



# Vitamin A cassava can save Nigeria US\$1.5B in health-related GDP losses

The consumption vitamin A-enriched cassava could help Nigeria reduce its economic losses estimated at about US\$1.5billion, says Nteranya Sanginga, Director General of IITA.

“But more important than economic savings, it will improve the nutrition of vulnerable women and children,” says Sanginga at the public presentation of the vitamin A cassava by the Nigerian government in Umudike on March 16.

The varieties were officially released on 7 December last year by the National Variety Release Committee of Nigeria. They were developed by IITA in partnership with the National Roots Crops Research Institute (NRCRI). The work was supported and funded by HarvestPlus.

Represented by Gbassey Tarawali, Coordinator of IITA’s Cassava Enterprise Development Project, the DG commended the Nigerian government for taking the lead in promoting nutritionally-enriched crops with the release of the vitamin A cassava to farmers.

“Today we have varieties that are rich in vitamin A to help tackle health and nutrition challenges in the country. We now need to get these varieties into the hands of farmers,” he added.

“Vitamin A deficiency also contributes to maternal mortality and other poor outcomes in pregnancy and lactation,” says Akinwumi Adesina, Nigeria’s Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

“Annually, Nigeria loses over US\$1.5 billion in GDP to vitamin and mineral deficiencies as many staple foods are low in essential micronutrients.”

Adesina said that it was crucial that Nigeria accelerates efforts and policies on improving health and nutrition of vulnerable groups, especially women, infants and children, adding that scaling up core micronutrient interventions would cost less than US\$188 million per



*Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Dr Akin Adesina proudly raising vitamin A cassava roots during the presentation of the varieties to the public at NRCRI in Umudike on March 16.*

year, which makes economic sense.

To popularize the vitamin A cassava, he said greater effort will be needed to increase the capacity of the Ministries of Health and Agriculture and Rural Development, improve infant and child feeding through effective education and counseling services, and increase coverage of vitamin A cassava across the nation.

“These varieties are not only rich in vitamin A but they are also suitable for gari, fufu, and high quality cassava flour,” says Thomas Ezulike, Acting Executive Director of NRCRI.

The yellow, vitamin A-rich varieties are products of over 20 years of conventional breeding work for improved nutritional quality.

Peter Kulakow of IITA and Chigozie Egesie of NRCRI said the development of the varieties was a major breakthrough that would change the nutritional status of people living on cassava-based food.

Farmers who participated in the testing of the varieties loved them for

their high-yields and resistance to major diseases and pests.

“Farmers are starting to demand for these varieties, but it will take some time before we have enough to give out,” says Paul Ilona, the HarvestPlus Manager for Nigeria.

He indicated that the vitamin A cassava is being multiplied through stem cuttings. In 2013, when sufficient certified stems are available, HarvestPlus and its partners will distribute these to about 25,000 farming households. Farmers can grow these new varieties and feed them to their families, as well as multiply and share cuttings with others, thereby amplifying the nutritional benefits. By 2014, HarvestPlus expects that more than 150,000 household members will be eating vitamin A-rich cassava.

Other partners in the development of the vitamin A cassava are the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa).

# Nigeria honors vitamin A cassava development team

Scientists who led the development of vitamin A cassava varieties were honored with the annual Ministerial Award by the Nigerian government on March 16 during the public presentation of the varieties in Umudike.

Work to develop the yellow vitamin A cassava was led by IITA in partnership with NRCRI. The collaborative effort was funded by HarvestPlus.

Akin Adesina, Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture & Rural Development, conferred the award on the scientists, saying that the varieties would help in efficiently tackling malnutrition in Nigeria.

The minister also threw his weight behind efforts to promote biofortification in the country with plans to put in place an aggressive strategy to take the vitamin A varieties to 1.8 million farm families.

Paul Ilona, HarvestPlus Country



Minister Adesina (2nd from right) addressing the vitamin A cassava development team. With Adesina are (L-R) are Elizabeth Parkes, IITA; Richardson Okechukwu, IITA; Paul Ilona, HarvestPlus; and Gbassey Tarawali, IITA.

Manager, commended the government's efforts, adding that the best way to tackle malnutrition was through the provision of nutritious food to the people.

Currently, some 250,000 to 500,000 malnourished children in the developing world go blind each year from vitamin A deficiency, half of whom die within a year of becoming blind.

In Nigeria, vitamin A deficiency afflicts almost 20% of pregnant women and about 30% of children under the age of five.

Gbassey Tarawali, representing IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga, said that the institute will fully support the government's target of improving the health and nutrition status of the people through the development of nutrient-enriched crops.

## Stakeholders fine-tune ComPro II project

Partners in the Commercial Products (ComPro-II) project met in Ibadan to finalize partnership arrangements and draft action plans toward the institutionalization of quality assurance mechanism and the rapid dissemination of top quality commercial products to increase yields and improve the food security of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

With the demand for food taking center stage, the region has been inundated with myriad commercial products that claim to boost productivity. In the last three years, researchers working on the first phase of ComPro sought to authenticate these claims.

"The project has identified products that do deliver on their promises," says Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA R4D Director for Central Africa and NRM program.

The ComPro-II project aims to raise awareness among over two million smallholder farmers on effective and

profitable commercial products by 2017 through public-private partnership. Of these households, 420,000 will have tested at least one effective commercial product and at least half of them adopt the technology and achieve 15-30% yield increase with substantial impacts on food security and income.

As a result, more farmers will confidently use these products because their safety, efficacy, and quality will have been ensured through an institutionalized regulatory and quality assurance mechanism.

Robert Asiedu, who represented IITA DG Sanginga at the meeting, described the project as being vital as it directly relates to the institute's mission of reducing the number of hungry people and improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Participants included representatives of IITA, CIAT-TSBF, CABl, FIPS, AATF, NAFDAC, KNUST, and MoFA in Ghana.



Participants of the ComPro II project refinement workshop held in IITA-Ibadan.

## Welcome Bernard Vanlauwe, R4D Director for Central Africa



Vanlauwe

The IITA Community welcomes Dr Bernard Vanlauwe as R4D Director for Central Africa and Natural Resource Management. He obtained a BSc in

Applied Biological Sciences from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium in 1989, and his PhD in Ag Eng, Applied Biological Sciences in 1996 from the same university.

Dr Vanlauwe, a Belgian, worked as an Integrated Soil Scientist, Senior Scientist, Program Leader, and Principal Scientist from 2001 to 2010 at the Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Institute of CIAT (TSBF-CIAT) in Nairobi.

He has previously worked at IITA as Junior Expert, Associate Expert, and Associate Scientist from 1991 to 2001; and as Research Assistant from 1990 to 1991.

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