



Congo Basin - New research institute to find solutions to food, water, and climate change challenges

The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) are developing a new research facility, the Congo Basin Institute (CBI). It was officially launched during a signing

ceremony on 20 June in Yaoundé, Republic of Cameroon, in the presence of H.E. Essimi Menye Lazare, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. He expressed the support of the Cameroon Government for this initiative.

The ceremony was chaired by Dr A. Namanga Ngongi, Vice Chair and Representative of the IITA Board of Trustees. The Congo Basin is a total of 3.7 million km² and home to some of the largest undisturbed stands of



Dr Kenton Dashiell, IITA DDG Partnerships and Capacity Development signs the partnership surrounded by Dr Kevin Reeds, VC Legal Affairs and Associate General Counsel UCLA, Dr Irioume, representative of the Honorable Minister of Scientific Research and Innovation in Cameroon, and Dr A. Namanga Ngongi, Vice Chairman IITA Board of Trustees (BOT), representing IITA BOT Chairman Prof Bruce Coulman (1st, 3rd, and 4th from left).



Drs Reeds and Dashiell shake hands after signing the partnership agreement.



Cross-section of the VIPs present during the CBI launch.



Dr Smith allows visitors to experience the heartbeat of a bird.



L-R: (1st) Dr Irioume, (2nd) Dr Namanga Ngongi, (3rd) Dr Kevin Reeds, (4th) H.E Essimi Menye, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Cameroon, (5th) Madame Cynthia, representing Rwanda Honorable Minister of Agriculture, (6th) Dr Kenton Dashiell, (7th) Dr Tom Smith, Director, Center for Tropical Research and Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology UCLA, (8th) Dr Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA Director Central Africa Hub, (9th) Dr Rachid Hanna, Resident Representative, IITA Cameroon, and Dr Mark Gold, Associate Vice Chancellor-Environment and Sustainability (behind Dr Dashiell).



Dr Dashiell welcomes guests to the inauguration ceremony.

tropical rainforest on the planet in addition to large areas of wetland. It increasingly faces severe challenges in the areas of water, health, food security, and loss of biodiversity as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation. The CBI is designed to establish an environmentally friendly research campus. This will serve as a nexus for interdisciplinary research, education, training, and technology development focused on finding solutions to those critical issues in the Congo Basin.

During the opening ceremony, Dr Kenton Dashiell, the IITA Deputy Director General, for Partnerships and Capacity Development, said, "I am glad to participate in the inauguration of the CBI; it will allow scientists from Africa and the US to work together on the most pressing issues of the day."

He added: "Only by working together beyond country borders and scientific disciplines can we find sustainable solutions to food security in an integrated approach."



Dr Dashiell during the opening ceremony.



H.E Essimi Menye, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Cameroon, reinforcing government support to the Institute.



Dr Hanna shows some vegetable grown in the region.

Dr Smith describes the CBI plan to the guest.



IITA researcher demonstrate how cassava plantlets are multiplied in the laboratory.



Dr Vanlauwe explains IITA's efforts in conserving soil fertility.



The Honorable Minister at the exhibition booth of collaborators from Drexel University.

The facilities at the campus will include a large conference center, a distance learning center, equipment repair facility, as well as lodging facilities for visiting students and researchers. Two existing state of the art facilities – molecular genetics and analytical laboratories and a newly established training center for GIS and remote sensing – were officially added to the CBI during the inauguration ceremony. Dr Namanga stressed, “The research results from the use of these facilities will be put to test in incubation platforms to encourage the scaling up and use of viable and sustainable solutions to many of the challenges in the domain of nutrition, agriculture, health, human resource development, and the use of science in support of sustainable livelihoods.



Dr Hanna tells UCLA partners “happy times are here.”



Dr Dashiell discusses other partnership avenues with a Cameroonian high chief during the event.



Guests arriving the event.



The Honorable Minister shakes hand with Dr Zac Tchoundjeu from ICRAF.



Apollin Fotso, IITA Researcher show IITA's works through posters.



Student researchers at the institute.



Visitors in the laboratory.



Group photo of dignitaries at the launch.



Group photo of some members of staff in the IITA Cameroon station.

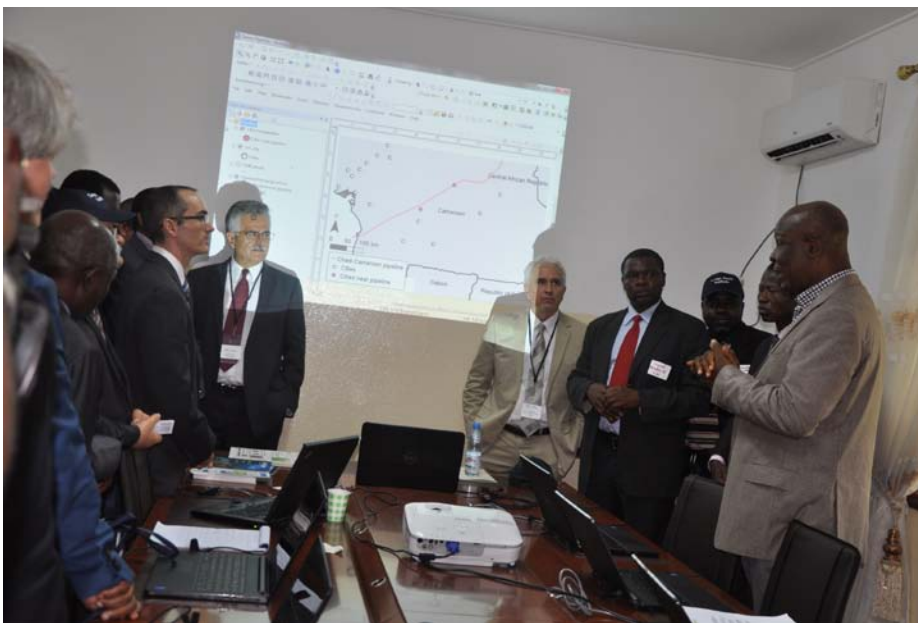
Ultimately, these will have a positive impact on the lives of millions of people in the Congo Basin and beyond, and also contribute to the sustainable management of the Congo Basin ecosystem."

The CBI will serve as an incubator for start-ups and entrepreneurs and a meeting point for an international community of scientists and researchers.

Professor Thomas B. Smith of the UCLA said, "Aside from addressing critical challenges in the Congo Basin, the CBI will also help to solve the problem of the brain drain. It will bring in premier researchers from all over the world to provide critical training for African scientists through partnerships with local institutions in addition to providing needed infrastructure."



Guests chatting up.



The GIS center of the CBI.



Guests arriving the event.



View of IITA research banners.



Elizabeth Stolow from UCLA welcomes Cameroonian high chiefs to the event.



Visitors learn how to handle birds.

Dr Rachid Hanna, IITA Cameroon Country Representative, echoed remarks by Dr Bernard Vanlauwe, Director of IITA Central Africa Hub, and Dr Mark Gold, UCLA's Vice Chancellor for Environment and Sustainability. He added, "Finding sustainable solutions to the complex environmental and developmental challenges facing the Congo Basin countries requires the level of multidisciplinary and international collaborations envisioned by the founders of the CBI. Together we can do a lot more that we can each do alone."

He also harbors hope that the creation of the CBI will create a model that builds on the culture of collaboration and innovation, creating opportunities for positive social, educational, environmental, and economic transformation.

The CBI is initially supported by UCLA and IITA. It is be open to participation by African countries, universities, and research institutions worldwide.



Event venue.



The women of IITA Cameroon station.



The Honorable Minister, Drs Hanna and Namanga Ngogi arriving the event.



Banana field of the CBI.



The UCLA team.

DR Congo explores areas of partnership with IITA

Senior Advisors in the office of the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Drs John Ulimwengu and Kamwanga Masankisa, are in Nigeria exploring areas of partnership with IITA.

The move is part of DR Congo's efforts to transform its agricultural potential and create wealth and jobs for the rapidly growing numbers of young people.

"DR Congo needs to create jobs for this increasing population and agriculture can create those jobs," Dr Ulimwengu said during a seminar presentation in IITA on Wednesday.

"Our estimate is that we need 1000 jobs annually to solve the growing unemployment problem."

DR Congo in Central Africa has a vast area of arable land and more than 50% of Africa's surface water. About 90% of the population in the rural areas is engaged in agriculture. "We have the potential to feed most of Africa but we depend on food imports and this is not good for the country," Dr Ulimwengu said.

"We hope that collaborating with IITA will help us to advance and bring the benefits of agricultural research."

Dr Nteranya Sanginga, IITA Director General, pledged the commitment of IITA to collaborate with the Government of DR Congo.

"We are ready to work with you and other countries in Africa to see how we can increase agricultural productivity and engage the youth in the sector so that they have decent jobs," Dr Sanginga said.

Last year, DR Congo gave IITA a grant of \$3m to help support youth engagement



Dr John Ulimwengu, giving a seminar in IITA Ibadan on DRC Agricultural Business Parks.



Dr Sanginga (middle) with the visitors.

in agriculture. The mineral-rich country is optimistic that a partnership with IITA would help to accelerate its agricultural development in the same way as in Nigeria. In context, IITA's Research-for-

Development model has contributed to making Nigeria the world's largest producer of cassava, cowpea, and yam. Research on soybean has also been accelerated with a significant increase in domestic utilization.



Drs John Ulimwengu and Kamwanga Masankisa (2nd and 3rd from right) explaining DRC's agricultural agenda to IITA top management in Ibadan.

Drs Ulimwengu and Masankisa arrived in Nigeria on Monday. They took a tour of IITA campus, and visited labs, the IITA Business Incubation Platform, IITA Youth Agripreneurs' fish ponds and fish hatchery, the Postharvest Unit, International Livestock Research Institute, and Niji Farms.

Several areas of interest emerged. The officials were impressed with the IITA Youth Agripreneur model and the value chain approach of the Institute which encompasses crop improvement in terms of productivity and food safety, especially the aflasafe technology.

"We are interested in all that we have seen here, especially the youth program and use of aflasafe to control aflatoxin in maize and groundnut," Dr Ulimwengu said.

At ILRI, the team met Dr Okike Iheanacho who explained the work of his organization with particular emphasis on the use of cassava peel for livestock feeds.

"Our goal is to convert what could be an environmental problem to a valuable commodity for animals. This will also save food for human consumption and reduce competition for resources between livestock and human beings," he explained.

Dr Masankisa described the visit to Niji Farms in Ilero as an eye opener and a demonstration of a can-do spirit in Africans.

Niji Farms occupies more than 1200 ha and there are plans for further expansion. The farm has integrated crops and livestock, comprising cassava, maize, poultry, and goats. The farm processes cassava into High Quality Cassava Flour, *fufu*, yam flour, and *gari*, in high demand from the United Kingdom.



Drs Iheanacho Okike, Sanginga and the visitors at the ILRI Cassava waste to feed demonstration factory.



Dr Bandyopadhyay Ranajit show the visitors the process of isolating aflatoxin strains at the Aflasafe Plant.



Dr Sanginga, and the visitors with the Agripreneurs.

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Andrea Gros (a.gros@cgiar.org), Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or Adaobi Umeokoro (a.umeokoro@cgiar.org).