

Africans choose cassava to fight hunger and poverty

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a pan African body, has selected cassava as one of the crops that will be given more attention to fight hunger and poverty in Africa.

The choice of the crop has further underscored and emphasized the significance of cassava to people living in Africa.

Pheneas Ntawuruhunga, IITA Cassava Breeder, said the growing interest in cassava had prompted researchers to tackle the challenges facing the crop and to boost its productivity.

According to him, cassava is still faced with an inefficient production system and low yields.

During a seminar presentation in Dar es Salaam, Ntawuruhunga noted that the crop was also under attack from two deadly cassava diseases, Cassava Mosaic (CMD) and Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD).

"We must provide farmers with improved varieties that are high yielding, resistant to disease and pests, and drought. They must also possess characteristics required for different uses; for example, sweetness for cooking cassava and high starch content for industrial use," he said. "The current yields in most countries are very low,



Cassava roots awaiting processing. Inset: Ntawuruhunga making a point during his R4D presentation in Dar.

averaging 9 tonnes per hectare against a potential yield of up to even 70 tonnes per hectare."

He said his team and partners had done a lot of work in introducing new materials in sub-Saharan Africa under the now closed East Africa Root Crops Research Network (EARRNET). The varieties were especially effective against CMD that had ravaged cassava in the

area. The varieties spread from Uganda to Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, DR Congo to Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Madagascar.

On efforts to contain the spread of CBSD in the region, the cassava breeder said his team now has "promising varieties that show tolerance to the disease."

Scientists provide a solution to maize contamination in Kenya



aflasafe™ rekindles farmers' hopes in Nigeria

Scientists working at IITA, the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), and the Agriculture Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture have identified strains of fungi native to Kenya that could solve large-scale grain contamination from aflatoxins and save millions of people.

When applied in the fields, these nontoxic-producing strains, also known as atoxigenic strains 'competitively exclude'

and displace the aflatoxin producers and, as a result, dramatically reduce the levels of contamination in the field before the crop is harvested, says Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, IITA Plant Pathologist, who developed aflasafe™ – a product provisionally registered for the control of aflatoxins in Nigeria.

"During harvest, the atoxigenic strains are also carried from the field to the stores. So, even if the grains are not stored properly or get wet during or after harvest, as is happening in Kenya this year, the atoxigenic strains instead of the toxigenic strains will increase, resulting in reduced aflatoxin contamination during the postharvest period," he added.

The severity of maize contamination in Kenya is quite serious, with high levels of lethal aflatoxins caused by inappropriate storage of maize by farmers in the drought- and famine-prone Eastern Province. Recently, a child was reportedly killed after consuming contaminated maize.

Oladokun is new Payroll Manager

Kayode Oludele Oladokun is the new substantive Payroll Manager.

He takes over from Johnson E. Bolarinwa, who retired recently after holding the position for close to 20 years.

Oladokun, a Chartered Accountant (ACA), holds a master's degree in Business Administration from the prestigious Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria.

He hails from Odeomu in Osun State of Nigeria and had worked in various capacities at the Nigerian Breweries Plc and ASKAR Paints Company before joining IITA in 1990. He steadily rose to the positions of Payroll Supervisor, Budget Officer, and MIS Senior Analyst before his appointment as the Payroll Manager on 1 June.

Oladokun is married with children. IITA Management congratulates Oladokun and wishes him a successful tenure in his new position.



Oladokun

“I am grateful”, trainee tells IITA

After undergoing a 3-week training on machine fabrication at IITA-Ibadan, entrepreneur Eustace Dixon, could not hide his feelings. “I am grateful to IITA for this opportunity to gain new knowledge in fabricating cassava postharvest processing equipment.”

Coming from Sierra Leone, a West African country ravaged by years of civil war, Dixon is among the youths helping to restore hope to the people of Sierra Leone by investing his time and energy in the fabrication of machines.

Presently, his little workshop has given employment to four youths who are understudying the fabrication trade.

With cassava production in Sierra Leone trending up, Dixon saw another window of opportunity in postharvest processing of the crop, but was limited by poor skills.

“Looking at the machines, you might think that it would be easy to fabricate them, but it is not so. It was not until I came to IITA that I understood the principles behind the construction of the machines,” he said.

“Now I can go back and teach others,” he added.

In spite of its favorable agroecological conditions, Sierra Leone is constrained by inadequate cassava processing centers. A survey revealed that presently, there



Eustace (third from left) and members of the cassava unit pose for a group photo. In the middle is a manual cassava chipping machine fabricated by Dixon during his three-week training.

are only three fabricators in the country, compared to over 240 in the southwestern states of Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun in Nigeria.

Thierno Diallo, IITA Postharvest Engineer, who conducted the training, said he was impressed with the performance of the participant.

“Within 14 days, he was able to fabricate

cassava processing machines,” he said.

Among the machines fabricated by Dixon were a cassava chipper, motorized grater for *gari* processing, *gari* pressing machine, and an improved manual *gari* frying pan.

The program is a pilot scheme, Diallo said, but there are plans to invite more fabricators to build national capacities.

IITA welcomes Visiting Scientist Martin Jemo



Jemo

Martin Jemo has joined IITA as a Visiting Scientist (soil science) under the COMPRO Project. He will be working with Robert Abaidoo and will be based in Ibadan.

Jemo, from Cameroon,

obtained a BSc in Natural Sciences in 1996 and an MSc in Crop Sciences in 2000, from the University of Yaounde, Cameroon. He got his PhD in 2005 at the University of Hanover, Germany, with a thesis titled: “Fitting soybean and cowpea into cropping systems of low phosphorus and high aluminum soils in southern Cameroon”.

Prior to this appointment, he had worked as a postdoctoral research scientist and Visiting Scientist (2006-2007) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich, Switzerland,

and IITA Cameroon (2007-2009). He also previously worked as Guest Research Scientist at the Institute of Plant Nutrition, University of Germany (2003 – 2004), and as a research fellow and research assistant at IITA. He is married, with children. He lives at 4 IITA Drive. Jemo can be contacted at office extension 2889 or his home extension at 2437.

Announcement

The IITA Intranet is being revamped. Please participate in the survey and use this opportunity to tell us about your problems with the current Intranet and what you would like to see in the new Intranet. The Communication Office will take responses for the next two weeks, until 18 June 2010. The link to the survey is: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8BVYPYBW>

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Closing Date: 15 June 2010