

Visit to Cameroon ... so what?

Between 9 and 12 September, IITA Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga visited Cameroon. During the visit, Dr Sanginga held meetings with top government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, donors, IITA staff, partners, farmers, and members of the press. The visit provided opportunity for IITA to rejuvenate its relationship with policymakers and partners in that country.

Cameroon and IITA agreed to join forces to improve agriculture, create wealth, and reduce poverty both in rural and in urban areas.

The Central African country pledged to work more closely with IITA to tap the vast agricultural innovations and technologies it offers with a view to shrinking yield gaps and improving agricultural productivity.

Thanks for your help

The Cameroonian Minister of Agriculture, Mr Essimi Menye commended IITA for its support to the country over the past years that has seen improvements in the yield of crops such as cassava.

He also thanked IITA for providing improved maize varieties and praised the Institute's efforts to combat crop pests and diseases.

The agriculture minister said he was impressed with IITA's cassava value addition efforts in Nigeria and would visit IITA's headquarters in Ibadan, in the near future, to look at innovations that could benefit his country.

Dr Nteranya Sanginga promised that IITA would continue to help enhance Cameroonian agriculture to help the country become a major player in Central Africa.

He said the Institute's new research agenda provided an opportunity for Cameroon and other tropical countries



IITA DG, Dr Nteranya Sanginga (left) and the Cameroonian Minister for External Relations, Mr. Pierre Muokoko Mbonjo (right) during the DG's visit to Cameroon

to tap innovations that would improve the livelihoods of farmers, eradicate poverty in the region, and also tackle the growing unemployment among youths.

According to him, the Institute's new strategy offers more emphasis on research, capacity building, and training, which are prerequisite for sustainable agricultural development.

At the moment, gaps exist in the productivity of many crops in Cameroon. For instance, local varieties of cassava have yields of less than 10 tons per hectare, compared with improved varieties that offer up to 30 tons per hectare.

Between 2000 and 2010, IITA-improved varieties disseminated to farmers helped the country to raise production from 1.9 million tons to 3 million tons according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Dr Sanginga said that if the Cameroonian government and IITA step up team efforts and commit more resources to agriculture, the country could realize more than 3 million tons per annum.

Building stronger ties

Support to work with international agricultural research institutes also came from the Ministry of Research and Scientific Innovations.

The Permanent Secretary, Ms Ebelle Etame Rebecca, said IITA 'is a reliable partner' in finding solutions to agricultural problems.

She said the ministry through the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development (IRAD) would continue to partner with IITA to make Cameroon a food-secure nation.

The Minister for External Relations, Mr Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, said that the government would provide support to IITA's station in Cameroon with a view to ensuring that the station serves not just Cameroon but also the whole of the Central African subregion.

Dr Sanginga also met with representatives of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The Director General was also received by the United States Ambassador to Cameroon.

In all the visits and discussions, Dr Sanginga was accompanied by the IITA-Country Representative for Cameroon, Dr Rachid Hanna.

Established 23 years ago, the IITA-Station in Cameroon conducts research for the development of agriculture – including crop improvement, crop protection, natural resource management, and commercialization -- in Cameroon and other countries in Central Africa.

From right: Dr Rachid Hanna, Country Representative, IITA-Cameroon; IITA DG, Dr Sanginga; Dr Holger Kirscht, IITA Scientist; and representatives of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in Cameroon.



New AGRA head lauds IITA's work in East Africa

Ms Jane Karuku, recently named President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), commended IITA's research-for-development work in East Africa, emphasizing the institute's R4D efforts on cassava which she says is a vital crop not only in the region but also across sub-Saharan Africa.

Ms Karuku was at IITA's East Africa Hub office in Dar es Salaam as part of her familiarization tour of agricultural R&D organizations working in the region. At the office, Karuku held brief discussions with IITA staff.

She thanked IITA for hosting AGRA in the country, adding that the two institutions should keep communication lines open and explore avenues for collaborative work since both serve smallholder African farmers.

Some of the areas she mentioned included strengthening extension to facilitate the transfer of research findings to intended beneficiaries, and ensure that these findings are used and lead to



New AGRA head, Ms Jane Karuku (second from left) in a meeting with IITA staff in Dar

positive changes in their lives.

She said that AGRA has a number of ongoing initiatives to strengthen the weak extension services across Africa, which she attributed to a shortage of resources. She emphasized that extension is vital to take research from the labs to the fields.

Ms Karuku emphasized that AGRA had a strong capacity building program at MSc and PhD levels and is supporting local institutions such as agrodealers.

Edward Kanju, Cassava Breeder

and acting country representative, welcomed the new AGRA president on behalf of IITA, saying that the institute was honored by the president's visit. He echoed her sentiments that the two institutes can indeed collaborate in many areas such as capacity building.

The AGRA president was accompanied by Ann Mbaabu, Director for Market Access Program; Sylvia Mwichuli, Director of Communications & Public Affairs; and Fred Muguku, Country Officer for Tanzania.

The IITA-Tanzania contingent was composed of Danny Coyne, Fen Beed, James Legg, Joseph Rusike, Alex Omodo, Eveline Odiambo, Gerald Rusulabeza, and Catherine Njuguna.

Scientists discuss use of modern cassava breeding techniques

African researchers met to discuss use of modern technologies in cassava breeding.

As cassava gains increasing importance as a food security and economic crop, cassava breeders from 12 African countries met in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, recently to discuss ways to work together to tap into advances in biotechnology to speed up breeding of cassava varieties with required traits such as high yield, resistance to pests and diseases, and tolerance to drought.

The meeting was organized by IITA under the auspices of the Cassava Breeding Community of Practice (CoP) funded by the General Challenge Program (GCP) of CGIAR. It was co-hosted by the Tanzanian Agricultural Research Institute (ARI).

According to Emmanuel Okogbenin from the National Root Crop Research Institute (NRCRI) of Nigeria and Cassava Products Delivery leader of the GCP, the purpose of the workshop was to

bring together cassava breeders from national agricultural research systems (NARS) to discuss how to modernize breeding in Africa through use of advances in biotechnology such as molecular-assisted breeding (MAB) in the face of emerging challenges and to share and learn from each other's experiences.

The first phase of CoP, 2003 – 2010, covered four countries: Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, and Uganda, providing capacity building and equipment and helped to set up simple biotech laboratories. Its successes include the release of varieties with resistance to Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD) developed with genetic material from cassava varieties from Latin America using markers. These varieties were released in Tanzania and Nigeria.

Geoffrey Mkamilo, team leader, Cassava Research and Development in Tanzania, said the meeting facilitated sharing of experiences between new and old members. He said they identified key traits for future breeding work among the member countries. These include Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) resistance, mealiness, and postharvest physiological deterioration.

Melaku Gedil, Molecular Geneticist and Head of the Bioscience Center at IITA-Ibadan and also the workshop organizer, said IITA organized the workshop as part of its capacity building role under the GCP. He said this was the fourth such workshop that the institute was organizing for the CoP.

Resource persons from IITA who made presentations at the workshop included Melaku Gedil and Ismail Rabbi, Molecular Geneticist from IITA Ibadan, and Edward Kanju, cassava breeder; and James Legg, Virologist from IITA-Tanzania.



Participants at the meeting

IITA welcomes Dr Dontsop Nguezet

Dr Paul Martin Dontsop Nguezet has assumed duty in Bukavu, IITA-DR Congo as Postdoctoral Fellow – Agricultural Economist. Dr Dontsop Nguezet, a Cameroonian, obtained his BSc in Economics from the University of Yaounde II (SOA) in 2001, MSc in Economics from the same university in 2002, and another MSc and PhD in Agricultural Economics from the University of Ibadan in 2006 and 2011, respectively.

Prior to this appointment, he worked as a Consultant at Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice) in Cotonou, Benin Republic. He was a Research Assistant in the CAADP Project of IITA, Ibadan, from January to September 2009 and at the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Ibadan from January to December 2008.

He is married with a daughter. His e-mail address is p.dontsop@cgiar.org or pdontsop@gmail.com.



Nguezet

Announcement

The 16th Triennial Symposium of the International Society for Tropical Root Crops (ISTRC) will be held at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State, Nigeria, 23–28 September 2012.