



Southern Africa to experience MIRACLE

People living with HIV/AIDS in the region set to benefit from agriculture-based health & livelihoods initiative

IITA has launched an initiative that would contribute to sustainable livelihoods of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in southern Africa through agricultural innovations.

Dubbed "Making Agricultural Innovations Work for Smallholder Farmers Affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa", or MIRACLE, the 3-year project will improve the health and nutrition status, food security, and incomes of PLWHA in the subregion.

Melba Davis-Mussagy, IITA Agroenterprise Development Specialist and project manager, says MIRACLE's key interventions include production, consumption, and marketing of nutritious crop and livestock products, lobbying for supportive agricultural and health policies, and strengthening capacities of stakeholders.

MIRACLE will be implemented in Zambia, Swaziland, Malawi, and Mozambique in partnership with government agencies, NGOs, farmer groups, and community-based organizations. It is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

The launching ceremony was held at the Farmer's Training Center in Mukulaikwa, Mumbwa District, one of the project sites in Zambia, on 12 August. It was attended by officials of the Embassy of Sweden, IITA, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MACO), Provincial and District Agriculture Coordinators, Development Aid from People to People, In-Service Training Trust, National Food and Nutrition Commission, HIV/AIDS support groups, village heads, media people, and target beneficiaries.

In her keynote, Monde Zulu, Chief Agriculture Research Officer of the Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI), representing the Permanent Secretary of MACO, described MIRACLE as a "strategic initiative that will help uplift the plight of poor farmers and their households affected with the scourge of HIV/AIDS."

"MIRACLE would also reduce the unwarranted stigma associated with

being a PLWHA - of being unproductive and helpless," she adds.

She especially thanked IITA and SIDA for implementing MIRACLE in Zambia, emphasizing that MACO will fully support its activities.

Davies Chitundu, Regional Advisor for Food Security and Human Rights of the Swedish Embassy in Zambia, speaking on behalf of SIDA, said that MIRACLE "dovetails nicely with the mission of SIDA and the Swedish government of fighting poverty through innovations and supporting civil society organizations in southern Africa, particularly addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on the productivity of affected people."

"We are proud to be associated with the MIRACLE project and IITA," he emphasized.

In response, David Chikoye, IITA R4D Director for Southern Africa, praised SIDA and project partners "for their commitment in helping PLWHA attain a decent and productive way of life."

While addressing the audience, Chikoye exclaimed, "We are all together in this, and together we will make MIRACLE work!"

The launching ceremony also included an exhibition of different food items that the local HIV/AIDS support group made from local cassava, soybean, and cowpea, among other crops. They will be introducing these as one of the many activities of MIRACLE.



(Top to bottom) The master of ceremony introducing the guests of honor; shot of the audience; a member of the local women's support group explaining how they prepared the food items on display; community members acting out a play about HIV/AIDS at the launch.

Team effort to develop environmentally safe, ecological option to control witchweed

IITA and the Institute for Agricultural Research - Ahmadu Bello University (ARI-ABU) have successfully completed the establishment of field trials across northern Nigeria to test a biological control agent against witchweed (*Striga hermonthica*).

The biological control agent (a soil borne fungus, *Fusarium oxysporum f.sp. Strigae*) was produced to industry quality standards by the University of Hohenheim, Germany and coated onto maize seed by the commercial seed coating company SUΔET.

Abuelgasim Elzein of IITA and Afiniki Zarafi of ARI-ABU who co-supervised the establishment of the trials and both having extensive experience in *Striga* control using

this biocontrol agent in previous small scale trials, were looking forward to the results from this comprehensive validation.

"This offers huge opportunity to define the robustness and applicability of this biocontrol technology," says Fen Beed, IITA plant pathologist who is also overseeing trials in Kenya in collaboration with Real-IPM, a Kenya-based private company that specializes in commercializing biopesticides.

The next step is for commercial practicality of the biocontrol agent to be considered as a component of an integrated management package required for witchweed under the "Achieving sustainable *Striga* control for poor farmers in Africa"



Striga biocontrol maize seeds coated with PSM197 (top, red), control coated with Arabic gum (lower right, yellowish), and untreated control (lower left, yellow).

project, an initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by Alpha Kamara, IITA agronomist.

IITA Sportsfest 2011

Sportfest 2011 wraps up; Green Team crowned overall champion

The Green Team, composed of staff from HR Office, Yam Breeding Unit, Communication Office, DTMA Project, and the General Directorate, emerged as the overall champion of the IITA Sportsfest 2011, which concluded on Tuesday, 23 August.

The team snatched the gold in football, volleyball, lawn tennis, and chess. Runner-up was the White Team which got first place in scrabble, draught, and table tennis. In other events, the Yellow Team got the top spot in Ayo Olopon, while the Red Team struck gold in badminton.

The closing ceremony was highlighted by a women's football exhibition game followed by the championship football match played between the Green and Red teams, which the Green Team won, 3-2. After the match, trophies and prizes were awarded to winners of the respective sports events.

Wole Oladokun, Employee Services Manager and Chair of the

Sportfest Organizing Committee, said that the activity was highly successful as all participants showed their best not only in the physical aspects of the events but more importantly camaraderie and sportsmanship.

In an email to staff, Olu Babasanya, Personnel Manager, thanked all coordinators and participants for their enthusiasm and effort, which, he said "is unprecedented in the history of sports in IITA."

Final medal tally: Green Team (4 gold, 2 silver); White Team (3 gold, 3 silver); Red Team (1 gold, 2 silver, 2 bronze); Yellow Team (1 gold, 2 bronze); Blue Team (2 silver, 4 bronze); and Pink Team (1 bronze).

(Top) Members of the organizing committee shaking hands with players of the women's exhibition football match before kick-off; (middle) Green Team coordinator Oluwole Amusa receiving champion's cup for the team; (bottom) some members of the Green Team wipping it up at the closing ceremonies of the sportsfest. More photos available in IITA's Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/iita-media-library/>.

