



Obasanjo lauds IITA for leading efforts in developing Vitamin A cassava

Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo has commended the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) for successfully leading efforts in developing provitamin A cassava varieties.

“The effort put in the development of these varieties is commendable,” says Obasanjo during a closed-door meeting with the IITA Director General, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga, in Abeokuta.

The provitamin A cassava varieties which are the first ever biofortified crops in Nigeria, were developed by IITA with funding from HarvestPlus. The National Root Crops Research Institute was a local partner.

Obasanjo said, “The varieties will offer consumers more nutritious food recipes especially gari—a form of processed cassava that is grated and roasted into granules.”

In Nigeria, vitamin A deficiency afflicts about 20 percent of pregnant women and 30 percent of children under five. Most of those afflicted live in the rural areas where poverty is relatively higher.

Apart from offering more access to vitamin A, the improved varieties will reduce the cost of producing cassava recipes such as gari by eliminating the



IITA DG, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga; IITA Ambassador, Olusegun Obasanjo; Dr. Gbassey Tarawali; and Mrs. Toyin Oke, during a visit to Obasanjo in Abeokuta... Last Thursday.

use of palm oil which hitherto has been used by many farmers to attain the yellowish color.

In his response, Sanginga said that the development of the varieties was a major breakthrough that would change the nutritional status of people living on cassava-based food.

He also noted that plans by the Nigerian government to include cassava in bread would get a boost with the

inclusion of the more nutritious varieties.

“But these efforts require the support of all stakeholders,” he added.

Those who accompanied Sanginga for the visit were the Coordinator, Cassava Enterprise Development Project, IITA, Dr. Gbassey Tarawali, Executive Assistant, Mrs. Toyin Oke, and the Communication Officer (West & Central Africa) Mr. Godwin Atser.

IITA extends N2Africa to Sierra Leone



Participants at the N2Africa project in Sierra Leone

The coverage of the N2Africa project has been extended to Sierra Leone, a move aimed at improving the livelihoods of farmers in that country using improved legumes.

In 2009, the project covered 8 countries but is now stretched to Sierra Leone and four other countries (Liberia, Ethiopia, Ugandan and Tanzania) on a 2-year pilot basis.

A two-day implementation planning workshop, marking the take off of the project was hosted by the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) between 19 and 20 March. The meeting attracted development partners, policy makers and non governmental organizations with bias in

agricultural development.

Welcoming participants, the Director-General of SLARI, Dr. Alfred Dixon said the project was timely, more so, against the background of huge yield losses caused by deteriorating soils.

Dr. Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA Director for Natural Resource Management and Central Africa informed participants that soil infertility could be halted and reversed if specific varieties of grain legumes were integrated in cropping systems to capture nitrogen from the air and make it available to crops in the form of natural fertilizer.

Dr. Braima James, IITA Country Representative in Sierra Leone, indicated additional nutritional and economic value of grain legumes in local food industries, especially the use of soybean to nutritionally fortify gari and other cassava products, including weaning foods and poultry feed.

Farming Systems Researcher, Dr. Franke Linus of the Wageningen University emphasized that in putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder farmers, the project would contribute to strengthening national research capacity, introduce new and improved varieties of food grain legumes, increase the area of land cropped with legumes, enhance soil fertility, increase legume productivity, link smallholders to markets and help create new enterprises to increase demand for legumes.

The N2Africa project is funded by Howard G. Buffet Foundation and implemented by Wageningen University (WU) in partnership with IITA.

Sanginga on official visits to Ghana...seeks to strengthen ties

IITA Director General, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga, is on a three day working visit to Ghana. As part of his planned meetings with both national and international agricultural research partners, he paid a courtesy visit to the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Hon. Kwasi Ahwoi, in his office. The DG highlighted the great strides in research by IITA in cassava, yams and maize and how this is contributing to food security in sub-Saharan Africa. He articulated efforts by the institute in research, processing and value addition. Sanginga pledged IITA's technical support by way of training of National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) scientists and availing IITA's facilities for NARS in the sub-region for research. The Minister of Agriculture was happy that IITA's efforts were contributing to the government of Ghana's agricultural development agenda of facilitating a shift from peasant agriculture to commercial agriculture. He stressed the great investments that the government was making in rehabilitating several irrigation installations in the country and how that would boost all year round farming especially in the guinea savanna. The DG was happy to note that the IITA managed consortium



L-R: In one of the meetings, IITA DG, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga in a constructive engagement with the DG of CSIR – Dr. A. B. Salifu.

under the 'Intensification of Cereal-Based Systems in the Sudano Sahelian Zone' (African RISING) funded by USAID would seek ways of taking advantage of the available irrigation systems in the implementation of the project. The newly launched yam project will also promote the cultivation of value addition to yam systems in Ghana.

Other meetings held by the DG included one with the Director General of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) – Dr. Abdulai B. Salifu. The DG of CSIR, a former student at IITA, implored the DG to consider the re-introduction of short courses for NARS scientists which he found beneficial for the NARS. Both discussed potential for future joint research for development projects and technical backstopping by IITA.

The DG also paid a courtesy call on the Minister

of Foreign Affairs in Ghana – Hon. Alhaji Mumuni in his office.

Bilateral collaboration was discussed, and the need for more integration of regional agricultural research. The Minister appreciated the presence of IITA in Ghana and the technical cooperation agreement it has with the CSIR. He promised to assist in expediting the conclusion of a Country Hosting Agreement with IITA, which has been reviewed by his office since submission by IITA.

The DG was accompanied on his visits by the IITA Country Representative, Isaac K. Gyamfi and Dr. Asaomah Larbi (IITA Consultant/ Systems Agronomist) on the Africa RISING project. A meeting with the IITA Ghana team was held on arrival by the DG in Accra.

The DG is expected, as part of his official visit, to hold meetings with the Regional Director of Forum for Agricultural Research (FARA), Dr. Monty Jones; and the Regional Director of The Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Dr. Bashir Jama.

Professor explores areas of collaboration with IITA



L-R: Dr. Peter Kulakow; Dr. Elizabeth Parkes, Mr. Emmanuel Alamu, and Prof. Florian Schweigert during an inspection tour of provitamin A recipes

Collaborative efforts with IITA will help in knowledge and technology transfer, and capacity building across borders, says Prof. Florian Schweigert of the University of Potsdam and founder of BioAnalyt in Germany. The professor's comments came during a visit to IITA in which he met with the Director of Partnership and Development, Dr. Kenton Dashiell and other top

scientists between 29 and 30 March.

Schweigert identified several areas that IITA and his university could partner, including training on analytical procedures. He foresaw a future where students from his university would come over to IITA and work with the cassava team in the field and also in the laboratories. This exchange and sharing of knowledge would also extend to scientists from both sides. While welcoming the professor, Dashiell expressed gratitude for the visit and assured him of IITA's interest in such linkages.

Earlier, Schweigert met with cassava scientists including Drs. Peter Kulakow and Elizabeth Parkes. At the Yam Barn, the cassava team presented a step-by-step demonstration on how iCheck™ is used in the cassava breeding program. The team also exchanged ideas with Professor Schweigert on how to optimize the technique. Schweigert also witnessed the processing of cassava and the various forms of cassava products. According to Kulakow, "the iCheck™ screening method is helping by accelerating the selection of more nutritious cassava genotypes that can be further evaluated with farmers and consumers."

About BioAnalyt

BioAnalyt manufactures a portable device called iCheck™ for rapid screening of cassava samples for proVitamin A content. In the last year, IITA has been testing this device for its potential to help develop biofortified cassava.