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Professor Wole Akinremi, a soil scientist and one of the principal investigators from the Department of Soil Science, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, described the project and the team as the fulfillment of a long time vision and aspiration. He said that seeing agricultural extensionists, economists, soil scientists and agronomists on a roundtable discussion is not only fulfilling but also productive in the context of achieving food security in Nigeria’s rural areas. Similarly, Professor Clement Adeboye, a renowned agronomist and a principal investigator from Osun State University took the team down the memory lane, highlighting the potential of Africa continent with respect to vegetables. He also outlined some remarkable scientific breakthroughs which the team has accomplished. He posited that the focus of the project is to build on and expand the earlier accomplishments through the current research project. In line with this view, Professor Duro Joseph Oyedele, a seasoned soil scientist and principal investigator from Obafemi Awolowo University said that the overall objective of the project is to increase food security and economic empowerment of resource-poor rural women farmers of Nigeria through the utilization, cultivation, processing and preservation of underutilized vegetable species.

The workshop was graced by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael O. Faborede, who congratulated the researchers and wished them a successful research endeavour. He used the occasion to thank the sponsor of the project and the Canadian counterparts for their interest in the Nigerian universities. He wish them a nice stay in Nigeria. Other eminent scientists at the workshop were Professors Akin Olajyinka (Dean, Agric. OAU), Adeolu Ayasawale (Agric. Economist), Dixon Torimiro (Agric. Extensionist/ Rural Youth Studies) and Kehinde A. Taiwo (Food Scientist). Others were Drs. Watsuwa Richard (Financial Management), Kemi Idowu (Soil Fertility), Peter Abgola (Economist), Chi Nwoke (Soil Fertility), Babatunde Fiyako (Plant Propagation) and Alabi Kaotkar (Agric. Extensionist).

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Project 106511 Team at UniOsun attended Inaugural Lecture

The Ni-Can-Veg research team, led by IDRC’s Senior Programme Officer, Dr Pascal Sangina, visited one of the four collaborating institutions, the Osun State University, Osogbo on March 16th, 2011. The visit was part of the Inception Workshop. The visit was very historic because, on this day, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sola Akinminade, signed the Memorandum of Grant Conditions for Project 106511 in a colourful ceremony in the presence of IDRC (Dr Pascal Sangina), all the Principal Investigators, all the Provosts of Colleges of UniOsun and journalists (see picture). In his speech, the Vice-Chancellor thanked IDRC/CIDA for funding this result-oriented research on under-utilized vegetables which will definitely positively affect the lives of the resource-poor rural farmers in southwest Nigeria. The Vice-Chancellor also praised the extensive collaborative network of the project team involving Canadian and Nigerian Universities. He promised that the University will do everything to assist IDRC to monitor the progress of the research. The visit also coincided with the professorial Inaugural Lecture delivered by Professor Clement Adeboye, the Principal Investigator from Osun State University. The lecture was titled, “Exploring the Vegetable’s World: Nutraceuticals and Physiological Investigations.” The pictures say it all in Photoscope section of this NEWS Letter.

A new giant stride was made in solving Africa’s food insecurity challenges on March 14, 2011 at the Obafemi Awolowo University’s Conference Centre. This was during the inception workshop of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) sponsored project. A team of seasoned scientists from top universities in Canada (Cape Breton University and University of Manitoba) and Nigeria (Obafemi Awolowo University and Osun State University) in collaboration gathered with the sole aim of enhancing rural food security through sustainable production and utilization of underutilized Nigerian vegetables.

A cross section of participants at the opening ceremony of the Ni-Can-Veg project inception workshop.

A Fadama Coordinator facilitating the Enumerators workshop in a session.

RESEARCHERS COMMENCE FAMILIARIZATION AND SUPERVISION TOURS TO COMMUNITIES IN OSUN STATE

The vision of IDRC/CIDA Ni-Can-Veg project is to bring back indigenous vegetables to the Nigerian tables by popularizing their cultivation, marketing and consumption, and also to empower the rural women economically. The project took the researchers round some rural and urban communities in Osun State of Nigeria. Among the areas visited were Alakukuma central market, Owena community and Majaro community in Illesa East LGA; Oja-Tiun market, Ajegunle community, Campus gate community and Ede Road community in Ife Central LGA; Obaloron Market, Oja-Ife market and Ilode

This edition contains the news of inception workshop of Ni-Can-Veg project 106511 jointly funded by IDRC and CIDA under the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF), inauguration of enumerators, some -preliminary field experiences and the photoscope section contains.

NIGERIAN AND CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES COLLABORATE ON VEGETABLES PROJECT

Inception Workshop held at OAU
community in Ife East LGA; Oloke market, Omifunfun market, Ugbogbogho market and Ibedo market community in Ife South LGA; Gbongan central market, Osu-Ormu community and Majekosu community in Ayedaade LGA and Okegbo market and Owode community in Owo LGA. The common indigenous vegetables gathered, cultivated, marketed and consumed in visited communities were Tete Ablayye, Odo, Worowo, Efinrin, Eblolo, Ogaama, Sokoyooko, Iyana-ijapa, Yarfin, Sani, Onosun, Ighaaba and Ghure to mention a few. The consumers, most of whom were elderly people of 50 years and above, expressed their satisfaction in consuming indigenous vegetables but noted that they are not readily available in the market coupled with the fact that majority of them are seasonal. Aside from the nutritive values of the vegetables, they also attributed reasons for consumption to inherent medicinal values.

The farmers were sensitized on the need to start cultivating some of the indigenous vegetables that are gradually being threatened by neglect. The Ni-Can-Veg project team enlightened the farmers on what the participating farmers stand to gain and also seek their participation in the project activities. The farmers, who are predominantly women, while expressing their eagerness to participate in and cooperate with the project team, also solicit for the project support for inputs such as fertilizer, seed, farm implements, pumping machine etc. to enable them maximize their production potential during the dry season.

Dry season Vegetable Business
-Emerging Means of Livelihoods

A team of Ni-Can-Veg project’s scientists conducted baseline surveys on under-utilized vegetables cultivation in Akure, Owo, Majekosu, Ajabandele, Ibedo, Omifunfun communities of Ondo State. Evidence from the field shows that dry season vegetable business is rapidly growing and emerging as an area of diversification among the farmers especially during the dry season. Most of the farmers testified that vegetables cultivation has significantly improved their socio-economic livelihoods as the proceeds have been used in training their children up to tertiary institution, built houses, acquired many assets, among others.

The team also observed a gendered division of labour along the vegetable production chain. For instance, men were found to be mostly engaged in land clearing and preparation, and planting, while women are predominantly involved in weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, packaging, transportation, and marketing activities. Men vegetable farmers were observed to have a better access to vegetable farming inputs such as land, capital, fertilizer, etc., than their women counterparts. This observation will be a challenge to the Ni-Can-Veg project which is focused on equipping women farmers so that they have comparable access to vegetable resources vis-à-vis men farmers. In the visited communities, green vegetables – Tete, were observed to be popularly cultivated followed by Osaad, Odo, utsa (zumkin), Ghaqebi, etc. Also, some vegetables such as woorowo, water leaf, bitter leaf, ghsowo, okala, efere, suak Tome, masuan an, isapa, efun ile, agebe, asyofoko, akamolapa, latafade, egwu daamu (local tete), ekebe, sokoyooko, etc. were found to be mostly gathered and not usually deliberately cultivated. Traditional methods of land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, packaging, and marketing were found to be more prominent among the vegetable farmers. The formation of Co-operative societies was found to be significantly influencing the vegetable farming business through provision of better access to capital and inputs to the members. An example of organized Co-operative group is the Unity Vegetable Farmers (UVF) located at Owena Military Barracks, Akure which is well recognized and supported by the Fadama Programme of Ondo State Government (see picture).