

21 High Yielding Crop Varieties Released For Farmers

By: Mohamed A. Sanoh and Richard Bockarie

21 high yielding varieties of rice, cassava, soybean and cowpea developed by the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) was Monday released by the National Seed Board (NSB) in Sierra Leone at an impressive ceremony at the Agriculture Ministry main conference hall, Youyi building in Freetown.



Occasion Participants

Addressing participants of the occasion including Officers of NGOs in the agriculture sector, the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS), Francis Sankoh who

chaired the occasion and doubled as Chief Agricultural Officer said that the road to transform the seed sub sector in the country is not only new but has been a long one.

"Some reasonable progress have been made as we do not only now have laws governing the conduct of the sub sector but functional structures have been put in place to ensure that our farmers and the nation fully benefit from the fine results of using good seeds in production", he said. He described the occasion as unique and a milestone in the history of the agriculture sector; expressing the hope that the release and use of seeds through a rigorous and acceptable standard system to our farmers will help meet the target goal of national food security and farming for business.

SLARI Director General Dr. Joseph M. Kargbo reiterated the crucial role of his institution in serving as a catalyst in helping to bring about enough and quality food on not only on the table of every Sierra Leonean but in bringing prosperity for all, Dilating on this, he opined that prosperity for all in the country is not farfetched, given the huge potential resources of the sector; adding that with progressive and adequate material, financial and human investment in the sector the quality of life of farmers who form the bulk of the population of the country will not only go for the better but the rest of the population as well.

“My staff will therefore continue to work through the difficult challenges the vicious civil conflict, the Ebola crisis and other issues have inflicted so that the government’s Agenda of Prosperity for all will be realized”, he told the audience. He expressed appreciation for the good leadership and support of the government as well as the support of the numerous partners of SLARI and urged the authorities concerned to continue to anticipate and respond to challenges in a way that the huge potential of the sector can be tapped into making us a food sufficient and food exporting country.



Minister Receiving the Varieties for Release

While he reaffirmed his continued support to SLARI in the provision of conducive working environment and other needed resources for it to come up with more technologies and at regular intervals, he disclosed that as a regional programme, the use of the technologies will not be restricted to Sierra Leone and markets is also available in the region for the products.

Presidential Adviser Dr. Sheku Kamara commended SLARI and all those who contributed to the generation and release of the crop varieties. He added that while the varieties may be of significant benefit to our farmers especially in transforming the sector in making the country food secure as well as move it away from subsistence farming, without effective dissemination and adoption, the efforts will go down the drains. “Our farmers need to know the merits of these technologies as against what they have and see the need to undertake production two or three times a year with the short ,medium and long duration crops you have continued to come up with together with the best bet cultivation practices”, he said.

In his address to participants, Agriculture Minister Dr. Joseph Sam Sesay said it was a privilege for him to preside over such an important event in the annals of the sector. “This is the first time in the history of the sector our agricultural scientists have gone through such an established

In his contribution, the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Programme (WAAPP) Acting Coordinator Suliman Sesay said the occasion marked a significant step in respect of the existence and purpose of WAAPP. “WAAPP in Sierra Leone has continued to support SLARI so that it can generate relevant technologies especially the two leading crops in Sierra Leone –rice and cassava for adoption by our farmers “He said.

procedure to ensure that our farmers make the most out of good seeds, qualifying our country to have our varieties in the ECOWAS Catalogue, “he said.

In order to ensure the usefulness of the crop varieties released, he re-echoed and emphasized the need for widespread dissemination for adoption and feedback, adding that SLARI should also endeavour to focus on the social and economic merits of technologies in a way that using it can bring the best for our farmers and the nation. Minister Sesay climaxed the occasion by formally releasing the 21 varieties of rice, cassava, soybean and cowpea.



Partial Group Photo of Participants

The occasion was organized by the Sierra Leone Seed Certification Agency (SLeSCA), the official seed testing authority in Sierra Leone. It has the mandate to regulate and spearhead seed industry development in the country. Following the establishment of SLeSCA, it has among many others secured funds for the development of crops catalogue and procedure manuals, commenced seed certification activities in the country and facilitated meetings of the Varietal Release Committee and Registration as well as the National Seed Board.

SLeSCA Director Dr. Momoh Y. Turay studied his undergraduate Degree Programme in Botany at Foray Bay College (University of Sierra Leone) and came out with BSc. with Honours. He pursued and successfully completed his MSc Degree Programme in Crops Science at Njala University and later proceeded to the United Kingdom where he studied and successfully completed his PhD Programme at Reading University.