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Former Benin President and Sasakawa executive members praise the work of IITA-Benin

On 21 March, IITA-Bénin hosted Honorable Ruth Oniang'o, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA), accompanied by Deola Naibakelao, Managing Director, Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension (SAFE), Mercy Akeredolu, SAFE West Africa Coordinator, and former IITA staff member Leonides Halos-Kim, now Director of Post-Harvest and Agro-processing with SAA. But that was just the beginning of an even more exciting event.

H.E Ex President Soglo touring the facilities at IITA Bénin, 25 years after his first visit in 1992.

Former President, H.E. Nicephore Dieudonné Soglo, the only Bénin President to have visited IITA station way back in 1992, hearing that Honorable Oniang'o was visiting the station, expressed the wish to be part of the delegation. As a result, the station witnessed the visit of a very high powered delegation, which also included the Secretary General of the Ministry of Agriculture, Françoise Assogba-Komlan and her staff, as well as colleagues from the University of Abomey Calavi.

Presentations by IITA-Bénin staff were followed by very lively discussions. President Soglo, Deputy Chair of the Board of Directors of SAA, was very pleased to see that the station was still vibrant and kicking after his last visit 25 years ago. He congratulated IITA for a job well done, particularly with regards to the new course taken by the station in addressing biorisks under the threat of climate change.

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Three Liberian journals feature IITA's work on cassava

Three Liberian journals recently reported how a series of training using IITA's improved cassava varieties has empowered and is now helping farmers fight poverty and malnutrition in the country.

The journals—*Rem Republic*, *Monday Daily*, and *Women Voices* reported that two separate training benefited 122 farmers and 500 farmers, respectively, in four districts in Grand Bassa County and Kakata, Margibi County.

During the training, which were facilitated by Michael Edet, IITA's Cassava Extension Agronomist, the beneficiaries received free stem cuttings of 16 improved cassava varieties and also learned about the common pests and diseases of the crop. Edet also helped to assess and observe the cassava varieties on the fields of the local farmers in Kakata.

He urged Liberians to be more engaged in agriculture, saying that if the people could devote more time to agriculture, their livelihoods would improve tremendously.

"This training will add value to cassava production and improve livelihoods of

Cassava roots.

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farmers and processors in the country. We encourage farmers here to develop an interest in agriculture to improve your income, which will ultimately reduce the poverty rate in the country," Edet stressed.

Participants interacted and exchanged ideas on the techniques used in planting the different varieties of cassava they had received.

Lorpu Gizzi, a Liberian farmer, who spoke on behalf of the farmers, extolled the organizers of the training for the knowledge and experience shared and for the enormous benefits they have received. Gizzi noted that the training were coming at an appropriate time when farmers in the country were seeking help in recovering from the effects of the civil unrest that had previously affected the country.

"This is a welcome initiative; the knowledge and experience gained is of great benefit to us and will help us improve our livelihoods; it will surely bring relief to Liberia. What we have gathered from this training will help bring relief to a poverty-stricken, post-war nation like Liberia," he said.

The training were conducted through an African Development Bank (AfDB)-funded project at IITA—Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization (SAPEC), in conjunction with the Liberian Government.

SAPEC has the mandate to engage local farmers in Liberia to enhance agriculture and increase food security in the country.

Former Benin President and Sasakawa executive members praise the work of IITA-Benin **Cont'd from page 1**

Hon. Oniang'o repeatedly emphasized the importance of providing sustainable and affordable agricultural technologies to youth and women, the most vulnerable groups within farming communities. The distinguished guests were impressed by the efforts deployed by the IITA-Bénin team in developing and disseminating solutions to control biorisks with minimal disturbances of plant, animal, environmental, and human health.

Ex President Soglo and Honorable Oniang'o (rightmost) pose with IITA staff at the station.

DDG-Corporate Services visits IITA-SARAH

Deputy Director General for Corporate Services, Hilde Koper-Limbourg, was at the IITA Southern Africa Research and Administration Hub (IITA-SARAH) at Kabangwe, Lusaka Province, Zambia 14 to 17 March as part of her familiarization and monitoring tour of the regional Hubs.

During her visit to IITA-SARAH, Koper-Limbourg toured the campus and facilities, and interacted with staff based in Zambia and in Mozambique (via video conference). Her discussions with regional management and staff highlighted, among other things, enhancing the efficiency of the various units under her directorate to ensure effective delivery of services to and within the regions to support R4D work. The DDG also focused on issues that relate to staff benefits, welfare, and professional development. She also discussed the results of the staff satisfaction survey carried out a few months ago across the Institute.

The DDG-CS cutting the cake.

The DDG's visit also coincided with two events at IITA-SARAH: the first year anniversary of the movement of the SA Hub office to the SARAH campus on 15 March, and the completion of the training course of the Zambia IITA Youth Agripreneurs on cassava processing and utilization (*see related story*).

On the occasion of the former, Koper-Limbourg congratulated the Hub management and staff for a job well done on establishing and developing IITA-SARAH and its facilities. To commemorate the date, she led a simple cake-cutting ceremony along with David Chikoye, Regional Director for Southern Africa.

"It's my honor and pleasure to be here and share this memorable occasion with you all," she said, addressing staff. "The IITA Southern Africa Hub has really gone a long way in establishing a foothold in this country and in this region, particularly in developing the facilities here at SARAH."

"Rest assured that the Corporate Services Directorate, myself specifically, will always be on hand to support SARAH as we look forward to more years here in Zambia and in southern Africa," she reiterated.

"On behalf of the staff of IITA-SARAH, I would like to thank you for visiting us and joining us on our anniversary celebration of moving to this campus, and also for gracing the completion of the training of our ZIYA members," Chikoye told the DDG. "We also extend an open invitation to you to come and visit us again soon. I promise you, you will see even more improvements to SARAH the next time you come," he concluded.

IITA-Mozambique hosts DG Sanginga

On 21 to 22 March, IITA-Mozambique hosted IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga, for a two-day visit to oversee preparations for the upcoming Board of Trustees (BoT) meeting, the official inauguration of the new IITA-Mozambique facilities in Nampula, and the local celebration of IITA's 50th anniversary slated to be held there on 8–12 May. DG Sanginga also met with partners in government entities to discuss possible areas of further collaboration.

DG Sanginga meeting with DPA Dzucula (extreme left) while Chikoye and Boahen look on.

On 21 March, the DG, accompanied by David Chikoye, Regional Director for Southern Africa, and Steve Boahen, Country Representative to Mozambique, and other IITA-Mozambique staff and scientists, paid a courtesy call to the Provincial Directorate of Agriculture (DPA), Pedro Dzucula, in his office in Nampula.

During this visit, Dzucula briefed the IITA delegation on the existing collaboration between his department and the Institute. He specifically congratulated the efforts of IITA in providing legume seeds to farmers through projects particularly in the northern region of Mozambique. The DPA encouraged the DG to expand IITA's work in the country to include cassava, maize, and cashew, which have been earmarked by the Government as priority crops in the region.

In response, DG Sanginga emphasized the commitment of IITA to continue working with the agricultural department of Mozambique, highlighting the establishment of the Institute's new facilities in Nampula as proof of this commitment. He added that IITA continues to explore other avenues to engage in viable agricultural programs.

DG Sanginga also informed the DPA of the upcoming IITA BoT meeting in mid-May, the planned official inauguration of IITA-Mozambique's new research and administration facilities, and the local celebration of IITA's Golden Jubilee, both happening on 8 May. The DPA suggested that IITA invite the President of the Republic of Mozambique to grace the inauguration as he will be in Nampula during that period. The DG replied that they appreciated the suggestion, appointing Boahen to follow up on the matter with the help of Dzucula.

On 22 March, the DG, accompanied by Chikoye, Boahen, and Gersonia Catine, IITA-Mozambique station administrator, met with the Northeast Zonal Director of Mozambique's Institute of Agricultural Research (IIAM), Constantino Cumbe, at its research station in Nampula.

At the meeting, DG Sanginga briefed Cumbe on the events happening at IITA-Mozambique in May. Cumbe expressed his appreciation for the visit, indicating that his office will support these events particularly in coordinating with local government entities if needed. He lauded IITA's work in the country and the strong collaboration between IIAM and IITA. He also suggested some areas of further collaboration such as climate change mitigation through resilient production systems, research on traditional crops such as cocoyam and Bambara groundnut, expansion of cassava, yam, and tuber research, improvement of seed systems, and agroprocessing and crop value addition. The IITA delegation ended their visit with a tour of IIAM's modern seed processing plant.

IITA technologies receive a lot of attention at the Nairobi Innovation Week

IITA was among the hundred plus organizations that showcased their work at the 3rd Nairobi Innovation Week, an annual signature event organized by the University of Nairobi and other key stakeholders to celebrate and recognize innovations that are relevant to Kenyan society.

IITA's participation at the exhibition which took place 5-10 March at the University was part of events to mark its 50th Anniversary. It was a collaboration between its Central and Eastern Africa hubs with support

IITA's Manyong (middle) hosts guests at the exhibition booth.

from Bernard Vanlauwe and Victor Manyong, the respective hub directors. IITA also received support from Tonny Omwansa, who recently joined IITA as Director for Research Support and who is also the brains behind the Nairobi Innovation Week.

Speaking at the end of the event Omwansa said he hoped IITA can participate at the event on an annual basis and in a big way to support efforts to increase the Institute's visibility.

The IITA exhibition booth received very many visitors from the university fraternity, media, other exhibitors, and the public. Several public universities were interested in developing strategic relationships with IITA to support research and capacity building efforts.

IITA also got very good feedback on the technologies displayed and many expressed appreciation for the work the Institute was carrying out.

In addition to general information on IITA and its research activities, innovations that IITA researchers have developed/are developing were exhibited at the event. These included research to address soil health and associated technologies including NoduMax—a rhizobium inoculant to improve soybean production and Biochar—a form of charcoal for enhancing soils to boost productivity.

IITA also showcased its research on tackling nematodes—microscopic "worms" that attach to roots of crops—and root health.

Technologies addressing postharvest losses and making food safe were also exhibited. These included IITA's efforts to reduce aflatoxin contamination using the biocontrol product, aflasafe. Representatives from the IITA Youth Agripreneurs from Kenya also demonstrated their products and those from the group in Tanzania.

The team at the booth comprised Catherine Njuguna (Communication); Wilfred Osao (Aflasafe), Geoffrey Kimuati (Biochar), Onesmus Mwaura (Nematodes), Stephen Njenga (Kenya Agripreneurs), and Susan Karonga (Logistics). Victor Manyong and Jay Tripathi from the East Africa Hub joined the team on the first day.

Two wheat scientists graduate with full scholarships from the SARD-SC Wheat project

In August and September 2016, two students, Mala Kachalla from Nigeria and Bruce Mutari from Zimbabwe, respectively graduated with a master's degree after successful studies funded by the SARD-SC wheat project. The AfDB-funded SARD-SC wheat component of ICARDA runs a scholarship program to build the capacity of African researchers in various segments of the wheat sector. The project has offered a full scholarship to nine wheat scientists from six African countries to pursue their PhD or master's studies on wheat in the fields of breeding, seed production, agronomy, and disease and pest management, among others. The scientists are undertaking their studies in various top level universities across Africa, backed by practical field experience and learning exchanges with other countries in the continent.

Kachalla studied at the University of Maiduguri in northern Nigeria and specialized in "*Screening of drought tolerant wheat lines in West African lowland environment and molecular marker analysis, using markers linked to IRS translocation, dwarfing genes and leaf rust resistance.*" Through the support of the project, Kachalla attended a DNA molecular training in Rabat, Morocco.

"The major challenge that plagues wheat production in West Africa is abiotic stress, particularly heat and drought," explains Kachalla. "With the knowledge I have acquired in conventional and molecular breeding, I hope to support the wheat sector in my country to develop varieties that are tolerant to drought and heat stresses," he adds.

Mutari, on the other hand, specialized in "Diversity studies and marker-assisted improvement for rust resistance in wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) genotypes" from the University of Fort Hare (UFH), Alice, South Africa. Mutari is about to publish three papers, and one of them is on *Detection of rust resistance in selected Zimbabwean and ICARDA bred-wheat germplasm using conventional and molecular techniques.*

"Before my research, there was limited genotypic information on slow rusting leaf rust (Lr) and stem rust (Sr) resistance genes deployed in Zimbabwe," says Mutari. "The knowledge generated through my study will assist plant breeders in selecting parents for use in future hybridization programs and design of multi-resistant cross combination cultivars with improved rust resistance," he adds. This is important because in Zimbabwe, most of the old and present commercial wheat cultivars and promising breeding lines are susceptible to the current races of leaf and stem rust.

Mala Kachalla (center) is one of the wheat scientists sponsored by the SARD-SC wheat project.

Demand for wheat in Africa is rising as a result of increasing population, urbanization, and changing tastes, while productivity remains low due to abiotic (mainly heat and drought) and biotic (disease, insects, pests, and weeds) stresses. Through these scholarships, the project builds the capacity of the next generation of wheat scientists and researchers who will help the continent address challenges in wheat production and support countries to raise productivity, curb imports, and improve food security and livelihoods. The scholarships are comprehensive and include a stipend, publication and research costs, tuition, travel, and insurance.

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).

FMS refurbishes cassava processing centers and trains machine fabricators in DR Congo to reinforce its cassava value chain

IITA's cassava processing center in Kalambo, DR Congo, now wears an improved look, thanks to the intervention by members of the IITA Facility Management Services (FMS).

The upgrade exercise was led by Engr. Thierno Diallo, FMS postharvest engineer, who with his team helped improve the facilities to enable the delivery of effective services at the processing center with the support of the Management and staff of IITA Kalambo, and the SARD-SC team.

The center was erected by IITA to provide convenient services in processing cassava into flour and garri but was outsourced to a local vendor to supply and set up machines.

The problems included a poor drainage system, non-anchored processing machines, and poor installation of factory machines and other facilities. To correct these, three consecutive missions were funded by SARD-SC for FMS in June and October 2014 and July/August 2015.

"After FMS intervention, the Kalambo cassava processing center is in a better shape in terms of full control of the waste water, machine layout, and ease of operations. The cassava washing bay and garri frying bay are also now in greater shape," Diallo said.

The upgraded machines are now functioning properly.

The renovated garri fryers at Kalambo.

Following this, the FMS team conducted training for local machine fabricators from Kalambo on the production, installation, and testing of cassava processing machines; helping to determine the cost of buying materials; and fabricating and selling basic cassava processing machines in Sud Kivu.

Of the trained fabricators, the best five were certified by the IITA team. With the knowledge from the training, the fabricators immediately developed their first cassava processing machine. These fabricators are now able to produce, deliver, and install machines in any part of the country.

With the support of SARD-SC, the FMS team also proceeded to design, build, and equip two Community Based Cassava Centers for the production of cassava chips, cassava flour, and garri. These centers were handed over to their respective communities in Sangue and Kavumu.

To prove a point, FMS enlisted the newly trained and certified machine fabricators to build machines and equip these new centers in Sangue and Kavumu and to provide an opportunity to test the functionality of the new processing centers. The machines proved very effective in processing cassava into chips, flour in Sangue and Kavumu, and garri at Kalambo. The refurbished machines and new layout in Kalambo were also certified excellent.

"From this experience, the SARD-SC Kalambo team was able to identify what was needed to handle issues related to building effective value chains in general, and the cassava value chain in particular and called for help in time. FMS handled these requests well and cherishes this opportunity to be part of the refurbishing and capacity reinforcement exercises. We encourage other projects to take inspiration from Kalambo," said Waheed Quader, FMS Head.

He also added that FMS is available to replicate similar services to other interested agricultural commodity value chains in Nigeria and in other African countries.

As an example, last year, FMS, from a request received from the Business Incubation Platform, established a cassava processing center with 3-ton per day capacity for an IITA client based in Nassarawa State, Nigeria.

"FMS welcomes patronage from projects, individuals, and businesses for a reasonable fee," concluded Hilde Koper-Limbourg,DDG Corporate Services, IITA.