



IITA to backstop Nigeria's national cocoa transformation initiative

IITA will be providing vital support to Nigeria's cocoa transformation efforts, as the country embarks on doubling production of the crop in the next few years.

Specifically, the institute plans to help the country in the development of high quality and clean planting materials using improved breeding techniques.

In the action plan presented to the members of the Cocoa Transformation Agenda in IITA-Ibadan on Thursday, IITA intends to deploy advanced micropropagation techniques for rapid and high ratio propagation of improved cocoa. The objective is to produce clean and disease-free cocoa trees with high yield that will improve the incomes of cocoa farmers and ensure environmental and social sustainability of cocoa-based production systems.

The technology, which is currently being applied in Cote d'Ivoire, has helped that country in rehabilitating its cocoa farms, making it the world's largest producer.

Although Nigeria accounts for about 5 percent of the world's cocoa

production, the government's efforts to increase production are being hampered by old and unproductive cocoa trees, poor infrastructure, pests, diseases, low farmer education, and inadequate supply of farm inputs, among others.

Lava Kumar, IITA Virologist, said the clean planting materials technology would help Nigeria to rapidly propagate improved cocoa trees that could be used by farmers to replace old and unproductive trees.

"This is an important step towards cocoa transformation because we need to increase Nigeria's cocoa yield," said Kumar.

"It's actually a game changer for the sector," he added.

The institute plans to work with the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN), National Centre for Genetic Resources & Biotechnology (NACGRAB), and other national partners, transferring the technology to them and building national capacity. IITA's strategy will also include conserving and maintaining cocoa diversity in the country.

Team members driving the clean

planting materials technology include Anna Muyiwa (CRIN), Lava Kumar (IITA), Mary Olayode (NACGRAB), and Ranjana Bhattacharjee (IITA).

Peter Aikpokpodion, Team Leader of the Cocoa Value Chain Development under the office of the Minister of Agriculture, commended IITA for its support to Nigeria's cocoa sector.

According to him, this will help farmers to have access to clean planting materials.

He expressed optimism that the zeal and commitment shown by members of the team signifies a bright future for the sector.

"These efforts show that we are laying a foundation for a great future for cocoa, and I am glad," he added.

Over the years, IITA has led efforts to revamp the cocoa sector in West Africa primarily through its Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP). Researchers intend to leverage on the success and knowledge gained from STCP in Nigeria to improve the fortunes of cocoa farmers in particular and the livelihoods of farmers in general.



Members of the Nigerian Cocoa Transformation Agenda team pose for a group photo during the workshop held in Ibadan on Thursday, 26 January.

New cassava varieties that combat two deadly viral diseases released in Tanzania

Good news for cassava farmers! Tanzania has officially released new cassava varieties that could simultaneously withstand two of the most devastating diseases of the crop: cassava brown streak (CBSD) and cassava mosaic (CMD).

The two diseases have been spreading rapidly through the Great Lakes countries of eastern Africa from war-torn DRC to Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi, nearly reaching epidemic proportions as all the varieties presently grown by the farmers are susceptible.



A Tanzanian farmer with his cassava harvest. The new varieties not only address CMD and CBSD but could also increase yields.

Combined, the diseases have caused an estimated US\$1 billion worth of damage to Africa's cassava, with poor smallscale farmers bearing the brunt.

The new varieties, named Pwani, Mkumba, Makutupora and Dodoma, are a result of eight years of collaborative work between Tanzanian Agricultural Research Institutes, IITA, and CIAT. They were developed through conventional breeding catalyzed by biotechnology tools.

Edward Kanju, IITA cassava breeder based in Tanzania, who was also involved in the research, says that

the varieties were developed by crossing local varieties with those introduced from Latin America from CIAT in Colombia.

"We used local varieties from Tanzania as sources of resistance to CBSD and for local adaptation and those from CIAT as sources of high yield and resistance to CMD and cassava green mites," he said.

The new varieties can also easily double the

crop's production with their potentially high yields (23- 51 tons/ha against the current average yield of 10 tons/ha). They also meet other local preferences such as taste, ease of cooking, and texture.

According to Geoffrey Mkamilo, Team Leader of Cassava Research in Tanzania, farmers will be very relieved and happy with the release of the new varieties.

"CBSD attacked at a time when we were starting to recover from years of battling CMD. CBSD is especially devastating because its symptoms are not always obvious.

"Farmers looking forward to a good harvest get a rude shock when they harvest and discover the useless rotten roots," he explained.

"As a result, many have abandoned this hardy crop. This is unfortunate as cassava performs well even under harsh conditions such as poor soils and little rainfall," he added.

The project was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. The Generation Challenge Program of the CGIAR also contributed funds for farmer participatory trials and to complete tests required by the National Variety Release Committee.

AVEC-BF farmer group wins top agriculture award in Burkina Faso

Cowpea seed producers trained by AVEC-BF project won the top award for agriculture in the national exhibition competition "De la foire regionale Agro-Sylvo-Pastrale et Artisanale du CENTRE-OUEST" held on 16-18 December 2011 in Burkina Faso. The annual event is held to evaluate activities in the fields of agriculture, forestry, industry, and animal husbandry. It is supported by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the private sector.

Two groups of AVEC-BF-trained cowpea seed producers were cited, with one winning the grand prize in the agriculture category.

Haruki Ishikawa, IITA cowpea agronomist, says, "Before, this (winning) group of farmers was just average farmers producing grain seeds. Now they have become the best seed producers in the region because of the intensive training they received from AVEC-BF."

"The award will give them further self-confidence and will serve as motivation for other farmer-trainees to be better seed producers with improved skills and knowledge."



The AVEC-BF-trained cowpea producer group that won the grand prize of the agriculture category of the annual "De la foire regionale Agro-Sylvo-Pastrale et Artisanale du CENTRE-OUEST" showing their certificates.

Launched in 2010 and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) of Japan, AVEC-BF aims to develop capacity and a system to accelerate the dissemination of appropriate varieties selected for the region by linking scientists with seed and grain producers. It has trained hundreds of seed producers in Burkina Faso.

Issa Drabo, who jointly trained the seed producers with IITA scientists, said, "The award won by these Pouni cowpea seed

producers is a testament to their hard work and the effectiveness of our training efforts. The Prime Minister himself has expressed his gratitude of the work by AVEC-BF for their farmers."

AVEC-BF has also been made into a White Paper for Agriculture in 2011 and has been cited by the Japanese government as a "model project".

"I am extremely excited about what the project would be able to further achieve in its two-year run," adds Ishikawa.