



COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL ROOT CROPS RESEARCH INSTITUTE (NRCRI), UMUDIKE AT THE CLOSE OF HER 2024 ANNUAL REVIEW AND PLANNING WORKSHOP HELD BETWEEN 13TH – 14TH MARCH 2024 AT THE NRCRI LIBRARY COMPLEX, UMUDIKE, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

Preamble

The National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike 2024 Annual Review and Planning Workshop took place from the 13th to 14th March 2024, at the Institutes' Library Conference Hall. The Theme of this Workshop was "Advancing Sustainable Root and Tuber Crops-based Farming Systems in Nigeria: A Pathway to Resilient Agrifood Systems".

The Workshop brought together a diverse group of stakeholders including Policy makers, Scientists, Academia, Past Executive Directors and Directors of NRCRI, Professors, Deans of Faculties/Colleges of Universities, Farmers, NGOs, His Royal Highnesses of Host Communities, and representatives from the Private Sector. The workshop was officially opened by the Governor of Abia State, represented by the Hon. Commissioner for Agriculture, Prof. Monica Ironkwe and Senior Special Assistant on Food Security, Dr. Cliff Agbaeze. The welcome address was delivered by the Executive Director of NRCRI, Umudike, Prof. Chiedozie Egesi. Goodwill messages were conveyed by The Vice Chancellor, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Prof. Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe; and Provost, Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu (FCAI), represented by the Deputy Provost, Dr. Jonah Nwawuisi. Additional goodwill messages were shared by the Programme Director for Commercialization at the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), Nairobi, Kenya, Dr. Emmanuel Okogbenin; and Director General, National Biosafety and Management Agency (NBMA), Dr. Yemisi Agnes Asagbra; and HRM Eze Ben Oriaku of Umudike Community. A Special address was delivered by the Executive Secretary of the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN), Prof. Garba H. Sharubutu. The workshop was declared open by the Abia State Governor who was represented by his Special Adviser on Food Security, Dr Cliff Agbaeze.

Keynote and Lead Paper Presentations

The Keynote Address was delivered by Dr Kent Nnadozie, Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Rome, while the Lead Paper on "Quality Early Generation Seeds: Key to Delivering Roots of Prosperity" was presented by Prof. Happiness Oselebe, Professor of Plant Breeding & Genetics at the Centre for Crop Improvement, Nutrition & Climate Change (CCINCC), Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki. The keynote address highlighted the high rate of genetic erosion that is ravaging the world presently, the danger it poses to the shrinking diversity of plants in the world, the consequences it poses to the world's ability to respond to future global food resilience and diversity needs, and the need for policies and collaborations at national and transnational levels to halt the drift. The lead paper emphasized the crucial role of quality early-generation seeds in agriculture and their impact on crop production, resilience, and overall success.

Key Highlights

The workshop highlighted the:

1. Threats to agriculture including population growth, climate change, genetic erosion, and governance complexities.
2. Importance of addressing loss of genetic diversity for agricultural and food resilience.
3. Significance of global and local policies and collaboration in managing plant genetic resources.
4. Challenges faced by root and tuber crops in Nigeria:

7. Urgency to enhance agricultural productivity due to global population growth projections.
8. Need for quality early-generation seeds for successful crop production and food security.
9. Importance of shifting the seed system of root and tuber crops from the largely informal systems to the formal system that enhances productivity and food security.
10. Importance of root and tuber crops in stabilizing food production and stemming loss of foreign exchange since most of the crops are homegrown and commands huge export potential.



Panel session with (L-R) Prof Chinedum Nwajiuba (former Vice Chancellor, Alex Ekwueme University, Ebonyi State, University), Prof Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe (Vice Chancellor, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike), Dr Kent Nnadozie (Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, Food and Agricultural Organization, United Nations, Rome); Prof Chiedozie Egesi (ED/CEO NRCRI); Prof Garba H. Sharubutu (Executive Secretary, Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN)); Prof Jude Njoku (former Vice Chancellor Federal University of Technology, Owerri); Prof Happiness Ogha Oselebe (former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Ebonyi State University), Dr. Emmanuel Okogbenin (AATF, Nairobi); and moderated by Mr. Richard-Mark Mbaram (African Development Bank) during the 2024 NRCRI Annual Review and Planning workshop which took place from the 13th to 14th March 2024, at Umudike.



On the green carpet from L-R Dr. Charles Amadi (Director, Tuber Crops Department, NRCRI), Mrs. Hauwa Tahir Jibo (NBMA), Dr. Joseph Onyeka (Director, Biotechnology & Product Development, NRCRI), Dr. Kent Nnadozie (Keynote Speaker, FAO, Rome), Dr. Agnes Yemisi Asagbra (Director General/CEO, NBMA), Prof Chiedozie Egesi (Executive Director/CEO NRCRI) Dr Tessa Madu (Director Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, NRCRI), Dr. Ihoma Okwuonu (Assistant Director/Coordinator, Biotechnology, NRCRI).

5. Need for a concerted focus on the four pillars of stable food systems which include: crop diversity, research and breeding, value chains and seed systems, and policy support.
6. Opportunities for transforming root and tuber farming in Nigeria through collaboration, technology, and policy tools.

Recommendations

The Workshop arrived at the following recommendations:

1. Expansion of conservation efforts for all crop genetic resources.
2. Enhancing crop breeding programs to improve food diversity and for better response to emerging issues that impact food security.
3. Support seed system development and the use of high-quality seeds of improved varieties for higher productivity.
4. Foster national policies for diverse and resilient agrifood systems for enhanced food security and job creation opportunities.
5. Enhance collaboration, technology adoption, and market linkages.
6. Collaborate with value chain actors for market-preferred varieties, certified seeds and commercialization of research outputs and products.

Conclusion

The NRCRI 2024 Annual Review and Planning Workshop concluded with a call to action for all stakeholders to collaborate, share expertise, and work towards transforming root and tuber crop production in Nigeria. There is an urgent need to address threats to agriculture such as insecurity, climate change, genetic erosion, and governance complexities to mitigate the current food crises. To ensure agricultural resilience and food security while also creating job opportunities, support for crop breeding programs and seed system development, policy alignment for diverse food systems, and enhanced collaboration and technology adoption are essential. By focusing on these key points, we can work towards a sustainable agricultural sector that not only meets the nutritional needs of the population but also contributes to economic growth and job creation. We opine that these are essential for the success of the efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria to enhance food security, stabilize food prices and enhance economic empowerment.

Signed:

Prof. Chiedozie Egesi (FBSN, FASN)
Executive Director/CEO, NRCRI Umudike
Date: 14th March 2024