

## MEDA, IITA, and Agriculture Ministry to build an economically sustainable seed system for cassava in Tanzania

Cassava farmers and processors in Tanzania have another reason to smile as a new project to address one of their major challenges—the lack of access to clean planting material of new improved, disease-resistant varieties—is launched.

(MALF), and IITA in 11 regions in Tanzania.

The project was recently launched by Honorable Engineer Mathew Mtigumwe, the Permanent Secretary (PS), Ministry of Agriculture, at a ceremony in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It comes hot in the heels of a recent announcement of a [US\\$1 billion partnership between Tanzania and a Chinese firm](#) to commercialize cassava farming and processing. The PS applauded the project as he noted its timeliness in the ongoing efforts to exploit cassava's great potential to boost the income of farmers and fight rural poverty.

“The production of cassava in Tanzania is affected by two devastating diseases—cassava mosaic disease (CMD) and cassava brown streak disease (CBSD). Therefore, providing farmers access to high quality planting materials of high-yielding, disease-resistant, improved cassava varieties will allow them to exploit this new opportunity and others to unleash widespread economic impact on smallholder farmers and lead to

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Meeting participants.

The five-year project titled Building an Economically Sustainable Seed System for Cassava in Tanzania - **BEST Cassava** seeks to set up an accessible and affordable commercial seed system for quality assured planting material of improved, disease-resistant varieties.

It is funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

It will be implemented by the [Mennonite Economic Development Associates \(MEDA\)](#) with the [Tanzanian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries](#)

## The Nigeria Zero Hunger Forum activates drive to end hunger in Nigeria by 2025

Members of the Nigeria Zero Hunger Forum have taken proactive steps to ensure that malnutrition and hunger will no longer be experienced in the country by 2025.

To achieve this goal, the forum agreed during the launch of its “Synthesis Report of the Nigeria Zero Hunger Strategic Review” earlier last month to select five pilot states (Benue, Ogun, Ebonyi, Sokoto, and Borno) where at least one livestock and two major food crops

will be commercially produced to help feed the country. The Secretariat that coordinates the activities of the forum is based at [IITA](#) in Ibadan with additional offices and farms in Abuja, Kano, and Onne.

Accordingly, on 26-27 January, a visiting team comprising experts from IITA, the [World Food Program](#) (WFP), and [AfricaRice](#) were in Ebonyi State to initiate plans to complement the State's projects on rice, cassava, and seed production.



Kenton Dashiell, IITA DDG, Partnerships for Delivery (left), presents the implementation document of the Forum to His Excellency, Engr. Dave Umahi, the executive Governor of Ebonyi state.

The visitors, led by [Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, were received by His Excellency, Engr. Dave Umahi, and his Deputy, H.E. Barrister Kelechi Igwe. Dashiell commended the state government for accepting to work with the Forum, shared the road map for the operations of the forum, and said that the state would still need support to deliver expected results at scale.

Other members on the visiting entourage were [Peter Kulakow](#), IITA Cassava Breeder; [Francis Nwilene](#), Entomologist, Country Representative/Coordinator, AfricaRice; [Abraham Shaibu](#), Rice Seed Expert, AfricaRice; Femi Amure, Advisor/Liaison, World Food Program, Nigeria; Najimu Adetoro, IITA Cassava Breeder; and Toyin Oke, IITA Manager, Resource Mobilization, Protocol, and External Liaison Office.

The scientists made presentations on various crops. Everyone agreed that scaling up of the various agricultural activities in the State should begin immediately and include sourcing investors to drive and support the initiatives on ground.

According to Nwilene, even though Ebonyi is currently reckoned as one of the biggest producers of rice in the country, the State may need to visit rice models yielding productively in Nassarawa and Kebbi States. He also said that AfricaRice would assist the State to identify rice varieties that would suit its ecology.

Barr. Igwe, accompanied by the State's Commissioner for Agriculture, Heads of Ebonyi State Crop Unit, and representatives of [IFAD](#), and [FADAMA](#), led the visiting team on a tour of some of the State's farms and infrastructures.

The *Forum* will meet for a full day every 6 months to share reports, updates, and challenges. During these biannual meetings, the group will go on a field tour to see accomplishments and challenges first-hand, and thereafter recommend appropriate action points. The first in the series of these meetings will be hosted by Benue State in Makurdi in June 2017.

The *Forum* was constituted during the first quarter of 2016 to help the Federal Government of Nigeria achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed upon by Heads of State and Government at the Special Summit of the United Nations held in September 2015.

It is chaired by former Nigerian president, His Excellency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo with members composed of the chairs of the nine subcommittees of the Zero Hunger Strategic Review, as well as Governors of the five pilot States.

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positive ripple effects throughout the community," he said in a speech read on his behalf by Hussein Mansoor, the Director of Research and Development (DRD) in the Ministry.

MEDA's Stephen Magige, Project Manager of BEST Cassava, said that the project aims to "have a commercialized cassava seed system in place that will facilitate farmers' access to cassava planting materials of improved varieties for increased farmers' productivity and incomes".

The project will support more than 430 privately owned cassava seed entrepreneur businesses that will directly target approximately 29,000 smallholder farmers and indirectly benefit over 1 million farmers and their households.

[Regina Kapinga](#), Head of Advocacy and Resource Mobilization, who is leading the team from the IITA side, noted that increased commitment and investment by the government in the development of the cassava seed sector will lead to improved livelihoods of smallholder farmers. The other researchers from IITA are [Edward Kanju](#), cassava breeder, and [James Legg](#), plant virologist.

The commercialized seed system will provide farmers access to new improved varieties developed by the national breeding program in collaboration with IITA. "The national cassava breeding program has released new varieties which have the potential to produce more than 20 t/ha without the use of fertilizers and irrigation. These varieties also have tolerance to cassava mosaic and cassava brown streak diseases. The seed systems will ensure that they reach farmers quickly and cost effectively," said [Geoffrey Mkamilo](#), the National Coordinator for the Root and Tuber Crops Research Program from the Ministry of Agriculture.

The project builds on the successes and lessons and the teams from [three previous projects](#) funded by the Gates Foundation launched in 2012. These are: the Cassava Varieties and Clean Seed to Combat CBSD and CMD (5CP) project led by IITA; Commercially Sustainable Quality Assured Cassava Seed System, implemented by MEDA; and the Community Action in Controlling Cassava Brown Streak Disease through the Clean Seed project led by the DRD.

## New IITA website

IITA has a new website. To view it go to <http://newint.iita.org/>. Comments and feedback are welcome.



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## Managers and scientists fashion novel pathway for IITA's Analytical Service Laboratory

IITA is on course to be the first research Institute that will have a world class Analytical Service Laboratory (ASL) in Africa. This was the crux of the deliberations by managers and scientists of the IITA ASL when they met in Nairobi on 13-15 February.

During the meeting, the experts designed some strategic pathways for achieving this vision and also agreed to immediately set up a quality management system (QMS) for all IITA ASLs.

Specifically, they resolved that certain systems, standards, and procedures must be in place for best service quality in terms of accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of reported test results. The team also deliberated and agreed that the best way to achieve first-rate performance in the ASLs across all IITA stations is by making sure that all aspects of laboratory operations are addressed to assure quality.

"We all have roles to play in achieving this big picture. To get the QMS in place as soon as possible, we must work to ensure that the right quality organization, personnel competency, sample collection and transportation, equipment, procurement, management, quality control and management systems, record keeping, analysis, report creation, facilities and safety



*IITA Laboratory managers and scientists who attended the meeting in Nairobi.*

measures—are all implemented," said [Dries Roobroeck](#) who represented [Bernard Vanlauwe](#), Director for Central Africa Hub and Natural Resource Management (NRM) Leader at IITA.

Another offshoot of the meeting was the harmonization of the standard operating procedures (SoPs) across IITA ASLs. Some of the laboratories were asked to align their protocols with standard IITA operations.

The meeting participants agreed to follow the new guidelines necessary to attain the desired level of QMS and also finalize all ASL validation and revalidation of reference samples, and

quality control processes which will be linked to the international schemes.

The IITA team also visited the laboratory of the World Agroforestry Center ([ICRAF](#)) in Nairobi and discussed areas of collaboration, especially on transferring knowledge to IITA on the use of spectroscopic instruments.

"What remains now going forward is for the ASL team to show competency and maintain top quality such that scientists at IITA as well as elsewhere on the African continent will patronize the IITA ASL for the analysis of their samples," said Joseph Uponi, IITA ASL Manager.

## IITA scientists debunk misconceptions about imminent global banana shortage

In an article entitled "Why we should all get off the banana shortage bandwagon" published in the [Adjacent Open Access](#) journal of 9 February, IITA researchers Rony Swennen and James Legg said the recent reports of an imminent global banana shortage are overblown and self-serving.

According to the report, Panama disease may be a threat to some species of banana, but the spread of the disease in itself cannot make all banana species extinct.

"...About [145 million metric tons of bananas are produced annually](#) in over 130 countries and on more than 11 million hectares. Banana is the

sixth most important starchy crop in the world after maize, rice, wheat, potato, and cassava. Only 15% are exported, consisting of one single type of varieties belonging to the Cavendish group. These Cavendish varieties, all genetically similar, are cultivated almost in every country by smallholders but the large export plantations are based in a few countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Almost 70% of the entire export market is in the hands of only 10 countries and about five companies dominate the banana export trade. It is the Cavendish and this linked business model that is threatened by [Panama disease](#). This is caused by a soil-borne *Fusarium*



*Different varieties of banana abound.*

fungus of which there is a severe strain called race 4 that kills the Cavendish plants and therefore destroys entire plantations.

...Panama race 4 started to affect banana export production in the 1990s with a major impact on the production in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In the meantime, the Taiwanese developed a set of Panama race 4 resistant Cavendish lines. Panama race 4 was inadvertently introduced to Mozambique, in

the southeastern part of Africa. It spread rapidly through two large commercial banana plantations where it occurred.

Efforts to remove infected plants failed to control the spread of the disease within the plantations. A lack of resources together with insufficient political will to apply stringent containment measures, mean that Panama race 4 will continue to spread through susceptible Cavendish plantations in Africa, and the disease

does therefore pose a threat to the future production of commercial dessert bananas in Africa. However, it is important that banana researchers, the media, and other banana stakeholders do not overstate the scale of this threat, not least since there is no current evidence to show that this disease will cause significant damage to Africa's most important banana crop, which is the food staple produced by non-Cavendish types."

Read the full report [here](#).

## Kigoma Regional Commissioner applauds SARD-SC project for improved cassava productivity

The newly appointed executives of Tanzanian Kigoma region, Brigadier General Emmanuel Maganga and Charles Pallangyo, visited one of the [SARD-SC](#) project sites in the Kibondo. About 105 officials from five districts of Kigoma Region were on the entourage of the executives who visited the Kibondo Big Power Group—a cassava farmers and processors' group involved in SARD-SC project activities in the district.

The chairperson of Kibondo Big Power Group, Kennedy Salundari, welcomed the visitors to the processing center, where they saw various processing equipment in operation. In his remarks, Salundari commended the project for improving the group's processing facility as an initiative to reduce cassava postharvest losses. He said: "Apart from support in postharvest management, IITA/SARD-SC has also brought about a significant change in our farming methods by training us on good agronomic practices." Salundari added that other farmers around the vicinity who were not the target beneficiaries have also benefited from their improved capacity as a result of the project. "Things have not remained the same but have changed for the better," he added on behalf of fellow group members.

Thereafter, the Regional Commissioner, Brigadier Maganga and his delegation visited the project's demo plots as well as a cassava farm owned by Kibondo

Big Power Group. In a discussion with the SARD-SC project representative, Hon. Maganga bemoaned the past incidents of food shortages in the region and said the situation has improved as a result of high cassava productivity.

[Veronica Uzokwe](#), representing the project, explained that farmers are used to planting local varieties that are low yielding and succumb easily to major pests and diseases. She further explained that the advent of the SARD-SC project has helped to address this challenge by promoting the use of improved varieties in collaboration with Lake Zone Agricultural Research and Development Institute (LZARDI). These varieties have high yield potential and are resistant to diseases.

The Regional Commissioner said: "I am very impressed with what SARD-SC has done in Kigoma Region. This is what is expected from all other projects. The beneficiaries/farmers should be guided on how to sustain their activities even when the project ends." He also instructed the Regional Agricultural Officer to find out how the local farmers in the region could have access to planting material of improved varieties.

"I am really impressed that farmers have learnt to manage the fields very well as we all see in this farm. It should be noted that the aim of all this is to improve the living standards of the people of Kigoma and SARD-SC has my full support. You are welcome in my office at any time."



*The regional commissioner (wearing cream colored pants) visiting project partners in 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)).

## IITA family gears up for its 50th anniversary celebrations

The vibe is turning intense in all [IITA](#) stations as staff and scientists prepare to celebrate the Institute as it turns golden this year! So, Communication went round HQ and asked staff how they feel about being a member of the IITA family. Many shared their journey, consisting long, rich years of service to the Institute and wished the Institute well for this anniversary and beyond. Watch out for more interviews next week!

**Adeola Akintoye**  
Project Accountant



My best wishes go to the IITA family as we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. IITA is a veritable hotbed for crop research excellence in sub-Saharan Africa. I am grateful for the current leadership as well as the board of trustees. The achievements so far recorded in the last 50 years have contributed tremendously to finding solutions to hunger, malnutrition, and poverty in Africa.

I joined IITA in 1990 and it has been exhilarating to observe the growth of the organization into a dynamic entity that has a powerful influence on research to nourish the teeming population of Africans and as a result uplifting the lives of thousands of youths who have the privilege of working, training, or doing research with excellent scientists across our hubs in Africa. Many thanks to all our outstanding leaders, who charted the course for IITA during the formation of our history.

**Maria Olukemi Akinlotan**  
Officer, Front Office, I-House

I joined IITA on 1 August 1985 and started as a secretary. Since then, I have risen through the ranks and now work at the I-House front office. Believe me this role has been a very big change in my life. I am happy working in I-House because it has given me the opportunity to relate to different classes of people from different backgrounds, religions, and countries. I

am so happy to be a part of the IITA team, working hard to eliminate poverty all around Africa, I am also so happy to be a part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary because I was part of the 20<sup>th</sup> celebration. I wish IITA long life and success.



**Alidu Sule**  
Mechanic 3, FMS

I started working for IITA in 1979. At the time, I was employed as an assistant mechanic in the workshop. January 2017 made my service at IITA 39 growth-filled and fulfilling career years. So I am wishing IITA the very best of the best because it is actually the best.



**Mercy Asiquo Ewang**  
Clerk Typist, I-house

I joined IITA in 1986, worked in Lagos at the Ikeja Guest House as a casual, and became a staff in 1989, then moved to IITA-Ibadan in 2008. IITA today is far different from IITA of some 10-20 years ago: everything has changed and work is easier now with a lot of smiles on our faces. It gladdens my

heart to see growth with greatness; I wish the Institute continuity in the good work of nourishing and transforming Africa's agriculture.



**Adeyemo Beatrice Folakemi**  
Computer Operator, Supply Chain



I am happy to be in IITA, I started 25 years ago and have been working hard to contribute to the goals of the Institute. With what I do, there has been a lot of developments in computer applications, like IITA has changed from Alpha programs to very well upgraded softwares and apps that are really making work easier and more productive for us. I wish IITA more positive changes and growth. I also wish IITA more power to put smiles on people's faces not only in IITA but around the world. I thank the administration of [DG Nteranya Sanginga](#), the scientists, and the workers. I wish IITA greater heights and to always be at the top. I am also grateful to our donors and partners. It has really been a long cruise but we sailed through. Long live IITA!

## Alumni and friends will also be reuniting this year

Did you work or had your field work, study, postdoctorate posting in the past at IITA? If yes, you are a precious part of the IITA alumni family and invite you to come and reconnect with old friends and colleagues during the 7<sup>th</sup> IITA reunion of alumni, children of alumni, and friends of IITA as a part of the anniversary celebrations.

The reunion will hold on 24–29 July 2017. [Kwesi Atta-Krah](#), IITA Director, Systems and Site Integration, who chairs the IITA50 organizing committee, is calling on all alumni to indicate attendance. He also requests both staff and friends of the Institute to help spread the word to other alumni in their network of contact.

To register for the reunion, click <http://ow.ly/FoZy308LCbC>; to view the IITA50 page, click <http://50years.iita.org/>.