

# Regional experts benchmark on new cassava varieties to boost food security

By Stuart Yiga

Regional crop experts from East and Southern African have embarked on a benchmark strategy to ensure higher returns for cassava farmers through developing high yield varieties.

Siraj Ismail Kayondo, a distinguished cassava molecular breeder at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), said they are currently working on two cassava varieties: TARICASS8 and TARICASSr.

The move is aimed at meeting the needs of farmers and boosting food security in the region.

"TARICASS8 offers a potential yield of 48.4 tonnes per hectare, while TARICASSr delivers up to 62 tonnes per hectare. These varieties are ideal for both food security and commercial purposes," Kayondo said.

Before they commenced



PHOTO BY STUART YIGA

**Regional crop experts from East and Southern Africa during a benchmarking session at the Namulonge-based cassava breeding centre, located in Wakiso district, recently**

their two-day training and assessment workshop at the beginning of last month, crop research experts from Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi visited their counterparts from Uganda at Namulonge cassava breeding centre in Wakiso district.

Kayondo said their research is focusing on coming up with more drought and disease-resistant varieties that will benefit farmers.

"We have also come up with a cassava handling area, which will be unveiled soon, although we shall remain

working with Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute for banana food quality variety assessment and National Crops Resources Research Institute respectively," he said. Kayondo said IITA collaborates with other partners including National Agriculture

Research Organisation and Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute, focusing on developing and delivering elite cassava varieties.

He said the new cassava varieties are tailored for specific agro-ecological zones, high yielding and resilient. Kayondo said they have also embarked on training and capacity building of farmers to enable them carry out sustainable agricultural practices.

## WHY THE VARIETIES MATTER

Experts said while both varieties excel in drought-prone areas, TARICASS8 may be susceptible to yield loss under extreme drought and high green mite pressure.

According to experts, the market for cassava has expanded in the region for consumption and small-scale processing, starch production, animal feeds, and bioethanol industries.

IITA country director Dr

George Mahuku, said the initiative is supported by RTB cassava breeding project and managed by IITA and Science for Humanity's Greatest Challenges, a global union of international organisations engaged in research about food security. The project is funded by international donors committed to agricultural research.

Vincent Woyengo Were, who has 20 years of experience in cassava breeding, said through IITA, they have been able to acquire innovation and technological support, training and logistics that have enhanced their cassava crop research and networking since 2019. Were is based at Kenya's National Agricultural Crop Research Organisation in the western town of Kakamega. Emmanuel Mirema, a cassava breeding expert from Tanzania, said they have released over 25 cassava varieties with IITA's support.