



IITA chief calls for redoubling of efforts to save Africa from hunger, poverty

As nations across the globe prepare to mark another World Food Day on 16 October, IITA DG Dr Nteranya Sanginga has appealed to world leaders and other stakeholders to step up efforts to save Africa from the pangs of hunger and poverty.

Although progress has been made - thanks to improvements in agricultural productivity and renewed attention to agriculture - these are being threatened by a fast-growing population and degrading soils.

Addressing participants at the 21st Annual Congress of the Nigerian Rural Sociological Association (NRSA) held at the University of Ibadan that ended on 11 October, Dr Sanginga - who was

represented by Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG for Partnerships & Capacity Building - said that challenges to wealth creation, food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable management of natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) were on several fronts.

For instance, Africa's population growth remains high compared to other regions in the world (2.4% in SSA) against 1.3% in non-African countries.

In addition, the urban population is rapidly growing, putting pressure on the rural areas to produce more food. There is also the problem of depletion of soil nutrients, which if left unchecked, could be catastrophic. Furthermore, destructive agricultural practices along

forest margins in Africa aggravate deforestation.

"While food security is a huge and increasing challenge, production per unit area has not increased as elsewhere in the world, and increments in total production have come at the expense of the natural resource base," he said.

"Clearly, there is much work to be done in sub-Saharan Africa," he added.

"Africa needs to adopt sustainable intensification of agricultural production practices that conserve and recycle soil nutrients and reduce the need for clearing new lands."

"Besides agricultural productivity, food availability, and food safety, he stressed that the sector's overall performance must all be increased against a growing and larger, more urban population, effects of changing climate, increased demand for energy, disease pandemics, rural-to-urban migration, and, in some cases, civil strife.

He commended the renewed attention to agriculture by African leaders which is producing positive results, and urged for more commitment of resources to the sector.

To this end, the DG pledged IITA's continued commitment to work with various partners to improve livelihoods of farmers in Africa.



DDG-PCD Dr Dashiell with participants of the 21st Congress of the NRSA held at University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Institute bids Jim Lorenzen farewell

Amidst toasts and addresses by colleagues and friends, IITA has bid farewell to Jim Lorenzen, IITA Banana Breeder, who has left the institute to join the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as senior program officer. Lorenzen joined IITA in 2007 and was initially based in Uganda. He later relocated to Arusha.

The ceremony was held at a cocktail reception at the Ngurdoto hotel in Arusha during the Africa RISING planning workshop (see related story in next page).

DDG-PCD Dr Kenton Dashiell, on behalf of the institute's management, thanked Jim for his dedication and his work at IITA.

"Jim is a real gentleman, very respectful, and a great team player", Dr Dashiell said. "Although I am sad that he is going, I am also happy for him to be going to a great institution," he added.

"We wish you success in your new career and we hope that you still continue to be a friend of IITA."

R4D Director for East Africa, Victor Manyong, said Lorenzen did a great job as head of the institute's banana program. He also wished him and his family well as they move back to the United States.

In response to the toasts, Lorenzen said that he enjoyed his time at IITA, and that he was sad to be leaving his IITA family. He urged management to quickly fill in the two vacant positions for banana breeders to continue with the work he had started.



Dr Dashiell bidding Dr and Mrs Lorenzen farewell as Dr Manyong Looks on.

Africa RISING charts way forward to boost productivity of smallholder mixed-farming growers in ESA



The Africa RISING East and Southern Africa team during the planning workshop in Arusha, Tanzania.

Partners in an ambitious 4-year project that seeks to improve the livelihood of farmers in the sub-regions through better and more efficient integration of crop and livestock in their farms, met in Arusha, Tanzania from 1 to 5 October to develop a strategic roadmap for the initiative.

The project, Africa Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation – nicknamed Africa RISING – funded by USAID as part of the US Government’s Feed the Future global food security initiative was launched early this year and is being implemented in maize- and rice-based mixed farming systems in East and Southern Africa and in the Guinea Savannah of West Africa, and in the Ethiopian Highlands.

IITA coordinates the East, Southern, and West Africa components while ILRI leads the Ethiopia arm.

Speaking at the meeting, Dr Ken Dashiell, DDG for Partnership and Capacity building noted that the initiative was very important for smallholder farmers due to the integrated approach and strong partnership.

“We are not just talking about cassava, beans or maize individually. We are looking at them as a system and how they interact with each other and how best to boost production for the entire system. We are not bringing in new technologies - we are merely putting together technologies that we currently have in a systematic manner.

That is what makes Africa RISING unique,” he said.

Jerry Glover, USAID Activity Manager for the program, added that Africa RISING is a complex project. “We want to increase the productivity of smallholder farms while avoiding undesirable impacts on the environment usually associated with it. We want to use science to bring about a new green revolution but without the environmental blowback,” he said.

Africa RISING kicked off in East and Southern Africa with 11 “jumpstart” projects that explored options for sustainable agriculture intensification and identified current best farming practices as well as challenges. Some of the issues being addressed include farmers’ access to and use of fertilizers and improved seeds, gaps in the current seed systems, food safety and nutrition, post-harvest handling and processing, and markets.

Dr Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon, Coordinator of the IITA-led component of Africa RISING, said the issues identified by the jumpstart projects were used as basis to develop a thorough research framework and establish strategic partnerships.

Prof Mateete Bekunda, the project’s Chief Scientist for East and Southern Africa based at IITA’s office in Arusha, added that Africa RISING brings together a rich mix of development and research partners – from key government entities to national and international agricultural research institutions, universities, and the private sector.

Asiedu, Tarawali address Niger State Council

IITA Director for West Africa, Dr Robert Asiedu, and Dr Gbassey Tarawali, Coordinator of IITA’s Cassava Enterprise Development Project, on 10 October addressed the Niger State council, comprising the state Governor, Chief Servant, Dr Mu’azu Babangida Aliyu; and members of the State Executive Council. The presentations by Drs Asiedu and Tarawali highlighted areas of opportunity that Niger could tap by partnering with IITA.

Dr Aliyu, who was clearly impressed by the presentations, directed the constitution of a 3-member committee to work with IITA and develop an accelerated agricultural road map for the state. He underscored the importance of agriculture, saying that it is a major tool against not only poverty but also social insecurity.

“Twenty years ago, Nigerians committing suicide attacks were unheard of. But today this is happening and the underlying factor is poverty. So we need to tackle it and agriculture is one of the tools we will use,” he said.

The governor reaffirmed that agriculture was a top priority for his government, stressing that it has the potential of creating both jobs for the youths and wealth in local communities, and providing meals on the table.

He also said that his state would want to tap into IITA’s 45-year expertise in the sector. The Niger State council was particularly impressed with IITA’s value chain approach to agricultural commodities.

Located in the Southern Guinea Savannah of Nigeria, Niger state hosts IITA-Mokwa station and has excellent potential for cassava, maize, yams and soybeans.



L-R: Governor Mu’azu Babangida Aliyu (far left), Dr Asiedu, Dr Tarawali, and Godwin Atser during Asiedu’s presentation in the Niger State Council Chamber.

Save electricity, help the environment.

YIIFSWA holds first annual planning meeting in Ghana...

On the third week of September, YIIFSWA hosted its implementation partners and technical advisers in Ghana for its first annual progress review and planning meeting, during which they deliberated on the project's progress and the way forward for its second year of implementation.

Gracing the event were Dr Namam Tay Dziedzoave, Director of the Food Research Institute of Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Dr Regina Kapinga, Senior Program officer for the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation (BMGF), and Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA R4D Director for East Africa.

In his welcome remark, Dr Asiedu made reference to an old Ghanaian adage, stating that "if an event was going to be great, you would notice it at the early stages. I see all the signs," he said, adding that "and there are many good signs of progress in the project."

"Yam is a key commodity crop for West Africa and as the only project on yam the Foundation has high expectations for the

YIIFSWA," Dr Kapinga said. "Although there is still commitment for the crop, the YIIFSWA must beef this up and show why yam is the best crop that would generate income for the poor, especially women, and that it could feed the West African community."

Dr Dziedzoave welcomed the YIIFSWA team to Ghana on behalf of the CSIR Director. In his keynote address, he stated that "in pursuit of the objectives set for the program, it is important to be more impact-oriented than activity driven."

"CSIR, as the lead research institute in Ghana, recognises the impact of research on economic development," he added. "All the stakeholders of the project are looking for impact while donors



The YIIFSWA Project team at the planning and review workshop in Ghana.

look for value for their investments. Government, on the other hand, will be assessing the economic progress derived from the project that impact national development."

"I believe in the competency of the institutions and individuals constituting this project in delivering its objective of bettering the lives of yam farmers in West Africa," he concluded.

...as project partners visit Kokomba Market in Accra

At the end of their four-day planning and review workshop, YIIFSWA partners visited the regionally renowned Kokomba market to gain better perspective of the yam market in Ghana.

The market is a principal corridor for yam farmers and marketers. Ware yams from different production zones are collected, graded, and distributed to terminal markets for final sale. Some are also exported to neighbouring countries in West Africa and to the growing African population in Europe and the Americas.

Participants to the field exposure trip were particularly excited to see the volume of trade of ware yams in the market. Amidst the chaos in the market, the YIIFSWA partners met with members of the Kokomba's market association. Dr. Norbert Maroya, YIIFSWA Coordinator, introduced the project, saying that it encompassed all aspects of the yam value chain and production system and provides options to improve the



A marketer stacking a cart full of yam for transport to other markets.

livelihood of yam farmers and marketers. He also indicated that YIIFSWA is an impact-driven program and, therefore, values the input of value chain players

such as the market association to achieve its goals.

In response, the market association members voiced the challenges they usually encounter, most important of which included poor yields, pest and diseases, transportation cost or lack of adequate transportation, poor roads, and uncoordinated market information. All these, they said, limited the yam production sector's development. They also appealed for YIIFSWA's help in finding a solution to the yam-eating beetle infestation that has recently occurred on their farm lands and storage barns, as well as linking them to other urban and global markets.

They indicated that a lot has been done for other crop like maize but little has been done for yam, and they are hopeful that YIIFSWA will help change this situation.

IARSAF greens IITA-Ibadan lakeside

The International Association of Research Scholars and Fellows of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IARSAF-IITA) conducted a tree planting activity on Tuesday, 9 October.

The purpose of the activity was to show appreciation to IITA for their support to IARSAF and to make a positive contribution to the

environment.

Present at the occasion were Zoumana Bamba, Head of the Capacity Building Unit, and Lola Idowu.

Fifty seedlings of five best-suited tree species were planted at the lake side near the stables. IARSAF members promised to continue to find more activities to contribute to the development of IITA.



IARSAF members and guests during the tree planting activity at the IITA-Ibadan lake side.

Stories of change: MIRACLE and Jacob's trials

In many places in Africa, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) are still often stigmatized and marginalized by society. While the disease may make HIV-positive individuals less productive, the social stigma associated with the disease has more far-reaching effect. PLWHAs usually withdraw from society and interact less. However, initiatives like MIRACLE can help reverse the situation by providing an enabling environment where PLWHAs can become highly productive and even serve as community models.

Take the case of Jacob, a 42-year old small-scale farmer of Mibenge agricultural camp in Mansa District, Luapula Province in Zambia, and a living testimony of rising above the stigma. In his younger days, Jacob used to drink and smoke heavily. Then in 2005, he suddenly became seriously ill. He was rushed to a hospital where doctors diagnosed him to be HIV-positive. Noticing his confusion and shock, the doctors directed him to the Network of Zambian People Living with HIV&AIDS (NZP+) for counselling.

Initially he kept his condition from his wife, 32-year old Generous. He took antiretroviral therapy (ART) secretly for one year. However, as he became weaker and unable to do any farm work, he opened up to his wife. With Jacob's encouragement, Generous went for a test, turning out to be HIV positive as well. Saddened but still firm, the couple decided to have their children tested. They were all negative.

From 2006 onwards, Jacob mainly stayed at home, feeling weak and tired. "I seldom talked to people because my entire family was shunned and discriminated", he said.

"At that time, my wife was physically stronger than me so she was the one who went to look for food. We managed to eat at least once a day."

Then in 2011, the IITA-led MIRACLE project came to Mansa District. Initially, Jacob did not attend any of the project's sensitization meetings in his community, largely because he was still ashamed of his condition.

Knowing Jacob's situation and that of his family, Mr. Gift Mutale, the agricultural camp extension officer of Mibenge, approached him and discussed the MIRACLE project.

"The only thing I understood at that time was that MIRACLE would want to help farming households affected by HIV/AIDS", Jacob said. Mr. Mutale was able to encourage Jacob to participate in MIRACLE, albeit reluctantly.

Jacob agreed to host one of the four baby trials for soybean varieties. As a host, he participated in a number of innovation platform workshops, meetings, and training sessions on running and managing soybean baby trials. This gave him the opportunity to extensively interact with fellow farmers and extension workers. During project field days, hundreds of farmers, community leaders, government extension workers, NGO staff, private sector, and even some District Officials came to visit Jacob's trials were invited to visit and learn from the trials, including his.

"I couldn't believe it. I was like a teacher telling people how to grow soybean," he enthused.

From that point, Jacob's behaviour and outlook started to change. He slowly regained self-confidence. He started to mingle more with people – first with his immediate neighbours and moving outwards to the community. In the first quarter of 2012, he was invited to participate in a number of training of trainers (ToT) on nutrition education and on fruit and vegetable processing in Lusaka. Eventually, Jacob became part of the team that conducted the same

training in his community.

"I felt very proud that MIRACLE picked me to be trained, and now I am training my fellow farmers, even those who used to despise me and my family. It felt wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"If the MIRACLE project hadn't come to my community I honestly do not know what could have happened to me and my family," he stressed. "These days, I feel stronger. I go to work in the farm almost every day. I can now do many things that I was not able to do 5 to 6 years ago. I am now socializing with the entire community. Many have come to me to ask how I was able to cope. They said I looked happier than ever."

"Those who used to denounce me are the same people who have come to ask for advice. I and my wife have become sort of counsellors and a source of motivation to other people in this community," he narrated.

Two months ago, Jacob was elected Chairman of his community's Village Committee on HIV and AIDS, a committee set up to handle programs and activities related to the disease. "Today, people here are no longer afraid to openly admit that they are HIV-positive", he said. "Just recently, the District Agriculture Office of Mansa also came to ask me for soybean seeds for the District Agricultural Show, which I proudly shared because that was a proof that I am now able to produce," he raved.

Jacob recounted that when the project was first introduced in his community people had second thoughts of joining because, he said, joining was tantamount to admitting that you are HIV-positive.

"Today, people like me are no longer ashamed of who and what we are. I am no longer a victim," he concluded.



Zoumana Bamba

IITA welcomes Mr Zoumana Bamba, new Head of Capacity Development Unit

Mr Zoumana Bamba has joined IITA-Ibadan as the Head, Capacity Development Unit. Mr. Bamba is a Burkina Faso citizen. He has Msc in Information Science from the University Montreal, Canada in 1989. He obtained Diploma in Information Management from University of Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal in 1979.

Prior to his appointment, Mr Bamba was the Knowledge Management and Grants Officer at International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) based in Italy from 2009 to 2012. He was the Chief Information Resources Center at the same organization between 2003 and 2008. Before joining IFAD, he worked as the Outreach Officer at Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), Canada from 1999 to 2003.

He is accompanied by his wife Anta and his youngest son Idriss. He resides at No. 4 Tropical Crescent. His office extension is 2614, and he may be contacted at z.bamba@cgiar.org.