Recognize the problem
The maize stem borer, also called African maize stalk borer is an insect pest of maize. It is a light brownish caterpillar that grows up to 4 cm long. When young (less than 1 cm), it feeds on young leaves but then enters the stems. During the early crop stage, the caterpillars may destroy the growing points of the plant. At a later stage, the caterpillars make tunnels inside the stem. This prevents the flow of water and other nutrients to the grain. The tunnelling weakens the stem so that it breaks and falls over.

Background
Stem borers can be eggs, caterpillars, pupae and adult moths. Stem borer moths do not like the smell of the fodder legume *Desmodium*. When it is planted between rows of maize, it pushes away the moths. *Desmodium* is also a good cover crop to reduce soil erosion. It can be ploughed back into the soil to increase soil health. In contrast, stem borer moths like the napier grass. When it is planted around maize, it serves as a trap crop. The stem borer moths will lay eggs onto Napier grass instead of maize. The eggs hatch into caterpillars that will bore into the grass, which produces sticky glue that traps them. Furthermore, Napier grass produces smells that can attract the stem borer’s natural enemies. Napier grass is a feed crop for animals, and its root system helps prevent soil erosion.

Management
Napier grass:

- On a field plot where you plan to grow maize the following season, plant at least 3 rows of Napier grass along the plot border in the first season (whatever crop is there).
- In the second season, plant maize on the field plot that is now fenced with Napier grass, which will pull and trap the moths.

*Desmodium* legumes:

- They are planted as an intercrop in between the rows of maize at 2:1 row arrangement at the same time of planting maize.
- Plant maize at 45cm between rows and 45-50 cm between plants.
- The legume is trimmed at 3-6 weeks to avoid shading the maize.
- Follow the usual recommended agronomic practices of maize.

*Desmodium* and Napier grass can be harvested regularly for feeding to livestock while performing the pull-push function against the borers and moths to protect the maize

- Do not intercrop or rotate maize with sorghum or millet because stalk borers also like these crops.

Scientific name(s) > *BuSeoLa Fusca*