



*KEPHIS staff use APP tool for BBTV surveillance. Photo Credit: Zablon Oyugi*

# Plant health inspectors equipped with IPPC tablets for pest surveillance

By Zablon Oyugi

**T**HE Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) has received 40 tablets from the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Secretariat to boost pest surveillance and protect plant health.

The tablets are installed with specialised software and mobile applications designed for conducting active surveillance and rapid detection of pests that can severely impact food safety, food security, and international trade.

The tablets were provided through the Africa Phytosanitary Programme (APP), an IPPC initiative designed to transform pest management across Africa. APP aims to strengthen the resilience of

Africa's phytosanitary systems against plant pests.

APP is implemented in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the African Union Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy & Sustainable Environment.

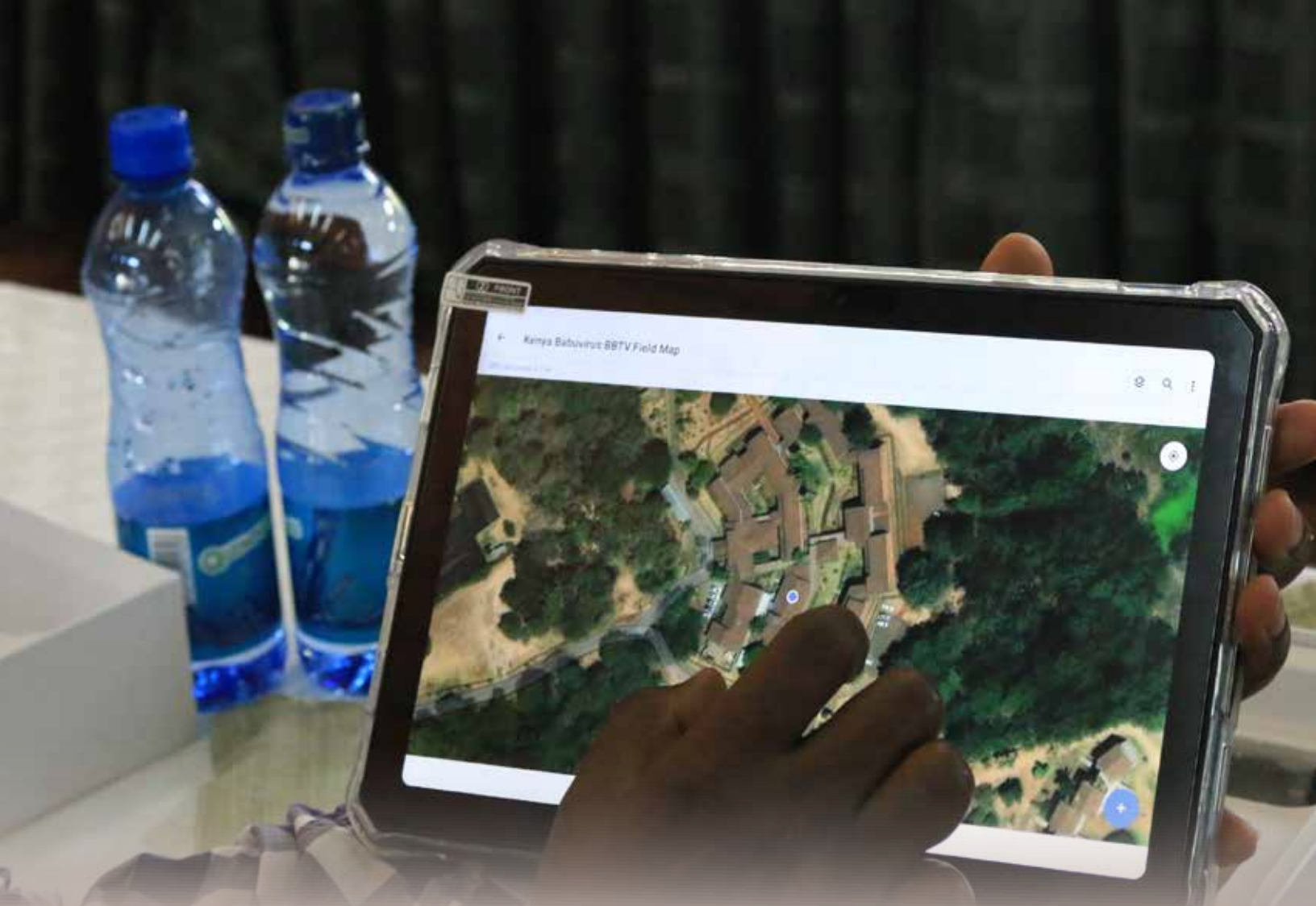
The tablets were handed over during a training organized by KEPHIS, to empower its plant health inspectors to use the latest digital technologies, particularly the APP applications, to tackle pest challenges.

"The tools will assist in collecting data on pests to support early warning

and rapid response to plant pests," said Isaac Macharia, KEPHIS Director of Phytosanitary and Biosecurity Services, who represented Managing Director Theophilus Mutui at the event. He noted that the tablets would play a key role in data collection and analysis.

"By enhancing the capabilities of phytosanitary staff in NPPOs, the IPPC, through APP, seeks to empower phytosanitary inspectors to leverage advanced science and modern digital technology for effective pest surveillance, detection, control, and prevention," said Arop Deng, the Officer-in-Charge for Day-to-Day matters at the IPPC Secretariat.

Deng observed that as global trade in



*The tablet installed with specialised software and mobile applications designed for conducting active surveillance and rapid detection of pests. Photo Credit: KEPHIS*

agricultural commodities grows, the risk of pest introduction and spread increases. Countries therefore need to proactively monitor these risks and use accurate diagnostics to detect pests to protect crop production and international trade.

According to KEPHIS, which is the national plant protection organisation (NPPO) in Kenya, the country has experienced several pest incursions that have affected food security and trade. They include Fall Armyworm, the Maize Lethal Necrosis Disease, the Papaya Mealy Bug, Golden Apple Snail and *Bactocera dorsalis* (Fruit fly).

Using the APP tools, plant health inspectors will also be able to carry out pest

surveys to better understand pest distribution dynamics to effectively manage the risks. Timely, accurate, and verifiable pest monitoring data will also help countries comply with international plant health standards.

Kenya is one of the 11 African countries participating in the pilot phase of the APP. Other countries are Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Through APP, the IPPC Secretariat is providing each of the pilot countries with up to 50 tablets, with the first lot distributed during the launch of the APP in Cairo, Egypt in September 2023.

Since then, KEPHIS has used the APP digital tools and resources

for surveillance of some of Kenya's prioritized pests- Banana Bunchy Top Virus, Fusarium wilt of banana (TR4) and *Xylella fastidiosa*. In May 2024, KEPHIS hosted the first Fusarium TR4 simulation exercise for the COMESA region.

KEPHIS demonstrated how the APP tools support pest surveillance and response to potential TR4 outbreaks and the identification of positive cases. KEPHIS shared its APP experience so far during the IPPC Regional workshop held in the Democratic Republic of Congo in September 2024 and during the IPPC's Strategic Planning Group meeting in October.