

## **Researchers flag up sustainable intensification for Africa, UK partnership**



Researchers drawn from key institutions working in agricultural research for development in Africa have flagged up the practice of **sustainable intensification of agricultural systems** as a key area of future cooperation between Africa and the United Kingdom.

The participants drawn from a broad range of disciplines, institutions and countries, shared strategic perspectives to facilitate links between wider research communities in the UK and Africa at a recent workshop on sustainable intensification of Agricultural Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The workshop was jointly convened from March 13-15, 2017 by Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa, the International Livestock Research Institute (BeCA-ILRI) in Nairobi, Kenya, in conjunction with the BBSRC (and NERC)-funded Sustainable Intensification Research Network (SIRN), the John Innes Centre (JIC), and Bioversity International.

### Future partnerships

The workshop was meant to inform potential future funding opportunities for sustainable intensification of agricultural systems in sub-Saharan Africa from the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund. The Global

Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is a new five-year £1.5billion resource funding stream, announced as part of the British Government's 2015 spending review of UK research in helping to address the problems faced by developing countries.

Working with developing country partners, the fund aspires to deploy the UK's world-class research capability in addressing challenges faced by the developing world, leveraging and mobilising existing networks and establishing new networks of global excellence and new multidisciplinary research responses to global challenges.

### **The objectives of the workshop were:**

- Identifying research challenges, and associated scientific and partnering opportunities, relevant to the sustainable intensification of agricultural systems in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Contributing to relevant partnership-building between research organisations in the UK and countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Key challenges**

Speaking to the theme, "the challenges for agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa", ASARECA Interim Executive Secretary, Dr. Cyprian Ebong said the key challenges to agriculture include feeding an increasing population without compromising the environment for future generations, managing diverse soil types, coping with the impacts of climate change, the threat to biodiversity, chronic and emerging pests and diseases and inadequate capacity to fore-caste land use planning.

### **ASARECA experience**

Dr. Ebong said ASARECA has promoted adaptation and mitigation and gender inclusiveness in ASARECA coordinated climate change interventions. As a result of an approach, which sees climate change as an opportunity rather than a curse, ASARECA coordinated projects in Eastern and Central Africa developed and promoted technologies, innovations and management practices such as improved varieties and seeds, water management innovations, integrated soil fertility innovations, agronomic packages (seed selection, planting and crop management), storage, value addition and marketing.

### **ASARECA innovations**

Between 2008 and 2012, ASARECA developed 364 agricultural technologies, innovations and practices. These interventions have benefited over 1,370,000 smallholder farmers' households with an average of six family members. This meant that over 8 million individuals had directly benefitted from ASARECA interventions which enabled them to access and adopt new and relevant varieties of selected commodities, livestock breeds, seeds, disease and pest management packages; extension and veterinary services. Their capacities to engage in productive and profitable agriculture were strengthened. ASARECA initiatives also opened up market opportunities for the farmers to buy farm inputs and sell their produce.

### **Harmonised policies**

ASARECA countries have also been involved in developing harmonized regional policies and standards that impact on agriculture and trade.

Specifically, Dr. Ebong cited that Sustainable Intensification of MAIZE Legume Cropping System Project implemented by CYMYT and ASARECA as one of the launch pads for future cooperation.

### **Why sustainable intensification**

Sustainable intensification is seen as one of the leading mechanisms to increase agricultural productivity while improving resource use efficiency and delivering improved environmental, social and economic outcomes. The notion of sustainable intensification is about balancing output with other ecosystem services and maintenance of the natural capital on which our farming activities depend.



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