

It's official: ACAI and IITA-CWMP become one project ... Pieter Pypers leads team



Participants during the annual meeting of ACAI sharing experience during breakout session

The African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) project and the Cassava Weed Management Project (CWMP), have merged into a single project. Both projects are funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation under the Agricultural Development program.

Under the new arrangement, Dr Pieter Pypers will lead the team with advisory support from Drs Alfred Dixon and Bernard Vanlauwe.

ACAI project has been carrying out research to develop tools that will increase the availability of appropriate and affordable technologies to sustainably improve cassava productivity in Nigeria and Tanzania.

CWMP, on the other hand, screened environmental-friendly and safe herbicides and explored agronomic factors including motorized mechanical options for weed control in cassava. After the rigorous and intensive research, the project developed the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management

toolkit that when applied increases the productivity of cassava and reduces the drudgery of hand weeding.

The two projects will operate as ACAI with an expanded mandate to include cassava weed management in the ACAI's decision support tools.

Project teams from ACAI and CWMP met in Nairobi early February to develop an integration plan and a new implementation plan for 2019 and 2020. Components of the weed management solutions will be incorporated into some of the ACAI decision support tools and then disseminated as a single composite package.

Commenting on the merging of the two projects, IITA Director for Development and Delivery, Dr. Alfred Dixon said the move was in the right direction, adding that it offers the new ACAI team a more diversified and talented team that would transform cassava on the African continent.

"(The two projects) have a common goal, coming together is going to make the team more successful, as they share experiences," Dr. Dixon said.

Last year, CWMP received a 2-year supplementary budget extension to join with ACAI in the dissemination of the technologies they have been developing. The weed management project began in 2014 aiming to generate relevant cassava weed management options to share with cassava farmers to help them improve their cassava production.

Among the knowledge outputs from the project include the Six Steps of Cassava Weed Management toolkit and the ABC of Weed Management in Cassava Production in Nigeria.

ACAI started in 2016 to develop decision support tools that would meet specific agronomic needs of partners actively involved in the cassava value chains in Nigeria and Tanzania. The tools are currently in the validation stage of development and slated for dissemination from 2019.

The ACAI project will be intensifying dissemination and scaling of the technologies developed by both teams.



Pieter Pypers

IITA-CWMP and BASICS hold 2019 annual meetings in Ibadan

The IITA-led Cassava Weed Management Project will hold its closing workshop on 14 – 15 March 2019 in IITA Ibadan, Nigeria.

The workshop will end the 5-year project which has been able to bring

recommendations to farmers to help control weeds in cassava farming systems.

During the meeting, stakeholders will reflect on the progress and successes made project. It will also provide opportunity for partners to share their perception about the findings of the project.

In a related development, the BASICS project will hold its annual meeting 11-13 March. During the meeting stakeholders will review the progress made in 2018 and plan for the new year.

ACAI/IITA-CWMP signs MoU with Viamo to promote 'Six Steps' toolkit via mobile phones



Participants at the development of messages workshop on 3-2-1 Mobile Service

The African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI)/IITA- Cassava Weed Management Project has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Viamo to promote the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management extension toolkit via the 3-2-1 mobile service of Airtel.

The 3-2-1 mobile service will allow Nigerian farmers to have access to good agricultural practices developed by the Cassava Weed Management project through an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system for as much as 10 times in a month free of charge.

"Through the mobile service, we aim to reach thousands of farmers especially women with information that would transform their cassava productivity, said Dr Alfred Dixon, Director for Development & Delivery at IITA, and Project leader of the Cassava Weed Management Project.

The use of the 3-2-1 mobile service will take advantage of the mobile subscriber-base in Nigeria with subscriptions of about 150 million and 97.2 million persons that use the internet. Furthermore, the availability of cheaper smartphones in Nigeria has given phone access to about 15 million persons, making it possible for this population to access improved weed control practices on mobile phones.

Pieter Pypers, Project Coordinator of ACAI sees the collaboration as strategic for the project as it aims to deliver best bet agronomic practices at scale.

In most of rural Africa, information and knowledge is usually passed by word of mouth. Oral communication therefore presents the opportunity of knowledge/ technology transfer.

Harriet Blest, Country Manager for Viamo

said the 3-2-1 mobile service will bring messages from the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management to farmers in local languages.

"All that farmers need to do is to get an Airtel SIM card and dial 3-2-1 and he or she will get the toolkit," she said.

To ensure that farmers enjoy the 3-2-1 service with messages on the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management, a validation workshop was conducted in February, drawing both private and public agricultural experts.

ACAI Digital Extension and Advisory Services Specialist, Godwin Atser made a presentation of the progress made in weed control and the achievements recorded.

He spoke on the benefit of using the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit for cassava cultivation, stressing that farmers using the toolkit were doubling the yield of cassava from the current national average of 9 tons per ha to more than 20 tons per ha.

The meeting also provided participants the opportunity to pick the results from the Cassava Weed Management Project for scaling through their farmer networks.

Ms Aisha Babangida, daughter of the former Nigerian Head of State, and Chairperson, Better Life for African Rural Women pledged to work with the project to ensure that women farmers have access to the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit.

Other partners who attended the meeting included Synergos, GIZ, representatives of universities of agriculture in Ogun and Benue, National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) Umudike; Syngenta, Bayer, UPL, Technoserve, Catholic Relief Services, and Market Development in the Niger Delta (MADE).

Best recommendations for cassava agronomic practices coming up soon

Remarkable progress has been made towards the development of Decision Support Tools (DSTs) that will provide best recommendations for agronomic practices in cassava, tailored to the needs of the target users, researchers working under the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) have said.

Presenting the DSTs at the annual meeting of ACAI in Abeokuta; Dr Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA Director for Central Africa, and Principal Investigator for ACAI said he was excited over the progress made by the team in the last 3 years, adding that farmers were already piloting the tools.

The DSTs being developed include Fertilizer Blending tool, Site-Specific Fertilizer Recommendation tool, Optimal Intercropping Practices tool, Best Planting Practices tool and Scheduled Planting and

High Starch Content tool. The Fertilizer Blending tool, which was demanded by the

fertilizer industry will help fertilizer blending companies to know exactly what elements

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Participants examining DSTs developed by ACAI via mobile phones

TAAT and ACAI join forces to deliver improved technologies on cassava to farmers



Dr Adebayo Abass making a presentation at the training/planning workshop

The Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) and African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) trained persons drawn from universities, research institutes, Oyo State Cassava Growers Association (OYSCGA), and other development partners on the use of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit.

The toolkit was developed by the Cassava Weed Management Project and has proven to help users to more than double the yield from the current African average of 9 tons per ha to more than 20 tons per ha.

The refresher training of trainers (ToT), which comes ahead of the 2019 cassava cropping season aims to equip partners with the necessary tools for successful delivery of technologies.

Addressing participants at the training, TAAT Cassava Compact Leader, Dr Adebayo Abass

said the ToT would place the participants in a better position to deliver the technologies being outscaled by the TAAT-Cassava Compact program.

He noted that the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit had been consolidated into a Cassava Technology Demo toolkit and is being disseminated across 15 African countries under the TAAT program.

While commending the work in Nigeria, Dr Abass reiterated that the aim of TAAT-Cassava Compact was to scale out proven technologies across Africa with the view to achieving an African Green Revolution.

In his welcome remarks, ACAI Weed Scientist, Prof Friday Ekeleme said the training would contribute positively towards the implementation of demos this year.

He urged participants to adhere to the principles of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed

Management toolkit for better results.

ACAI's Digital Extension & Advisory Services Specialist, Godwin Atser took participants through the theory and practice of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management.

He explained that the toolkit was a complete package that addresses all aspects of good agricultural practices in cassava production, adding that farmers who used the toolkit had more than doubled cassava yield (>20 tons/ha) from the current national average of 9 tons per ha.

Topics covered during the training included: GAP: Harnessing Experiences/Results from Cassava Weed Management Project, Cassava Agronomy, Principles and Practices of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit, Calibration, and Safe Use and Application of Herbicides.

There was a video demonstration of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit. Participants were also introduced to the IITA Herbicides Calculator mobile App which allows farmers to know exactly the amount of herbicide to apply on any given field.

Participants at the training were drawn from the National Root Crops Research Institute (Umudike), University of Agriculture Makurdi, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Leventis Foundation, Psaltry, Oyo State Agricultural Development Program, Bestacor, Oyo State Cassava Growers Association, Justice Development and Peace Movement, Oyo; KOLPING in Abia, and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife.

Participants commended TAAT/ ACAI for conducting the training and promised to put the knowledge gained to practice.

...Best recommendations for cassava agronomic practices coming up soon

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are needed and in what quantity to blend fertilizers specifically for cassava.

Other tools such as the Site-Specific Fertilizer Recommendation, Optimal Intercropping Practices, Best Planting Practices and Scheduled Planting and High Starch Content tools offer support to farmers on what decisions to make for their yield and profitability to be enhanced.

Dr Vanlauwe called on partners to give their feedback on the use so far of the DSTs as the team takes the tools for validation later this year.

He reiterated that the goal of developing the DSTs was to give farmers and fertilizer blending companies, site-specific recommendations on cassava agronomy.

Dr Christian Witt, Senior Program Officer with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation commended ACAI for being a remarkable project and for the success it has achieved so far.

He advised the project team to reflect on what has been achieved, think about the future, and beyond the project.

According to him, many other initiatives can leverage on what ACAI has achieved and what it is doing.

He called on all actors in the project to work together to ensure that the project is sustained.

"It is not the sole responsibility of ACAI team alone but the responsibility of all of us," he said.

The Annual meeting, which was held 9-13 December 2018 provided opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on what had been achieved in the previous year but also to plan for the future. There was also a field visit to Psaltry International—a cassava processing factory that is located in Oyo state where stakeholders interacted with extension agents and farmers.

Managing Director of Psaltry, Yemisi Iranloye commended ACAI for the tools developed, adding that the company was testing some of the tools for their operations.

Dr Witt thanked ACAI for creating a learning opportunity, adding that the principle of agronomy to scale is a very good concept and can be applied to other crops as well.

GIZ/ SEDIN organizes training for lead farmers/trainers to boost cassava yield

Recognizing the devastation caused by weeds to cassava farming systems, the German International Corporation, GIZ, has organized training of trainers for its lead farmers, farmer cooperatives, extension agents and the N-power youths in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

The objective of the training of trainers which took place 4-6 March was to help farmers to minimize crop losses (cassava and maize) due to weeds infestation.

The three-day training, which was facilitated by IITA Digital Extension & Rural Advisory Services Specialist, Godwin Atser capitalized on successes/lessons learnt under the Cassava Weed Management Project of IITA.

Value Chain Advisor of GIZ/SEDIN, Sunday Idahosa said weeds were a major challenge constraining the productivity of cassava, adding that in some instances, weeding takes from 50 – 80 percent of labor budget for cassava production.

He noted that the training was a dream come true, stressing that it would create an open door for future collaboration between GIZ and IITA.

"We are hoping that this Training of Trainers (ToT) would extend to about 1000 farmers from the step-down activities that will take place following the training," Idahosa added.

The training was well received by participants. For Fatimo Atanda, she said, "This training has improved my knowledge base as an agronomist, with access to rural farmers. As an N-power beneficiary, I can disseminate all I have been taught in the last three days."



Participants during the training session

She described the IITA Herbicide Calculator which was given to participants free of charge as a great tool.

"The training has shown that the use of the calculator makes herbicide calibration a lot easier," she said.

Another participant, Tolulope Aina, a cassava farmer and CEO of Tolulope Foods, a company that is into cassava value addition, said the materials given during the ToT were a great resource for training the farmers. "I can now teach the Six-steps to Cassava Weed Management," she said.

Mrs Taiwo Ayansanwo, Program Manager for the Ogun State Agricultural Development Program (OGADEP), described the training on the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management as a welcome development and called for more of such trainings in the state. She said that such

regular trainings would build capacities and help in improving farmers' knowledge on good farming practices such as record keeping, weed management and safe use of herbicides.

The ToT included the following sessions: Good Agricultural Practices: Harnessing Experiences/Results from Cassava Weed Management Project, Cassava Agronomy, Principles and Practices of the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit, Calibration, and Safe Use and Application of Herbicides.

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ACAI/IITA-CWMP trains 70 agro-dealers on cassava weed management

The African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) and IITA- Cassava Weed Management Project (IITA-CWMP) has trained 70 agro-dealers in Oyo State on how to control weeds in cassava farming systems.

The training was organized by African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI/IITA-CWMP) with facilitation support from KingsApple, an Ibadan-based agri-business consultant company.

Speaking on the event titled: 'Scaling six steps to cassava weed management toolkit through agro-dealers,' at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the ACAI Country Manager, Dr Christine Kreye, said the training would be beneficial to participants.

Dr Kreye noted that the training was on how to control weeds on cassava farms using an integrated approach that combined the use of safe and environmentally-friendly herbicides with good agronomic practices. She assured that the trainees would be better off at the end of the training.

In his remarks, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of KingsApple Services, Joseph Alloh, said that the training would enhance the business activities of agro-dealers as well as help farmers to increase their productivity.

"By the time you go through the training, you will know how to tackle your problems and when you apply the knowledge, it will increase your reputation and your customers (farmers) will have more confidence in you.

"I enjoin you to pay much attention to the resource persons and maximize the opportunity given by the training," he said.

The Digital Extension and Rural Advisory Services Specialist, IITA, Godwin Atser, also spoke on the importance of the training.

He said the IITA- CWMP had over the last five years worked on how to control weeds in cassava using integrated approach that were environmental-friendly.



Participants during the practical training session