



IITA, partners launch landmark US\$12M yam initiative for West Africa

In one of the most ambitious efforts ever undertaken on behalf of an orphan crop like yam, IITA and a host of partners on Monday officially launched a groundbreaking initiative to dramatically boost yam productivity and double the incomes of three million yam farmers in West Africa.

The 5-year Yam Improvement for Income and Food Security in West Africa (YIIFSWA) project, which is supported by a US\$12 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, will be led by IITA in collaboration with the governments of Ghana and Nigeria, the UK's Natural Resources Institute (NRI), the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The YIIFSWA project will focus on increasing yields through better seed tuber supply and improving markets for this underground, edible tuber—some of which are as small as a fist, others as tall as a man.

"Right now, most farmers cultivate yams mainly for household consumption, but if we can increase yields, while also improving marketing conditions, then many of these farmers should be able to earn a steady income from growing yams," said IITA's Director General Dr. Nteranya Sanginga.

The initial focus of YIIFSWA is on 200,000 smallholder farm families in Ghana and Nigeria—90 percent of whom cultivate less than two hectares. A key priority is to ensure that affordable pest- and disease-free seed

(At right, L-R) Kapinga, Sanginga, and Adepomola; (below) YIIFSWA stakeholders at the project launch in IITA-Ibadan.



yams are available to farmers, along with storage and handling technologies that can reduce post-harvest loss.

Yam breeders will develop and widely disseminate new, higher-yielding, disease-resistant varieties. The private sector partners are expected to play a key role by providing certified seed and working closely with efforts to link small-holder farmers, particularly those in remote areas, to markets where a strong and steady demand for yams should allow them to realize the economic benefits of increased productivity.

"Yams are a very important crop to smallholder farmers in Africa, and if these farmers can grow more, and have better access to markets, it can make a real difference in their lives," said Dr. Regina Kapinga, program officer for the Agricultural Development initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"We want to reach a stage where robust yam seed production techniques will use parts of the yam plant other than tubers, thereby releasing an

additional 30 percent of the crop for food," she emphasized.

Declaring the project officially launched was Chief Tola Adepomola, National Vice President and Chair of the Roots and Tubers Committee of the All Farmers' Association of Nigeria, who represented yam farmers in West Africa, the target beneficiaries of YIIFSWA.

"I am extremely honored to be here today to declare this very important project as started, and to represent yam farmers everywhere," Chief Adepomola said. "I believe that this gesture from the organizers of this project signifies that YIIFSWA is truly concerned with us."

"On behalf of the yam farmers, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, through Dr Kapinga, for making this project a reality, as well as to IITA and the various partners represented in this gathering for taking this bold step of ensuring the future and well-being of yam and those depending on it for their livelihoods," he stressed.



IITA sets up meteorological stations in DRC to monitor climate

IITA in the DR Congo has set up a network of meteorological stations to monitor climate and contribute to research on climate change. As a result, the DR Congo foresters have joined this effort and have purchased a meteorological station in their YOKO forest reserve. IITA Scientist, Stefan Hauser installed the station and trained eight young forestry students in the management of the climate sensors, the programming of the data logger and in handling and analyzing the meteorological data collected by the electronic station.

The Congo basin is the largest contiguous forested area in Africa, and is being threatened by agricultural practices such as logging and slash-and-burn. Climate change as a consequence of deforestation has been documented in African history in the past 3000 years. Today the combined effects of greenhouse gas emissions and

deforestation may cause stronger and highly undesired effects on agriculture and livelihoods.

The REFORCO project in Kisangani, DR Congo is training foresters to build capacities in protecting forest resources and engendering sustainable forest use. The impact of climate on forests plays a major role in conservation efforts, and IITA's capacity in climate research and monitoring will make a significant contribution in improving the knowledge on forest management under changing climatic conditions.



Hauser (leftmost) training young Congolese forestry students on operating a meteorological station.

IITA supports IOM/SLeCAD farmer training in Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone Chamber of Agribusiness Development (SLeCAD), in collaboration with IOM Netherlands, has concluded a 3-week training in Business Development, Communication Management and Web Management skills for farmer organizations in the Western Area on 15 March.

The training helped 20 participants from various farmer organizations to develop a business plan, run profitable, successful and sustainable businesses in their communities, and develop a marketing communication plan. The training also helped participants to learn how to develop and manage a website.

The activity was conducted under the TRQN (Temporary Return of

Qualified Nationals) project, which is an initiative of IOM (International Organization for Migration) of the Netherlands funded by the Dutch Foreign Ministry. The initiative aims to build institutional capacities in Sierra Leone through the deployment of local experts in the Netherlands as resource persons.

The Executive Secretary of SLeCAD Mr Ahmed Nanoh told SLV that his organization, together with partners IOM, UNIDO, FAO, IITA, PAGE, CARE, and IFAD, is determined to fight poverty and promote the expansion of local and international value chains by generating appropriate skills and technologies among farmers.

Value chain approach changes focus of IITA cassava breeding work

In the last decade or so, IITA breeders and their partners have widened their target group to include all the stakeholders along the crop's value chain and extended the crop's uses to include industrial processing.

According to Mahungu Nzola, IITA cassava breeder based in DRC during a seminar on 'Integrating value chains in breeding strategy: the case of cassava,' in Dar es Salaam on 15 March, the change was as a result of the launch of the Global Cassava Development Strategy in 2000. Its vision was that the crop would spur development and raise incomes for producers, processors and traders, and contribute to food security.

This led the breeders towards a demand-driven approach to respond to the needs of various end users from pre-production to consumption making it more dynamic. They started to widen their selection criteria to include other aspects such as inputs, Natural Resource Management and market pull.

"Breeders must to tap into market studies to understand stakeholders' needs in addition to the traditional traits of yield and diseases tolerance," he said.

"For example, the production of ethanol from cassava is not competitive compared to sugar cane as it requires more energy to distill the alcohol. However, juicy cassava would come in handy for this yet in the past breeding work, we have discarded juicy cassava," he cited.

He added that for a long time, breeding work had focused on early maturing varieties, yet when it comes to industrial use where cassava is grown on a large scale, sometimes the crop stays longer than necessary in the field. During this time, some of them start losing their yield and succumbing to diseases that they had shown strong resistance to.

He says in DRC, IITA has initiated a selection scheme that incorporates both harvesting at standard time of maturity (12 months) and at late time of maturity (24 months) at the advanced and uniform stages of the trial.

"We are also working with machine fabricators to develop varieties that are suitable to the use of various equipment in the market, such as harvesters and peelers," he added.

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