

NSE explores financial opportunities in IITA

Representatives from the [Nigerian Stock Exchange \(NSE\)](#) met with IITA officials on 25 August in Ibadan to discuss partnership opportunities. The meeting came after IITA's visit to NSE to ring the closing bell in end-June to mark the Institute's 50th anniversary celebrations.

They were received by [Kenton Dashiell](#), Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, who gave them an overview of IITA. Speaking on behalf of NSE delegates, [Ade Bajomo](#), Executive Director of Market Operations and Technology for NSE, said they were eager to "learn about the research innovations in IITA, and seek ways to merge the agricultural innovations of IITA with financial and entrepreneurial flow that NSE can bring."

"We are delighted to be here. We know that agriculture is essential to the development of Nigeria, so we thought of coming for a visit to understand what IITA does and explore some of the financial opportunities that are available in IITA," Bajomo stated.

During the tour of IITA facilities, laboratories, and fields, Bajomo expressed amazement over the work being done at [IITA](#) as he stressed "We are quite impressed with the professionalism and quality of research

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IITA Management led by Dr Kenton Dashiell, Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, met with NSE partners in Ibadan, Nigeria.

IITA-SARAH holds annual Hub retreat...



Dr Chikoye welcoming participants to the 2017 SARAH Retreat in Livingstone, Zambia.

On 21-25 August, staff of the IITA Southern Africa Research and Administrative Hub (SARAH) converged at the David Livingstone Safari Lodge in Livingstone, Zambia, to hold their annual regional Science Week and Retreat. Around 80 members of staff based in Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique—as well as invited guests from IITA-HQ and IITA-Nairobi—attended the 5-day event.

"It is always a good feeling when the region gets together during our annual Hub retreat," said David Chikoye, Regional Director for Southern Africa, speaking at the opening of the event. "I cannot overemphasize the importance of this retreat especially as we continue to grow in both scientific scope and staff numbers. Although it is imperative that we keep ourselves apprised of what others in the region are doing, it is equally important—

if not more so—that we physically come together to renew and strengthen our bonds as colleagues and friends.”

“Despite the difficult challenges that we currently face as an institute, we can always surmount them with teamwork. And this is what this retreat is all about: keeping alive and strengthening the team spirit of the Hub,” he added.

“To those who are coming to Zambia for the first time, I welcome you to the country. And to those who have recently joined us in the region, I welcome you to the IITA SA Hub family. However, always remember that where you are based is just your ‘residential address’; at the end of the day, we are all still one IITA,” he emphasized.

At the retreat, scientists and project managers based in the region presented the activities, results, issues, and challenges related to their respective research and projects. A total of 26 scientific presentations were made under the following thematic areas: Crop Improvement and Biotechnology; Plant Production and Plant Health Management, and Natural Resource Management; Food Science and Nutrition; and Socioeconomics and Technology Dissemination.

Additionally, topics related to youth-in-agriculture, finance and administration, internal audit, risk management, HR, and communication were also presented and discussed. Some of these topics were



A sea of gold – SARAH retreat participants having some sun and fun during the teambuilding exercises.

presented by colleagues from other IITA stations such as Patrick Kamau (internal audit) from IITA-Kenya, Oyediji Musendeeq and Kayode Owabajo (risk management), and Helen Adeniji and Kunle Fatai (human resources), all from IITA-HQ.

A special presentation on Gender Awareness was also delivered by Titilope Yewande Fakoya of the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD).

A highlight of the retreat was the teambuilding exercise facilitated by the HR Unit. The

exciting and fun-filled exercise, which served as a fitting culminating activity for the retreat, aimed at promoting teamwork and strategic group thinking among the participants.

The retreat was also punctuated with a cocktail, which also served as the region’s own celebration of IITA’s 50th anniversary (see *related story below*). The participants were also treated to a sunset cruise and closing dinner along the picturesque Zambezi River.

Malawi was named as the host of next year’s edition of the SARAH retreat.



SARAH! Retreat participants cheering on the Hub during the group photo session.

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going on in this institute. We can see clearly that IITA’s research is very important for Africa to survive, and specifically compete in the area of our comparative advantage, agriculture.”

Bajomo further advised that all hands should be on deck to harness and strengthen the development of agriculture.

“As our population increases, it is mandatory that we find innovative ways to develop agriculture and export raw materials and finished products. To achieve this, we need science and technology to come together with financing options; you also need stronger value chain and a bigger ecosystem, which is where NSE comes in,” he added.

NSE is part of a sustainable stock exchange association and believes in the UN’s sustainable development goals. It is committed to adopting the highest levels of international standards. As a result, NSE specifically associates with institutions and individuals who showcase best practice and make a big impact in society in general.

...as SA Region celebrates IITA's Golden Jubilee

As a complementary event to the SA Hub retreat, regional staff also celebrated IITA's 50th founding anniversary with a cocktail on 21 August at the David Livingstone Safari Lodge, fronting the scenic Zambezi River.



IITA's 50th birthday cake during the SA region's celebration of the institute's Golden Jubilee at the SARAH Retreat cocktails.

At the anniversary cocktail, staff raised a toast to IITA on its Golden Jubilee, with some delivering congratulatory messages. A ceremonial 50th anniversary cake-cutting was also held to commemorate the event.

Steve Boahen, Deputy Regional Director for Southern Africa, recounted how he started with IITA and how he witnessed the growth of the region. "I still remember vividly when I was first hired by IITA as a scientist based in Mozambique about 12 years ago. We were very few back then, and we were housed in a squalid office in downtown Nampula."

"Then just last month, we inaugurated our brand new research station in Nampula. It's amazing how the station—and the Hub—has grown. With this, I congratulate IITA, and every member of this great institute, on our 50th anniversary. May we continue to grow and prosper!"

Engr Oyedeji Musendeeq, based at IITA-HQ and who has been with the institute for more than 20 years, had this to say: "I would like to thank SARAH, particularly Dr Chikoye, for inviting me to participate in your retreat. It is



Dr Chikoye addressing SARAH staff during the IITA@50 cocktail celebration.



SARAH staff enjoying the festivities of IITA50 celebration in Livingstone.

my extreme honor to also be a part of your celebration of IITA's 50th birthday. All I could say is that I am very, very impressed by

the camaraderie of the SARAH staff, which I think represents the spirit of staff across IITA."

"I therefore raise a glass to you, to us, and to IITA. Congratulations on our Golden Jubilee!" he exclaimed.

"I am deeply honored to be hosting this year's retreat, and the region's celebration of IITA's 50th founding anniversary, on behalf of SARAHA," said Chikoye. "I believe that the team spirit shown here tonight is what has maintained IITA through these years—through all the ups and downs, and successes and challenges."

"I see all of us in white—equals, with the common vision of making IITA successful as it was originally founded to be. It reminds me of when we were still in primary school. Come to think of it, we are all still students—continuing to learn of how we could make Africa a better place through research," he added.

"Let us all raise our glasses to IITA's 50th birthday. Here's looking forward to another 50 years of great work!" he concluded.



Raising a glass (or two): SARAH staff raising a toast to IITA on its 50th anniversary.

IITA's 50th anniversary features at 14th Malawi National Agriculture Fair

Partners, donors, NGOs, and farmers in Malawi joyfully took part in IITA's 50th anniversary celebration during the 14th Malawi National Agriculture fair held on 16-18 August in Blantyre.

The agriculture fair with the theme "Unleashing full agriculture potential: The role of markets," attracted over 25,000 participants that included the President of the Republic of Malawi, Members of Parliament, traditional authorities, the private sector, government agencies, donors, NGOs, research institutions, national agricultural research systems, the diplomatic community, farmers' associations, various developmental projects, seed companies, and members of the press, who gathered at the 4-day exhibition to network and learn about the latest agricultural research products, technological and institutional innovations, and industrial applications.

The fair was inaugurated by the President of the Republic of Malawi, Prof Peter Mutharika. In his address, he remarked that the essence of the fair was to "boost local and international markets for agricultural produce and further encourage farmers and all other stakeholders to continue to work hard and develop technologies that will further improve the socioeconomic status of the country."

Commenting on markets, President Mutharika said that despite the country being an agro-based economy, Malawian farmers have not fully realized the benefits of their work due to the challenges of marketing of agricultural produce in the country.

IITA showcased a variety of technologies and products from soybean, cassava, and cowpea, and Aflasafe. Also on display were posters designed to showcase the past and present of IITA and also some of its key achievements in Malawi over the past 30 years. Some of the products displayed included cassava starch, fermented cassava flour (*kondoole*), high quality cassava flour (HQCF), Aflasafe, soybean food products/snacks, and various materials

and posters showcasing some of IITA's work and achievements in Malawi and across Africa.

Lloyd Phiphira, the National Coordinator for the N2Africa Project, interacted with hundreds of participants who visited the pavilion to inquire about IITA technologies. Participants were also exposed to various processed products from soybean and cassava. Phiphira also provided expert advice to those who showed a keen interest in trying some of the technologies on display.

Farmers expressed delight in seeing the IITA technologies on display and also to learn about the major achievements of the Institute in Malawi.



The IITA exhibition booth at the Malawi National Agriculture Fair.

N2Africa success story: Malawi

This is the second in a series of articles on the beneficiaries / successes of the N2Africa project, a large-scale, science-based, research-in-development project focused on putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder farmers growing legume crops in Africa. The project, which is now halfway through its second phase is working in DR Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Our story (and photos) was contributed by Emmanuel Mwale of IITA Malawi.



Mr Kawalewale in his inoculant production lab.

Successful private sector partnership eases delivery of soybean inoculant in Malawi: The story of AISL

After developing and demonstrating the benefits of soybean inoculants in boosting the crop's productivity in Malawi, the challenge for the N2Africa project was to ensure that the technology would be both available and affordable for farmers.

The inoculant, which adds nitrogen-fixing bacteria to the soil to improve its fertility, has been found to boost soybean yield by at least 40 to 50%. Other benefits include increasing the protein content of the grain—an increase of up to 40.6% if well inoculated.

The project had been importing the inoculant Biofix from MEA, Kenya, for research and demonstration purposes.

Previously the Government of Malawi, through the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS), produced and supplied about 2000 sachets of an inoculant named "Soy" that was accessible to a limited number of farmers who would come to the research station to buy the product and for research.

Private sector to the rescue

The project therefore sought out private sector actors to partner in producing affordable inoculant in Malawi. Fredrick

Kawalewale, a qualified accountant, quickly seized the business opportunity through his company Agro-Input Suppliers Limited (AISL). He invested in lab equipment and in 2014 AISL produced 20,000 sachets of Nitrofix inoculant as a pilot.

"When we started, we improved the packaging and handling of Nitrofix. We invested in solar coolers for proper storage. From the first 20,000 sachets of 50 g, we have moved to 280,000 sachets managing to reach over 95,000 farmers. All this has happened within a space of three years. We are envisaging that we will reach 1 million sachets which will translate to about 350,000 farmers having access to the product in the next five years," he said.

Kawalewale, who holds an MBA, says his background gave him the opportunity to find practical solutions for farmers.

"I did not need to be an agriculturalist to figure out that farmers face problems in the value chain. We needed to be doing things that serve the needs of farmers," he said.

Quality assurance

To ensure that the inoculant meets the required standards, Kawalewale has set up a well-equipped, high-standard

laboratory for production and testing, and excellent packaging for delivery to farmers. He is also currently constructing bigger facilities with robust laboratory equipment to increase production of the inoculant to cater for the whole of southern Africa and later, the world. AISL is also coming up with inoculants for beans and groundnut.

Farmers in Malawi are reaping immense benefits from the use of the inoculant and other good agronomic practices introduced by N2Africa and have noted the easier accessibility of the inoculum with AISL's involvement.

Farmers now have easier access to soybean inoculant

Natalia Matiasi, a soybean lead farmer from Mpingu Extension Planning Area (EPA) in Lilongwe, is helping fellow farmers with best practices and new technologies of legume farming. In her field, she applies all the agronomical practices she has learned from N2Africa to increase her legume production; she applies inoculant to her seed before planting, planted in double rows to increase yields. She is a clear evidence of how new technologies can improve farmers' livelihoods.

Natalia says there are clear differences in the crop when the inoculant is applied. The plants have greener leaves, longer stems, and more pods than when the inoculant is not applied. Even the roots also had a lot of nodules and were therefore able to introduce more nitrogen into the soil. She also compared her maize harvest from the following year from the same field and observed that yields had increased even with reduced application of inorganic fertilizer.

With AISL, access to the inoculant is now easier. "This year, it was easier for us to get the inoculant than other years. We bought it from our local agrodealer at a price of MK1000.00 (US\$1.4) per sachet and applied 12 sachets to at least two hectares of land (translating into \$8.4 worth of inoculant per hectare), which proves how economical planting soybean is compared to tobacco farming which I did previously



Farmers showcasing legume-based processed food.



Participants and facilitators at one of the training of trainers' workshops in Salima, Malawi.

and required about \$220 worth of fertilizer to establish the crop. I am now able to send my children to school from my earnings in soybean farming.”

And like every mother, Natalia hopes that soybean farming can help improve her life and that of her children. She hopes she will be able to send her children to high school and college with savings from soybean farming. She plans to renovate her house and buy more land.

As a lead farmer, she says over 400 farmers visited her field in the last planting season to learn about her farming practices. Some of them have already started planting inoculated soybean under her supervision. N2Africa is supporting her through training, mounting demonstration plots, and facilitating field days on soybean and legume farming and marketing strategies.

Phiphira is proud to see that N2Africa's vision is materializing and thinks Malawi is

a model of impact that has been achieved with partnership with the private sector and government.

“N2Africa is proud of what AISL has achieved. Many of our targets have been met mainly through partnerships. We have seen the lives of farmers improving and this was our goal. We are also happy to see the private sector blossoming and ready to sustain that which we dreamed of from phase one of the project,” says Phiphira.

N2Africa in Malawi

IITA-Malawi has been implementing the N2Africa project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, since 2010. Malawi is one of eight countries in Africa where the project is operating. N2Africa aims to make use of biological nitrogen fixation to improve soil fertility of maize-based cropping systems, as well as improve the livelihoods and nutrition of rural households. In Malawi, N2Africa has been testing and promoting technologies for four grain legumes (soybean, groundnut, common bean, and cowpea) on farmers' fields in

seven districts of the Central Region. The project's vision of success is to build sustainable, long-term partnerships to enable African smallholder farmers to benefit from symbiotic N₂-fixation by grain legumes through effective production technologies, including inoculants and fertilizers. As such, N2Africa has been working with various partners such as the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision International (WVI), the National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Agro-Input Suppliers Limited (AISL), Interchurch

Organization for Development Cooperation/ Churches Action in Relief and Development ICCO/CARD, and government departments such as the Department of Agriculture Extension Services (DAES) and Department of Agriculture Research Services (DARS). So far, over 30,000 farmers in Malawi have been reached with various legume technologies through demonstrations, field days, agriculture fairs, and training. Technologies being disseminated include inoculants (Nitrofix), improved legume varieties, and improved agronomic practices.

Announcements

- **Africa RISING ESA Project Review and Planning Meeting**, Zanzibar, Tanzania, 11–15 September
- **Hands-on Basic Molecular Biology Techniques**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 11–15 September
- **International Workshop on Measures to Control the Spread of Maize Lethal Necrosis in Africa**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 25–28 September
- **Modeling under Climate Change Scenarios Hands-on Training**, Abomey-Calavi, Benin, 16-20 October
- **Basic Bioinformatics Workshop**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 23–25 October
- **R4D Week**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 20–24 November
- **Board Meeting**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 20–24 November
- **Science Conference on Food and Nutrition Security: Foresight and Futures**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 24-25 November
- **Open Day**, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 25 November

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or David Ngome (d.ngome@cgiar.org).