



## Five IITA-developed cowpea varieties released in Swaziland

The Government of Swaziland, through its [Ministry of Agriculture](#), has officially released five IITA-developed cowpea varieties, paving the way for their widespread adoption and use in farmers' fields. In its National Seeds Varieties List Notice of 2015, Swaziland's Ministry of Agriculture listed the following IITA cowpea varieties: IT-16, IT-18, IT-04K-321-2, IT-97K-390-2, and IT-99K-494-4.

"The release of these IITA cowpea varieties in Swaziland is further testament to IITA's positive image and trust that governments and national institutions in the southern African region have of the Institute's leadership in the field of agricultural science and research," said [David Chikoye](#), IITA Regional Director for Southern Africa. The release of these five cowpea varieties comes at the heels of the release of two IITA-bred soybean varieties in Zambia just in October.

Characteristically, IT-16 has a yield potential of 1400 kg/ha and takes about 90 days to mature. It is also tolerant of

drought, leaf spot, and bacterial diseases, and has a reddish brown seed color. On the other hand, IT-18 could potentially yield 1510 kg/ha. It matures in about 92 days, is also tolerant of drought, leaf spot, and bacterial diseases, and has a brown seed color.

IT-04K-321-2 1460 takes about 94 days to mature, is tolerant of drought, leaf spot, and bacterial diseases, and has a white-colored seed with brown eye. Its yield potential is 1460 kg/ha.

IT-97K-390-2 could yield up to 1370 kg/ha. It takes about 92 days to mature, is tolerant of drought and leaf spot and bacterial diseases, with a reddish brown seed color.

IT-99K-494-4 has a yield potential of 1660 kg/ha, matures in about 94 days, is tolerant of drought, leaf spot, and bacterial diseases, and with a brownish seed.

All the released IITA cowpea varieties have protein content above 25%. They are yet to get their local names.



*A Swaziland farmer showing part of his harvest of cowpea (left) and soybean (right) to be used as seed in the coming planting season.*

## Congratulations, IITA is proud of you!



*Abebe Menkir.*

The Crop Science Society of America (CSSA) has conferred its prestigious fellow award on [Abebe Menkir](#), IITA Maize Breeder/Geneticist.

The award ceremony took place during the 2015 international annual meeting of the CSSA in Minneapolis, USA, on 17 November.

Menkir was selected among 10 other recipients by the members of the society, in recognition of his professional achievements and meritorious service to the society. These achievements

include Menkir's pioneering work and providing assistance to many maize breeding programs for more than 18 years at IITA.

He has also developed many high yielding, drought tolerant, pest and disease resistant as well as nutritious maize varieties that have significantly boosted the livelihoods of farmers and people in West and Central Africa.

Details of the awards are available on the CSSA [news page](#).

## Reviving IITA Onne station

Discussions about IITA's plan to revitalize its plantain breeding in the rainforest station in Onne, south Nigeria, was the center of a presentation delivered by [Rony Swennen](#), IITA banana Breeder, in Port Harcourt. Swennen disclosed this plan during his visit to the University of Port Harcourt for the first public lecture at the Institute of Agricultural Research and Development. The lecture was entitled "*The contribution of IITA plantain and cooking banana hybrids for food security in Africa*" and was presented to staff and students of the University on 18 November.

From 1976, IITA had operated at Onne --one of the major banana/plantain producing regions in West Africa. At the time, Swennen pioneered research and breeding programs that led to the development and distribution of improved, high yielding and [black Sigatoka](#) resistant plantain varieties to many countries across sub-Saharan Africa. These efforts significantly contributed to food security in the region and received international recognitions and awards, including the International King Baudouin Award of [CGIAR](#).

These research outcomes were, however, halted in 2005 due to the move of the plantain breeding



Courtesy Visit on UNIPORT Vice Chancellor by Rony. From left to right: Prof N.E.S. Lale, VC, UNIPORT; Prof Rony Swennen, IITA Scientist; Dr G.E. Omokhua, Director, IARD.

program to Cameroon and Ibadan, Nigeria. IITA realizes that Onne is unique for plantain breeding as seed production there is superior than in any other location.

IITA now plans to revive the station by establishing a center of excellence for banana breeding research and also train young researchers as well as recruit more youth from the south-south region into the IITA Agripreneur scheme that is also planned to be implemented at the station.

Swennen was received by Ndowa Lale, Vice Chancellor, UNIPORT. During the lecture, Swennen spoke extensively about IITA's banana/plantain breeding programs in recent times, and also highlighted steps being undertaken by management to ensure that the Onne station is fully operational by 2016.

This step is also part of efforts to implement the terms of the collaborative agreement with the University signed since February 2013.

## Still flying high

A short narrative highlighting the background, impression, and achievements of Charity Muteji, IITA's East Africa Aflasafe Project Coordinator, is currently being featured on the *Featured profile of the week* section of the modernizing African



food systems' [website](#).

Muteji was recognized as a role model for young women professionals in

agriculture and for her outstanding contribution towards the fight against aflatoxins and food safety in Kenya as well.

Muteji's brief has been available on the page since 8 December.

## Announcements

- **World Conference on Root and Tuber Crops;** Nanning, China, 18-23 January 2016.
- **7th International Conference of the Africa Soil Science Society;** Theme: Critical soil solutions for sustainable development in Africa. February 2016, Salle de Banquets in Ouaga 2000, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
- **Joint World Cowpea and Pan-African Grain Legume Research Conference 2016,** co-organized by IITA and the Feed-the-Future Legume Innovation Lab, Livingstone, Zambia, 28 February to 4 March 2016. For more information, visit the conference [website](#) or download the conference [announcement](#).
- **7th International Nitrogen Initiative Conference,** Melbourne, Australia 4-8 December 2016. More details on the conference are available [here](#).

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

# Climate proofing Uganda's agriculture sector strategic plan

Non-state actors in Uganda recently met to review the country's draft Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan (ASSP)-a five-year strategy document outlining the priorities and interventions for the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) from 2015/16 to 2019/20-to ensure it adequately addresses issues of climate change and food security.

The meeting was convened by the IITA-led Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) project in partnership with [Uganda National Farmers Federation \(UNFFE\)](#), [Agri-Pro Focus](#), [Participatory Ecological Land Use Management \(PELUM\)](#), [University of Oxford](#) and [Environment Management for Livelihood Improvement \(EMLI\)](#).



Participants deliberating during the workshop.

The goal of the two-day workshop, held in early November in Kampala, Uganda, was to raise awareness on the ASSP, and provide a platform for non-state actors to contribute and undertake a scenario-guided review of the ASSP.

The PACCA team with support from Lucas Rutting, a scenario and policy researcher at Oxford University, facilitated the process. While introducing Uganda scenarios to participants, Rutting said scenarios are not strategies but a tool for testing strategies. "It is important for the participants to understand it from the start," he said.

"Scenarios can be used to explore different directions of change in climate, markets, governance, and other key factors," Rutting said. "Through scenario testing, it is envisioned that the ASSP will be more robust in the face of future uncertainty, taking into account both climate change and socioeconomic developments."

PACCA seeks to link policies and institutions from national to local level for the adoption of climate resilient food systems in Uganda and Tanzania through the integration of the scientific community

with policy actors. It is a project of the CGIAR Research Program on [Climate Change and Food Security \(CCAFS\)](#).

During the two-day meeting, participants-using the four socioeconomic scenarios for Uganda developed at an earlier [workshop in February 2015](#) and with climate information, analyzed and reviewed the ASSP. They came up with recommendations to ensure that ASSP will be more robust/flexible in the face of future socioeconomic development, climate changes, and the complex interactions between them.

## Celebrating a day for soils

The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) commemorated the World Soil Day on 5 December with the theme "Soils: a solid ground for life".

At the FAO Headquarters in Rome, and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and in Bangkok, Thailand, the celebration of the World Soil Day and the closure of the International Year of Soils 2015 were observed on 4 December.

In a statement released to mark the celebration, Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, enjoined all to join efforts in the fight against soil depletion. He said that "The world's soils are rapidly deteriorating due to soil erosion, nutrient depletion, loss of soil organic carbon, soil sealing, and other threats, but this trend can be reversed provided countries take the lead in promoting sustainable management practices and the use of appropriate technologies".

He also added that "The Status of the World's Soil Resources produced by FAO's Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils brings together the work of some 200 soil scientists from 60 countries.

Its publication coincides with World Soil Day which is celebrated on 4 December and also the end of the UN International Year of Soils 2015, an initiative which has served to raise global awareness on what has been described as "humanity's silent ally".

"Let us promote sustainable soil management rooted in proper soil governance and sound investments. Together, we can promote the cause of soils, a truly solid ground for life," he ended.

A voluntary guideline for sustainable soil management has received support from the FAO council. To effect this, major activities have been planned for which IITA has also pledged support.

