



Africa needs more seed companies to push out improved maize varieties



Participants pose for a group photo at the DTMA training course in Ibadan

African governments have been urged to encourage the emergence of more seed companies that will multiply, market, and disseminate improved maize varieties to farmers to boost food production.

So far, in the West African region, only Nigeria has a relatively vibrant seed industry with about 12 emerging private sector-driven seed companies. Ghana and Mali have three each, while the Republic of Benin has none.

Researchers say that this development needs to change for Africa to test the much-awaited Green Revolution.

At a training course on 'Variety Testing and Seed Production of Open-pollinated and Hybrid Varieties,' organized by the Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa, Dr. Baffour Badu-Apraku, IITA Maize Breeder based in Ibadan, said that the development of the seed sector was imperative for the continent to have a landmark breakthrough in agricultural productivity.

According to him, Africa needs to push for the establishment of more seed companies that will meet the growing demand of farmers.

The training course, which was held between 19 and 24 July 2010, brought together maize breeders in Africa and scientists working on maize improvement under the DTMA project.

The main aim of the course was to upgrade the technical capabilities and skills of seed specialists of public institutions and production managers of seed companies in variety testing, and the techniques of quality seed production, particularly hybrid seed.

Badu-Apraku said the training course was part of strategies adopted by IITA and CIMMYT to encourage the emergence of more seed companies in the region.

Another option being used by researchers is the establishment of Community Based Seed Production companies.

Badu-Apraku said, "For about 20 years, we have been supporting community based seed production companies by providing training, working with the national systems and arranging inputs for them, linking them with credit facility providers, and in some cases, connecting them with the seed production companies."

According to him, once linked to certified seed companies, the community based seed producers become contract growers and that they have assured market.

IITA welcomes new cassava breeder



Maroya

Norbert Maroya has joined IITA this week. Maroya is from Benin. Prior to joining IITA, he worked at ICRISAT in Mali as a Coordinator for two years and became a Senior Advisor

on Public Partnership and Seed Policy of the West Africa Seed Alliance. Maroya previously worked for IITA between 2002 and 2007 as the Coordinator of the West

Africa Seed Network based in Ghana.

He completed a Diploma in General Agronomy and Agricultural Engineering at the National University of Benin followed by a Diploma in Production Systems and Rural Development Strategies in Montpellier, France. Maroya completed his PhD in 2008 at the University of Ghana Legon with a thesis titled "Genotype by Environment Interaction Effect on Beta-Carotene and some yield components of Yellow Root Cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz) Genotypes in Ghana"

He is married to Catherine and they have four children; Kenneth, Gwladys, Ange Joel, and Merveille.

Maroya will be living at 6 IITA Drive. His office is room 35 in Building 400 where his extension is 2671. Norbert's email address is N.Maroya@cgiar.org.

Library update

Access to Ulrich's Web

The Library is pleased to announce that IITA stations can now access Ulrich's web – the global serials directory. The access is by IP authentication at www.ulrichsweb.com

Ulrich's web:

- makes journals search and discovery easy and effective.
- provides in-depth information on journals.
- helps to identify journals in which to publish or which support various research interests.
- helps to identify peer-reviewed journals.

Varieties offer short-term solution to deadly cassava diseases



Farmers harvesting cassava leaves

Three cassava clones have shown significant tolerance to both cassava brown streak disease (CBSD) and cassava mosaic disease (CMD) for the fifth year in research trial farms in Uganda. This offers a glimmer of hope to poor farmers in mid-altitude areas in eastern and central Africa where the two diseases have devastated the crop with negative impacts on the region's food and income security.

The three are now ready to move to on-farm trials to test their tolerance and productivity under different agroecological zones before they can be officially released to the farmers even as scientists continue the search for varieties that are truly resistant to both viral diseases.

While 11 of them showed moderate to severe symptoms when harvested this year, the three showed mild symptoms and only in the leaves. The roots – the most economically important part of the crop – were intact. Furthermore he said they were high-yielding producing up to 35 tonnes per hectare compared to the average 10 tonnes per hectare in the country.

He explained that using these three promising varieties and other sources of resistance, they would start another breeding cycle to cross with locally adapted varieties in Uganda to transfer the tolerance.

In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, cassava is the second most important

Edward Kanju, a cassava breeder with IITA and one of the scientists behind the work, said he was happy with the three that had not only showed very mild symptoms of the diseases but were also high yielding.

He said the three were selected from 14 breeding lines that had shown promising resistance to CMD and CBSD after last year's growing season.

staple after maize and is regarded as a food security crop as it yields reasonably during drought and with little inputs such as fertilizer.

"We will make them available to national research institutes in the five countries already hit or immediately threatened by the disease including Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, and DRC for their breeding trials," he said.

The research is being undertaken by IITA in collaboration with the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO).

Its main focus is on the CBSD that causes a dry rot in the tuberous crop. The disease has been around for many years in eastern and central Africa since the 1930's but confined only to the low altitude coastal lowlands. However since 2004, a more deadly and devastating form of the disease was reported in Uganda and from there it has spread to mid-altitude areas of its neighbouring countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi and DRC.

The team is foreseeing a few more years of research before the farmers can finally have cassava varieties that are truly resistant to the diseases.

"Truly resistant varieties that have internal mechanisms that either stop the virus from spreading to the rest of the plant from the point of infection or keep its population so low that it cannot infect nearby plants, are the sustainable and most cost-effective solution to the disease," said Kanju.

NRS supervisory management training workshop holds in Ibadan



Participants at the NRS supervisory management training workshop pose for a group photo

The Human Resources has organized a two-day Supervisory Management Course for Senior and General Staff that play supervisory roles in their various units and who supervise the work of other staff.

The workshop was based on the training needs identified for staff in last year's performance appraisal reports.

Sixty NRS participated in the training which was organized in two sessions of 30

participants per session, between 19 and 27 August 2010.

The training was designed to:

- Expose and orient the supervisors with various people-handling skills as well as important elementary leadership skills.
- Acquaint them with team building concepts, useful tips in time management, performance

management and customer handling techniques especially in a multi-cultural environment

- Equip them with effective communication and interpersonal skills, among other capacity building skills.

At the end of the training, participants said they learnt a lot of new and valuable skills and would wish to recommend the course to others.