

US Ambassador inspires IITA youth agripreneurs to lead efforts in creating jobs for African youth

The US Ambassador to Nigeria, His Excellency, Stuart Symington, accompanied by the Political and Economic Officer from the office of the US Consulate, General Benjamin Williams, paid a courtesy visit to [IITA](#) on 28 August to meet the [IITA Youth Agripreneurs \(IYA\)](#) and learn more about the progress of the Youth-in-Agribusiness initiative.

Ambassador Symington and Williams were received at the IITA headquarters in Ibadan by IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#), and Deputy Director General for Partnerships for Delivery [Kenton Dashiell](#), key IITA staff, IYA members, and delegates of the Ivorian government who were visiting IITA to learn about the Youth-in-Agribusiness program in preparation for the implementation of the ENABLE Youth program.

Evelyn Ohanwusi, Interim Head, IITA Youth-in-Agribusiness Office, gave an overview and update of IITA's youth agribusiness initiatives, especially highlighting the ENABLE-Technologies for the African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) program. She emphasized the program's goal of investing in about 32 African countries, which she said can easily be achieved by having the right partners and investors who believe in the youth thriving in agriculture.

Ibukun Agbotoba, cofounder of Afribroiler Ltd, one of the agribusinesses incubated in the IYA program, talked about her experiences in setting up her business.



US Ambassador Stuart Symington shaking hands of Evelyn Ohanwusi of IYA. Photo by IITA.

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Seedling exhibition for vegetable farmers held in Uganda

Planting healthy vegetable seeds significantly reduces the use of chemical pesticides on vegetable farms thereby limiting exposure to the associated health and environmental risks.

Therefore, as part of efforts to create awareness of the importance of healthy seedlings, the IITA-led Healthy Seedlings Project organized a farmers' field exhibition on 3 August at Parents Empowering Children and Youth Uganda (PECYU) demonstration gardens in Gayaza, Central Region, Uganda.

The event also brought together value chain actors in vegetable production, government officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and

the local government, national researchers from [Makerere University](#) and the [National Agricultural Research Organisation \(NARO\)](#), and development partners including the [Austrian Development Cooperation](#) and the Association for Strengthening of Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA).

The guest of honor at the event, Paul Mwambu, the Commissioner for Crop



Dr Danny Coyne talking to students from Kitagomba primary school..

Inspection and Certification, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MMAIF), appreciated the efforts of IITA and collaborating partners for not only training farmers in the peri-urban areas of Uganda to reduce use of chemical pesticides, but also for their research on the possibilities of using biocontrol through the healthy seedlings project.

“The challenges in agriculture can only be resolved with a concerted effort by different stakeholders. The Ministry welcomes all partners willing to support the sector,” said Wambu in his speech read by Ms Brenda Kisingiri, an inspector in the agriculture ministry.

[Danny Coyne](#), IITA Nematologist and project manager, said that the healthy seeds project is being implemented in Uganda and Ethiopia and aims to train vegetable farmers to raise healthy seedlings to reduce overuse and misuse of chemical pesticides.

Idi Ramathan, the head of the vegetable production program at the [National Crops Resources Research Institute](#) (NaCRRI), noted that Ugandans consume less vegetables than the recommended minimum, and one of the reasons for this was their concern over the safety of eating vegetables sprayed with pesticides. This was alarming given the importance of vegetables to humans, especially children and mothers.

“Over time, people have become conscious of their health and what these chemicals (pesticides) can do. Therefore, there is a need to limit the usage of pesticides, and any efforts that can contribute to this are much appreciated,” he said.

Reiterating the overuse and misuse of pesticide, [Peter Ebanyat](#), the acting Officer in Charge of IITA Uganda Country Office, noted that some vegetable traders,

especially of tomato, used pesticides as a preservative. He requested the Ministry to urgently address this issue because of the hazards to consumers.

In response, Kisingiri said that the Ministry had already developed the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Policy as part of measures to curb this trend.

After the training, different farmer groups in the project shared their inspiring stories.

Among them was Yusuf Matovu, the leader of Katoogo Farmers’ Group, who had received training from IITA on using clean seeds. He said the members of the group had noticed that over a period of three years of using healthy seedlings, the use of chemicals in their vegetable gardens had decreased to 30%.

“I noticed that after transplanting, I do not need to spray until my tomatoes have fruited. And even when I do, the chemicals required are less than what I used to apply before,” he said.

The farming group, PECYU, noted that their community sensitization has gone beyond adult farmers to target school children. The [IITA Uganda Youth Agripreneurs](#) were also benefiting from their business of selling of vegetables and are now venturing into raising and selling healthy seedlings.

During the closing, Pia Hopfenwieser from the Austrian Development Cooperation, applauded PECYU for including children in the project and the event, noting that it is crucial that they get involved because they are the future farmers.

For more insights, watch <https://youtu.be/J0cUfVS82Mo>.



Display of healthy seedlings.

US Ambassador inspires IITA youth agripreneurs **Continued from page 1**

Afribroiler aims to grow a franchise network of small-scale commercial feed-to-fork broiler enterprises. Together with partners they will establish a reference-farm with feed mill and breeding, incubating/hatching, growing, processing, and retail/food units for research, training, and demonstration.

Ambassador Symington asked questions and expressed satisfaction about the youth initiatives and IITA’s transformation agenda. He also encouraged the youth to work as a team to achieve the common goal of building successful business empires in the future.

He encouraged them to be “amazing” saying, “As future leaders, do not leave anyone behind.

Support each other always because it is easier to pull hundreds and thousands of people as a team into the path of enhancing and securing the economy than doing that alone.” He continued: “One of the greatest challenges people face is that they do not know whom to trust. However, if you want to attract investors, customers, and partners, speak passionately about your product or brand, and make the interaction with your customers the most important in your life, because words translate into actions.”

The Ambassador also said:, “Before you think of exporting your products to other parts of the world, think of marketing them to your colleagues, classmates, friends, and family. Because if you cannot sell in

your territory, it will be difficult for you to sell outside your territory.”

Williams, visiting IITA for the first time, was amazed to see young and energetic youth working to make Africa a food-secure continent while expressing admiration for the work that IITA is doing especially in creating jobs for youth across Africa.

On behalf of IYA, Dare Odusanya, another youth agripreneur under the [Business Incubation Platform](#) (BIP), expressed appreciation for the Ambassador’s inspiring and motivating words: “We are more than grateful for your presence and we are very positive that when next we meet, we would be able to tell you more of our success stories.”

Getting to grips with aflatoxin in Ghana with Aflasafe

Aflatoxin is a major threat to health, food security, and trade but positive change was heralded in Accra recently, at the official launch of Aflasafe GH02. Aflasafe offers a powerful solution to the aflatoxin threat which is amplified when combined with other good practices and with up to 100% aflatoxin reduction in more than half of the tests, Ghana sets a brand-new Aflasafe record.

Besides celebrating the advent and outstanding performance of Aflasafe in Ghana, participants at the launch came to grips with aflatoxin, deliberating on the need for greater awareness, incentives for farmers, and the potential for Aflasafe to transform access to markets.

In his opening remarks, Managing Director of IITA's Aflasafe Technology Transfer and Commercialization initiative (aTTC) [Abdou Konlambigue](#) said: "What we are celebrating today is really a joint effort of many years by different kinds of actors at the national, regional, and global level."

The all-natural Aflasafe GH02 is tailored specifically for Ghana and was developed by [IITA](#) in collaboration with the [United States Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Research Service](#) (USDA ARS), and [Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology](#) (KNUST).

The local Ghanaian farmers also made a vital contribution testing Aflasafe on their farms.

With the registration of Aflasafe GH02, Ghana is now the latest of six nations where Aflasafe is on sale. Aflasafe GH02 is distributed in Ghana by our new partner, Macrofert Ghana Limited, a company established in Ghana by [Louis Dreyfus Company](#) to take over its agriculture input business in the country. Louis Dreyfus Company Group is a world leader in agroprocessing and in marketing agro-commodities and agricultural inputs, so it brings proven expertise in reaching farmers.

The Minister for Food and Agriculture, Dr Owusu Afiyie Akoto, was represented at the launch by the Deputy Director of Crop Services in the Ministry, Harry Bleppony, who decried the lack of awareness on aflatoxin, particularly at the grassroots. He emphasized the

need for evidence-based information saying: "When people see how hard aflatoxin hits them, they will take it seriously. I describe aflatoxin as a 'slow poison'—language that Ghanaians understand well."

In his keynote address, Professor Richard Tuyee Awuah of KNUST spoke on the challenges of aflatoxin contamination in Ghana, and the parts we can all play in tackling them. This was followed by a lively panel discussion on the event's theme—*Aflatoxin control: Whose responsibility?*

For the [Ghana Export Promotion Authority](#) (GEPA), Aflasafe GH02 comes at an opportune time as it can open up export markets, but also premium domestic ones with urgent unmet demand for aflatoxin-safe grain. According to the Director for Agricultural Export Development, Erasmus Ashun: "We were trying to find solutions to concerns raised by our trade partners, especially the European Union. We hope this product is going to support GEPA in executing its national mandate as we are currently unable to participate in the US\$32.5 billion maize world trade, primarily because of excessive aflatoxin in our maize products."

Read [Aflasafe media release](#) for details.



Research Leader of the Africa-wide Aflasafe Initiative at IITA, Ranajit Bandyopadhyay (left), with Abdou Konlambigue of ATTC (rightmost) and other dignitaries showing off packs of Aflasafe GH02 at its launch in Accra.

Understanding women's financial capabilities in South Kivu, DRC

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), women's opportunities to gain skills in enterprise development and participate in formal savings opportunities are severely limited and high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) further marginalize women from gaining access to microfinance.

This was reported in a project "*Improving women's financial capabilities: A pilot project proposal to empower women in South Kivu*," which addresses the issue. The project, started in 2017, aims to enhance women's empowerment by improving their financial capabilities, which refer to the "attitude, knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy needed to make and exercise money management decisions that best fit the circumstances of one's life".

Training, group discussions, and personal counseling were employed

to fulfill this objective and improve entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and attitude. The project targeted both women and men because training women alone was shown to be inadequate to support women's empowerment as husbands control the income of their wives in many instances, clearly undermining efforts to improve gender equality and development outcomes overall.

The project was designed jointly with [Mamas for Africa](#), an NGO supporting women and girls in eastern DRC in

their fight against violence, poverty, and inequality. Through this initiative, the NGO facilitates access to microfinance services for women who have experienced GBV as well as working to increase women's abilities to manage their finances.

The project currently runs in two rural locations in Walungu territory with beneficiaries engaging in diverse enterprises such as selling rice, beans, flour, and banana. They established a link to formal banking services and opened group accounts in the nearby banking cooperative. Twelve beneficiaries from Irongo as well as 14 from Mushinga meet once a week with their local facilitator to discuss their successes and challenges.

Since their involvement in the project, beneficiaries have reported significant changes in their level of satisfaction in managing their expenses and acquired business management skills as they are better positioned to follow through on their investment and savings plans. Such changes are vital to achieving sustainable transformation in the lives of these women and their families.

According to [IITA](#) Postdoctoral Fellow on Gender Research Renee Bullock and collaborator Bonaventure Munzunghirwa, the project has provided key insights to guide future gender transformative research. The lessons include the need to use relational and intersectional approaches to understand the local social context. A key conclusion from the project is the need to engage men in the bid to address and improve women's financial capabilities as this will better support the potential to enhance women's entrepreneurship, savings, and gender equity in the agriculture sector.



Irongo Women's group following discussions on how to better manage household budgets and business activities.

Got a story to share?

Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to iita-news@cgiar.org or Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org) and Uzoma Agha (u.gha@cgiar.org) for headquarters and Western Africa, Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org) for Eastern Africa, and David Ngome (d.ngome@cgiar.org) for Central Africa.