

Australia-Africa Agricultural Research Symposium, 20-21 March 2018, Nairobi, Kenya

Three innovative and enterprising Africa-Australia agricultural projects were awarded equal first prize of the inaugural Innovation Competition funded by the Australian Government at the third Australia-Africa Agricultural Research Symposium, held on March 20-21 at the Southern Sun Mayfair Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Symposium was co-hosted by Australia-Africa Universities Network (AAUN), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), the Australia Awards, the University of Nairobi and the University of Sydney. The Symposium was funded by the Australian Government and the AAUN.

The three successful projects, each awarded AU\$10,000 in seed funding from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (AU\$30,000 commitment in total), were:

- 'Use of ecological approaches to integrate small livestock and vegetable production for household food and nutrition security', with team members from Australia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.
- 'Horticultural waste utilisation in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria', with team members from those countries plus Australia, Cameroon, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.
- 'Management of watersheds to enhance soil fertility and crop productivity (tef and rice) in Ethiopia, Kenya and Madagascar', with team members from those countries plus Australia.

Each of the competition winners also featured partnerships and funding provided by the private sector, incorporating the '[shared value](#)' approach adopted at the Symposium. These cross-country partnerships and collaborations were formed during the two-day Symposium.

The event attracted approximately 100 participants from both Australia and Africa, including the 21 Awardees participating in the Australia Awards Africa short course 'Increasing the Development Impact of Agricultural Research' (IDIAR) funded by the Australian Government plus 33 Australia Awards alumni from 12 countries in Africa. In addition, Symposium participants included agricultural academics presenting in the IDIAR program from Australia and Africa, along with representatives from Nairobi-based agricultural research institutions, NGOs and the private sector.

The day commenced with an opening session themed 'Transforming agriculture through research and innovation'. This opening session was attended by Professor Hamadi Boga, Principal Secretary Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (Kenya). Professor Boga spoke of the pressing need for relevant and current research to inform policy in the Kenyan context. The Australian High Commissioner to Kenya, Her Excellency Alison Chartres, spoke of the long-standing commitment that Australia has to Africa in development. Other speakers included Professor John Hearn, co-Chair of AAUN, Professor Peter Mbithi, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, and Professor Robyn McConchie, Professor of Horticulture at the University of Sydney.

Following the opening session, three panel sessions were held, each focusing on increasing agricultural impact. The three panel sessions were:

- Technology for agricultural impact
- Private sector engagement for agricultural impact
- Gender for agricultural impact.

The presenters and presentations from each panel session is below.

The first panel, held on the morning of the first day of the Symposium, was chaired by Professor Robyn McConchie, with the theme of technology for agricultural impact. Speakers were:

- Dr Bruce Pengelly from Australia on Climate smart agriculture: lessons from ZimCLIFS
- Dr Mulugetta Mekuria, CIMMYT, SIMLESA Program Leader on Sustainable Agriculture: lessons from SIMLESA
- A/Prof Brett Whelan, University of Sydney in Australia on Digital soil mapping for food and soil security
- Prof Hetti Schönfeldt, University of Pretoria speaking on Food composition data for animal-source foods in Sub Saharan Africa
- Prof Mu Li, University of Sydney speaking on Using digital technology in health promotion: job aid mobile apps.

The second panel, chaired by Palladium Team Leader in Africa Fiona Pakoa, was held on the afternoon of day one. The theme was private sector engagement for agricultural impact. Speakers for this panel, all based in Kenya, were:

- Dr Christy van Beek, SoilCares on The business of soil testing: innovative agro-technology and integrated soil fertility management in Kenya
- Prof Catherine Wangari Muthuri, World Agroforestry Centre-ICRAF on Developing value chain innovation platforms to improve food security in East and Southern Africa (VIP4FS)
- Dr Sylvester O. Oikeh, African Agricultural Technology Foundation on the 'Shared Value Initiative' Water Efficient Maize in Africa (WEMA) Project
- Dr Paul Greener, Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund on the ACEF's work in supporting agribusiness
- Mr Colin Forbes, Base Titanium on Partnerships for improved livelihoods in the cotton industry.

The third panel, on gender for agricultural impact, was held on the morning of the second day of the Symposium, chaired by ACIAR's Regional Manager for Africa, Dr Leah Ndung'u. Speakers on this panel were:

- Dr Michele Mbo'o Tchouawou, African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) on Building capacity of African women scientists
- Dr Rahma Adam, CIMMYT on SIMLESA lessons on gender and benefits to women, men and youth of sustainable intensification technologies and constraints to adoption compare between women and men.
- Mrs Violet Gathaara, KALRO on Gender and extension
- Dr Jemimah Njuki, Canada's International Development Research Centre on Working with men and women for agricultural development.

Questions from the floor followed each of these panels. After these Q&A sessions, the Symposium broke into smaller working groups after each panel had presented to discuss the barriers, constraints, and major development questions ahead, for each of the panel topics. The quality of the discussions during these working group sessions was very high due to the diverse representation of participants and speakers at the Symposium. Some of the key development questions arising from these breakout sessions were:

- How should agricultural extension services be funded in Africa in the 21st century?
- How can we improve and sustain soil fertility for increased productivity and nutrition of crops?
- How can we better engage youth in agriculture and agricultural research?

- What can be done to further encourage private sector investment and link research collaborators with the private sector?
- What can be done to better support Public Private Partnerships in agriculture?
- What is the interaction between sustainable livelihoods and environmental protections?
- How do we incorporate culture and religious beliefs into the broader discussion about gender equity in agriculture?
- How do we address and change community mindsets and traditional roles of women when it comes to the inclusive engagement of men and women in agriculture?

In addition, the 21 Awardees from the IDIAR course gave a series of exhilarating one-minute, one-slide 'lightning' presentations highlighting the work that they would be undertaking as part of their reintegration action plan (RAP) on return to work, after the IDIAR course. These presentations demonstrated the depth and breadth of the Awardees' research programs and assortment of skills gained through the four-week course.

A reflection session was held on day two of the Symposium to reflect on the first day's deliberations. Three participants of the Symposium each gave their perceptions on the day one program: an Australia Awards alumnus (Pardon Njerere from Zimbabwe), a Nairobi-based agricultural researcher (Mrs Violet Gathaara from the Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization) and a representative of the private sector and Australia Awards Alumnus (Philip Chemeltorit from Tradecare Africa based in Kenya, also an Australia Awards alumnus).

The vote of thanks at the end of the Symposium was given by Australia Awards alumnus Nicholas Amartey from Ghana.

The fourth Australia-Africa Agricultural Research Symposium will be held in Africa in 2019.