




# Drought-tolerant maize alliance needed

## US scientist airs call during R4D seminar on crop stress tolerance

United States-based scientist, Prof Thomas Mitchell-Olds has said experts in pursuit of drought-tolerance in maize and other cereals need cross-border partnerships in order to achieve significant breakthroughs and impact.

Mitchell-Olds hinted at this during his R4D seminar on “Advances in biotic and abiotic stress tolerance” held at the Seminar Room of IITA-Headquarters in Ibadan on Monday, 15 December.

Emphasizing on approaches to drought tolerance in maize and rice, he said improving that crops’ ability to withstand lack of water was important for increased production in sub-Saharan Africa and the world at large. With climatic change affecting and limiting the distribution of rainfall, Mitchell-Olds said drought resistance in maize and rice, two of the world’s most important staple crops, are becoming vital especially in the light of the recent food crisis.

Besides drought tolerance, he said his interest was also in insects’ resistance. “Our goal is to understand mechanisms that enable maize, rice and other crops to grow in areas with limited water and to work with colleagues in plant breeding in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan Africa countries,” he explained.

While acknowledging that a lot of research was ongoing in the laboratory, he underscored the synergy between those working in the lab and those in the field. “This is because those of you in the field have to ensure that the molecular biologists in the labs get the message and are doing the right thing in order to have positive results,” he said.

Although his current work on the subject focuses on Arabidopsis, he said the plant and rice share similar qualities, implying that results of his study could be applicable to rice. According to him, his focus was to contribute towards improving global food production. “This will certainly be my joy,” he ends.



*Prof Thomas Mitchell-Olds animatedly answering a question during his R4D seminar on Advances in Biotic and Abiotic Stress Tolerance held at IITA Headquarters on 15 December.*

## NIGERIA CUSTOMS, IMMIGRATION PLEDGE CONTINUED ASSISTANCE TO IITA



*Dr Lakshmi Menon listening intently to a point being made by SN Mohammed, Deputy Comptroller of the Nigerian Customs Service as Mrs Rebecca Ayuba, head of the Immigration Service - Ibadan office looks on.*

Top-ranking officers of the Nigeria Customs Service and the Immigration Service reiterated their continuing support to IITA’s work in the country during an official visit to the Institute’s Headquarters in Ibadan on Tuesday, 16 December.

IITA Deputy Director General for R4D Support, Dr Lakshmi Menon, in her welcome address lauded the relationship between the Institute and the two federal services over the years. Commending the operations of the two agencies, Lakshmi noted that IITA has been enjoying speedy clearance of goods from the Nigeria Customs Service. “We have noticed in some cases that our cargoes from the airports recorded less than 24 hours clearing time, and this has helped us tremendously in moving our work forward faster,” she said.

The visit, which saw officials of the two organizations touring the different units of IITA including the biotech lab, seed store and cassava processing unit, was aimed at enlightening the officials about the operations of the Institute.

The leader of delegation of NCS, Deputy Comptroller, S N



*A Biotech staff explaining his unit's functions and operations to the visiting Customs and Immigration Services officials.*

Mohammed, promised that the Customs would continue to ensure that IITA and indeed other firms get speedy clearance of goods at the ports. He said that he would personally intervene should IITA have problems in clearing its cargo at the port. Mohammed further said the NCS had for long attained 48 hours clearing time in line with global best practices.

On the other hand, the head of Immigration Service in Ibadan, Mrs. Rebecca Ayuba, gave tips on how the institute could speed up the approval of work permits and visa processing for its staff. She also added that the Immigration Service would render whatever assistance the Institute would require of it.

IITA's External Relations Coordinator, Mrs. Olufunke Osoimehin, describe the meeting as an "occasion to foster understanding and collaboration", emphasizing that both the NCS and the IMS were strategic for the operations of IITA in Nigeria.

## CENTRAL BIOTECH CONDUCTS TRAINING COURSE ON RADIOACTIVITY

A two-day Radioactivity Training program was held on 10-11 December 2008 for five laboratory staff and two members of the IITA Safety Committee by the Central Biotechnology Laboratory. The training was aimed at familiarizing the staff with the basic safety and protective measures required in a radioactivity laboratory, especially as IITA will soon commence research work using some radioactive materials. Trainers from the Lagos State University Radiation Monitoring and Protection Services served as resource persons.

Topics covered by the training included radioactivity source and application, quantities and units in radiation protection dosimetry, operational radiation protection, security of radioactive materials, health effects of radiation and classification, emergency plans for radiological accident, dosimetry services and safety in the research laboratory. The lectures were supplemented with a video showing various safety measures to be observed in the labs to avoid accidents and spillage as well as health risks from radioactive materials.



*Participants of the Biotech-organized training course on Radioactivity attentively watching a video-showing on radiation safety.*

## COMMUNICATION OFFICE BIDS LONG-SERVING COLLEAGUE FAREWELL

As the IITA Communication Office (CO) marked the end of 2008 with a get-together party, the occasion also doubled-up as a send-off for Mrs Ayotunde Oyetunde, Publishing Services Manager, who has resigned from her post after more than 15 years of dedicated service.

Mr Eric Koper, Head of the CO, cited Oyetunde as being one of the pillars of the office and said that although her exit would be difficult for the office, he is also happy for her as she is going for much better things ahead. Koper also commended Oyetunde for her work attitude and commitment to quality service.

Responding, Oyetunde thanked Koper, her colleagues as well as the management of IITA for the opportunity of working with such a professional group of people. She said her retiring was for a 'higher calling', explaining that she was both a pastor and a grandmother whose attention is in high demand. She added that though resigning, she would still be in touch with the Institute as she and her husband are engaged in a cassava processing business, an area in which her work and relationship with IITA will continue to serve her well.



*Staff of the Communication Office pose for a group picture during their year-end get-together and send-off party for Mrs Ayotunde Oyetunde (middle seated, holding baby) Publishing Service Manager, who recently resigned from her post after more than 15 years of service.*