

## IITA commences public-private partnership in Central Africa seed sector with IFAD support

On 14-15 April in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), [IITA](#) launched the Strengthening the Supply of Improved Seeds and Improved Public-Private Partnerships in Central Africa (SISCA) Project under the patronage of the Minister of State for Rural Development, His Excellency Francois Rubota Masumbuko. The IFAD-financed SISCA is a regional project, which will be implemented in Cameroon, DRC, and the Republic of Congo.

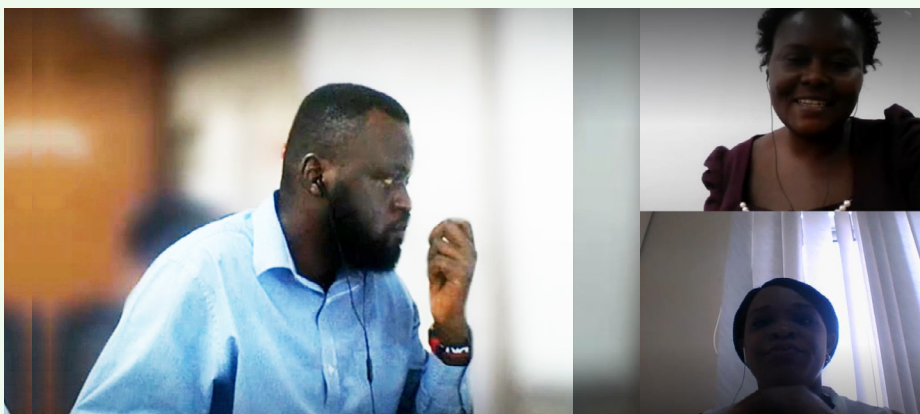


Speaking with journalists, (left to right) IFAD DRC Country Director Valentino Achancho, Minister of Rural Development His Excellency François Rubota Masumboko, IITA Central Africa Hub Deputy Director Zoumana Bamba, and DG of INERA Lutaladio Ne Bambi.

SISCA is a support project for the leading players in the seed sector, namely agricultural research organizations, private sector operators, farmers' organizations, and communities involved in the seed supply chain. It aims to provide improved, quality seed at competitive prices for smallholder farmers in the three countries, which will impact the Central African region. The core foundation of the SISCA project is the creation and strengthening of public-private partnerships and the collective learning processes on seed value chains in the region.

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## GSN to boost visibility of IITA gender-focused activities



New network members highlighting their gender-focused activities in various projects.

Following the launch of a new [gender research webinar series](#) by the [IITA Gender Science Network \(GSN\)](#), the GSN held its first quarterly meeting in 2022. The meeting took place on 29 March and assembled scientists, communication staff, and project managers to discuss activities carried out in the first quarter of the year, plans for the next quarter, and highlights of the first webinar. [Steven Cole](#), Coordinator of the GSN, moderated the meeting.

Gender Scientist [Martina Cavicchioli](#) introduced the new network members and their activities in IITA. After this, Cassava Seed Mainstreaming Officer [Devis Mwakanyamale](#) recapped the last quarterly meeting held in 2021.

Mwakanyamale emphasized the high attendance and impressive gender-focused research efforts by colleagues around the different IITA research stations. He also highlighted the initial brainstorming efforts by Network members to implement a gender research webinar series at IITA that will increase the visibility of gender research activities in the Institute and increase the knowledge and participation of staff in gender-focused activities. The [first webinar](#) from the series themed "Gender Research Learnings and Exchanges for New inSights (G-LENS)" was held on 2 March.

Reflecting on the G-LENS webinar, members commended the high level of participation and engagement, despite being the first in the series. Some network members requested a longer webinar duration to allocate more time to the question-and-answer session.

Following reflection on the webinar series, network members reported on their gender-focused research, and the team reflected on their levels of gender integration in projects. The team also discussed the contribution of GSN members to some of the One CGIAR initiatives, such as the Sustainable Intensification of Mixed Farming Systems initiative, Market Intelligence and Product Profiling initiative, HER+ (Harnessing Gender and Social Equality for Resilience in Agrifood Systems) initiative, and Excellence in Agronomy initiative.

As part of a new initiative to promote gender-focused research, aside from news story development for the IITA newsletter, IITA Gender Communication Focal Person Favour Eleta shared insights about the "Gender Talk Show" on Radio IITA. The show features IITA gender research and the celebration of gender-focused international days. "It is aired every Tuesday at 2 pm WAT and rebroadcast at the same time on Thursdays. The radio is internet-based and can be accessed on the one time link [radio](#).

[iita.org](#)," she said. Cole emphasized that this is an excellent opportunity for GSN members to showcase their work.

Concluding the meeting, Cole responded to the question of a new GSN member on the place of IITA's Gender Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) activities in the workplace in the GSN activities. He asserted that having a gender-inclusive and diverse workforce is essential to carrying out high-quality gender research. However, the GSN currently serves as a platform for sharing knowledge and supporting researchers integrating gender into their research activities. "There are, however, opportunities for collaboration with the One CGIAR GDI Initiative," he said.

Senior Research Associate [Olamide Olaosebikan](#) appreciated GSN members for attending and providing positive feedback. She also encouraged them to participate actively in the radio shows and webinars to continuously promote IITA's gender research. *Contributed by Favour Eleta*

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IFAD's DRC Representative, Dr Valentino Achancho, recognized that sustainable increases in agricultural productivity are necessary to achieve food and nutrition security and inclusive economic growth in Central Africa but noted that this would not be possible without a thriving seed sector. "IFAD believes that concomitant and coordinated actions need to be implemented in six priority areas to address current challenges and develop the seed sector, namely: (i) governance of seed value chains; (ii) structuring and functioning of seed markets; (iii) research and development; (iv) seed

policies; (v) capacity development of actors; and (vi) funding mechanisms. The SISCA project will contribute to these areas," he said.

The IITA regional office in Kinshasa will coordinate the Project. Country facilitation will be established in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo, where consultants specializing in seed technology and business will be working with the stakeholders.

The SISCA Project has the potential to have a positive impact on the national

food and nutrition security objective of the country concerned once the improved seeds and planting material have reached the target farmers. The adopted model should empower seed producers, youth, and women to seize emerging economic opportunities by providing them with technical capacity.

At the end of the workshop, delegates delivered the activity plan for implementing the Project in Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, and DRC. *Contributed Michèle Kimpwene*



*Workshop delegates discussing project implementation plans.*



# IITA and partners launch EBS-Maize Platform to modernize breeding programs

A significant agricultural transformation is under way for maize breeders across the globe to overcome the challenge of data loss. [IITA, Excellence in Breeding \(EiB\), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center \(CIMMYT\)](#), and other partners launched the [Enterprise Breeding System \(EBS\)](#) for maize breeding data management on 22 April. CGIAR EiB platform led the EBS development. EBS supports CGIAR and National Agricultural Research System (NARS) programs to adopt modern breeding workflows and data management practices.



*John Derera explaining the EBS-Maize Platform roadmap.*

EBS is an open-source, cloud-based breeding informatics system developed for crop breeding programs serving resource-poor farmers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It provides key inputs to the modernization and digitization of breeding programs to achieve the ultimate goal of increasing genetic gain and farmers' yield. EBS provides a single powerful and inclusive tool to accelerate the development of improved crop varieties through data-driven decision-making.

IITA West Africa Hub Director [Michael Abberton](#) welcomed and congratulated everyone involved in the training and launch of the EBS-Maize Platform to ensure people are familiar with and adopting the system. He mentioned that the system was a combination of work and a start of something new in transitioning into One CGIAR. Therefore, "EBS will bring closeness and cooperation between other CGIAR centers," he stated.

Business Change Manager (BCM), [Dr Wende Mengesha](#) said that the deployment of EBS is aligned to Crops to End Hunger (CtEH) and the request of CGIAR centers to optimize breeding programs and provide shared services to CGIAR regional breeding networks. He explained that the software would be used to collaborate with our NARS and private sector partners and share

the newly improved system for data management and data analysts with them. Hence, "we can reach the ultimate goal of increasing agricultural productivity and lifting people out of poverty through collaboration," he said.

IITA Head of Breeding [John Derera](#) and Breeding Data Manager Simon Imoro presented the IITA EBS roadmap. Derera gave an overview of EBS, which comprises the core breeding module--experiment creation and management, germplasm and search, list management, and data collection and upload. In addition, he highlighted the digitization project achievements in IITA, including implementing EBS for maize improvement; training on digitization at IITA and partners; establishing bioinformatics infrastructure and systems administration; and utilizing server resources by multidisciplinary teams.

Imoro explained that the data was curated from a baseline data survey stored in a spreadsheet, a non-standardized format, and pedigrees non-curated. They did this to ensure the data was of good quality, accuracy, and high integrity. He added that a training was organized for biometricians, data managers, and breeders to ensure a successful EBS migration.

EiB's Director and Accelerated Breeding Initiatives (ABI) Lead, [Dr Michael Quinn](#), noted that EBS is important in achieving the goals of ABI and Crops to End Hunger. These include an increase in the rate of genetic gain in farmers' fields and support data management for better breeding.

EBS Project Manager, Dr Steffan Weber, commended the cooperation between the breeders and developers that yielded great success and a path to continue. In addition, EBS will make it easier for people to exchange data and harmonize data standards, process workflows to make it easier for people to collaborate and elaborate between breeding teams, CGIAR, and NARS breeding networks. He added, "We look forward to releasing more functionalities."

IITA Maize Breeder and Maize Improvement Program Lead [Abebe Menkir](#) stated that different software programs have been developed and adopted to analyze data in IITA and CIMMYT. Thus, the maize management in the CGIAR Research Programs (CRP) decided to have a common platform for IITA and CIMMYT for standardization, consistency, and ease of data sharing and reuse. He then launched the EBS Platform for the users.

*Contributed by Anita Akinyomade*



# National energy center to partner with IITA on research and energy conservation

Representatives from the National Center for Energy Efficiency and Conservation (NCEEC) visited [IITA](#) headquarters on 21 April. The team, consisting of research and technical staff, was led by Dr Olawale Ajibola, Director of NCEEC. NCEEC focuses on research and energy conservation; hence the team visited IITA to identify areas of partnership in line with their mandate.

In a meeting with the NCEEC team and IITA management staff, [Michael Abberton](#), IITA West Africa Hub Director, appreciated the team's interest and proposal to visit IITA. He introduced the team to IITA activities and technologies, emphasizing that IITA is a research Institute that is open to partnering with both government and private institutions.

Relating the purpose of their visit, Dr Ajibola said that as a research center under the Energy Commission of Nigeria, NCEEC manages and harnesses resources for energy conservation, an area in which IITA also has working experience. "We are here because we are visiting stakeholders to partner and see where we can work together on resources and energy conservation," he said.

The team went on a tour of the biogas facilities in IITA, including the youth biogas section established by former corps members in the Institute. Femi Akeredolu, Deputy Head of Facilities Management Services (FMS), took the team through the process of producing biogas and showcasing all the facilities used. "We use waste around the Institute to fill the biogas digester to produce energy. Nothing is really a waste in the agricultural value chain," he said. The team also visited the



*Top: The NCEEC team on a tour of IITA Biogas facility. Bottom: NCEEC team with the IITA Youth Biogas team.*



Genetic Resources Center (GRC) to see the various seed storage facilities in IITA.

[Waheed Quader](#), Head of FMS, gave a presentation on “Renewable Energies, Africa.” He shared what IITA has been doing to save energy on light and appliances. “The GRC laboratory has a sky-lit roof to admit natural light and reduce the use of electric bulbs. It also has double insulated roof sheets to reduce heat from the sun,” he said. Quader also shared future energy projects that IITA is working on, including a vortex hydroelectric generator, solar water heater, and biogas production and use.

During the wrap-up meeting, Dr Ajobola highlighted areas that the team identified for partnership. He mentioned their interest in vortex hydroelectricity and agricultural waste. The team plans

to schedule another visit to tour the entire IITA campus to identify more areas of partnership. “We appreciate

the IITA management for the tour and exposure. We will come back,” he said. *Contributed by Favour Eleta*



*Top: Dr Ajobola and team visiting storage facilities at the IITA Genetic Resources Center. Bottom: IITA FMS Head Waheed Quader giving a presentation on renewable energy in Africa..*

## 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](mailto:iita-news@cgiar.org) or Katherine Lopez ([k.lopez@cgiar.org](mailto:k.lopez@cgiar.org)) and Uzoma Agha ([u.gha@cgiar.org](mailto:u.gha@cgiar.org)).

