

Governor of South Kivu, DRC, thanks IITA for its development efforts in the country

His Excellency, Governor Marcelin Chishambo Ruhoya of South Kivu in DR Congo, has praised IITA's efforts to support development in his region and country and assured the Institute of his government's support of its activities. He said he was especially happy with the decision to set up a new science building in the province which is scheduled to be launched in June 2014.

IITA is a friend, he said, and the repairing of the road to the Station was a clear demonstration of his government's desire to collaborate with the Institute.

The Governor was speaking at a dinner he hosted at his residence on 10 January 2014 for the IITA DG who was in the country on an official visit. It was attended by the Provincial Ministers of Agriculture, Health, and Budget, other aides to the Governor, and others.

On his part, the IITA DG thanked the Governor for granting him an audience earlier in the day and for his continued assistance and generous support to the IITA Station. He recalled how the two of them had nurtured the idea of establishing a science

laboratory in Kalambo (to be known as "Science for Peace" building) in 2004 while the DG was the Director of International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and the Governor was a State Advisor.

The DG further commended the Governor for facilitating the execution of the project and for supporting the expansion of the station and construction of a Science Building. The DG also seized the opportunity to inform the aides of the governor of the plans to commission the IITA Kalambo Science Building on 5 June 2014.

He said that the launch would attract Heads of States and top government functionaries and representatives of donor agencies and international organizations in the region and that the IITA Ambassador for Africa, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo would attend.

He added that the Station will have cassava processing facilities so that farmers will have the opportunity to learn how to derive more benefits from cassava production.

"Apart from *ugali*, a popular cassava food in the region, there are more than 27 food products from cassava, well known for their nutritional value and marketability", he said.



The Governor of South Kivu during the dinner he hosted in honor of IITA DG at his residence

DG Sanginga was accompanied to the dinner by Chris Okafor the Officer in Charge of IITA Kalambo and Musendeeq Oyedeji, one of the IITA engineers working at the site.

Tanzania takes first steps towards initiating a Youth Agripreneurs program

IITA Tanzania will soon start own its youth agribusiness program that aims at equipping young, unemployed men and women with agriculture and business skills to encourage them to set up their own agribusiness or increase their employment

opportunities in agriculture and research. This is part of the Institute's effort to tackle the high unemployment rate, one of the main development challenges in Africa, and a general lack of interest in agriculture by young people.

Currently, several students from the University of Sokoine in Tanzania who finished their internship at the Institute but asked to stay on as volunteers have expressed their interest in such a program. The youth also met the IITA DG in December, while he was on an official visit in the country, and he briefed them on the Agripreneurs program in Nigeria. He also assured them that IITA was very keen on establishing such programs across all its hubs in Africa to create employment opportunities for Africa's youth.

"It's a good start. We are exploring how to establish a youth agripreneurs program in Tanzania under the SARD-SC project and around the cassava value chain modeled along the one in Ibadan," said Abass Adebayo, IITA value chain specialist under whom the students interned and are now volunteering. They were involved in efforts to develop the cassava value chain in the country.

Adebayo said the Institute was also currently working with a group of youth in Kigoma region, named Big Power Group, who have 30 ha of land and were engaged in growing and processing cassava.



DG Sanginga (centre) poses for a group photo with the staff and youth volunteers at IITA Tanzania in Dar es Salaam.

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DG meets staff of IITA Kalambo, Bukavu, DR Congo



IITA DG and the Director for Central Africa addressing the staff at IITA Kalambo station

During his official tour in DR Congo, the IITA Director General, Nteranya Sanginga, met with all the staff and students of the Kalambo Station on 9 January 2014. He was accompanied by Bernard Vanlauwe, the Director for the Central African Hub; Jacqueline Musiimenta, the Finance Officer;

and Linda Wangila, the Hub Administration Assistant based in Nairobi, and Quader Waheed and Oyedeji Musendeeq from Ibadan.

Giving a brief history of the station, the DG said the idea for the station was conceived 10 years ago while he was a Director at the

International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). He was happy and excited that the Station would be now officially commissioned under his leadership in 2014.

He said the event would attract Heads of State in the region including the IITA Goodwill Ambassador for Africa, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, top government functionaries, and the donor community. He therefore urged all staff to give their best and ensure the success of the event.

He further encouraged both staff and students to take advantage of opportunities available at the IITA Capacity Development Unit to advance their professional careers and academic interests.

Also addressing the staff and students, Vanlauwe added that the event would be a golden opportunity to explain to the host country, DR Congo and Africa in general on how IITA could contribute to efforts towards reducing poverty and food and nutritional insecurity in the region. He said during the event, both scientists and students would be given the opportunity to present their work and future plans.

IITA-Kalambo Station Celebrates Christmas and Year-End 2013

On 23 December 2013, IITA-Kalambo held a Christmas and year-end party to celebrate Christmas and reflect on its achievements over the year. The event which was held in collaboration with CIAT and Biodiversity International was attended by staff and their families.

The event was geared towards improving relationships among the staff for effective team work and collaboration and for their families to get to know each other and exchange Christmas and new-year wishes.

The CIAT Coordinator and Country Manager of HarvestPlus, Antoine Lubobo, gave the opening remarks and welcomed all the families to the event while the Officer-in-Charge of IITA-Kalambo, Chris Okafor, made the closing remarks. Okafor, accompanied by his wife, thanked all staff for their diligence, dedication, and contributions to the success of the Station.

“This is the first time that CIAT, Bioversity, and IITA staff are celebrating together. This goes to strengthen the fact that we are a family and I am convinced that the next year will be more even more successful,” Okafor noted.

Also during the event, the Most Valuable Colleague (MVC) of the Year among the nationally recruited staff at IITA and CIAT, as voted by their colleagues, were recognized and given appreciation plaques and gifts. The winners were Ghislain Kakule, IITA Station Accountant, and Elise Mundwanga, CIAT Research Assistant.

Two children of staff members—Kaambira Hense and Mugaruka Regie—who were successful in the IITA Women’s Group 2013 Scholarship scheme also received their award certificates at the event.



Okafor (in a hat) poses for a group photo with the winners of IITA Women Group scholarships for 2013 and their families



Okafor (in a hat) poses for a photo with the winners of the Most Valuable Colleague (MVC) of the Year (to his immediate right) IITA’s Ghislain Kakule and CIAT’s Elise Mundwanga.

Giant strides in IITA plantain breeding for West Africa



Amah during her contract review seminar

IITA has made significant progress in its plantain research in West Africa with the generation of seedlings from crosses with in vitro induced tetraploids from diploids—a first for the Institute.

The IITA Regional Banana Breeding Manager, Delphine Amah, who supervised execution of the crosses in IITA-Ibadan, said the crosses were vital for plantain improvement in West Africa in the years ahead.

Delivering her contract review seminar titled: Support to Banana and Plantain Breeding—Updates on West Africa, Amah said the Banana Unit had recorded giant strides in the recent years.

For instance, as part of a revised pre-breeding strategy to produce improved parents while shortening the breeding cycle for plantain, the unit was now

producing tetraploids which have four sets of chromosomes from diploids (which have two) using optimized in vitro doubling techniques.

In addition, tissue culture techniques have been employed to generate seedlings from crosses through embryo culture and mass propagation of plants for clonal evaluation.

The unit is also promoting the use of macropropagation and field propagation techniques for the production of clean planting material and good agronomy practices.

So far, Amah and her team have produced and distributed thousands of *Agbagba* plantain plantlets to the IITA farm unit and Youth Agripreneur project for propagation and distribution.

Furthermore, they have established pollination blocks with female fertile plantain landraces and *Black Sigatoka* resistant tetraploid plantain hybrids for accelerated breeding.

The team has established recently imported *Musa acuminata* ssp. *banksii* accessions for evaluation and use as parents in crosses to breed for plantains with high provitamin A content.

They have also established a propagation scheme for the production of plantlets for pollination blocks and planned trials to enable registration of new IITA hybrids.

All these activities are aimed at rejuvenating plantain breeding in IITA for efficient delivery of improved varieties to farmers, she said.

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He also noted several leaders in the country had requested for IITA's support in engaging the youth in agriculture including the Regional commissioners for Coast and Kigoma regions.

"We will work with these leaders in developing programs to involve youth in agriculture where we will train and support them to carry out modern agriculture".

One of the volunteers is Gaspa Audifas, 25, who graduated from the University of Sokoine in Food Science. He says he is very interested in such a program following the briefing of IITA's DG on the progress made by the youth in Nigeria.

"There are many opportunities for the youth in agriculture. We just sometimes lack the knowledge and even faith in ourselves. Therefore such a program that will give us the skills to help us to put into good use the knowledge we gained in school, and not necessarily wait to be employed, will be very important for Tanzania where unemployment is very high" he said. "There are very many unemployed graduates roaming the streets. There is no difference between them and those who are not educated!"

IITA hosts party for staff and their families in Tanzania

IITA ended its rather eventful year in Tanzania on a high note with an end-of-year party for all its staff and their families in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The annual event was held at the Kunduchi Beach Hotel and was packed with lots of fun activities and games allowing the staff and family members to interact and get to know each other better in an informal setting.

While addressing the staff and their family members, Victor Manyong, the Director for Eastern Africa thanked them for all their support and hard work that saw a very successful year for the hub.

He highlighted one of the key events in the year as the very successful launch of the Science Building in May that was attended by high-level policy makers in the region

including presidents and ministers, donors, and the private sector. He said the success of the event had led to the selection of IITA Tanzania as the venue for the CGIAR Board meeting in March 2014. He also noted the hub had increased in staff and in the number of new projects.

He called upon everyone to work together

towards supporting the Institute to achieve its goal of helping smallholder farmers in Africa.

Manyong also presented a long-term service award to Sophia Swai who had been with the Institute for 12 years. Presents were also given to the winning teams in the different games and activities for the day.



Manyong (second left) presents a gift to Sophia Swai (extreme right) in recognition of her 12 years of service to IITA



Children of staff prepare to compete in a sack race

IITA steps up capacity building efforts in Tanzania



A group photo of the participants of the SAS training

Two one-week trainings took place at IITA-Tanzania as part of efforts to build the capacity of its staff and those of partners to improve the quality of its research for better impact. One of the trainings focused on use of Statistical Analysis System (SAS) to manage and analyze different types of data including experimental and socioeconomic data while the second was on Real-Time PCR.

The SAS training, conducted by Sam Ofodile and Yemi Oluwasoga, from

Ibadan Nigeria, brought together 32 participants. They were drawn from both national and international IITA staff and from partner institutions—the Sugarcane Research Institute (SRI) Kibaha as well as MSc and PhD students from Sokoine University of Agriculture and Mandela University. Two PhD students also came from Nairobi.

The training covered the different analysis models for different study designs. The SAS software was installed on each participant's laptop with a one-year license provided

by the IITA Biometric Unit to enable participants to access it.

The training was officially opened by Edward Kanju on behalf of the Director for the Eastern Africa Hub who welcomed all the participants and noted that the training was long overdue. The training was officially closed by Abass Adebayo, also on behalf of the Director for Eastern Africa. He thanked the training facilitators for a job well done and urged participants to use the gained skills to improve their data analysis and paper publications.

Real-Time PCR training

The second training was conducted for the staff of the Molecular Biology Laboratory at the hub and was conducted by Rudolph Shirima, a research associate under the Virology and Vector Ecology department of IITA Eastern Africa Hub.

The training was organized by IITA under the auspices of the Cassava Varieties and

Clean Seed to combat CBSD and CMD (5CP) project. Its objective was to equip the trainees with the knowledge and skills to operate and use real-time PCR to diagnose viruses in cassava. The training also covered sample collection and management for diagnostics.



Shirima shows the trainees how to detect cassava brown streak viruses (CBSVs) using real time PCR

Upcoming events

Central Africa Hub

Recovering banana production in Banana Bunchy Top Disease (BBTD) affected areas—community and farm household approaches, 20–25 January 2014, Bujumbura, Burundi

Eastern Africa Hub

Second meeting of the project on “Controlling diseases in sweet potato and enset in South Sudan and Ethiopia to improve productivity and livelihoods under changing climatic conditions”, 20–24 January 2014, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

RTB Postharvest project meeting on “Driving livelihoods improvement through demand-driven interventions for competitive production and processing of RTBs”, 21–22 January, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

West Africa Hub

The Sixth Reunion of IITA Alumni will be held from 12 March to 15 March, 2014, Ibadan, Nigeria