IITA
Research to Nourish Africa
Issue No. 2047, 13-17 December 2010

Sierra Leone farmers get one more cassava processing center

Dr Richardson Okechukwu cutting the ceremonial tape to the new cassava processing center in Sagila, Kailahun District, Sierra Leone. Looking on are some partners, farmers, and members of the community. The center was established under the auspices of the UPoCA project funded by the USAID and implemented by IITA and Sierra Leone partners.

Farmers in Sierra Leone on Thursday got another cassava processing center that will strengthen the crop's value chain and boost their processing capacity.

The inauguration of the center is part of the bigger "Unleashing the Power of Cassava (UPoCA)" project that is funded by USAID and being implemented in seven African countries by IITA to cushion the negative impact of the 2007/2008 food price crisis in the region.

Located in Sagila, Kailahun District—about eight hours drive from Freetown in eastern Sierra Leone—the microprocessing centre will absorb and process cassava roots being produced by resource-poor farmers in that community.

Since 2008, IITA and partners, with support from USAID, have been working through UPoCA in efforts to help rebuild Sierra Leone's war-ravaged agricultural sector by improving crops' yields, and creating wealth in local communities through cassava value addition.

Consequently, cassava production in Sierra Leone has increased prompting the need for value addition and diversification of the root crop's utilization.

"Currently, we have cassava on our farms that are rotting in the ground, but with this processing center the situation will change," says Chief MK Mustapha, Paramount Chief of Sagila.

"We are glad and we are saying thanks to the American people and to IITA," he adds.

Apart from processing the cassava in the community, the center will also create jobs for youths in the community.

Known for rice production and consumption, Sierra Leoneans are gradually turning to other cassava food products such as gari—roasted cassava granules and fufu—a powdered form of cassava that is prepared into porridge or paste and consumed with stew. Cassava flour is also becoming popular as bakers compose it with wheat flour for the baking of bread and cake.

"With this center and the products that we will be producing, we are sure that poverty will reduce in our community," says Mohammed Vande, Chairman, Moamaleh Farmers Marketing Association—the benefiting group. "We also promise to make this enterprise viable," he adds.

To ensure the sustainability of the project, Vande and his team of more than 30 youths are cultivating two acres each of improved cassava. The improved cassava stems for the planting are being supplied by IITA.

"We are happy for your pledge to keep this center running," say Drs Braima James and Richardson Okechukwu, IITA scientists that are implementing the UPoCA project.

They reiterated the potential of cassava in helping alleviate poverty, citing its tolerance to changing climatic conditions. They also urged the farmers to cultivate the root crop, and to make judicious use of the facility.

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

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving the workplace at the day's end, 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.

CBSD molecular markers identified

Scientists have identified molecular markers associated with Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) tolerance derived from 'Namikonga' – a variety showing great tolerance to the disease have been identified.

This was revealed by Morag Ferguson, IITA molecular biologist and leader of the team that unraveled the markers. She said that the discovery was one of the main achievements of IITA's project on 'Biotechnology Tools to Combat Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD)' funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in its first year.

She added that if validated these markers would allow selection for CBSD tolerance at the seedling stage in crosses derived from Namikonga, as opposed to waiting for three years for the new clones to be challenged under field conditions.

"The new markers will also allow for preemptive breeding in West Africa, where although currently not present, the disease poses a real threat to the region," she said during the first project's first annual progress review and planning meeting held in Dar-es-Salaam, from 1st to 3rd Dec 2010.

She said this was the result of tremendous effort over the past five years by IITA's partners Heneriko Kulembeka and Geoffrey Mkamilo from the Agriculture Research Institute (ARI), Tanzania, Ismail Rabbi, an IITA post-Doc and herself.

Necrosis on CBSD-infected cassava roots.

According to the team, significant progress has been made in validating these new genetic markers. It has also produced a large quantity of seed for fine-mapping of genes associated with CBSD tolerance in Namikonga x Albert, and from alternative sources of tolerance.

In addition, progress has also been made in establishing a confined field trial in Uganda to evaluate cassava transformed for CBSD resistance.

The four-year project involving scientists from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the US aims at expanding the current work to improve the genetic markers from Namikonga, and identify more from other sources of tolerance to the disease.

The next step will be to validate and refine the existing genetic markers and develop a system for cassava breeders to efficiently use them in their breeding programs in Tanzania and Uganda.

IITA-Tanzania team moves to new home...

IITA-Tanzania staff toasting their new office.

The IITA Tanzania team toasts their new office during their usual Friday tea which was held at the premises to allow the staff to get acquainted before moving in from this week before the year ends.

The office is located next door to the Mikocheni Agricultural Research Institute (MARI), and for many of the staff this will be a return to where they started as MARI housed IITA for a number of years before the team became too large and had to move.

In the new premises, the existing offices were refurbished and will house the team until the proposed science complex to permanently house the East Africa Hub is completed.

... as IITA-Liberia inaugurates office

IITA has opened a new Liberia office at the 3rd floor of the old National Election Commission Building on 16th Street, Sinkor. The Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP) has also moved its administration at the IITA-Liberia Office. The main operation of STCP will soon be relocated to Gbarnga while the program maintains the IITA-Liberia office as its liaison office in Monrovia.

Over the last four and half years IITA's operations in Liberia has been mainly through the STCP, focusing on improving the lives of small-scale Liberian farmers. IITA will continue to train and empower farmers with improved planting material to increase their productivity while building its presence and enhancing its visibility by strengthening its R4D partnerships

Signage outside the Old National Election Commission Building on 16th Street, Sinkor, Liberia marking IITA's office in the country.

with the Central Agriculture Research Institute, the Ministry of Agriculture and other government agencies, farmer organizations, NGOs, and the private sector.

Former IITA staff and families to hold grand alumni reunion in 2011

Former staff of IITA and their families will be holding a grand reunion next year. The IITA Alumni Association is planning to hold the reunion on 11-14 March 2011 at the Sanur Beach Hotel in Sanur, Bali, Indonesia. The association says that current IITA staff and their families are most welcome to attend the reunion as well.

For further details about the IITA Alumni Reunion, interested parties should contact the following persons:

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