



N2Africa project launched in Tanzania

The Putting Nitrogen Fixation to Work in Africa (N2Africa) project launched its activities in Tanzania yesterday. The project aims at encouraging smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa to grow legumes for their ability to fix nitrogen from the air into the soils, thus improving soil fertility, and for their nutrition and commercial value.

N2Africa was officially launched in the country by the Director for Research and Development in the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr Fidelis Myaka on behalf of the Permanent Secretary, Ms Sophia Kaduma, at a two-day workshop hosted by IITA—one of the project’s partners.

Speaking at the event, Dr Myaka lauded the project for singling out legumes. He said that despite their obvious benefit to the country’s food security, employment, and even contribution to GDP, legumes had low productivity and yields that were far below their potential.

He attributed the low yield to inadequate application of scientific knowledge by both farmers and development practitioners and other factors. He was therefore pleased to note that N2Africa was working to expand the area and enhance yields of grain legumes through the application of scientific knowledge including the use of improved varieties and rhizobium inoculants to maximize their yield potential.



Dr Fidelis Myaka, Director for Research and Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Tanzania, making the opening remarks.

“The application of scientific knowledge, especially by small-holder farmers, has always been constrained by poor targeting of the technologies to the diversity of farmers and farming conditions, poor packaging of technologies, and issues relating to input supply and output market. I am aware that N2Africa’s approach puts into consideration all these factors through farming systems analysis to adapt technologies to the conditions of small-holder farmers and through a value chain approach,” he added.

Other speakers at the forum included the Project Director, Dr Ken Giller from Wageningen University who gave an overview of the project. Dr Giller said the project aims at increasing the land area cropped with legumes.

He said the project was following a Development-for-Research model and was disseminating the already available technologies for legume production such as improved varieties, and use of rhizobium. The research would now focus on the challenges farmers were facing in adopting and adapting these technologies in their farming systems.

Dr Edward Kanju welcomed the participants to the workshop on behalf of the IITA Director for Eastern Africa Dr

Victor Manyong. Dr Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA Director for Central Africa, conveyed the IITA Director General’s greetings to the participants. Vanlauwe noted that the initiative was important to IITA as part of its natural resource management activities.

The project launch brought together a wide diversity of stakeholders working in legume production, input development, and supplies including seeds and fertilizers, processing, marketing, and regulatory bodies to policy makers.

The project, now in its second phase, is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by the Wageningen University. Phase 1 of the project initiated in 2009 was implemented in DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. The second phase started in January 2014, will focus on five core countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda but will maintain activities in the other countries under Phase 1.

Implementing partners are IITA, International Livestock Research Institute, and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. They will collaborate with the national agricultural research systems and local and international NGOs.

Yam Day on 22 February: Come celebrate the “King of Crops”!

The Yam Improvement for Income and Food Security in West Africa (YIIFSWA) project of IITA is organizing a “Yam Day” tomorrow, 22 February, to promote yam, considered the “king of crops”. An exhibition will be held to promote YIIFSWA’s key advancements made through research for development on the crop. YIIFSWA will showcase agricultural technologies and innovations designed to increase yam production and to boost smallholder farmers’ incomes, ensuring food security and economic development.

YIIFSWA holds 3rd annual progress review and planning meeting

The Yam Improvement for Income and Food Security in West Africa (YIIFSWA) held its 3rd annual progress review and planning meeting at IITA headquarters in Ibadan this week, back to back with the meeting of the project's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

In attendance were more than 60 project implementers and partners from Ghana and Nigeria, who came together to review work progress and discuss work and implementation plans for the third year.

The 5-year project aims to increase productivity of yams in the major yam-

producing countries, Ghana and Nigeria, that would stimulate a sustainable increase in incomes for small-holder producers and contribute to their food security and economic development.

The project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and is implemented in the two countries by IITA in partnership with a consortium of national and international R and D agencies: Nigerian National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Ghanaian Crops Research Institute (CRI), Natural Resources Institute (NRI), Alliance for

a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary (MSHR), in collaboration with service provider organizations, the private sector, farmers, and yam traders.

The project addresses the following major constraints:

- High cost and unavailability of disease-free seed yam.
- On-farm postharvest losses.
- Low soil fertility.
- Unexploited potential of markets by small-holder farmers.
- Unavailability of varieties adapted to stress environments of the savanna agroecologies.
- Diseases and pests.
- Limited opportunities for small-holder farmers, mainly rural women, in production and marketing.

YIIFSWA's research achievements so far include developing an aeroponics system for yam seed production, development of technologies for yam storage, development of a multiplex RT-PCR diagnostics tool for yam viruses, establishment of a quality management protocol (QMP) for seed yam, including training for regulatory bodies in Ghana and Nigeria, among others.

As part of the meeting, an exhibition of research highlights of the project will be featured during Yam Day, on 22 February, at IITA.



Members of YIIFSWA's Technical Advisory Committee and project implementing partners go on a tour of IITA facilities. YIIFSWA Project Manager Norbert Maroya (in coat and tie) briefs the guests on the project's yam seed propagation work.

IITA announces 2014 Talent Development Competitive Grant

As part of efforts to develop the capacity of staff, IITA Management has again allocated a sum of \$40,000 as a Talent Development Competitive Grant for staff training this year. The grant will be awarded to NRS who want to gain advanced knowledge and improve their skills in their areas of specialization to enhance their productivity. A maximum of \$4000 will be awarded to each successful member of staff after competitive selection.

Interested staff members are requested to fill out and submit the application form (found on IITA Intranet) adhering strictly to the program rules. The deadline for submission of all applications is 28 March 2014. As previously done, the scheme will be implemented in close collaboration with HRS, and the names of successful awardees announced after the selection committee has completed its work.

Upcoming events

Central Africa Hub

- Commissioning of IITA Science Building, 5 June 2014, Bukavu, DR Congo

Eastern Africa Hub

- CGIAR Consortium Board Meeting, 19 - 20 March 2014, IITA, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Southern Africa Hub

- Cassava World Africa. Theme: "Transforming Cassava in Africa - Enhancing Food Security through Agro-industrial Products". 20 - 21 March 2014, Radisson Blu Hotel, Lusaka, Zambia. <http://www.cmtevents.com/eventschedule.aspx?ev=140312&>.

West Africa Hub

- YIIFSWA Technical Advisory Council (TAC) Meeting, 20-21 February 2014, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
- Yam Day, 22 February 2014, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
- Sixth Reunion of IITA Alumni, 12 - 15 March 2014, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
- IITA Board Meeting, IITA-Benin, 6 - 9 May 2014, Cotonou, Benin