

Introduction

Land degradation and soil fertility depletion are the most serious threats to food production in Africa. The population is trapped in a vicious circle between land degradation and poverty, and the lack of resources and knowledge to generate adequate income and opportunities to overcome the degradation.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), recognizing that agriculture-led development is fundamental to fighting hunger, reducing poverty, generating economic growth and opening the way to an expansion of exports, has developed the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). CAADP proposes to extend the area under sustainable utilization, develop reliable water control systems, to improve infrastructure and trade-related capacities for market access, and thereby improve national and regional food security, underpinned by agricultural research, and technology dissemination and adoption.

To support the CAADP, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) with its member Sub-regional Organisations (SROs) has developed a vision for African agricultural research that calls for 6% annual growth in agricultural productivity. Achieving this vision will require enhanced collaboration among the national agricultural research systems (NARS), international research centers (IARCs), advanced agricultural research institutions (ARIs) and other African partners, increased public investment, and capacity building to foster institutional innovation.

The African Network for Soil Biology and Fertility (AfNet) is an example of such collaboration. Its membership now covers most of sub-Saharan Africa and brings together national and international scientists to work for Africa's development. This AfNet's International Symposium will be an important step in the CAADP process, bringing together key researchers, policy-makers, and natural resource management practitioners to review state of the art knowledge on soil fertility management and to

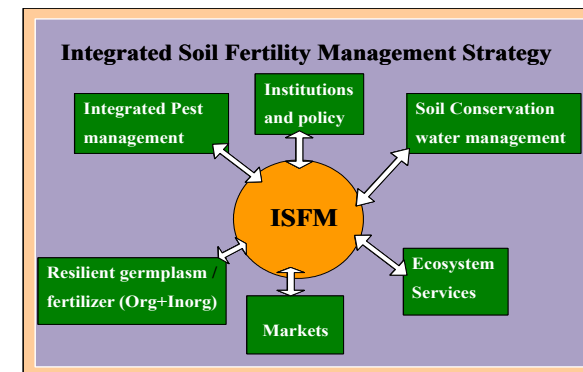
identify solutions to land degradation and soil fertility depletion.

Tremendous progress has been made on the principles, methodologies, approaches and technologies for replenishing soil fertility, culminating in new paradigms on integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) and integrated agricultural research for development (IAR4D). These recognize the need for holistic approaches to soil fertility addressing the full range of driving forces and consequences: biological, physical, chemical, social, economic and political. Many technologies have been developed on integrated nutrient management, cropping systems, integration of multi-purpose legumes, improved fallow, biomass transfer, etc., but empowering farmers to improve their welfare using these technologies requires embracing the whole suite of forces and consequences.

AfNet's recent restructuring into multidisciplinary, eco-regional teams has been designed to position it to develop adoptable and sustainable soil management practices that integrate the biological, chemical, social and economic processes that regulate soil fertility and optimize the use of plants and nutrients.

Symposium specific objectives

- To review recent research achievements on integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) and ecosystem services
- To develop strategies on scaling-up soil fertility enhancing technologies
- To increase stakeholder awareness of new initiatives in natural resource management including integrated agricultural research for development (IAR4D)



Symposium themes

Theme 1: State of the art on integrated soil fertility management and ecosystem services

- State of land degradation in Africa
- ISFM approaches and principles
- Recent achievements on ISFM technologies and management of carbon and nutrient cycles
- Managing soils for enhanced ecosystem services.
- Managing soil genetic resources for enhanced biodiversity



Theme 2: Opportunities and challenges for scaling up/ out integrated soil fertility management innovations

- Constraints to adoption of ISFM technologies
- Socio-economics and policy
- Lessons from farmer participatory approaches and scaling up/ out
- Opportunities and challenges of participatory market analysis for enabling rural innovations
- Integrating ISFM in IAR4D to include market access, enabling policies and their interactions
- Gender analysis
- Success stories on development and adoption of ISFM technologies

Theme 3: Increasing stakeholder awareness of new initiatives in natural resource management and developing strategies for implementation

- Overview of CGIAR challenge programme with special emphasis on the sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme
- Multi Country Agriculture Productivity Programme (MAPP)

Note: For each theme, there will be a keynote paper to introduce the subject.

There will also be a poster session, as time will not accommodate all papers

- March 15, 2004: Selection of abstracts by AfNet steering committee for oral or poster presentation and call for development of full papers
- May 1, 2004: Submission of full papers
- May 17, 2004: Symposium

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Improving Human Welfare and Environmental Conservation by Empowering Farmers to Combat Soil Fertility Degradation

Venue: Yaoundé, Cameroon
Dates: May 17 – 21, 2004



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Symposium announcement

Deadlines

January 2004: Call for abstracts

February 29, 2004: Submission of abstracts

