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## **BiomassNet: The First Expert Network for Food and Non-Food Biomass in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

Global demand for biomass as food, feed, a source of energy and industrial raw materials is putting increasing pressure on the agricultural sector and food production worldwide. This is a particular challenge for Africa where many countries still struggle to achieve food security, while facing new demands for biomass as a source of income, energy and industrial raw materials. The creation of future development pathways for the African agricultural sectors is thus a complex task and requires exchange and cooperation between experts from different disciplines and sectors. To facilitate this exchange, the first expert network for food and non-food biomass in Africa (BiomassNet) was initiated in 2016 by the Center for Development Research (ZEF) and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) within the framework of the BMBF-funded research project BiomassWeb - Improving food security in Africa through increased system productivity of biomass-based value webs. BiomassNet aims at supporting African countries in achieving food security and developing sustainable bioeconomies through the exchange of knowledge and expertise between experts from science, policy and practice. The network is open to all disciplines and all sectors who address food and non-food biomass issues in Africa, including for example scientists and experts from governmental and non-governmental organisations, development agencies, or the private sector. BiomassNet is implemented through an interactive website that allows users to create profiles, to contact each other and to upload and download information. In addition, the BiomassNet Dgroup that currently has 417 members from 46 countries provides a platform for moderated email discussions. The first Dgroup discussion on ‘Post-harvest cassava technology and value addition’ was rated as highly useful by the participating experts. The BiomassNet website will be launched in July 2017 and will form part of the ongoing FARA capacity building and outreach activities. In conclusion, we will highlight the lessons learnt from setting up the BiomassNet expert network and discuss its possible contribution to shaping future development pathways and strategies for agricultural systems in Africa.

**Keywords:** Bioeconomy, capacity-building, exchange, food security, future agriculture