IITA
Research to Nourish Africa
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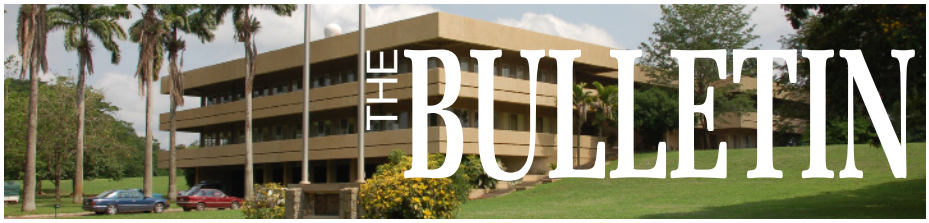

Roots and tuber crops symposium a success

A cross section of participants at the ISTRC-AB symposium during a field trip

More than 150 professionals working on root and tuber crops drawn from research institutions, universities, NGOs, the private sector, and students from all over Africa, Asia, Europe, USA, the Caribbean, and New Zealand gathered in Kinshasa, DRC on 4 to 8 October, for the 11th symposium of the International Society for Tropical Roots and Tubers-African Branch (ISTRC-AB). The forum, held every three years, was organized and hosted by the National Institute for Research and Agricultural Studies (INERA) of DRC in collaboration with IITA-DRC with the theme "Tropical roots and tuber crops and the challenges of globalization and climate changes."

Mahungu Nzola Meso of IITA-DRC, the newly elected president of ISTRC-AB, while making the closing remarks, said this year's symposium was a success with 86 oral presentations and 58 posters on different fields of research from socioeconomics, breeding, agronomy and physiology, integrated pest management, and postharvest. Special sessions were organized on projects such as IITA's Unleashing the Power of the Cassava in Africa (UPOCA), HarvestPlus, and the European Union/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (EU/ACP).

He said the society had experienced a noticeable shift from production-oriented papers in the 1980s to the commodity value chain approach and during the 11th symposium, presentations on processing and commercialization had dominated.

Meanwhile, during the opening ceremony, Madame Kavira Jeanette, the Minister of Arts and Culture, representing the Minister of Scientific Research, welcomed the participants to the meeting and thanked the ISTRC-AB for holding the meeting in Kinshasa. She encouraged INERA scientists to participate actively and learn from shared experiences so they can develop science-based solutions that can contribute to economic growth through the improvement of the agricultural sector and increase in root and tuber crops production in DRC.

In his keynote presentation, outgoing ISTRC-AB President Bokanga Mpoko said tropical roots and tubers in Africa had a very important role to play in addressing the challenges of globalization and climate change.

The participants also took part in a field visit to see the booming cassava sector in DRC and saw demonstrations of mechanical planters, processing machines, an array of new products from roots and leaves, new improved varieties, and fermented water purification machines.

New officers of the society were elected to lead the association for the next 3 years. They are: Dr. Nzola Mahungu (President), Prof A. Lema (1st Vice President), Prof Lateef Sanni (Secretary), Dr M. Chiona (Assistant Secretary), Dr A. Sartie (Treasurer), Dr R. Okechukwu (Editor in Chief), Dr P. Ntawuruhunga (Assistant editor), Prof M. Akoroda (Fund Raise Officer), Dr G. Asumugha (West Africa Rep), Dr G. Ssemakula (East Africa Rep), Dr I. Benesi (South Africa rep) and Dr Willy Tata-Hangy (Central Africa rep). Drs R. Asiedu, R. Hanna, and A. Dixon remained as Ex-officio. The conference was sponsored by IITA, the UPOCA project, Southern Africa Roots and Tubers Research Network (SARRNET), FAO, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), DRC Funds for the Promotion of the Industry (FPI), the EU/ACP project, and IITA/ International Fund on Agricultural Development (IFAD) Cassava Green Mite (CGM) project.

IITA Cowpea Breeder Christian Fatokun honored at World Cowpea Conference

Christian Fatokun, IITA Cowpea Breeder, was honored with a certificate of recognition by peers at the recent 5th World Cowpea Conference held in Saly, Senegal.

He was recognized for his "passionate devotion and long years of work on the development and promotion of cowpea, a humble, yet rich and nutritious and very important African crop." He had "served the African people and IITA for 17 productive years... As chair of the 5th WCC Organizing Committee, he provided leadership and inspiration to all. He was also a member of the organizing committees of the previous conferences."

Similarly honored at the event was T.J. Higgins, an Honorary Fellow at the Plant Industry of CSIRO, Australia, for his "continuous efforts in improving the nutrition of plants for food and feed, and protecting plants from pests and diseases, and for his active involvement in communicating science to the public."

Fatokun, in his response, thanked the many cowpea breeders attending the conference for the honor given him.

He said the success of the 5th WCC was a result of teamwork involving scientists and the Communication Office at IITA.

L-R: Jacob Mignouna, AATF; Larry Murdock, Purdue; Christian Fatokun, IITA; TJ Higgins, CSIRO; and Hakeem Ajeigbe, IITA (in front); shortly after Fatokun received his certificate of recognition at the WCC in Saly.

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Stakeholders chart release of vitamin A cassava in Nigeria

Ahead of the World Food Day celebration which comes up tomorrow, 16 October, agriculture and health experts are holding talks in IITA, Ibadan, to discuss the progress made in breeding new varieties of cassava that can provide vitamin A through the diet.

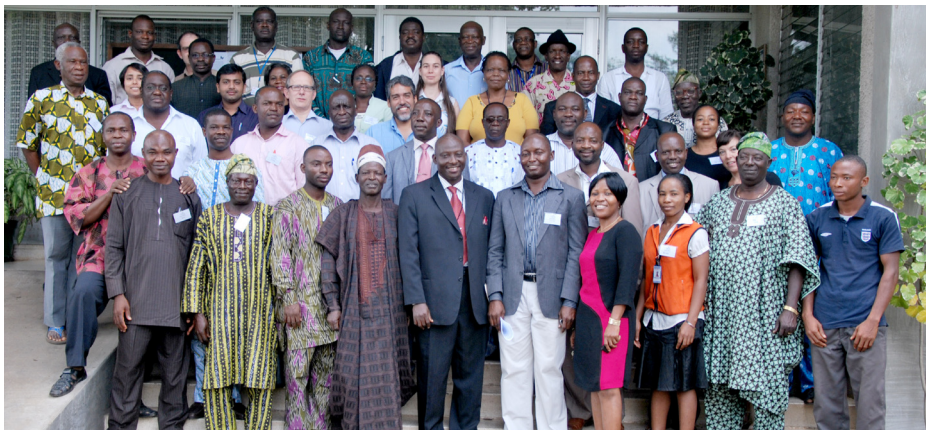
The nutritionally-improved cassava will give more Nigerians access to vitamin A and help fight 'hidden hunger.'

Pre-varietal release trials of the varieties across the country have proven that farmers find them irresistible.

"Farmers love the varieties, which have good culinary qualities. When you make *lafun*–cassava porridge—with it, it is very smooth," says Tola Adepomola, Vice President of All Farmers Association of Nigeria, who is participating in the pre-release trials.

"To us, the varieties save costs in producing *gari*—a processed form of cassava. We do not need to buy palm oil to process yellow *gari*. We hope that these varieties will help solve the problem of vitamin A deficiency and make farmers have more access to nutritious food," he adds.

Since cassava is eaten daily in most of Nigeria, these new varieties that have been bred to provide vitamin A could improve the nutrition of millions of Nigerians, says Harrie Hendrickx, Head of HarvestPlus' Product Delivery.



Participants at the stakeholders' workshop on vitamin A cassava in Nigeria pose for a group photo

Researchers believe that biofortification of key staples is an option to enhance nutrition especially among resource-poor farmers and children.

"We have seen fortication of vitamin A in commodities such as sugar and flour but we feel the biofortification of staples, such as cassava that is widely consumed will give the vulnerable groups more access to a nutritious diet," says Paul Ilona, Country Crop Manager of HarvestPlus.

Working with partners across the world, HarvestPlus, an international research organization, leads the effort to improve the vitamin A content of cassava using conventional plant breeding techniques. Partners include the International Center for Tropical Agriculture, IITA, Nigerian National Root Crops Research Institute, and the private sector.

Peter Kulakow, IITA Cassava Breeder, says the multiplication of the nutritionally-improved varieties is ongoing. "The plan is to make sure that farmers have access to the varieties once they are officially released," he adds.

"World looks up to IITA to answer CBSD puzzle"

Farmers and researchers the world over are looking up to IITA to provide a solution to Cassava Brown Streak Disease—a disease that is threatening the livelihoods of millions of farmers in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

The optimism that IITA could proffer a solution stems from that fact that the Institute in the 80s provided a cure to the cassava mealybug, a pest that threatened to wipe out cassava at that time.

Edward Kanju, IITA Cassava Breeder based in Tanzania, says, "All other partners and farmers are looking up to us to proffer a solution."

Breeding efforts are promising, Kanju told listeners during his R4D seminar titled: "Progress in developing cassava varieties with resistance to Cassava Mosaic Disease and CBSD in eastern Africa."

Researchers estimate that annual losses to CBSD in SSA amount to about $75million. The disease is reported in Malawi, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda.

"It is moving very fast and more efforts are needed to check the spread," Kanju added.

Working with partners, Kanju has developed CBSD-resistant varieties that are offering hope to farmers in Zanzibar—a region once devastated by CBSD.

These varieties are candidates for trials in other regions where CBSD has been reported.

With the greatest impact noted on the roots, CBSD forms root rot-causing disease, lowering yield and incomes of farmers.

Kanju during his R4D seminar

Kanju said that host plant resistance is the most effective and realistic approach to reducing losses. He mentioned some sources of resistance available at the IITA gene bank. He also said that Kaleso and Namikonga were among the "best parents to improve resistance and fight the spread of the disease."

He is certain that IITA's efforts in breeding cassava with dual resistance to CMD and CBSD are producing results.

Announcements

Fellowships on sustainability

The Sustainability Science Program at Harvard University's Center for International Development invites applications for resident fellowships in sustainability science for the University's academic year beginning in September 2011. The fellowship competition is open to advanced doctoral and postdoctoral students, and to mid-career professionals engaged in research or practice to facilitate the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective interventions that promote sustainable development.

For more information on the fellowship's application process see: http://www.cid.harvard.edu/sustsci/fellowship
Applications are due 1 December 2010.

IITA Open Day 2010

IITA Open Day 2010 will be held on **Saturday, 6 November,** at the IITA- Ibadan campus. Please plan to attend.

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.