



Experts roll out banana control plan



Participants pose for a group photo

Disease control experts from the Great Lakes region have prioritized actions needed to control the deadly Banana Xanthomonas Wilt (BXW) that is devastating food security in the region at a recently concluded workshop organized by IITA in Goma in the north Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

One of the workshop organizers, Fen Beed, an IITA plant pathologist, said he was satisfied with the outcomes of the workshop which prioritized what needs to be done, when, and by whom to manage the deadly bacterial rot disease.

Speaking during the closing session, various government officials from the Ministry of Agriculture of North and South Kivu said future initiatives should be linked to the governments to increase awareness and sustainability of interventions to control BXW.

They recognized IITA, the Catholic Relief Society (CRS) and Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Institute (TSBF) for their well coordinated efforts in the region through previous projects such as Crisis Crop Control Program (C3P) and current ones such as Great Lakes Cassava Initiative (GLCI) and Consortium for Improved Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA).

The workshop attracted over 80 participants drawn from organizations across the region with rich experience and expertise of technologies, partnerships, and coordination mechanisms required to manage BXW. There were also several representatives from a variety of NGOs based in eastern DRC looking to benefit from lessons learned from across the region on BXW control.

The presentations on the first day focused on recognizing and controlling the disease and

assessing its impact on livelihoods and were followed by breakout sessions to identify and prioritize knowledge gaps for research.

The second day focused on extension mechanisms with participants prioritizing the most important extension technologies to implement in the region and those that needed to be established immediately during a breakout session. The final day was an open forum discussion on partnerships and coordination, which, according to Beed are critical if impact is to be achieved in a cost-effective manner and at scale.

The workshop was funded by USAID which had also financed an expert evaluation report to define the impact of BXW on livelihoods in eastern DRC which was also led by IITA in collaboration with FAO, Bioversity International, and University Catholique du Graben, Butembo.

Susan Karonga joins IITA as Senior Administrative Assistant



Susan Karonga has joined IITA Kenya as the senior administrative assistant effective 1 November 2010. She replaces Alice Muchiri, who resigned to pursue higher

studies.

Susan joins IITA from the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) in Nairobi where she worked as an administrative assistant. She has a wealth of experience in office management and support services and is a welcome addition to IITA Kenya.

While wishing Alice all the best, Lakshmi Menon, IITA Deputy Director (Support), called on all staff to welcome Karonga.

Karonga can be reached at s.karonga@cgiar.org for any administrative issue regarding IITA Kenya.

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.

IITA and partners campaign to stop BBTV spread

IITA-Cameroon, under the coordination of Rachid Hanna (Entomologist and Country Representative), launched a campaign to stop the spread of dangerous banana bunchy top virus (BBTV) disease in Cameroon, during a BBTV field day on 15 November, in Abang Minko'o, Vallée du Ntem Division in the south region of Cameroon. The field day was organized by IITA together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINERAD), IRAD, and CARBA and funded by a USAID-linkage grant. It was inaugurated by the Sous-Préfet and the representative of the Minister of Agriculture and was attended by the farmers and plant quarantine service staff.

Rachid Hanna and Lava Kumar, IITA Virologist, explained that the BBTV situation in Cameroon showed the disease-affected areas and outlined preventive measures. Participants were taken to BBTV-infected fields of the local farmers and also to an IITA experimental site evaluating the rate of disease spread by aphids and performance of local and improved banana and plantain varieties. While in the field BBTV-infected suckers were uprooted to mark the launch of the BBTV control campaign.

BBTV is the most important virus disease of banana and plantain worldwide, because of its highly destructive potential; it virtually eliminates production of any consumable fruit causing huge losses. BBTV is spread through suckers and by an insect, banana aphid, which is exclusive to banana and facilitates much of the local spread of the disease. There are no



Rachid Hanna (right), Lava Kumar (third from left) and other stakeholders during the campaign against BBTV spread.

disease-resistant varieties, hence, eradication of infected plants and prevention of disease spread into new regions is the only effective way to control this disease. IITA survey studies showed that BBTV is well established in the southern region of Cameroon and also spread to several locations in the western region. The disease is suspected to have spread from its southern neighbors, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, which are already hit by the epidemic.

Participants urged for a speedy intervention by the government to prevent widespread

and protect plantain production. As part of its efforts, the government plans to improve export potential of the fruit.

In light of the recent surge in BBTV incidence in Africa, it becomes necessary to urgently develop sustainable disease control strategies that include control of aphids, development of resistant/tolerant germplasm, and promotion of appropriate phytosanitary measures to limit disease incidence and spread. Without proper control measures BBTV is likely to continue its spread into Nigeria and beyond with severe economic consequences.

Consultant: Africa is endowed with talented women

Africa has a pool of talented women whose potentials could help in bringing about a positive change in the continent. To this effect a dinner for fellows of the African Women in Agriculture Research & Development (AWARD) was held in Ibadan.

Philip Merry, an AWARD consultant, described African women as people with passion and commitment to work.

The dinner, which was organized by Prof. Lateef Sanni, provided an opportunity for feedback from the women fellows since their contact with AWARD.



African women fellows at the dinner

The fellows said they were more confident in taking leadership roles after coming in contact with AWARD, and more importantly with Philip and his wife, Normala, both facilitators with AWARD.

Petra Abdulsalam-Saghir, who spoke on behalf of the fellows, commended AWARD for giving African women the opportunity to rediscover themselves and commented on how the AWARD program made them "better wives, better sisters, better daughters, and better professionals." She commended Philip and his wife for their inspiration and help during the training.

The fellows also presented gifts to Philip and his wife as a mark of appreciation.

In his response, Philip thanked the fellows for their gesture. He said he was constantly amazed by the positive impact that AWARD had on the lives of its fellows and urged them to live a life of meaning, authenticity, and to strive to make connections (MAC). He further commented that working with AWARD fellows was one of the most meaningful projects for him and Normala in recent years. The love, joy, and enthusiasm the fellows had given them was much more than they gave.

The AWARD dinner was also attended by Robert Asiedu, John Last, and Bussie Maziya-Dixon. Asiedu thanked the fellows for making it



L-R: Philip Merry, Lateef Sanni, and Bussie Maziya-Dixon at the dinner

to the dinner in spite of their busy schedules.

It will be recalled that AWARD offers one and two-year fellowships designed to fast-track the careers of African women scientists and professionals delivering pro-poor agricultural research and development that benefits rural communities, especially women. The goal is to help them increase their contributions in the fight against hunger and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.