



Nigerian Agriculture Minister to support IITA Youth Agripreneurs

Nigeria's Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbeh, has expressed interest in supporting the [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) (IYA).

Receiving the IITA and IYA delegates led by Director General Nteranya Sanginga, in his office on 14 March, the Minister said the initiative was in line with his administration's vision of ensuring that agriculture is embraced by Nigerian youth as a business.

Expressing delight about the IYA program, Chief Ogbeh promised to negotiate a 100-ha piece of land for the IITA Youth Agripreneurs in Abuja at Gurara Dam Irrigation Scheme Land. He also promised two tractors to mechanize crop production and operations.

The Minister said "Agriculture will be the next goldmine of the world." He added that the country is finding it difficult to meet the food supply demand from countries around the world.

He enjoined the youth to tap into the opportunity and secure the future by taking agriculture as a business. He added that the Ministry will build a Youth-



The Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbeh, talking to DG N. Sanginga (left) and with the Agripreneurs in Abuja (right).



Agroindustrial Complex in Abuja and other states to train and empower youth in agribusiness.

The Minister also emphasized banana/plantain production through the tissue culture technique. He urged IITA to invest more in tissue culture to enhance production of suitable banana/plantain for export.

Responding to the Minister, DG Sanginga highlighted IITA's efforts in the areas of food production and research. He said IITA has the expertise and resources to boost food security and production in Africa.

The IITA entourage included Alfred Dixon, Gbassey Tarawali, Toyin Oke, Evelyn Ohanwusi, Ene Agada, and Zacchaeus Isuwa.

IWD2016: Gender parity in research and science by 2030

IITA joined the rest of the world in marking this year's [International Women's Day](#) and organized a half-day panel discussion that focused on how to accelerate gender parity in science and research at its Eastern Africa hub in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This was in line with the theme of this year's international women's day campaign "[Pledge for Parity](#)".

It is the second year that the hub has marked the International Women's Day with the full support of its Director [Victor Manyong](#), who ensured that resources were available for the event.

The event brought together an impressive lineup of women working in various science



A powerhouse of women panelists talk about gender parity.

fields to share their experiences. The panel consisted of staff and partners at the hub as well as students from nearby secondary schools, the [University of Dar es Salaam](#), and the media.

The panelists included Christine Ngereza, a Senior Curator of Invertebrate Zoology at the [National Museum of Tanzania](#); Latifa Mrisho, a PhD student from the University of Dar es Salaam/[University of Lund](#) conducting research on cassava whitefly at IITA; and [Veronica Uzokwe](#), an Agronomist with the [SARD-SC](#) project led by IITA.

Other panelists were [Rose Funja](#), Founder and Managing Director, Agrinfo; and [Hyasinth Ntuyeko](#), Founder and Managing Director, Kasole Secrets, both [Mandela Washington Fellows](#) for 2014 and 2015, respectively. [Regina Kapinga](#), IITA's Head of Advocacy and Resource Mobilization gave a talk on "Beyond the scientist's desk" on her charity work with [Mission Africa](#) which she said was going to launch a scholarship program for women in science.

[Catherinerose Barreto](#), a Human Resources expert and Co-Founder of [Kinu Group Ltd](#), and an [Aspen-African Leadership Initiative](#) Fellow, gave a brief career talk to the young audience.

"IITA is very committed to supporting efforts towards gender parity and in

particular in science and research where the representation by women is still very low", said [Edward Kanju](#), while officially welcoming the participants to the event on behalf of the hub director, [Victor Manyong](#).

"Although there has been a lot of improvement and more and more women are coming into science and research, we are still not at 50:50. Therefore a lot still needs to be done to encourage women to pursue science careers as well as address the challenges they face," he added.

Rose Shayo, a senior lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam, noted that efforts to achieve gender parity by 2030 need to start in the education sector where girls should be encouraged to stay in school and to take up sciences.

"In the lower classes we find that there is gender parity—the ratio of girls to boys is nearly one. However, as they grow older, there are more boys as the girls drop out for various reasons and this difference is even higher in science subjects," she said.

The panelists and participants all agreed that it was possible to have a 50:50 representation of men and women in science if there was commitment and good will from all the stakeholders starting from

policymakers, the education system, the employment sector, and the determination and effort by the women themselves to take up opportunities offered.

They also took the parity pledge to support efforts towards having 50:50 representation in all spheres by 2030.

"Women need to have confidence in themselves and be prepared to grab any opportunities that come their way," said Veronica Uzokwe, IITA Agronomist.

"Always learn to fight, and just run for it; nothing comes easy; science is for both boys and girls. With our own effort and support we shall make gender parity feasible!" said Latifa Mrisho.

This was echoed by Sabrina Hassan, a Form Four student at Jangwani Secondary school: "To achieve gender parity we girls must fight for it. Nothing will come to us when we laze around. We must wake up. Women are capable and can do science just as well as men, if not better. Gender parity is possible."

The event was well appreciated especially by the students who said they rarely had such opportunities to meet and interact with other professionals. This was the second such event to be held at the hub.

BiomassWeb project group visit IITA

Over 50 members of the [BiomassWeb](#) Project including scientists, postdoctoral, doctoral, and master's degree students from various institutions in five countries—Ethiopia, Germany, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria—visited IITA-Ibadan for an excursion on 26 February. The BiomassWeb Project aims to contribute to food security in sub-Saharan Africa by focusing on biomass-based value webs and innovation in the agricultural sector.

[Alfred Dixon](#), representing IITA DDG Kenton Dashiell, welcomed the visitors to IITA. He talked about IITA's research work and output on banana, cassava, coffee, cocoa, cowpea, maize, soybean, and yam; and described IITA's programs, projects, and facilities and how it is working with other research institutes and universities. Other IITA staff present were [Michael Abberton](#), who represented Robert Asiedu, R4D Director for West Africa; [Sylvia Oyinlola](#), Regional Administrator; Terngu Abur, Visitors Assistant; and [Adebayo Abass](#), IITA scientist, and BiomassWeb project manager, work package 5.3.



Biomass Web group visit IITA facilities, including cassava processing center, BIP, Agripreneurs; and ILRI outstation.

The team were taken on a tour of the Cassava Processing Center, IITA Youth Agripreneurs office, Aflasafe plant, and the outstation of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). Various processing techniques and machines in the production and processing of cassava into high quality cassava flour were showcased during the tour. At ILRI, Country Manager [Iheanacho Okike](#),

explained how ILRI undertakes research on animal health, genetics, forages, impact assessment, and production systems focusing on cassava peels. There was also an elaborate demonstration on the processing of cassava peels into animal feed. The economic advantage of processing cassava peels into animal feed compared to maize and other feeds was also shared by Okike.

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or Adaobi Umeokoro (a.umeokoro@cgiar.org).

SARD-SC Maize component supports the launch of the Ghana Maize Association

Maize is the most important cereal grain in terms of total production and utilization in Ghana, with the bulk of production being used for human consumption. The average yield is about 1.7 t/ha, which is comparatively lower than what is produced in other countries.

Partners working in the maize value chain came together to form a national association that would help increase maize productivity and profitability. The National Maize Association of Ghana (NAMAG) was launched on 8 March in Kumasi, Ghana.

The launch attracted many important personalities, as well as various stakeholders such as input dealers, farmers, poultry farmers, and agroprocessors from far and wide in the country. In his welcome address, [Kwadwo Obeng-Antwi](#), SARD-SC Maize Country Coordinator, articulated the importance of the association as one of the ways to accelerate productivity and form alliances with various users of maize to create profitable marketing and business links. "It is therefore, incumbent upon us, as major stakeholders, to pool our resources for more effective use to benefit ourselves and our country. It is in the light of this that the AfDB-funded "Support to Agricultural Research for Development of Strategic Crops in Africa ([SARD-SC](#))" project wishes to join hands with the Maize Association to accelerate maize transformational impact in Ghana".

Obeng-Antwi said the project believes that one major approach to realizing its objectives is to establish strategic alliances that link researchers; link producers



SARD-SC Maize Commodity Specialist Sam Ajala (leftmost) and Steve Kiingi during the launch.

to inputs and finance; link end users to producers; and create new market potentials and opportunities.

[Sam Ajala](#), SARD-SC Maize Commodity Specialist, bemoaned the low maize output in Ghana and the attendant market fragmentation which continually traps most local farmers in poverty. He said maize is the third most important crop in the world. For a transformational impact in Ghana to occur, Ajala advised the stakeholders: "Grow maize competitively and in areas best suited for it. You need to address issues of the right type of fertilizer to use for planting, what quality of seeds to plant, and it is important to address the fragmented maize market. And then you should strategically place maize to feed the local poultry industry and for food security. There is a need to create a market-led business by creating the demand which will in turn increase production and productivity."

Kwaku Minka Fordjour, Ashanti Regional Director of Agriculture, said the Association would be the mover of maize production in Ghana. He called on Ghana's Ministry of Agriculture to provide the necessary extension services and technological support to the farmers.

Asante Krobeah, Director of Crop Services, Ghana, reiterated the importance of maize to food security in the country as the current production is not enough to feed the nation. "With concerted effort, our national output can be increased, so the idea of a maize association is heartwarming, bringing all maize actors on the value chain on board to achieve a common goal," he said.

NAMAG was officially launched by Opong-Adjei, national president of the Poultry Farmers Association. An interim executive was elected to run the association until a substantive executive committee is put in place.

IITA BIP guests at Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Workshop

The Business Incubation Platform (BIP) of IITA was invited to speak at the "Do it Afraid" Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Workshop on 6 March in Lagos. The workshop had as its theme "Agribusiness: The Next Frontier". It was convened by Omilola Oshikoya, Africa's premier wealth coach.

BIP was represented by Support Manager Layi Olatunji, who spoke on the topic "Nigeria's Agribusiness space—Navigating Trends and Patterns". This gave the BIP a good stage to analyze the state of agriculture in Nigeria—the current reality, its potentials, and what IITA is doing through BIP. Olatunji presented the BIP model, showcasing and extolling the virtues of its flagship products such as Aflasafe, GoSeed and Nodumax. He also highlighted the activities of the IITA Youth Agripreneurs and emphasized

how involving the youth, who account for 42% of the Nigerian population, in agribusiness is the solution to youth unemployment in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

Supported by Bank of Industry (BOI), the workshop was designed to increase the technical capacity and provide support for both potential and current business entrepreneurs in agribusiness, and educate these entrepreneurs on how to operate in the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) segment and how they can finance their agribusiness as well as access BOI's funds.

The workshop was facilitated by agribusiness entrepreneurs who shared their experiences and gave business lessons. More than 300 participants attended the workshop.



Layi Olatunji speaks on behalf of BIP at the agribusiness workshop.

Nigerian Minister commends SARD-SC wheat achievements; pledges to triple wheat areas to 300,000 hectares by 2017

The SARD-SC Wheat project organized a national field day with local partners and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture on 12 March at Alkamawa, Kano State. The Federal Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Honorable Audu Ogbeh was the main guest of honor. The other guests of honor were His Excellency Governor of Kano State Hon Abdullahi Umar and His Excellency Governor of Kebbi State Hon Atiku Bagudu.

The field day was attended by over 1000 stakeholders, including parliamentarians, senior federal and state level government officials, farmers, extension specialists, researchers, NGO representatives, input suppliers, millers, and youth and women groups engaged in project wheat value chain activities, and invited guests from the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas ([ICARDA](#)).

The Minister said that for nearly 40 years, Nigeria had tried to produce wheat of acceptable quality without success, but that hurdle had now been crossed. The new high-yielding wheat varieties introduced from ICARDA also meet the required end-use quality. As a result, the Nigerian Millers Association officially submitted a written commitment to the Ministry stating that they will buy all the wheat produced in the country during this season through the new initiative. During the 2016 cropping season, the country is expecting to harvest 350,000 tons of wheat from the total 100,000 ha wheat area, Minister Ogbeh stated.

Adding that a “silent revolution” is already happening on farms all across northern Nigeria, the Minister further announced that the country is dedicating 300,000 hectares of land to wheat production in 2017 to significantly reduce overdependence on importation. The Ministry and the Government will thus aggressively continue to support wheat farmers by providing inputs (fertilizer and seed), mechanized operations and equipment such as planters, combine harvesters, motor pumps, and access to credit and links to markets.

At the event, the Honorable Minister disclosed: “Today, Nigeria is spending over US\$4.6 billion every year on wheat importation and domestic production accounts for less than 7% of the country’s annual wheat requirements.” He added that with the right technology and the right policy in place and the fact that the country is endowed with land and water resources, this overdependence on wheat importation is “totally unacceptable”. The way to stop this is through transforming rural economies by transforming agriculture.

The Minister expressed appreciation for the significant contributions of [IITA](#), SARD-SC,



The Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Chief Audu Ogbe, and the chair, Nigeria Senate Committee on Agriculture, Senator Abdullahi Adamu speaking to the wheat farmers at Alkamawa.

and ICARDA, in promoting improved wheat technologies in Nigeria, and for organizing the wheat field day. He also praised the [African Development Bank](#) for funding SARD-SC.

[Kenton Dashiell](#), DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Development at IITA, representing the Director General, expressed appreciation for the joint collaborative work. He congratulated all involved for a job well done and expressed his desire for more occasions like this to showcase the many achievements of the SARD-SC project.

Speaking at the forum, the Chair of Nigeria’s Senate Committee on Agriculture, Senator Abdullahi Adamu, promised to lead in legislative reforms to support wheat growing saying that the Senate would make legislation to remove obstacles faced by wheat farmers in the country.

SARD-SC wheat coordinator [Solomon Assefa](#) of ICARDA also said that with the new high-yielding and heat-tolerant wheat varieties, and excellent work with farmers and value chain actors including the private sector in the milling and baking industries, Nigeria can and will significantly reduce and eventually stop its unsustainable wheat imports, increase income for farmers and stakeholders, create job opportunities for the rural youth and women, and alleviate poverty.

The Minister led the Nigerian high level dignitaries and other invited participants on a tour through the farmers’ wheat fields at Alkamawa. The field day presented an opportunity for farmers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to interact and discuss ways of further enhancing wheat production, processing, and marketing in Nigeria. The field day was jointly organized by LCRI and IAR of Ahmadu Bello University with the project implementing CGIAR centers ICARDA and IITA.



Farmer Bala Yahaya with wife Halima and child in his wheat farm in Alkamawa, Kano State, Nigeria.

“Before I got involved in this project, I could hardly imagine feeding my children properly or sending them to school. Today, I can take care of all of them. I can see a bright future for me, my family and my neighbors,” says Bala Yahaya, a farmer from Kadawa, in Kano State, Nigeria.

Bala, a full-time farmer and wheat grower, said: “I have sent one of my sons out of the country to learn French, I have another child in college here in Nigeria, and two in secondary school, and all this has been possible as I started to work with the new wheat seed varieties from the ICARDA SARD-SC project,” says Bala. *Source: Andrea Gros and Polycarp Otieno, ICARDA.*