



Key forum on plant viral diseases organized in Arusha, Tanzania

The 12th International Plant Virus Epidemiology (IPVE) symposium was held in Arusha, Tanzania, this week with the theme "Evolution, Ecology and Control of Plant Viruses." The meeting brought together over 200 scientists and leading experts on plant viruses from 40 countries all around the world.

Dr Lava Kumar, IITA virologist and chair of the Symposium said the meeting provided participants with the opportunity to share experiences and the latest knowledge and technologies to control plant viruses and mull over a global strategy to combat emerging and reemerging plant virus diseases focused on Africa.

"The event is very special as it is taking place in Africa for the first time. It will therefore devote a lot of time on exploring the key challenges facing the continent in tackling the key viral diseases to increase agricultural productivity, food availability, and economic development," said Kumar.

Dr Nteranya Sanginga, IITA Director General, speaking at the forum, noted that Africa was changing for the better and so was its leadership. Its future is thus looking bright, he said. However, there were several challenges that need to be addressed including viral diseases of staple crops such as cassava, banana, and maize, he added.

He said cassava is going to be the crop of the future for Africa, noting that it is not just a food security crop but that it holds immense potential as an income earner as it is a source of industrial raw materials such as glucose and starch.

"Cassava production is picking up – in Nigeria, in Malawi, in Rwanda, and Tanzania. Countries are changing from overreliance on maize. The future of this crop in the continent is bright. However, it faces many challenges including the two viral diseases that are a headache



Group photo, 12th IPVE Symposium, Arusha, Tanzania.

to our farmers and policymakers," he said. "We need science to solve these problems."

Sanginga also emphasized the need to invest in building the capacity of young researchers for the future and said the symposium provided a great opportunity for young scientists and students to learn and interact with experienced researchers from all over the world.

Other speakers included Dr Elly Kafiriti, Director of the Naliende Research Institute representing Dr Fidelis Myaka, Director for Research and Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives; and Dr Joseph Nduguru from the Mikocheni Agricultural Research Institute (MARI), Tanzania, a co-conference organizer.

The meeting was jointly organized by IITA, MARI, the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) of Uganda, AVRDC—The World Vegetable Center in Arusha, and CORAF under the auspices of the International Committee on Plant Virus Epidemiology (ICPVE).



IITA DDG Ken Dashiell (right) receives plaque of appreciation from Alberto Fereres (center), ICPVE Chair, for hosting the 12th IPVE Symposium, with Lava Kumar, chair, Organizing Committee.

Africa RISING holds series of meetings in Ghana

The Africa Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation (Africa RISING) held a series of meetings last week in Accra, Ghana, that included a stakeholders' meeting/consultation and separate meetings of the West Africa Project Steering Committee (PSC) and the Program Coordination Team (PCT).

The stakeholders' meeting, held on 23 January, kicked off the series of meetings. According to Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA R4D Director for West Africa and Chair of the West Africa PSC, the forum provided project implementers and participants with the opportunity to share progress on activities in the two project countries (Ghana and Mali), talk about plans for year 2, and discuss important issues that affect project implementation, partnerships, and operations. More than

40 participants that included project implementers from Ghana and Mali, national partners, and representatives from CGIAR centers involved in the project, NGOs, other donor groups, and regional and international entities attended the 1-day meeting.

Meanwhile, the West Africa PSC and the PCT each met for the first time since the Africa RISING program was launched in October 2011. Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Development, chairs the PCT this year.

In both meetings, the program and project (West Africa)-level management structures, roles of committee members, research framework, workplans and budgets, implementation concerns, and issues that came out of the stakeholders'

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IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga emphasized that science is needed to solve problems in agriculture.

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forum and various meetings were discussed. Several other meetings on the side were conducted to discuss specific issues such as research design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and communication.

Africa RISING is a USAID-supported program consisting of three multi-stakeholder agricultural research projects in sub-Saharan Africa. Through action research and development partnerships, Africa RISING will create opportunities for smallholder farm households in key African farming systems to move out of hunger and poverty through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, and income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

The three projects are led by IITA (in West Africa and East and Southern Africa) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI, in the Ethiopian Highlands). The International Food Policy Research Institute leads an associated project on monitoring, evaluation and



Participants, Africa RISING stakeholders' meeting, Accra, Ghana.

impact assessment. Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon coordinates both the West Africa

and East and Southern Africa project components.

COMPRO-II off to a good start

The Commercial Products II project (COMPRO-II) has made significant progress in achieving its first year's targets despite some challenges. This was noted at the end of the project's first Steering Committee and Planning Meeting held in Naivasha, Kenya, on 14-17 January 2013.

More than 30 participants attended the meeting, including among others, Dr Prem Warrior from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Dr Sanginga Nteranya, IITA Director General; Dr Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA R4D Director, Central Africa Hub and for natural resources management; and Dr Cargele Masso, COMPRO-II Project Leader. Participants included members of the project's

Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and project objective leaders from partner organizations, including the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), Farm Input Promotions (FIPS), Centre for Agricultural Bioscience International (CABI), International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), and IITA.

Also in attendance was a farmer representative and representatives of the project countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, and Ethiopia) and their regulatory agencies.

During the first day of the meeting, project leaders, objective leaders, and country representatives gave updates on the project, which commenced in April 2012. Challenges faced by the teams were

identified and discussed during a plenary session held on the second day. The country and objective leaders developed action plans for 2013 while at the same time addressing challenges identified over the first 9 months of the project.

The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) members also met and gave recommendations on how to steer the project forward to achieve targets and address the challenges.

The farmer representative, Rev Sam Ebukalin from Uganda, talked about the impact of research by projects such as COMPRO-II to smallholder farmers. The Reverend said the COMPRO-II project results would significantly change the lives of smallholder farmers not only in Uganda but the larger African continent.

The COMPRO-II project is a 5-year project funded by the Gates Foundation. It is the second phase of an initiative that began three years ago (COMPRO-I which worked with partners) to assess commercial products available in the market that had the potential to significantly increase farmers' yields by 15-30%.

This work was undertaken in Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. Findings showed that of the more than 100 products evaluated, only three resulted in yield increases of 15-30% when used as directed. In COMPRO-II, the project aims to make a substantial contribution to food security and poverty reduction among smallholder farmers.

This initiative hopes to reach over 2 million smallholder farming households in the participating countries with information on effective and profitable commercial products by 2016. The project will rely on public-private partnerships to promote effective commercial products. Regulatory agencies from participating countries will be involved in the entire process.



Participants, COMPRO-II steering committee and planning meeting, Naivasha, Kenya.

IITA explores ways to boost cocoa production with CRIN...

IITA and the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN) are exploring new ways and approaches to improve the productivity of cocoa and the livelihoods of cocoa farmers.

A delegation from IITA led by Dr Robert Asiedu met with the Executive Director of CRIN, Prof Malachy Akoroda, early this month. In the meeting, which was attended by Dr Ranjana Bhattacharjee and other researchers from CRIN, it was agreed that



IITA and CRIN counterparts brainstorm on research ideas.

there is a need for a closer collaboration between the two institutes.

CRIN proposed the need to urgently duplicate the cocoa germplasm at IITA to prevent the threat of genetic erosion as well as the influence of climate change.

Discussions also centered on capacity building, production of clean seed systems using somatic embryogenesis, and appropriate breeding programs against pests and diseases. There was also a request for the use of IITA research facilities.

Dr Asiedu said the doors of IITA are open to partners and that joint efforts between the two institutes would create impact not just in Nigeria but also in the entire cocoa belt in Africa.

A second meeting was hosted in IITA between 23 and 25 January to brainstorm on research areas. CRIN's Director of Research, Dr Lelia Dongo, and other cocoa experts attended the meeting.

During the meeting, the two institutions developed concept notes on different research areas for cocoa improvement. The synergy between IITA and CRIN is expected to attract funding to the sector in the nearest future and genuinely transform the cocoa industry and the livelihoods of small-holders farmers in the country.

...and inks MOU with Wageningen University

IITA and Wageningen University recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to foster "closer collaboration especially with regard to the CGIAR Research Program on Humidtropics". IITA's Deputy Director General for Research Ylva Hillbur and Martin Kropff, Rector of Wageningen University and Vice President of the Executive Board of Wageningen University and Research Centre (UR), signed the MOU for their respective institutions.

A workshop and one-on-one meetings between the IITA delegation and WUR scientists were also held to discuss areas for closer collaboration.

Plant Production Systems Prof Ken Giller of Wageningen UR chaired the workshop where the IITA delegation that includes Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA R4D Director for Central Africa hub and Natural Resource Management, and 22 WUR researchers discussed and looked at areas for collaboration.

The IITA delegation was impressed by the potential areas of collaboration and the quality of the research at Wageningen. Both institutions are looking at more concrete activities as a result of the signing of the MOU.

Source: Wageningen UR enews

Welcome, new staff!

IITA welcomes three new staff who joined this month.

Dr Kwesi Atta-Krah joins IITA as Director for the CGIAR Research Program, "Integrated Agricultural Systems for the Humid Tropics", which is hosted and led by IITA, effective 25 January. He will be responsible for providing overall management and leadership for the CRP on Humidtropics, and coordinating partnerships management among participating CGIAR centers, and non-CGIAR partners and stakeholders.

Dr Atta-Krah comes to IITA from Bioversity International, where he has been DDG from June 2005 up till 31 December 2012. Earlier, from 2000 to 2005, he was Regional Director for Bioversity in sub-Saharan Africa. He also worked with the World Agroforestry Centre (1993-2000), IITA (1989-1993), and the International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA), now ILRI (1983-1989).

In his early years as a research scientist at IITA, Dr Atta-Krah was a member of the Resource and Crops Management Program, and was Coordinator for the Alley Farming Network for Tropical Africa (AFNETA).



He was a key proponent of what was referred to as "Development-oriented On-Farm Research" — linking research to development, extension, and impact.

He holds a BSc degree in Crop Science/ Agronomy, from the University of Ghana, Legon (1977), and MSc and PhD degrees in Agroforestry/Natural Resources Management (1980 and 1984) from the University of Ibadan. He has held senior positions in research management, and has served on a number of international committees related to agriculture, food security and environment.

Dr Atta-Krah, a Ghanaian national, is married to Felicia, and they have 3 children.

Dr Dries Roobroeck has joined the IITA team in Nairobi, Kenya, as postdoctoral fellow on soil fertility management. He is an alumnus of Ghent University in Belgium where he obtained a PhD in 2012. He completed an MSc in Biology with a major in Environmental Studies at the University of Antwerp, Belgium in 2006.

He has worked as scientific personnel (PhD fellowship) at the Isotope Bioscience Laboratory, Faculty of Bioscience Engineering, Ghent University. During that time he was engaged in several international research projects and tutored master's students for their dissertation study. His field of expertise is soil biogeochemistry and multivariate statistical analysis. At IITA he will investigate the non-responsiveness of soils in Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria,



and Congo. He can be contacted at D.Roobroeck@cgiar.org or telephone +254-20-8632930.

Ms Zulfawu Yahaya has joined IITA-Ibadan as the procurement specialist of the African Development Bank-funded project "Support to Agricultural Research for Development of Strategic Crops in Africa (SARD-SC)". She is a trained procurement specialist with over ten years of progressive experience in all areas of procurement, finance, project management, administration, and research. She holds a Master's in Business Administration with specialization in finance from Argosy University, Atlanta, USA (2009) and a Bachelor's of Education degree with specialization in business from the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana (1999).

Zulfawu was formerly the procurement and finance manager for MANET in Accra, Ghana, before this appointment. She worked as a senior investment specialist at Flagstar Bank in Georgia, USA, in 2009-2011. She was the procurement specialist/buyer and later purchasing/finance manager (procurement) at Home Depot Inc. in Atlanta, USA, (2005-2009), and finance/administrative assistant at CAC Limited, Accra, Ghana (2000-2003).

She is from Ghana and was accompanied to Ibadan by her husband and three children. Her e-mail address is Z.Yahaya@cgiar.org.

