

IITA to support agricultural transformation in Republic of South Sudan

IITA plans to deploy its agricultural innovations to help in the agricultural transformation of the Republic of South Sudan (RSS).

To this end, a team led by IITA Deputy Director General (Partnerships & Capacity Development), Dr Kenton Dashiell, visited several institutions and projects in RSS on 10–11 September.

Among the institutions visited were the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC); Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Cooperatives and Rural Development (MAFCRD); Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA); Food, Agribusiness and Rural Markets (FARM) Project; Catholic University of South Sudan (CUSS); University of Juba (UJ); and Dr John Garang's Memorial University of Science and Technology (MUOST).

During these meetings, Dr Dashiell formally introduced Dr Victor Manyong as the director for IITA's East Africa Regional hub, with the mandate of implementing research and development activities in the RSS.

The institutions expressed readiness to collaborate with IITA on different areas of mutual interest.

Some of the specific areas for research in South Sudan are (1) deployment of testing



Drs Dashiell (first from left), Manyong (fourth from left), Meseka (sixth from left), and other development partners during the visit to the RSS

kits of the six IITA crops to be tested in 2013; (2) deployment of improved seeds of the six crops to FARM-South Sudan for demonstration; (3) provision of scientific backstopping, guidance, and technical advice to agricultural projects; (4) collaboration with IFDC/ South Africa brewery on cassava public-private partnership; and (5) partnership with universities in the RSS to

provide training opportunities ranging from short- to long-term collaboration on all topics that IITA has expertise in.

It will be recalled that since 2011, IITA had been sending testing kits of cassava, cowpea, and maize to South Sudan.

Dr Dashiell was accompanied on the visit by Drs Victor Manyong and Silvestro Meseka (IITA Maize Breeder).

IITA Director for West Africa Hub, Dr Robert Asiedu, visits Abuja station

The Director for West Africa Hub, Dr Robert Asiedu on 11 October visited IITA-Abuja station. The visit to the station offered him the opportunity to assess the ongoing renovation work.

Accompanied by Dr Gbassey Tarawali and Mr Godwin Atser, Dr Asiedu was conducted around the station by Mr Francis Adunoye, the station manager.

The director commended the work done

so far, stressing that the Abuja station is strategically important and that it has a lot of potential for the hub.

Dr Asiedu also visited the research farms and urged scientists to carry out activities at the station.

Located in Nigeria's capital, the IITA-Abuja station is about 15 minutes drive to the presidential villa and is near the offices of several donors.



Dr Asiedu (middle) pose for a group photo during the visit to IITA station in Abuja

IITA DG, Dr Sanginga declares Sportsfest II open



IITA DG, Dr Sanginga kicks...

IITA DG, Dr Nteranya Sanginga on 17 October declared open the second phase of 2012 Sports Festival tagged Sportsfest II. The sportsfest is a platform for building team spirit and fostering more interaction among staff.

Games include football, volleyball, lawn tennis, and table tennis.

The opening ceremony featured dancing by staff and a brigade band display. An exhibition match between the Pink and White teams ended up in favor of White scoring five goals while Pink scored nil.

DDG (Research), Dr Ylva Hillbur encouraged participants to display sportsmanship during the event. The activities will culminate on R4D Week in the last week of November.

CSIR and IITA explore more areas of possible collaboration

IITA and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Accra, Ghana, are exploring more areas of collaboration aimed at improving food security.

CSIR Deputy Director General, Dr Mamaa Entsua-Mensah, who recently visited IITA, noted that joint efforts between IITA and CSIR would bring several benefits to Africa.

Delivering a seminar in Ibadan last September, Dr Entsua-Mensah underscored the need for greater partnership among research institutions on the continent, stressing that the solution to food insecurity in Africa lies within.

In the past, IITA and CSIR have collaborated on several projects including germplasm exchange.

Dr Entsua-Mensah said there is a need for the two institutions to work more closely especially in the area of capacity building to develop the critical mass of human resources that would tackle the present and future challenges facing food production in Africa.

She also said that CSIR has several facilities in Ghana that IITA could use



L-R: Drs. Parkes, Entsua-Mensah and Hillbur during Entsua-Mensah's visit to IITA headquarters in Ibadan

for its research activities to improve the livelihoods of farmers.

Other areas where joint actions are needed include the fields of virology, pathology, and soil science.

During her visit, Dr Entsua-Mensah held

discussions with the DDGs (Partnerships and Capacity Development), Dr Kenton Dashiell and (Research) Dr Ylva Hillbur.

In most of the meetings and campus tour, she was accompanied by Dr Elizabeth Parkes, HarvestPlus cassava breeder.

Simple technology supporting farmers to revive banana production in Burundi

Beatrice Bukuru, 50 from Kassa village in Muyinga community, Burundi is a happy woman. She wasn't so happy three years ago. A deadly strange disease was ravaging her banana, threatening her ability to earn a living and feed her family. Today through the crop, she even has two goats.

So what changed in three years? Well, she joined a farmers group called *Tugurukire kitoki* (rehabilitate banana) that has transformed the farming of this important food and staple crop in the region.

She said the group started when the president of the group came back from training with a few improved banana plantlets. He also introduced a new technology of getting planting materials which are disease free and fast growing.

Usually, Beatrice and other smallholder farmers cultivate banana suckers-- the little banana plantlets growing at the side of the mother plant either from their own existing banana or from a neighbor. It's not only slow,

as a plant can only produce about four to five suckers in a year, it also transfers pests and diseases from one farm to another.

However, with the new way of multiplying planting material, known as macropropagation, a healthy sucker is cut into small pieces which are carefully planted in a nursery and when they are big enough, they are transferred to potted bags for acclimatization before planting them in the farms. One sucker if well prepared and meristem scarified can produce up to 50 plantlets in three months.

The training on macropropagation and on improved methods of growing banana were conducted by a team from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) working under an umbrella initiative that brings together many development partners to support the agricultural sector by the name Consortium for Improving Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA).

The training was part of efforts to control the spread of diseases and pests and in particular, the banana wilt and banana bunchy top disease which are spreading rapidly and destroying banana in the Great Lakes region. All banana varieties are susceptible to the two diseases hence the need for concerted efforts by all.



A farmer demonstrates the macropropagation technology during a farmers' field day in September