

Soil scientists harmonize positions on sustainable soil management

To mark 2015 as the International Year of Soils declared by the United Nations, a consultative meeting of the African Soil Partnership (AfSP) was held at Elmina, Ghana, 20–22 May. Scientists and representatives from 35 countries across sub-Saharan Africa set out and fine-tuned their positions on a five-year regional strategy for achieving food security and climate change adaptation and mitigation through sustainable soil management initiatives. The secretariat for the AfSP is held within the FAO Africa regional office in Ghana.

AfSP is part of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) instituted by FAO in 2011 to coordinate and create a unified and recognizable voice for soils and to avoid the fragmentation of efforts and waste of resources. This partnership ensures that healthy soils are maintained as required for feeding the increasing world population and meeting the needs for biomass (energy), fiber, fodder, and other products. It focuses on these five action pillars.

[1. Promote sustainable management of soil resources for soil protection, conservation, and sustainable productivity](#)

[2. Encourage investment, technical cooperation, policy, education awareness, and extension in soil](#)

[3. Promote targeted soil research and development focusing on identified gaps and priorities and synergies with related productive, environmental, and social development actions](#)

[4. Enhance the quantity and quality of soil data and information: data collection \(generation\), analysis, validation, reporting, monitoring, and integration with other disciplines](#)



Soil scientists and representatives from 35 countries attended the workshop.

[5. Harmonize methods, measurements, and indicators for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources](#)

During the consultative meeting, discussions centered upon options for improving the performance of African soils for food and nutrition security in the region. The process will help to develop an implementation plan for each of the five action pillars of the GSP and, based on these implementation plans, a consolidated effort will be made to raise funds to enable these plans to be executed.

Following these discussions, implementation strategies compatible with the peculiar needs of the sub-Saharan African region were drafted, drawing experiences from the ideas developed by the GSP forum.

Dr Jeroen Huising, IITA's soil scientist, together with other participants, resolved during the meeting to advocate the protection and conservation of good soils, restoration and rehabilitation of degraded soils,

promotion of sustainable resource management at all levels and in all land-use types with a focus on nutrient balance, soil conservation measures, and increases in organic matter and carbon stocks. They also developed action plans to achieve these resolutions and consolidated the AfSP by establishing a Steering Committee, in which IITA is represented. These positions are contained in the [Elmina communiqué](#).

The identified challenges in the key sectors will receive urgent attention through this new collaboration. For [IITA](#) this is a good partnership to shape its collaboration with national institutions in Africa as far as the sustainable management of soil resources is concerned.

It is expected that this will directly contribute to achieving food and nutrition security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, provision of various ecosystem services, and sustainable economic development in sub-Saharan Africa.

AfricaYam project can achieve more impact on farmers in sub-region, DG of CRI tells partners

During the inauguration of the new AfricaYam project, Dr Victor Agyeman, Director General of Crops Research Institute (CRI), Ghana, affirmed that the project could achieve more impact on farmers in the subregion.

"AfricaYam is sure to succeed," he said, "because it involves a community of people from Anglophone and Francophone countries and uses agroforestry to tackle the effects of environmental degradation faced by farmers as a result of climate change." He assured participants of his support in implementing recommendations on the community of practice when developed by the project.

Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA Director, Research for Development (West Africa), led a team of IITA representatives to the inauguration at Mensvic Hotel, Accra, Ghana, 26–29 May. The meeting's objectives were to establish and strengthen links among the project team, review the work done so far, and discuss the project targets and activities in detail especially for the first year. The meeting also featured a training for accountants from partner NARS on financial management and IITA's reporting procedures.

The AfricaYam project aims at enhancing the breeding of species of white yam (*Dioscorea rotundata*) and water yam (*D. alata*) for increased productivity



(L-R): Drs Jim Lorenzen (Gates Foundation), Glenn Bryan (JHI), David De Koeyer, Lava Kumar, and Robert Asiedu (IITA).

in West Africa, specifically in Nigeria, Ghana, Bénin, and Côte d'Ivoire. It also aims to reduce production costs and adverse environmental impacts by developing and deploying end-user preferred varieties with high yield, greater resistance to pests and diseases, as well as improved quality. This will benefit diverse stakeholders primarily yam farmers, consumers, processors, and transporters.

AfricaYam is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation over a five-year period and led by Dr David De Koeyer of IITA. The project is also collaborating with various research institutes in France, Japan, United Kingdom, and USA to increase results.

The project activities are grouped into four main components:

- Strengthening capacity for yam breeding
- Tools and methods to raise efficiency of yam breeding
- Data management
- Breeding and regional testing of promising breeder lines

Over the next five years of implementation, the following outcomes are expected from the project: active yam breeding programs in the target countries; improved efficiency of yam breeding programs through the use of faster and more precise tools and methods; and breeding methods used in national and international yam breeding programs in West Africa for sustainable development of new varieties that combine high and stable yield with good tuber qualities.



Participants at the inaugural workshop in Ghana.

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Andrea Gros (a.gros@cgiar.org), Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or Adaobi Umeokoro (a.umeokoro@cgiar.org).

IITA scientists participate in a workshop organized by Gates Foundation

Four IITA scientists, Drs [Norbert Maroya](#), [Djana Mignouna](#), [Victor Manyong](#), and [Thomas Wobill](#), joined 64 other partners from different research institutions, NGOs, universities, [USAID](#), and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation at the Swissôtel Nai Lert Park, Bangkok, Thailand, 26–28 May for a learning workshop. The workshop was organized by the Monitoring, Learning & Evaluation (MLE) team on Agricultural Development of the [Gates Foundation](#).

The experts converged to build a shared learning agenda on technology adoption, discuss the dearth of credible data around the adoption of technologies and practices, and reach a consensus for improving measurement techniques to deliver credible data to the agricultural sector. All are aimed at reducing poverty and increasing the agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

The discussions were focused on establishing what works, as well as on identifying the gaps that remain in the knowledge base on technology adoption. Other objectives of the workshop were as follows:

- Arrive at a common understanding of issues related to adoption, specifically ideas in planning, promoting, and measuring adoption
- Identify best practices in adoption planning, promotion, and measurement



L-R: IITA Scientists Drs Norbert Maroya, Djana Mignouna, Victor Manyong, and Thomas Wobill during the meeting in Thailand.

- Co-create a list of open questions, existing gaps and constraints, and known opportunities to measure the adoption of agricultural developments

As a result of [IITA's](#) participation in the meeting there are shared lessons which are expected to facilitate learning among collaborating partners. The main achievement was the development of a list of significant questions pertinent to adoption which helped to build a strong knowledge base for both the

Gates Foundation [AgDev](#) Program and partners.

The challenges identified were that many pockets of credible evidence existed but shared learning was infrequent. Different adoption studies tried to answer questions of the same type and often in the same locations, without collaboration. This duplication of efforts leads to a waste of resources. To prevent these, some common tools for adoption will be developed by participants.

Events

Annual Review and Planning Meeting - Africa RISING, NAFKA and TUBORESHA CHAKULA Scaling Project, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 8–10 July

[Africa RISING ESA Project Annual Review and Planning Meeting](#), Mangochi, Malawi, 14–16 July

Africa RISING ESA Project Steering Committee Meeting, Mangochi, Malawi, 16 July

Tropentag 2015, Humboldt Universitaet zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany, 17–19 September

First World Congress on Root and Tuber Crops, Nanning, Guangxi province, southern China, 5–10 October

The 7th International Conference of the African Soil Science Society Announcement of Special Program: Soil Fertility Management for Sustainable Intensification in West and Central Africa, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 25 October – 1 November

IITA to host AWARD Women's Leadership Program in June 2015

IITA is collaborating with African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) in hosting the [AWARD Women's Leadership and Management](#) course to be held in IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria in June.

IITA warmly invites participants from partner organizations, colleagues, and other interested parties. Reservation deadline is 5 June 2015. Click <http://bit.ly/1Cd7lz8> to view details on how to apply.



Training of trainers on mechanical weeders held at IITA

Twenty-three participants from partner organizations benefited from a three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop on the use and maintenance of mechanical weeders in cassava farms.

The ToT, held on 25–27 May, was coordinated by the IITA-led [Cassava Weeds Management Project](#). The ToT came after Nigerian engineers came together and modified some imported motorized tillers from the United States. Other items of equipment used for the training were manual weeders acquired from [AfricaRice](#).

The ToT will pave the way for extensive testing of the machines on farmers' fields billed to take place later this year across four States in Nigeria.

Engr Thierno Diallo of IITA handled both theoretical and practical sessions assisted by [Godwin Atser](#), Communication & Knowledge Exchange Expert for the Project. Dr [Alfred Dixon](#), Project Leader, Cassava Weeds Management Project, commended the progress made in the modification and adaption of the mechanical weeders, noting that the equipment would alleviate the pain associated with manual weeding using hoes and cutlasses.



A trainee demonstrates the use of the mechanical weeder on the field as other trainees look on.

Participants were drawn from the [Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi](#), [Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta](#), and National Root Crops Research Institute. All are partner institutions of the Project.

In the field, participants were given plots to measure and then asked to identify the weeds before the weeding exercise began. The participants expressed enthusiasm and said that they would put to use knowledge gained from the training.

Prof [Friday Ekeleme](#), Principal Investigator of the Project, addressed participants at the closing ceremony and urged them to use the knowledge gained.

The ToT workshop was funded by the IITA Cassava Breeding Unit, IFAD-High Quality Cassava Flour Project, [HarvestPlus](#), Postharvest Utilization Unit, Cassava Transformation Agenda project, and Cassava Weeds Management Project.

'AgKnowledge Innovation' Process Share Fair: Better ways to share and learn - Better ways to work!

On 25 and 26 May, [CGIAR](#) centers and other organizations working in agriculture and rural development convened a Share Fair at the [International Livestock Research Institute](#) campus in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The event was driven by the desire to make sure that agricultural research and innovations would have more impact; by recognizing and paying attention to the power of good processes that attend to people, partnerships, and participation. The insights and connections helped the participants and the organizations they work for to cultivate much stronger capabilities for the design and delivery of truly effective process improvements that lead to applied innovation, social learning, and value for money. These improvements should help CGIAR and partner organizations to tackle tough issues through collective actions and collaborate across teams. See the full story [here](#).



Humidropics social scientist Marc Schut (right) talk about innovation platforms.



IITA Head of Communication Andrea Gros (center) in a group discussion on participatory video.