Dryland systems scientists strategies to meet 2015 challenges

The Interdisciplinary Research Team (IRT) drawn from the different CGIAR Centres working on the West African Sahel and Dry Savannas Flagship have resolved to be more strategic and to maintain the centre-based nature of the flagship while the action sites could rotate every two years. They equally resolved to adjust their work plans to fit the recent budget cuts of 19%. The scientists agreed to make good use of all existing funding and partnership opportunities within the region to help make more impact and facilitate the agricultural transformation of West Africa. The easiest way to make this wish see the light of day is to have projects and they agreed to develop concept notes. They scientists were unanimous that there is urgent need to translate publications on the Drylands Systems (posters, posters and reports) into French to facilitate comprehension by stakeholders and policy makers, taking into consideration the fact that many countries in the region are French-speaking. The Interdisciplinary Research Team equally exhorted other CGIAR centres to copy the example of ICRAF by allocating at least 5% of all bilateral budgets to communication and improve inter-centre communication and data sharing.

The two-day meeting held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on 13-14 March 2015 and was chaired by Antoine Kalinganire, the regional coordinator for the CRP research program on dryland systems. Opening the workshop of IRT members, Antoine exhorted the team to adjust their workplans to meet the budget cuts announced by the consortium office. He equally announced the replacement an ICRISAT scientist, Pierre Sibiry Traore who stepped down by another scientist, Bado Vincent. The meeting was equally attended by new members.

The different presentations enabled the scientists to be better informed on the current status of the West African Sahel and Dry Savannas Flagship, have an insight of the major achievements and highlights registered of 2014. They had the opportunity to look at certain cross cutting issues like gender, governance, communication, capacity development, CRP DS data and information management and sharing. The two transect coordinators of Kano-Katsina-Maradi (KKM) and Wa-Bobo-Sikasso (WBS) shared their 2015 work plan on regional activities per action transect. Another important issue discussed was the issues of system research for better impact of DS CRP. The next meeting of the Interdisciplinary Research Team has been scheduled for next August in Bamako, Mali.

By Julius Atla

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⇒ Forestry students visit ICRAF Cameroon
⇒ Daisy touching the realities in Cameroon
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⇒ Early fruiting Irvingia spp. (bush mango) bringing hope and more income to women in Cameroon
New project to improve yam-cropping systems in Cote d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso

The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and partners have launched a new project to improve yam-cropping systems in Cote d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso. The new inter and trans-disciplinary project, “Biophysical and socio-economic drivers of sustainable soil use in yam cropping systems for improved food security in West Africa” (YAMSYS), brings together a host of partners including the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (Switzerland), the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (Switzerland), the Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques (Côte d’Ivoire), the Université Félix Houphouet Boigny (Côte d’Ivoire), the Institut de l’Environnement et Recherches Agricoles (Burkina Faso), the Université Polytechnique de Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF).

YAMSYS is a six years project (2015-2017 and 2018-2021) funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation through the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development. ICRAF through the Science Domain, "Land Health Decisions" is leading one of the 4 YAMSYS work packages entitled "Start-of-the-art description of the project implementation sites". Through this work package, ICRAF’s role will be to conduct a biophysical characterization of the project sites (2 in Côte d’Ivoire and 2 in Burkina Faso) using the Land Health Surveillance Approach. It will also contribute to develop, test and disseminate trees-based innovations for soil fertility improvement in yam cropping systems.

Yam is an important food crop feeding about 155 million people mainly in West Africa where it has also an important cultural value, however it is classified as an orphan crop e.g. three yam species are among the 100 crops targeted by the African Orphan Crops Consortium (AOCC). Traditional yam production practices are known as drivers of land degradation e.g. encroachment in biodiversity rich landscapes and soil nutrient unbalance. The objective of YAMSYS is to develop and implement innovative soil management technologies for increased crop productivity, food security, profitability, and environmental sustainability of yam cropping systems. The project has also a strong capacity development component including training of 5 PhD students and 20 MSc students from West Africa.

The kick-off meeting of YAMSYS was held in Abidjan on 2-7 March 2015. The partners developed a common vision of the project and discussed the governance and the role of each partner. Interview sessions were conducted to recruit the project site managers, PhD and MSc students. A field trip was also organized to meet and chat with yam producers in Bringakro and yam traders in Bouake wholesale market.

By Innocent Kiba, Valery Hgaza & Lucien Diby

Daisy touches the realities in Cameroon

It was on a very bright Monday morning on March 21st 2015 when plane in which Daisy Ouya was on board touched the tarmac of the Yaounde Nsimalen International Airport. The communication specialist from ICRAF’s head office in Nairobi, visiting Cameroon for the first time had an exceptional opportunity to touch and feel the realities on the ground. She came for a week long working visit to Cameroon. She got her first impressions even before landing. She was able to take a few aerial pictures with her smart phone before the plane touched the tarmac.

“Your country is very green...trees are everywhere...this is a complete contrast with Nairobi” she told me. “Welcome to Cameroon. We are in the Congo Basin...you will see forests everywhere” I replied. I found it important to remind her that the Congo Basin is an important biodiversity hotspot and that at global level, the forests act as the planet’s second lung, counterpart to the rapidly dwindling Amazon. I did not hesitate to inform her that the populations of the region are very receptive to the technologies developed by World Agroforestry Centre as partners in the region and that, with more resources, we can reverse the trend of poverty in more communities.

I promised to make her visit one of our beneficiaries. The next day we visited a farmer in Nkenlikok, a village in the purities of Yaounde. There Daisy had the opportunity to visit his nursery and farm. She was asking questions as we went along and thanks to the eloquence of the farmer, she got answers to all her questions. The farmer, Louis Marie Atangana explained why he has integrated very many high value trees species like safou, allanblackia, bush mango, bitter cola, njansang and more. Daisy was marvelled by the early fruiting trees, some of which were less than a metre and were already bearing fruits. The farmer explained to Daisy how he generates income from the nursery and how he helps train many other farmers in his locality. After the farm, Daisy had the opportunity to visit the ICRAF nursery in Nkobisson where the technicians where on hand to explain how the not-mist propagators is constructed, the different vegetative multiplication techniques used, the different types of substrates and the different priority species. She left the nursery very satisfied wishing the technicians well in their challenging tasks.

By Innocent Kiba, Valery Hgaza & Lucien Diby
Forestry students visit ICRAF Cameroon

Nineteen M.Sc. students from the University of Dschang were at ICRAF on Thursday 19 March 2015 to learn more about agroforestry and tree domestication. The students were accompanied by two lecturers who were at ICRAF as part of field trip that took them to some organizations in Yaoundé. It was an opportunity for the students to have a practical insight of what they have learned in theory in school. The group comprised students from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Congo, Gabon and Cameroon.

At the ICRAF office in Bastos, the Regional Coordinator, Dr Zac Tchoundjeu explained the challenges faced by environmentalists in the Congo Basin. Using a PowerPoint presentation, Dr Tchoundjeu explained to the students and their lecturers some of the domestication technologies used by ICRAF and how these technologies are helping to roll back poverty in many communities across West and Central Africa. He explained the work that has been done by ICRAF in the different countries in the region to help improve the livelihood of the communities. He explained to them using examples of farmer groups which have been able to break the chains of poverty through tree domestication and marketing techniques introduced by ICRAF and concluded by saying tree domestication holds great prospects for poverty alleviation in the region.

“We do not expect you to ask us where to get a job upon graduation. We should be asking you how many jobs can you create in your communities upon graduation...there are lots of opportunities and you must make good use of them” Dr Tchoundjeu told the students.

The visit started at the ICRAF nursery in Nkolbisson where Alain Tso-beng and the technicians explained the composition and functioning of the different propagators, and took enough time to demonstrated the different multiplication techniques; grafting, marcottage and propagation by cuttings. At each stage, it was followed by a series of questions to help them understand better.

At the end of the visit, the students through a representative expressed profound gratitude to ICRAF for the opportunity and the Regional Coordinator handed to some useful documentation.

JA

On-going and upcoming activities

30th March – 2nd April 2015: BRACED Consortium Kick-Off Workshop Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

22 April 2015: BIODEV meeting in Finland (Helsinki)

14-17 April 2015: WCA Science Retreat 2015 / HR Training in Bamako

27-28 April 2015: Humidtropics is organizing a Strategic Communication Planning Workshop for the West Africa Flagship and would like to invite you and some of your staff to participate. The objective is to develop a WA Flagship Communication Plan for 2015, with a focus on facilitating adoption and uptake of key research outputs by first/next users.

New working hours in ICRAF-WCA

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Cameroon staff acquire presentation skills

The staffs of ICRAF Cameroon has received a two-day training on how to improve their presentation skills. The training which ran from 25-26th march at the conference hall of IITA in Yaoundé was facilitated by Daisy Ouya, communications specialist and science writer from ICRAF’s head office in Nairobi.

For two days, scientists and administrative staff received useful tips on how to improve their public presentations either through Power-Point or Pitching. The training that had a lot of practical exercises helped staff to know their target audience and be able to package according to the different audiences.

“It has been observed that many donors are not scientists and consequently do not understand some our complicated scientific explanations... they need to be told simply” Daisy said. Most of all, she highlighted the need for presentations to be clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete and courteous. Using some practical examples of presentations by ICRAF scientists, they tried to rectify and the results was wonderful. we look forward to much improved presentations from staff in Cameroon.

Agnes Mballa is a very happy farmer in the centre region of Cameroon. In 2004, with the support of ICRAF, Agnes and other members of a women’s group, MERUNGA began integrating a variety of high value fruit trees such as *Ricinodendron heudelotii* (njansang), *Dacryodes edulis* and *Irvingia spp* on-farm in order to maximise the benefits and reduce the vulnerability in the face of fluctuating prices of cocoa and other cash crops. When ICRAF staff visited her farm on Wednesday 1st April 2015, she was all smiles. The bush mango seedlings she integrated are all fruiting. “This is the third year that these trees are fruiting and each time the harvest is more than the previous year” Agnes told the visiting ICRAF staffs. Agnes was happy to show around her farm to see all the early fruiting trees. The fruits on the ground were abundant. She had not yet gathered them because a buyer from Yaounde has accepted to buy all her produce.

“During the first year of fructification, I was able to generate CFA 14,000 (about USD28) from bush mango...but each year the production increases and I generate more money...this year i lost two branches of the other tree because the fruits were too much and the branches could not sustain the weight.” she said. ICRAF scientist, Thaddee Sado gave her some useful tips on how to manage similar situations in the future. The other women of the group are also harvesting bush mango planted in their farms. Another farmer, Christophe Missé started harvesting his grafted *Irvingia gabonensis* after three years.

In 2009 ICRAF in collaboration with the members of the MERUNGA group started a trial cocoa agroforest. Ngali II is a small village located 40 km from Yaounde. This is one of the many villages in Cameroon that have partnered with ICRAF in its efforts to promote best practices in agroforestry – a science and an art that focuses on growing a wide range of trees on farms to nurture the land while improving people’s lives and the environment.

Josephine Makue trying her hands on pitching

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