



African governments urged to step up investments in rural roads to end hunger



Participants at the international workshop on "getting farm harvest to market" pose for a group photo

More investments in rural transport infrastructure networks are needed in Africa to aid transport of agricultural commodities, reduce postharvest losses, and more importantly combat the menace of hunger, says Hartmann, IITA Director-General.

He made the call against a backdrop of prevalent postharvest losses in Africa over the years that have been caused by deplorable rural road networks, inadequate infrastructure, and inefficient energy delivery.

These limitations have given rise to annual postharvest losses of between 10 and 90% in Africa, said Hartmann during a three-day international workshop hosted by the IITA on "Getting farm harvest to market" that ended on Thursday this week.

The workshop, which is a collaboration of the Africa College at the University of Leeds, the sub-Saharan Africa Transport Policy Programme (SSATP) managed by the World Bank, and IITA, aims to promote active

dialog among a range of stakeholders on food security, agriculture, and rural transportation.

George Banjo, Senior Transport Specialist at SSATP, said investments in rural roads would help developing nations come out of the poverty trap.

With more than 80% of agricultural produce transported by roads, Banjo said the development of the rural road network would ease transportation and offer farmers greater access to markets.

"It will also improve the agriculture sector's contribution to rural growth and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa," he said.

Despite favorable agroecological climate in the region, SSA remains a net importer of food with some of its member states being donor dependent. The region is also faced with infrastructural constraints that are hurting harvest.

Hartmann called for concerted efforts and dedication from stakeholders to good rural transportation so that Africa would cease being a recipient of food aid as "there is no dignity in asking for food aid."

In addition to poor energy and infrastructure, he noted that harvests in Africa are also lost due to biological and commercial threats.

WASCO explores areas of collaboration with IITA



WASCO's two-person delegation (right) held talks with IITA scientists in Ibadan

The West Africa Seasoning Company Limited (WASCO) is seeking areas of possible collaboration with IITA as the food company plans to expand its investments in Nigeria.

The Japanese-controlled firm, which manufactures Ajinomoto—a popular seasoning product, plans to make cassava a key raw material in its operation and hopes to tap IITA's expertise in cassava production.

WASCO's plans come at a time when the Japanese government is giving more attention to research on root and tuber crops.

The team from WASCO that visited IITA over the deal included Keiji Debari and Mitsuhiro Kishino.

Peter Kulakow, David Watson, and Gbassey Tarawali had fruitful discussions with the team. Tarawali pledged IITA's willingness to work with WASCO.

Announcements

Fellowships on sustainability

The Sustainability Science Program at Harvard University's Center for International Development invites applications for resident fellowships in sustainability science for the University's academic year beginning in September 2011. The fellowship competition is open to advanced doctoral and postdoctoral students, and to mid-career professionals engaged in research or practice to facilitate the design, implementation, and evaluation of effective interventions that promote sustainable development.

For more information on the fellowship's application process see: <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/sustsci/fellowship>

IITA Open Day 2010

IITA Open Day 2010 will be held on **Saturday, 6 November** at the IITA-Ibadan campus. Please plan to attend.

Ghana's Agriculture Minister calls for improved yam cultivation measures and knowledge exchange

The Ghanaian Minister of Agriculture, Kwesi Ahwoi, has tasked breeders and scientists to develop nutrient-efficient yam varieties, and technologies alongside effective disease and pest control measures that can significantly boost yam production and conserve the environment.

Ahwoi's remarks were made in a speech read on his behalf at a two-day regional stakeholders' forum held in Accra, Ghana recently.

The meeting was part of activities under the Strengthening Capacity for Yam Research-for-Development in Central and Western Africa (SCYReC), a project that is being funded by the EU-ACP Science and Technology Program.

The meeting sought to draw a strategic



Participants at a yam workshop in Ghana pose for a group photo

road map for ways to make research on yam more vibrant, interesting and appealing to young scientists. The forum, which is the last in a series, is part of efforts to raise yam's profile on the agricultural research agenda.

IITA's R4D Director, Dr. Robert Asiedu expressed the limitation of data on yam.

He said data and knowledge gaps constituted a handicap in the field which needed to be addressed if research in yam was to attract attention.

The power of cassava

The Unleashing the Power of Cassava in Africa (UPOCA) project of IITA, funded by USAID, is now on its second year. The Wambato farmers' group in Tanzania, a beneficiary of the project, has seen a remarkable increase in cassava production. Members of the group share their experience with IITA.



Dividends of investing in cassava: A video den, thanks to UPOCA

"From my dividends and the sale of my cassava to the group, I have finished constructing a video den, purchased seats, a TV, and a DVD player, and installed a solar system to power them. The villagers will pay to watch news and movies," says 61-year-old Peter Mtoi, who shows off his latest acquisitions with pride.

His wife, Mary Mtoi, 51, adds that they have also purchased a commercial charcoal oven to bake bread and cakes made of mixed cassava and wheat flour to sell to the village and nearby shopping center.

The two are members of the Wambato Farmers group (Wakulima wa Mhogo Bagamoyo Tongwe/Cassava farmers of Bagamoyo Tongwe) in Tanga region,

Tanzania. The group has been involved in cassava processing since 2008 after the Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) donated a fully equipped center for processing cassava flour. It was responding to an increase in the crop's production as farmers rapidly adopted new, high-yielding, disease-resistant varieties introduced by the roots and tubers research program of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Cooperatives.

The UPOCA team, impressed with their efforts, built their capacity further with a series of training in 2009. The training focused on the production of high quality cassava flour, new products, and recipes using the flour; quality control and safety issues; and packaging and marketing.

The group enthusiastically implemented their newly gained skills and knowledge. They constructed a toilet at the center, raised the racks for drying the cassava to avoid contamination by dust or domestic animals, and purchased polythene bags to spread the cassava chips to dry, among others.

Tabu Maghembe, an extension agent working with the group, said that before the training, the group was processing 500 kg of fresh cassava roots per month. But now as a result of improved flour quality and better packaging, and marketing skills, it is now processing up to 5 – 6 tons per month and supplying supermarkets and shops in Morogoro and Dar es Salaam as well as around the village.

The group is clearly enjoying a better life today, thanks to their hard work and the interventions of the three institutions in unleashing the power of the cassava. Mary Mtoi says, "I no longer look down on cassava. It has brought me and my family to where we are today."

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving your workplace at the end of the day, make sure that you have:

- (1) Powered off all unnecessary electrical office/lab equipment;
- (2) Turned off air conditioners; and
- (3) Switched off all lights.