



IITA receives US \$5 million to support policy action for agricultural intensification in Uganda

IITA has received a \$5 million grant from the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands (EKN) in Uganda to start a project entitled: “Policy Action for Sustainable Intensification of Ugandan Cropping Systems (PASIC).”

The project seeks to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF) to identify and prioritize policies and actions needed to boost agricultural production in the country through intensification of farming systems.

Speaking recently during a brief ceremony to sign the contract, the Ambassador of the Netherlands in Uganda, His Excellency Alphons Hennekens noted that the country needed to intensify its agricultural production through the use of modern farming methods and technologies to meet the food needs of its rapidly increasing population.

“The inevitable solution lies in the intensification of cropping systems by using fertilizers, improved seeds, good agronomic practices, and attracting investors for buying farmers’ produce,” His Excellency Alphons Hennekens said.

Also present at the event was MAAIF Minister, Honorable Tress Bucyanayandi, who welcomed the initiative and noted it was well in line with the countries priorities and strategic development plans.

“Through sustainable intensification of cropping systems, PASIC directly contributes to increased rural incomes



R-L: Tress Bucyanayandi, H.E Alphons Hennekens, and Piet Van Asten, exchange the signed contracts.

and household food security, the two objectives of our Development Strategy and Investment Plan (DSIP),” he said.

Victor Manyong, the IITA Director for Eastern African, on behalf of the PASIC consortium, thanked the Dutch government for the support. He said the project was very important to tackle the constraints to sustainable intensification of agriculture through research on policy and policy action.

The project will carry out research in two zones targeting two important cropping systems—the South Western Highlands for Irish potatoes and the Lake Kioga plains in Eastern Uganda for rice.

In these zones, population pressure is high, farm sizes are small (less than 2 ha), and there is limited new land to expand agriculture production which makes traditional farming no longer sustainable.

Piet Van Asten, IITA Country Representative and project leader said “PASIC will generate vital knowledge and evidence for decision makers to plan public investments and attract responsible private entities to the agriculture sector.”

The project will run to September 2017. The findings and lessons learnt will support MAAIF staff to formulate credible policies and programs to intensify cropping systems. Other project partners are the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), the leading policy think-tank in Uganda, and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).



L-R: IITA’s Piet Van Asten and His Excellency Alphons Hennekens sign PASIC contract

IITA and the Zambian government strategize to fight cassava diseases threats in the country

The “Mitigating Cassava Diseases Threats for Improved Cassava production in Zambia, with a Special focus on Eastern Province” is a four-year project under the “Feed the Future Program,” research-for-development (R4D) component sponsored by USAID-Zambia mission.

The project, implemented by IITA in collaboration with the government’s research wings, i.e., Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI) and Seeds Control and Certification Institute (SCCI) has reached half of its lifespan. The strategizing was done during the project’s second annual review/planning meeting held in Chipata from 4 to 6 September 2013. The meeting attracted the participation of implementing partners (ZARI, SCCI, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), farmers and NGOs such as ADRA) and other stakeholders with interests in Zambia’s cassava sector.

The meeting was officially opened by Mr Kennedy Kanenga in his capacity as acting Provincial Agriculture Coordinator (PACO). Mr Kanenga reiterated the importance of Zambia’s crop diversification policy. He mentioned that cassava has been recognized by the Zambian government as a strategic crop for food security hence the need for continued research to mitigate any adverse effects which might hamper its production potential. In conclusion, Mr Kanenga informed participants that the meeting received the blessings of both the donor



Participants at the meeting

(USAID) and the government through his office.

Implementing partners shared reports on the activities carried out during the period under review and presented planned activities for the fiscal year 2013/2014.

For the two consecutive years, no folia cassava brown streak diseases symptoms have been observed. However the 2013 survey showed higher incidences of white fly population compared to the 2012 survey. The white fly is the major vector for CBSD virus and other viro-diseases. The diagnostic survey team was concerned over the recent reports of CBSD occurrences near Zambia’s northern border. This was

compounded by the fact that earlier this year (2013), superabundant whiteflies with sooty mold symptoms were observed in Mambwe district of Eastern province during routine data collection in the participatory variety selection (PVS) cassava trials.

During the field visit, participants exchanged views with farmers that host the PVS on how to increase cassava acreage and suggested ways on how to minimize the effect of animals’ damage during dry season when other crops have been harvested and only cassava remains in the fields. The forum was used to come up with strategies to contain the worrisome situation of disease threats.

Dr Therese Gondwe wins top poster prize

Dr Therese Gondwe, Technology Dissemination Specialist under the MIRACLE Project based at IITA-Zambia, is the recipient of the first prize for the “Best Poster” category of the 11th African Crop Science Society Conference held in Entebbe, Uganda on 14–17 October.

The poster entitled “Scaling up soybean production for sustainable soil fertility management, income, and nutrition of smallholder farmers in Zambia: The case of the MIRACLE project” was adjudged the best among more than 50 posters displayed at the conference. The prize also came with a US\$500 cash award.

The announcement was made by Prof Rubaihayo, Chair of the Organizing Committee, during the closing ceremony of the conference, which was attended by more than 300 participants. Prof Rubaihayo said that the poster “showed excellent balance and connection between scientific research and on-the-ground development efforts related to improving the lives of people affected by HIV and AIDS.”

Dr Gondwe’s poster best suited the conference theme of “Sowing for innovations

for sustainable food and nutrition security in Africa.” It featured the importance of soybean in the continuous maize cropping system in Zambia especially among households affected by HIV and AIDS, MIRACLE’s target beneficiaries.

The poster presented the results of trials conducted during the 2011/2012 planting season in which different soybean varieties treated with phosphorus fertilizers and rhizobia inoculants were compared to those that were not. The results showed much better yields for the former than the latter. The poster also showed the soybean traits that farmers preferred, with big grain size as top priority and high yield as second.

The research results have far-reaching implications on the cultural management of soybeans as well as on the breeding considerations when developing new varieties in Zambia. Additionally, the poster also highlighted the importance of training on the scaling up of soybeans in the country and the empowerment of rural women.

Dr Gondwe credited the award to SIDA for funding the MIRACLE project, her co-authors Laston Milambo of the Zambia Agriculture



Dr Gondwe (right) wins “Best Poster” award

Research Institute and Jim Ellis-Jones of UK-based consultancy firm— Agriculture for Development. She also thanked Jeffrey Oliver, IITA Communications Specialist for Southern Africa, for the help in developing the winning poster, and her supervisors Dr David Chikoye, Dr Steve Boahen, and Melba Mussagy for the support during the field research work.

Researchers from Ghana and Nigeria get training

Fourteen senior laboratory technicians from Ghana and Nigeria have been trained on Good Laboratory Practices and Laboratory Information Management Systems (GLP-LIMS) for soil and plant analytical laboratories.

The training which took place at IITA-Ibadan from September 1 to 13, 2013 was organized by the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) in collaboration with IITA. In attendance were laboratory technicians (5 from Ghana and 9 from Nigeria) who are either supervising or managing analytical laboratories in their respective countries.

Addressing participants at the end of the training, Dr Kenton Dashiell, IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships and Capacity Development called on participants to utilize the skills learnt to tackle the constraints to agricultural productivity.

Linking agriculture to social stability in Africa, Dr Dashiell said, "Africa is passing through an exciting time as governments in the region are waking up to support agriculture... And when we get the agricultural sector right, we won't be running after our youths."

The GLP training is a train-the-trainers program. Some of the course participants will be used in organizing in-country



Participants with Dr Dashiell (middle) in a group photo

training in Soil and Plant analysis upon their return to their countries. Areas of emphasis in the training included the preparation and use of control samples, sample exchange program, use of standard operating procedures, networking for trouble shooting of analytical problems, laboratory safety, and the interpretation of analytical results for fertilizer recommendations to farmers. Participants were also trained on the use of computer software for Laboratory Information Management (LIM), and running the laboratory as a business. Each participant was given a set of certified reference samples to assist

them in monitoring the quality of their laboratory analysis.

"We believe that the improved credibility of the laboratory results will encourage small-scale farmers and others (e.g., food scientists and environmentalists) to patronize the laboratories thus enabling the farmers to better benefit from fertilizer use," says Mr Joseph Uponi, Manager, IITA Analytical Services Laboratory.

The training is the second in the series. In March 2013, IITA conducted a similar training for technicians in soil and plant analysis, thanks to the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa for providing funds.

NAFDAC and IITA step up campaign on aflatoxin contamination



L-R: Drs Dashiell, Bandyopadhyay, and Mrs Denloye during the sensitization workshop in Ibadan

IITA and Nigeria's food and drug regulator, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), are jointly raising awareness on the prevalence of aflatoxins in food and feeds.

At sensitization workshops organized in Ibadan and Abuja, the Director-General of NAFDAC, Dr Paul Orhii, said awareness became necessary in view of the dangers inherent in the consumption

of contaminated food and feeds.

Represented by Mrs Stella Denloye, the agency's Director of Laboratory Services, Orhii noted that the consumption of contaminated foods could cause liver cancer and even death.

According to him, awareness creation is a preventive strategy to reduce the risks associated with aflatoxin contamination.

Welcoming participants during the sensitization workshop in Ibadan, the

Director General of IITA, Dr Nteranya Sanginga observed that aflatoxins have become one of the major sources of food poisoning across Nigeria.

He said the meeting in Ibadan was to sensitize the public on the dangers of aflatoxins and also introduce stakeholders to IITA biocontrol product—*aflasafe*TM—that is helping farmers in tackling the problem.

Represented by Dr Kenton Dashiell, Deputy Director-General, Partnerships and Capacity Development, Dr Sanginga said that the use of *aflasafe*TM had proved effective in controlling aflatoxins in Africa.

In attendance at the stakeholder meeting were policymakers, food and drug regulators, farmers' associations, students, researchers and the private sector.

AgResult Pilot Manager, Debo Akande described the meeting as a milestone in awareness creation efforts.

Drs Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, team leader for the aflatoxin control work in IITA; and Joseph Atehnkeng, coordinator for aflatoxin control in West Africa were among the key stakeholders that made presentations during the meeting, highlighting the dangers of aflatoxins and the benefits of *aflasafe*TM.