

## Stakeholders hold talks on germplasm health safety

IITA and the Nigerian Agriculture Quarantine Services (NAQS) of Government of Nigeria held a meeting on 'Safe Germplasm Exchange Procedures' on 14 February 2011 at IITA-Ibadan, Nigeria. The meeting offered stakeholders the opportunity to discuss safety procedures during international exchange of germplasm and plant material.

Presenting an overview of the Germplasm Health Unit (GHU), Lava Kumar, Head of GHU, spoke on the operations and procedures undertaken by the unit to ensure: germplasm health safety, and the production of clean-planting material for international exchange and compliance with national and international phytosanitary regulations.

He also talked about IITA measures to prevent the introduction and export of pests and pathogens. Kumar explained that in 2010 alone, the GHU conducted 158 assignments, involving nearly 100,000 units/accessions of samples for planting or analytical research and facilitated exchange between IITA-Nigeria and 43 countries in Africa, Asia, America's, Europe and South Pacific.

He said that the GHU would continue to augment its procedures to align with the IITA and NAQS demands and emerging pest situations in Africa.

The meeting, which was presided by Robert Asiedu, IITA Director, West Africa, also had high profile NAQS team led by O.O. Awosusi, Head, Post-Entry Quarantine Station; A Chineke,



Representatives of the Nigerian Agriculture Quarantine Services and IITA during the discussions on safety procedures in exchanging germplasm and plant material.

Deputy Head; and S.A. Kazeem, Plant Pathologist, NAQS.

Dominique Dumet, Head, IITA Genetic Resources Center, and a major player in facilitating international exchange of germplasm also participated in the meeting.

Awosusi lauded IITA's efforts in improving agriculture in Nigeria and measures taken by the institute to prevent accidental introduction of noxious pests, pathogens, and weeds during material exchange.

She also spoke on the risk of spread of quarantine pathogens such as CBSV and BBTV that are prevailing East and Central Africa, and the havoc they could cause to Nigerian agriculture. Awosusi urged IITA to maintain highest

standards during the exchange of plant materials from the affected regions.

It will be recalled that unrestricted movement of seeds and other genetic and plant materials is critical to IITA international R4D programs in Nigeria, and others parts of the world.

The GHU, under the aegis of NAQS, undertakes appropriate quarantine inspection to arrest the introduction or export of pests along with germplasm and other biological materials and ensure prompt clearance of shipments for export and imports. NAQS and IITA's GHU have been working together for nearly two decades to ensure and maintain high phytosanitary standards.

For information about GHU, visit: [www.iita.org/germplasm-health](http://www.iita.org/germplasm-health).

## IITA bids farewell to Sharon Kanyamunyu, RFO



IITA-Tanzania organized a farewell for Sharon Kanyamunyu, former Regional Finance Officer (RFO), who has left the institute. Speaking at the event held on 11 February, Eveline Odiambo, Regional Administrator, thanked her for the short time she was with IITA and wished her well in her future endeavours.

Kanyamunyu on her part said she was indeed sad to leave IITA after such a short time- six months, but said she will always treasure the short time

and the warm people she had met. She said she will always be a friend of the institution.

In e-mail correspondences, Sholola Shalewa, the Chief Finance Officer, and Victor Manyong, Director for Eastern and Central Africa, bade her farewell as well. According to Shalewa, though Sharon had been with IITA briefly, she had already made significant impact.

Kanyamunyu takes up a finance director position in Seychelles for a private mobile telephone company.

Sharon Kanyamunyu (middle) cutting her farewell cake during the send-off party held in her honor by colleagues at IITA-Tanzania.

# Breathing new life into a faltering cassava industry in the DRC



Women farmers of FRUD in the DRC singing praises in gratitude of a bountiful cassava harvest.

In the hilly terrains of Miwazi near Kikwit, the main town in Bandundu Province about 600 km from Kinshasa the capital of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a group of women are harvesting cassava, marveling at the huge roots. Every now and then they break out into a joyous song in praise of the crop.

Just two years ago, things were very different: harvests were down, roots were much smaller, and the leaves – which they eat, too – curl and turn a strange color. However, the farmers did not know that these were being caused by the cassava mosaic disease (CMD) until staff of the “Unleashing the Power of the Cassava in Africa (UPoCA)” project came to their community and pointed it

out. UPoCA is a USAID-funded initiative implemented by IITA.

“Each year we got less and less cassava. We did not know it was a disease and were worried because for us, no cassava means no food. If you do not have cassava, it is like being in prison, you are going to die,” said Manunga Jeanne, 58.

Manunga is part of the *Femmes Rurales pour Development* (FRUD), or Rural Women United for Development in Kwilu District, which was formed in 2005 and has about 150 members.

Aside from training on managing CMD, the women also got clean planting materials of high-yielding and disease-tolerant varieties developed by IITA. The women are all praises for them.

“We are not only getting very big roots and many leaves, but they [the improved varieties] are not getting this disease,” Manunga added, proudly showing the bulging roots they had just harvested.

They also like the taste of the new varieties. “The chikwangue we make from these cassavas is quite tasty,” she exclaims. Chikwangue is a popular dish in the country made from fermented and pounded cassava.

Like what they did last year, the women will sell the cassava roots to *Groupement des Paysans Agriculteurs de Miwanzi* (GROPAM) – a federation of 36 farmers’ groups including FRUD – and distribute the stems to other farmers. In 2009, FRUD made about US\$ 5000 from the sale of the roots to GROPAM.

In 2010, FRUD received 600 bundles of cuttings from UPoCA, which they planted on their communal 15 ha land donated by a local philanthropist as well as on their individual farms. They also distributed some to farmers in the neighboring communities. UPoCA also trained the women on good farming practices to maximize yields.

According to Jean Octave Mawika, 57, president of GROPAM, all the 36 farmers’ groups received planting material and training from UPoCA.

“We have distributed planting materials to over 7000 farmers,” he said. “We did not have enough to give to everyone, so some ‘stole’ from their neighbors,” he remarked.

GROPAM is also working hard to create awareness about CMD through weekly radio shows in Radio Liberte, a local radio station.

“We raise awareness on the disease, its symptoms, and how to stop its spread. We are also advising farmers on the new and improved varieties,” said Mawika. “The radio listeners are coming to us for planting material.”

Lukombo Singi, UPoCA-DRC project coordinator, says that farmers favor the improved varieties because all the local ones are susceptible. “With cassava being the top staple crop in the country,” he said, “the demand for these planting materials is very huge.”

“We have given out planting material to over 18,000 households. This is a total of 2 million cuttings worth over US\$ 100,000! However, we have barely scratched the surface as the country needs 3.5 billion cuttings. Farmers from all over the country are coming to us for cuttings of these IITA-improved varieties,” he emphasized, “and we are doing our best to provide what they need.”

## Announcements

### Former IITA staff and families to hold grand alumni reunion

Former staff of IITA and their families will be holding a grand reunion on 11-14 March 2011 at the Sanur Beach Hotel in Sanur, Bali, Indonesia. The IITA Alumni Association says that current IITA staff and their families are most welcome to attend the reunion as well. For further details interested parties should contact the following persons:

- **Dimy Nanju** - [dimynangju@yahoo.com](mailto:dimynangju@yahoo.com)
- **David Sewell** - [davidsewellibadan@hotmail.com](mailto:davidsewellibadan@hotmail.com) or [davidsewell177@hotmail.com](mailto:davidsewell177@hotmail.com)

- **Rob Dumsday** - [dca.economics@gmail.com](mailto:dca.economics@gmail.com)

### Global confab on humid tropics, 24-27 October 2011

The Consortium for Improving Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA) and the CGIAR Consortium Research Program (CRP) on the Humid Tropics will hold an international conference on the ‘Challenges and Opportunities for Agricultural Intensification of the Humid Highland Systems of sub-Saharan Africa’ in Kigali, Rwanda from 24-27 October 2011. For further details on how to submit abstract, kindly contact: [cialca-conference@cgiar.org](mailto:cialca-conference@cgiar.org) or visit [www.cialca.org](http://www.cialca.org).

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