

## Researchers begin activities to make cassava work for the poor

Researchers and key partners working under the Support for Agricultural Research and Development for Strategic Crops (SARD-SC) have kicked off activities to improve the productivity of cassava by at least 20 percent in project sites, increase household incomes and food security, and make the root crop work for the poor.

Four countries – DR Congo, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zambia – are the main beneficiaries of the cassava component but the project allows neighboring countries to tap from technologies that would be generated.

“About 500,000 farmers will directly benefit from the crop with more than 2 million indirect beneficiaries,” said Dr Chrys Akem, SARD-SC Project Coordinator, at the launch of the cassava component of the project in DR Congo.

Consumed by more than 600 million people in the developing countries, cassava is now competing with crops such as maize and rice as Africa’s major staple. But the potential of the crop is still stymied by a myriad challenges including pests and diseases, poor adoption of improved varieties by farmers, and low use of improved best practices. Consequently, yields from local varieties across most regions are below 10 tons per hectare as opposed



L-R: Dr Bernard Vanlauwe, Dr Alexis Makumyaviri, and Dr Victor Manyong at the launch.

to over 30 tons per hectare obtained from improved varieties.

“SARD-SC intends to tackle most of the bottlenecks confronting cassava by disseminating improved varieties and unlocking the power of the crop along the value chain,” Dr Akem added.

Participating countries welcomed the project, saying that it would help alleviate hunger and poverty, and improve food security in Africa.

DR Congo’s Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Jean-Chrysostome Vahanwiti said cassava is a food security crop and that research to improve cassava was a welcome development for the country and the region.

The minister, who was represented by his Chief of Staff, Dr Alexis Makumyaviri, said cassava is important to DR Congo because it is the major source of calorie and protein in the country. He applauded the attention being given to women and youth in terms of wealth and job creation in the project.

Launched last year, the SARD-SC is a 5-year, multi-CGIAR center initiative funded by the African Development Bank that is aimed at enhancing the productivity and income derived from cassava, maize, rice, and wheat – four of the six commodities that African Heads of States, through the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program, have defined as strategic crops for Africa.

The project, which will run until 2016, will be co-implemented by three Africa-based CGIAR centers: IITA, Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice), and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), supported by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). IITA is also the Executing Agency of the project.

Drs Victor Manyong and Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA Hub Directors, said the success of the project depended on joint efforts with partners to ensure that scientific innovations work for the poor.



Researchers and partners at the launch of the SARD-SC cassava component in DR Congo.

## IITA and Zanzibar to strengthen collaboration on agriculture R4D

While IITA has a long history of partnering with Zanzibar, the semi-autonomous archipelago in Tanzania, in various agricultural research initiatives, the two have agreed to strengthen their collaboration to further boost agricultural production in the isle.

This was decided during a meeting between IITA's DG Nteranya Sanginga and key officials from Zanzibar's Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources led by Mr Affan O. Maalim, the Principal Secretary (PS) when the IITA DG paid him a courtesy visit.

Other officials present at the meeting were two Deputy PS of Agriculture and of Natural Resources, and six directors including the Director of Zanzibar Agriculture Research Institute. The DG was accompanied by Edward Kanju, cassava breeder, and Adebayo Abass, postharvest specialist based at IITA Eastern Africa hub.

The PS thanked the DG for the courtesy visit and informed him that agriculture was the government's strategic plan to reduce poverty; it also placed great emphasis on agricultural research and training.

In this regard, the PS said, the Zanzibar government had upgraded Kizimbani Research station to become the Zanzibar Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI) and was collaborating with the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) on the improvement of laboratories. However, he said staff development was still a problem and requested IITA's support on this area.

Other areas of collaboration between the two organizations were identified: exchange of germplasm for pest and disease management, breeding to expand the genetic base of crops, biological control of diseases (e.g., fruit flies), postharvest management of perishable crops; and sustainable soil fertility



*DG N. Sanginga (top center) meeting with officials of the Zanzibar Agriculture Research Institute.*

management.

Others included value chain development especially of cassava and product development for bread, fruit, ethanol, starch, chips, and high quality cassava flour production, multiplication of disease-free planting materials, research on climate change and adaptation, and student exchange visits.

The DG also invited the PS and his team to the inauguration of the new science building which is scheduled for 10 May.

**At the Zanzibar Agricultural Research Institute.** The DG also met and held discussions with the scientists at the research institute led by the Director, Mr Haji Saleh.

They briefed the DG and his team on the ongoing research efforts at the station and the continuing upgrade of the research building (financed by COSTECH).

Options for joint research funding were explored and it was agreed that scientists

from both organizations should devote more time to write research proposals.

**Long years of collaboration.** IITA has had many years of collaboration with Zanzibar, according to researchers. This included the elimination of cassava mealybug in the isle in the 80s through IITA's biological control program.

They said Zanzibar had also received tissue culture materials from IITA in the 80s as part of research to deal with banana black sigatoka. In fact, the institute had also installed a tissue culture laboratory and trained the staff of the research station. Furthermore, the current director had received training at IITA, Nigeria, in 1998 and still continues to work closely with IITA scientists.

The institute had also established a cassava processing center at Mikatawani in 2003 with funds from the Common Funds for Commodity.

## IITA Youth Agripreneurs: Youths explore opportunities in seed sector

Youths under the IITA-Youth project have explored opportunities in the seed sector, making visits to seed companies across Nigeria. The exploratory visits which took place in 2012 were aimed at exposing the youths to the business and

development potentials in the seed sector.

"Plans are under way for these youths to join the Nigerian seed companies in providing farmers with high quality seeds/planting materials (for IITA commodities such as maize, cowpea,

soybean, cassava, yam, and banana/plantain) in the first instance," says Dr Gbassey Tarawali, Representative of the DG and DDG (Partnership & Capacity Development), who is working closely with the youths.

Seed companies visited include Da-AllGreen Ltd., Premier Seeds Nigeria Ltd., Nagari Seeds Nigeria Ltd., Savannah Seeds Ltd., National Agricultural Seed Council, Sun Seed and Springfield Agro Ltd., Maslaha Seed Company, Terratiga Ltd., Seed Project Company Ltd., Maina Seed Ltd., and Manoma Seed Company.

During the visit, the youths were able to understand the challenges facing the seed sector and came back with plans on how to overcome those challenges.

Initiated by Dr Nteranya Sanginga, IITA Director General, the IITA Youth Agripreneurs aims to unlock the potential in agriculture by attracting and engaging young men and women in agribusiness to create decent employment opportunities comparable to those of their colleagues in the banking, oil, and communication sectors.



*DG N. Sanginga is helping empower the youth through the seed entrepreneur project.*