

## Stakeholders map out 2018 STMA workplan to ensure successful project implementation in West Africa

In an effort to intensify the production of certified seeds and to increase the productivity of smallholder maize farmers in West Africa, about 80 stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Stress Tolerant Maize for Africa (STMA) project, convened at IITA, Ibadan, on 2-5 May. The 2018 work planning meeting provided an opportunity for participants from the four West African countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and the Republic of Bénin, to discuss the best approaches to promote certified seed of multiple stress tolerant maize varieties in Africa, while motivating seed companies to serve farmers more effectively and efficiently.

The 4-day annual workshop was attended by maize breeders, scientists, researchers, seed company representatives, policy makers, extension agents from the national agricultural research systems (NARS), the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC), CIMMYT, and IITA. The workshop aimed to provide a platform to discuss progress made in the previous year, devise measures to overcome challenges in the execution of project activities, and draw strategies for implementing partners' work plans for 2018.

May-Guri Saethre, IITA Deputy Director General, Research for Development (R4D), gave the opening remarks, during which she lauded the stakeholders on the progress made in maize research and encouraged them to keep upholding IITA's legacy. "IITA and its partners have done a good job in the improvement and release of maize varieties. These have resulted



*May-Guri Saethre, IITA DDG-R4D giving her welcome address during the STMA planning meeting at IITA.*

in tremendous progress. For your research impacts to be felt by more farmers, please, endeavor to secure a second phase for this project when it ends, to enable you continue the good work you are doing. I commend you all to use this opportunity to deliberate and synergize efforts to ensure sustainability of improved maize production in Africa," Saethre added.

The STMA project seeks to develop maize cultivars with tolerance and resistance to multiple stresses for farmers, and support local seed companies to produce seed of these cultivars on a large scale. STMA aims to develop a new generation of over 70 improved stress tolerant maize varieties, and facilitate production and use of over 54,000 metric tons of

certified seed.

In his presentation on the role of STMA in the transformation (planting for food and jobs [PFJ]) agenda of the government of Ghana, Robert Asuboah, from the Grains and Legumes Development Board, Ghana, stated that maize stands out as the main beneficiary crop of the PFJ campaign in Ghana. He added that the STMA varieties are receiving enormous attention in production and upscaling because of their inherent advantages and tolerance for stresses in the environment.

While enlightening the participants on the progress and prospects of the seed sector activities in Nigeria, Olusegun Ojo, NASC Director, stated: "It is worth mentioning that over this period,



Group photograph of the STMA stakeholders during the West Africa planning meeting.

the the seed industry processing capacity increased by 40% with many companies migrating from manual processing to acquiring their own state-of-the-art modern seed processing equipment thus creating more jobs for the unemployed. So, we need to do more to ensure we meet the quality and quantity needs of maize production by 30–50%, and provide 5.5 million smallholder farmers with improved maize varieties in the target countries.”

Echoing the resolve to increase efficiency, Cosmos Magorokosho, STMA Project Leader for CIMMYT and IITA, said: “The project emphasizes the use of innovative breeding tools and techniques, increased commercialization, and strong partnerships with the public and private sectors to increase farmers’ productivity and income. However, Africa needs CGIAR centers to meet the high demand for maize and other crops and feed a growing and prospering population.”

IITA Maize Breeder Abebe Menkir corroborated the need to promote diverse multiple stress tolerant varieties through different channels. He emphasized that it was necessary to actively engage the national and regional seed companies to build the capacity of partners to market multiple stress tolerant maize hybrids.

As part of promoting the availability of stress tolerant maize varieties, a new book titled “Advances in Genetic Enhancement of Early and Extra-early Maize for sub-Saharan Africa”, co-authored by Baffour Badu-Apraku and M.A.B. Fakorede was launched during the meeting. Copies of the book were presented to representatives of each country in recognition of their successful work on the STMA project.

In concluding the meeting, Badu-Apraku, IITA Maize Breeder, expressed sincere gratitude to all participants, saying: “Without your support and collaboration, I don’t think we would

have made much progress. I believe with all the planning that has been made this year, nothing can stop us from achieving great strides.”

The workshop closed with an award ceremony chaired by Robert Asiedu, Director, Research for Development, IITA-West Africa, and Melaku Gedil, IITA Molecular Geneticist. Ghana received the best team award for technology promotion with Benin as the runner-up, while the best team award for maize breeding went to Nigeria with Mali as the runner-up. The session also incorporated the presentation of awards to Tsedeke Abate of CIMMYT, Amare Tegbaru of IITA, Ntji Coulibaly from Institute of Rural Economy of Mali, Chabi Yallou from National Institute of Agricultural Research of Benin, and Simeon Bamire, from Obafemi Awolowo University, for their years of dedicated service in pursuit of STMA’s objective of increasing food, income, and livelihoods of the resource-poor farmers in Africa.

## Got a story to share?

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## IITA banana breeder honored at international Musa meeting

On 3 May in Miami, Florida, IITA banana breeder [Rony Swennen](#) was honored with a prestigious award by the Association for Cooperation in Research and Integral Development of Banana and Plantains (ACORBAT).

The award, which was presented by Dr Jorge Sandoval, President of ACORBAT, recognizes Swennen's "unquantifiable contributions to the development of Musa research in various topics and appreciates his initiative, commitment, and dedication to farmers and students all over the world."

In his keynote presentation during the 12th International Banana Congress titled "Breeding new banana varieties for Africa with strategies for global relevance," Swennen talked about the importance of cooking banana and plantain in Africa. "Banana and plantain are important staple crops in Africa. About 35% of global banana production comes from there alone,

with farmers reaching only up to 20-40% of potential yield."

He highlighted the need for growing improved banana varieties both for economic enhancement and global relevance which would promote all efforts that had been put in place by Musa researchers and students all over the world.

In the past 31 years, IITA, in collaboration with 14 partners all over the world, has been working to improve the banana breeding platform. The breeding pipeline aims to increase breeding efficiency, involving flower biology to increase seed set, improved management with a tracking system, heterosis studies, and combining phenotypic with genetic data to select crosses. It also involves searching molecular markers for biotic stresses and developing genomic prediction tools to hasten selection of hybrids of interest.



Rony Swennen (left) and the President of ACORBAT, Jorge Sandoval (right).

## US Ambassador to Benin visits IITA to learn more about the fall armyworm and the biodiversity center

On 7 May, the US Ambassador to Benin, H.E. Lucy Tamlyn, visited the IITA-Benin station accompanied by the US Embassy Political and Economic Section Chief Marisa N. Cohrs and USAID-Benin General Development Officer Geoffrey Minott. The main reason for this courtesy visit was to understand the progress towards the control of the invasive and highly destructive fall armyworm *Spodoptera frugiperda*, see IITA's arthropod collection, get acquainted with activities in the Agro-Eco-Health section, and learn about the USAID Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab collaborative work in cowpea IPM with Michigan State University (MSU).

The attention of the US Ambassador was spurred by reports from USAID officers who participated in the USAID co-funded workshop on fall armyworm held on 13-15 February at the IITA-Benin campus near Cotonou, Benin. The Ambassador was met by Manuele Tamò, IITA-Benin Country representative, who briefly introduced



US Ambassador H.E. Lucy Tamlyn (2nd from right) with IITA Biodiversity Center curator Georg Goergen, and US Embassy Political and Economic Section Chief Marisa N. Cohrs, IITA Emeritus Scientist Peter Neuenschwander, and USAID-Benin General Development Officer Geoffrey Minott.

IITA in general, and activities at the Benin station in particular, which now also include the Clearinghouse of the Technologies for African Agricultural

Transformation (TAAT), and sister institutions such as AfricaRice, WorldVeg, Bioversity International, CIRAD, Access Agriculture, the GIZ

Green Innovation Center, and East-West Seed.

Georg Goergen presented on the activities of the biodiversity center and its arthropod collection, and highlighted the need for increased biodiversity studies for early interception of new invasive species as had been the case for the fall armyworm, which was identified by IITA. Ghislain Tepa-Yotto showed the visitors the rearing facilities,

where the fall armyworm and its natural enemies are presently reared under strict hygienic conditions. Djouaka Rousseau led the delegation on a tour of the Agro-Eco-Health platform labs, emphasizing the importance of monitoring insecticide residues in maize as more and more farmers resort to using inappropriate and harmful pesticides to fight the fall armyworm. The collaborative work on cowpea IPM was presented by Manuele Tamò, who

detailed the efforts undertaken so far in developing and deploying biological control agents and biopesticides, and highlighted the excellent collaboration with MSU through the USAID grant.

In her final remarks, the Ambassador expressed her admiration for the work conducted at the Benin station, and was happy to note that US Government funds had gone a long way in providing alternatives to chemical pesticides.

## IITA participates in Farmers' Day

On 19 April, IITA joined cocoa farmers in a Farmers' Day at Akure, Ondo state. [Tulip Cocoa Processing Limited](#) (TCP) in conjunction with [Farmers Development Union](#) (FADU) organized the yearly program which honors farmers and stakeholders in the TCP-FADU sustainable supply chain for their commitment and exceptional performance throughout the year.

Representing IITA, [Ranjana Bhattacharjee](#), IITA Molecular Geneticist, participated in the event. In her presentation, she chronicled the declining trend in cocoa production in Africa; "In the early 1960s and 1970s, Nigeria was the second largest producer of cocoa in the world. Currently, the Nigerian output has been declining rapidly. The country now ranks seventh in the world and there is a need for us to work aggressively at improving cocoa farming," she said.

Dr Peter Aikpokpodion, former Cocoa Breeder at the [Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria](#) (CRIN), who developed the eight recently released cocoa hybrids and had been involved in the Cocoa Transformation Agenda of the [Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development](#) (FMARD) under the leadership of former Minister of Agriculture, the Honorable [Dr Akin Adesina](#), gave a talk on transforming cocoa in Nigeria through sustainable use of inputs including planting materials and other inputs. He emphasized the importance of clean planting materials and capacity development of farmers on good agricultural practices to increase the productivity of trees and generate more income for farmers. He also said that it is an urgent necessity to bring in



*Ranjana Bhattacharjee addressing farmers and other stakeholders.*

young cocoa trees and cocoa farmers into the sector to revive and increase its contribution towards the GDP of the country. He made a plea to all stakeholders across the cocoa value chain to work together to revise the sector in this country.

For continuity and to develop a brighter future for cocoa farming in Nigeria, Bhattacharjee suggested the engagement of youths in developing a standard process that would ensure profitability and visibility. "At [IITA](#), we believe in the youths and their ability to transform agriculture. Many of you here are getting on in years; your lands as well; please engage young people that will carry on the legacy and bring modern techniques and ideas into your farming systems."

Towards transforming African Agriculture, Bhattacharjee confirmed

IITA's commitment to promoting agriculture, proffering solutions, and encouraging farmers. "IITA, with national bodies, will continue to assist farmers in whatever capacity we can to ensure food security and improve livelihoods," she stated.

Farmers who benefited from the sustainability program gave testimonies of how their lives and farming have been transformed.

The event was attended by representatives from [Syngenta](#), Harvest Field, [Armajaro connect](#), and farmers from Ondo, Osun, and Oyo states.

The joint TCP-FADU Sustainability program is targeted at helping smallholder cocoa farmers to achieve increased productivity, income, and improved livelihood through integration into Tulip's supply chain.

# Research Support Services discuss achievements and way forward

The research support day held at IITA Conference Center, on 7 May, brought together staff members under the Research Support subdirectorates, including Communication Unit, Data and Information Management Unit (DIMU), Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (M&E), and Project Development and Administration Unit (PDAU). The workshop was organized to discuss the status, achievements, and future plans of each unit and was attended by more than 100 staff.

In his opening remarks, Tonny Omwansa, Director, Research Support Services, encouraged the team to be more efficient and resilient in the use of modern technologies that have been put in place to enhance the delivery of services. He announced to the participants that his official mandate is to focus on the automation procedures to upgrade financial processes and enhance project management and operations in IITA.

In his presentation titled "IITA Enterprise Resource Planning Enhancement: Automation," Omwansa highlighted that the key success factors in the automation plans are people, processes, and technology. The automation mission should be user-friendly, easily maintained, and should be accessible from multiple locations. It has a fundamental role of supporting multiple currencies, multiple



*Tonny Omwansa, IITA Director, Research Support services, discussing and enlightening the participants.*

organizations, seamless integration of Oracle with other applications, and managing application configuration.

Katherine Lopez, Head of Communication; Rosern K. Rwampororo, Head, Monitoring & Evaluation Unit; Allan Liavoga, Head of PDAU; and Martin Mueller, Database and Knowledge Management Expert, gave updates on activities and future

plans of units and some key initiatives.

In concluding the meeting, discussions on how automation would impact work plans for 2018, in addition to the potential impact on key departments within the institute were made. Omwansa solicited the participants' support, saying: "This is a huge and complex initiative. I need all your support and hard work to achieve a substantial result very soon."

## Events

- 7th International Food Legume Research Conference, 6–8 May, Palais des Congrès, Marrakech, Morocco
- N2Africa Advisory Committee meeting, 15-18 May, Kigali, Rwanda
- Enable Youth Agreement Signing, 17 May, Yaounde, Cameroon
- Enhancing Results-Based Management in RTB and program participants by harmonizing and strengthening ME&L systems, 22-25 May, Ibadan, Nigeria
- N2Africa Annual Review and Planning Meeting, 24-25 May, Kano, Nigeria
- GCP21 IVth International Cassava Conference: Cassava Transformation in Africa, 11–15 June, Cotonou, Benin