

## IITA donates ‘Seeds of Renaissance’ to Nigeria to address humanitarian crisis

IITA donated about 35,930 kilograms of seeds to the Borno state government as part of efforts to cushion the humanitarian crisis in the northeastern part of Nigeria.



L-R: The Governor of Borno State, Alhaji Kashim Shettima; Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, IITA, Dr Kenton Dashiell; and IITA Ambassador and former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo during the donation of seeds and rice to Borno State government in Maiduguri.

The donation, which took place on 22 May, is perhaps the largest quantity of seeds offered to Nigeria in recent times. This IITA

initiative addresses the humanitarian crisis in the region—a region once referred to as the bread basket of Nigeria.

Delivering the seeds to the Governor of Borno State, [Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, representing Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#), said the donation is aimed at helping Nigeria to rebuild Borno in particular and the northeast in general.

Donated seeds include improved varieties of cowpea, soybean, maize, millet, sorghum, and rice that are adapted to the climate of the region. “They are also high yielding and resistant to the major pests and diseases, and other biotic and abiotic constraints in the region,” Dashiell explained, adding that another 3000 bundles of cassava planting materials will be delivered to the state once the rains stabilize.

IITA Ambassador and former Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo described the donation as the “most meaningful gift” ever given to the people of Borno state.

The IITA Ambassador pledged IITA’s commitment to support Borno state and Nigeria at large during this challenging period.

“IITA and partners including the [World Food Program](#) (WFP), the Zero Hunger Forum, and [African Development Bank](#) will continue to give priority attention to Borno state in

*Continued on page 2*

## AgYouth Lab project, a rescue operation—Vice President Yemi Osinbajo

Nigeria’s Vice President, Prof Yemi Osinbajo, has tendered his support for the joint [AgriFood Youth Opportunity Lab project](#) (AgYouth Lab) of the [Michigan State University](#) (MSU) and [IITA](#), saying that the initiative will harness employment and entrepreneurial opportunities among African youth.

Prof Osinbajo, who was represented by Ifeoluwa Adebayo, Special Assistant to the Vice President on Innovation and



Building a strong partnership that works.

Entrepreneurship, at the launch of the project on 15 May in Lagos, expressed confidence in the project as a rescue operation for its beneficiaries.

The AgYouth Lab is sponsored by [MasterCard Foundation](#) to help 15,000 young people access employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the fast-growing horticulture, aquaculture, poultry, cassava and oilseed sectors in Tanzania and Nigeria.

The project spans five years and will focus on youth aged 18 to 24 in major food shed regions surrounding Lagos and Dar es Salaam. It will also assist economically disadvantaged, hard-to-reach, and out-of-school youth transition into employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the agrifood system, focusing specially on gender equity, aiming for equal representation of young men and women across its programs and addressing policy, training, mentoring, and other constraints that affect the ability of young women to start enterprises or obtain employment.

Speaking at the launch of the program, Alemayehu Konde Koira, the Senior Program Manager, Youth Livelihood, MasterCard Foundation, said that the program is one way through which the Foundation engages the private sector to develop business opportunities for young people.

He also expressed hope that the project will contribute to the organization's effort in addressing some of the challenges faced by youth in seeking work especially in Africa.

"In MasterCard Foundation, we believe that investing in the youth is critical to economic development, so we invest a lot in them," he stated.

The AgYouth Lab project will respond directly to opportunities and constraints identified in the 2016 MSU and The MasterCard Foundation-Agrifood Youth Employment and Engagement Study (AgYeEs).

Soji Adelaja of MSU reported that a survey revealed that young people who are usually hit by the adverse economy can be productively engaged in agriculture. He added that the project will train its youth beneficiaries on the vast opportunities available for young people in the agricultural sector. The partners, according to him, will also work with the private sector to ensure that the youth are given better opportunities of getting decent employment in the sector.

"MSU is poised to address one of the most critical problems facing the continent—youth unemployment with our partners in Nigeria and Tanzania. We see great potential to expand youth agrifood employment both on and off the farm," he added.

Adelaja also revealed that 20% of Africa's population in Tanzania and Nigeria together represent an important opportunity for intervention in skills acquisition, job creation, and employment.

[Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA's Deputy Director General, Partnership for Delivery, said the long-term impact and experience of building the capacity of unemployed graduates to become employers of labor along the value chains in the agricultural sector will be adopted by the organization. He added that this will help transform Africa's agrifood systems and build a brighter future for Africa.

He assured the partners of IITA's commitment in implementing the project through its youth-to-youth platform.

The [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) will be playing a major role in assisting with the implementation of the program.

Selected Agripreneurs also shared their experiences on how agribusiness can be adopted and sustained by youth as a means of creating decent employment.

Other partners in the project include the [Venture Garden Group](#), Tanzania's Sokoine University Graduate Entrepreneurs Cooperative ([SUGECO](#)); and Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology ([OYSCATECH](#)).

## IITA donates 'Seeds of Renaissance' to Nigeria to address humanitarian crisis [Cont'd from page 1](#)

particular and the northeast in general," Chief Obasanjo said.

Located about 850 kilometers northeast of Abuja, Borno state became the epicenter of attacks from Boko Haram—an Islamic extremist group that had killed more than 20,000 since 2009, and displaced more than 2.3 million, majority of them farmers. The group has become the world's deadliest organization according to the Global Terrorism Index in 2015.

In February 2017, the United Nations listed northeastern Nigeria as one of the regions in the world facing hunger and devastating levels of food insecurity.

Dashiell says: "The donation is being given because IITA is concerned about the plight of the people of the Northeast who, by many accounts, are very food insecure, malnourished, and need assistance to get back to normal life. We are committed to working with the Federal Government and the State governments in northeastern Nigeria to transform agriculture. We also plan to partner with WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) of the United Nations during this 2017 growing season. It is also an opportunity for IITA as an international agricultural research-for-development institution to implement its

mission to transform agriculture in Nigeria and Africa at large."

The seeds are intended for planting by farmers of Borno State in the upcoming cropping season. The IITA seed collection is a product of joint efforts by IITA breeders and agronomists, special project managers, and scientists, the Business Incubation Platform (BIP)-GoSeed producers, and [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#). Sister centers [ICRISAT](#) and [AfricaRice](#) also provided seeds to support this initiative.

The Governor of Borno State, Alhaji Kashim Shettima, noted with appreciation that agriculture remains the highest employer on earth and that "IITA plays a pivotal role in sustaining the sector in Africa."

"Words cannot adequately convey the depth of our gratitude to IITA and to President Obasanjo who is an Ambassador of IITA, for the choice of Borno as beneficiary of this remarkable intervention. Seeds, particularly at this time, are life saving for us in Borno State. In a typical conflict situation, majority of farmers end up eating up their seeds because they can't plant them. These seeds will be of immediate use to our farmers in the southern part of Borno State which has been less affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. Farmers there are still carrying out their activities as against areas like Northern Borno," Governor Shettima said.

Seed donation clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9NtjyLzrA>



Launching of the "Seeds of Renaissance" project in Maiduguri, Borno, Nigeria.

# Breeding for grand challenges

As part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, IITA had mounted a one-day symposium tagged "Breeding for the Grand Challenges". This full-house event was held on 11 April at IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria, and attended by more than 200 collaborators from the national agricultural research system, including advanced research institutions and various universities, and private sector partners working on crop improvement.

The meeting was organized by [Robert Asiedu](#), Director for the Western Africa Hub, and [Michael Abberton](#), Head, IITA Genetic Resources Center.

According to Abberton, the meeting was timely for three reasons. "Firstly, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IITA provided a good opportunity to take stock of past achievements...But the main purpose of the meeting was to build on this progress to move forwards. Therefore, a second reason is the recent advances in biotechnology that bring with them the chance to make faster gains in breeding. Thirdly, it has become increasingly obvious that this acceleration is indeed necessary if we are to achieve food security for Africa in the face of climate change by 2050," Abberton explained.

Most of the presentations focused on two key themes: Firstly, that breeding of African

staple crops must focus on quality including micronutrient composition as well as disease, pest resistance, etc. Secondly, that both classical and modern techniques can make significant progress in this regard and that the use of transgenic technology or the new and exciting genome editing methods are complementary to classical breeding and require it to reach fruition in new varieties with real impact.

Topics and speakers include: Policy and regulatory issues for GMO and new breeding techniques, Dennis Eriksson, [Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences](#); Current status and future prospects of breeding cassava for micronutrients, [Elizabeth Parkes](#), IITA; Breeding maize for micronutrient enrichment, [Abebe Menkir](#), IITA; Role of genetic engineering in crop improvement, [Leena Tripathi](#), IITA; Bananas: new traits into old cultivars by genetic modification, James Dale, [Queensland University of Technology](#); Capacity building for plant breeding in West Africa, Malachy Akoroda, [University of Ibadan](#); Breeding to transform cassava, Eugene Terry, CGIAR Systems Management Board, [West Africa Center for Crop Improvement \(WACCI\)](#), and [@BecA-ILRI](#); Advancing plant breeding education in sub-Saharan Africa: Successes and challenges, Eric Danquah, WACCI; and Consortium approach to develop and deploy

sorghum enriched with vitamin A, iron, and zinc for farmers in Africa: The case of African Biofortified Sorghum, Michael Njuguna, Africa Harvest.

Some of the key outcomes from this one-day event were:

- A dialogue between/among scientists working on different avenues of crop improvement is necessary to maximize gains. Approaches are synergistic and complementary only when awareness is high and communication is good.
- The regulatory environment for transgenic and editing technologies will be a key factor determining whether they are successfully implemented. For editing this is uncertain globally. For both there is need for greater engagement of scientists with regulatory agencies, policy makers, politicians, and of course farmers and consumers.
- The challenge is to increase the rate of progress in crop improvement. A major focus of the day was how to equip the next generation of plant breeders to bring together old and new tools to achieve this.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL48GL1y1VagU-fONwuKW-9CW4oj2aWHsV>



IITA's Abebe Menkir addressing the workshop attendees in Ibadan.

## Announcements

- Launch of the Ago-Owu Farm Center, 1 June, Osun State
- Congo Basin Grant Program application for admission now open. Deadline for application is 1 June 2017. Log on to [www.conservationactionresearch.net/apply.php](http://www.conservationactionresearch.net/apply.php) for more details.
- Media day, 22 June, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
- Africa RISING Science Advisory Group Meeting, 22–23 June, Arusha, Tanzania
- Africa RISING-INVC Bridging Activity Project review and planning meeting, 29-30 June, Lilongwe, Malawi
- Ringing of the bell, Nigeria Stock Exchange, 30 June, Lagos, to mark IITA's 50th anniversary
- Africa RISING-NAFAKA scaling project review and planning meeting, 3-4 July, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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

## STMA empowers seed companies to produce seeds

In 2016, the Stress Tolerant Maize for Africa (STMA) project had empowered seed companies in its target countries, (Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and the Republic of Bénin) with funding support and technical capacity and capability to produce breeder and foundation seeds at scale. In addition, a total of 23,700 metric tons of certified seed of multiple stress tolerant maize varieties and hybrids released by the project over the years in the different countries was produced by selected seed companies. This amount exceeded the target production of 21,000 metric tons set by the project for the year.

Stakeholders who convened in Ibadan on 2-5 May for the project's annual planning meeting said the move was necessary to motivate seed companies to serve farmers more

effectively and efficiently. The 4-day planning meeting also detailed progress in increased commercialization of multiple stress tolerant maize varieties in the target countries and drew strategies for implementing partners' work plans for 2017.

"An important strategy of the STMA project to contribute to increased maize production and productivity in the partner countries is to supply adequate quantities of Early Generation Seeds (EGS) of released hybrids to private seed companies. STMA aims to support and strengthen various categories of seed companies in its network, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that certified seed of most promising varieties are always readily available to farmers," said [Baffour Badu-Apraku](#), IITA Maize Breeder.

STMA focuses on developing improved multiple stress tolerant maize varieties that effectively address emerging and future production challenges, while increasing genetic gains. It also pays considerable attention to scaling out these new products and knowledge to beneficiaries in project member countries.

[Robert Asiedu](#), Director, Research for Development, IITA West Africa, lauded the stakeholders on the progress made in maize research and encouraged them to keep upholding IITA's legacy.

"IITA has not been working in isolation; we have 50 years of partnership and success stories. You have done a good job in the improvement and release of maize varieties. These have resulted in tremendous progress. Let us do better and expand the impact of our hard work," Asiedu said.

[Abebe Menkir](#), IITA Maize Breeder, corroborating the need to promote diverse multiple stress tolerant varieties through different channels, emphasized that it was necessary to collaborate with national and regional initiatives to build the capacity of partners to market the multiple stress tolerant hybrids.

The STMA project also promotes the adoption and commercialization of improved varieties and hybrids with tolerance to drought, low soil fertility, heat, as well as varieties with resistance to diseases and pests affecting large maize production areas in West Africa.



STMA holds annual planning meeting in IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria.

## IITA Onne: back and better!

After almost 10 years of dormancy, IITA in Onne—which has produced tremendous breakthroughs in breeding plantain varieties with resistance to [Black Sigatoka disease](#) and advances in Musa genetics that have won for IITA various prestigious awards, which included the CGIAR King Baudouin award, is back and better.

The station has been known as a leading center for plantain and banana research in Africa. It was established in 1976, but had to be shut down in 2008 due to security challenges. Since 2016, from funds received

from the African Development Bank through the Agricultural Transformation Agenda Support Program Phase 1 (ATASP-1), IITA began renovation of the dilapidated infrastructure and will officially relaunch the Station this year.

The Onne station in Rivers State is in the high rainfall ecology of Nigeria. It had mainly served as a benchmark site for banana research, and cassava, yam, maize, rice, and livestock germplasm development in the past. The station still has the largest collection of [Irvingia](#) in conservation within its 100-ha

campus. The research center is almost 75% renovated and has started to receive many visitors from top government agencies from Nigeria, scientists, host communities, and international donor agencies.

Currently, the Onne station hosts the ATASP-1 project, USAID-funded Banana program, and the [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#), who have taken advantage of the area to develop new agribusiness enterprises in poultry, catfish, and micropropagation of plantain. The center will also serve as an incubation center for young people. A key facility being revived is the tissue culture lab which will enhance the capacity of the station to produce large amounts of plantlets and offer opportunities to graduate students and the private sector involved in commercialization.

The Onne Station will help transform the agricultural sector through training and innovative research programs that will impact lives in Nigeria. It plans to achieve this by seeking and reestablishing partnerships with government, private agencies, national and international organizations, NGOs, and farmers' organizations. The station is headed by [Richardson Okechukwu](#).



A wing of the renovated office block.

# IITA researchers present on climate change policy studies at CCAFS climate change meeting in Ireland

IITA researchers working on climate change were among the scientists gathered in Galway, Ireland, for an international conference on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security—Where is the cutting edge?



Laurence Jassogne



Edidah Ampaire

The conference was jointly organized by the National University of Ireland Galway ([NUI Galway](#)) and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security ([CCAFS](#)) on 24 April in Galway, Ireland.

The conference brought together some of the world's leading experts in agricultural, climate, agro-environmental, economic and social sciences to identify and address the most important interactions, synergies, and trade-offs between climate change and agriculture.

[Edidah Ampaire](#), Project Coordinator of the Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation ([PACCA](#)) based

at IITA Uganda, presented on the project's experience of influencing the development of climate resilient policies in the agriculture and natural resource sectors using the guided policy planning approach. She said this ensures that climate change issues, especially in relation to food security, are adequately addressed.

Ampaire said future scenarios were used to address constraints identified in agriculture and environmental policy formulation and implementation at both national and local levels. These included insufficient integration of climate change issues in the policies, poor harmonization and coordination,

lack of evidence to inform policies, limited capacity and capacity building, and focusing only on short-term impacts of climate change, among others.

The policies reviewed included the Tanzania National Environment Policy 1994, Ugandan Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan 2015/16-2020 /21, and climate change mainstreaming guidelines for the agricultural sector, Uganda.

[Laurence Jassogne](#), Systems Agronomist and Country Representative for IITA-Uganda, was also at the conference and was interviewed in a Hardtalk by CCAFS Flagship Leader on emissions, Lini Willenberg.

The interview focused on the feasibility of mitigating climate change through sequestering more carbon in soils. This is based on the French-led initiative (4p1000) that was launched at [COP 22](#) in Morocco, with the goal of engaging stakeholders in a transition towards a productive, resilient agriculture based on sustainable soil management and generating jobs and incomes, hence ensuring sustainable development.

These scientists have also recently published findings of a new study on the gender gap in Tanzania and Uganda climate policies. The full articles are available [here](#) and [here](#).

## CBSD control project for Rwanda and Burundi launched

IITA in partnership with the Institute of Agricultural Science of Burundi (ISABU) and Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) have launched a new project titled "Fighting Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) and Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD) through the deployment of new resistant germplasm and clean seed in Rwanda and Burundi".

The two diseases are a major threat to cassava production in the two countries and neighboring eastern DR Congo. Of concern is CBSD which was first reported in the region in 2009 and is spreading rapidly.

The four-year project seeks to increase cassava productivity in the countries through the development and deployment of CBSD/CMD resistant varieties, as well as establishing a system to produce and disseminate to farmers high quality virus-tested seed. It is funded by [IFAD](#) and led by [IITA](#) with the national

cassava research programs at ISABU and RAB, from Burundi and Rwanda, respectively as the major partners.

The launch workshop brought together stakeholders from the two countries and was held at the IITA-Kalambo station in Bukavu on 15–18 May. [Chris Okafor](#), officer in charge of IITA-Kalambo station, representing [Bernard Vanlauwe](#), regional hub director, officiated the launch.

Speaking at the workshop, [Silver Tumwegamire](#), the project leader, said the expected outcomes of the project in the

two countries included a 50% increase in cassava productivity for 20,000 cassava farmers through the introduction of high-yielding and disease-resistant varieties, and establishing a sustainable system for dissemination of certified early generation seed (prebasic and basic) of the best varieties.

The project builds on the experiences and lessons from the just concluded New Cassava Varieties and Clean Seeds to combat CMD and CBSD project (5CP in short) implemented in five countries in East and Southern Africa. It will make use of the new improved cassava varieties selected under the 5CP project that showed high levels of tolerance for the two viral diseases.

The meeting also brought participants from other IITA-led projects including the 5CP and Action to Control Cassava Brown Streak Disease in DR Congo (CBSD-DRC)



Workshop participants.

to share their experiences and lessons learned, and to identify areas of synergies. The CBSD-DRC is led by [Nzola Mahungu](#) who is also the country representative for DR Congo.

[James Legg](#), IITA Virologist, shared experiences and lessons on the development of a pilot clean seed system for cassava in Tanzania under 5CP. He

also outlined the requirements and approaches of developing clean seed systems to produce virus-tested cassava prebasic seed.

[Regina Kapinga](#), Head of Advocacy and Resource Mobilization at IITA gave a presentation on the importance of ensuring that the project was aligned and mainstreamed to the priorities of

the two countries for greater efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.

“We need to ensure our activities are relevant to the countries where we work. We also need to systematically track the progress we are making in contributing towards the countries’ economic growth through agriculture,” Kapinga said.

Mahungu’s project in DR Congo also aims to maintain sustainable cassava productivity through the development and promotion of appropriate varieties resistant to CBSD and other biotic constraints, and to disseminate approaches for the integrated management of cassava diseases and pests to contribute to increased food availability, income generation and sustainable livelihoods. In addition, he presented the one-year work plan activities.

The workshop concluded with a visit to the virology laboratory at IITA-Kalambo where researcher Clerisse Casinga talked about a CBSD study conducted in DR Congo under the supervision of IITA’s Legg and Rudolph Shirima in 2016.

## IITA ATASP-1 youth corps member bags prestigious state award

For meritorious service to his country and host community, Azeez Akanni Salawu, an ex-IITA National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda Support Program, Phase One (ATASP-1) project, has earned the 2017 Federal Capital Territory (FCT) State Honors Award as “the most outstanding National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member in the FCT-Abuja.

FCT State Coordinator recognizing Azeez as the most outstanding corper.



which would prepare them for life after NYSC.

Apart from working with the CDS group, Salawu undertook some personal projects in his host Azhayaphi and Byazhin Across communities in Kubwa. These included the rehabilitation of Azhayaphi Community Borehole which had been abandoned since 2012. Before this intervention, community dwellers had to travel to far streams to fetch dirty and unhygienic water every day.

He also provided 10 wooden chairs and desks to the less privileged pupils of LEA Primary School in Azhayaphi community where most pupils had to sit on the bare floor to learn. He also proceeded to construct and erect a directional signpost for LEA Primary School and donated an Inscription of Mothers Creed—a collection of statements aimed at shaping the lives of LEA Primary School pupils. All these projects were commissioned by the NYSC FCT Coordinator on 17 March, at the LEA Primary School Premises.

The NYSC conferred the award on Salawu during the passing out ceremonies of the scheme in Abuja earlier this month.

During the period of his compulsory national assignment from 2016 to 2017, Salawu successfully combined his duty as a Research Assistant at IITA with many other charitable projects in the FCT. These included serving as president of the SDGs Agro-Allied Community Development Service (CDS), and championing the group to acquire 5 hectares of farmland from the NYSC Kwali

farmland. Under his leadership, the group also acquired 2 Demo Vegetable farmlands in Government Secondary School Jabi and Government Secondary School Gwarimpa where the CDS group trained students on theory and practical demonstration on land preparation and land management for vegetable production. He also led the group to IITA to receive agribusiness training from the IITA Youth Agripreneurs