

Going for choice: cowpea farmers in Burkina Faso get more and better options

In five villages in Northern and Central Burkina Faso, more than 400 farmers attended a Farmer's Participatory Varietal Selection (FPVS) activity to identify and select cowpea varieties that suit their preferences and meet their needs.

The activity, organized by IITA under its "Appropriate Variety of Early-Maturing Cowpea for Burkina Faso" (AVEC-BF) project, was held from 21 September to 4 October.

The AVEC-BF aims to widely disseminate early maturing cowpea varieties jointly developed by IITA and the *Institut National d'Environnement et des Recherches Agricoles*, Burkina Faso (INERA). These varieties mature within 60-70 days and withstand serious drought stress – a perennial problem of cowpea production in the dry regions of Burkina Faso and other Sahelian countries.

IITA and INERA are working to quickly disseminate these early maturing cowpea by identifying appropriate varieties through FPVS, increasing seed production of improved cowpea varieties through training and technical backstopping, and enhancing farmers' knowledge and skills through field schools.

Haruki Ishikawa, IITA cowpea agronomist, says, "The FPVS promotes quicker dissemination of elite varieties to farmers who selected the varieties themselves. The activity also furthers breeding to develop more suitable varieties."

"Cowpea and its crop relatives are very familiar to us in Japan. We hope that the project will help foster closer linkage between Japan and African countries," he adds.

About 15 seed producers trained under the project are producing one of the extra early maturing genotypes (IT98K-205-8) for widespread distribution. The genotype has been dubbed "Konr Cale" in Moore – a local dialect in Burkina Faso – which means "hunger stopper" even before the variety was released.

Issa Drabo, INERA partner, said, "We



(Above) Women farmers in Burkina Faso discussing about the improved cowpea seeds in their hands; (at right) Japanese Ambassador to Burkina Faso, Tsutomu Sugiura, observing FPVS activities with JICA expert Komi Uchino and Haruki Ishikawa, IITA scientist.



are receiving many requests from local governments for the breeder seeds of this variety for next year's certified seed production. We expect more appropriate genotypes to be identified for further varietal release via FPVS."

The Japanese ambassador to Burkina Faso, His Excellency Tsutomu Sugiura, has visited a project site – Pathiri, a village about 70km northwest of Ouagadougou) – to see the developments on the ground. He was joined by Komi Uchino and Tomoko Ichikawa, experts from JICA-Burkina Faso.

The group lauded the efforts of farmers to seek improved cowpea varieties for production and their eagerness to learn new cowpea cultivation skills and techniques.

The AVEC-BF project is funded by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery.

Liberia seeks IITA support of its Cassava Value Chain Strategy

A delegation from Liberian cassava sector has sought the assistance of IITA through a public and private sector partnership to help rebuild the country after war. The delegation, comprised of the Cassava Sector Coordinating Committee, specifically sought IITA's expertise in cassava research for production, processing, and commercialization.

Josephine George Francis, Committee Chair, said they have heard about IITA's contribution to the growth of the cassava industry in Nigeria and would want the institute to do the same in Liberia. "This is because we hope to make cassava a 'white gold' in Liberia," she explained.

The delegation also sought IITA's inputs in its recently developed national cassava strategy.

Earlier, Paula Bramel, IITA DDC-R4D, said the institute was ready to support Liberia in improving its cassava sector for food production and surplus for export. She illustrated this through the institute's R4D model which seeks to ensure that responsive research gets to the ultimate beneficiaries while ensuring an exit strategy for scientists.

The committee's visit to IITA was a result of an earlier meeting held by farmers, other stakeholders, and officials of that country with IITA on 21 July that saw the launch of the Cassava Value Chain Strategy for Liberia. More than 100 stakeholders attended the meeting.

The strategy was developed with funds from the ACP-program with the technical assistance of the International Trade Center (ITC) and IITA.

Antonio Lopez-Montes, IITA yam breeder, represented ITC during the first two thirds of the strategy development process. He then represented IITA during the last part of the strategy and at the launching.

The strategy is being supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Youth of Liberia. Stakeholders plan to fine tune and endorse it to Liberia's Parliament to be passed

as a national policy. The delegation toured the IITA-Ibadan campus and also visited other cassava processing and farmers' fields in nearby Ogun State.

Aside from Mrs Francis, the other members of the Liberian delegation included Momo Sandimanie, Ministry of Commerce; Eric Nimely, farmer-processor; Solomon Gofleetoe, farmer; Una Kumba Thompson, Farmers Women Union; Roselyn Perkins, farmer; David Peters, farmer; Abu Konneh, Ministry of Agriculture; and Hilary Barbington David, Committee's Consultant.



The Liberian Cassava Sector Coordinating Committee and IITA representatives during the meeting at IITA-Ibadan.

More farmers in northern Nigeria to reap benefits of improved maize varieties

Improved maize varieties developed by IITA and partners are fast penetrating new communities in Zamfara State, northwestern Nigeria. Traditionally, farmers in Zamfara State—located in the Sudan Savannah—grow millet, sorghum and cotton but improved results recorded by farmers in neighboring states in the region are fueling the introduction and adoption of maize.

For instance, the Emir of Maradun, after reading media reports, requested for maize

seeds of a yellow drought-tolerant variety for testing in Maradun, which is located in the Sudan-Savanna zone of Zamfara State.

The National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS) contacted Maslaha Seeds to supply seeds of an extra-early maturing *Striga*-tolerant maize variety (99 TZEE Y STR) for planting at the Emir's farm. The variety was developed by IITA and extensively tested in collaboration with partners.

resistant to *Striga*.

Abebe Menkir, IITA Maize Breeder, said that the introduction of maize in the region was a welcome development especially as it would create more options for farmers to make money and guarantee food security.

The field day, which attracted policy makers, also highlighted the importance of involving government officials and community leaders during the promotion of new agricultural innovations to speed up the process of reaching out to more farmers in rural areas.



Abebe Menkir and other guests of honor during the farmers' field day.

At a field day organized by the NAERLS, the Emir lauded the performance and adaptation of the variety in the region. He said the arrival of improved maize varieties in the region would promote crop diversification. He also indicated his willingness to support the testing of more high-yielding and drought-tolerant varieties that are also

Announcement

Central Biotech Lab is now the "IITA Bioscience Center"

The Central Biotechnology Laboratory at IITA-Ibadan has been rebranded as the "IITA Bioscience Center" effective immediately.

Melaku Gedil, Head, says that the name-change was necessitated to reflect the center's infrastructural upgrading and capacity refocusing with renewed and expanded scope.