

Rwandan farmers name new cassava varieties during Cassava Week

An association of farmers in Rwanda, the Ingabo Syndicate, in collaboration with the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) and their partners, held Cassava Week 2020 from 17 to 19 November. The State Minister of Agriculture, Honorable Jean Chrisostome Ngabitsinze, officially kicked off the event at the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources.

The meeting attracted different stakeholders from research, government departments, development partners, local leadership, private sector food processors and seed multipliers, and farmers. The week showcased the importance of cassava in the country, looking at the progress made in cassava research and development plan, and laying common strategies for the future.

Farmers named new cassava varieties as part of the opening activities at the three-day event. The farmers had tested the varieties in their farms and tasted different recipes from them in their homes.

Mrs Césarie Kantarama, Chairperson of Ingabo Syndicate that hosted the naming ceremony, said, "This naming event is very important for Rwandan cassava farmers. Like the way the government of Rwanda allows Rwandans and some influential international people to name baby gorillas, the named varieties are our 'baby gorillas'

as cassava farmers." She said this, referring to the new varieties' anticipated impact on the farmers and Rwanda's food and income security as a country.

Farmers named the new varieties according to their efficiency, production, and growth period. The names of the six varieties are Biseruka, Tegereza, Gikungu, Buryohe, Nsizebashonje, and Tebuka, respectively meaning, stand tall, just wait, get rich, taste sweet, can't be hungry, and mature early.

Vedaste Bapfakurera, who named the Buryohe (taste sweet) variety, said: "I tested this new variety and confirm that it is very high yielding within 12 months, has tasty boiled roots, leafy vegetables (*isombe*), and *ubugali* (paste mingled from cassava flour)."

"Our main purpose as RAB is to develop and make improved varieties available to farmers that are resistant to pests and



Francois Nsanzintwari, with the Tebuka (mature early) variety, which he named.

diseases, mainly cassava brown streak disease (CBSD) and cassava mosaic disease (CMD). We have initiated this activity of naming the new varieties with Kinyarwanda names so that farmers can easily identify and use them," said Dr Athanase Nduwumuremyi, Head of the cassava program at RAB. **to page 2**



Meet the new Board Chair: Christian Borgemeister

IITA's new Board of Trustees' Chair is [Christian Borgemeister](#). He succeeded Amos NamangaNgongi at the end of April 2020 to lead the BoT as the Institute transitions to the One CGIAR system. Before becoming BoT Chair, Borgemeister served as the Board's Program Committee Chair, a role now occupied by Bruno Delvaux.

Borgemeister obtained his PhD in Horticulture from Leibniz Hannover University (LUH), and he is currently with the Center for Development Research (ZEF) at the University of Bonn in Germany.

Read more about the new Board Chair here <https://www.iita.org/board-member/borgemeister-christian/>.

Do not forget Plant Health in the One Health approach says IITA scientist

The One Health approach, which looks at the interconnectedness between human, animal, and environmental health, should also emphasize plant health, says [IITA's](#) plant health pathologist for the Eastern Africa hub, [George Mahuku](#).

Speaking at a seminar at IITA-Tanzania on 3 November, Mahuku said, "There is an urgent need to recognize the interconnection between plant health and the other major concepts under the One Health concept."

Mahuku noted that 40% of global food crops are lost to plant pests and diseases; this amounts to trade losses of US\$220 billion in agricultural products annually. Climate change also impacts plant health leading to a reduction in the quality and quantity of crops.

Food safety and One Health

During the seminar, Mahuku used aflatoxin contamination to illustrate the importance of including plant health under One Health.

Aflatoxin is caused by *Aspergillus flavus*, a fungus that lives in the soil

and attacks crops while in the field and in storage. It affects both human and animal health and is impacted by environmental health.

According to statistics from the US [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#), approximately 4.5 billion people globally are chronically exposed to harmful aflatoxins through food intake, who are either unaware or aware but without alternative options.

Aflatoxins also have a negative economic impact on agriculture through reduced trade of crops contaminated with aflatoxins and on livestock production such as reduced milk and egg production and poor growth of animals.

Mahuku said a comprehensive solution to the aflatoxin problem calls for collaboration across scientific disciplines and leveraging shared knowledge,



IITA's plant health pathologist for the Eastern Africa hub, Dr George Mahuku.

addressing social and cultural issues related to agriculture, animal and human health, and leveraging advances made in biotechnology and medicine.

Improved plant health can benefit human health in various ways, including increased food security, better nutrition, and reduced pesticides.

According to the Center for Disease Control, One Health is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach—working at the local, regional, national, and global levels—to achieve optimal health outcomes recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment.

Rwandan farmers name new cassava varieties during Cassava Week

continued from page 1

Rwanda currently cultivates about 200,000 hectares of cassava countrywide with an approximate average yield of 14.5 t/ha.

"With the new varieties named and launched today, we hope to achieve increased production from 14.5 t/ha to between 30 and 40 t/ha. And the new varieties are promising since they are reported to be yielding between 35 and 45 t/ha," Minister Ngabitsinze emphasized.

In 2007, the Government of Rwanda started the crop intensification program, with cassava among the prioritized crops. However, it has been facing many challenges, including two deadly diseases: CMD (locally known as Ububembe) and CBSD (locally known as Kabole), which have disrupted cassava production.

To address this, [IITA](#) partnered with RAB to develop improved cassava varieties resistant to both diseases. IITA has, through two collaborative projects, the IFAD-funded CBSD Control project and the Dutch government-funded Cassava Agribusiness Seed Systems, supported the introduction and adaptive testing of the most promising varieties and building capacities of the local research personnel

and infrastructure. The new varieties include two developed by IITA, with some of the other four national program-bred varieties having parental origins from IITA materials introduced in the past.

"We are glad that IITA has contributed to this noble cause, to develop new, improved cassava varieties that are liked by farmers and tolerant to diseases that have in the recent past affected cassava production in Rwanda. Together with the

cassava program at RAB, all these named varieties have gone through testing stages at research and farmers' level to confirm that they are good and acceptable," highlighted [Silver Tumwegamire](#), IITA Cassava Breeder.

Two other events, the launch of E-Cassava Enterprise (initiative with SPARK under IITA-led CASS project) and awarding best cassava farmers, took place during Cassava Week.



State Minister of Agriculture, Honorable Jean Chrisostome Ngabitsinze, giving a speech.

Private sector engagement: Way forward for African agriculture

A webinar was organized on 5 November to connect partners and deliberate on ways to increase private sector engagement in African agriculture.

The webinar, a collaborative activity of the [African Union Development Agency \(AUDA-NEPAD\)](#) with [Grow Africa](#) and [IITA](#), with [Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation \(TAAT\)](#), was moderated by [Kwesi Atta-Krah](#), IITA Director for Country and Regional Engagement and Senior Program Engagement Specialist for TAAT.

In his opening remarks, [Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA DDG Partnerships for Delivery, highlighted the private sector's importance and role in the entire agriculture value chain. He said that when the private sector is fully engaged in African agriculture, smallholder farmers will have easy access to technologies to enhance production and profit. He encouraged participants to envision a productive agricultural environment that is driven and powered by the private sector.

Ibrahim Gourouza-Magaji, Chief Operations Officer, Grow Africa (AUDA-NEPAD) noted that since June 2017, African Institutions, under the leadership of the African Union Commission (AUC) and NEPAD, have adopted a framework which facilitates private sector investment in agriculture in Africa called the Country



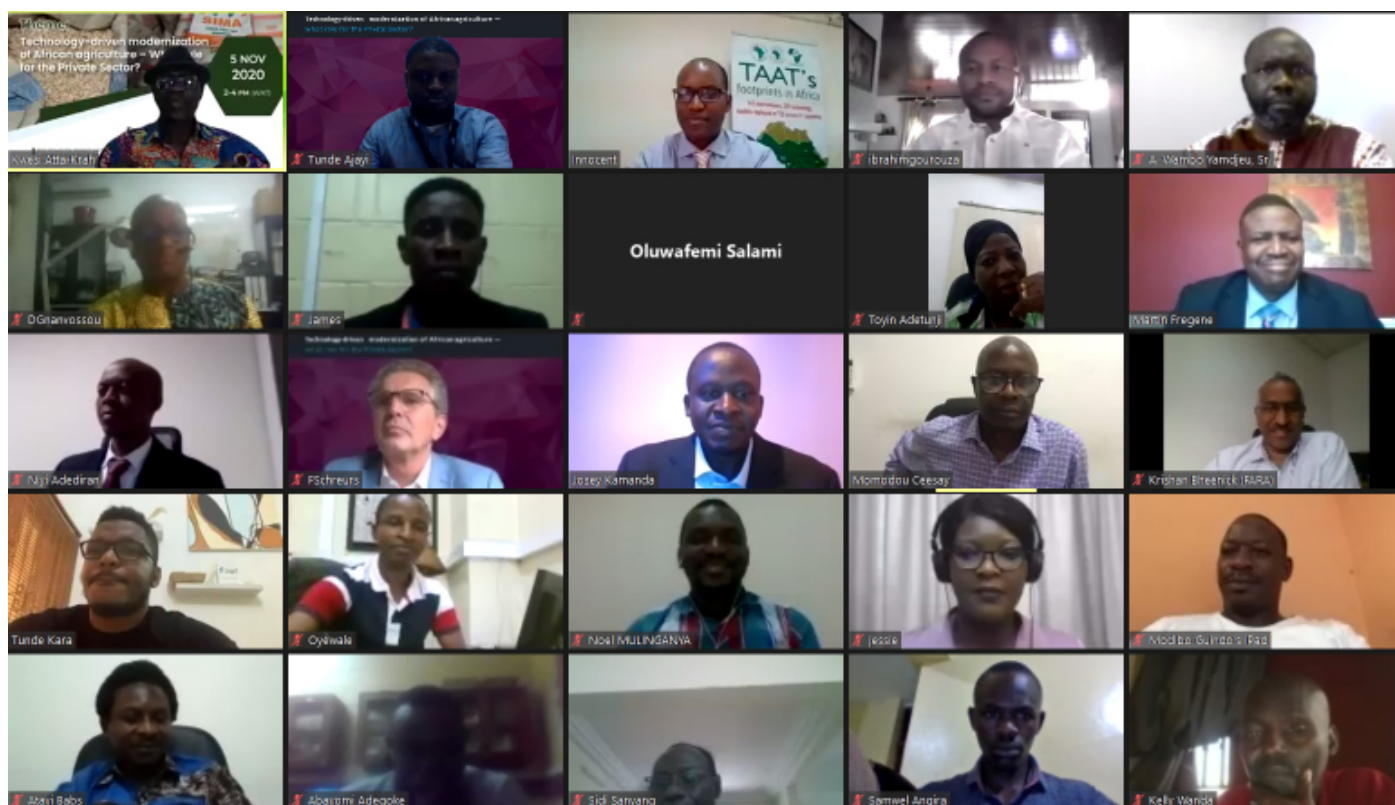
Left: Dr Kwesi Atta-Krah, moderating the webinar. Right: Innocent Musabyimana, Head, TAAT \ Clearing House, giving the vote of thanks at the end of the webinar.

Agribusiness Partnership Framework (CAP-F). Gourouza-Magaji explained that CAP-F conducts policy changes, mobilizes private sector investors and FDI investment, sets up coordination mechanisms in countries, and provides a mutual accountability framework. "The model has been tested, and it has been able to mobilize half a million dollars investment in various value chains in six African countries," he said.

"Technology is the pivot," Wanbo Yandjeu, NEPAD Rural Development Specialist, said. He explained that digital technology is changing farming in Africa by providing an increasing number of precision services. He explained that new breeds of crops and animals being released by research help manage climate stresses better while increasing yields.

"With reduced economic activities, disruption in global supply chains, and increases in the price of commodities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expedient for the private sector to be brought on board massively to effect a significant change," said Dr Martin Fregene, Director, Agriculture and Agro-Industries, African Development Bank (AfDB). Fregene explained that 80% of all food consumed in Africa passes through small and medium enterprises. Since the private sector invests up to \$16 billion in agriculture already, it is important to harness more input from it.

Putting the private sector at the center of transformation to ensure sustainability, and building stronger linkages between research institutions and SMEs to ensure the affordability and availability of food on the African continent is of high importance and should be developed into a policy.



Some of the webinar attendees.

ENABLE Youth Cameroon back on track

The Cameroonian Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), Gabriel Mbairobe, and the IITA-Cameroon Country Representative [Cargele Masso](#) signed an amendment to the agreement on youth vocational training in agricultural entrepreneurship and agribusiness (ENABLE Youth Cameroon) on 30 October. The event took place in the MINADER office in Yaoundé in the presence of partners, agricultural stakeholders, and the press.

With this amendment, the State of Cameroon, through MINADER in its capacity as contracting authority of the Agricultural Value Chain Development Project (AVC_DP), and IITA reaffirm their commitment to pursue more intensively the implementation of the key activities of the Program, which is component 3 of the AVC_DP. This amendment also improves the basic management conditions of the Youth Agribusiness Incubation Centers (YABICs) and puts the Program back on track. This gives IITA independence in the management of the Program, particularly in the fiduciary and administrative aspects.

Months of financial constraints impacted progress and led to the slowdown of key activities at the YABICs. The signed



Displaying the signed agreements: Cargele Masso, IITA Country Representative in Cameroon (left) and Honorable Mbairobe Gabriel, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

amendment will address these pitfalls hindering the implementation of the Program and allow the immediate resumption of activities. For this purpose, a corrective plan to get the train back on track and a six-month emergency plan have been drawn up to guarantee smooth continuity and the achievement of the Program's objectives.

In addition to the production of these operational documents, the Program Coordination Unit will hold participatory meetings with the managers of the host institutions of the YABICs to offer better

living conditions to aspiring agripreneurs. The Coordinators of the YABICs, who are the administrative managers of incubation centers, and Aspiring Agripreneurs, who are the essence of the Program, will be the main target of this emergency communication set-up.

This amendment is a real boost for the Program because it will permit the activities to be finalized. During the next six months, the EYC Coordination Unit will work at a sustained pace to close the incubation cycle of the first cohort and finalize the recruitment process for the second batch.

Event announcement: 4th National Annual Conference of the Society for Underutilized Legumes

The Society for Underutilized Legumes (SUL), in conjunction with the [IITA](#) Genetic Resources Center in Ibadan, Nigeria, will hold its 4th National Annual Conference on 8–9 December. Due to the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, the event will take place via Zoom.

The virtual conference will feature keynote speeches, plenary sessions, and other academic engagements. Prof Nwadiuto Esiobu, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton FL USA/Founder, Applied Biotech, Abuja, Nigeria is the invited keynote speaker on the theme “Underutilized legumes: Towards sustainable ecosystem development and food security”. Other lead paper presenters include Prof Lateef B. Taiwo, Institute of Agricultural Research & Training (IAR&T), Obafemi Awolowo University, Ibadan, Nigeria, who will be speaking on “Cropping practices and their effects on environmental sustainability”. Prof S. G. Ado, Vice-Chancellor, Al-Qalam University, Katsina, Katsina State, Nigeria & Institute of Agricultural Research, Samaru, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria will address “Fighting hunger with underutilized legumes:

A paradigm shift”. IITA's Head of Germplasm Health Unit, [Lava Kumar](#), will speak on “The impact of climate change on plant health”.

The 2019 edition featured field trips to IITA and IAR&T, plenary sessions, the Annual General Meeting, the official launch of the SUL website (www.sulegumes.org) and the Society journal: Journal of Underutilized Legumes (JUL), and the award of an honorary fellowship to Head of IITA Genetic Resources Center (GRC), [Prof Michael Abberton \(FSuLeg\)](#), for his outstanding contributions and research support for the promotion of underutilized legumes.

The SUL was set up for academic research and the promotion of improved use of underutilized legumes in tropical Africa. The Society encourages the growth and development of opportunities to researchers, entrepreneurs, and organizations (universities, research institutes, and donor agencies) to disseminate research outputs aimed at improving the economics, utilization, and conservation of underutilized legumes on the African continent and worldwide.



Society for Underutilized Legumes logo.

A 2016 symposium on African yam bean, organized by the GRC in Ibadan, Nigeria, was the foundation for SUL formation. The inaugural conference was held in 2017 at Ebonyi State University in Abakaliki, Nigeria, while Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria hosted the second edition in 2018. The IAR &T, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, hosted the 3rd and 2019 edition.

This year, the conference fee is ₦2,500 (regular) and ₦1,500 (students). The membership fee for new members is ₦10,000, and existing members will pay the same amount as annual dues. Registration for the conference is online via the Society's website <https://sulegumes.org/4th-annual-conference-2020/>

Co-create the future: UI-SME collaboration and fair

On 12 November, the University of Ibadan organized the 2nd UI-SME Fair, tagged “Co-create the future: University of Ibadan and Small and Medium Enterprises,” which was held at the International Conference Center to bring together key stakeholders in the SME sector to provide crucial support for SME growth and sustainability.



Fair participants flock to the IITA stand.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are independent firms that employ less than a given number of employees. In low-income countries, SMEs contribute 60% of GDP and more than 70% of employment. SMEs are crucial economic catalysts in national development,

poverty alleviation, and employment generation, Olayinka said.

The fair brought together key stakeholders in the SME sector, including consultants in different domains who can support businesses. SMEs are the drivers of the

economy, but because of their limitations in fostering cooperative research and development, the University serves as a tripod supporting sustainable growth and development.

According to Prof Adedoyin Soyibo (Pioneer Director, Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, UI), who chaired the occasion, the trade fair acts as a marketing tool or medium for advertising and promotion. It enables producers to meet face-to-face with consumers in a way that provides an immediate impact on products and services”. Trade fairs provide a platform for traders and individuals to support their survival and success and create a true relationship between national and international organizations as well as local, state, and national companies.

To promote visibility and knowledge sharing, IITA exhibited some products and technologies suitable for small and medium-sized enterprises. Participants who visited the IITA booth wanted to learn, inquire, or purchase goods.

The first-ever UI-SME Summit started on 7 November 2019 to foster cooperative research and development support for SMEs. Due to its success, it has become an annual fair to ensure a robust interaction between the University community and SMEs and foster a greater town-gown relationship. The summit partners were [IITA](#), the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration (NAFDAC) and Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS) as well as the Bank of Industry and Paylink.ng.

Take responsibility! Stop the spread of COVID-19!

Always clean your hands; practice physical and social distancing; wear face masks properly; avoid crowds and public places; keep a 2-meter distance from the next person; and practice general sanitation and hygiene.

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.agha@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.

