

Lawmaker seeks stronger ties with IITA to address food security, other agric issues



Kolade Olagunju (fourth from left) and his entourage discussing avenues for further cooperation between his community and IITA with Lakshmi Menon.

The Honorable Kolade Olagunju, representative of the Akinyele Local Government Area to Nigeria's House of Assembly and whose community hosts IITA-Ibadan, has called for greater cooperation between the institute and his constituency, specifically in the areas of food security and agricultural production. Olagunju emphasized that such collaboration would help in tackling food insecurity in the community with spin off effect on poverty reduction.

He aired this appeal during a visit to the

campus during which he also promised that the state government would facilitate the provision of the necessary incentives and infrastructure that would aid IITA's research.

He said that the visit "was meant to familiarize us [local government authorities] with what IITA is currently doing in order to gain more knowledge and plan for further collaboration."

He noted that neighboring countries have been benefiting from IITA research and that the community would equally

want to tap into IITA's expertise.

The lawmaker was met by Lakshmi Menon, Deputy Director General for R4D Support, who thanked the lawmaker and the community for hosting IITA.

She specifically praised the harmonious relationship that had existed between the Akinyele Local Government and IITA over the years.

Apart from explaining the institute's mission, Menon also tabled the issue of traffic congestion on the main road leading to IITA-Ibadan campus, suggesting also that the construction of an alternative route to the campus' back-gate might be a short term solution to the problem.

She explained that aside from facilitating the movement of IITA staff and visitors, the construction of the road would also bring relief to local farmers by easing transport of agricultural produce.

Reiterating the commitment of the institute in fighting hunger and poverty, Menon said that the institute's technologies were open to communities to benefit, adding that innovations in cassava production, for instance, have helped Oyo state farmers to more than double yields in Iddo local government area.

The lawmaker later toured the IITA campus visiting some of its strategic facilities such as the genebank and the Bioscience Center.

IITA bids farewell to Sarah Hearne, Plant Molecular Geneticist

The IITA community on Monday held a farewell get-together for Sarah Hearne who has recently disengaged from the institute. Hearne worked with IITA as a plant molecular geneticist based in Ibadan.

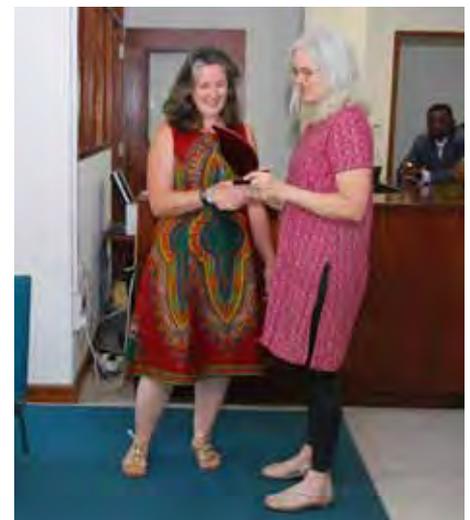
Paula Bramel and Robert Asiedu described Hearne as a good team player and someone who goes out of her way to ensure that "things are done".

As part of her achievements, Hearne contributed immensely in the upgrade of the Bioscience Center.

Melaku Gedil, who heads the Center, said the Bioscience team would miss Hearne. "Even though she is leaving, Hearne has been suggesting things that need to be done and filling in the gaps. This shows her passion for the Center," Gedil said.

Responding, Hearne thanked colleagues for the support over the years. "I will miss you but I am not saying bye to Africa. I am saying, 'see you later,'" she said.

Sarah receiving a Plaque of Appreciation from Dr Bramel.



IITA, NISLT hold training on aflatoxin monitoring

IITA and the Nigerian Institute of Science Laboratory Technology (NISLT) of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology organized an advanced training workshop on "Laboratory Estimation of Aflatoxins" from 20 to 25 June 2011 in Ibadan, Nigeria. Twenty participants from the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Nigeria; the Department of Food Technology Clinic, Lagos Polytechnic; and WAMCO Pvt. Ltd., Nigeria attended the hands-on course.

Aflatoxins are invisible metabolites produced by the fungus *Aspergillus flavus* and related fungi. They are toxic to humans and animals and an important trade barrier. The workshop familiarized trainees with various diagnostic tools used to ascertain the presence and to quantify levels of aflatoxins in food commodities. Specifically, participants were trained on the principles and application of Afla-ELISA™, a low-cost, indirect competitive ELISA-based method developed at IITA to estimate the quantity of aflatoxins present in

commodities. Other topics covered were HPLC and TLC methods, monitoring needs, international regulations, and improving aflatoxin monitoring capacity.

The course was organized by Lava Kumar of IITA and J Oshu of NISLT. Resource persons were Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon and Joseph Atehnkeng, also of IITA. At the end of the course, the trainees received certificates of completion from Robert Asiedu, IITA R4D Director, and IF Ijagbone, NISLT Director General.



Participants, organizers, and resource persons of the aflatoxin monitoring training workshop.

Japan, IITA partner on yam and cowpea study

The Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences (JIRCAS) is collaborating with IITA on research to improve yam and cowpea - two crops that are critical to Africa's food security but have otherwise received low attention research-wise over the years.

The 5-year "Evaluation and utilization of Diverse genetic materials in Tropical field crops", or EDITS, project started this year. Activities related to yam and cowpea, two of the several target crops of the project, will be held at IITA.

EDITS-Yam targets the development and utilization of genomic information and molecular techniques to facilitate yam breeding for improved productivity in West Africa, while EDITS-Cowpea aims to strengthen strategic approach to develop high-value cowpea varieties with higher nutrient content and suitable consumer preferences.

The project focuses on breeding and will involve various collaborating universities and institutes in Japan.

Satoru Muranaka, a former IITA

physiologist, returned to the institute as a JIRCAS scientist and will lead the collaborative work.

"We expect EDITS to present valuable learning opportunities for

IITA and Japanese researchers," Muranaka said. "The idea under the collaboration is to strengthen the relationship between the two research institutes."

IITA welcomes pioneer batch of graduate trainees

Four newly-appointed trainees under IITA's new Graduate Trainee Program (GTP) have started work at IITA-Ibadan.

The new trainees are Laureta Okojie, Soji Akinyemi, Temi Salam, and Bolu Olateju. Also the newly employed Recruitment Officer, Femi Shodipe, has resumed.

The GTP is a strategic initiative aimed at attracting, retaining, managing and developing the right people that would

be committed and motivated towards the achievement the institute's corporate goals and boost succession plan efforts of the institute.

Olu Babasanya, IITA Personnel Manager, held induction training for the new trainees and officer. He also accompanied them on a familiarization tour and visited key offices in the institute.

He described the GTP as a more sustainable option of retaining staff in the face of a highly competitive labor market.

Under the program, the institute will provide intensive hands-on training to the trainees for 12 months. Successful candidates will then be offered job positions.



The GTP trainees with Olu Babasanya, Personnel Manager (center), and new Recruitment Officer Femi Shodipe (far right).