeas also favour ants (*mchwa*) and praying mantis (*Vunja chungu*) which feed on stalk borer caterpillars. Furthermore cowpeas increase soil fertility because they can transfer nitrogen from the air into the soil.

Management
• Sow maize at the beginning of the rainy season at a spacing of 30x90 cm
• Sow cowpeas 7 days after sowing maize, just after maize emergence. Sow cowpeas at a spacing of 15 – 20 cm along the middle line between maize rows.
• Carry out all agronomic practices such as weeding and fertilizer application
• Harvest cowpea first as it matures earlier than maize
• Remove and then burn all crop residues of maize after harvest, because stalk borers can live there
• Do not intercrop or rotate maize with sorghum and millets because stalk borers also like these crops

Scientific name(s) > *Busseola fusca*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia

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