



## Youths' interest essential in conservation

Scientists and environmentalists have been urged to develop tools that will draw children's interest towards environmental conservation.

Delivering a keynote address to members of the 80-year-old Nigerian Field Society, IITA Director General Hartmann said that to sustain present conservation efforts, it was imperative to pass the conservation torch on to the younger generation by creatively exploiting their interest.

"This can be done by making conservation part of the school curriculum, getting their teachers, parents, and the children themselves involved," he explained.

Hartmann's comments came at a time when the world is losing its biodiversity at a rate faster than ever imagined.

For instance, between 1990 and 2005 alone, the world lost 3.3 percent of its forest while Nigeria lost 21 percent. In fact, it is estimated that the deforestation rate in Nigeria is about 3.5 percent annually, an equivalent loss of between 350,000 and 400,000 hectares of forest land per annum.

To halt this trend, education of the younger generation is key, according to Hartmann.

"We need to get more involved, so that



*DG Hartmann addressing attendees to the Nigerian Field Society's 80th anniversary celebration at the Conference Center, IITA-Ibadan.*

conservation, and its power and utility, appears in the curriculums of students in elementary schools, secondary schools, and universities," he stressed.

The Director General further extended a hand of partnership to the Nigerian Field Society, stressing that IITA would like to learn and replicate the Society's staying power.

President of the NFS, Prof. I. F. Adeniyi

commended IITA for the honor and reception. He pledged that the Society would be interested in partnering with IITA to conserve biodiversity for the benefit of humanity.

Thereafter, members of the NFS ended their 80th anniversary celebration by visiting the IITA forest, which accommodates a large pool of genetic resources in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Bridging cassava's nutrition gap



*Biofortified cassava could significantly address Vitamin A deficiency prevalent in cassava-consuming Nigeria and other countries in West Africa.*

On-station trials of yellow cassava have recorded progress in Nigeria, raising hopes for more nutritious cassava roots in the country.

Although cassava is a food security crop to more than 600 million people, it has relatively low nutritional value; a situation which the new varieties aim to reverse.

Yellow root cassava contains higher beta carotene content than white root cassava according to Peter Kulakow, IITA Head of the Cassava Breeding Unit. This could

give consumers better nutrition, especially pregnant women and children. Vitamin A, the active form of beta carotene, is necessary for better eyesight.

The trials taking place in Ikene, located in South West Nigeria, are among on-station trials occurring at five locations throughout Nigeria, each in different ecological zones. Each trial consists of 20 to 25 different genotypes of cassava, most of which were bred for enhanced beta carotene content, high yield, and disease resistance.

"Among the lines being tested are three promising genotypes that are candidates for release as yellow root (bio-fortified) varieties in Nigeria," said Kulakow.

This month in Ikene, about a hectare of land is being planted with the promising varieties for stem production for distribution to farmers.

"The favorable environment for growing cassava in Ikene makes this a key location for multiplying new varieties because Ikene produces both excellent root yields and high stem production," said Kulakow.

But IITA Research Supervisor Adetoro Nimjami knows that IITA's work must extend beyond the possible release of new varieties because of the difficulty in getting people to adopt yellow cassava. He emphasizes that people in South West Nigeria have traditionally consumed white cassava and are not likely to change this without educational and promotional efforts on IITA's part.

In South East Nigeria, however, people are used to consuming yellow cassava and are more likely to adopt the bio-fortified varieties.

Although adaptations might be necessary, the project will give consumers the needed amounts of vitamin A in a way that does not change traditional cassava diets.

## IITA-Uganda holds virus indexing workshop

IITA-Uganda organized a two-day workshop on banana virus indexing – a step of procedures to ensure planting materials are free of viruses – to promote the safe movement of tissue-culture derived planting material within and between the eastern Africa countries.

Due to widespread pests and diseases, the use of tissue culture-derived planting material within and between countries in the region is becoming popular, driving the growth of a largely private sector-driven industry. However, this poses significant threats if there are no harmonized schemes in place for indexing large quantities of commercially produced plants, as viruses can not be eliminated from tissue culture plants.

Speaking at the workshop, Dr. Ephraim Tumuboine, Head of Phytosanitary and Quarantine Inspection Services of Uganda, said the workshop was timely and important as there was an urgent need for all players in the sector to work together to ensure the safe movement of planting material without compromising a flourishing private industry.

The workshop was organized by Dr. Lava Kumar, IITA virologist based in Ibadan, who updated the participants on banana viruses in the region and demonstrated both DNA- and ELISA-based virus indexing. The demonstrations were organized by Ms. Valentine Nakato (IITA) and Mr. Samuel Opio (NACRO), flanked by Mr. Vincent Kyaligonza and Mr. Anthony Mukwaya from NACCRI, who all received high accolades from the delegates for their work.

On the second day, the participants



*Participants and resource persons of the virus indexing workshop held in Uganda pose for a group photo.*

brainstormed on policies, protocols and laws related to safe movement of tissue cultured planting material in East Africa, using the current frameworks and concrete examples from other banana-exporting countries in the world.

The workshop, held from May 26–28, was part of a larger two-week tissue culture training course, organized by the Uganda National Crop Resources Research Institute (NACCRI) in collaboration with Makerere University and ASARECA, focusing on cassava and sweetpotato.

It attracted 25 participants from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. They were drawn from national programs, the private sector and the plant health and quarantine bodies.

The workshop was organized in the

framework of the BMZ project “Banana tissue culture: community dissemination pathways for delivery of high quality planting material to create markets for African farmers”, lead by Drs. Danny Coyne and Thomas Dubois.

### Announcement

To better serve the needs of staff, the Communication Office (CO) is revamping the IITA Intranet. The CO is conducting a survey to improve the intranet site and is encouraging staff to participate and let us know what you like to see in the ‘new’ intranet. We will be taking responses until 25 June. To participate in the survey, please go to:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8BVPHYBW>.

## IITA staff completes Supply Chain skills training



*IITA staff who have completed the skills' training by the Supply Chain Unit pose for a group photo with DDG-R4D Support Dr Lakshmi Menon during the completion and certificate-awarding ceremony held at the Conference Center on 16 June.*

IITA employees who took advantage of classes offered by the Supply Chain Unit this year received their certificates of completion on 16 June 2010. The ceremony was held in the Conference Center, with Deputy Director of Support Lakshmi Menon speaking before the certificates were awarded.

The training program at IITA enables employees, and occasionally community members, to receive training in areas of technology, finance, language, and other subjects as they are offered. Taking place in the evenings, it is a commitment to make the time for the classes and studying.

Menon stressed that the students who put forth the effort to complete the courses “should be agents of change”. She was pleased to see so many students and thanked teacher Monsuru Bakare for “tak[ing] forward the torch”.

Three courses were offered in 2010 – Basic Microsoft Excel, Advanced Microsoft Excel, and Financial Management, Shipping, and Logistics. About 45 staff members participated in the courses, with only 12 people not receiving certificates.

Students received First, Second, and Third class passing rates, a First class passing rate is 71 percent or higher, and some students passed with distinction. Top student awards were given for each class as well.

Many students had opted to take multiple classes, and over 30 certificates were given out to students who attended the event. Students consisted of employees from a wide range of units at IITA, including IT, Communications, Security, and many others.

Currently, there are 26 people enrolled in classes