

## Africa needs 'local content' in diets



L-R: Hotel and Catering Manager Samiran Mazumdar, IITA Ambassador, former President Olusegun Obasanjo tasting 40% cassava bread, and Communication Officer Godwin Atser, during a visit to Abeokuta.

Africa needs to rethink its food import burden and consider 'local content' options, such as the inclusion of cassava flour in wheat to reduce the rising import bills, says IITA Ambassador, former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

The IITA Ambassador views the 'local content' option as part of efforts to free up resources for infrastructural development and poverty alleviation in the continent.

In 2011, estimates show that Africa spent more than \$50 billion on food imports. The rising prices of food does not make the situation better in the years ahead, according to Dr. Akin Adesina,

Nigeria's Agriculture Minister who is also an economist.

"If we want to develop, we must change our consumption habits. We must consume what is our own, what is around us in Africa. In this way, we will be able to make progress," Obasanjo added.

As the President of Nigeria between 1999 and 2007, Obasanjo promoted a 10% cassava inclusion policy in wheat bread in an effort to boost agricultural growth and diversify the economy.

The policy, backed by improved agricultural practices from IITA and national partners, increased cassava

production in Nigeria by 10 million tons within 6 years, making Nigeria the world's top producer of cassava.

Building on that success, researchers from IITA, working in a pilot bakery, have raised cassava content in bread to 40% without compromising quality.

Upon tasting the 40% cassava bread, Obasanjo exclaimed, "The taste is good!" "We need to promote it to make people adopt and consume it," he said.

Besides relieving the burden on food imports, the adoption of cassava flour offers several benefits to Africa. It promises to make cassava competitive by creating markets for the root crop and offering fair prices to farmers.

With climate change taking a negative toll on most grains, cassava production is fast becoming an option. The crop's tolerance of extreme weather such as drought and its ability to thrive on poor soils are increasing its appeal.

In Nigeria, for instance, the government estimates that the 40% inclusion of cassava flour in wheat bread could help the country save about N254 billion (\$1.7 billion) annually.

"But more than savings, this will also provide jobs for our youths," said Adesina.

The success of the cassava policy in Nigeria aims to radiate benefits to larger aspects of the economy including helping stabilize the exchange rate of the naira to the dollar and more importantly, making the farmers proud and richer.

## IITA and icipe signs MoU

Late last year, IITA and the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*) signed a memorandum of understanding, paving the way for the two institutes to work more closely in the areas of integrated pest management, biological control, and natural resource management with a particular emphasis on soil health. The photo at right shows the Directors General of the two institutes sealing the deal.



IITA DG, Dr. Nteranya Sanginga (right) signs MoU. With him is Director General, icipe, Prof. Christian Borgemeister.

### Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving the workplace at the day's end, make sure that you have:

1. Powered off all unnecessary electrical office/lab equipment;
2. Turned off air conditioners; and
3. Switched off all lights.

### Travel update to Nigeria

Nigerian trade unions on Tuesday suspended the 8-day strike.

Flight operations have resumed. Also, normalcy has since returned to the country.

# Healthy yam seed technique brings succor to farmers

Nigerian farmers are getting cleaner seed yams that promise better harvests in the seasons ahead, thanks to the healthy seed yam producing technique by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture.

The healthy seed yam producing technique involves cutting tubers of yam into small sizes of between 50 and 100 grams, treating them with appropriate pesticides and insecticides before planting.

In Ekiti state, a yam producing region in Nigeria, farmers who participated in the healthy yam project in 2011 now have enough seed yams to plant this season.

Mr. Moses Oguniyi, a state extensionist who is partnering with IITA scientists on the project said farmers have more than doubled their seed yams.

"Some farmers planting 200 seed yams before now have enough to plant 500 heaps," he said.

"Also the quality of the seed yams is very good and farmers love the technology," he added.

Preferred by most people in West Africa, yams are important sources of carbohydrates in the region which accounts for more than 90 per cent of production.

But a major limitation to production has been the high costs of seed production, in addition to pests and diseases, which lead to poor quality seed yam.

For many farmers, planting for the next



Farmers and researchers pose with yam harvested using improved yam technology in Ekiti.

cropping season usually demands setting aside up to one-third of harvest. Using the improved technology can reduce this proportion, leaving more to feed the family, while the better quality seed produces more still.

Bishop Samuel Oke of the Anglican Diocese of Ekiti West said he was happy that his parishioners participated in the project, citing its empowerment potential especially for those living in the rural areas.

"The healthy seed yam production came at the right time and it has produced benefits," he said.

To improve the livelihoods of members of the church, the Anglican Diocese of Ekiti West has embarked on several agricultural programs including capacity building and training. One of the modules for training planned for this year is the healthy seed yam technology.

"A few people that participated last year got benefits and we want more to benefit

hence the need for training and awareness of this technology," Oke said.

Elsewhere in the state, farmers are equally reaping the benefits of the improved technique.

The healthy seed yam production project is supported by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) under the Research Into Use (RIU) program. IITA works in collaboration with Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary and Diocesan Development Services (DDS), and the project is currently being implemented in Abuja, Rivers, Kogi and Ekiti states in Nigeria.

Drs. Danny Coyne, and Biodun Claudius Cole, IITA Nematologists, said the technology was addressing the constraints faced by farmers. They expressed optimism that the adoption of the technology would be widespread across Nigeria and would vastly improve the fortunes of yam farmers.

## University of Ibadan seeks closer collaboration with IITA



IITA staff and the UI delegation during a visit to IITA in Ibadan.

Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan, is seeking closer partnership with IITA that will lead to joint efforts towards finding solutions in protecting and conserving biodiversity of forest and fresh water resources. The request for partnership was the result of a visit to the IITA lake and forest reserve by a delegation from the University led by Prof Ayodele Ibukun.

Although the initial mission of the delegation was to learn from IITA and share experiences on how best to develop the university's dam, ecotourism and

fishery resources; the field visit opened up new opportunities of collaboration between the two institutions that will provide long-term benefits to Nigeria and West Africa.

Prof. Ibukun said a joint project to catalogue the diversity of fish would be of interest to the university.

Other shared interests were reforestation and management of the riparian forest along the bank of the lake, and the use of the full potential of the IITA lake for fish production.

Receiving the delegation, Stefan Hauser, IITA Agronomist, said IITA is open to

partnership with universities and other national systems, stressing that in most instances extension agents from the Agricultural Development Programs are involved in most of the research work with farmers.

He spoke on IITA's efforts towards conservation of natural resources such as forest, soils, and water resources.

According to him, one of the focal activities of IITA is conservation of biodiversity, which he said was being eroded at a faster rate than ever imagined.

During the discussions, cross-cutting issues were tackled on the potential of organic agriculture and the impact of climate change on food production.

Hauser acknowledged that climate change is becoming a major challenge and explained that part of the adaptive measures being promoted by the institute was the incorporation of natural resistance and tolerance to drought or high temperatures in major food crops and the use of biological control agents to address many of the climate change-related emerging pests and diseases.

The IITA Bulletin is produced by the Communication Office. For comments and/or contributions, please email: Jeffrey T. Oliver ([o.jeffrey@cgiar.org](mailto:o.jeffrey@cgiar.org)), Godwin Atser ([g.atser@cgiar.org](mailto:g.atser@cgiar.org)), or Catherine Njuguna ([c.njuguna@cgiar.org](mailto:c.njuguna@cgiar.org)).