

Congo's Minister of State lends voice to Africa's agricultural rejuvenation

Henri Djombo, Democratic Republic of Congo's Minister of State, recently appealed for an increase in efforts to rejuvenate Africa's agricultural practices and called on every stakeholder in managing the Congo Basin Forest to work assiduously to improve agricultural production and activities in non-forest land on the continent.

Research institutions were challenged to develop planting materials and technological packages compatible with the protection of forest stands in Central Africa.

Other delegates that attended and spoke at the session/symposium coorganized by IITA and CIFOR on climate change and agriculture were from the Rain Forest Alliance, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Government of DRC. Jostein Lindland of the Government of Norway chaired the session organized by CIFOR and IITA.

IITA is a member of CBFP. It was launched by the then Secretary of State Colin Powell at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg during the Rio + 10 summit. The CBFP1 works with the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) to promote conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin's forest ecosystems. It is now facilitated by the European Union (EU) and brings together around 70 partners from government, donors, international organizations, NGOs, scientific institutions, and the private sector.

CBFP offers IITA an opportunity to share its vision of natural resources management in sub-Saharan Africa and particularly its effort to intensify agriculture in the perspective of food security, job procurement, and sustainable natural resources management.



Denis Sonwa of CIFOR (Left), and Kantengwa Speciose IITA Rwanda (center), with a visitor at the IITA exhibition booth during the event at Kigali.

"Congo's agricultural and forest sectors need to be managed in a sustainable manner while responding to climate change," Djombo said.

The call follows the focus of the [16th Meeting of Parties \(MoP\)](#) which enjoins members of the [Congo Basin Forest Partnership \(CBFP\)](#) to help Central African countries in their efforts to transform agriculture into opportunities to fight climate change, feed populations, provide job opportunities for youth, and ensure a balanced development of agribusiness models.

At a symposium jointly organized by [IITA](#) and the Center for International Forestry Research

([CIFOR](#)) in Kigali on 21-26 November 2016 to commemorate the 16th (MOP) of the CBFP, thematic areas that could help the region reach its agricultural potentials were discussed. These included mitigation and adaptation to climate change, conservation and sustainable use of wildlife resources, as well as the interface between agriculture and the forest in the Congo Basin.

Denis Sonwa from CIFOR and IITA highlighted IITA's role in mainstreaming improved agricultural materials and technologies/practices in protected areas and landscapes of Cameroon and DR Congo.



Denis hands IITA annual report to the Minister.

IITA leaders chart operations' course for Abuja station

IITA's Director General, [Nteranya Sanginga](#) and [Kenton Dashiell](#), Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery (P4D), during two separate visits to the IITA station in Abuja on 10 and 12 January, respectively,

announced operational plans for the station in 2017.

DG Sanginga also inspected progress on the ongoing construction work at the AfDB-funded Youth Training Center which will serve as one of the offices

for implementing the ENABLE-Nigeria project.

DDG Dashiell had said that the station is strategically important to the Institute and will now be governed under the P4D directorate.



DG Sanginga with the Abuja team.



DDG Dashiell in Abuja with members of staff.

The IITA Station in Abuja hosted Mitsuhiro Ota, the Advisor, Business Planning Division of the Business Planning Department, NTC-Japan, on 18 January. He visited the station to understand IITA's business models of promoting biofortified cassava and maize, as well as systems of technology diffusion and dissemination.



Bill Gates eulogizes NextGen cassava research in Africa

The efforts of researchers working through the Next Generation Cassava Breeding ([NextGen Cassava](#)) project to significantly increase the rate of genetic improvement in cassava breeding and unlocking the full potential of Africa's most popular staple crop were applauded by Bill Gates, founder of the Bill & Melinda [Gates Foundation](#) in his [blog](#) this month.

While sharing his five reasons for being optimistic about Africa, Gates said that the efforts of the researchers are helping to generate varieties that are both nutritious and high yielding. His blog in part reads

“In the developed world, most people eat the root vegetable cassava only in tapioca pudding or bubble tea. But in Africa, it's the primary staple for half a billion people and the continent's most popular crop. That's why I'm super excited that scientists are using the [most advanced hybridization techniques](#) for the benefit of cassava farmers and those who depend on the crop. With the support of UK Department for International Development and our foundation, scientists are making great progress

developing hybrids that are resistant to the major virus that cuts down on cassava yields (cassava mosaic virus). At the same time, these scientists are breeding strains that have more nutrients than the strains under cultivation today”.

The NextGen Cassava project uses genomics to breed varieties that will respond positively to most of the “sensitivity” issues exhibited by the crop in the region. Earlier last year, *The Economist* featured a [report](#) on [Chiedozie Egesi](#), IITA scientist and researcher at the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike, Nigeria, who leads the NextGen Cassava project. The report detailed some of the progress on the crop as highlighted during the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), in Washington, DC.

NextGen is led by [International Programs in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences](#) at Cornell University, in collaboration with IITA, NRCRI, the National Crops Resources Research Institute in Uganda, Tanzania's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, the West African Centre for Crop Improvement in Ghana, Makerere



Millions of African households depend on cassava for their livelihoods.

University in Uganda, the Boyce Thompson Institute, USDA-ARS, and the US Department of Energy in the United States. The project is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK Department for International Development.

Announcements

A new IITA at 50!

This year, 2017, marks 50 years of IITA's presence in sub-Saharan Africa! The core anniversary celebrations have been slated for July and November 2017. Watch this space for updates on the anniversary celebrations.

Crop Breeding Conference, 11–12 April 2017, Ibadan, Nigeria

The FUNAGIB Foundation is calling on African students working on cassava breeding to apply for its 6-month scholarship to study at Brasilia from 1 August 2017. Applications are open to PhD and MSc students who have completed their course work and are preparing their thesis.

The application deadline is 15 May 2017.

More information and guidelines for application are available [here](#) and [here](#). Interested applicants can also contact Professor Nagib Nassar at nagibnassar@geneconserve.pro.br

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to 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).