

WAAPP Sierra Leone Supports the Training of Agricultural Scientists to Do More

By Richard Bockarie

“The low level of agricultural productivity and production of our farmers in the sub region is largely attributable to low generation and dissemination of relevant technologies for adoption under current by poor research infrastructure and capacity building,” WAAPP Deputy Project Coordinator Suleman Sesay said at the opening ceremony of a two week long training workshop in cassava value chain for 37 agricultural scientists in Bo.



SLARI DG delivering his keynote address

In order to address this important problem holding back the meaningful contribution of agricultural research to agriculture and the economic development of the country, he disclosed that following its inception in Sierra Leone, the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Programme (WAAPP)

has started providing support for the training of agricultural researchers and communicators and will continue to do so in the areas of both long and short term training courses. Deputy WAAPP Coordinator Sesay explained that raising the productivity and production of our farmers in the sub region so as to improve their standard of living and promote sustained economic growth, the mounting challenge of rapidly generating relevant technologies and disseminating them to our farmers in the sub region for adoption has to be urgently addressed.

Adding his voice to the issue, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Training Consultant in Sierra Leone Dr. James A. Whyte told the trainees the role of his institution in meeting the training objectives of WAAP. “This will make you capable in successfully performing your responsibility in generating needed technologies”, he said. He added that since its presence in the country, IITA has contributed to research and development by introducing germplasm as well as agronomy and biological control practices.” My institution has also implemented five agricultural projects including Unleashing the Power of Cassava in Africa

(UPoCA),Cassava Value Chain Project,Gari Market Linkage Project with World Food Programme and Putting Nitrogen Fixation to Work”,Dr.Whyte explained.

Giving the keynote address, the Director General of the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), Dr.Alfred Dixon explained the importance of the agricultural sector in the country. “It does not only provide jobs for the bulk of the population but impacts on almost all sectors of development, which is why the President in his wisdom has made it his priority in his Agenda for Change and Prosperity”, he said. He told the audience that the World Bank and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through WAAPP are enhancing the capacity of his institution



A cross section of the participants

and others in the country to effectively and efficiently make use of different agricultural value chains. He disclosed that the two major crops in Sierra Leone-cassava and rice have been selected for this purpose and other improvements under the WAAPP ; adding that each link in the value chain system of the two crops will be examined, followed with effective research and technology generation programmes; enabling the trainees to develop, disseminate and facilitate technology adoption.

To this end, he commended the collaborative role regional research institutions are playing including IITA especially as a major source of technology, training, provision of advisory services, among others.

During the two weeks training course, Facilitators from the IITA explained the meaning of value chain adding: “the concept includes the full range of value adding activities needed to bring a product or service through the different stages of production...and the ultimate response to end consumer demand.”The trainees learned that Agricultural Value Chains in Sub Sahara Africa are constrained by several factors including lack of credit to induce production, deficient public

regulations and limited cooperative actions often leading to large number of scattered small producers.

The vital need for and the concept of creating Innovation Platforms (IPs) in a value chain system was also explained and fully discussed. "Stake holders or actors in the various chains such as service providers, producers, processors etc. need to be brought together and get engaged in a process of dialogue, and collective learning in a way that they can make better decisions to effectively and efficiently create added value to their products", the facilitators told the trainees. Types of platforms, entry points, platform linkage in value chains, steps for value chain platforms implementations and many others were explained and discussed.

The trainees were also fully engaged in looking at the various steps in value chain analysis with special reference to cassava using basic tools such as secondary sources, interviews with key informants, survey processes, observations, focus groups etc. They also learned how to identify constraints and opportunities as well as value chain mapping. The training also provided opportunity for field work where basic tools were used to get information from various stake holders for analysis, conclusion and recommendations on the type, level of performance of IPs, their governance system and effectiveness among others.

At the closing ceremony of the two weeks training workshop, WAAPP Project Coordinator Peter Kaindenh commended the efforts of the trainees. He reiterated the objectives and focus of WAAPP and urged them to do their best to tap into them in a way that they can make the sector productive. "The agriculture sector is a leading means of bringing economic and social prosperity to the people of Sierra Leone and the region", he said.