

Two ministers in one day!

IITA had two important visitors in one day! Two ministers from the Federal Government of Nigeria dropped in on lightning visits on 10 July at IITA Headquarters in Ibadan.

Agriculture Minister impressed with IITA's technologies; says IITA can quadruple yam production in Nigeria

Nigeria's minister of agriculture says there are high hopes for Nigeria's agriculture as a result of IITA's "impressive and advanced" agricultural technologies.



Chief Audu Ogbeh (middle, in blue) was delighted to see finished products from biofortified cassava and hear about IITA's semi-autotrophic hydroponics technology for mass propagating cassava plants.

Nigeria's honorable Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbeh, visited IITA in Ibadan, Nigeria, on 10 July, and said that he is "impressed" by the many commendable agricultural technologies developed there because they hold promise to quadruple production and export for a crop like yam and also for other staple crops like banana, plantain, soybean, and cocoa.

At the tour of the Institute's facilities including cassava fields, the [Aflasafe](#) (a biocontrol product for controlling aflatoxins) production plant, the seed yam production facility with the [aeroponics](#) system, and [NoduMax](#), a soybean inoculum fertilizer facility, Chief Ogbeh said "...We are seeing amazing research happening at IITA. One issue that people raised when they learned

that Nigeria is now exporting yams is the fear that there'll be shortages back home. We assured them that there wouldn't be because we are not intending to just sell all the yams and starve Nigerians. With what we have seen at IITA, we are getting more reassured that that won't happen because if we spread the technologies piloted by IITA throughout Nigeria, yam production can quadruple," the Honorable Minister said.

Earlier in the day, Chief Ogbeh who was in Oyo State on a working tour, had met with farmers in the state and also visited fields in different parts of the state to understand and work out implementable policies based on the state's comparative advantage in terms of crop production.

Oyo state is the largest state in south west Nigeria, sitting on an estimated land expanse of 28,454 km², which represents 55.6% of the total land area of all six states in that region combined. But over the years the agricultural potential of the state has not been optimally maximized.

Chief Ogbeh said he wants his visit to remind the people of the state that "there is a future and fortune to be made from agriculture, especially for the young and educated who embrace commercial farming".

According to him, agriculture holds the future but it cannot be achieved through the use of hoes and cutlasses. Agriculture is not just hoes and cutlasses, but also research and science. That is what IITA is offering. This institute has come to play a role not just for Nigeria but Africa," he explained.

He added that: "Agriculture has a future. Agriculture has fortunes, and with an Institute like this, those who want to go into agriculture and make money should know that there is money to be made. With you (IITA) we can move forward," he added.

IITA's Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) reassured the honorable Minister of the Institute's commitment to support the efforts of the Nigerian government towards ensuring that the country is food secure. According to DG Sanginga the goal of the Institute is to work with governments in the context of their national agriculture strategies to eradicate hunger and poverty and create wealth.

On 29 June, Nigeria made history by launching the export of yams with 72 tons

of tubers from the country to the United States and Europe, sparking concerns over the ability of the country to sustain exports owing to the high cost of seed yams which is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge on modern seed yam multiplication techniques.

Traditionally farmers are compelled to reserve a minimum of 30% of their harvest as seeds for the next planting season. However, researchers from IITA and national partners have developed the aeroponics system of seed yam multiplication using vines of the crop to propagate seed yams rather than tubers. Through this method, farmers may not need to reserve their harvest for the next planting season but can simply produce seed yams for the planting season, according to [Norbert Maroya](#), Coordinator for the project Yam Improvement for Incomes and Food Security in West Africa ([YIIFSWA](#)).

Chief Ogbah also cited the strong collaboration history between IITA and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development ([FMARD](#)) saying that during IITA's 50th anniversary celebration which is slated for 24–29 July, FMARD will



Chief Ogbah inspecting how IITA grows yam in the air through aeroponics.

announce the modalities of how it intends to keenly partner with IITA to get available technologies into farmers' hands.

Top African government officials and private sector champions including Prof Yemi Osinbajo, Nigeria's Acting President; Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President; General Yakubu Gowon, former head of state; Bruno Tshibala, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo; Dr Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African

Development Bank; Dr Deo-Guide Rurema, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Burundi; Mr Sadanobu Kusaoke, Japanese Ambassador to Nigeria, Entrepreneurs Alhaji Aliko Dangote and Tony Elumelu, Oba Saliu Adetunji, Olubadan (local king) of Ibadan; and state governors are expected to grace IITA's 50th anniversary celebration, with support from the Dangote group, Tony Elumelu Foundation, IITA staff, alumni, and Board of Trustees, Bovas, Inqaba, Punch and the Guardian Newspapers.

Federal Ministry of Environment establishes ties anew

The new Hon. Minister of State for Environment, His Excellency Alhaji Ibrahim Usman Jibril, visited IITA this week to familiarize himself with IITA and seek future collaboration.

The minister was accompanied by the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Environment, Dr Shehu Ahmed, a former IITA board member and immediate past Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; the Executive Director of the Forest Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN), Dr Adepoju Adeshola, and a host of other officials.

Deputy Director General for Partnerships for Delivery Kenton Dashiell welcomed the minister and his party to IITA, after which Robert Asiedu, Director, West Africa, explained about some of IITA's ongoing efforts and activities in Nigeria.

The Minister congratulated IITA on its 50th anniversary celebration and its many groundbreaking activities, saying "IITA has been quietly working and touching the lives of Nigerians...We are proud of that..."

He said, "We are here because we believe we are partners and can keep on collaborating on sustainable agricultural practices... agriculture needs to be sustainable since there are many (environmental) problems associated with agricultural activities."

"We are visiting research-related institutions, and in our own national interest, we are taking care of key international donors

and partners," he said. "We will continue to collaborate and find new areas of collaboration with IITA."

The Minister also brought up the issue of biotechnology and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). He said the Ministry is neutral and looking at things objectively and scientifically. He said there is a need to let people know what is happening.

In response, Dashiell said "IITA has the capacity and resources to talk about these breakthroughs. We should and will continue to work with both the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to create jobs and increase the productivity of farmers while protecting the environment."



The Minister of State for Environment and his officials in a group photo with IITA staff.

IITA, USAID Mission to jointly tackle cassava diseases in DR Congo

The USAID Mission in DR Congo has partnered with IITA to promote research in forestalling Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD), which has drastically reduced cassava production in the country since the late 1990s and early 2000s.



Christopher Tocco (center) with other USAID delegates and event participants at the youth Agripreneurs exhibition center.

The collaboration will be implemented through a USAID-funded CBSD project in South Kivu, which was officially flagged off on 22 June by Christophe Tocco, USAID Mission Director, DR Congo in the presence of Adolphine Mulley, the Provincial Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment; Muller Ruhumbika, Provincial Minister of Plan; representatives of various government agencies; and IITA scientists and staff.

According to Tocco, USAID has had many effective partnerships with IITA and is banking on its expertise to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in sub-

Saharan Africa. "USAID has a mission to help developing countries move towards sustainable development. We are working with stakeholders like IITA to achieve enduring impacts because CBSD, now prevalent in Eastern DR Congo, may spread countrywide if nothing is done to stop the virus," Tocco added.

Presenting on the highlights of the CBSD project, IITA Country Representative Nzola Mahungu, said that DR Congo was the number one producer of cassava in Africa before 1990. However, the country's production nosedived from 20 to 15 million tons per year between 1990 and 2000 due

to severe cassava mosaic disease attack. Presently, CBSD, another major cassava disease, is causing serious havoc in some cassava-producing provinces of the country. "I believe that with this new project, the CBSD menace will be reduced," Mahungu said.

Chris Okafor, Officer-in-Charge of the Bukavu Station, presented an overview of the Station's work as well as highlights of ongoing projects. He especially drew the visitors' attention to the IITA Youth Agripreneur initiative and its progress to date. He invited the visitors to find time to visit the Station's state-of-the-art science laboratories and the crop processing facilities run by the youth group. He had also invited the visitors to join IITA in celebrating its Golden Jubilee on 29 June at College Alfajiri in Bukavu town.

On behalf of the South Kivu Government, Mulley thanked the Mission Director for visiting the Province. She said that cassava was the main pillar of food security for 80% of the Congolese population and is also a major cash crop. She urged all the actors to participate actively in the project and ensure its successful implementation.

After a guided tour of the station's laboratories, and cassava and soybean processing facilities, the Mission Director wrote in the "golden book": "Dear IITA Friends, thank you so much for a wonderful visit of the lab and station facilities. I appreciated meeting the youth working with IITA and seeing the modern laboratories in a place such as this. Our hope is that together we can help improve the food security situation in Congo. Thank you!"

IITA records unprecedented media presence in recent weeks

IITA has been hitting the high notes, trending back to back on radio, television, print, social media, and electronic press since the latter part of June. This is a welcome development springing from two media events held in June during which Kenton Dashiell, DDG Partnerships for Delivery, enjoined the media to help IITA in spreading its message to the rest of the world.

The media familiarization and press conference events, which were respectively held in IITA offices in Ibadan and Lagos, were collectively attended by over 100 journalists from the local, regional, and international media.

Since then, journalists have taken a much keener interest in promoting IITA positively to the world, publishing a weekly average of 50 stories, cross posts, and global mentions.

Stay tuned and help promote IITA on all its social media platforms and IITA News.



IITA scientists granting interviews to the press.

To like us on Facebook: <https://web.facebook.com/IITA.CGIAR/>
To follow us on Twitter: https://twitter.com/IITA_CGIAR

To follow us on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/iita_cgjar/
To keep up with the news and subscribe to IITA News, go to <http://www.iita.org/subscribe/>

Networking in agriculture, the case of AgResults

As Nigeria advances on its resolve to diversify its economy and reignite agriculture, an IITA project—emphasizing strongly on both health and income—is creating the needed platform for the new wave of businesses that will spring from the sector.

The project, called [AgResults Aflasafe](#), is the first multilaterally funded pilot that encourages farmers to use IITA's flagship biocontrol product [aflasafe](#), proven to reduce aflatoxin contamination in field and store by more than 80%. [Aflatoxin](#) is one of the most harmful toxins of natural origin known to man.

Through its pull mechanism, AgResults links producers of aflasafe-treated (proxy for low aflatoxin) maize with potential off-takers through implementers who enforce standards and nurture the relationship between smallholder farmers and private sector businesses. This symbiotic relationship creates a bond between stakeholders and a paradigm shift in the way traditional agriculture is viewed and practiced.

Those already on the scheme are better off. One such beneficiary is Chief Eric Nwokedike Ozongwu, a grain merchant based in Kaduna state who participated in the year 4 innovation platform and market linkages workshop held in Lagos on 29 June. After 3 years of using aflasafe, Ozongwu is one of the first set of Nigerians confident that his aflatoxin-reduced maize can meet the standards set by Europe and America.

“The fact remains that aflatoxin is a big problem. I sell maize to Nestlé and this has exposed me to the dangers that

aflatoxins pose especially for children. Nestlé has set a maximum limit of 4 parts per billion aflatoxins for the grains that they use. This may seem really a stringent standard but we have met this specification using aflasafe. Aflasafe works! My company's next plan is to export maize to Europe and America and with aflasafe we can go to sleep trusting that the grains will not be rejected there,” Ozongwu said.

But how can off-takers like Ozongwu remain in business and continually aggregate the volume of safe maize that is demanded by food processing companies like Nestlé and Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc for instance?

[Debo Akande](#), Lead, AgResults project, Nigeria, explained that when the right networks are in place, the existing disconnect between maize producers and buyers who are mostly residing in different regions of the country is bridged.

“In the agricultural industry in Nigeria, maize farmers ask the questions who will buy the low-aflatoxin maize I produce?

On the other hand, buyers struggle to find safe maize. It was essential then for AgResults to create the bridge for the market of aflatoxin-reduced maize, and the project does so every year through its innovation platform and market linkages workshop,” Akande noted.

This year, the farmers participating in the project hope to produce 80,000 tons of aflasafe-treated maize for which there are already assured buyers. Akande, therefore, called for more producers to begin using aflasafe so as to enjoy premium prices

for their produce. He also enjoined government to create an enabling environment for the private sector to drive transformational changes in the country's agricultural sector.

Another commendable approach the project recently explored is providing opportunities to farmers to access funds required to purchase Aflasafe and growing maize on a large scale. To take care of this, AgResults has enlisted the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending ([NIRSAL](#))—an agency facilitating access for farmers to loans and credit from banks.

“NIRSAL takes the heat off farmers by derisking agriculture and issuing credit guarantee so that banks can have confidence to give farmers access to loans which they need to grow their businesses. The organization also provides inputs, machineries, storage, market and all the farmer needs to get the best agronomic practices to do his farming business,” said Chris Uche, a NIRSAL official.

Furthermore, AgResults also partners with regulatory agencies such as the National Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control ([NAFDAC](#)), which enforce standards for maize export and processing. In the long run, the project will complement efforts of the Aflasafe Technology Transfer and Commercialization ([ATTC](#)) project specially designed to tackle the aflatoxin problem in maize and groundnut, creating a balanced opportunity for viable businesses in the maize and groundnut value chains to thrive.



Debo Akande takes participants through the project's vision for 2017.

New DDG-R4D visits southern Africa Hub

From 6 to 7 July, the new IITA Deputy Director General for R4D, May-Guri Saethre, was at the Southern Africa Research and Administration Hub (SARAH) campus in Lusaka, Zambia, as part of her familiarization tour of the different IITA stations and offices across Africa.

During her sortie of the SARAH campus, she toured the station's research facilities and experimental fields. She also met with scientists and staff, who briefed her on the different research activities and projects happening within the country and the region.

[David Chikoye](#), Regional Director for Southern Africa, led Zambia-based staff in welcoming the new DDG to SARAH. Saethre was particularly interested in IITA-Zambia's modern mechanized irrigation system, which is currently being tested on-campus, stating that this could serve as a model for other IITA stations to emulate.

"I am very impressed by this irrigation system that you have set up here," the DDG pointed out. "At Ibadan, we are looking at ways to modernize and make more efficient the irrigation system that we have in place there, which has been there for decades."

"What you have here could serve as a model of a modern and fully automated irrigation system in our experimental fields in different IITA stations across Africa," she added. "But more than the irrigation system itself, we need to realize that IITA exists to show farmers that things could be done better and more efficiently in the farm. And this system is a good example," she emphasized.

"What we want to do here at SARAH is to showcase automation and mechanization of agricultural processes," explained Chikoye. "In addition to this modern irrigation system, we also have a well-equipped cassava processing center and an agricultural machinery fabrication building. Together, these facilities highlight what African farmers in southern Africa could potentially adopt to make their lives better."

Apart from touring the campus and facilities, the DDG also held meetings with IITA staff based at SARAH as well as those from Malawi and Mozambique, who participated via online conferencing. Here, the DDG briefed the staff on her plans, and also answered questions asked by staff.

"I am pleased to be here at SARAH," Saethre said, "and I can clearly see that the Hub is doing very well in terms of research and related activities. With my interactions with all of you, I have also sensed the deep dedication and belief of everyone in what IITA is trying to accomplish here in this region."

"Rest assured that I and the R4D directorate will do our best to support your initiatives in southern Africa. And thank you very much for welcoming and having me here. I am very sure that I will be back soon," she concluded.



Top: IITA-Zambia staff with the DDG-R4D. Bottom: DDG Saethre being briefed by Chikoye and other scientists on activities at the experimental field at SARAH.

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).

Looking back

IITA's first collaborative projects

IITA's first project involving research cooperation was established in 1971 with the Overseas Development Administration in the UK. The project focused on grain legume physiology and root development. In the same year, the Institute collaborated with CIMMYT (the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center) to help plan the national maize improvement program of Zaire, now called the Democratic Republic of Congo. Also around the same time, Liberia and Sierra Leone requested for assistance with rice projects, and IITA sent missions to Ghana and Togo. For the next two years, IITA was also involved with the Nigerian Accelerated Food Production Project.

By 1973, IITA had appointed James Moomaw as the assistant director for what they called the Outreach Program, intended to increase the number of collaborative projects rapidly. Moomaw developed a statement of objectives and outlined a strategy for guiding partnerships. A year after his appointment, 20 scientists were already assigned to collaborative projects in Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zaire.



James Moomaw outlined a strategy for IITA's collaborative projects.

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

Ortiz, Rodomiro, compiler. 2017. IITA: 50 years after: Transforming Africa's Agriculture and Nourishing Rural Development. IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria. 110 pages.

Source: <http://irri.org/blogs/irri-history/this-month-in-irri-history-july>

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research*

IITA is part of the 15 international research centers scattered across the world under the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The CGIAR is one of the most successful research-for-development organizations. Its roots go back to the Mexico-Rockefeller Foundation International Agricultural Program that successfully led to Mexico's self-sufficiency in wheat by 1969. The Rockefeller Foundation wanted to expand this success to Asia, and thus established a partnership with the Ford Foundation to set up the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. The success of IRRI led the two foundations to establish three more institutes: CIMMYT, CIAT, and IITA.

and the administrator of the United Nations Development Programme. The letter was a proposal to organize a long-term program of support for the four existing regional agricultural research institutes, and a proposal to establish more. This program of support is what is called the CGIAR.



CGIAR has evolved over the years. The partnership is now officially called CGIAR System Organization.

Sources:
CGIAR, 2012. The CGIAR at 40: Institutional Revolution of the World's Premier Agricultural Research Network

Ortiz, Rodomiro, compiler. 2017. IITA: 50 years after: Transforming Africa's Agriculture and Nourishing Rural Development. IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria. 110 pages.

The CGIAR was officially established in 1971 through what was later dubbed the First Bellagio Conference. The conference, hosted by the Rockefeller Foundation, brought together top officials from major organizations and focused on agricultural development and emphasized the need for financial assistance for institutions at the international, regional, and national level.



The CGIAR was officially established in 1971 through what was later dubbed the First Bellagio Conference.

Due to the discussion that ensued after the conference in their respective agencies, the president of the World Bank sent letters to the director general of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

* Not used anymore.