



Global yam conference calls for more investments on yam R4D



Dr Sanginga addressing participants at the Global Yam Conference in Accra

Increasing funding for research and development on yam will help unleash the

potential of the crop, improve livelihoods, create jobs, and enhance food security in Africa.

Researchers, policymakers, and representatives from the private sector at the first ever global yam conference in Accra, Ghana, say that recent investments in yam research are paying off, and demonstrating the crop's greater potential than what is being realized.

"Sustaining and enhancing funding support for yam research and development backed by political will are needed to unlock the crop's full potential," said Director General Nteranya Sanginga.

He praised the government of Japan, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the West and

Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD) for supporting IITA on yam research and called on researchers to develop a vision for the crop.

Known as the 'king of crops' because of its contribution to incomes and food security, yam also has high cultural value especially in traditional marriages in Africa. However, the crop is under-researched due to low funding, limiting its potential for alleviating poverty.

"If we attract more investments to advance and expand yam research globally, the anticipated benefits and impacts will be quite enormous," said the Ghanaian Minister for Food and Agriculture, Clement Kofi Humado.

Represented by the Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture, Ahmed Yakubu Alhassan, the minister said that there was a need to "soberly rethink through research-and-development, and invest our limited resources judiciously to ensure best results."

FARA wants more attention on yam research

The Executive Director, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), Dr Yemi Akinbamijo has said that in spite of the contribution to food security and incomes, African crops such as yam have not commanded the attention they deserved, and have as a result remained underutilized.

"Yams are unexploited in several aspects: actual yields are lower than potential, utilization is low for instance in animal feeds, and potential for diversification of yam products among others is unexploited," he said.

Commending IITA for its contribution to yam research and development, Dr Akinbamijo said that the key to unlocking the potential of yam lies in science and technology and empowerment of the producers, marketers, and consumers to take advantage of what research offers.

According to him, "the challenge is to mobilize the investment required to conduct research and develop the yam value chain into a profitable enterprise for small and large-scale operators alike."

The Global Conference on Yams held in Accra, 3-6 October, provides a forum for stakeholders to explore recent innovations in yam improvement, share lessons learned,



Participants at the Global Yam Conference in Accra

identify research and development needs, and develop global alliances.

Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA Director for Western Africa, and the Convener of the Conference said that the event provided a platform for consultation and development of a global strategy for improving the yam sector based on genetic enhancement; crop protection and mitigation of risks due to pests, diseases and climate change; conservation of genetic resources; prevention of postharvest losses;

improved seed systems; crop diversification; and enhancing industrial potential of yam and improved market access.

The ultimate goals of the event are to establish: (i) a global alliance for yam improvement; (ii) gain more investments to advance and expand yam R4D agenda globally, and (iii) contribute to the strengthening of R&D capacity and human resource development for sustainable yam improvement.

Ghana becomes the first country to launch national yam strategy

Ghana has taken a major step ahead of other yam-producing nations with the launch of a strategy for the development of the yam industry from farm to market. This follows the global conference on yams held in Accra on 3-6 October and ongoing strategic development for the sector.

The national yam strategy puts yam in the spotlight as a key crop to help Ghana fight poverty, enhance food security, and improve the livelihoods and income of women and men engaged in the yam sector.

“The strategy envisions making Ghana the leading source of premium quality yam products with global penetration and contributing to an improved Ghanaian economy and livelihoods,” says the Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture, Ahmed Yakubu Alhassan.

“One of the objectives of the strategy is to develop commercially-driven research and development as well as capacity building in yam value chain,” he added at the inauguration of the strategy in Accra on 8 October.

The economic value of the yam industry in Ghana has grown quite rapidly in recent years, with its foreign exchange earnings shooting up to the third position among the nontraditional export commodities in the period 2010 to 2012. Demand for yam in both



Participants at the Ghana Yam Strategy launch

fresh and processed forms is increasing in new markets abroad and domestically. The industry faces tremendous opportunities as well as challenges and requires support policies, and private sector investment to be organized as a whole value chain.

The Ghana Yam Strategy is a private sector-led road map that started in 2012. It is championed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture with the support of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Ministry of

Gender, Children, and Social Protection.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) and IITA provided technical support and process facilitation.

“Despite the contribution of yam, the crop has not been given the right attention. This is what this strategy aims to correct,” says Mr Anthony Sikpa, Chairman of the Ghana Yam Strategy Committee.

“With this strategy not only will yam be given attention, but it will also provide opportunities for all stakeholders in the yam sector,” he added.

National yam strategy: IITA urged other African countries to emulate Ghana



Dr Asiedu speaks at the Ghana yam strategy launch

IITA Director for Western Africa, Dr Robert Asiedu has commended Ghana for taking the lead in developing a strategy for the tuber crop.

According to him, “We also encourage other countries to emulate Ghana, by developing similar strategies that give clear direction on how to make the crop work for the poor and improve their economies.”

Indigenous to Africa, yam is a major staple contributing to food security and incomes, and also plays a significant role in the culture of the people.

The strategy has been designed and developed to provide a holistic approach to sector development by considering both the economic and social value of yam in

Ghana. “The methodology used combines IITA’s experience in agriculture research-and-development with ITC’s practice of participatory mechanisms and market-led planning for policy, enterprise, and sector development,” said Hernan Manson, ITC Adviser for Value Chain Development, and Antonio Lopez-Montes, IITA Yam Breeder.

Perlin Gunesoglu, Chairperson for the Turkish-Ghanaian Business Council for Delk (the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board), observed that the strategy provided a platform for transforming the yam sector into a vibrant industry beyond but not excluding food security.

According to her, “The work being done in Ghana for yam is very valuable and can serve as an example for other countries trying to develop their sector looking at commercial as well as social objectives.”

Perlin pointed out that apart from yam as food, the crop can also be used in many different industries including food, paper, textiles, and adhesives, through value addition.

But to achieve a high level of value addition, she emphasized the need for support from the government on each step of the strategy, starting with farming and collection of yam genetic resources.



Dr Akinbamijo (3rd from left) and Ghanaian Deputy Minister for MOFA, Dr Alhassan (2nd from right) having a taste of bread baked with 20 percent yam flour during the Global Yam Conference

IITA and ITC train bakers on baking yam bread

Yam took center stage this past week in Ghana with the convening of global experts and processors on yam, and the launching of the Ghana Yam Sector Development Strategy. A precursor to the launching of the Ghana yam strategy training was held at La Palm Royal Beach hotel.

On Saturday IITA and ITC organized a training on the use of yam flour in baking with the support of IITA hotelier Sami Mazumdar and Baker Greg.

The composition was made up of 1 kg white water yam flour and 4 kg wheat flour. The bread dough was kneaded into molds and baked.

Alex, the pastry chef of La Palm Royal Beach hotel said that he was initially sceptical about the yam bread.

However after baking, he indicated it tasted good.

Mr Kwamina Laast, an exporter looking to invest in yam flour stated that yam bread is a promising technology, given that the commercial value of water yam is on the low side.



Samiran Mazumdar trains bakers on the use of yam flour in confectioneries

“No one ever thought of substituting wheat flour with yam flour. The time for Africa to use its products is now,” he said.

Water yam is loosely regarded in West

Africa because it is not suitable for the preparation of ‘fufu’. However processing water yam into flour and fries, as well as a range of other products such as liquor, pasta, and ice cream can promote its usage.

Lifting Africans out of poverty with IITA’s holistic approach

An insight into a redefined strategy by IITA to address the immense issues of poverty, undernutrition and untenable agricultural practices and use of natural resources in Africa was provided by its Deputy Director for Research and Development, Dr Ylva Hillbur, during her visit to the UWA Institute of Agriculture, in August.

Dr Hillbur’s public lecture showcased how strengthening the presence of IITA, the leading institute of agriculture in Africa, across the African continent and building stronger scientific research and development networks at national levels is already creating new opportunities for improved livelihoods in sustainable environments.

IITA operates from 18 research stations across four regional hubs in West, Central, East and Southern Africa managed from Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Zambia, respectively. Here, an international group of more than 120 scientists works on IITA’s ‘research-for-development’ programs with an annual budget of 80 million US dollars, of which about 20 percent comes from the CGIAR Consortium. IITA, with its headquarters in Nigeria, is one of CGIAR’s research



A farmer cultivating improved soybean

institutes, and the scientific focus of IITA’s strategy for Africa overlaps with priorities across many of CGIAR’s research programs (CRPs).

IITA works on a whole-society approach to achieve its goal of lifting 11 million Africans out of poverty and developing 7.5 million hectares of land into sustainable use by 2020. Its success comes from quality research, translation of research, and commercialization of research outputs, but collaboration with national and local partners and serious

efforts towards capacity development and gender equality are as important for long-term progress to be made.

“From an agronomical perspective, we are challenged with low and further decreasing soil fertility, a high incidence of pests and pathogens, and undiversified cropping systems, leaving the systems vulnerable and leading to undiversified diets,” Dr Hillbur explained.

IITA aims to generate impact by intensifying, diversifying, and improving cropping systems of many essential staple crops and grain legumes. Encouraging outcomes have already been achieved with the development of pro-vitamin A enriched ‘orange maize’, *Striga* resistant and drought-tolerant maize varieties, the cassava transformation program in Nigeria and the banana transformation project in Uganda, to name a few.

Further attention to improve systems management, education and youth employment completes the holistic plan to combat the underlying issues of poverty in Africa.

Dr Hillbur met Hackett Professor Kadambot Siddique, Director of UWA’s Institute of Agriculture and a member of the CGIAR Grain Legumes Independent Advisory Committee, at the launch of the Grain Legumes CRP in India early this year. During her visit Dr Hillbur discussed potential future areas of collaboration between IITA and UWA.

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