

Feeding Central Africa's booming populations on less land critical to averting conflict



(Left) Parcels of smallholder farmlands just outside of Kigali, Rwanda; (right) Nteranya Sanginga, IITA Director General, speaking to the press at the opening of the CIALCA International Conference in Kigali.

Unless there is widespread use of farm approaches and innovations that can grow more food with less land, countries in Central Africa's densely populated Great Lakes region could face increased conflict and greater instability in coming decades, warned agricultural experts who met in Kigali to examine the challenges and opportunities for sustainably improving farm production in Central Africa.

Although good rainfall and temperatures make Central Africa one of the continent's most high-potential farming areas, small farm sizes, persistent civil conflicts, poor infrastructure and political instability have left the region plagued with chronic food insecurity and the highest rates of malnutrition and extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Great Lakes region includes Burundi, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, northwestern Kenya and Tanzania. Most of the agricultural land has

extremely high population densities – up to 400 people per square kilometer in Rwanda and Burundi – and severely degraded soils.

The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has been in a state of almost continual instability and periodic violence since 1996, while a decade of conflicts in Burundi and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda are responsible for widespread displacement and regional instability.

"Previous conflicts have been indirectly driven by the ability of the land to support the food needs of Central Africa's high population densities," said Nteranya Sanginga, a Congolese scientist and new Director General of IITA.

"In the future, a big question will be whether the land and the soils that underpin farm yields can support booming populations under new constraints like rapid climate change and other environmental factors," continued Sanginga. "Without sustainable intensification of food production, there will be a high price.

We will be going back to the situation of war – and not because of ethnicity – war for food, war for space."

Indeed, the effects of climate change in the region are a major concern. Rising temperatures, for example, are making cash crops more susceptible to pests and diseases according to some studies.

The Consortium for Improving Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA) on 24 October opened the first international conference to examine the challenges and opportunities for intensifying farm production in sub-Saharan Africa's humid tropical regions.

Participants at the CIALCA conference shared examples of sustainable farm approaches that can increase yields and alleviate land pressure in the region.

These include the widespread adoption of higher-yielding climbing beans in Rwanda that improve soils and the availability of dietary protein and intercrop high-value

Continued on next page...

IITA youth corper bags top NYSC award in Oyo State

Maureen Anyanwu, a Youth Corper detailed at the Virology and Molecular Diagnostics Unit at IITA-Ibadan from November 2010 to October 2011, has been named as "Oyo State Best Corper" for Batch-C 2010/2011. She was bestowed with the title "Amuludun of Moniya" by NYSC (National Youth Service Corps). This award automatically qualified her for employment in the State Government.

Anyanwu was bestowed the award due to her diligent, dedicated, and positive input at her place of assignment (IITA), her community development group (Media), and her immediate community (Moniya, Akinyele Local Government and Oyo State).

The Virology and Molecular Diagnostics Unit and the IITA Community congratulate Anyanwu.



Ms Maureen Anyanwu at work in the Virology & Molecular Diagnostics Unit.



The CIALCA-IITA delegation briefing Honorable Minister Odette Kayitesi (middle) in her office.

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

From previous page...

coffee plants with banana in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

"Hopefully, it is these kinds of innovations that can help to steer the region towards a brighter future," said Jos Kalders, representing Belgium's Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGDC), which funds the work of the Consortium.

And while significant progress has been made in the region, scientists also drew attention to the severe yield gap of sub-Saharan Africa's

agricultural productivity.

Staple crops such as maize, millet, beans, sweet potato and cassava are being produced at 60 percent to 90 percent below their potential.

"The region and the global community cannot afford to wait for pressures to mount again before acting," said Kalders. "Addressing social and environmental pressure through sustainable farm intensification should be given a priority focus to reduce the immense pressure the region is under now."

Burundi agriculture minister lauds CIALCA research initiatives

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Burundi, Honorable Odette Kayitesi, has cited the work by the Consortium for Improving –Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA) to rebuild the country's research capacity which was destroyed following many years of conflict. She also commended the consortium's efforts to control the spread of the deadly Banana *Xanthomonas* disease (BXW), a major threat to the country's top staple crop.

She said Burundi had suffered from 18 years of conflict which had destroyed its research activities and facilities and therefore CIALCA's efforts to rebuild its research activities by supporting the national research institute ISABU (*Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Burundi*) and the university were very appreciated.

She thanked the project for supporting four PHD students from ISABU, Burundi's national research institution, and urged it to extend support to masters and degree levels.

She noted that when BXW spread to Burundi, CIALCA played an instrumental role in creating awareness on the disease and

to 7%. She added that the government is striving to reach the 10% budget level for agriculture as stipulated under the Maputo declaration of which Burundi is a signatory.

Minister Kayitesi was responding to a presentation by the CIALCA team in Burundi on its activities during a courtesy visit to her offices led by the ISABU Director General Dieudonne Nahimana. The CIALCA delegation consisted of Jean-Prosper Kanyaruguru, CIALCA Country Coordinator; Piet Van Asten, IITA Agronomist; Emily Ouma, Agricultural Economist, CIALCA Burundi; Boudy van Schagen, CIALCA Knowledge Sharing Specialist; Emmanuel Njukwe, in charge of partnerships; and Laurence Jassonge of IITA Uganda. Also in the group were Shigeru Arika and Papa Saliou from Kyoto university in Japan who were visiting CIALCA to explore possible partnerships after they participated in the international conference organized by CIALCA in Kigali, Rwanda. Also in the delegation was Anacet Nibasuma from ISABU who is also a PHD student funded by CIALCA.

van Schagen briefed the minister on CIALCA's activities in the country that ranged from developing improved high yielding disease resistant varieties of key crops, developing and promoting good agronomical practices among farmers to improve productivity, controlling diseases, and marketing issues through a robust network of partners.

Van Asten assured the minister that as long as the consortium had funds it would continue to conduct research in Burundi together with ISABU and local universities.

He also briefed her on the recent CIALCA international conference in Kigali where participants agreed it was necessary to increase agricultural productivity in Central Africa, where the population is growing rapidly and land was shrinking, through the introduction of improved varieties and use of inputs such as fertilizers.

ways to control it by developing videos and other information materials that were widely distributed in many parts of the country.

She was happy to announce that the government of Burundi had prioritized agriculture in its agenda and had increased the sector's share of the national budget