

East African heads laud Aflasafe

A team of African leaders from Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda under the East Africa Community (EAC) have endorsed IITA's aflasafe—Africa's first indigenous biocontrol product for control of aflatoxins.

The EAC delegates spent three days, 20–22 March, on a learning visit to the Aflasafe project and also went to a local community in Ibadan to see how the product is helping maize farmers meet international standards and improve both their health and income.

The visit created awareness among the EAC delegates on best practices in the control of aflatoxin, as well as supporting initiatives around the biocontrol technology, and approaches to address the impact of crop aflatoxin contamination along the value chain.

According to the visitors, the decision to come and see first-hand how aflasafe

is working in Nigeria will help them promote Aflasafe as a project in East Africa.

“EAC intends to benefit and partner with the Aflasafe project in various areas, marketing inclusive. For instance, we now know that using aflasafe increases the value of farmers' products, eventually boosting market prices and benefitting the economy in the long run. Keying into this project will also help improve the health of people in the countries we represent, as well as the added possibility of reducing the risk of cancer and other health burdens associated with aflatoxins,” Engr. Ladislaus Kyaruzi Leonadis, EAC member said.



Ranjit Bandyopadhyay shows a maize cob to a young farmer.

[Ranjit Bandyopadhyay](#), Leader of the Aflasafe project, and [Debo Akande](#), AgResults Aflasafe Pilot Manager, led the visitors to the Ijaye farm settlement where they spoke with maize farmers already using and benefitting from Aflasafe.

Continued on page 2

Seed sector: Economically sustainable seed businesses can transform cassava production in Nigeria

Nigerian seed sector professionals said that businesses selling improved varieties and high quality cassava stems for cultivation could help farmers significantly raise their productivity. The benefits of this raised productivity are expected to be enjoyed by all the stakeholders across the value chain in a sustainable way.

This came out during a national stakeholder conference on cassava seed system organized by the project “Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Cassava Seed System” (BASICS) held at IITA, Ibadan, on 23 March.

The meeting brought together national and international researchers, academics, policymakers, the private sector,



Cassava stakeholders celebrating the project BASICS in developing sustainable seed systems in Nigeria.

nongovernmental organizations, and farmers to a roundtable to reflect on the experiences of BASICS in 2016 and refine the project plan for 2017 and beyond.

Hemant Nitturkar, Project Director for BASICS, made the case for the need for all stakeholders to work towards a sustainable seed system in Nigeria. He said that Nigeria is the largest producer of cassava in the world with a production of about 54 million tons, but its yield per hectare of roots is about 8 tons, less than half of the realizable yields of more than 20 tons. According to researchers, one of the causes of low yields in cassava is the poor adoption of clean and healthy seeds of improved varieties by farmers.

"We have to start with the right planting material and nurture it with good agronomy and weed management practices. Each of these three components has the potential to raise the productivity of cassava by 30 percent. If we do not improve our practices in seed, weed and agronomy, we are incurring a lost opportunity of about 200 billion naira annually from each of the three issues," Nitturkar explained.

BASICS is commercially piloting two pathways of seed delivery. One is called Village Seed Entrepreneur (VSE), in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Benue and with National Roots Crop Research Institute (NRCRI), in Abia, Imo, Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom states. Here, the project is helping develop a network of 130 community based seed

enterprises. These VSEs will source certified stems of improved varieties from NRCRI and IITA to multiply and sell to the farmers in their vicinity. This way, the farmers will not have to go far to source quality stems for planting.

The second pilot is called Processor Led Model (PLM), in partnership with Context Global Development. Here, the project works with large processors who then make available quality stems to their outgrowers with a buy-back arrangement for the roots produced.

Slow and low multiplication ratio has been a key constraint in cassava seed system. The project is piloting a new technology called semi-autotrophic hydroponics (SAH) for rapid seed multiplication. Once this technology from Argentina is adapted and perfected, it is expected to have a significant impact on the ability of early generation seed businesses to quickly bring suitable varieties within reach of farmers. The project is also working with National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC) and Fera of UK to improve the quality certification system in Nigeria.

Lawrence Kent, senior program officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said that the Project aims to build an economically sustainable seed system that is profitable both to the sellers of quality stems and to the farmers who purchase and plant those stems. He encouraged all to "create reusable bridges to continuously link technology



Key BASICS project implementers in a huddle.

developers with farmers through business-oriented approaches, like the one being implemented under BASICS."

Graham Thiele, Director of the CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas led by the International Potato Center (CIP); Alfred Dixon, IITA Director for Development and Delivery, and Project Leader for the Cassava Weed Management Project; Amin Babandi, Director of Agriculture, FMARD, represented by Segun Ayeni, Deputy Director, Roots and Tuber Crops, FMARD; Folusho Olaniyan OON, CEO, Contact Consulting Nigeria and Program Director, Agralnnovate West Africa; Emmanuel Okogbenin, Director of Technical Operations, AATF; and Robert Asiedu, Director R4D, IITA-West, all shared perspectives and added their voice to the call for stakeholders to jointly build a strong and sustainable seed system for cassava in Nigeria.

East African heads laud Aflasafe **Cont'd from page 1**

The Head of Ijaye Farmers Association, who spoke on behalf of other farmers, said that maize crops treated with

aflasafe meet international safety standards and that they are now able to sell that maize at a premium price.



EAC delegates and Aflasafe Project management and implementers in a meeting in IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria.

"When Aflasafe was introduced to me, I was sceptical at first. But I went ahead and used it on a small portion on my farm and discovered during harvest that the output was far better and the yields were able to withstand the test of time. Since then, I have never stopped using the product and this time I am using it on a wider expanse of land," he said.

Further convinced by the testimonies heard during the field visits, the EAC delegates during their closing meeting with [Kwame Akuffo-Akoto](#), IITA Deputy Director General for Special Duties, said "We are anticipating a beneficial collaboration with IITA to support the eradication of aflatoxins in our countries."

SARD-SC project stimulates rural economy through establishment of cassava community processing centers in DR Congo

The cassava community processing centers (CCPCs) are currently stimulating the economy and creating employment for the rural population of Kavumu village, in the Kabare territory of South-Kivu Province of the DR Congo. Until the introduction of the CCPC in early 2015, there was a high level of unemployment in Kavumu community.



Mapendo Benedicte (right) with a colleague.

The CCPC is a collective agroprocessing enterprise made of farmers' groups for the processing of fresh cassava roots, high quality cassava flour, fermented flour, garri, and starch. These activities within the center bring the community together; boost the market for cassava roots, flour, and other products; and facilitate access to healthy cassava planting materials through the multiplication farms of CCPC members and the local farmers around the factory.

Through the [SARD-SC](#) project, members of the CCPC were trained on good

agronomic practices in cassava cropping systems, business plan development, and market linkages. At the end of the training, participants realized the many opportunities and profitable businesses in the cassava sector, and have now started practicing the techniques learned. They have also started training other small associations and farmers groups within their community.

In addition to the training, the project gave the organization healthy cassava planting materials for a 2-ha plot from

which they harvested 67 tons of raw roots for US\$5955.5 at 80 Fc/kg. Kavumu CCPC now employs five regular staff receiving monthly salaries as well as casual workers (around 20 persons each day).

Initially, a market outlet for the cassava products was a big problem until the CCPC was linked to the IITA Kalambo Youth Agripreneurs (IKYA). As the CCPC started flooding the market with cassava products, members of the Kavumu community were encouraged to get more involved in the cassava sector and many have benefitted greatly from it.

A very good example is a young woman named Mapendo Kabiona Benedicte, who is one of the Kavumu CCPC staff. She is the fifth child from a family of seven children (three girls and four boys) whose parents are farmers. Through the support of her parents, she had earlier obtained a diploma in 2014 but she couldn't gain admission into university to pursue a degree due to lack of funds. She looked for a job, including as a primary school teacher, but could not get one.

However, following her successful participation in the SARD-SC project training, Benedicte was offered a job at Kavumu CCPC with a monthly salary of US\$60. In addition, she has been able to convince her parents to produce more cassava to supply CCPC. With increased resources, she has enrolled to study a course in the university.

Local agencies pledge security and safety of IITA staff

Representatives of two local entities—the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and the Oyo [State Security Services](#) (SSS)—visited IITA in Ibadan recently and assured the safety and security of staff.

The Director of Oyo State SSS, Andrew Yakubu, came to visit [IITA](#) headquarters on 30 March, after indicating an interest in developing a cordial relationship with the Institute. SSS is responsible for intelligence gathering, and upholding and enforcing the criminal law of Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the Moniya Unit Commander of FRSC, (Ms) M.T. Ishola, paid a courtesy visit 31 March. The visit aimed to ensure that all vehicles used by IITA staff meet the minimum safety standards, and that all staff possess a valid driver's license and plate number.



Oyo State Security Services representatives meeting with IITA staff in Ibadan.

Deputy Director General, Corporate Services (DDG-CS), [Hilde Koper-Limbourg](#) welcomed and briefed both teams about IITA and its work. Koper-Limbourg, in welcoming the guests, said “In IITA, we are one family, we maintain peace and order. Since you have shown an interest in a cordial relationship, we accept and express our appreciation for your support”.

IITA Security Manager, David Oluwadare, lauded the SSS team for their unceasing support towards safeguarding the staff of IITA, and sought for more intense security measures. “We are grateful for your prompt assistance whenever we need your help; we have enjoyed your support, and hope for more cooperation for technical assistance and safety standards. Please use your office to ensure that our staff members are safe and well protected,” Oluwadare said.

“IITA lives up to the name. The work being done here is massive; it is very impressive, and I must say that this is the beginning of a robust relationship with IITA...I will ensure the safety of every staff member of this organization. Thank you for the warm

reception; it was indeed a memorable experience,” Yakubu stated at the end of the visit, after which he presented a plaque to IITA.

Ishola and her team met with Koper-Limbourg; Oluwadare; Superintendent Officer, James Adedayo; Protocol & External Liaison Manager, Toyin Oke; and a member of the IITA Youth Agripreneurs.

The Security Manager sought technical assistance on speed limiters, and pointed

out how staff are delayed coming to work in the morning because of special patrol FRSC officials. Ishola said she had reduced the number of days that the FRSC patrol the IITA-Moniya road to two—Tuesdays and Thursdays—to ensure diligent discharge of duties.

The team members were taken on a tour of IITA facilities, laboratories, and newly implemented projects and a drive around the lake. Ishola later presented a “bible” to the security unit of IITA.



M.T. Ishola of FRSC on a tour of IITA.

Southern Africa soybean breeders train on Breeding Management System

A recent training workshop held and hosted by the IITA Southern Africa Research and Administration Hub (SARAH) in Lusaka, Zambia on 21-24 March, on Breeding Management System resulted in shared enthusiasm by participants – mainly soybean breeders from national programs in the region – to use and adopt Breeding Management System (BMS) in their respective soybean breeding programs.

The participants, which included researchers from Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia from the public and private

sectors, had the opportunity for hands-on training using their own data from their breeding programs in the use and implementation of BMS. The training was co-facilitated by Trushar Shah, Integrated Breeding Platform (IBP) Hub Manager, IITA, and Akinnola Akintunde, ISS Consultant, Integrated Breeding Platform (IBP).

BMS is a suite of database management software applications that can be used to efficiently manage plant breeding data across all phases of the crop

improvement cycle from seed inventory to nurseries, trials, and trial data statistical analyses.

“BMS is an amazing plant breeding toolbox that brings the whole breeding cycle and processes to your fingertips that facilitate data sharing within and among breeding groups. This greatly increases scientists’ breeding efficiency and data storage,” says Godfree Chigeza, Soybean Breeder based at IITA-SARAH, who organized the BMS workshop and also participated in the training.



Breeding Management System training participants in Zambia.

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).