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THE BULLETIN

IITA "magic" works on farmers

Some yam farmers are calling the minisett technology "magic" after they saw its performance in the field.

Farmer-representatives from 40 villages in the six local government areas (LGA) of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) who attended a Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop on the production of quality seed yam using the minisett technology at Gwagwalada on 23 May, were captivated by the process of preparing the minisetts. They learned about the major pests and diseases affecting yam production and received practical training on the technique.

Participants, however, laughed in disbelief when Dr Beatrice Aighewi, YIIFSWA's Seed Systems Specialist, cut the mother tuber into small setts. They insisted that the minisetts would not grow. However, some lead farmers who had taken part in previous training activities confirmed the good performance of minisetts in the field. In fact, one of them asserted that the technique was "magic."

Yam farmers in the FCT are now beginning to accept the value and benefits of the minisett technology on seed yam production after the YIIFSWA project had given several training sessions. These were intended to solve the problems of lack of high quality seed tubers and the high prevalence of pests and diseases which had lead to low productivity.

Salisu Saraki, a yam farmer who attended the training, was grateful for the opportunity after losing a significant amount of his crop to anthracnose last year. He explained, "Three years ago I lost some of my crop to the disease. Last year the same disease returned and I faced the possibility of losing my entire yam crop. I thought then that it was witchcraft because the plants looked as if they had been burned. I sought the help of shamans (local priest or priestess who can use magic) to ward off the curse on my farm but to no avail. It cost me two goats and some money. In fact, the shamans argued with each other about the intervention they had made on my behalf.

The problem got worse by the day and so I went to other yam farmers for help. They directed me to Dr Adamu Shuaibu of MSHR (Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary) who works in the YIIFSWA project. I told him of my plight. When he visited my field, a significant number of my yam plants were already dead. He said he knew what it was but wanted a second opinion. He returned with a lecturer from the University of Abuja who ascertained that the problem was anthracnose. They asked me to buy Z-force (a fungicide with active agent mancozeb 80% WP), mix it with water, and use it to spray my plants. I did that. The remaining plants survived and I was extremely grateful for the advice.

"This year my community was chosen to host a demonstration field and I was invited to participate and learn how to produce clean seeds." With a wide grin on his face he concluded, "The training was very informative. Now I know more about pests and diseases that may affect my yam crop and I can do something about them."

A lead farmer from Gwagwalada recounted how favorable varieties such as Pepa and Ame have almost disappeared because "The ground didn't accept them (tubers did not germinate) any longer, so we have stopped planting them. Meccakusa (a variety valued for its size and poundability) is no longer productive and we were getting worried, but with this technology there is hope. I learned about the minisett technique last year so this year I planted minisetts on 1500 heaps for seed yam production."

Another lead farmer from Kuje stated, "Yam is a source of energy and strength for my people so we eat it every day to be able to farm well. With this 'IITA magic' we can produce more and better tubers."

The word is fast spreading about the benefits of the minisett technique from those communities that have attended YIIFSWA's demonstrations. Now other communities are reaching out to YIIFSWA's extension partner in Abuja, MSHR, to ask to be included in project activities. Dr Shuaibu said that the number of new communities had to be pared down to 40 villages this year but those that were chosen are spread out across the FCT to reach a large population of yam farmers.

Each farmer received seed yam, fungicide, and pesticide for the demonstration plot. The trained farmers are expected to assist the extension agents assigned to their locality with community training on using minisett for seed yam production and the management of demonstration plots in their localities.

Dr Beatrice Aighewi of YIIFSWA explains about the pests and diseases affecting yam.

ILRI establishes cassava processing demonstration unit

The International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) office in IITA-Ibadan has established a demonstration unit that is converting waste to wealth by processing cassava peels into high-quality feeds for ruminants, poultry and pigs. On 22 May IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga visited the facility in Ibadan to see the various activities involved in processing cassava peel into high quality feeds.

Dr Nteranya Sanginga (center) meets the staff at ILRI led by Country Program Manager Dr Iheanacho Okike at the cassava processing demo facility.

The DG took a keen interest in the process. He was happy with the progress of the project and said he would like greater collaboration with ILRI in promoting the by-products of IITA's mandate crops including soybean residues as livestock feed.

He suggested that testing the feeds with the fish and pigs reared by the IITA Youth Agripreneurs would provide a good opportunity for ILRI and IITA to continue to work together and develop joint proposals for funding opportunities. He assured the staff that the necessary support would be extended in this joint effort. He said he was happy to know that the ILRI farm was being resuscitated to provide facilities for animal trials. Finally, he thanked the staff and promised that he would ensure that a visit to ILRI would be a regular component of the itinerary for important visitors coming to IITA.

HRS raises awareness on harassment and discrimination policy

IITA's Human Resources Services (HRS) had conducted seminars for all staff on the Institute's harassment and discrimination policy on 26 and 27 May at the IITA Conference Center in line with the CGIAR's campaign on gender and diversity.

The policy was launched last June 2014. Mrs Lilian Mendoza, Head of HRS, explained that the purpose of the seminar was to raise awareness on the existence of the policy, IITA's stance on the subject, what constitutes harassment and discrimination, and how victims can get help in IITA.

IITA is a global organization and has 1000 nationally recruited staff and 200 international staff. With this multiracial workforce IITA is committed to providing a work environment that respects the dignity of individuals and is free of all forms of discrimination based on ethnic, social, or political background, color, nationality, religion, gender, disability, or sexual preference, and devoid of both general and sexual harassment.

It is imperative to note that diversity skills are critical to IITA's effectiveness in working with partner organizations and the end-users of the knowledge and technologies developed in meeting our fundamental objectives of fighting hunger and poverty.

At the seminar, staff members were encouraged to report any cases of harassment and discrimination and were assured of their privacy and protection against reprisal.

Mrs Mendoza address members of staff during the awareness seminar.

IITA to host AWARD Women's Leadership Program in June 2015

IITA is collaborating with African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) in hosting the AWARD Women's Leadership and Management course to be held in IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria in June.

IITA warmly invites participants from partner organizations, colleagues, and other interested parties. Reservation deadline is 5 June 2015. Click http://bit.ly/1Cd7lz8 to view details on how to apply.

AWARD
African Women in Agricultural Research and Development

Cassava Monitoring Survey Project conducts 3-day training workshop for survey enumerators

The IITA Cassava Monitoring Survey (CMS) project, designed to study the adoption rate and diffusion patterns of improved cassava varieties in Nigeria, successfully conducted a training workshop in Ibadan on 20-22 May for the 60 enumerators on contract to collect data for the project.

The training covered aspects of the use of geographic information system and related tools in the collection of data to facilitate adoption mapping, collection of cassava samples for DNA-based varietal identification using single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) markers to facilitate the identification of the varieties developed and released by IITA and the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), as well as a gender-differentiated survey of end use.

To provide an accurate description and understanding of these diffusion patterns of improved cassava cultivars, those who produce 80% of Nigeria's cassava–the farm families–will be directly involved in the survey. Specifically, the enumerators are expected to elicit the needed data from 2,500 cassava-growing households in 16 states.

Dr Victor Manyong, Director, IITA-Social Science and CMS Project Director, welcomed the enumerators to the training and highlighted the importance of the assignment and the high standard required in data collection. He emphasized that the development community at large was watching and waiting to see the results coming from this study because it was the first of its kind. Dr Manyong also stressed the importance of team work for success and enjoined participants to start building the team spirit right from the workshop.

In support, Dr Godwin Asumugha, Director of Extension and Farming Systems Research, NRCRI, said that in addition to providing direct and comprehensive evidence to address research questions on

Ms Funke Akomalafe, a trainee, practicing how to capture the agronomic characteristics of cassava on the field.

cassava adoption, the study would produce replicable tools and methods for measuring variety adoption.

"The outputs of this study are of great interest to the development partners who could use the results to improve interventions and direct strategies," he said. Dr Asumugha said that the study was the first of such size and scale to be conducted on cassava adoption; before this, adoption studies had been piecemeal, focusing on small communities and local government areas.

A detailed overview of the research approach of the CMS Project was given by Dr Tahirou Abdoulaye, CMS Project Manager. "The objectives are to assess the adoption of improved cultivars developed over the years by IITA and NRCRI in Nigeria and to investigate the drivers of adoption for these varieties," he said.

Dr Abdoulaye said that one of the key expected outcomes from the monitoring survey was better decision-making in cassava breeding and dissemination activities of IITA and key partners such as NRCRI.

The workshop equipped participants with practical skills on the use of GPS for the collection of data and area measurement and of computer tablets and of Surveybe software for socioeconomic data collection. Training also covered agronomic traits to differentiate the various cassava cultivars on-farm and the methods for collecting and preserving samples for DNA analysis.

A field visit to three communities around Ijaye village, Oyo State, was arranged to enable training participants to practice everything that they had learned including a pretest of the survey instrument, and to undergo tests on the use of GPS and the method of DNA sample collection. The hands-on exercises provided an opportunity for the workshop organizers to assess the training outcomes. Furthermore, a post-field assessment session allowed the participants to receive feedback on individual and group performances.

Data collection is expected to start in early June 2015 for 60 days in all regions of Nigeria.

IITA has been chosen to lead this important and innovative adoption study based on its expertise and experience with similar work in West Africa. Molecular biologists, breeders, and economists are joining hands in making sure that correct identification of varieties and household characteristics is done to produce an accurate picture of cassava adoption in Nigeria. Dr Ismail Rabbi of the IITA Bioscience Center will coordinate the DNA extraction to confirm varietal identification.

NRCRI, Cornell University USA, Catholic Relief Services, and a host of other international and bilateral partners are also involved in the project's implementation. Funds from theCGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will drive this initiative.

Group photo of the trainees with the organizers of the workshop in Ibadan.

GIS training course for agricultural research in Africa successfully completed

Eighteen trainees drawn from various sectors in Nigeria, DR Congo, Ghana, Malawi, and Rwanda have successfully completed a training course on Geographical Information System (GIS) in Ibadan conducted by the IITA Geo-Spatial Laboratory with the support of the Capacity Development Office (CDO).

Dr Kenton Dashiell congratulates a participant from Nigeria.

Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG Partnerships and Capacity Development, welcomed the participants on behalf of Zoumana Bamba, Head of CDO. He highlighted the numerous opportunities for using GIS as a tool for analysis and decision-making and urged the trainees to use the knowledge derived from the training to improve the research activities in their regions.

The training focus was on the use of GIS as a tool in agricultural development research. The objective was to enable participants to understand the basic concepts of GIS and to discover how it can be applied in the context of IITA's research-for-development agenda in a descriptive, analytical, and predictive manner. The participants were exposed to various GIS tools that enable dynamic decision-making in priority setting, spatial targeting, trial site selection, and the dissemination of research through simple maps. Particular emphasis was placed on how to bring field data from surveys and trials into a GIS and perform analysis in the spatial dimension.

The course combined intensive lectures and practical sessions on basic concepts of GIS and ArcGIS, the use of symbols on maps and cartographic design, GIS data needs for natural resource applications, geoprocessing and GIS modeling tools in agricultural research, designing maps with GIS, and the use of global positioning systems (GPS).

At the end of the training participants were ready to go and apply spatial technologies for priority setting and improved decision making for the R4D agenda of the Institute. The resource persons were Mr Michael Haertel, GIS Database Expert, Mr Tunrayo Alabi, the GIS Support Services Manager, and Mrs Sarah Chiejile, GIS Data Analyst.

IITA featured in The Washington Post

The Washington Post recently published an article highlighting the debate about genetically modified organisms in Africa, and mentioned IITA and Leena Tripathi, IITA Biotechnologist. Read the full article here.

IITA researcher Leena Tripathi being interviewed by Washington Post journalist Tamara Haspel.

Events

Africa RISING Program Coordination Team retreat, Washington D.C., USA, 2–5 June

Annual Review and Planning Meeting - Africa RISING, NAFAKA and TUBORESHA CHAKULA Scaling Project, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 8–10 July

Africa RISING ESA Project Annual Review and Planning Meeting, Mangochi, Malawi, 14–16 July

Africa RISING ESA Project Steering Committee Meeting, Mangochi, Malawi, 16 July

Tropentag 2015, Humboldt Universitaet zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany, 17–19 September

First World Congress on Root and Tuber Crops, Nanning, Guangxi province, southern China, 5–10 October

The 7th International Conference of the African Soil Science Society Announcement of Special Program: Soil Fertility Management for Sustainable Intensification in West and Central Africa, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 25 October – 1 November