

# The Prospective

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# IARSAF welcomes new IITA DG, Dr Simeon Ehui

With great pleasure and enthusiasm, we welcome Dr Simeon Ehui as the 8th Director General of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the 1st CGIAR Regional Director for Africa.



IITA DG, Dr Simeon Ehui.

Dr Ehui's appointment marks an exciting new era in the rich history of our Institute, as he brings over 30 years of experience in agriculture and sustainable development to the role. His remarkable track record in research, leadership, policy, and economic advocacy aligns perfectly with IITA's mission to transform agriculture for smallholder farmers and enhance food security across Africa. We are thrilled to have him at the helm of affairs.

As an association of research scholars and fellows dedicated to advancing agricultural research in Africa, we recognize the importance of strong leadership and vision. We are dedicated to aligning ourselves with Dr Ehui's vision of enhancing Africa's agricultural potential through critical research aimed at

development and implementation so that Africa can feed itself and make its food systems more resilient to climate change.

Dr Ehui's leadership will motivate us to attain new heights in our research endeavors. His inclusive and proactive approach will provide an environment where young scholars and fellows can thrive, develop, and contribute substantially to today's agricultural challenges.

We use this medium to extend our heartfelt welcome to Dr Simeon Ehui and pledge our unreserved support as he leads us toward a future of innovative research, sustainable solutions, and positive impacts on the lives of millions in Africa. Together, we can make a lasting difference.

## From the President's desk

Hello, and welcome to the second edition of our newsletter. It is a great privilege to address you via this medium. As it is well known, ensuring food security in sub-Saharan Africa has been a major challenge. Research has shown a great impact on the use of science to revolutionize agriculture in a way that promotes economic development. Research fellows at IITA have embarked on research that provides solutions to agricultural challenges that are relevant to people's lives. Research fellows aligned their research programs with CGIAR's strategic plan via IITA's strategy of scaling up technologies and knowledge by carrying out research relating to food security. This may not look like we are doing much, but we should be confident in our work as early-career scientists.

In this issue, Dr Alejandro Ortega-Beltran highlights how we can achieve great feats in our careers. Furthermore, we must avail ourselves of cutting-edge knowledge in molecular science, bio-informatics, and advanced data analytics. In a nutshell, let us use this newsletter to highlight some of the notable ways we can navigate the research frontier to achieve an excellent career. We also showcase our graduates herein, and IARSAF is proud of their accomplishments, as evident in the honors bestowed at university convocations this past year. Also, take advantage of the publications published by IARSAF members this year to broaden your horizons. Here at IARSAF, we are committed to delivering innovative research toward the inclusive adoption of climate-smart agriculture

for food and nutritional security. I remain grateful for your continued support and commitment to IARSAF.



Olukunle Babatunde.

# Scientists' speak

## “How to navigate the research frontier to achieve an excellent career”

**Making extraordinary strides in science through sound and innovative research. A blueprint for how to achieve great feats in our careers**

Thanks for this opportunity to share my opinions and experiences. Perhaps you should have contacted a Principal Scientist because I consider my career not mature yet, and I have many goals to accomplish. Nonetheless, I hope the information provided serves its purpose. Below are short paragraphs on elements that I consider relevant to your questions.

### ● A well-defined mission

I consider myself to be 'mission-oriented.' The mission is to contribute to food security and food safety on a large scale. I am fortunate to be able to do so by conducting research and implementing actions to control plant diseases, with a primary focus on aflatoxin control. Also, I help various units in IITA to i) identify sources of resistance to several diseases and ii) develop disease control technologies that can ultimately lead to higher yields and more nutritious crops.

### ● Passion to lead your area

One must become passionate about their chosen area, understand it as much as possible, and stay current with the latest developments. Those who do not aim to eventually become authorities in their fields will have less chance of success than those who choose to do so. Passion also relates to going above and beyond the line of duty and



Alejandro Ortega Beltrán.

being willing to make sacrifices of various types.

### ● Continuous learning is key for new ideas

One must continuously pursue knowledge within their area of expertise. Of course, it is necessary to expand your horizons and learn about many other subjects. A broader perspective contributes to becoming a well-rounded scientist. It takes a lot of discipline to stay current with the latest developments, but there is no alternative if new ideas are to be generated, tested, improved, and eventually transferred. New ideas are the result of thinking habits, for which a lot of reading and writing are required, plus engaging in discussions with colleagues and affected stakeholders (Page 5).

### ● The approach

In a science-related career, regardless of your area of expertise, your approach must be scientific (drawing conclusions supported by evidence) and philosophical (using reason to reach conclusions). Sometimes, there are exaggerated

claims or criticisms of others' work without the requisite evidence. The knowledge acquired in the laboratory and research fields needs to reach end users. As early as possible, it is critical to conduct experiments and activities outside the lab and on-station trials. Conducting trials/experiments in isolation or controlled conditions does not allow us to evaluate the system being studied in the context in which it exists and interacts. Go to the fields and talk with affected stakeholders. The most valuable knowledge can be obtained from field visits. Most of what we know and apply in the unit has resulted from visiting, observing, and listening to the affected stakeholders and then working with them as a team. Also, I think it is important to remain scientists and not managers once your career evolves. As much as possible, step out of your office.

### ● Effective communication

We need to deliver public lectures, presentations, and discussions while avoiding uninspiring styles and using language according to the audience. The information must be packaged based on whether the audience comprises farmers, regulators, donors, scientists, private sector members, politicians, or a combination thereof. It is easy to lose an audience's attention if the information is not packaged or presented well. Communication also needs to be effective when writing. I mentioned above that reading a lot is necessary. Your reading (scientific papers, novels, poetry, etc.) will reflect in your writing.

### ● Asking for help is not only okay, it is necessary

It is very important to ask for help when needed and seek advice from more experienced colleagues.

But also, seek the advice of non-specialists in your domain and young researchers. When you know too much about a subject, you may disregard experimenting with new ideas, assuming they will not work. However, an outsider can suggest or try new approaches and will discover new things because of their curiosity. Try as much as possible to form and work in multi-disciplinary teams with varying strengths, points of view, and expertise.

### ● Discouragement

Sometimes, we become discouraged by failed experiments, unsuccessful submissions (both papers and proposals), or unawarded positions or promotions we apply for. This is relatively common, and we need to learn to live with it. Rather than focusing on those negative events, we also need to remember the successful outcomes.

### ● Interactions

Talk to colleagues in the laboratory, hallway, or meeting rooms at every opportunity. When attending

meetings, introduce yourself to unknown people. They may become valuable collaborators. I have met several collaborators just by visiting their posters in meetings or linking up after their presentations. When attending meetings, I try to attend presentations on topics unrelated to mine to meet more people and learn how to incorporate valuable concepts and principles into my research. Attend and join discussions any time there is a chance. Also, ask your supervisors to make you part of important meetings, field visits, and discussions (in case they do not do so).

### Other important thoughts:

- Be empathic with your colleagues. Period! Avoid thinking too much about your career, but pay attention to those of others.
- We need to learn from our mistakes, but we also need to be humble enough to admit them.
- Sometimes, it is necessary to abandon preconceptions. We can be completely wrong about

a certain idea or topic, and it is necessary to be able to recognize this.

- Recognize if you are not qualified for a task. Do not accept tasks or positions if you are not qualified.
- You need to be able to make your own decisions instead of allowing someone else to impose them.
- One frequent worry among young researchers is the number of publications. I think it is more important to work toward creating an impact for the benefit of farmers and, ultimately, consumers. Eventually, the publications will come.
- You need to be surrounded by people who will talk to you frankly once you are in a position of responsibility.
- Finally, you must be thankful to those who have helped you in your career. I would not be here if it were not for all my bosses who believed in me. My doctoral, postdoctoral, and scientist supervisors gave me chances even when I was relatively young for such scholarships and positions (or had poor English when interviewed for graduate school). All of them taught me well, and I am forever thankful. Give a chance to those individuals with a true desire to excel in their duties once your career starts establishing itself and throughout it.



Dr Alejandro Ortega Beltrán at the Aflasafe laboratory.

For my list of publications, please visit my Google Scholar profile:

[Alejandro Ortega Beltrán](#)

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=EZTwY34AAAA-J&hl=en&oi=ao>



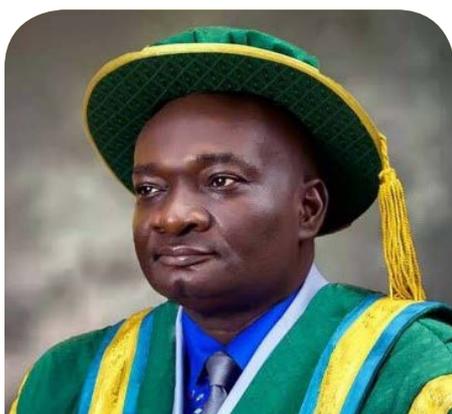
Dr Alejandro Ortega Beltrán with stakeholders.

## Short biography

Dr Alejandro Ortega-Beltran has worked on agricultural research for over two decades, first as a maize field worker in Obregón, México, at INIFAP, then as a PhD student at the University of Arizona studying aflatoxin producers and resistance of maize landraces to aflatoxin, a postdoc at UC Davis working on aflatoxin-prone tree nut crops, and now a senior plant pathologist at IITA working on multinational projects delivering solutions for the unseen aflatoxins and combating diseases of several crops. He has also worked picking grapes and packing dates in the US before going to college in Mexico.

# Meet Our Alumnus

## Professor Felix Kolawole Salako



Professor Felix Kolawole Salako

Professor Felix Kolawole Salako is a Soil Physics/Soil Conservation Professor in the Department of Soil Science and Land Management, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Nigeria. He was born on 18 April 1961. He was the sixth Substantive Vice-Chancellor of FUNAAB from 1 November 2017 to 31 October 2022. He was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) from 27 April 2021 to 22 May 2023. He is a Fellow of the Soil Science Society of Nigeria (FSSSN) and the Agricultural Society of Nigeria (FASN).

He attended the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), between 1978 and 1983, where he obtained a BAg in Soil Science, Second Class Upper Division, emerging as the best graduating student of the Department of Soil Science in 1983.

After his National Youth Service at the Department of Soil Science, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, he returned to UNN to earn an MSc in Soil Physics/Soil Conservation in 1986.

He was affiliated with the IITA Soil Physics Unit under the supervision of Dr Rattan Lal during his MSc studies. Prof. Salako began his career in 1987 as a consulting soil scientist at TCI Associates, Ibadan. He later proceeded to IITA, Ibadan, in 1989 to manage an IITA/United Nations University project within Okomu Oil Palm Company, Okomu Forest Reserve, Edo State as a Resident Research Associate. He eventually worked on different research projects at IITA, Ibadan, for eleven years (1989-2000).

Prof. Salako joined the services of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), in 2000 as a senior lecturer in the Department of Soil Science and Land Management (SSLM), formerly the Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Mechanization. Apart from teaching courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, he has supervised more than forty-five (45) undergraduate projects and more than thirty (30) postgraduate theses. He was the acting head of the Department of Soil Science and Land Management from February 2001 to December 2006. He became a Professor of Soil Physics in 2006, and he has to his credit more than ninety (90) publications in learned journals, book chapters, conference proceedings, and technical reports.

He was re-appointed Head of SSLM between January and March 2008 after a

year of sabbatical leave at the University of Venice (Ca'Foscari University), Venice, Italy. In March 2008, he was appointed the Director of the Agricultural Media Resources and Extension Centre (AMREC), a position he held until March 2011 before he became the Pioneer Director of the Community-Based Farming Scheme (COBFAS) from March 2011 to September 2011. He moved on to become the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development) in September 2011 and spent two terms of two years each until December 2015.

Professor Salako was listed for Outstanding Achievements in the Marquis Who-is-Who in Science and Engineering, Eighth Edition, 2005-2006. He has won many research-support grants, including those from the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) and the Training and Research in Italian Laboratories (TRIL) of the Abdus Salaam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), Italy. From 2016 to 2020, he participated actively in the African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI) as the Southwest Coordinator under the auspices of IITA, Ibadan. He is also a member of several professional societies and was once an associate editor for the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation in Iowa, USA.

Professor Salako focused his research over the years on (1) Rainfall Erosivity and Soil Conservation, (2) Soil Water Flux and Evapotranspiration, and (3) Soil Water Management using Agronomic Practices and Improved Fallow Systems. He has been involved in development projects all over Nigeria.

He is married to Deaconess Mabel Obehi Salako, and they are blessed with children and grandchildren.

# Scholar of the year 2022

Meet Oluwafemi Oyedele, the IARSAF scholar of the year for 2022. He is currently a research assistant on the Cocoa Soils Project at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). He obtained his Master's degree in Agrometeorology from the University of Ibadan with distinction. Oyedele's work involves studying soil properties, nutrient dynamics, and other factors that affect cocoa and cassava production in tropical regions. He has a strong interest in processed-based modeling, which focuses on simulating and predicting complex processes in

natural systems. Oyedele was awarded the Best Scholar of the Year in 2022 for his punctuality to meetings, activeness, and contributions to the association's affairs. His passion and selflessness in assisting fellow graduate students, especially in experimental design and data analysis using R statistical tools, stood him out for this award. "I remember when I needed to urgently analyze my data because I was tight on deadline, Femi had to leave what he was doing at home and came to work on Saturday just to help me. I believe he deserves this award,"



Oluwafemi Oyedele.

says Ufuoma, an IITA Research Fellow. He invites you to explore his website and learn more about his life's work as one of the greatest scholars and thinkers. [Oluwafemi Oyedele \(bb1464.github.io\)](https://bb1464.github.io)

## OneCGIAR News



Olaoye Dorcas and Adewinle Adeshina on a tour at the hydroponics facility.

### **Inclusive agribusiness:** Transforming the landscape for women and youth in agriculture

With women constituting a significant portion of the agricultural workforce in Africa, it is essential to address the structural and societal barriers that hinder their empowerment and equality. As such, key changes within agribusiness are required to foster a more inclusive environment for

women and youth in agriculture. Read more here: [Inclusive Agribusiness: Transforming the Landscape for Women and Youth in Agriculture - CGIAR.](#)

### **Integrated approaches key to achieving development goals**

International institutions need to take a more integrated approach to solving the world's problems – and need more funding – write Claudia Sadoff, executive managing director of CGIAR, and Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, chair of the group's System Board. CGIAR has long partnered with the World Food Programme (WFP) to integrate systems thinking into relief work.

By combining food aid distribution with social protection programs, we can address immediate humanitarian concerns while at the same time building longer-term resilience. Read more here: <https://www.scidev.net/global/opinions/integrated-approaches-key-to-achieve-development-goals/>

### **A food systems response to COVID-19**

A united CGIAR is working to 'build back better' by transforming the world's food systems. CGIAR, as the world's largest public agricultural research network, is working to anticipate and address the causes and consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, building on work that spans almost half a century.

As the world prepares to 'build back better,' CGIAR is adapting its approach to meet global challenges related to food systems, climate change, and sustainable development.

A CGIAR COVID-19 Hub, in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, will ensure that a research-informed response effectively reaches the world's most vulnerable. Read more here: <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/all-news/a-food-systems-response-to-covid-19/>.

## Visionary leader, strategic thinker: CGIAR appoints Dr Ismahane Elouafi as Executive Managing Director



Dr Ismahane Elouafi.

Following a robust, globally competitive recruitment process, the CGIAR System Board has announced that Dr Ismahane Elouafi will be appointed as CGIAR's next Executive Managing Director (EMD), leading the organization to deliver science and innovation for a food- and nutrition-secure future. Read more here: [Visionary leader, strategic thinker: CGIAR appoints Dr Ismahane Elouafi as Executive Managing Director - CGIAR](#).

## World Bank seeks to scale IITA's innovations

The World Bank Country Director for Nigeria, Dr Shubham Chaudhuri, paid a courtesy visit to IITA-CGIAR Headquarters and met with the Director General, Dr Simeon Ehui, on 17 August. His visit aimed at learning about the existing agricultural innovations at the Institute and exploring scaling up these technologies with private sector involvement. Read more here: [World Bank seeks to scale IITA's innovations - CGIAR](#).

IITA-BBEST project to integrate digital technology in scaling innovation

The Accra office of the IITA-led Black Soldier Fly (BSF) for Bio Circular Economy and Environmental Sustainability (BBEST) project was visited by a representative of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) on 15 August. Christer Solheim Gundersen, a Digitalization Specialist, visited the project to gain a firsthand understanding of the progress and achievements while exploring the integration of digital technology in

educating various stakeholders on BSF technology, including farmers, youth, and extension officers. Read more: [IITA-BBEST project to integrate digital technology in scaling innovation - CGIAR](#).

IITA advances innovation in the EBS Maize Breeding Program to enhance food-secure solutions

The Enterprise Breeding System (EBS)—launched in April 2022 at IITA—is an open-source breeding informatics software developed for researchers, breeders, and other users to harness a comprehensive crop breeding database to improve the genetic gains of maize for farmers in the field.

On 23-24 August, IITA organized a 2-day refresher training to help users gain practical skills to navigate the upgrades and new features added to the EBS. This will help facilitate effective and efficient work processes among maize breeders in IITA, CIMMYT, and CGIAR-wide. Read more here: [IITA advances innovation in the EBS Maize Breeding Program to enhance food-secure solutions - CGIAR](#).

## Three-Minute Thesis competition winners



**Iyanu Lydia Ibrahim**  
First place  
Three-Minute Thesis Presentation



**Aiyedun O. Priscilla**  
Second place  
Three-Minute Thesis Presentation



**Beulah Ayeni**  
Third place  
Three-Minute Thesis Presentation

Postgraduate research students presented their research in an engaging way in under three minutes at the 25th annual symposium of the International Association for Research Scholars and Fellows (IARSAF), held between 14 and 17 November 2022, at the IITA International Conference Center, Ibadan, Nigeria. Iyanu Lydia Ibrahim, a Research Fellow at the Pathology/Mycotoxin/AflaSAFE Unit of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, and a Master's student at the Department of Microbiology, the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, was awarded the First Place Position for the Best Three-Minute Pitch. Priscilla Aiyedun, a Research Fellow at the Genetic Resources Center and a PhD student in the Department of Pharmacognosy at the University of Ibadan, came in second. Ayeni Beulah, a Research Fellow at the Genetic Resources Center and a PhD student of the Department of Crop and Environmental Biology, University of Ibadan, was awarded the third position.

# Inspiring IARSAF scholars



Adenike Dada

## Academic qualification

PhD in Plant Pathology (in-view)

MSc Plant Pathology  
BSc Plant Science

## University/affiliation

University of Ibadan

## Brief research info

My research is focused on cowpea improvement against the devastating anthracnose disease. Identification of resistance genes to cowpea anthracnose disease will promote the development of resistant cultivars accessible to growers.

## Career prospects

To transform Africa's agriculture by engaging in quality research that is of economic importance.

## Skills

Pathology research, bioinformatics and molecular biology

## Publications

First Report of *Colletotrichum cliviicola* Causing Anthracnose Disease of Cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) in Nigeria. <https://doi.org/10.1094/PDIS-10-22-2512-PDNPDFSUPPLEMENTAL>



Mohamed Mambu Luseni

## Academic qualification

PhD (in view)

## University/affiliation

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## Brief research information

My research focuses on sustainable cocoa development in Sierra Leone, which includes the effect of cocoa agroforestry systems on black pod (BP) disease, *Trichoderma atroviride* effect on cocoa BP, and genetic diversity of cocoa germplasm based on KASP-SNP genotyping.

## Career prospects

To enhance the quality of research outputs by back-stopping agricultural research institutes in Africa with my areas of expertise.

## Skills

Developing proposals, reports, and publishing papers

## Publications

Black pod disease of cacao: *Phytophthora palmivora*. [doi: 10.1079/pwkb.20127801283](https://doi.org/10.1079/pwkb.20127801283)

## Congrats to IARSAF graduates!

### Photo Gallery

Name: Dr Isaac Tize

Degree: PhD Crop Protection/Biological Control/Breeding University: University of Ngaoundere, Cameroon  
Email: [isaac.tize@yahoo.fr](mailto:isaac.tize@yahoo.fr)



Name: Dr Ekanem Uko Abasi

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Name: Dr Flora Asibe

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Name: Gbemisola Okunlola  
Degree: PhD Agriculture and Sustainable  
Environment in Plant Breeding  
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Agriculture, Abeokuta  
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Name: Funmilayo Adebukola Oke  
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Name: Ayomide Ajoke Kasali  
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## Publications by IARSAF members



**Adebowale Oluwaseun Osunbade**, Emmanuel Oladeji Alamu, Wasiu Awoyale, Aishat Bolanle Akinwande, Johnson Akinwumi Adejuyitan, and Busie Maziya-Dixon (2023) End-user quality characteristics and preferences for cassava, yam and banana products in rural and urban areas -A review, *Cogent Food & Agriculture*, 9:1, 2205720, [doi: 10.1080/23311932.2023.2205720](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311932.2023.2205720)

**Bhadmus, A.**; Abberton, M.; Idehen, E.; Ekanem, U.; Paliwal, R.; and Oyatomi, O. Genetic Diversity Assessment of Winged Bean [*Psophocarpus tetragonolobus* (L.) DC.] Accessions Using Agronomic and Seed Morphometric Traits. *Crops* 2023, 3, 170-183. <https://doi.org/10.3390/crops3020017>

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## About IARSAF

IARSAF is an acronym for International Association of Research Scholars and Fellows. It is an International body of Postgraduate students in areas of Agriculture and related disciplines, conducting their research at IITA or any of the CGIAR Research Centers based at IITA in close collaboration with hundreds of partners under the co-supervision of CGIAR researchers and their respective Universities across the globe.

### Vision statement

Ensuring poverty eradication, nutrition and food security, and improving natural resources and ecosystems through a global research partnership for a food-secure future.

### Mission statement

Continuous collaboration with researchers to advance agricultural science and innovation and improve productivity and resilience in managing economic growth, natural resources, and other challenges.

### Statement of objectives

IARSAF is a non-political association seeking to

1. Provide a forum for exchanging academic and research ideas among its members.
2. Establish and promote a spirit of friendship, tolerance, and humility among its members through social activities.
3. Discuss, suggest, and seek solutions to problems affecting members.

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