

US Ambassador pledges to spread the IYA “gospel”

The US Ambassador to Nigeria, W. Stuart Symington, impressed by the [IITA Youth Agripreneurs \(IYA\)](#) program, has said that he is convinced and compelled to share the “Farming is cool” gospel of IYA with the rest of the world.

The Ambassador and his team from the consulate office were at IITA on 19 June to see and understand the impact of the Institute’s research and technology in the development of Africa’s agriculture.

“I will join in telling your stories to the world. They are worth sharing, and I will do so to prospective investors. IITA has finally provided an answer to the lingering question of how to make agriculture cool and attractive for people to embrace as a business,” Ambassador Symington stated.

He congratulated [Nteranya Sanginga](#), IITA’s Director General, for the dynamism in the Institute’s strategy of attracting young graduates into agriculture. He however advised the youth beneficiaries to be innovative and develop ideas that will enable Africa to feed itself.



H.E Ambassador Symington (center) gives thumbs up sign to IITA to the excitement of DG Sanginga (left) and DDG Dashiell (right).

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IITA’s successes highlighted at media forum

Research breakthroughs over the last 50 years were highlighted during the first Media Day organized by [IITA](#) in Ibadan.

Media Day was held as part of preparations to mark the celebration of IITA’s 50th anniversary and to engage our media partners in IITA’s celebration and in “telling our stories to the world.” It was attended by more than 40 media partners from the local, regional, and international press.

In his remarks, Deputy Director General [Kenton Dashiell](#), Partnerships for Delivery, said “We need the support of media in getting our message out.” He therefore called on greater media engagement in telling the world about breakthroughs and innovations at IITA that could help transform



Members of the press listening keenly to an explanation on IITA’s interventions in Africa in the last 50 years.

agriculture and lead to development, not only in Nigeria, but the whole of Africa.

The event also appreciated the invaluable contribution of the press to the Institute in the past 50 years. This is the first time the Institute had engaged members of the press for a full day, showcasing to them our facilities, projects, and the Institute's direction for the next 50 years.

During the campus tour, journalists heard stories of IITA's research breakthroughs—how IITA defeated the [Black Sigatoka disease](#) on banana, [cassava mealybug](#), and [maize streak virus](#); the development and use of [Aflasafe](#) to make maize and groundnuts safer; innovations that include growing yam in the air ([aeroponics](#)) and new technologies to control weeds in cassava.

Journalists saw ongoing research on maize, yam, cassava, cowpea, banana and plantain; and the Africa-wide youth-in-agribusiness initiative ([IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#)), which has received strong support from the African Development Bank and about 11 heads of African States.

"IITA stands with the people, and because we are truly people-centric, our goal in the last 50 years has always been to make living more fulfilling for even the poorest of the poor farming households. Even now, IITA will not stop. The Institute will continue to join hands with relevant stakeholders to do its best to transform agricultural practices on the continent," said [Kwesi Atta-Krah](#), Chair, IITA50 Organizing Committee and Director, Systems and Site Integration.

On 30 June, a press conference will be held at IITA's facilities in Lagos, after which IITA's senior management team will proceed to ring the closing bell at the Nigerian Stock Exchange, officially announcing the Institute 50th anniversary to the public.

The IITA50 celebration received financial support from IITA staff and the Board of Trustees, Dangote Group, Bovas, and Inqaba. Other supporters include Punch Newspapers and the Guardian Newspaper.



At the Genetic Resources Center, the media practitioners saw seeds of various crops of importance which IITA holds in trust for humanity.

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"I want you, for the rest of your lives, to think of how you will feed not yourself alone but how you will outscale this and extend the benefit of what you have learned within the premises of this institution to others who do not have the opportunity of being here. Always think of growing Nigeria because you are the greatest gift Nigeria has and if you move with your ideas, the world will feel you move. That for me means development for Africa," the Ambassador said.

He also enjoined government to support innovations that will change the narrative of the agricultural sector.

"It is not for government to help but for government not to be in the way. I want you to think of how you can approach a farmer who makes \$40 in a year and convince him that he can triple the amount in a year. I know you can do this because you have the training, skills, experience of doing things differently by using the right technology, seeds, and practices," he added.

DG Sanginga, senior staff and members of IYA, welcomed the guests to Ibadan and conducted them on a tour around some of the enterprises of the youth.



Top: DG Sanginga elaborates on the relevance, production, and distribution procedures of Aflasafe—IITA's flagship biocontrol product for aflatoxin management. Bottom: Ambassador Symington saw an array of finished products produced by IYA and also got to taste their soy milk.

Spirited effort by IITA team to manage the viruses destroying cassava in Africa

From convincing communities to uproot all their cassava to replace with new clean planting materials, piloting a commercial system to supply disease-free planting materials, to developing new rapid methods to diagnose the viruses, the IITA Vector Entomology team in Eastern Africa has certainly been busy exploring all options to save the cassava in Eastern and parts of Central Africa.

A seminar presentation by [James Legg](#), a plant virologist at IITA who is leading the team, shared information about the various activities the team has been conducting to control two devastating diseases of cassava.

The seminar was held recently at IITA's Eastern Africa hub offices, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Cassava is an important food crop in sub-Saharan Africa with the potential to become a commercial crop too. However, two viral diseases, cassava mosaic disease (CMD) and cassava brown streak disease (CBSD), are threatening to wipe off the crop in Eastern and Central Africa. The diseases have been spreading fast causing huge losses to farmers and affecting the food and income of millions of farmers. Africa-wide losses are estimated at US\$1 billion annually.

Setting up a commercial clean seed system

The virus diseases are transmitted by whiteflies but get a helping hand from farmers as they share planting materials with each other. There has been little interest from private sector companies to set up a commercial seed system. This creates a challenge on how to supply farmers with top quality disease-free seeds of the best available varieties produced by research.

Legg says the team has been piloting a system to supply clean seeds to farmers in Tanzania – the first in the country.

"To supply farmers with clean seeds, we need to start with planting materials that are disease-free and multiply them on farms that are isolated from surrounding sources of disease. We also need good, affordable diagnostics for detecting the viruses, and regulations in place for clean seed certification."

"Working with the National Research System, we have established clean sites in all the major cassava-growing parts of the

country. We have selected locations where the disease pressure is very low. We've put in place a rigorous system for keeping the plants healthy through regular surveillance and uprooting any plant that shows any symptoms."

"Although the work started by using varieties that have been 'in the system' for some time, in the last couple of years many of the newly released elite varieties have also been introduced, so that currently there are more than 10 varieties in Tanzania's clean seed system for cassava", Legg adds.

The team has been working with Tanzania's national seed certification body, TOSCI, to develop guidelines on acceptable limits for CMD, CBSD, and pests such as mealybug and green mite in the planting materials and for inspection. These guidelines were incorporated into the country's Seed Act, which represented a major step forward. They are now being used routinely in certification of pre-basic, basic, and certified cassava seed production sites.

A major challenge in the certification of cassava seeds is testing for the virus in the plants. The plants do not always show symptoms.

This calls for sophisticated testing methods such as [real-time PCR](#). The team has therefore built the capacity of TOSCI for testing the viruses using this technology. But it doesn't stop there. The team is also exploring novel ways of detecting cassava disease in Tanzania.

"We are looking at technologies such as digital diagnostics that makes use of photos of leaves taken by smart phones to automatically identify major diseases. This is something farmers will be able to do on their own farms, both quickly and cheaply. Through collaboration with Penn State University working with Google, computers are being trained to recognize symptoms. So far, they have been achieving 90% accuracy for healthy, CMD or CBSD infected leaves," said Legg.

Working with the community

The team has also tested how communities can control the viruses. They went to selected villages in Chato and Mkuranga Districts and asked farmers to uproot all their cassava plants and gave them new healthy planting material. This is not easy as farmers always have their cassava crop for food security.



Brown streak disease in cassava.

The team held many sensitization meetings with the communities, because for it to work, it needed the cooperation of all farmers.

"In communities where the disease pressure was high we got the highest cooperation. This is because they were harvesting almost nothing from their fields. Communities practicing phytosanitation were compared to control villages, where only a small number of randomly selected farmers were given new planting material, and where they were not asked to remove infected plants from their fields," Legg said.

The results were interesting. In year 1–3, disease pressure was very low in the phytosanitation-practicing communities. By year 3 we started seeing symptoms of the disease but this is because farmers again started introducing small amounts of their local varieties. Overall, yields were almost doubled and disease pressure greatly reduced in phytosanitation-practicing communities, while these benefits were not achieved in the control areas.

"Is this the best approach to managing CBSD? Yes and no. Although phytosanitation reduced disease and increased yields, the process was expensive and only one new variety was available for each target community. The results did show clearly, however, if healthy material of new varieties is introduced to an area, there is a great benefit if farmers do this together, at the same time as working to reduce the amount of infected cassava material in their neighborhoods," Legg said.

The team has also been studying the whitefly vector to understand their genetic diversity in the region, the crops they feed on, how they are attracted to cassava and the mechanism for spreading the viruses. Another area the team is looking at is how climate change has affected and will affect the spread of the vectors. Their work supplements the efforts by the IITA breeding team to develop new improved cassava varieties that are tolerant to the two diseases.

Nigerian governors endorse peer advisory mechanism to facilitate the attainment of zero hunger by 2025

... Benue hosts first meeting of NZHF

Five state governors in Nigeria have endorsed a peer advisory mechanism to enable them to monitor the implementation of their state-grown agricultural plans with a view to ending hunger by 2025.

The peer advisory mechanism is a brainchild of the Nigeria Zero Hunger Forum (NZHF) that aims at reviewing, monitoring, and advising states in Nigeria on the ways and means by which the states themselves, using available resources, can achieve zero hunger by 2025.

The five pilot states which have given their endorsement include Benue, Borno, Ebonyi, Ogun, and Sokoto.

"More states will be involved as we make progress," according to IITA Goodwill Ambassador, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is chairing the NZHF.

Members of the NZHF, which cut across the private sector, government and development partners, agreed on a unified structure to enable the Forum to achieve its goals.

To facilitate the implementation of its role, the Forum adopted a template for its future advisory meetings: The first day should be dedicated to a welcome address by the state followed by presentations of what is going on in the host State related to achieving zero hunger (challenges, successes, and lessons learned). The next day should be dedicated to field visits to engage with large, medium, and small-scale farmer groups; medium and large-scale agriculture-related industries such as food and feed processors, and fertilizer blending factories, and programs to improve the health and nutrition of infants and children. The day should end with a reflection and a communiqué.



Standing: IITA Goodwill Ambassador, former president Olusegun Obasanjo, addressing the audience during the NZHF in Benue.

[Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, who also manages the secretariat of the NZHF at IITA, explained that the peer advisory mechanism of the NZHF would encourage states to keep focus on the commitment they made towards agriculture so they could achieve their targets.

He commended the maiden meeting in Benue state, noting that the state has the capacity to feed the country if its agricultural potential was fully tapped.

The Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom, described the Nigeria Zero Hunger initiative as a tool that would accelerate the agricultural development of states through peer learning. He noted that through the Forum the state was able to purchase fertilizers in good time for distribution to farmers.

"Besides, through the meeting, we had been given advice on how to handle certain areas and in some cases the former president personally facilitated contacts on our behalf to persons who have the answers," Ortom explained.

The meeting in Benue, held 8-9 June, was attended by Governor Ortom, Ebonyi State Governor David Umahi, Deputy Governor of Borno State, and representatives of the governors of Ogun and Sokoto States, [IITA](#), [African Development Bank](#), World Food Program ([WFP](#)), private sector, farmer groups, members of Benue State Executive Council, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nigeria Army School of Military Engineering, and the press.

The NZHF is supported by IITA, AfDB, WFP and the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library.

Obasanjo, Dashiell, Umahi, and Yaji honored by Benue government

The Benue State government has honored IITA Ambassador, former President Olusegun Obasanjo; IITA Deputy Director General for Partnerships and Delivery, [Kenton Dashiell](#); Governor of Ebonyi State, David Umahi; and a former Deputy Governor of Benue State, Sule Yaji for their contributions to food security. The four eminent persons were dressed in a cultural attire of the state as a mark of honor for their contributions during the maiden meeting of the Nigeria Zero Hunger Forum in Makurdi, Benue state.

Obasanjo, who spoke on behalf of the four, thanked the state for the honor and pledged

his commitment to supporting initiatives to end hunger.

In another related development, DDG Dashiell was also received by the traditional head of the Tiv nation, His Royal Highness Prof James Ayatse. Prof Ayatse had served as a member of IITA's Board of Trustees.

DDG Dashiell was accompanied by IITA Communication and Knowledge Exchange Expert, [Godwin Atser](#); and Head of Resource Mobilization and external Liaison, Toyin Oke. The visit to the traditional ruler was part of efforts to get traditional rulers' support for the zero hunger initiative.



L-R: Godwin Atser, Toyin Oke, His Royal Highness, Tor Tiv, Prof James Ayatse; and DDG Dashiell in Benue state.

AfDB Director urges scientists to take advantage of IITA Onne

Chiji Ojukwu, Director, Agriculture and Agroindustry Department of the African Development Bank (AfDB), called on scientists to consider setting up their research plots at the reopened agricultural research and training facility in Onne.

He made the appeal on 15 June when he visited with a team comprising Omoluabi-Davies Omotere, Senior Agribusiness Officer, AfDB, [Evelyn Ohanwusi](#), Interim Head, Youth in Agribusiness Office, IITA, and Victoria Lawal, ENABLE Youth coordinator, Nigeria.

"IITA Onne is an excellent site for research, agribusiness ventures and training. Scientists should take advantage and join in the expansion of the station," the AfDB Director said.

In welcoming the AfDB director, [Okechukwu Richardson](#), Head, IITA station in Onne, reiterated that the station was reopened to serve Africa in the area of capacity building for small, medium and large-scale farmers; provide support to novel agribusiness enterprises; and collaborate with universities and agricultural research institutions. These, he noted, were areas that scientists could anchor their projects on.

Another attraction of the station is an *"established tissue culture laboratory which will assist in research and seed multiplication,"* Okechukwu stated. He also expressed optimism that the station's effort in seeking funds for sustainability through new program development, partnership, and sponsorship will be highly successful.



Director Chiji (center, in black) flanked by the youth agripreneurs and staff in Onne.

The AfDB Director was treated to various presentations on the history, evolution and success of the station. Josephine Agogbua, Postdoctoral research fellow, in her presentation, recalled that plantain and banana were incorporated as IITA's mandate crops in 1987. Consequently, a program was started in 1991 on breeding for resistance to [black sigatoka disease](#).

"This effort resulted in the development of high-yielding disease-resistant hybrids widely recognized as PITA. These have since been deployed to farmers in collaboration with NARS. The station has also swung into full breeding activities since its comeback," she reported.

Dorcas Ogunwole, IYA Onne pioneer member, reported on the various viable agribusiness ventures identified through

informed market analysis and surveys, and plans in place for expansion. She said that the station is an excellent incubation center for training young people in agribusiness in the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria.

Responding, Ojukwu applauded the young farmers for their resilience and self-motivation and for living true to the belief that vibrant young men and women can convert a seemingly hopeless situation to something enviable.

He pledged the Bank's unflinching support to IITA with the two mega projects—ENABLE (Empowering Nobel Agribusiness-Led Employment) Youth and TAAT (Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation). The visit ended with a tour of the station facilities.

Gates team discusses food security with IITA

Two top officials of the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) were in IITA to discuss ways to address food security in Africa with impact at scale. The team comprising Tom Kehoe and Audu Grema met with IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) and management team on the program Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT). Thereafter they met with the different IITA programs funded by the foundation to better understand the impact Gates' agricultural programs are making at farm level.

The Gates team also toured IITA's campus, looking at the Semi Autotrophic Hydroponics (SAH), Business Incubation Platform (NoduMax and Aflasafe), and the yam aeroponics units.



IITA recently hosted top officials of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Ibadan.

Looking back

PPS and the IITA Campus

The IITA Campus we know today owes its history to the institute's Physical Plant Services (PPS). Plans for the first phase of construction in the campus had been completed by December of 1967, and the campus' first building, the Crop Threshing and Drying Building (Building 201), was completed in June of 1970.

William Gamble, IITA director general from 1975 to 1980, said that none of the institution's progress would have been possible if not for the PPS. The building commissioned equipment, and assured the staff of electricity, water, and air-conditioning. These outputs, Gamble said, were critical to the development of IITA.

Sources:

Lawani, S. 1992. History and Evolution of IITA's Scientific Program. Sustainable Food Production in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the beginning was 'Building 201' and then PPS... IITA in the beginning, Kunle Afolabi, 2008



Top: Round-about, gatehouse under construction 1969
 Bottom: Main entrance under construction, 1969.

Top: IITA entrance under construction, 1968.
 Middle: Entrance road under construction, 1968.
 Bottom: Main road of IITA before construction, 1968.