



Rwandan High Commissioner to Nigeria visits IITA



His Excellency, Joseph Habineza (fourth from left) visits IITA HQ

The Rwandan High Commissioner to Nigeria, His Excellency Joseph Habineza on Thursday paid a courtesy visit to IITA. He was received by Dr Gbassey Tarawali, IITA Coordinator of the Cassava Enterprise Development Project,

on behalf of Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG Partnerships and Capacity Building.

Habineza made a tour of the campus including the Genetic Resources Center, Bioscience Center, cassava processing unit, and the pathology and virology labs.

His visit comes ahead of the planned meeting of donors and partners, including government representatives, that is scheduled in July.

He commended IITA's contribution to food security in Africa, adding that the time has come for Africa to take the bull by the horn by supporting the institute.

Habineza urged IITA to make available improved technologies and planting materials to Rwanda to help farmers in the country.

In his response, Tarawali commended Rwanda's interest in agriculture and in what IITA is doing.

He highlighted several projects including CIALCA that have benefited farmers in that country.

The visit gave the High Commissioner a better understanding of IITA's work in Africa.

IITA and SCCI train seed inspectors in managing cassava seed crops in Zambia

IITA, in collaboration with the Seed Control and Certification Institute (SCCI), recently trained a team of seed inspectors from Zambia on proper management of cassava seed crops to ensure the availability of clean planting material. This is part of efforts to control the spread of diseases and boost the crop's productivity in the country.

The training also initiated the review of the Zambian certification standards for cassava seed crop to update them and make them more comprehensive.

The training, attended by 17 seed inspectors, emphasized the management of cassava seed crops with a focus on cassava diseases and pests. It was held at the Natural Resources Development College in Lusaka on 23-26 April with resource persons from IITA, SCCI and Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI).

The training was officially opened by the Chief Seeds Officer, Mrs. Mable Simwanza, on behalf of the director of SCCI. In her opening remarks, she emphasized the importance of quality cassava planting materials and the need to have personnel on quality seed services. She thanked IITA for supporting the training activity and urged the participants to make full

use of the acquired knowledge in improving cassava productivity in the country.

This was reiterated by Dr Catherine Mungoma, SCCI Director during the closing program. She further urged the participants to make use of the valuable resources that IITA had put into the training to good use by practicing in the field what they have acquired.

Dr Pheneas Ntawurhunga, IITA Cassava Breeder based in Malawi, who coordinates the project, said that the training was timely and very important as it was the start of the partnership between IITA and SCCI in improving and strengthening the cassava system in the country.

He noted that the cassava strategy calls for the industrialization of the crop, and that this would not be possible unless the cassava seed system is functioning properly in the face of spreading diseases such as cassava mosaic and potentially the cassava brown streak.

The training balanced theory and hands-on practical sessions on cassava pest and disease identification, and general certification of cassava seed crops. It was conducted under the project titled "Mitigating Cassava Disease Threats for Improved Cassava Production in Zambia with a special focus on Eastern Province".



Participants at the training in Lusaka

IITA to backstop new food security project in East DRC

IITA, operating under the CIALCA platform, has started implementing a 3-year project to provide technical backstopping to a larger project of the Food for the Hungry (FH) in East DR Congo funded by the USAID-FPP (Food For Peace), which seeks to improve the food security and livelihoods of farmers by increasing the production of banana and cassava, their main staple crops.

The IITA component was launched in a planning meeting in Bukavu held on 28-29 May with the participation of project partners that include the national agricultural research systems and IITA staff from Kinshasa, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, and Bujumbura.

It will be implemented in three territories: Walungu in South Kivu and Moba and Kalemie in Katanga.

Activities include selecting resistant and high-yielding banana and cassava germplasm and setting up vegetative seed systems to improve the availability of



Tata Hangy, an IITA research associate based in Kinshasa, explains to FH and IITA/CIALCA colleagues on how to best approach cassava selection and multiplication at the FH multiplication site in Walungu, South Kivu

planting materials. Farmers will also be trained on improved crop management, processing, and storage. IITA will analyze the value chains and train farmers' groups in business planning and joint marketing.

IITA will also carry out diagnostic studies to quantify key crop constraints

and threats. Training will then be conducted targeting the high priority needs identified by the farming communities.

Emmanuel Njukwe, who is managing the project, emphasizes the increasing demand for technical backstopping in such large outscaling projects.

"These projects do not only provide an opportunity to spread IITA's technologies to a large number of farmers, but also allow us to directly learn from the farming community and outscaling to partners on what works, what doesn't, and what we need to work on more", says Njukwe.

"In recent discussions, some researchers and development officers have suggested that we need to move from 'research for development' to 'research in or through development.' This is one initiative that gives us an opportunity to do just that," says Piet van Asten who coordinates IITA's contributions to CIALCA.

IITA explores stronger links with Thailand

IITA and Thailand-based institutions—the Kasetsart University (KU), Bangkok and World Vegetable Centre (AVRDC) — are exploring areas of collaboration to improve food security.

Of interest to IITA is the strengthening of links with collaborators of a project on vegetable value chain that is also being implemented in Thailand and certain other African countries.

During a visit to Thailand, Dr Danny Coyne held discussions with officials from the Kasetsart University and AVRDC in this direction.

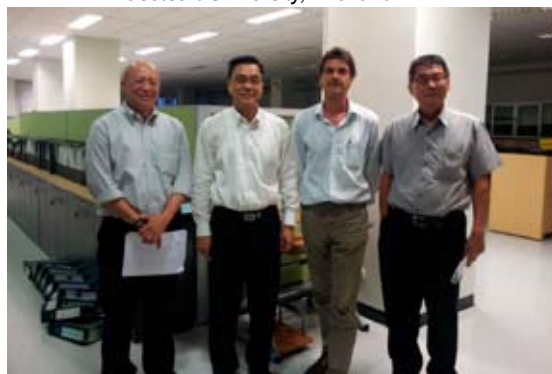
He was accompanied by his host, Buncha Chinnasri, Assistant Dean for International Affairs, KU; and a team member of the project.

The team met Robert Holmer, Regional Director of AVRDC situated at the university. Holmer expressed interest to work with IITA in the region on vegetable-related issues.

Coyne also met the Dean and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, KU, Vichan Vichukit and Yingyong Paisooksantivatana, who also expressed interest to extend links with IITA especially in their International Tropical Agriculture Program. Other areas of collaboration discussed included assessment of elite IITA cassava material and possible exchange of visits by professionals and students. "Such collaborative links may prove helpful for the CRP on Humidtropics: Integrated Systems for the Humid Tropics" says Coyne.

IITA has already had positive interactions with Thailand after assisting in the introduction and release of the cassava mealybug biocontrol agent, *Anagyris lopezi*, at the country's request.

The project on vegetable value chain is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).



Danny Coyne with hosts and partners, Kasetsart University, Thailand

Former IITA postdoc wins Hewitt award

Former IITA post doc, Peter Ojiambo, won the William Boright Hewitt and Maybelle Ellen Ball Hewitt Award.

Ojiambo was a postdoctoral fellow at IITA in Nigeria; he conducted multidisciplinary research on diseases of maize, cassava, banana, and soybean. He has contributed to a better understanding of the population structure, diversity, pathogenic variation, and epidemiological dynamics of *Phakopsora pachyrhizi* on soybean. He also published on the genetic diversity of *Mycosphaerella* species and resistance to those organisms in banana and plantain in Nigeria. He was a contributor to publications elucidating the potential of atoxigenic strains of *Aspergillus* species to serve as biocontrol agents for toxigenic *Aspergillus* species.

A native of Kenya, Ojiambo received a B.S. degree in agriculture with first class honors in 1994 and his M.S. degree in plant pathology in 1997, both from the University of Nairobi. He received his Ph.D. degree in plant pathology from the University of Georgia in December 2004. Following a 2-year postdoctoral fellowship at IITA in Ibadan, Nigeria, he was appointed as an assistant professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at North Carolina State University in 2007.

He continues to collaborate and publish on soybean rust with colleagues in IITA. Ojiambo serves on the Departmental Advisory Committee and teaches and mentors students. He is particularly active in the American Phytopathological Society, serving as a section chair on the Annual Meetings Board, and has previously served as vice chair and chair of the Epidemiology Committee. He currently serves as an editor of Plant Pathology.

Ojiambo's list of accomplishments is one of the most distinguished for an early career scientist. His program serves as a model for other young scientists working on plant disease control.

IITA welcomes new auditor

Taoheed Oladehinde Sikiru from Nigeria, has joined the Internal Audit Unit as an auditor effective 1 June.



He obtained Bachelor of Art (BA) in Arabic Studies from Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto in 2004; Master's in Business Administration from Bayero University, Kano in 2009; and another master's degree in International Affairs and Diplomacy in 2011 from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Sikiru is an Associate member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (2004).

He worked with Ahmed Zakari & Co. (Audit Firm) as a Senior Auditor between 2005 and 2007. He was the Internal Control Officer with Finbank Plc (Kano Branch) till 31st May 2012 when he joined IITA. Sikiru is a Nigerian. He is married with children.