

Agro-Eco-Health Alliance launched at IITA-Benin

A multi-institutional platform that would promote awareness and address issues linking poor agricultural practices, environmental hazards and human diseases have been launched at IITA-Benin.

The "Agro-Eco-Health Alliance" would sensitize farmers and decision-makers on the negative effects of poor agricultural practices on the environment and human health, and the reverse negative impacts of poor human health on agricultural productivity.

The platform would advocate holistic agricultural programs at community levels, taking into consideration environmental and health linkages, and mobilize resources for key related operational R4D efforts.

IITA-Benin will host the Secretariat of the alliance.

The platform was formally launched at IITA-Benin during a multi-stakeholders' and policymakers' workshop on agriculture, environment and health for sustainable agricultural productivity in West Africa, held on 3-7 May 2010.

Present were representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, and Environment, the Dean of the Faculty of



Participants and organizers of the Agro-Eco-Health workshop and platform launching held at IITA-Benin in Cotonou, Benin Republic.

Agriculture and professors of the University of Abomey Calavi, West African Catholic University, USAID, FAO, the Belgium Technical Cooperation, RTI-America, CIP, AfricaRice, and members of rural agricultural communities.

The workshop focused on the linkages between poor agricultural practices,

environmental hazards and human diseases, and increasing agricultural productivity while preserving the environment and mitigating related human diseases.

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Project managers complete training course



Some of the participating IITA scientists playing out the role of "chefs" during one of the project management workshop's interactive sessions.

From 31 May to 4 June, 20 IITA scientists from Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, DR Congo, and Nigeria came together for a five-day intensive training course on project management.

The activity was held at the Hotel Intercontinental in Nairobi, Kenya and was

run by Clive Eaton of the Coventry, UK-based MTD Training. Eaton facilitated a similar project management course held at IITA-Ibadan in November 2009.

The course combined practical exercises and challenges, as well as case studies, seminars and lectures on many aspects of project

management and design. Topics included project integration management, project scope and time management, project cost and quality management, and people, risk and procurement management.

Dave Watson, Director of IITA's Project Development and Management Office, said that the course "showcased tools and approaches to strengthen project management in IITA and also offered an excellent opportunity for managers to share problems of, and potential solutions to, current projects".

Energy conservation tip: Power down computers, monitors, and peripheral equipment when not in use.

Cote d'Ivoire, World Bank and IITA mull partnership

The World Bank and its partners in Cote d'Ivoire are considering collaboration with IITA to advance agricultural research efforts in that country. This was revealed during a visit to IITA Headquarters by a delegation from Cote d'Ivoire on 22-23 June.

In welcoming the group, Dave Watson, Director of IITA's Project Development and Management Office, said that the country would benefit from testing new varieties through on-farm trials, receiving improved crop varieties, improved postharvest technologies, and other agricultural research initiatives that are tailor-fit to the country.

He added that the collaboration would be a valuable research opportunity as it is a natural extension of the areas where IITA is already established in sub-Saharan Africa.

The delegation from Cote d'Ivoire included a representative of the World Bank, Cote d'Ivoire contingent of the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP), representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture and Finance, *Centre National de Recherche Agronomique*, and *Fonds Interprofessionnel pour la Recherche et le Conseil Agricoles*.

Representatives from Cote d'Ivoire discussed objectives of the WAAP program while IITA



IITA DDG-R4D Paula Bramel addressing the Cote d-Ivoire delegation and IITA staff attending the exploratory partnership meeting.

scientists gave an overview of related IITA R4D projects and activities.

"The main focus of this meeting is really what our specific role should or could be within banana and plantain projects in Cote d'Ivoire. However, they are also interested about our work on cassava, yam, and maize," added Watson.

A member of the visiting delegation

indicated that one of their goals was the adoption of agricultural R&D in rural areas, as well as production and distribution of seeds.

Paula Bramel, IITA Deputy Director General – R4D, underscored IITA's interest "in having an opportunity to work more in collaboration with the national program of, and local partners in, Cote d'Ivoire... [and] furthering the development of this kind of collaboration."

Research is critical for developing countries - IITA ECA Director

Agricultural research is very important to aid developing countries and those that are in transition to address their development challenges. In these countries over 60 percent of the population rely on agriculture for their livelihoods in one way or another.

Speaking at a forum on the role of research in development at Tanzania's Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) on 11 June, Victor Manyong, IITA's Director for Eastern and Central Africa, said that in these countries food insecurity was on the increase caused by soaring food prices and poor distribution of food.

"There is mounting pressure on food supplies as a result of global economic growth and population increase. And overstretched natural resources and climate change are further complicating the situation," he said.

To address these challenges, countries could expand agricultural land at the expense of environmental services, or improve agricultural productivity under the current land size. The latter, he indicated, was the most viable option but would require application of knowledge and technologies.

"Today agricultural research is receiving high level attention after the World Bank's 2008 World Development Report focused on Agriculture for Development. The world leaders have recognized we cannot solve major world challenges outside of agriculture," he said.

Speaking about IITA, Manyong said the



A cross-section of the participants at the COSTECH forum in Tanzania listening intently to Manyong's presentation.

institution's new 10-year strategy was to use advances in agricultural technologies to remove 20 – 25 million people out of hunger and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa where majority of the world's poor lived.

"To do this, we are involved in developing disease resistant and high-yielding varieties through conventional breeding and marker-assisted breeding."

He added that the institute was also addressing value addition to ensure that farmers' prices do not drop when there was an increase in production as a result of adoption of improved varieties and good farming practices.

"There is a huge potential for processed cassava products. For example, in China there is an annual demand of 6 billion tonnes of

cassava chips that African countries are not tapping into."

Thanking him, Hassan Mshinda, COSTECH Director General, said his institution had invited him to give the talk as the country was in the process of prioritizing its agricultural research agenda.

"We were wrestling with the challenge of what comes first breeding for improved varieties or value addition. But from your presentation, the two must go hand in hand."

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