

IITA and ministry of youth & sports explore partnership on youth-in-agriculture program in Zambia

Ranking officials of Zambia's Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) led by the Permanent Secretary (PS) Agness M Musunga were at the IITA-Zambia Hub office in Lusaka yesterday, 19 March, to discuss possible collaboration in a program to actively engage the country's youth in agriculture.

Accompanying PS Musunga were Mr Raphael Mulenga, Chief Sports Development Officer, and Ms Grace Zimba, Senior Accountant. They were received by Dr David Chikoye, IITA's Director for Southern Africa; Dr Pheneas Ntawuruhunga, Cassava Breeder; Dr Nhamo Nhamo, Cassava Agronomist and coordinator of the Zambia Agripreneurs Program (ZAP); and Mr Jeffrey Oliver, Regional Communication Officer.

Dr Chikoye briefed the visiting group about IITA, focusing on the budding Youth-in-Agriculture Program in Zambia. "ZAP is basically still in its initial stage. Your visit comes at a most opportune time as we are building the partnerships needed to push this initiative forward," he said.

He further explained that the initiative was part of an umbrella program called IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA) that was started three years ago in Nigeria. IYA aims to tackle youth unemployment and the need to improve food security through increased agricultural

production—objectives that, Dr Chikoye explained, ZAP also aims to achieve.

"The MYS will definitely play a critical role in this effort," he emphasized.

Dr Nhamo said, "Just 2 weeks ago in Livingstone, we coorganized a meeting-workshop with the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA) during which we brought together various stakeholders, including youth groups, to enlighten them about ZAP and come up with a draft implementation strategy."

For the MYS, PS Musunga said that her ministry had already started on a similar program. She explained: "On a 3,000-hectare resettlement scheme in Mwange, Mporokoso District, in the Northern province, we have established a youth resource and training center for young Zambians from within the district and adjacent areas on different aspects of crop production and utilization."

"The basic infrastructure is already there. MYS is putting in resources to rehabilitate and upgrade some of the facilities, such as faculty buildings, schools, and hostels to cater for the trainees."

"We currently have about 100 young people at the resource center being trained on

soybean production. We aim to increase the number to 500. We then plan to give 5 hectares to each successful trainee within the resettlement area to develop, with support, of course," the PS continued.

"To better ensure the success of the program, we want to expand into cassava production and, possibly, processing. And this is where we need your help. The people that we had previously talked to, and who referred us to you, said that IITA was the best in this regard," she added.

The PS said, "For now, we need planting materials of improved cassava varieties, as well as training on good cultural and management practices."

Dr Ntawuruhunga replied, "In Zambia, we have released seven improved varieties of cassava, so you have a choice depending on the qualities that you want or the intended use. Planting materials for these varieties are readily available. We can also provide clean (disease-free) planting materials for your use."

"Apart from providing improved cassava seeds and training the youth in planting and maintaining them, IITA could also help MYS to establish a seed multiplication system at the training center to generate the needed number of planting materials, as well as providing the necessary training."

"Additionally, we could offer to train the youth in Mwange on cassava processing such as producing starch using simple mechanized equipment; and in producing various cassava-based food products such as bread and confectionary," Dr Ntawuruhunga added.

"It's been really good to have this exploratory talk with IITA," said PS Musunga. "On behalf of the ministry, I am inviting you to come and visit our youth resource center in Mwange so you can suggest what we could do to further improve the program."

"I am very excited about this potential partnership to get the Zambian youth actively engaged in agriculture for their own and the country's future. I am really looking forward to formalizing this collaboration," the PS concluded.



The Zambia Ministry of Youth and Sports delegation meet with IITA-Zambia staff to discuss possible collaboration on the Zambia youth-in-agriculture program. From left to right: Ms Grace Zimba, Mr Raphael Mulenga, PS Agness Musunga, Dr David Chikoye, Dr Pheneas Ntawuruhunga, and Dr Nhamo Nhamo.

Celebrating women in science and entrepreneurship

The Women Empowerment Platform (WEP), an avenue for ensuring that women are empowered at work and get into senior leadership and strategic positions, organized a forum on "Celebration of Women in Science and Entrepreneurship" at IITA headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria, on 25 March during Women's Month.

Attended by more than a hundred career women mostly from IITA and entrepreneurs, the forum featured three remarkable women in the community: Ylva Hillbur, IITA's Deputy Director General for Research for Development; Femi Olayebi, Chief Executive Office (CEO) of My World of Bags; and Achenyo Idachaba, CEO of MitiMeth, both from Ibadan.

Celebrating women's accomplishments in their fields was the focus of the symposium, which provided an impetus for inspiring women to succeed in their chosen paths. The three speakers talked about their life's journey—and challenges—to get to where they are now.

The forum was part of the celebration of UN Women's Month with the theme "Make it happen". According to Sylvia Oyinlola, Regional Administrator for West Africa, who leads the group, WEP was established one year ago after IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga challenged the women of IITA about gender parity in management positions by 2017.

Last year, in a bigger women's forum on Women's Month, Dr Sanginga had said that he wanted to "empower the women for positions of leadership not only in IITA". After that fateful meeting, the women nominated a group of representatives from various areas and specializations that would lead



To mark Women's Month, IITA's Women Empowerment Platform (WEP) led by Sylvia Oyinlola (left), organized a forum to celebrate successful women in the community (L-R): Ylva Hillbur, IITA's Deputy Director General for Research for Development; Femi Olayebi, CEO of My World of Bags; and Achenyo Idachaba, CEO of MitiMeth, both from Ibadan.

the activities of the group. Thus, WEP was formed.

"WEP is working towards empowering women," said Sylvia. "It aims to get more support for women and for the larger community. All of us women should make a commitment to touch someone and show how we can make a difference."

The goal of WEP is to "empower female IITA staff in their professional roles and advance women's leadership and management skills to achieve positive changes in gender parity". The target is to achieve 50% female representation at management level within IITA by 2017.

WEP has provided basic education for the local community, conducted training and mentorship for some women members,

provided Christmas gifts to the IITA crèche, and is undertaking an awareness campaign to highlight various global issues, such as violence against women, harassment, breast cancer, human trafficking, and environmental protection.

During his keynote address at the WEP forum, Sanginga said, "This is about leadership and about strategizing and making sure that women compete favorably and get into management positions." He said that the next director general in IITA should be a woman.

The common message from all the speakers was: "We need to affirm and encourage our fellow women. We need to hold each other's hands to help us get better in our chosen field of competency, and ensure that we get credit and acknowledgment for our efforts."



Celebrating successful women in IITA and the local community.

Large-scale survey initiated to track adoption of improved cassava varieties in Nigeria

The implementers, stakeholders, and experts in a study to assess the level of adoption of improved varieties in Nigeria and the factors that led to their adoption or nonadoption, recently met in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 17-18 March.

Although over 40 improved cassava varieties have been officially released in Nigeria since the late 1970s, there's little scientific evidence on the extent of adoption for each of the varieties across the country and their impact. Hence, there is the need for the large-scale study which will begin in April this year and conclude in June 2016. It will cover 17 States in four geopolitical zones of Nigeria—South-West, South-East, North-Central, and South-South—where over 80% of the country's cassava is grown.

The study team is made up scientists from [IITA](#), the [National Root Crops Research Institute \(NRCRI\)](#), [International Center for Tropical Agriculture \(CIAT\)](#), [International Potato Center \(CIP\)](#), and the [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\)](#). It is funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) with an additional contribution from the [CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Banana \(RTB\)](#) and led by IITA.

Speaking at the planning meeting, [Dr Victor Manyong](#), IITA Director for Eastern Africa and leader of the Institute's social science research, said the survey was very important in shaping the future



Jared Jones from the Gates Foundation giving an overview of the project.

of breeding work by identifying the preferences for different uses and users of cassava and the gender aspects.

"It will give us ideas on what to do better in our future breeding efforts and in the dissemination of improved technologies to smallholder farmers," he said.

The study is part of an effort within the Gates Foundation to measure the adoption of improved technologies by smallholder farmers to understand more accurately the levels and drivers behind adoption when programs are being designed.

Describing the study, [Dr Tahirou Abdoulaye](#), IITA's Socioeconomist, said the survey would have three components: a large-scale household survey among farmers in the major cassava-growing areas of the country would, among others, determine the area grown to improved varieties, the widely adopted varieties, their uses and preferred traits. This would be accompanied by a genetic fingerprint component to be carried out by IITA's molecular scientists using DNA testing to identify the varieties accurately. The third aspect will look at the end users and gender issues.

"Through qualitative research including focus group discussions, we will look deeper into the preferences of men and women as farmers, processors, and consumers and how they have benefited," said Dr Dai Peters from CRS who is leading this component.

During the meeting, the project implementers and experts agreed on various aspects and methodologies of the study ranging from how the sampling would be done, the household survey questionnaires, the DNA fingerprinting, and the gender/end users survey.

In addition to informing breeding and extension efforts, the findings of the research will also be used to guide and inform policies.



Group photo of workshop participants.

Time to prioritize: Africa RISING scientists focus lenses on 2015 field season

The review and planning meeting of the Africa RISING West Africa project ended on 25 March in Accra, Ghana, with partners committing themselves to take the integration of research activities a notch higher in 2015. The focus of the 2-day meeting was on taking stock of achievements during 2014 and on planning research activities for the approaching field season in Ghana and Mali while addressing the major project implementation challenges cited in [the report of the Mid-term External Review](#), November 2014.

One of the main strategies for better integration agreed upon by the partners during the meeting was the sharing of experimental designs and protocols in advance of the 2015 cropping season. This decision signifies a big step towards ensuring that all project partners are reading from the same script in terms of research site locations and linkage of activities at the landscape and farm levels.

[Discussions at the meeting](#) also centered on how gender considerations fit into the partners' proposed work plans for 2015/2016. It was therefore resolved that, with the help of the new gender specialist joining the project, all partners would incorporate into their work plans for the year specific activities that would address the gender contexts of the ongoing research work in the two countries. Project partners will therefore have to take a keen look at the roles of women and men, and their needs and interests when it comes to the adoption and use of the technologies being adapted and tested by the project.

Project partners were also briefed on decisions taken by the Steering Committee which held a parallel half-day meeting chaired by IITA's Research for Development Director for West Africa, Dr Robert Asiedu. Issues addressed there included the following: use of the baseline data generated by IFPRI for project locations in Ghana and Mali; use of data from the farming systems analysis conducted by Wageningen University; inclusion of new activities to the work plans that had already been presented to



Participants at the 2015 Africa RISING West Africa Review Meeting.

and approved by the Management; and the requirement for all research activities and outputs to be communicated to the project stakeholders.

"This has been a good planning meeting. In my opinion the resolution by project partners to share their experimental designs and protocols is a brilliant way forward for better integration within the project. It will ensure that our project activities are better linked and that we are in good shape for the upcoming USAID-commissioned review of the project later on in the year," noted the

project's Chief Scientist, Dr Asamoah Larbi, at the end of the meeting.

Africa RISING Program Coordinator, Dr Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon expressed her gratitude to the scientists who took part in the meeting, from over 50 various partner institutions. She also thanked the project donor USAID, represented at the meeting by Dr Jerry Glover, for maintaining a keen interest in ensuring the achievement of the Africa RISING vision of lifting smallholder farm families out of hunger and poverty.



Participants during one of the workshop activities.

SARD-SC farmers' field day demonstrates improved cassava farming practices to spur production

The project [Support to Agricultural Research for Development of Strategic Crops in Africa \(SARD-SC\)](#) led by IITA held a farmers' field day to demonstrate improved cassava production technologies it was piloting to increase the crop's productivity while at the same time conserving and maintaining soil fertility.

The event also enabled the project to get feedback from the farmers on the technologies that they preferred and which they would readily adopt to enhance the productivity of cassava in the region to improve food and nutritional security and contribute to poverty reduction.

The technologies demonstrated at the event, held on 27 February at Kakonko District, Kigoma Region, in Tanzania, included intercropping and the use of fertilizers and new improved varieties.

Dr Mboyi Magendi, a Zonal Research Director at the Lake Zone Agricultural Research and Development Institute (LZARDI), hailed the technologies being piloted by the SARD-SC project. He

said they had the potential to increase the production of cassava, one of the region's key staple crops, and contribute to efforts to improve food security and reduce poverty in the region.

"The improved cassava farming technologies being piloted have the potential to significantly boost cassava production in this region and at the same time conserve soil fertility. However, the farmers will also need further training to adopt these new technologies," said Dr Mugendi.

He added: "There is need to create awareness among the farmers on the importance of testing their soils so they will know the deficient minerals and the best crops to grow and fertilizers to use. They also need support in the testing."

Cassava mosaic disease (CMD) and Cassava brown streak disease (CBSD) were identified as major challenges threatening production in the region. Dr Simon Jeremiah from LZARDI briefed the farmers on the two diseases, their symptoms, and the measures to stop their spread.

He also urged farmers to invest in the production of clean seeds and to change to the improved cassava varieties which are tolerant of the two diseases that the project will recommend from its trials.

Mr Christopher Briton Chugwa, Chairman of a farmers' group in Kibondo District, said the farmers' field day was important as it exposed them to new technologies with the potential to increase yields to motivate them to improve their farming practices.

Ms Veronica Laurence, a farmer from Kiobela Village, said the improved varieties and farming practices being demonstrated by the project had better yields than the local varieties and local practices. However, she added that lack of financial resources was a major barrier to many farmers in adopting the new technologies.

Thanking the project on behalf of the Kakonko District Commissioner, Mrs Tausi Madebo, the Divisional Officer, said that the technologies demonstrated a lot of potential to boost cassava production. She encouraged farmers to form associations and work as a group to tap into the existing market opportunities in the area.

Participants at the event included farmers from Kakonko, Kiobela, and Kasanda villages, government officials, and staff from LZARD and IITA.

The SARD-SC is a multinational project led by several CGIAR centers which aims to enhance food and nutrition security and contribute to reducing poverty in selected Regional Membership Countries (RMCs) in Africa. Funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB), it focuses on raising the productivity and profitability of cassava, maize, rice, and wheat.

It is being implemented in Benin Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



A huge cassava harvest.

Station and regional administrators meet in IITA HQ

A week-long training and meeting of regional and station administrators from IITA's Eastern, Southern, Central and Western Africa hubs was held 16-20 March, in Ibadan. The meeting aimed to deploy action plans that will be beneficial for the effective oversight of administration, communication strategies, security, staff welfare, policies, and the maintenance of facilities, among others.

During the opening, Kwame Akuffo-Akoto, DDG, Corporate Services, said the training for administrators was important because of the germane roles that they play in the organization and promotion of the morale of staff and scientists who work to meet the goals of the Institute. He stressed that the focus was to learn and deliberate on key issues affecting all stakeholders in all the locations where [IITA](#) operated.



DDG Kwame Akuffo-Akoto (behind the podium) notes feedback from station administrators.

Resource persons from the Human Resource Services, Finance, Audit, Security, Facility Management Services, and Communication Office made

presentations on various topics to highlight updates, changes, and new expectations for optimal performance.

IITA-HEDA draft a plan for implementing partnership deal

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) between IITA and the Human and Environmental Development Agenda ([HEDA](#)) signed in 2014 aims to foster cooperation for development, implement opportunities for collaboration and partnership to help reduce poverty, empower local communities, foster farmers' rights, provide climate information services, engage the youth in agriculture, and promote other agriculture-related areas.

To implement the MoU, farmers and staff from HEDA visited the IITA Ibadan campus

on 25 March and in the process implored IITA to participate in its agricultural development activities for 2015. The visitors also requested IITA scientists to train about 25 HEDA farmers on the application of new techniques for agricultural development.

"IITA is ever ready to assist," said Dr Kenton Dashiell, who received the visitors and applauded the farmers for their dedication to agriculture.

IITA scientists Drs Femi Aina and Elizabeth Parkes, Farm Manager Wilson

Igbaifua, and Engr Peter Kolawole took turns to present on selected topics to the farmers.

Dr Aina gave a presentation on Soil preparation, spacing, and chemical application. Dr Parkes gave a presentation on Cassava biofortification.

David Kolawole responded on behalf of the HEDA farmers. He said the session with IITA was a great learning experience and that he hoped more of such training and more assistance would be organized for the farmers.



DDG Kenton Dashiell (seated, third from right) with HEDA farmers at IITA.