



Cassava varieties tolerant to deadly viral diseases shared across five countries



Dr Ochieng, Assistant Director at KARI, chief guest at the handing over ceremony making his speech before receiving the cassava plantlets from GTIL.

Five countries that are severely affected by deadly viral diseases threatening to wipe out cassava in East, Central, and Southern Africa, have joined efforts to tackle the problem. These countries agreed to share their top five varieties that could best withstand these threats. The 25 varieties will then be evaluated in each country to identify varieties well adapted to various cassava-growing regions and acceptable to the local farming communities.

Together cassava brown streak disease (CBSD) and cassava mosaic disease (CMD) cause production losses worth more than US\$1 billion every year and are a threat to food and income security for over 30 million farmers growing the crops in East and Central Africa.

During the handing over of the tissue culture plantlets to IITA and Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), Dr Ochieng Joseph, Assistant Director, Food Crops at KARI, who was also the chief guest, said this marked a very important step in the efforts to control the two cassava diseases as part of efforts to ensure food security in the five countries.

He thanked all the partner organizations for their efforts in collecting, cleaning up, and multiplying the varieties that they are sharing. “The next task will be to ensure once these varieties are evaluated and the best varieties identified, and they reach the

small-holder farmers by having an efficient seed distribution system in place. Without seeds, we have no varieties. And all our efforts and the breeders’ efforts will have been in vain,” he said.

“Cassava is a very important food and income security crop for over 80 million farmers in the tropics. We are also looking to it to help our farmers cope with climate change as it is able to withstand harsh conditions such as drought and poor soils. However, for this to happen we need to control the spread of these two diseases. And one of the most sustainable ways to do so is to develop varieties that have dual resistance,” said Dr Leena Tripathi, the IITA Kenya Country Representative.

This exchange of material is one of the key activities of the project “New Cassava Varieties and Clean Seed to Combat CMD and CBSD” led by IITA and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The project aims to alleviate food insecurity and poverty by ensuring that farmers have access to high-quality disease-free planting material of diverse improved varieties that combine resistance to CBSD and CMD with preferred end-user characteristics.

The varieties were first sent to the Natural Resources Institute (NRI, UK) and to Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Services (KEPHIS) for cleaning and then forwarded to GTIL.

“Each country will have 20 new varieties to evaluate and choose for official release and multiplication to farmers,” said Dr Edward Kanju, IITA breeder and 5CP Project Coordinator. “We have also taken steps to ensure that we are not spreading the diseases from one country to another and that the materials that we are distributing are virus free.”

Each country will receive 300 plantlets of the 25 varieties which they will multiply in bulk and test across different cassava growing regions to fast-track efforts to provide farmers with varieties that are tolerant to the two diseases.

“On behalf of the National Agricultural Research Systems from Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, I receive these tissue-culture plantlets and promise we will multiply and test them across different cassava growing regions. We will identify those that are tolerant to the diseases and suitable for different uses such as for cooking, for flour, and even for starch,” said Dr Therese Munga, the 5CP Kenya Country Coordinator and also the Head of Cassava research at KARI.



IITA Kenya Country Representative, Leena Tripathi speaking at the handing over event.

DG visits Kano



From L – R: A.Y. Kamara, A.S. Rabo, Chief Security Officer, DG Sanginga, O. Boukar and M. Oluoch on a tour of the Kano station.

Director General Nteranya Sanginga was in Kano for a two-day working visit, 24 to 26 February. During the visit the DG held separate meetings with staff members and with collaborators at the IITA Kano station.

At the staff meeting the DG talked about several issues including policies, projects, staff welfare, and the plan to make the station a center of excellence.

He further stated that the Kano station is very important to IITA and its prospective projects. This would lead to an increase in activities, and thus more hands and support from all staff would be needed at all times.

Furthermore, the DG also said that there should be staff training as done at the headquarters since out-station offices tended to feel left out. He advised staff to write proposals on training either in groups, units, or on an individual basis.

He informed staff that IITA would work towards providing more infrastructure and equipment for laboratories and farms mindful of the intended expansion. He instructed the Striga unit to begin to put into consideration the proposal for the second phase of the Striga Project.

Advising all staff on the need for team work, he highlighted the importance of working with other institutes such as ICRISAT and ILRI, and respecting them as colleagues in the system. The DG made it clear that IITA would not tolerate any member of staff using their position or office to oppress others; instead all staff are expected to be open minded, and to listen to people bearing in mind that we are all working towards the same goal.

Attitude and its importance in the work environment was also stressed by the DG, therefore all staff are expected to exhibit the spirit of transparency.

The DG entertained questions and requests from staff to which he responded

positively. Some of the questions were on NRS children's education allowance, farm management, training, lab equipment, and the need to have IITA-owned houses in one location for the security of staff.

In his response the DG firstly made it clear that immediate solutions could not be provided to some of the issues raised. Adding to this the following resolutions were arrived at:

- That training is extremely important and the Kano staff must not necessarily wait for the team to come to Kano but could also come to Ibadan for training.

- That IITA hopes to expand and more scientists will be brought to Kano station and the expansion in infrastructure and units, advising all staff to give their total support. Kano station is an important center of cowpea breeding.

- That the DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Development hopes to bring a breeder for soybean as part of a 6-year project and IITA would again become more active in soybean breeding and its utilization.

The DG also met with partners from Bayero University, Kano; National

Agricultural Research Liaison Services (NAERLS); SG2000; Jubaili Agro Tech; Springfield Agro Ltd.; KNARDA, KKM/FARA.

At this meeting the DG stressed the importance of collaborators in the achievement of IITA's goals. He said that it is a situation of give and take between the collaborators and IITA.

The DG emphasized that in IITA's desire to reach 2 million people in Africa, all collaborators from universities, research organizations, and the private sector need to be involved. To strengthen partnerships the office of DDG Partnerships and Capacity Development was revived; he added that 25% of IITA's budget will go to partners.

He informed the forum of IITA's new innovation of establishing large factories for aflasafe™ with a capacity to produce 200 tons per day and a Rhizobium inoculant factory that is due for commissioning in two months' time.

In their response the collaborators reiterated their commitment to working with IITA towards fighting hunger in Africa.

All the collaborators thanked IITA for choosing to partner with them and they promised to give their best in achieving shared goals. They emphasized their willingness to assist in transferring suitable practices to the farmers.

Springfield Agro requested IITA to use their chemicals for quality testing.

The collaborators suggested that this type of meeting should be made regular.

Visit to Minjibir farm

After meeting with staff and collaborators the DG was conducted around the station before the team moved to Minjibir farm. On the way to Minjibir farm the DG briefly visited Jubaili Agro Ltd.

At the farm the DG was taken around by Mr Shakiru Apenna and Drs Boukar Ousmane and Mel Oluoch. He was informed about the progress so far on the planned irrigation system, and problems in the farm.

The DG commended the staff for their efforts and dedication, and requested a write-up on the needs in Kano station and the Minjibir farm.



Kano station staff with the DG.

Improving the cassava value chain in Zambia through Innovation Platforms

SARD-SC is geared towards improving the cassava value chain in Zambia through the use of an innovative systems approach to build and strengthen partners' capacities. In this approach—called the innovation platform (IP)—stakeholders from district level, local communities, research, extension, NGOs, and the private sector who share a common developmental vision come together to interact, prioritize issues, identify challenges and opportunities, and share experiences, with the overall goal of promoting the cassava value chain.

Under the SARD-SC Cassava component in Zambia, five district-level innovation platforms have been established in Mansa, Samfya, Kasama, Kaoma, and Serenje districts through meetings. During the meetings, partners echoed that cassava production in Zambia remains weak and uncompetitive mainly due to non-adoption of improved technologies that are essential to increase productivity and profitability. It was noted that although new improved varieties have been released by the breeders, there is low uptake of improved technologies among small-holder farmers. This is due to a number of factors such as nonavailability and accessibility of clean and disease-free planting materials, lack of deliberate policy measures to support cassava processing and utilization, declining soil fertility, and weak linkages and interaction among different stakeholders such as research, extension, and input and output markets. It is for this



Cassava value-addition through innovation platforms is one of the objectives of the SARD-SC project.

reason that SARD-SC has prioritized the setting up of innovation platforms in the first year of the project to strengthen the linkages and interaction among different players along the cassava value chain.

IPs are defined as social systems with the purpose of solving its members' problems through concrete and systematic communication to produce or construct the desired innovation. The platform adopts innovation as a systemic and dynamic institutional or social learning process and recognizes that innovation can emerge from many sources (science or

indigenous knowledge or others), complex interactions, and knowledge flows. IPs are also seen as a practical tool to find solutions in an effective, nationwide, and sustainable way.

Among the terms of reference, the newly formed IPs will serve as an advisory body to the project on issues that relate to opportunities and constraints associated with production, and input and output markets and, where possible, advocate for policy options. The final aim is to commercialize cassava, generate income for rural communities, and improve wealth.

IITA alumni meet in Ibadan for 6th reunion this week

More than 60 alumni are participating in the 6th reunion being held this week at IITA headquarters in Ibadan.

Participants came from different parts of the world including Europe, Africa, the

US, and Asia.

The event provided an opportunity for former and current staff, training participants, and students to come together, share experiences, and revisit IITA and



Alumni who came for the 6th reunion pose for a souvenir photograph with management and some staff.

get reacquainted with its programs and activities. Activities for the week included meetings with staff, social events, sports events and recreation, lab and field trips, and visits to interesting sites in Ibadan.

The reunion also highlighted IITA's scientific breakthroughs in the last 47 years. Part of the event were meetings between alumni and management and staff to discuss issues and recommend some actions to improve alumni relations, increase IITA's impact, and enhance operational effectiveness, among other topics. A special issue on the event will be circulated soon.