



IITA Bénin hosts Center of Excellence for research on biotic stresses linked to climate change and biodiversity

A center of excellence for research and training to link climate change with biodiversity and biotic stresses was launched this week in the IITA campus in the Republic of Benin.

This follows a major conference on

Biotic stresses, climate change and agricultural production in Cotonou, Bénin, held on 5-7 May.

The Center, which comes under the auspices of the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and

Development (CORAF/WECARD) has IITA, the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Bénin (INRAB), AfricaRice, Bioversity, the French Agricultural Research Centre for International

next page, please



Board members with staff in IITA Benin.

IITA Youth Agripreneurs launch soybean processing center

Under the leadership of the Director General of IITA, the IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA) has launched a processing center for soymilk. Soybean is one of IITA's mandate crops. "IYA has, in only about 2 years of existence, delivered on its promise to process and basically add value to our fresh harvest from the fields; and this is lovely," DG Nternaya Sanginga said.

Since its inception in 2013, IYA has operated from its office complex in the

IITA premises. Opposite IYA's office, a structure managed by the Crop Utility Unit houses different processing machines which were scarcely used. Efforts were made to revive activities there. Staff from the Facilities Management Services and the Crop Utilization Unit of IITA worked tirelessly—after an initial assessment visit by the DG and IYA members on 30 April 2014—to ensure that the derelict facilities could start functioning straightaway. Necessary repairs were made on broken-

down equipment and a general renovation of the building was undertaken. The adjacent wing occupied by AfricaRice was demarcated to make room for a possible extension of the Processing Center.

On Friday, 2 May 2014, the first product—soymilk—was enjoyed by those responsible for the rehabilitation and by other guests. An expansion in the capacity of the Center is currently being explored as several income-generating options have already been identified. IYA would be the project executors, overseeing production and the marketing of the products.

Aside from the commercial gain, another angle worthy of note is the tremendous health benefits that soybean and its by-products offer to consumers. Soybean is also called a "miracle crop" because of its very high nutritive value, particularly protein. It also serves as an immune booster that ultimately improves quality and effective performance.

The Soybean Processing Center is expected to go into full operation in the coming weeks, with products ranging from soymilk to tidbits, and with IITA and the University College Hospital (UCH) in Ibadan as clients.



Dr Sanginga enjoying soymilk at the Processing Center.

IITA Bénin hosts Center of excellence for research on biotic stresses ...from page 1

Development (CIRAD), and the University of Abomey Calavi (UAC) as partners but is also open to other national agricultural research systems in the West and Central African bloc.

The Center was inaugurated by the Republic of Benin's Minister of Agriculture, Madame Fatouma Amadou Djibril; CORAF/WECARD Director General, Dr Ibet Outman Issa, and IITA Board of Trustees Chair, Prof Bruce Coulman.

The inauguration of the Center of Excellence aligns with IITA's refreshed strategy which seeks to "establish the IITA Cotonou station as a biodiversity center and a leading research and training center providing sustainable solutions to crop biotic stresses linked with climate change in West Africa in partnership with CORAF/WECARD, West African universities, CGIAR centers, and international agricultural research centers (IARCs) in the region."

Already, IITA has taken over the rehabilitated forest of Drabo Gbo in the

Republic of Benin as a field research station linked to the Cotonou biodiversity center.

IITA Board Chair, Dr Bruce Coulman explained that the need to establish a center of excellence is based on the fact that climate change is important and it would affect agricultural production and productivity and pest population, and so there was the need to develop strategies to mitigate this challenge.

"This facility will attract global attention to this very important topic," he said.

With a great proportion of the agricultural production in West and Central Africa relying on rainfall, agricultural production in the region is being threatened.

Climate disturbances in the region usually generate extreme events such as droughts and floods, but even sudden dry spells during a normal rainy season could have a tremendous impact on productivity.

IITA Board Member Trine Hvorslev-Eide said that the establishment of the Center of Excellence was a wonderful

opportunity for West and Central African farmers.

"This Center will help the region to be prepared for these new challenges, and more importantly, the Center will offer easy access to farmers in terms of information which they could use in addressing climate change," she said.

Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA Director for Western Africa, said the establishment of the Center would help the region to develop and harmonize its efforts in tackling the menace from climate change.

"With this facility, we can understand, predict and develop the necessary tools that will help us influence our destiny. If not, we will be helpless when the effects of climate change finally hit us," he explained.

At the inauguration were members of the donor community, the Director General of AfricaRice, Dr Adama Traore; IITA Board Members, IITA Management team, and researchers from the national systems in the region.

Humidtropics holds Cameroon Action Site Inception Workshop

The Launching Workshop of the Cameroon Action Site of the West African Humid Lowlands Action Area took place recently in Yaounde.

The West African Humid Lowlands Action Area of Humidtropics has four action sites in four countries: Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. Cameroon is the second Action Site to be launched after the Nigeria Action Site. Humidtropics is a CGIAR Research Program led by IITA that seeks to improve the livelihoods of poor, smallholder farmers in the humid tropics of the world. Four action areas have been identified for Tier 1 of the implementation program, one of which is the West Africa Humid Lowlands Action Area. In each Action Area, several action sites have been delineated.

The objectives of the workshop were to launch the activities of Humidtropics in the Action Site, identify the entry themes for research activities, delineate the potential field sites where the research activities will take place, and initiate the establishment of the R4D platform for the Cameroon Action Site.

Dr Latifou Idrissou, the Action Area Coordinator for the West Africa Humid Lowlands Action Area, organized the workshop supported by the Cameroon teams of IITA, ICRAF, and AVRDC and the national research institute of Cameroon IRAD. The workshop was opened by the IITA-Country Representative for Cameroon Dr Rachid Hanna and the Director of Humidtropics Dr Kwesi Atta-Krah. Drs Stefan Hauser from IITA-Ibadan and Kirscht Holger from IITA-Cameroon facilitated the workshop.



Group photo of participants in the inception workshop

Forty-one participants attended the workshop representing partner centers, farmers' organizations, ministries, universities, research institutes, NGOs, the private sector, and the media.

The workshop started with some presentations to introduce Humidtropics to the participants, the criteria for field site selection as well as some experiences of innovation platforms from the Donat project implemented by FARA, the rural resource center established by ICRAF, and the cassava project implemented by IITA. Group sessions were held to identify the constraints and challenges of the agricultural sector in Cameroon, the potential field sites, and the conditions for platform establishment in the Action Site.

The main entry themes identified by the participants to the workshop for research activities are related to the intensification of agricultural production,

soil degradation and fertility management, access of farmers to financial and agricultural product markets, and partnership building among agricultural sector stakeholders. These entry themes will serve as the basis for research in three field sites: the Southwest and Littoral region, the Central region, and the Western Highlands region. The participants also identified the key stakeholders to be involved in the R4D platform of the Action Site and the conditions an organization should fulfill before becoming a member of the platform.

The workshop was closed by Dr Rachid Hanna with the expectation that the decisions taken during the workshop would be implemented with the full support of the participants' organizations to improve the livelihoods of the smallholder poor farmers in the Cameroon Action Site.

IITA Board honors Emeritus Scientist Peter Neuenschwander

Emeritus Scientist Peter Neuenschwander was honored by the IITA Board of Trustees for his support and contribution to the Institute, and particularly for his donation of the Drabo Gbo forest to IITA.

The Drabo Gbo forest is a 14-hectare rehabilitated forest in the Republic of Benin that is rich in biodiversity. Four forests within the Drabo Gbo forest are sacred and the resource hosts diverse species of butterflies, birds, endangered species of monkeys, trees, and snakes, among others.

Peter said that in line with IITA refreshed strategy and with the focus on climate change and biotic stresses, the forest resource could be used for sustainability and natural resource management studies.

Dr Bruce Coulman, IITA Board Chair who presented the plaque of honor to Peter reiterated the board's pleasure to Peter's contribution during his stay in IITA as a staff, and also in his retirement.

A native of Switzerland, Peter did a postdoctoral fellowship in biological control at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1975, he joined FAO and in 1983, IITA. For several years in addition to leading the Center for Biological Control for Africa, Peter was the Director of IITA's Plant Health Management Division.



IITA BOT Chair presents plaque of honor to Peter at Drabo Gbo forest

He resigned in 2003 but has continued to offer his wise counsel to the staff of the Biological Control Center for Africa. He is IITA's first Emeritus Scientist.

At the Drabo Gbo forest, Peter took IITA management and the Board on a forest tour, a trip that highlighted the diversity in the forest.

Welcome, new staff

Christine Kreye has joined IITA-Ibadan, as an Agronomist-NRM Expert. She is German, and obtained a PhD from Kiel University, Germany in 2004 and an MSc in Agricultural



Studies from Georg August University, Göttingen, Germany in 1999.

Christine worked as Scientific Assistant/Assistant Professor at the Department of Plant Nutrition in the (sub) tropics, Institute of Crop Science

and Resource Conservation, University of Bonn, Germany from 2008 to 2014. She was an International Research Fellow at IRRI from 2005 to 2008 and a Research Associate at the Institute of Plant Nutrition and Soil Science, Kiel University Germany from 2000 to 2004.

Christine can be contacted on c.kreye@cgiar.org, Bldg 401, room 45, and telephone ext. 2484.

Michael Haertel has joined IITA-Ibadan as GIS and Database Expert. Michael, also a German, obtained his Diploma (Master's) in Geography from Georg August University, Göttingen, Germany in 2002.

Michael worked as Development

Leader for Geo-Spatial Applications at the System House of the Authority of the Rhineland in 2007. He was a Web Developer at the Federal State Data Processing Centre in



Hessen, Germany in 2005 and a Junior Application Engineer at Integragh Germany GmbH in 2004.

Michael can be contacted on m.haertel@cgiar.org, Bldg 401 Room C2 within the Geo-Spatial Lab, and telephone ext. 2285.

Upcoming events

1. IITA Board Meeting, 6-8 May, IITA, Cotonou, Benin
2. Commissioning of IITA Science Building, 5 June, IITA, Bukavu, DR Congo
3. Engagement of Youth Entrepreneurship for Agricultural Transformation in Africa, 28-30 May, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria

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