

# Foreword

Dear participants,

On behalf of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, and its partner organizations Bioversity International, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, the International Society of Horticultural Science and the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute, we extend a very warm welcome to all of you.

We all are aware of the importance of banana as an essential staple crop for the African continent. However, the time is ripe to think about harnessing this agricultural commodity, which is deeply engrained in everyday life of many Africans, and take it a step further: to a system sustained by an invigorated private sector that actively seeks technological interventions and strengthened market linkages, creating income for the millions of farmers that grow banana everyday. That was the goal with which we approached the initial planning stages of this conference, and the reason why its content is different from that of other banana gatherings that have taken place on the continent. Besides the many scientists present, we actively solicited input from the private sector – large and small, the farmer groups and entrepreneurs, the donors and governments, the policy makers and advocacy groups. We organized the program in order that each day represents a clear theme: Markets and trade, Production, and Innovation Systems. More importantly, the conference will culminate in a final Strategy Day, which will build on the input provided by participants from each of the themes towards the development of a 10-year strategy, the road map that explores and strategizes the possibilities this crucial crop can achieve.

From an initial small gathering, brewed up during a casual field trip in early 2006, it has sparked huge interest and has exponentially grown into a massive international event, with interest far beyond initial expectations. We especially wish to thank the many donors, institutions and companies that have supported this conference, not in the least by facilitating participation of over a hundred participants that would have otherwise been unable to attend. Recent issues such as the stabilizing importance of banana among rising food prices and the initial steps of international banana exports from the African continent undoubtedly added to the interest. This conference, and its structure, clearly fill an urgent need.

Much effort, funding and planning went into this event. Let us not forget why we are here, and work together to ensure its success – enjoyably!

On behalf of the Organizing Committee,



THOMAS DUBOIS  
Chair



DANNY COYNE  
Vice-Chair