

Building business skills of banana farmers in DRC and Burundi

IITA is holding a training of trainer's workshop on marketing and agro-enterprise development skills for extension workers from government organizations and NGOs from DRC and Burundi. These extension officers will, in turn, help build the entrepreneurial skills of smallholder farmers in their respective countries to improve their livelihoods and raise incomes. Smallholder farmers are among the poorest in sub-Saharan Africa.

According to Dr. Emily Ouma, an IITA agricultural economist based in Burundi, banana farmers are unable to get the best out of their produce because of its highly perishable nature, seasonality of production, and high transaction costs associated with market exchanges.

"It is therefore important to show them how to plan production according to market demands," she said. "To get good prices, farmers should supply the right quantity and quality at the right time."

The training will look into ways to minimize transaction costs such as having knowledge on the market prices, value addition, and collective marketing and processing. Knowledge of market prices and collective marketing gives the farmers more bargaining



power. Collective marketing also helps to reduce transportation and marketing costs. Farmers can fetch better prices from value-added products such as banana wine or beer, flour, fiber craft, and dried banana. The prices are constant and not affected by seasonality of production. They also have longer shelf lives.

Agricultural practices such as adjusting sucker selection can shift banana production towards periods of high banana prices and low food security. In Latin America, farmers time the planting of their bananas to target

the harvest for winter time in North America and Europe when prices for fresh fruit are very high. Farmers in DRC and other African countries can do the same.

The workshop is taking place in Bukavu in South Kivu province of Eastern DRC, from 2 to 5 March 2010 and has attracted over 30 participants from non-governmental organizations, farmer groups and Consortium for improving agriculture based livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA) project field staff from South Kivu and Burundi.

IITA's eastern and central Africa hub expands

The team at IITA –Tanzania, the institute's hub for eastern and central Africa, has grown with the addition of two scientists: Daniel Coyne, a nematologist previously based in Uganda, and Joseph Rusike, a socioeconomist previously based in Malawi.

This is in line with the institute's plan to consolidate scientists in its three hubs to support activities in the continent efficiently and effectively. Fen Beed, plant pathologist, and Jim Lorenzen, banana breeder, will also join the team later in the year.

Meanwhile, Leena Tripathi, Biotechnologist, has officially been appointed as the new Officer in Charge of IITA-Uganda.

In other developments, the director for eastern and central Africa, Victor Manyong, received the keys to the new premises for the hub this week from its previous owner.

Currently, the administration staff is based at Mikocheni in Dar es Salaam while the scientists and technical staff are based at the Sugarcane



Victor Manyong receives the key to the new IITA premises from Eugene Gasana, its previous owner. Looking on from left are Cassian Vuluwa (IITA -Tanzania), George Mpelu, IITA-Tanzania lawyer and Celestine Kasindi, Ultimate Securities.

Research Institute at Kibaha, about 30 km from Dar es Salaam.

Manyong said the current arrangement is very uneconomical. "As the team grows, it makes a lot of economic sense that everyone

works together. We will save on time and fuel from stopping the daily 60-km shuttle to and from Kibaha every day by some members of staff," he said. IITA will move into the new offices next year.

Institute mourns loss of Sam Ayebameru, IITA Senior Human Resources Assistant



Sam Ayebameru, IITA Senior Human Resources Assistant, passed away on Wednesday (3 March) at the University College Hospital in Ibadan after suffering from an illness.

Born on 13 April 1958 in Araromi-Obu, Ondo State, Sam commenced work at IITA on 16 May 1984 as a Secretary in the Personnel Department. He did very well in his job and was promoted to become the Executive Assistant to the Director of Human Resources in May 1989. He was again promoted and made the Senior Human Resources Assistant in September 2009. Well known and very well liked by all his colleagues and friends, Sam had a ready smile, a cheerful manner, and was always willing to help.

He was invariably the first point of contact for newly recruited IRS and many of them would still turn to him for help, advice, and support years down the line. When IRS from duty stations outside Ibadan first come to HQ, they would seek out Sam to introduce themselves, or just to say hello. He would always find the time to give them a hearty welcome. Sam was a very dedicated and hardworking member of staff. Fondly known as Uncle Sam, he was well respected and liked in the whole Institute.

He is survived by his wife Margaret and by his 6 children, Olusola, Segun, Oluwatoyin, Olufemi, Bukola, and Tolulope.

IITA welcomes new staff

Hakeem Ajeigbe, Extension/Dissemination Specialist



Hakeem Ajeigbe has now taken up a new position as Extension/Dissemination Specialist in the N2FixAfrica Project.

He has been with IITA since 1994 and was

mostly a consultant based in Kano working on the Sudan Savannah Taskforce Project.

Ajeigbe will be based in Lilongwe, Malawi. He completed his MSc in Plant Breeding at the University of Ibadan and his PhD in Agronomy at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University in Bauchi. He is Nigerian and is married to Fatima and they have four children.

Ajeigbe's contact details are as follows: h.ajeigbe@cgiar.org, telephone +265 9938623.

Abdullah Bala, Inoculant Delivery Specialist

Abdullahi Bala has joined IITA as an Inoculant Delivery Specialist to be based at IITA-Kano. He will work with the N2FixAfrica Project.

Prior to his appointment with IITA, Bala was an Associate Professor at the Department of Soil Science, Federal University of Technology, Minna, in Niger State.

He completed his MSc in Soil Chemistry and Fertility at the University of Reading in England and his PhD in Soil Microbiology at Wye College, also

in England. Bala is married to Anima and they have three children.

Bala's contact details are as follows: ABala@cgiar.org +234 803 5871479 or +234 708 5241260.



Announcements

World Cowpea Conference 2010



IITA, in cooperation with partners – Pulse-CRSP, Purdue University, and the ISRA, Senegal – is organizing the 5th World Cowpea Research

Conference to be held on 27 September - 1 October 2010 in Dakar, Senegal. Global cowpea experts will tackle research issues related to enhancing the profile of cowpea as a viable income-generating and food security crop. For more details and to submit papers, please visit the conference Web site at <http://cowpea2010.iita.org>.

Submission of abstracts: 15 April 2010

Abstracts approval and contact with presenters: 16 May 2010

Full paper submission: 30 September 2010

Early registration: 16 July 2010

ISTRC-AB to hold 11th symposium

The International Society for Tropical Root Crops- Africa Branch (ISTRC-AB) will hold its 11th symposium with the theme "Root Crops and the Challenges of Globalization and Climate" in Kinshasa, DR Congo, 4-8 October 2010.

Submission of abstracts: 30 April 2010

Submission of full papers: 30 July 2010

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving your workplace at the end of the day, make sure that you have:

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