

Obasanjo urges industrial scale agriculture for self-sufficiency in Africa

Former Nigerian President and [IITA](#) Goodwill Ambassador, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo has called for the adoption of agriculture as a business, which when implemented on an industrial scale will generate employment, especially among youth, as well as drastically reduce national food import bills. He made the remarks in Kalambo, Democratic Republic of Congo, during the inauguration of IITA's research station, which was named after him.

Chief Obasanjo reminisced about being deployed to DR Congo 59 years ago as a young soldier with the United Nations Peacekeeping and noted with nostalgia how honored he was to be back and to have the campus named after him.

He lauded IITA's research and innovation in agribusiness stating, "I cannot be better honored than to be associated with the work and stations of IITA

as a foremost agricultural research undertaking in Africa."

"As the honorary ambassador of IITA," he continued, "what makes me particularly happy is that the product of the research in this campus will soon be discharged all around in this country and in the adjoining countries."

He spoke of the growth of the cassava value chain in Nigeria during his



Chief Olusegun Obasanjo giving his remarks at the inauguration of the IITA campus in Kalambo.

presidency and enjoined President Felix Tshisekedi of DR Congo to support IITA's work to ensure such progress, and even more, is replicated in DRC. "When I became the President of Nigeria, we were producing 30 million metric tons.

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IITA names Kalambo station "The President Olusegun Obasanjo Research Campus"

[IITA](#) has named its research station in Kalambo, Democratic Republic of Congo, after former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo in an event that took place on 8 October.

The IITA [Board of Trustees](#) decided to name the station after Obasanjo in recognition of his contributions to agricultural research throughout Africa. This was also an acknowledgement of his sacrifices in DR Congo, made when



In front of the inauguration slab (L-R): President Felix Tshisekedi of DR Congo; Former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo; and IITA Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga.

he served as part of the UN troops mandated to bring peace to the country after independence in 1961.

Chief Obasanjo is also spearheading the “Zero Hunger Initiative” in Nigeria that IITA is helping to implement and which has strong relevance to DR Congo.

In his acceptance speech, Obasanjo appreciated DR Congo President Felix Tshisekedi for making it to the event and thanked IITA Director General, [Dr Nteranya Sanginga](#) and the BoT for the honor and for its tremendous work in the Institute. “I am honored to be associated with such a successful research initiative in Africa,” he said.

In an exclusive interview with Radio IITA Senior Correspondent Dajie Odok, the honoree said he is glad to be back in the area for such a heart-warming event as he recalled the first time he had been in that country for a peace-keeping mission.

The research station, now called President Olusegun Obasanjo Research Campus, has been operational in DR Congo since 1974 as a project site. In 2011, the IITA BoT upgraded the site and made it a focal point of the Institute’s regional hub for natural resource management in the Great Lakes Region.

In his speech at the inauguration, Sanginga explained that the essence of establishing the research station is the dedication of IITA and its partners to the mission of fighting hunger and poverty in Africa, which would help boost agricultural productivity in DR Congo and the region.

He said the station is a symbol of IITA’s dedication and commitment towards building the research and development capacity in DR Congo and the Great Lakes Region.

He also reiterated the importance of research to agricultural transformation while citing the progress made by IITA and its partners.

Also speaking at the inauguration, DR Congo President Tshisekedi thanked Chief Obasanjo for “championing agriculture across Africa” and [African Development Bank](#) (AfDB) President, Dr Akinwumi Adesina, for his support to IITA, describing the initiative as

an “obvious illustration of regional integration.”

He said AfDB is expected to fully play its role in helping DR Congo boost the capacity to process agricultural products through the industrialization plan he is rolling out. He also congratulated Sanginga for having established the IITA Kalambo station, with his personal means, pointing out that the facility is expected to build youth potential in agribusiness and help stimulate agricultural development in the region.

The newly inaugurated campus offers modern research facilities for impact-focused agricultural research for development, which includes a soil

and plant analytical laboratory, a soil microbiology unit and molecular lab, a product and processing unit, and training facilities.

It also serves neighboring countries in the region including Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.

Other dignitaries at the event include wife of the honoree, Mrs Bola Obasanjo; [AGRA](#) Chairman and former Ethiopian Prime Minister, [Hailemariam Desalegn](#); Former and current Ministers and Government officials of DRC and other countries; [World Bank](#) Representative, Omar Lyasse; IITA Board Chair, [Amos Namanga Ngongi](#); traditional chiefs; and others.



Chief Obasanjo arriving at the new tissue culture building accompanied by some IITA Senior Management Staff.



Guests on a tour of “The President Olusegun Obasanjo Research Campus”.

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By the time I left, it moved to 50 million metric tons and there was no reason why we could not go on to reach 100 million metric tons.”

He noted there was room for more growth as cassava has gone from simply being a food crop to being used in industrial production of ethanol and other products.

He spoke of three other crops that he considered important cash crops namely, soybean, cowpea, and plantain/banana and noted that, “If we can be self-sufficient in them, I believe that we will drastically reduce the 50 billion dollars that we are spending every year in Africa to import food.”

In an exclusive interview with Radio IITA, Chief Obasanjo spoke of his love for agriculture, which he says, “I have been practicing very seriously for the last 40 years when I first left public office, and it is something that gives me joy.” However, he repeatedly advocates for the adoption of agriculture as a business and not just as a development issue.

“As a development project or program, agriculture is slow to address hitches but as a business, the planning and execution would be more urgent to achieve business goals”, he said. To meet the food security needs of Africa

now and in the future, particularly with the expected population explosion, this urgency needs to drive agriculture to the next level of productivity.

“Agriculture as a business will create employment especially among the youth, who need to start participating more in the sector to guarantee the commercial and nutrition stability of Africa in the present and in future.” According to Chief Obasanjo, it has been difficult to appeal to youth by

treating agriculture as a development issue, but agribusiness stands a better chance of attracting young people, particularly the educated ones.

Chief Obasanjo's final words at the inauguration focused on harnessing the human resources of Africa. He encouraged leaders to look out for competent Africans in diaspora and take advantage of their expertise for the benefit of African countries and the continent as a whole.



Radio IITA Correspondent Dajie Odok doing an exclusive interview with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

Events

- 1st Aflsafe for Africa Conference**, Arusha, Tanzania, 4-5 November
- Food Security Synthesis Caravan Conference**, IITA headquarters, 5 November
- International Plant Protection Congress (IPPC) 2019**, Hyderabad, India, 10-14 November
- 5th Nutritious Food Fair**, IITA headquarters, 13-15 November
- Board Meeting and R4D Week**, IITA headquarters, 18–22 November



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New tissue culture laboratory launched in DR Congo

[IITA](#) Kalambo station, newly inaugurated as the President Olusegun Obasanjo Research Campus, commissioned a new tissue culture laboratory during an inauguration ceremony in the Democratic Republic of Congo on 8 October.

The world-class laboratory, which is the second of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa, is intended to multiply clean and disease-free planting materials of banana, cassava, cocoa, potato, and yam—important African food and economic crops.

Former Nigerian Head of State Yakubu Gowon and ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo commissioned the first tissue culture laboratory in 2017, along with [African Development Bank](#) President Akinwumi Adesina, during IITA's 50th anniversary

celebration at the Institute headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria.

At a pre-launch press conference held on 7 October, IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Development, [Kenton Dashiell](#), said the laboratory will serve researchers in the region, help in the diagnosis of problems of agricultural crops, provide solutions to challenges in agriculture, as well as support government initiatives in agriculture.

He said it will “contribute to the drafting of youth and women into agribusiness.” This will help address unemployment and DR Congo's dependence on food imports to feed its population.

“To achieve this, IITA will make sure that this laboratory will multiply seedlings and cuttings of cassava and other important food crops. This is to help DR Congo and all of Africa in general to find sustainable solutions to problems related to food insecurity,” he said.

Also speaking at the press conference, IITA Director Research



IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga giving remarks during the ceremony.

for Development, Central Africa Hub and Natural Resources Management, [Bernard Vanlauwe](#), said efforts need to be linked to better agronomic and postharvest practices to develop competitive value chains and combat these crop diseases in DR Congo. He noted that IITA is already “working on it.”



Newly launched tissue culture building

Team of IITA BoT members embark on IITA Rwanda visit

On 9 October, the IITA Board Chair, [Dr Amos Namanga Ngongi](#), and the Programs Committee Chair [Dr Christian Borgemeister](#), paid a courtesy visit to the [IITA](#) Rwanda offices. They were transiting through Kigali from Bukavu where they attended the inauguration of the President Olusegun Obasanjo Research Campus at IITA Kalambo. “The purpose is to see the IITA Rwanda offices and briefly learn what is going on,” said Namanga Ngongi.

The visiting team was received by [Silver Tumwegamire](#), IITA Cassava Breeder who is also the Leader of Cassava Agribusiness Seed System (CASS) and the Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) Control projects. Tumwegamire was standing in for the Country Representative, [Marc Schut](#) who was leading a majority of the 18 Rwanda station staff in field operations as part of the annual meeting for the ICT4BXW project that was in progress at the time. This pleased the visitors as it indicated that the staff at IITA Rwanda were busy implementing their programs. “We didn’t expect to find all of you here and we would be surprised if we did,” said the Board Chair.

The visitors embarked on a tour around the offices and were briefed on staffing and the seven projects that are being coordinated from Rwanda. Some of these projects also have activities in neighboring countries, Burundi and DR Congo. These include the Consortium for Improving Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Central Africa (CIALCA), the Aflatoxin



Board Chair, [Dr Amos Namanga Ngongi](#) (third from right) and Programs Committee Chair, [Dr Christian Borgemeister](#) (second from right) in group photo with IITA Rwanda staff.

Control Project, the Rural Urban Nexus Project (RUNRES), the Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) Control Project, the CASS Project, several CGIAR RTB projects, and the ICT4BXW Project.

The visitors were also informed of the presence of other CGIAR centers (CIP and CIAT) and AGRA and GAIN in the same office building. The Board Chair urged staff to always work as one CGIAR consortium and initiate consultative meetings to share ideas and discuss ongoing projects and activities within their respective offices.

Namanga Ngongi was keen to know the way IITA Rwanda projects are

implemented and how they work with local partners. IITA Rwanda implements all projects through partnerships and collaboration, with the [Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resource Development Board](#) (RAB) as the main partner. Other partners include the One Acre Fund, Rwanda Standards Board, Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum, Kinazi Cassava Processing Factory, media platforms, and many farmer cooperatives. The visitors urged IITA Rwanda to always ensure the visibility of IITA’s collaborative activities with other partners in the country. They were also happy that IITA Rwanda is expanding both in personnel and activities on the ground.



[Dr Amos Namanga Ngongi](#) (second from left) and [Dr Christian Borgemeister](#) (extreme left) engaging with [Dr Silver Tumwegamire](#) and other IITA Rwanda staff.