Smallholder farmers in the country have been advised to adopt and plant new improved seed varieties to increase productivity.

Dr Rajeev Varshney, Research Programme Director of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), India, it was the way forward to prevent lower crop yields. He added that many of the developed countries “have higher crop yields than the developing countries because they cultivate new seed varieties”.

He was speaking during a field observation trip to Tolon to assess the maturing stage of the Tropical Legume III project (TL III) new seed varieties cultivated by farmers in the Tolon District. The new groundnut and soya bean seed varieties were produced by the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR –SARI) with support from ICRISAT in partnership with SEND-Ghana and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. These are resistant to disease and pest infection, and they have “very high yielding potential” with about 12.7 per cent food protein content.

Dr Varshney said ICRISAT and its partners would provide the technical resources and support to facilitate the cultivation of the new seed varieties and their distribution in markets within the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions.

He encouraged the farmers to come out with their own business plans without depending on funds and support from donors to ensure that they became self-dependent, to effectively manage their businesses.

Mr Desmond Sunday Adogoba, a socio-economist at CSIR-SARI and researcher on the TL III project, spoke on the gender component of the project and said it aimed not only at empowering women to be financially independent but to also strengthen the seed production systems in rural communities.

This had been done through the use of the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) to empower the women in areas like the Wantugu community in the Tolon District, Salinkpan in the Mion District, Gbimsi in West Mamprusi, Baribari in the Bawku Municipality and Tibani in the Nadowli-Kaleo District.