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Cassava could "transform economies" in Central Africa

Ministers of agriculture and rural development from Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Gabon are optimistic that agriculture could transform the region into a semi-industrialized economy, with cassava being at the center of the sector. They were speaking with agricultural experts, policymakers, and smallholder farmers in Cameroon during the inaugural biennial Cassava forum last month (6-9 December).

The initiative is a newly established regional forum on cassava for Central African countries that aims to facilitate dialogue on how to add value to cassava farming.

It also aims to bring relevant individuals and institutions in the cassava value chain together to discuss the challenges and opportunities in cassava farming, especially in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Gabon.

The forum was organized by the Netherlands-headquartered Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in partnership with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and IITA. The Ministers, speaking at different sessions during the forum, noted that cassava is a very important crop that could help the region boost its food security through increased production. They urged researchers and the private sector to help the transfer and adoption of new technologies by smallholder farmers to enable them to overcome challenges such as climate change. "This forum is very important in helping us address the challenges facing a crop that is important, especially to the rural poor," says Ananga Messina, ministerial delegate to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Cameroon. Messina urged hospitality industries to ensure that cassava meals are served in their restaurants and hotels to help increase markets for farmers. She added that the next forum to be held in 2018 in the Central African Republic should address postharvest losses in processing of cassava, which is still a major challenge in the region. Messina also asked participating countries to have national forums prior to the regional one to discuss national challenges and opportunities. She says that this would make the regional forum sustainable.

Cassava has the potential to transform African economies and improve farmers' livelihoods.

Vincent Fautrel, a senior program coordinator, agricultural value chains at CTA, noted that "Cassava has been associated with the rural poor for a long time yet it has the potential to transform economies." Fautrel therefore urged the region to increase investments in the crop because it has helped boost agricultural production in Ghana and Nigeria. He added that the forum could help change the perception towards cassava and how to improve its value chain. (Adapted from SciDev.Net)

Tanzania's deputy minister applauds joint IITA–University research on cooking banana

Tanzania's Deputy Minister for Education, Science and Technology has praised the collaboration between IITA and the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST).

Hon Eng. Stella Manyanya who was on a tour of the Pan-African university on 21 January, said that great things happen when academic institutions partner with world class research institutes such as IITA.

The deputy minister was particularly impressed by the banana propagation project jointly implemented by NM-AIST and IITA. She also perused research projects by students and faculty members and toured the university's well-equipped laboratories. IITA refurbished and equipped one of the laboratories and has its banana breeding project office at the university where the leader of the program, Alan Brown and his team are stationed.

"I commend the efforts made by IITA and NM-AIST and hope that many more of such efforts and projects that touch lives and the needs of the society and industries will be developed. That is how we can truly achieve national industrialization and pave the way to living the 'motto'*Academia for Society and Industry,"* she said.

Hon. Eng. Manyanya was received by top NM-AIST management including Prof Karoli Njau, the acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) - Academic, Research and Innovation (ARI); Mussa Chacha, Ag. DVC- Planning, Finance and Administration (PFA); Victor Bwindiki, Zonal Chief School Quality Assurance Officer; and IITA and NM-AIST staff in Arusha.

L-R: The Deputy Minister for Education Science and Technology, Hon. Eng. Stella Manyanya (center, wearing a black jacket and a flowery dress) in a group photo with the management of NM-AIST. On her right is Prof Karoli Njau, and to her left are Victor Bwindiki and Mussa Chacha.

Good progress but major challenges remain in gender integration efforts in agric and climate change policies in Tanzania and Uganda

While both Uganda and Tanzania have made great strides in strengthening the gender component of their agriculture and climate change policies, a lot still needs to be done to ensure gender issues are adequately addressed including the allocation of resources and better planning of activities and strategies for gender transformation. This in turn will contribute to efforts to reduce poverty and achieve economic growth in an equitable manner.

These are the findings of the latest research from the Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) led by IITA and supported by the CGIAR Program on Climate Change and Food Security (CCAFS). The key findings were recently published in two Info Notes: Towards gender responsive policy formulation and budgeting in the agricultural sector: Opportunities and challenges in Uganda and Gender responsive policy formulation and budgeting in Tanzania: do plans and budgets match?

Women have a critical role to play in tackling climate change and related threats to food security.

The findings were based on desk surveys carried out by Mariola Acosta, research fellow at IITA and PhD candidate at Wageningen University; Edidah Ampaire, Social Scientist and PACCA Project Coordinator and Laurence Jassogne, a Systems Agronomist, all from IITA-Uganda and others. In Tanzania, the researchers analyzed 75 documents from the national, district, and ward levels and primary quantitative budget data at the district level while in Uganda, 83 agri-food policies and strategies at national, district, and sub-county levels were analyzed.

In both studies gender issues were mostly seen as women's issues and women were generally stereotypically portrayed as vulnerable and marginalized by society with limited access to land and resources. These characterizations reinforce gender inequalities and might even become counterproductive. The study therefore recommends that gender issues in agricultural policies incorporate men's, women's, and youth challenges, opportunities, perceptions, and preferences.

The study also found gaps in gender planning and implementation at both national and lower governance levels such as districts and sub-districts. In Tanzania, while the majority of the national policies and strategies sufficiently integrated gender issues, they lacked clear implementation plans and did not allocate appropriate budgets. At district level, the budgeting was not done consistently - some districts budgeted, some did not, and others started and stopped.

In Uganda, budget allocations for gender issues at sub-county and district levels were low, fluctuating from year to year and with sharp differences between estimated and actual budgets. This makes the planning and implementation of gender mainstreaming activities extremely challenging. Furthermore, the gender activities planned and implemented at district and sub-county level were largely informative such as celebrating International Women's Day.

In view of these results, the researchers recommend, among others, that the two East African governments should increase efforts in streamlining gender integration from the national to the local levels, increasing budget allocation, and improving gender planning to focus on gender transformation.

Congratulations! UK body recognizes IITA

Emmanuel Njukwe.

In central Africa, the work of one IITA scientist—Emmanuel Njukwe has received commendation from Industry Insight Monthly—a UK-based organization—and he has subsequently been recognized in its 2017 Farming & Agriculture Awards.

The 2017 Farming & Agriculture Awards recognized individuals and institutions working on seed systems.

Njukwe leads a team that employs a rigorous propagation technique for cassava and banana, to ensure that smallholder farmers get unlimited access to improved, clean, and healthy planting materials. He is also a key promoter of viable strategies for disseminating improved and healthy cassava and banana planting materials in Central Africa and in the process has helped to control endemic and emerging diseases such as Cassava Mosaic Disease and Cassava Brown Streak Disease for cassava, Banana Xanthomonas Wilt and Banana Bunchy Top Disease for banana.

For instance, in 2006 Njukwe co-authored and published a technical manual on banana macropropagation and in 2009 received an award on innovative system for disseminating improved cassava varieties. These efforts prompted the organizers of the Awards to nominate and honor Njukwe.

"Your hard work and dedication has been officially recognized and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture has been crowned: Best in Tropical Agriculture Seed Production - Central Africa & Excellence Award for African Agriculture Development," the organizers wrote.

Speaking on the significance of the award, Njukwe said he is happy that IITA's efforts are gaining international recognition. He believes that a good crop harvest begins with healthy planting material and IITA as a lead institution in alleviating hunger and poverty in Africa needs adapted and cost-effective approaches to scale out improved planting materials to farmers.

"To ensure the dissemination of improved and preferred varieties beyond the initial intervention sites, every contract farmer is expected to return 25% of their planting material for each variety/clone received at the end of a crop cycle. These are then sorted and packaged at the focal sites and distributed to a new wave of farmers.

This process ensures a continual and expanding supply of planting material of improved varieties in the region…For banana and plantain, we have bridged the gap between farmers and private suppliers of tissue culture plantlets by establishing and maintaining tissue culture mother gardens from where we obtain healthy suckers for macropropagation," he said.

The awards will be announced on the Farming & Agriculture Awards platform later this year.

Announcements

All-Africa Postharvest Technologies & Innovations Challenge: The Organizers of the 1st All Africa Postharvest Congress and Exhibition, comprising global stakeholders in the postharvest sector and other partners, are announcing the All Africa Postharvest Technologies and Innovations Challenge, 2017. The aim of the challenge is to document and showcase the best emerging postharvest technologies and innovations with potential for scale-up. Additionally the challenge seeks to establish and strengthen linkages between innovators and potential investors to facilitate upscaling and outscaling of their innovations with the ultimate goal of reducing postharvest food losses. The call is open to individuals and institutions from or working in Africa. The technologies/innovations should either be at testing or market-ready stages. Are you interested? Read full announcement here.

A new IITA at 50!
This year, 2017, marks 50 years of IITA's presence in sub-Saharan Africa! The core anniversary celebrations have been slated for the weeks of 24 July and 20 November 2017. Watch this space for updates on the anniversary celebrations.

The International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (icipe), Kenya, in partnership with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) In-Country/In-Region Scholarships Programme and African university partners, invites applications from suitably qualified candidates for PhD scholarships in the African Regional Postgraduate Programme in Insect Sciences (ARPPIS). The application deadline is 12 February 2017. Read full announcement here.

Crop Breeding Conference, 11–12 April 2017, Ibadan, Nigeria

The FUNAGIB Foundation is calling on African students working on cassava breeding to apply for its 6-month scholarship to study at Brasilia from 1 August 2017. Applications are open to PhD and MSc students who have completed their course work and are preparing their thesis. The application deadline is 15 May 2017.
More information and guidelines for application are available here and here. Interested applicants can also contact Professor Nagib Nassar at nagibnassar@geneconserve.pro.br

The Environmental Research Letters (ERL) has published the final "Synthesis/Review" editorial piece to finalize the Nitrogen Management focus issue collection. The collection features 34 research letter articles, in addition to this final editorial, and so is the joint second-largest such collection that has ever been published in ERL!
This special collection addresses the challenges for nitrogen management, specifically on nitrogen in the context of food production and its impacts on human and ecosystem health.
The issue, co-edited by Africa RISING Chief Scientist for East Africa Mateete Bekunda, is a result of the 6th International Nitrogen Conference in Kampala, 18–22 November 2013. It was hosted by IITA with support from IITA's Africa RISING project. Authors and the interested public can view the collection here.

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or Adaobi Umeokoro (a.umeokoro@cgiar.org).