

'Saving local yam varieties holds benefits'

Meeting the global demand of yams in the future depends on preserving the local varieties and maintaining the diversity of the crop, experts have said.

The local varieties may also turn out to offer solutions to emerging threats such as pest and diseases, and climate change, says Jane Toll, Project Manager with the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

Like several other crops, the diversity of yam is being narrowed leaving breeders with few varieties and threatening future crop improvement programs.

A global meeting in Ibadan which sought a conservation strategy for yams identified climate change as a major factor responsible for genetic erosion—a term that describes the loss of varieties.

IITA participants at the meeting included Dominique Dumet, who anchored the meeting; Paula Bramel, who delivered the welcome address; Antonio Lopez, Danny Coyne, Hidehiko Kikuno, Lava Kumar, Ranjana Bhattacharjee and Gueye Badara among others.

National partners from Togo, the Republic of Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, Colombia, Thailand and Japan were also in attendance.

Toll said, "Climate change is actually putting a lot of pressure."

Based on projections, by 2050, temperatures will rise above current levels with some areas predicted to witness drought while others flood. The changing climate might also bring about new pests and diseases. Consequently, predicting planting and harvest seasons



Participants at the global yam conservation meeting in Ibadan pose for a group photo

will become more difficult. How food crops will cope is still a matter of concern.

Toll said, "Though plants may adapt, their productivity might be affected negatively—a situation that will have dire consequence on food security."

"One best option is conservation to maintain the diversity of what we have now so that we might refer to them in the future for solution."

Consumed by millions of people around the world, yams are a major source of calories in West and Central Africa. This makes the crop a major source of livelihood in the rural and urban areas.

Preserving the crop would require investments in both the national

and international genebanks for *ex-situ* conservation and also in field conservation or *in situ* conservation.

Besides, a global network that would provide a backup mechanism for conserved seeds is important.

"This is already happening as we see a lot of national partners conserving their varieties in national genebanks but also sending duplicates to be conserved at the Ibadan-based International Institute of Tropical Agriculture," Toll noted.

"But we need to strengthen that relationship."

Dominique Dumet, IITA Head of Genetic Resources Center, said the meeting was timely and that it would draw more synergy from partners towards yam conservation.

Menon meets staff at IITA-Kano station



Menon at a dinner with members of staff of IITA-Kano station

Lakshmi Menon, Deputy Director General (Support) has visited IITA-Kano station for the first time. She arrived in Kano on 2 December.

During her visit, she met with the staff and briefed them about the expected changes in the coming year as it affects the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research centers. She also entertained questions from staff and made clarifications on policy and management issues. She thanked staff members for their dedication to duty and urged them to redouble their efforts to assist in the achievement of IITA goals.

The IITA Bulletin is produced by the Communication Office. For comments and/or contributions, please email: Jeffrey T. Oliver (o.jeffrey@cgiar.org), Godwin Atser (g.atser@cgiar.org), or Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org).

N2Africa launches planting season in Malawi

IITA scientists and partners working under the N2Africa project in Malawi launched the 2010-2011 planting season on 17 November in Bwalo II Village in T.A. Mtembambalame in Lilongwe District.

During the event, farmers were given seeds of improved varieties of soybean, groundnut, beans and cowpea for the planting season. Based on individual demands, farmers were offered inoculants for those that selected inoculation as their constraint; and TSP fertilizer for those that selected fertilizers as their constraint.

The event also created more awareness on the activities of the N2Africa project—a project that aims to put nitrogen fixation to work for small-scale farmers in Africa.

Scientists at the occasion demonstrated the methodology of inoculating legume seeds with *Rhizobium*.

There was also an exhibition of cowpea and soybean dishes by men and women farmers trained by the N2Africa project.

In his welcome address, the Project Leader for N2Africa, Kenton Dashielle, underscored the benefits of N2Africa project.

He also highlighted the benefits of legumes to human and animal health, and more importantly their role in soil conservation and management.

Hakeem Ajeigbe, IITA Dissemination Specialist, gave a presentation on the extension and the overall strategy of the N2Africa Project.

The launch drew the attention of several



Dashielle, N2Africa Project leader, with some lead farmers

stakeholders including the Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Research Services (DARS), Mackson Banda who presided as the guest of honor. Others were the Programme Manager for Lilongwe Agriculture Development Division, Ching'amba; a Member of Parliament for the area, Jolly Kalero; the media, officials of CIAT and other partner organisations.

Farmers were very happy to receive the seeds and inputs.

One of the women farmers could not hide her feelings as she said, "I am now happy and satisfied that this project has really come to help us uplift our livelihood by way of better nutrition, food security and income generation. I know that my life will be better after this year."

IITA's R4D work changes cassava landscape in Nigeria



Farmers harvest improved cassava varieties, thanks to IITA

Help conserve electricity!

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- (1) Powered off all unnecessary electrical office/lab equipment;
- (2) Turned off air conditioners; and
- (3) Switched off all lights.

IITA's research has led to the growth of the cassava industry in Nigeria. This is a result of the institute's efforts in promoting the processing of the crop and new value-added products which in turn has led to an increase in demand for and adoption of improved varieties, according to an evaluation recently carried out in Nigeria in 14 states.

Tahirou Abdoulaye, Outcome/Impact Socio-Economist, said the cassava revolution has led to the development of processing machines such as graters and millers to overcome processing challenges. Value-added products such as odourless fufu, High Quality Cassava Flour (HQCF) were promoted and adopted. Consequently, the capacity of National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) partners and farmers have been built.

He said another area that had shown impact was in the adoption of improved varieties.

"By 2009, there was a 70% adoption as compared to 20 years when it was only 20%. And all stakeholders have also recognized the role of IITA in the cassava sector in the country," he said.