

Nigerian Finance Minister: ENABLE Youth should be rolled out

The Nigerian Minister of Finance, Honorable Kemi Adeosun, visited [IITA](#) on 10 June to look at the [IITA Agripreneurs Program](#) (IYA) and learn more about the [African Development Bank-funded ENABLE Youth](#) (Empowering Novel Agri-Business-Led Employment) Program.

IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) and senior staff, including members of the IYA, welcomed the Minister and her party.

According to DG Sanginga, *"This is the first time that a Minister of Finance from the Federal Republic of Nigeria visited IITA in its 50 years of existence. We have hosted Presidents, Ministers of Agriculture, Environment, and other officials, but you are the first Minister of Finance to come to IITA!"*



Left: DG Sanginga takes Finance Minister Kemi Adeosun to visit the Agripreneurs.
Right: An Agripreneur explaining all about catfish farming to the Minister's staff while DG Sanginga



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Using wild relatives in breeding cowpea for improved adaptation to drought and heat

Cowpea is an important staple crop of the savannah region of West Africa but efforts to increase its productivity may be hampered by climate change particularly reduced and erratic rainfall and increased temperatures. Important traits for coping with changes in climate may lie not only in the cultivated cowpea but also in its near relatives.

Consequently, cowpea breeders from three West African countries met for their



Researcher inspecting cowpea plants.

first annual project meeting on 25—26 April, at IITA's Guest House in Lagos, to discuss progress in identifying individuals of related species that may prove useful in enhancing the tolerance of cowpea for heat and drought.

Results from the first year of project implementation showed that important variation was present in wild germplasm with potential to be used to improve the cultivated crop once appropriate crossing and selection had been carried out.

[Ousmane Boukar](#), the Project Leader, remarked that “during the first year of this important project, the evaluation of cowpea wild relatives under high

night temperatures (>20°C) and water stress has revealed several accessions with better performance than existing drought and heat tolerant cultivated lines under these stress conditions. The identified accessions will be confirmed this second year and their desirable genes for climate resilience introduced into cultivated lines”.

[Michael Abberton](#), head of the IITA Genetic Resource Center, also pointed out that the genebank maintains more than 1900 wild cowpea relatives with about 400 of them being cross compatible with cultivated lines.

The project is funded by [Global Crop Diversity Trust](#) and led by IITA



Improved cowpea variety.

in partnership with the Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles ([INERA](#)) Burkina Faso, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger (INRAN) Niger, and the National Centre for Genetic Resources and Biotechnology ([NACGRAB](#)) Nigeria.

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After a short discussion with the IITA team, the Minister met the Agripreneurs—about a 100 of them—graduates of different disciplines, some of who talked about how the IYA program had changed their mindsets about agriculture and agribusiness, and how it is now transforming their lives.

Several youths provided testimonials on how they, in the different locations in Nigeria, have succeeded in their start-up businesses, thanks to the training and initial support received from IITA and various partners from the private sector, development partners, and international organizations.

In a short interview after the meeting, Minister Adeosun said she and her team had come to IITA to “see what the youth and IITA are doing (in the area of youth engagement in agriculture), and how to get people into agribusiness, which is key for job creation and food security.”



“We came to IITA to assess a project (ENABLE Youth) being considered by the Federal Government. From what I have seen today, I am extremely impressed and inspired! ... We should work on how we can roll out this project nationally!” the Minister concluded.

AfDB had approved the [ENABLE Youth Nigeria](#) program and will provide US\$300 million as a loan to contribute to job creation, food security and nutrition, rural income generation and improved livelihoods for youths in both urban and rural areas in the country.

ENABLE Youth is expected to create business opportunities and decent employment for 1000 young women and men along priority agricultural value chains of various enterprises per state, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory.

The Minister's team included Ahmed Aliyu, Director, International Economic Relations, Special Adviser Adora Asonye, Technical Assistant Tolulope Kasali, and Chief Administrative Officer (Agriculture) Abubabkar Ibrahim Matazu, among others.



Top: Deputy Director General, Special Duties, Kwame Akuffo-Akoto, welcomes the Finance Minister's party to IITA with Interim Head of the Youth in Agribusiness Office, Evelyn Ohanwusi. Bottom: DG Sanginga and an Agripreneur presents a plaque to HE, Kemi Adeosun.

Study on youth and commercialization of agriculture in Africa kicks off with a planning workshop

Agriculture is one sector that many Africa countries are banking on for their economic development. For this to happen there is need to transform and commercialize the sector. However, the vision of how and where African agriculture will transform itself, and how youth are likely to fare within this process, is not very clear.

Therefore, a two-year policy study on young people and commercialization of agriculture has been launched to explore and try to shed some light on these issues. It will be conducted in three countries – Tanzania, Ghana, and Zimbabwe and is led by the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, UK with IITA as a major partner. Other partners include Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana, and Universities of Zimbabwe, Cambridge in the UK and Cape Coast in Ghana.

The study kicked off with a planning meeting at IITA-Eastern Africa hub offices in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 22–24 May, that brought together all the project partners to define the research framework and the activities to be undertaken.

“Involvement of youth in agriculture is very important for Africa. It offers them great opportunities to create jobs for themselves and others. They can also play a critical role in efforts to modernize the sector, which is dominated by an aging population. The findings of the study will be used to inform governments and other actors in designing programs for youth in Agriculture in the continent,” said Victor Manyong, IITA-EA hub director who is leading the efforts from IITA’s side.



Workshop participants in East Africa Hub.

“The findings will also be very important for the IITA Youth Agripreneurs program and ENABLE Youth whose goals are to attract youth to agriculture.”

Most of the research on youth and agriculture in Africa has focused on their attitudes towards agriculture. Relatively little attention has been paid to young people who are already or are trying to engage in farming or associated economic activities in agricultural commercialization. ‘The study will analyze the pathways that these young people use to better understand the opportunities and challenges for youth in agricultural commercialization across

different crops and commodities’, said Jim Sumberg, IDS Research Fellow and Leader of the study.

The study will provide insights on young people’s potential engagement in agriculture in Africa and help change the content of policy and programs relating to young people’s potential engagement in agriculture in Africa.

It is being conducted under the Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA), a new research program that aims to produce new information and insights into different pathways to agricultural commercialization in Africa.

SARD-SC maize conference leverages on private sector partnership

The SARD-SC maize conference, held in Livingstone, Zambia, 14–20 May, was a valuable opportunity for the maize project and its partners to interact with other stakeholders from Zambia, Nigeria, and Africa in general, to share key issues pertaining to maize value chain development, technology generation, and dissemination.

The expanded maize conference organized by the SARD-SC maize value chain with the theme Improving maize value chain for transformational impact, aimed to “showcase our achievements in SARD-SC maize so that the lessons learned in this conference would be useful for other maize countries and the forthcoming TAAT program,” said Sam Ajala, Maize Commodity Specialist.



IITA Maize Breeder Abebe Menkir with other members of the high table.

In his opening remarks, David Chikoye, Director of the southern Africa hub, enumerated key achievements of IITA but raised a pertinent challenge that may be an obstacle to achieving the impact of maize in Africa as a result of aging farmers, subsistence farming, and lack of mechanization.

Chrys Akem, SARD-SC project coordinator, lauded the institutional collaboration the project enjoyed with its partners, AfricaRice and ICARDA, which was responsible for the success of the maize value chain and other projects as well. "It has been a challenging four-year period and the maize team has come along very strongly."

The Zambia Minister of Agriculture, represented by Sinmu Choba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, said the conference theme reaffirmed the importance of maize to the economy and food security of many African countries. Maize farming is mainly done by small-scale farmers. He called on researchers in the maize sector to find answers aimed at enhancing adoption of improved seed varieties and technologies, among others.

Private sector participation in the conference cut across the banking sector in Nigeria and Zambia, such as Innovare; farming equipment leasing outfits, big conglomerates like Flour Mills of Nigeria, Babban Gona, a commercial farm growth developer, in Kaduna and Kano, Nigeria, that works with thousands of smallholder farmers, linking them to sustainable output markets while increasing their productivity. The participation of private sector actors infused the discussions with a valuable business perspective that could help to achieve greater impact on maize in Africa.

Segun Falade, Head, Agro Inputs, Agro Allied Division, FMN, spoke of the need for partnership with both commercial farmers and smallholder farmers to serve as outgrowers as sources of raw materials for his organization to reduce importation. The First City Monument Bank, (FCMB) Nigeria, was represented by Olushola Obikanye. He spoke of the opportunities open to farmers to borrow money at 9% interest rate, based on the bank's working model which identifies aggregators with their growers and as primary obligors. Similar sentiments and observations were

expressed by Arundel Sakala, Standard Quality Coordinator of the Zambia Food Reserve Agency that stressed the need for aggregation as a means to getting a steady supply of maize for food and industrial uses in Zambia, thus creating a guaranteed output market; Zanaco, represented by Chali Mweyeni, Head, Food and Agriculture Banking presented and discussed financial products tailored to the needs of the different categories of farmers in the farming business.

Ajala, the convener of the conference, was happy with the involvement of the private sector: "Each came with a special interest and focus; there were those in the value chain development business, inputs distribution, equipment leasing, and end-users. There was an aggregation of people that had a role to play to increase maize productivity."

Several scientific papers were also presented, followed by a robust discussion. Ajala presented two papers on Enhancing maize competitiveness in Africa and Maize seed production and system development under the SARD-SC project

IITA West Africa holds second retreat

IITA West Africa scientists, specialists, and support staff came together in Cotonou, Republic of Benin in April, for their second retreat. The theme of the event was "Generating a Buzz about Excellent Science." It was attended by 60 participants based in IITA West Africa.

The meeting allowed colleagues to share ideas and brainstorm on the way forward for the hub to attain the Institute's mission of "transforming African agriculture."

[Robert Asiedu](#), R4D Director for West Africa, set the tone for the retreat in his welcome address. He recognized colleagues that will be leaving the Institute upon attaining mandatory retirement age as well as presented the Futures Leader Award to [Julius](#)

[Adewopo](#) for his outstanding contribution to agricultural research in Africa.

Asiedu then gave a presentation on "Scientific solutions to grand challenges in West Africa," weaving a thread from decisions reached in the 2014 West Africa Staff Retreat to the current challenges faced by the region using the UN Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) as a point of reference. He also gave a snapshot of IITA West Africa in terms of international staff strength, stations, science domains, and project teams. Asiedu enjoined all to look critically at the subregion and IITA's work to proffer scientific solutions for the grand challenges facing agriculture now and into the future.

On the first day, participants broke out in groups to brainstorm on the many

grand challenges that they perceived in the region; the plenary session reduced the numerous challenges to four major ones. The participants then broke out in groups to deliberate on an integrated strategy to address the grand challenges. The achievements of the first day can be summarized as: "A very good discussion around science and identification of four grand goals all of which link to IITA goals and the SDGs. The discussions focused completely on aligning research to higher goals without nuance of crops, disciplines, themes, or CGIAR Research Programs".

The next day, a presentation by [Alfred Dixon](#) titled "Technologies for outscaling in West Africa" generated an animated discussion on mechanisms for identifying IITA technologies for outscaling. A key point was the urgent need for clarity on integration between what appears to be two separate wings in the Institute as well as the need for an internal process that moves the research products from R4D to Partnership for Delivery (P4D).

The West Africa team also discussed on how to improve efficiency at work and also visited the Cotonou facilities, the Bioversity Center of IITA, including the famed collection of insects.

The third day was dedicated to visiting the IITA Forest at Drabo, which was donated to the Institute by Peter Neuenschwander, IITA Scientist Emeritus. The visit provided the opportunity for participants to appreciate the work Peter has been doing in the area of biodiversity and protection of indigenous plant species as well as see the red breasted monkeys.



Team West Africa.

Looking back

Biafran War almost impeded IITA establishment!

The official legislation that would eventually construct IITA was just being reviewed by representatives of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations when Nigeria's first military coup took place on 15 January 1966. The civil war that this coup led to had people questioning the decision to establish the institution in the country.

Forrest (Frosty) Hill, vice president of the Ford Foundation at the time, reinforced the decision to establish the institution in Nigeria in a taped interview. He noted that at the time the decision was made, nobody had anticipated the outbreak of a civil war. He also reiterated the various reasons as to why they decided to establish the

institution in Nigeria, such as *"Nigeria's resource endowments, encouraging economic growth, possession of the two best universities in sub-Saharan Africa, and a simple lack of better alternatives."* Therefore, planning of IITA's facilities continued without serious interruption, albeit a little slow.



Dr F.F. Hill, Senior Consultant, Ford Foundation



Source: Lawani, S. 1992. *History and Evolution of IITA's Scientific Program. Sustainable Food Production in sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 1-23.

Myers' "mandate"

Will Martin Myers, a representative of the Rockefeller Foundation, wrote a 38-page document entitled *"International Institute of Tropical Agriculture: Tentative Scope of the Scientific Program"* in 1964. In his paper, he emphasized that he was not *"necessarily implying a departmental structure of administrative organization."* Myers proposed research in areas that include plant sciences, agronomy and soil science, plant protection, biochemistry, animal sciences, agricultural engineering, and economics and other social sciences.

This large agenda may seem unrealistic today, but nearly 10 years after Myers' paper was written, the institution was already working on legumes, and root and tuber crops.

The institution was also already working on a project to introduce, select, and breed various crops with a view to integrating these into farming systems. Inevitably, Myers' suggestion was eventually considered by management as the institution's mandate, making it an integral document for understanding IITA's history.



Will Martins Myers



Despite the civil war, the construction of IITA began in 1967.