



## IITA Board meets in Zambia; deliberates on strengthening institute in midst of CGIAR crises

From 4 to 6 May, the IITA Board of Trustees (BoT) as well as members of the Institute's Management and Directorate were in the picturesque town of Livingstone in southern Zambia for the first of their two annual meetings for 2015. Figuring prominently in their agenda were the current financial and governance crises within [CGIAR](#); these were outlined in the mid-term report submitted by the Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga, to the Board and circulated to IITA staff.

"For this meeting, we (the Board) mainly deliberated on strategies to strengthen IITA's position in the context of the finance and governance crises within CGIAR," said Dr [Bruce Coulman](#), BoT Chair. "Results of our discussions will be communicated to the general IITA community by DG Sanginga in due time."

However, Dr Ken Dashiell, Deputy Director General for Partnerships & Capacity Development, pointed to communication as a specific area that the BoT highlighted with regard to these strategies. "Time and again, during the course of discussions, the role of communication came out as a common salient point," Dr Dashiell said.

"The Board agrees that we need to trumpet our R4D successes more actively despite the crises in CGIAR. We



IITA BoT members with IITA management and directorate.

need to enforce our image and credibility as the lead international agricultural research institution in Africa that plods on, despite these challenges. This, then, would make our supporters see that investing in us is well worth it," he added. Dr Dashiell mentioned [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) and the [Business Incubation Platform](#) as examples of the many successes upon which the Institute must build.

Welcoming the IITA Board to Livingstone, Dr David Chikoye, Regional Director for Southern Africa, said, "It is good to have the Board here (again) in Zambia. This

is also a good opportunity to showcase Zambia – Livingstone in particular – as a prime destination, especially in the light of the conference that we will be holding here in 2016.

I am formally inviting the Board members and IITA Management to attend this event." Dr Chikoye was referring to the Global Cowpea and Legume Conference that IITA will be co-hosting in February–March 2016 in Livingstone. This will be an African signature event to mark 2016 as [International Year of Pulses](#), as declared by the UN.

## First banana hybrids bred in Arusha go for field trials

Three years after starting its activities, the IITA banana breeding team based in Arusha-Tanzania has planted its first banana hybrids for field evaluation. While this is a major milestone for the program, it also underscores the complexity and slow pace of banana breeding.

The program started its activities in Arusha in early 2011 after many years of [successful](#) banana breeding in [Nigeria](#) (for plantain) and [Uganda](#) (for



Dr Brigitte Uwimana, planting the hybrid banana in the trial field in Arusha.

matooke or highland cooking bananas) in collaboration with the [National Agricultural Research Organization \(NARO\)](#).

In Tanzania, the breeding is focusing on Mchare, an important group of cooking banana varieties in the Arusha-Kilimanjaro region and in other East African countries. This breeding program aims to develop Mchare banana varieties that are high yielding with resistance to [Fusarium wilt](#), a soil-

borne fungal disease that is attacking the crop in Tanzania. "This breeding program follows two main streams. One stream targets crosses to gather information to accelerate banana breeding. The other target crosses that aim at producing improved Mchare," said [Dr Brigitte Uwimana](#), the postdoc banana breeder based in Arusha.

"Banana breeding is a tedious undertaking, mainly because banana

are sterile and don't generally produce seeds (parthenocarpy). This makes the generation of new hybrids a challenge. These hybrids will be evaluated in the field and the best will be selected for further breeding Mchare banana," Brigitte explained.

The successful breeding of the new hybrids involves the selection of fertile parents, seed extraction, seed germination in the laboratory, and nursery management.

## IITA Cassava Weed Management Project holds Annual Review & Work Planning Meeting in Ibadan

Researchers, policymakers, and farmers working under the Cassava Weed Management [Project](#) met at IITA, Ibadan, 29-30 April, to review achievements made by the project in 2014 and to plan for 2015.

The meeting had 11 presentations covering the activities of the project in 2014 and provided a platform for stakeholders to compare notes and share lessons learnt.

Declaring the meeting open, Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG (Partnerships & Capacity Development), IITA, commended the project for its excellent implementation and encouraged partners to sustain the momentum and work together for the task ahead.

Prof [Lawrence Kent](#) cited the project team for meeting the milestones for the year.

"I was impressed when I read your report...you did exactly what you had promised in the work plan," Prof Kent said.

Prof Kent expressed his confidence in the leadership of Dr Alfred Dixon (Project Leader) and Prof Friday Ekeleme (Principal Investigator) and lauded the participatory management style and the transparency adopted by the project leadership. It had been a great motivation to the whole project team.

Earlier, Dr Dixon in his remarks, noted that the importance of the meeting could not be overemphasized for several reasons cutting across crop losses, low yield, and the negative health impact of weeds on farm families.

He said, "As we speak, there is a high probability that a child aged between 5 and 14 years is withdrawn from school to assist in weeding a cassava farm. If this is not happening, I can bet that many women are weeding cassava fields under duress. Because of prolonged bending to carry out hand weeding with hoe and cutlasses, most of these women end up having backaches. Also as we speak, several cassava farms are being abandoned because of weeds."

He called on the team to redouble efforts to help to solve the problem of the weed menace. For activities marked for 2015, participants at the meeting broke into four groups: Agronomy, Communication & Knowledge Exchange, Mechanical, and Herbicide Screening, and developed work plans. These were carefully reviewed during plenary sessions and then adopted.

The meeting had 64 participants from [IITA](#), National Root Crops Research Institute; Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta; University of Agriculture Makurdi; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; chemical companies – Bayer Crop Science and Syngenta; Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; regulators – Standards Organization of Nigeria, National Environmental Standards Regulatory Enforcement Agency, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, Nigerian Cassava Growers Association, Agricultural Development Programs; and the private sector.



Cassava Weeds Management Project workshop participants in IITA-Ibadan.

# Zanzibar's pilot seedling production unit revolutionizing vegetable production

There is a high demand for vegetables in the island of Zanzibar, known for its sandy beaches and historic Stone Town, but the local farmers are unable to effectively tap into this lucrative tourist market despite the fertile soils and an accommodating climate ideal for vegetable production. The majority of vegetables are imported, mostly from the mainland, at high cost.

A major challenge is that local vegetable varieties are low yielding and suffer from pest and disease attack. One project is working with smallholder farmers in Zanzibar for the safe production of vegetables, to tap into the market, increase their income, and contribute to lowering the price of vegetables for local consumers.

The project has linked up with the [Zanzibar Agricultural Investment and Development Inc. \(ZAIDI\)](#) and in cooperation with the [Tanzanian Agricultural Productivity Program \(TAPP\)](#) has piloted an innovative seedling production unit to deliver healthy seedlings of improved varieties to farmers.

It is encouraging farmers to grow high-yielding, improved vegetable varieties, and use good agricultural practices, particularly on reducing losses from pests and diseases. At the same time it is reducing farmers' reliance on synthetic pesticides.

The project, led by IITA, is funded by the German Government through the [German Society for International Cooperation \(GIZ\)](#) and the [Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development \(BMZ\)](#) and extends across coastal East Africa.

"Most farmers who grow vegetables do so mostly for home use and use small plots. They plant local seeds which they produce for themselves. The project aims to change the mindset of farmers towards vegetable farming, commercialize it, and tap into a ready market," says [Dr Danny Coyne](#), IITA soil health specialist and the project coordinator.

"Most farmers in Zanzibar produce their own seedlings using a small portion of the field for their nurseries; some cover them with mosquito nets to keep away pests. But a key threat comes from the soil—from soil-borne diseases and pests such as nematodes. We are therefore training farmers how to produce and handle the healthy seedlings," Danny says. "Healthy seedlings need less pesticide. This reduces costs and also makes the vegetables safer for consumers."

The pilot seedling production unit in Zanzibar was established in 2013 at ZAIDI,

using an [AMIRAN Farmers Kit](#)—a small plastic greenhouse. ZAIDI is growing seedlings, mostly tomato and pepper, using seedling trays and sterile media. When farmers purchase seeds at the ZAIDI store, they can choose whether to take the seeds away to plant directly or alternatively to pay an additional cost for ZAIDI to prepare the seedlings for collection when three weeks old. The seedlings are also enhanced with a biological treatment for protection against nematodes and other soil-borne diseases through a further collaboration with [Real IPM](#), a company based in Kenya producing biologically based pest management products. The site is also used for the demonstration of good farming practices.

"The demand for the healthy planting material is so high. We don't have enough seedlings to meet this demand. Currently we are selling healthy seedlings to about 20 farmers a month," says Abdullahi Yahie, the founder of ZAIDI.

Reaping rewards from using clean seeds Makame Hamis, 58, from Kitumba village, Central District, is one of the farmers growing the hybrid seeds purchased from ZAIDI. He has also received training on good farming practices to maximize his yield.

"I have been growing local varieties of tomato for three years. But now I am growing hybrid varieties which I bought from ZAIDI and I can see a big difference. Before, I would lose nearly half my plants to diseases but not anymore. Now my income has increased three times," Hamis said.

Encouraged by the good results, Hamis is expanding his vegetable production and investing in drip irrigation to ensure year-round production. The project has chosen him as a model farmer to demonstrate other improved farming practices and encourage surrounding farmers to use quality hybrid varieties and healthy seedlings.



Makame Hamis, from Kitumba village, Central District, shows the high yielding tomato on his farm.

Hamis Abdi Miraji, 63, and Ali Suleiman Ame, 52, are also good customers of ZAIDI. "We have received training from ZAIDI on the use of healthy seedlings, and safe use of pesticides. We have now seen that vegetable farming can be a good business. We can make money from it," says Miraji.

Challenges in supply of healthy seeds ZAIDI also faces many challenges but it plans to concentrate on the production and supply of clean healthy seedlings and support farmers in adopting better agricultural practices," says Abdullahi. "We see real potential to make a positive change in the lives of farmers in Zanzibar."

Many organizations have also seen the potential for vegetables in the island and are supporting the farmers and ZAIDI to increase production. These include the [Government of Zanzibar](#) and the Zanzibar Agricultural Research Institute. Soon, fresh vegetables will be more accessible to Zanzibaris. The hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit the island every year will be enjoying locally grown fresh vegetables, thus having more impact in the lives of the local communities and supporting the island's economy.



Danny Coyne (rightmost) and Abdullahi Yahie (left) in the ZAIDI store for agro-inputs in Zanzibar.

# Biofortified cassava and bean consumption boosted; HarvestPlus Director visits DRC

On Thursday, 30 April, Dr [Howarth Bouis](#), Director of HarvestPlus, visited Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The meeting brought together national and international partners working in the field of food security and nutrition to discuss the activities of [HarvestPlus](#) worldwide and in particular those executed in the DRC.

There were 40 participants in the meeting from the following institutions: the Prime Minister's office; National Seed Service, (SENASEM), National Institute of Agronomic Studies and Research (INERA), the secretary of Rural Development, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Smart Development Works, IITA, World Food Program, UNICEF, Mercy Corps, Catholic Relief Service, Helen Keller Foundation, and the international and local press.

The meeting talked about the [mission](#) and [activities](#) of [HarvestPlus](#) in DRC, which is to contribute not only to food security but also in the fight against malnutrition by promoting biofortified crops rich in vitamin A, iron, and zinc. During the meeting HarvestPlus emphasized the importance of capacity building for national services such as SENASEM, INERA, and other stakeholders, including local structures for the ownership and sustainability of activities for improving the livelihood of the Congolese people living in rural areas.



Dr Howarth Bouis (center) with the IITA team in Kinshasa.

Prior to this meeting, Dr Bouis, accompanied by Dr Antoine Lubobo and Ir. Sylvain Bidiaka, the Country Managers of HarvestPlus-DRC, was received at the Prime Minister's office, USAID, and the Canadian and Belgian cooperative projects in DRC to discuss the program and its future prospects.

In DRC, HarvestPlus is currently concentrating on cassava rich in vitamin A and beans rich in iron and zinc. The challenge is to improve the habits and mind set of Congolese citizens to consume not only the right quantity but also the right quality of food, especially with its food diversification strategy. These biofortified varieties of cassava and beans are registered in the national catalog published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Livestock. They are being spread among the beneficiaries in partnership with local organizations.

Biofortification is an integrated and multi-sector strategy for improving nutrition and well-being. It is a conventional method for improving plants without genetic manipulation to increase the micronutrient content in agricultural crops.

HarvestPlus is also a member of [CGIAR](#) and is coordinated by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture ([CIAT](#)) and the International Research Institute for Food Policy ([IFPRI](#)). In DRC, HarvestPlus activities carried out under cassava and maize are conducted in partnership with [IITA](#), INERA, and local universities.

## ICRISAT DG visits IITA Kano station

Dr [David Bergvinson](#), Director General of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid-Tropics ([ICRISAT](#)), visited IITA Kano station on 28 April to discuss further the prospects of scaling out improved agricultural technologies in Northern Nigeria and expanding the activities of ICRISAT in Nigeria with IITA as a partner.

The visit also provided a platform for Dr Bergvinson to learn and interact with ICRISAT scientists working at the Kano station.

Dr Bergvinson was received by Dr [Alpha Kamara](#), the Station Representative together with Mr Ado Rabo, the Station Administrator. "There has been a mutual relationship between IITA and ICRISAT for a long time now," said Dr Kamara while receiving the august visitor. "We share facilities and ideas and IITA has supported ICRISAT in many ways. However, for ICRISAT to achieve its goal of providing

useful solutions to many more farmers, it needs to deploy more scientists to Kano to create a critical mass of specialists who will complement each other in their work."

Dr Bergvinson gratefully acknowledged the support given by IITA in Kano. He also expressed ICRISAT's commitment to more collaboration. "ICRISAT is ready to work with IITA in the Tropical Legumes III project and to identify cross-cutting

projects that integrate all the mandate crops of the two institutions, given that farmers mostly grow all the crops at the same time," said Dr Bergvinson.

He further enjoined IITA to continue to work more closely with ICRISAT to strengthen the components of the CGIAR Research [Program](#) on Integrated Agricultural Production Systems for the Poor and Vulnerable in Dry Areas.



ICRISAT DG and his team in a meeting with IITA Kano station representatives.

# New Senior Program Officer of Gates Foundation visits YIIFSWA at IITA

On 30 April, [Lauren Good](#), the new Senior Program Officer from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) overseeing YIIFSWA, visited with the project implementers at [IITA-Headquarters](#) in Ibadan.

Dr Good spent a day with YIIFSWA's core team to learn about the project and its achievements so far. Good met with the Director for West Africa [Dr Robert Asiedu](#), Project Leader [Dr Norbert Maroya](#) and the other team members, including Drs [Beatrice Aighewi](#) (seed specialist), [Antonio Lopez](#) (yam breeder), [Morufat Balogun](#) (tissue culture specialist), [Djana Mignouna](#) (regional economist), [Katherine Lopez](#) and Owoja Odihi, (YIIFSWA Communication). Regina Kapinga, former program officer, Gates Foundation, and now IITA's new Head of Advocacy and Resource Mobilization, also attended the discussion.

The Senior Program Officer, only 11 days on the job, was shown the [aeroponics](#) and [bioreactor](#) systems for seed yam production, and the diagnostic tools for virus indexing and the quality management protocol for seed yam certification developed by the project.

According to Good, a key take-way from the visit was that through these innovations, the actors within the formal seed systems can rapidly develop and recommend new varieties and also boost the production of consumer-preferred varieties.



Dr Norbert Maroya shows yam plants grown in the screenhouse using the new technologies.

Although he was excited about the research novelties Good was also concerned about the impact of using these technologies on smallholder farmers. He was pleased to hear that new NGOs had been enlisted to help work with local communities based on the comment from the external reviewers about having 'more boots on the ground' to effectively facilitate the

dissemination and adoption of existing technologies among smallholder farmers in Ghana and Nigeria. This would help the project meet its goal of reaching 200,000 smallholder farmers in Ghana and Nigeria.

In the discussion with the project team, Good stated that 'his role as the Senior Program Officer is to support the Project Leader and the project to ensure its success, because the Foundation is concerned about making sure that farmers are producing better yam with better yield, and less problems with viruses and nematodes.

[Yam](#) plays a key role in ensuring food security and sustainable income generation for millions of smallholder farmers and their families in Ghana and Nigeria. However, the unavailability of quality seed tubers and the dominance of pests and diseases limit the smallholders' productivity. By using quality seed tubers, pest and disease management, and technological packages that would improve farm management, smallholder farmers can increase their current yield.



Lauren Good of the Gates Foundation listen as IITA staff explain the process of producing healthy seed yam.

# Welcome

Dr Ibrahim Baba Mohammed has assumed duty at the IITA-Kano Station as the Country Coordinator, Nigeria, for the project Transformation of agronomic research and delivery services for smallholder farmers in maize-based systems of sub-Saharan Africa. Dr Mohammed, from Nigeria, obtained his PhD (2006) and MSc (1994) degrees in Agronomy and a BSc degree in General Agriculture (1986) from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State.

Prior to his appointment, he was an Associate Professor at Bayero University, Kano State. He worked as a Senior Lecturer at the same university 2008-2011 and was with the Jigawa State College of Agriculture, 1988-2008.



He is married and has children. Contact details: [i.mohammed@cgiar.org](mailto:i.mohammed@cgiar.org); tel +234 8069242734

Dr Kolade Olufisayo Atinuke has been appointed in the Virology and Molecular Diagnostics Unit as a postdoctoral fellow (Yam Disease Phenotyping Specialist) under the project Africa Yam: Enhancing Yam Breeding for Increased Productivity and Improved Quality in West Africa.

She holds a PhD (2013) and an MSc (1995) in Genetics from the University of Ibadan and a BSc in Botany from the University of Ilorin (1989).

Prior to her appointment, she worked as a Research Administrative Manager with



the Africa Rice Center Ibadan station (2013-2015); and as a Research Assistant in AfricaRice, Cotonou, Benin Republic (2008-2013). She was a Research Associate at the Bioscience Center of IITA (2004-2008); Research Supervisor at the Cassava Breeding Unit (1994-2004); Research Supervisor at the then Tuber, Roots and Plantain Improvement Program, IITA (1990-1994) and was a youth corper (NYSC) (1989-1990).

She was a DSF fellow (BEST: Bourses d'échanges scientifiques et technologiques) at the Institute of Research and Development IRD, Montpellier, France (2011-2012 where she contributed to the research on the identification of a resistance gene to the Rice yellow mottle virus. She is presently an AWARD (African Women in Agricultural Research and Development) fellow.

She is a Nigerian and married with three children. Contact details: [o.kolade@cgiar.org](mailto:o.kolade@cgiar.org); Room 38, Building 400, ext. number - 2305.

## IITA to host AWARD Women's Leadership Program in June 2015

IITA is collaborating with African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) in hosting the [AWARD Women's Leadership and Management](#) course to be held in IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria in June.

IITA warmly invites participants from partner organizations, colleagues, and other interested parties. Reservation deadline is 5 June 2015. Click <http://bit.ly/1Cd7lz8> to view details on how to apply.



## Events

Training Workshop on Management Analyses of ISFM data, IITA Ibadan Nigeria, 25–29 May

Target participants: Representatives of the five Soil Health Consortia from Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria

SARD-SC Mid-Term Review Stakeholders Consultation Workshop Conference Center, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, 13–14 May

AfricaYam Inaugural Workshop, Mensvic Hotel, Accra, Ghana, 26–29 May

Tropentag 2015, Humboldt Universitaet zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany. 17–19 September

First World Congress on Root and Tuber Crops, Nanning, Guangxi province, southern China, 5–10 October

The 7th International Conference of the African Soil Science Society Announcement of Special Program: Soil Fertility Management for Sustainable Intensification in West and Central Africa, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 25 October – 1 November

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