

IITA DG Sanginga awarded Doctor Honoris Causa for visionary leadership in historic ceremony

[KU Leuven](#) has awarded [IITA](#) Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) with the prestigious Doctor Honoris Causa. [VLIR-UOS](#) (The Flemish Interuniversity Council–University Development Cooperation) hosted the ceremony in Brussels, Belgium on 15 May as part of celebrations marking its twentieth anniversary.

History was made as this was the first time five recipients received honorary doctorates from the five Flemish universities on the same day. The awards were given in recognition of the outstanding contributions of the recipients to the field of university cooperation for development.



Dr Sanginga receiving the award certificate.

In his welcome address, chair of VLIR-UOS and [University of Antwerp](#) Rector, [Prof Herman Van Goethem](#), applauded the model of cooperation between the universities who are collaborating for impact on society. As outlined in the VLIR-UOS slogan, “Sharing minds, changing lives”, he noted that the institutions are committed, not to competition but, only to collaboration.

“With these honorary degrees and the joint ceremony, we show the world that the Flemish universities are engaged universities taking up their responsibilities for the global challenges that the world is confronted with,” stated Prof Van Goethem.

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IITA Scientist Julius Adewopo wins international award!

[Julius Adewopo](#), a Geospatial Analyst at [IITA-Rwanda](#), has won the 2019 Agropolis Louis Malassis International Scientific Prize for Agriculture and Food, in the “Young Promising Scientist” category.

“The prize marks a new beginning for me, a call to a higher pedestal in the pursuit of my long-held vision. I am humbled by this calling to uphold the ideals of the Agropolis Foundation and to advance the legacies of Dr Malassis through research and collaboration that will further advance food security and agricultural sustainability globally,” said Adewopo.

Adewopo heads the project titled ICT4BXW in Rwanda, which focuses on the use of ICT for advancing the prevention and control of Banana Xanthomonas Wilt in Rwanda. BXW is a challenge to banana farming and addressing it will revert huge crop losses.

Adewopo has managed research to address major challenges related to management intensification in diverse agroecosystems and support development of digital tools for agronomic decision making in smallholder farming systems.



Julius Adewopo won the “Young Promising Scientist” award.

He stated that the award comes as a motivation to continue to pursue his contribution to agricultural research at national and regional levels.

He continued, *“I am quite honored by this recognition. I think the major vision of this award and this recognition is to inspire researchers to continue to advance the frontiers of science with a focus on advancing agricultural systems, improving food security at regional or national level. So, this award is a call to a higher level of engagement and commitment to*

really add value and advance the vision of Louis Malassis and the Agropolis Foundation.”

Speaking on the impact of the award in his current engagement on BXW prevention in Rwanda, Adewopo added, *“I think this is really important especially in Rwanda and Central Africa because most farmers depend on banana for their income and economic prosperity. I think by developing a system where we can truly monitor incidences and provide information on control, we will be*

securing the livelihoods of farmers; we will help farmers also make better and timely decisions about how to control the disease.”

Adewopo acquired multidisciplinary experience in natural sciences, geospatial applications, and corporate management prior to joining [IITA](#). He earned his PhD in Soil Science from the [University of Florida](#) (UF) and MSc in Forest Resources from the [University of Arkansas at Monticello](#), both in the USA.

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“The academic authorities of all Flemish universities highly value this university cooperation for development,” he continued.

Following a brief video testimonial, the Rector of each institution presented the recipients with their awards.

In a [pre-recorded message](#), IITA emeritus board member, [Prof Roel Merckx](#), recounted positive memories from his decades-long collaboration with Dr Sanginga and his consistent attention to capacity building. He said, “Singinga has a very special mission towards young academics in Africa. He really sees the importance of having the best brains in agronomical research in Africa, so he goes to great lengths to stimulate young people...”

In his presentation speech, KU Leuven Rector Prof Luc Sels noted that Dr Sanginga has been working to fight hunger and improve the quality of life for smallholder farmers and their communities in sub-Saharan Africa. He said, “Dr Sanginga’s work demonstrates that agricultural transformation can only be successful when research institutions pool capacity and pool resources. Under Dr Sanginga’s leadership, IITA has become a highly successful international research organization.”

He also stated KU Leuven’s mission to continue to strengthen the academic capacity of researchers, departments, and institutions in Africa—a mission in which they consider Dr Sanginga and IITA as strong partners.

Prof Sels continued, “We want to help create the conditions that will ultimately allow African institutions to continue

capacity building by themselves, in a sustainable way, and throughout the entire region.”

He also noted that, “Dr Sanginga’s research and development approaches are an inspiration for implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our university is exploring ways to systematically engage with these goals and to strengthen our commitment to realize them.”

Upon receiving the award, DG Sanginga used the opportunity to highlight three of IITA’s success stories, achieved despite challenges to food and nutrition security faced by the region, such as land degradation and soil fertility.

One of the projects he highlighted was the Consortium for Improving Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA), which helped to foster “peace through science” as well as bring about poverty alleviation in the Great Lakes Region of Burundi, DR Congo, and Rwanda.

He also spoke of IITA’s role in influencing policy with regard to the use of fertilizer in African crop production at a time when the continent was at a crossroads.

Finally, Dr Sanginga recounted the inspiration for and the beginnings of the [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) (IYA) program, which has overseen the growth of youth participation in multiple value chains in African agriculture.

Dr Sanginga ended by dedicating the award to the young and upcoming scientists, hoping that this honor would serve as a motivation for them to continue to combat famine in Africa through better soil fertility management.



Dr Nteranya Sanginga giving his acceptance speech.

The other recipients of the honorary degrees are: Dr Clarice Garcia Borges Demétrio from Brazil, who received her honorary degree from [Hasselt University](#) (UHasselt), while [Vrije Universiteit Brussel](#) (VUB) gave the award to Dr José Ramón Saborido Loidi from Cuba. Dr Leymah Roberta Gbowee from Liberia received the Doctor Honoris Causa from [Ghent University](#) and Dr Jean-Jacques Muyembe Tamfun from DR Congo received his from the University of Antwerp.

Watch DG Sanginga’s acceptance speech here: <https://bit.ly/2JUsWrV>

Throwback highlights from the day: <https://bit.ly/2W3gzRF>

Nigerian farmers get free advisory services on cassava production via mobile phone

Nigerian farmers can now access extension and advisory services related to weed control, best planting practices, and other aspects of cassava production on their cell phones free of charge, thanks to the [African Cassava Agronomy Initiative \(ACAI\)](#).

The mobile telephony service is powered by [Airtel](#) using the 3-2-1 Service of [Viamo](#). Farmers with Airtel sim cards who want to access the service and get good advice on cassava production can simply dial 3-2-1 and listen to all the information they need to make the most out of cassava production.

[IITA](#) Director for Development and Delivery, [Alfred Dixon](#), said the use of mobile phones would give farmers, especially women, access to the knowledge they need to improve their livelihoods.

"The mobile approach will also enable the recommendations contained on the 'Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices' to reach the hard-to-reach terrains in Nigeria," he added.

The cassava information on weed control and best planting practices on the 3-2-1 service are the combined recommendations from the now merged IITA Cassava Weed Management Project (CWMP), and the IITA African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI).

The recommendations from these projects were validated during a stakeholders' meeting involving the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCI), Umudike and the two premier universities of agriculture in Abeokuta and Makurdi. State extension agencies from Abia, Benue, Ogun, and Oyo were also part of the initial message development. There were also development partners such as GIZ, Catholic Relief Services, and the Market Development in the Niger Delta project (MADE) who gave useful insights into the message development process.

Dr Pieter Pypers, ACAI Coordinator said the release of evidence-based messages on

the 3-2-1 service provides farmers the tools they need to improve cassava yield and make more profits.

Harriet Blest, Country Manager of Viamo said they were excited to work with IITA in the framework of ACAI to transform cassava in Nigeria using the 3-2-1 service of Airtel.

With a subscriber base of 43.1 million, Airtel is one of the top three telecommunication companies in Nigeria, according to data reported by Nigeria's leading newspaper, The Punch.

Godwin Atser, Digital Extension & Advisory Services Specialist with IITA who coordinated the messages with Viamo, said the development was a new dawn for cassava farmers.

"This move will complement the extension work we are doing in Nigeria by offering farmers the information they need in real time", he added.

In the days ahead, IITA-ACAI and Viamo plan massive awareness so farmers can take advantage of the information on the 3-2-1 space to improve their livelihoods.



Farmers with Airtel SIM cards can now listen to advisory services on cassava by dialing 3-2-1.

Got a story to share?

Please send your story with photos and captions every Tuesday 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 and Southern Africa, and David Ngome (d.ngome@cgiar.org) for Central Africa.

Danish company visits IITA-Abuja, seeks partnership for sourcing shea nut in Nigeria

To sustain effective collection and utilization of shea nut for the benefit of key stakeholders, especially women, a two-member delegation comprising Mr Guillaume Noirot, Sourcing and Logistics Manager, AAK Benin Republic and Mr Arne Strauss, Project Manager, AAK Denmark, visited IITA-Abuja Station on 18 March. The visit was to explore opportunities for partnership with [IITA](#) in achieving regular and sustained sourcing of shea nut in Nigeria.

Receiving the delegation, Head of IITA-Abuja Station, [Gbassey Tarawali](#) thanked the AAK delegation for visiting and gave them an overview of IITA's work in providing cutting edge agricultural technologies for the transformation of African agriculture. He welcomed the idea of collaborating with IITA, whom he said was preparing to implement a USAID integrated agricultural project in the North East, which involves a shea nut agribusiness support component. Tarawali noted that IITA is well positioned to sensitize and create awareness on the need to preserve shea nut trees and promote its sustainable collection and processing.

A private sector participant, Mr Richard Akanmonde, Director of Operations, Shea Butter Division at Gamut Ventures Ltd, also attended the meeting along with the AgResults Project Manager, [Debo Akande](#) and ATASP-1 Outreach Project Administrator, Ijie Ben Asuelimen.

In other news, IITA was represented at the Nigeria Agriculture Donor Working



AKK Denmark delegation meeting with IITA-Abuja leadership.

Group (ADWG) meeting held on 20 March at the FAO Nigeria Country office in Abuja. Representatives of several donor organizations attended the quarterly meeting. They included [United States Agency for International Development](#) (USAID), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Netherlands Embassy, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Other participants were the Association of Deans of Agriculture in Nigerian Universities (ADANU), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD). Head of IITA-Abuja Station, Gbassey Tarawali represented the Institute.

The meeting included presentations by ADANU and Public Private Partnership. In addition, JICA updated the meeting on the Multisector Nutrition Workshop that was held on 31 January 2019, which IITA attended. Updates were shared based on the agreement by stakeholders during the last meeting that data collection and submission to Regional Economic Community (RECs) be completed by 30 June 2019 for the Joint Sector Review. FAO expounded on the 2019 action plans for the recently inaugurated National Fall Armyworm Task Force. This included the strategies to be adopted, activities, expected outcomes, and the organizations responsible for each activity. The Agricultural Policy Brief by IFPRI was also not left out of the discussion. The Institute of Agricultural Research & Training (IAR&T) used the opportunity to invite the group to its 50th Anniversary celebration which came up from 1 to 5 April 2019.

IITA Scientists carryout preliminary bird survey in Benin Republic

A survey was carried out by [IITA](#) scientists in Drabo Forest Reserve (DRF), Benin Republic between 26 February and 4 March 2019, to assess the species diversification of birds. The survey was carried out in DRF due to its location in the Dahomey Gap as both forest and savanna bird species. In addition to bird species, DRF is home to various other plants and animals, some of which are listed as threatened on the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN) Red List.

Ornithological skills have been on the increase in Western Africa, especially after the establishment of the [AP Leventis](#)



IITA Forest Reserve researchers.

[Ornithological Research Institute](#) (APLORI) in the region. However, there are still some important gaps in specific countries, one of which is Benin Republic. Excessive exploitation, unsustainable farming practices, woodlot propagation, and urbanization are the main threats facing forest ecosystems in the area. Despite its small size and encroaching urbanization, DFR is a haven for biodiversity, especially those of high conservation concern.

Using the same transects and mist-netting sites as were used in May 2017, all birds seen or heard within a 100-m radius of forest edges were recorded. Binoculars (8 × 42 magnification) and the field guide

Birds of western Africa were used to confirm the identification of birds sighted. Playbacks were used to confirm the birds heard and Geographic Positioning System was used to mark important points. Line transects were concurrent with mist-netting at four locations. However, during mist-netting, morphometric data, including sex, fat, tarsus length, pectoral muscle, brood patch, molt and mass were taken.

Results showed that a total of 376 birds, distributed across 55 species and 27 families, were recorded during the survey. Among these were 12 new additions, bringing the total number of bird species

recorded at DFR to 76. Notable among the recorded species was the Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris*, an uncommon bird species, which is restricted to the Guinea-Congo Forests Biome. Furthermore, the record of Chestnut Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophya castanea*, a skulking species, which depends on forest thickets and canopies, suggests the relevance of the DFR to forest specialists.

Conclusively, the diversity of birds recorded during the survey was satisfying. The diversity of birds, comprising prey and predators, pinpoints the balanced status of the DRF ecosystems.

Akilimo Dashboard: ACAI develops data management system for field activities and validation of agronomy advice tools

ACAI has developed a dashboard that will be used to curate project activity data and provide a real-time summary of results from field activities as entered by extension agents. The Akilimo Dashboard is a suite of code in R language combined with the Open Data Kit (ODK) data collection tools to form a data processing engine that delivers reports in easy-to-read pdf format, CSV files, and an interactive web interface.

Extension agents (EAs) and national research system agronomists provide agronomy advice to cassava growers, monitor validation activities, and provide data via mobile phones or tablets using the ODK collect app. Data entered by the EAs are processed daily through the R script and organized as output for interpretation customized to the user's needs.

The dashboard will help ACAI management in monitoring the activities around the validation of the ACAI decision support tools (DSTs). Coordinators of the activities will be able to check

the status and get real-time information on planned and ongoing activities in their respective regions at the click of a button. From this information, the project team and interested parties can view the number and details of the households who have received ACAI recommendation for follow-up and further observations.

EAs working with ACAI on validation activities are compensated through a reward system, based on the amount of work done and data delivered. The dashboard will provide a summary of all activities to facilitate payment for the EAs.

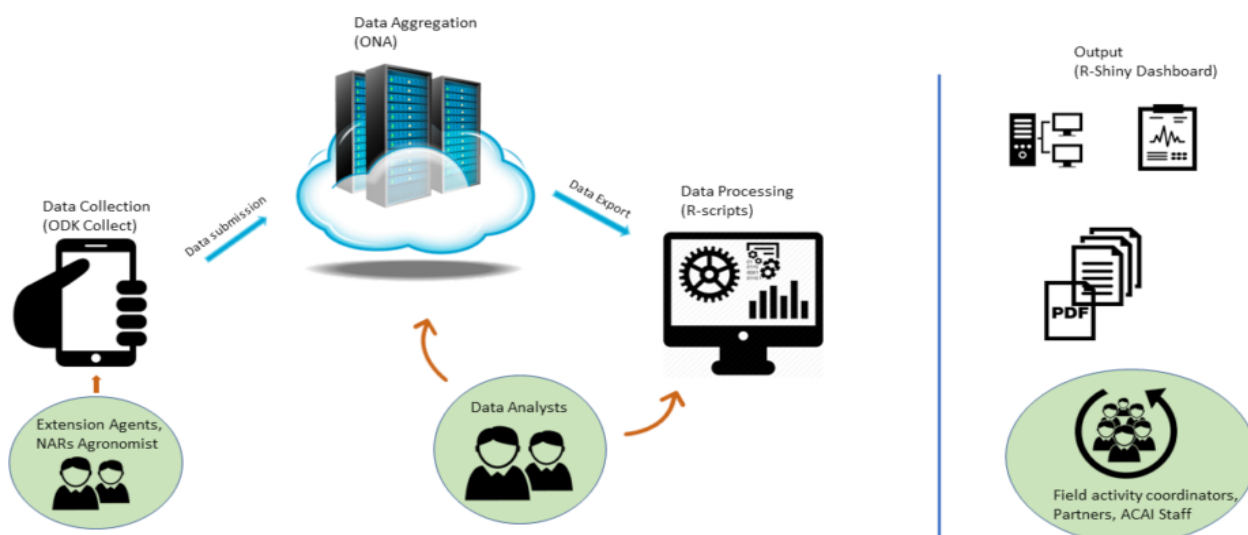
The Dashboard is a result of 5-month's intensive programming by ACAI's data scientist Meklit Chernet and data analyst Turry Ouma. According to Turry, the Akilimo dashboard provides on-demand access to all-important metrics for a coordinator to manage EAs and households under his supervision. The dashboard will greatly increase the efficiency of accessing and referencing information about ACAI field activities. It provides an

unbiased view of EAs performance and offers the coordinators a platform for further dialog and great decision-making. The tool also offers a platform for accountability which increases the performance of the EAs.

"We have aggregated EA data into a single interface thereby increasing efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and speed of generating research data," says Turry.

The tool is interactive and versatile, it offers the user a dynamic experience through filtering data, interacting with plots to see changes over time. The tool can be customized for use in other projects by changing the variables of the significant entries that have an impact on the indicators of the project progress and regular activities in general. ACAI will further develop the dashboard as a standalone application, complemented by a training module to allow new partners to test the ACAI DSTs. Through this process, new and valuable data is delivered to further improve the DSTs.

Akilimo Dashboard: Validation of Decision Support Tools



A simplified diagram of the Akilimo dashboard data management processes.