

Cassava Matters

Issue No. 019

17th November 2019

Bravo Cassava Weed Management Project! Bravo IITA!



L-R Prof. Friday Ekeleme, Dr Alfred Dixon and Lawrence Kent looking to the future



Seattle presentation

The events of last week (4 – 8 November) when members of the Cassava Weed Management Project (CWMP) visited the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the United States of America may have come and gone but the memories still linger.

At the invitation of Lawrence Kent, Senior Program Officer with the Gates Foundation, members of the CWMP were requested to come to Seattle with a presentation of the 5-year project, which began in 2014 and ended in 2018. The meeting also provided an

opportunity for the team to share learning from the project.

In Seattle, members of the team (Dr Alfred Dixon, Prof. Friday Ekeleme and Godwin Atser) made a presentation to senior executives of the foundation in a well-publicized and well-attended conference.

The CWMP team's message was simple: First, we have developed a package/ toolkit known as the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management & Best Planting Practices that

is helping farmers to double the yield of cassava per ha. The increase in productivity means more money for farmers, improved food security, more raw materials for the cassava industrial sector, less drudgery for women and children who weed cassava and ultimately better livelihoods.

Second, we are working with the private sector, government, existing programs such as TAAT and AGRA, agrodealers, spray service providers, agricultural development programs (ADPs), and digital tools including videos (using mini-projectors), radio, interactive voice recording (IVR) etc to scale out sustainably.

Third, we have integrated into the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative as one project, offering the team a greater platform for scaling.

After their presentations, the team, led by Dr Alfred Dixon, was congratulated for a job well done.

Bravo to CWMP! Bravo to IITA!

Decision Support Tools: Tanzania partners give kudos to ACAI for training on DSTs



Participants at the ToT with Prof. Friday Ekeleme, Weed Scientist and Godwin Atser, Digital Extension _ Advisory Services Specialist

National Agricultural Research and Extension partners in Tanzania have applauded the training on Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management/ Best Planting Practices, saying they were now better equipped to take the agronomy of cassava to scale.

The Six Steps to Weed Cassava Management and Best Planting Practices is one of the Decision Support Tools developed by the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI), that when applied help farmers to double their yields from the current national average of 10 tonnes per hectare.

The ToT, which was conducted 11-12 September 2019 by IITA researchers (Prof. Friday Ekeleme, Weed Scientist and Godwin Atser, Digital Extension & Advisory Services Specialist) working under the ACAI was part of efforts to enhance the capacities of partners in Tanzania on good agricultural practices in cassava farming systems.

Topics covered included identification of weeds, types of herbicides, basic agronomy of cassava, calibration using the IITA mobile app, and safe use of herbicides and application. There was also a session on effective facilitation of trainings using the Technology of Participation.

Prof. Ekeleme in his presentation said the use of Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management & Best Planting Practices found average net profits increased by 83% when using herbicides on monocrop cassava compared to best practice weeding.

Mrs. Rhoda Mahava from Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre while giving her verdict of the training remarked that the training was a 'must have' activity for everyone desirous to

see a change in cassava farming system.

"The training supersedes my expectations. It demystifies cassava agronomy. I am happy to have been given this opportunity," she added.

Mrs. Mahava works with dozens of extension agents across Tanzania and she plans to pass on the knowledge to them ahead of the planting season so they can help farmers to improve their cassava productivity.

Cassava is one of the major staples in Tanzania and is fast becoming an industrial crop providing cash for farmers. However, like most African countries, cassava growers face the challenge of poor yields due to poor knowledge of the agronomy of the crop. The ACAI project is addressing this challenge by offering farmers decision support tools to help take agronomy to scale.

Dr Victor Manyong, IITA Director for East Africa Hub commended ACAI for conducting the ToT, and Dr Veronica Uzokwe, ACAI coordinator for Tanzania for organizing the training.

IITA unveils digital tools for agric. transformation as Sanginga marks 8 years as DG



Unveiling of a suite of IITA digital tools that are transforming agriculture, and improving yield and livelihoods of farmers



Dignitaries at the event congratulate IITA DG, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga



Cross section of attendees at the event

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) recently unveiled a suite of digital tools that are helping in transforming farming, improving yield and livelihoods of farmers.

The digital tools include the cassava, Goseed and yam seed trackers; Akilimo, IITA Herbicide Calculator, e-commerce site and IITA News App.

Dr Nteranya Sanginga, IITA Director General who marks his 8th year in office on Friday described the development of the digital tools as a remarkable feat, adding that they would assist in creating impact at scale.

“This aligns with our vision that led us to create the Partnership & Delivery Directorate whose responsibility is to ensure that not only are we carrying out research and writing scientific papers but also delivering and making impact on farm level,” he added.

The seed trackers are mobile platforms designed to help in seed production planning, seed traceability, seed inventory, real-time tracking of production status, seed certification, marketing, information

resources, among others, Dr Lava Kumar, the IITA Head of Germplasm Health Unit and Virologist said.

The IITA Herbicide Calculator is a mobile app that was developed by the Cassava Weed Management Project and deployed across Nigeria and other African countries and is being used in controlling weeds in cassava, explained Godwin Atser, IITA Digital Extension & Advisory Services Specialist.

“The App helps growers to estimate correct amount of herbicides to be added to knapsack sprayers, helping farmers to avoid underdosing or overdosing which leads to environmental pollution and weeds resistance,” he added.

Akilimo on the other hand, is a mobile agronomy advisory tool developed by the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) that combines weed management/ best planting practices, fertilizer recommendations, scheduled planting, according to Dr Christine Kreye, West Africa Coordinator for ACAI.

For the IITA News app, IITA Head of

Communication, Kathy Lopez said the app captures and disseminates, in real time, news about research and delivery activities to the public.

Launching the Cassava Seed Tracker, Yam Seed Tracker, Dr Sanginga and Dr. Olusegun Ojo, Director General of the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC), noted that the development of the digital apps were steps in the right direction.

Among those present at the launching were Dr. Alfred Dixon, IITA Director for Development and Delivery, who called for the integration of digital tools in IITA; Dr. Paul Ilona, Country Director of HarvestPlus; and Prof. Simon Irtwange, President of the Yam Export Association of Nigeria.

While the DG of the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) Umudike, Abia State, Dr. Joseph Ukpabi was represented; Dr. Debo Akande, Executive Adviser to Oyo state Governor on Agribusiness, joined the event via telephone, assuring launchers of the tools of Governor Seyi Makinde’s support and readiness to make IITA a partner in his agribusiness plan for the state.

IITA-ACAI agronomy recommendations in Yoruba, Igbo, Pidgin English underway

...As experts validate translations



As part of measures to ensure that the Decision Support Tools (DSTs) developed by the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) are available to farmers in several Nigerian languages, language experts, researchers, academics, extension agents, broadcasters, and farmers have validated the translations from English to Yoruba, Igbo and Pidgin English.

The translations of the DSTs would make agronomic recommendations that would help farmers to increase their cassava yield and make wise investments decisions available in major languages spoken in states where cassava is majorly cultivated in Nigeria.

According to Godwin Atser, Digital Extension and Advisory Services Specialist with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the validation is important to ensure that the translations perfectly and correctly convey the messages in the English version. Scientists, agricultural communication specialists, extension agents and ACAI researchers, had already validated the English version.



Yoruba language validation team at work

The validation comes a month after the meeting of ACAI researchers and dissemination partners where participants stressed the need for the continuous translation of the DSTs into local languages to tackle language barrier.

The validation team was split into three groups according to their vastness and expertise in the languages.

On the Igbo validation team were Professor Boniface Mbah, Igbo translator from University of Nigeria (UNN), Nsukka, Enugu State; Prof. Friday Ekeleme, IITA-ACAI Principal Investigator on Weed Science; Dr. Ekwuruchi Mbanaso, Assistant Director at the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike, Abia State; and Mr. Ibe Johnson, Deputy Director, Agric Extension

Department, ADP, Abia State. Others were Mr Darlington Ezegbu, Controller of Operations, Federal Radio Commission of Nigeria (FRCN), Ibadan; Mr. Anayochi Jonathan, ADP, Owerri, Imo State; and Chief Chukwuma Obisike, the Managing Director, Chuks Glorious Farms International Investments Ltd.

The Yoruba team had Mr Seun Akinola, a presenter with Splash FM; Mr. Abiodun Olatoye, Communication officer with Oyo ADP; Dr Adeyemi Olojede, Director, National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike; and Mr Rasheed Adegbola, a media practitioner. Others on the team were Joseph Alloh, an extension worker; Mr. Bashir Adesiyun, a farmer and Ibadan-based agripreneur, and Ms Ibukunoluwa Oladokun of the department of agricultural extension, University of Ibadan.

The Pidgin English content was validated by Dr. Moses Okwusi, a Director at NRCRI, Umudike; Mr. Felix Osagiede, Radio Nigeria's pidgin translator; Mr. Chris Okoli, a Director with SG2000; and Mr. Tony Ogundiniyi, a senior producer at Radio Nigeria.

The three groups worked on the IITA campus in Ibadan for two days from November 13 to 14, 2019. The product of their work would now become the official content for dissemination in the three languages concerned.

Prof. Ekeleme, commended the experts for their contribution to the translation of the DSTs, adding that it would speed up the adoption of the DSTs and cassava transformation in Nigeria.

IITA-ACAI to train 30,000 farmers in Abia, Benue, Oyo, Osun and Ogun states



Farmers and Extension agents inspecting a cassava field

About 30,000 farmers from Abia, Benue, Oyo, Ogun and Osun state will benefit from the training on the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management & Best Planting Practices, says Godwin Atser, ACAI Digital Extension & Advisory Services Specialist today.

The trainings are aimed at empowering farmers with the knowledge to boost cassava and maize productivity and yield per hectare. This will subsequently increase farmers' incomes, better their livelihoods, and create jobs for more people.

The trainings are being done in close collaboration with state Agricultural Development Programs (ADPs) and other extension service providers.

To ensure a seamless and successful dissemination of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting

Practices tool, the team has developed videos and translated same into local languages – Igbo, Yoruba, and Tiv, targeting the respective zones.

The ACAI team has also procured mini-projectors and mobile phones to empower extension service providers in the participating states.

The Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management was first developed by the IITA Cassava Weed Management Project. The tool has since integrated the best planting practices of ACAI. Farmers who use the toolkit have more than doubled their cassava yield from the national average of 9 tonnes per ha to more than 20 tonnes per ha.

“It is amazing to see how the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management & Best Planting Practices Decision Support Tool is changing the face of cassava farmers,” Atser added.

Dr Alfred Dixon, IITA Director for Development & Delivery described the toolkit as an innovation that combines a set of agronomic recommendations and plant protection products to control weeds and increase the productivity of cassava.

Beyond Nigeria, several other countries have requested for the toolkit with ACAI team training partners in Liberia, Tanzania, Burundi, and Zambia.

Apart from the use of videos, the ACAI team has put up the recommendations from the Six Steps on Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices on the 3-2-1 service of Airtel where subscribers in Nigeria can dial 3-2-1 and get information on cassava weed management and other agronomic practices free of charge up to 10 times in a month.

“The idea is to get the recommendations to thousands of farmers across Nigeria and Tanzania so they can get better yield from cassava farming,” Dr Dixon added.

Nigerian radio stations air tips on how to double yield in cassava farming

Three Nigerian radio stations are now broadcasting agronomic recommendations on the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices. The Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices is one of the Decision Support Tools of the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI). The radio stations include Splash FM (105.5 FM), Harvest FM (98.9FM) and Amuludun FM (99.1FM).



Research done by the Cassava Weed Management Project concludes that farmers are able to more than double the yield per hectare of cassava (from less than 10 tons per ha to more than 20 tons per ha) using the ACAI's Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices extension toolkit.

The three radio stations which are airing the toolkit are among the prominent listened to stations, according to Media Planning Services— an agency that advertisers depend on to make investment decisions.

The program on Ibadan-based Splash FM 105.9 which is also streamed online is aired every Wednesday, 7.00 PM – 7.30 PM and is anchored by Seun Akinola with Godwin Atser, IITA Digital Extension and Advisory Services Specialist. On Benue-based Harvest FM 103.5, the program is aired in Tiv language by 1.00 PM -1.30 PM every Friday and anchored by Joseph Kwaghega with Atser, while Amuludun FM 99.1 airs the Yoruba version on Tuesdays (5.00 PM – 5.30 PM) with Rasheed Adegbola as the anchor with Abiodun Olatoye, an extension agent with Oyo State Agricultural Development Program. Plans have also been concluded to

broadcast the program on Radio IITA—an internet-based radio.

In several rural areas in Africa, radio is among the top medium used by farmers as a source of information. With the traditional extension system being overwhelmed, ACAI is using the radio platform to reach out to millions of farmers in Nigeria. The radio programs being promoted by ACAI are aimed at changing the behavior of farmers and influencing the adoption of ACAI recommendations.

Radio channels being selected were based on reach and listenership. ACAI plans to undertake a study on the effectiveness of the radio programs after six months. At the moment, the private sector is excited over the radio programs and partnership support is being received from pharmaceutical and life sciences company, Bayer. More companies are planning to sign-up.

ACAI, partners hold preparatory meeting to review tools, progress



Dr. Christine Kreye addressing the ACAI partners meeting

The IITA-led Africa Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) and its partners held a week-long preparatory workshop, taking vital decisions on the scaling of the project's Decision Support Tools (DSTs).

Participants at the meeting, which took place on IITA campus from 14-18 October 2019, were representatives of several agricultural research institutions, faith-based organizations, development partners, private sector-led enterprises and academic institutions in Benue, Ogun, Oyo, and Abia states.

The meeting focused on assessing the progress made in the dissemination of the DSTs to farmers and re-evaluating the DST formats with a workshop on video making and editing. The DSTs include the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices, Recommendations for

Cassava and Maize Intercropping, Tailored Fertilizer Application Recommendations for Cassava, Scheduled Planting and Harvest Recommendations for Cassava.

The digital component of the DSTs – Akilimo, the Airtel 3-2-1 service by VIAMO, and Arifu, were also discussed. Mrs Lydia Odeh, VIAMO's Director of Programs was on ground to give an overview of the 3-2-1 service. She also took feedback from partners.

The Senior Partner, Relations Manager of Arifu, Martina Taverna, explained and demonstrated how the SMS-based app of Arifu helps in information dissemination at scale.

Partners at the meeting proposed that the DSTs in print and audio-visual materials be translated into more local languages and dialects as well as pidgin English for multi-cultural communities. They also agreed that

the use of radio programs to communicate the tools be expanded.

Dr. Pieter Pypers, ACAI Coordinator said the aim of the meeting was to examine the progress made and collectively plan for the future.

According to him, the meeting also provided opportunity to get feedback from partners on the DSTs being developed and how to make the tools better.

The meeting also provided a platform for stakeholders to plan for the annual meeting billed to hold in December 2019.

Partners at the meeting commended ACAI for the progress made so far and renewed their commitment to meeting the targets earlier set at the beginning of the year.

Partner institutions in attendance were the Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi



Dr. Pieter Pypers addressing the ACAI partners meeting

(FUAM), Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike, Abia State; Justice Development and Peace Movement (JDPM), Oyo; Oyo State Agriculture Development Program (Oyo ADP); Oyo State Cassava Growers Association (OYSCGA), Notore Chemicals Ltd; Sasakawa Global (SG2000), Cassava: Adding Value for Africa (CAVA 2); Psaltry International Ltd, and several others.