

Cassava Matters

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IITA-CWMP is putting smiles on our faces, and making life easier for us, farmers say



Farmers sharing testimonies

Resource-poor farmers who are participating in the demonstration farms being organized by the IITA-led Cassava Weed Management Project (CWMP) have said that the project intervention is making life easier for them. According to them, the project is a “burden lifter.” They said they have “suffered over the years, seeking solutions to weed management in cassava farming systems.”

For farmer Fortunatus Okeke, the IITA-CWMP is perhaps the best thing to have happened to farmers in recent times.

“It was a ‘new normal’ to hand weed and face drudgery. But now, IITA has brought solutions to control weeds. We are glad for

this,” he said.

Another farmer, Abu Ogundapo who is based in Abadapo village, said that the yields from the demonstration farm were unprecedented. “We have never had it so good like this,” he said, while admiring his cassava harvest.

Farmer Esther Ayangbade from Otuu village said, “This project has made cassava farming easier. I am glad to be part of this.”

Responsible for between 50 and 80 percent of yield losses in cassava farming systems, weeds rank high among the constraints to cassava production in Africa, limiting the

yield of the root crop to less than 10 tons per hectare in Nigeria.

Farmers plant cassava to the extent to which they can control weeds, notes Dr Alfred Dixon, Project Leader of the IITA CWMP. For women, who contribute up to 90 percent to weeding labor, it is a “nightmare” imagining the emergence of weeds and having to clear them. In some cases, children of school age are withdrawn from schools to support weeding operations, a practice that undermines the future of this vulnerable group.

With the interventions of the IITA-CWMP using integrated weed control, farmers are heaving a sigh of relief from the ‘yoke’ of weed infestation in cassava.

The integrated weed management package comprises the use of best-bet agronomic practices plus the use of safe and environmentally friendly herbicides.

Using this approach, Prof Friday Ekeleme, Project Investigator for the IITA-CWMP, has reported that farmers are now doubling the national yield average of cassava—crossing the 20 tons per hectare mark to 32 tons per hectare in some cases.

Participating farmers in the demo farms interviewed said they were willing to adopt the weed management practices, a signpost that the intervention is relevant.

GCP21: Send a photo and stand a chance to win a prize

The Global Cassava Partnerships for the 21st century (GCP21) with support from the French Institute of Benin in the framework of the French Embassy in Cotonou is organizing a photo competition under the theme; “Cassava Transformation in Africa.”

The objective of this contest is to recognize all aspects of cassava value chain from production, processing, marketing and consumption.

The winning photos will be part of a special exhibition at the French Institute of Benin to be held 11-30 June 2018. Photo entries should illustrate and tell compelling stories about cassava in Africa.

If you want to participate in this contest,

please send your preferred picture(s) to: Godwin Atser (g.atser@cgiar.org),

...Increase the visibility of your work

Do you have a compelling video demonstrating the impact of your work? You stand a chance to increase the visibility of your work or project by sending us such videos. The videos will be streamed to an audience comprising donors, researchers,

the Communication Coordinator for the conference. The deadline is 1 May 2018.

policymakers and farmers.

If you want to participate, please send the link of the video to: Godwin Atser (g.atser@cgiar.org), the Communication Coordinator for the conference. The deadline is 1 May 2018.

Breaking!!!

GCP21 opens Pre-registration.
Register and reserve a space.

Please check out <http://www.gcp21.org/beninconference/index.html> for all other information.

Extension service providers make bold new decisions after weed management training

After a day's training on weed management in cassava farming systems, extension service providers have resolved to adopt and disseminate best bet weed management practices including appropriate spacing, tillage, use of improved varieties, and the use of safe and environmentally friendly herbicides.

The training, which was organized by the IITA-managed Cassava Weed Management Project in collaboration with the Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Seed System for Cassava (BASICS) and Catholic Relief Services, presented the change agents new information on integrated weed management in cassava farming systems.

The 35 change agents drawn from different

local government areas of Benue state resolved to:

- Tell farmers the importance of land measurement for cassava farming.
- Tell farmers not to wash used containers and other herbicide equipment near sources of water.
- Advise farmers on appropriate use of pre-emergence and post-emergence herbicides.
- Mobilize village seed entrepreneurs (VSEs) and farmer groups for a step-down training on weed management.
- Advise farmers on calibration and proper mixing of herbicides.
- Inform farmers the importance of wearing personal protective equipment.



Participants at the IITA -CWMP and BASICS/CRS-organised training on weed management in cassava farming systems in Makurdi

Switch to integrated weed control and make profits, says Prof Ekeleme

For investors to reap the benefits of cassava production, they must invest in appropriate weed control, says the Principal Investigator of IITA-CWMP, Friday Ekeleme.

Addressing members of the Nigeria Agribusiness Group (NABG) on the topic Cassava Weed Management Project:

Opportunities for collaboration with the private sector, Ekeleme said that weeds constitute one of the greatest constraints to cassava productivity in Africa, limiting national average to less than 10 tons per hectare.

"Under the IITA Cassava Weed Management Project, we have demonstrated on farmers' fields that it is possible to double national average. If farmers do proper weed control, they can get more than 20 tons per hectare," he explained to the visiting team of the NABG.

The visit on 19 February by the NABG—an agricultural think tank, was aimed at fostering ties with IITA but also exploring areas of business opportunities to members.

The NABG, which comprises eminent persons drawn from Nigeria's private sector players in the agricultural value chain, was excited over the many innovations that have been developed by researchers in IITA ranging from improved seeds that could more than double farmers' productivity, to technologies that control weeds and double the yield of cassava, to simple processing machines that add value to crops such as cowpea, cassava, and yam. Other technologies such as inoculum production which raises the productivity of legumes such as soybean by about 20 percent, and aflasafe—a biological control product for managing aflatoxins—were also explored. The semi-autotrophic hydroponics which is being used to produce thousands of clean seeds of clonal crops such as cassava and yam, and the yam aeroponics—a system of growing clean seed yam in the air—were also well received by the group.

After a series of presentations by IITA researchers and a tour of the 1000-hectare

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• Advise farmers on the use of appropriate dosage in herbicide application and that an overdose of herbicides is harmful and not beneficial because it can lead to environmental pollution, resistance by the weeds, and even economic loss.

The training, which was held in Makurdi on 22 February, was part of efforts to extend the knowledge generated by the IITA-CWMP to farmers especially beneficiaries of the BASICS project, and address the challenge of weeds in cassava farming systems in Nigeria.

The Project Director of BASICS, Hemant Niturkar, said the collaboration between BASICS and IITA-CWMP is aimed at harnessing the expertise from weed management and cassava seeds system with the overall aim of increasing the yield of cassava.

The training, facilitated by Godwin Atser, Communication and Knowledge Exchange Expert, covered areas such as Land Preparation and Best Agronomic Practices, Types of Weeds, Types of Herbicides, Herbicides Application and Calibration, and Safe Use of Herbicides. There was also a practical session where participants were exposed to tips on application and spraying.

Alfred Dixon, Project Leader, IITA-CWMP, welcomed the inter-project collaboration, stressing that it was a step in the right direction.

"No one project can solve the problems of cassava. We need to work together and empower the farmers on all fronts," Dr Dixon said.

"I commend IITA-CWMP, BASICS, and CRS for organizing this training of trainers," he added.

Eunice Alice, an extension service provider with the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) in Oturkpo, said the training was relevant.

"Before, I had used bare hands in mixing herbicides and even ate on the field but today I discovered that was very bad," she said.

Another change agent, Emmanuel Okwor who works with the Benue State Agricultural Development Authority (BNARDA) said: "I used to think taking milk was an antidote to herbicide ingestion but today I have come to realize that milk does not help reduce the effect of herbicides on health."

langba Oliver, a change agent with JDPC, said: "I have come to know the various cassava spacing for targeting roots or stems."

Earlier Emmanuel Azaino, Program Manager for CRS and convener of the training, urged participants to use the training for the benefit of farmers in their domain.

He expressed optimism that the training would go a long way in addressing the constraints in weed management and help cassava seeds (stems) producers to maximize the gains from their investment in seed production.

IITA-CWMP and RiceCo International Limited sign MoU



Dr Dashiell (3rd from left) at the signing of MoU with Riceco. Srivastava (4th from left) and other IITA staff in Ibadan

The IITA-CWMP has signed a memorandum of understanding with the RiceCo International Limited. The MoU, which was signed on 26 January, allows both parties to jointly collaborate and carry out research and testing of RiceCo's products.

Kenton Dashiell, Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery at IITA said the MoU was a step in the right direction, and a plan to see how both organizations could work for the betterment of the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. RiceCo is an arm of the "UPL" group, a private

limited liability company. The company develops, manufactures and distributes agrochemicals, specialized fertilizers and allied inputs to farmers in Nigeria and Ghana.

Shanni Srivastava, Country Representative of RiceCo in Nigeria, said the company's partnership with IITA-CWMP would help bring solutions that would increase the productivity of crops and improve the livelihoods of farmers.

Details of the MoU show that both parties agreed to:

- Exchange scientific information and develop specific cooperative programs and projects.
- Facilitate linkages between IITA and UPL scientists.
- Hold annual consultative meetings and personnel visits.
- Exchange research materials, publications and other materials of common interest, subject to the conditions of the MoU.
- Include results of collaborative research, either in full or in summary, in either Party's reports, in accordance with the conditions of the MoU.
- Build the capacities of students, researchers, industry staff, and farmers in weed management/science.
- Organize safety awareness workshops on Safe and Responsible Use of Pesticides for farmers from time to time

The Project Leader of IITA-CWMP, Dr Alfred Dixon; and the Principal Investigator of the IITA-CWMP, Prof Friday Ekeleme, said the project would work with the company in the framework of IITA principles to bring the desired results.

Switch to integrated weed control and make profits, says Prof Ekeleme

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research facility, Emmanuel Ijewere, Vice President of NABG remarked, "The visit to IITA is an eye opener."

"Yes, we knew that IITA was doing some things, but little did we realize the extent and depth of what they have done... how far they have gone, and how relevant they have become to Nigeria's agriculture future," he added.

IITA was established 50 years ago with the aim of providing solutions to constraints that plague Africa's agriculture and development.

In the last 7 years, IITA under the leadership of Director General Nteranya Sanginga, has refreshed its strategy with emphasis not just on research but also partnership building, delivery, commercialization of technologies and dissemination of innovations, and youth in agribusiness.

Ijewere said the NABG would work with IITA to see how the research outputs of the Institute in the last 50 years could be 'translated to money in the bank for resource-poor farmers.'

The President of NABG, Sani Dangote, who is also the Vice President of the Dangote Group said, "What we saw here (in IITA) is amazing."

Dangote, who was represented by Baba Girma said, "I never thought we have this in Nigeria. Before, we thought IITA was only

about research but what we saw today shows opportunities that can bring synergy between what they (IITA) are doing and the private sector."

Earlier, the Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, Kenton Dashiell, reiterated IITA's commitment to work with the private sector with the goal of improving the livelihoods of millions of farmers in Africa.

The convener of the meeting, Alfred Dixon, Director for Development and Delivery at IITA, said IITA was glad for the exploratory visit by NABG, and was willing to join forces with the group towards eliminating poverty and hunger in Nigeria.

Dixon said the decision to collaborate with NABG and other partners was aimed at paving the way for the rapid delivery of IITA-developed technologies.

Researchers and staff who made presentations at the meeting included Robert Asiedu, West Africa Hub Director; Chrys Akem, Head, Technologies for Africa Agriculture Transformation (TAAT); Frederick Schreurs, Chief Executive Officer, IITA Business Incubation Platform; Sam Ajala, Maize Breeder; Elizabeth Parkes, Cassava Breeder; David DeKoeper, Yam Breeder; Christian Fatokun, Cowpea Breeder; David Ojo, Soybean Breeder; Oluwaseun Adedeji,

member, IITA Youth Agripreneurs; and Friday Ekeleme, Weed Scientist. Others were Norbert Maroya, Yam Breeder; Peter Kolawole, Postharvest Engineer; Mercy E. Deibiru, Scientist; Wilson Igbaifua, Farm Manager; Oluwadare Odusanya, a youth agripreneur; A. Alonge, NoduMax Specialist, and B. Zeledon, Aflasafe Specialist.



Prof. Ekeleme making a presentation on opportunities in weed management in cassava farming systems

IITA-CWMP and BASICS to share 'game changers' in cassava farming systems to policymakers

The IITA Cassava Weed Management Project and the Building an Economically Sustainable Integrated Seed System for Cassava (BASICS) project will share results of research in weed management and seeds systems in cassava this month.

The unveiling of the scientific results is part of the plans for the meeting taking place in Ibadan for BASICS, 14 – 16 March, and IITA-CWMP, 19-20 March.

The results from the two projects will be presented to policymakers, researchers and other partners for possible scaling out to other states in Nigeria. Already 12 commissioners of agriculture in Nigeria have confirmed participation to the meeting. The invited commissioners are drawn from the major cassava producing regions of Nigeria.

"What we are going to share is more or less game changers for cassava production," the Project Leader, IITA-CWMP, Dr Alfred Dixon said.

Inaugurated in 2014, the IITA-CWMP is a 5-year project with the key objective of addressing weed constraints in cassava farming systems, thanks to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for funding support.

In the last 4 years, the project has developed weed control options drawing from the use of best bet agronomic practices, use of motorized weeders, and the use of safe and environmentally friendly herbicides.

Dixon said the meeting holding 19-20 March will give details of what has been

achieved in the last 4 years.

Like IITA-CWMP, the BASICS project will also be sharing findings and the progress made from its work on cassava seed systems in Nigeria. BASICS' meeting will be on 14-16 March with a clear focus on seeds systems.

The BASICS project will share with researchers and policymakers the latest findings from cassava seeds system, including activities from the semi-autotrophic hydroponics and the village seed entrepreneur model of seed multiplication and multiplication.

Generally, seeds are the bedrock for the quest to increase agricultural productivity. In cassava, the seed system is weak, yet with great potential. The combination of

improved seeds and weed management can bring benefits to farmers by raising productivity while at the same time reducing the drudgery of hoe weeding.

Grown by more than 4 million people, cassava is a major source of livelihood and food security to millions of people in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the productivity of cassava has been stymied over the years by poor weed control, a weak or nonexistent seed system, and poor understanding of the agronomy of the crop.

Hemant Nitturkar, Project Director of BASICS, noted that the knowledge generated by the IITA-CWMP and BASICS would redefine the narrative of cassava in Africa by impacting positively on yields at farm level.



Knowledge sharing with farmers on the field

Republic of Benin, France, and development partners endorse GCP21 cassava conference in Cotonou

The Republic of Benin, France, and development partners in that West African country have thrown their support to the cassava conference being organized by the Global Cassava Partnerships for the 21 century (GCP21) billed to hold 11-15 June in Cotonou.

The endorsement of the conference was in response to the call made by the Director of GCP21, Claude Fauquet, during the unveiling of the conference proposal to stakeholders in Benin recently.

In his presentation, Fauquet said despite the key role cassava is playing in Africa's food security, its productivity had remained low (about 9 tons per hectare), keeping the growers in the trap of poverty.

"In Asia, cassava productivity is more than 21 tons per hectare—a situation that gives Asia competitive advantage in global cassava trade," he added.

Addressing the yield gap demands more funding for cassava research and development (R&D) from all stakeholders

if truly the world wants to help farmers towards ending hunger and poverty in Africa.

The French Ambassador to the Republic of Benin, H.E. Veronique Brumeause, who hosted the preconference meeting, said the conference was timely and would go a long way to address the constraints to cassava production while at the same time proffering opportunities for investors and farmers alike to harness new innovations from the research community.

The ambassador's position was re-echoed



Cassava in a weed controlled field

by the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Republic of Benin, H.E. Dossouhoui Gaston, while underscoring the importance of cassava to Benin and Africa in general. He said cassava's importance would continue to increase as its consumption per capita was high and the root crop is resilient to climate change.

The Minister of Higher Education, Mme Attanasso Marie-Odile, said the Republic of Benin was proud to host the conference. She noted that cassava's development and transformation has opportunities for youth engagement which the country and other African countries could tap into.

The pre-conference meeting had in attendance some representatives from the embassies of France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Switzerland, Brazil, Holland, Germany, Japan, Canada, United States, and European Union. Also in attendance were representatives of development agencies such as USAID, JICA, GIZ, AFD, EU, UNDP, and FAO.