

The IITA logo is displayed in a stylized, white, blocky font with a horizontal line underneath it. It is positioned over a background image of several large, round, light-brown drums with dark wooden frames and white laces.

Transforming African Agriculture

TALKING DRUMS

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IITA-Kinshasa welcomes new Country Representative

On 27 July, outgoing IITA Country Representative for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nzola-Meso Mahungu along with IITA-Kinshasa staff and DRC Youth Agripreneurs, welcomed Zoumana Bamba and his wife, in a get-together at Mahungu's residence. Bamba started his new role as IITA-DRC Country Representative on 1 September.

In his welcome speech, Mahungu told the staff and Agripreneurs that, "The day was special and provides an opportunity to officially welcome Bamba and his wife to DRC." He informed Bamba that DRC staff members cover Kinshasa station, staff based in the Maniema Province who work in a project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Kalambo station. Mahungu advised staff to "give their best to make the new Country Rep's job easier and to welcome changes, which will contribute to the success of activities."

In response, Bamba thanked Mahungu for the warm welcome to him and his wife. He told the staff that when the



caption

IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga proposed him as the new IITA Country Representative in DRC, he did not hesitate to respond positively. He promised to do his best to contribute positively to the development of IITA in DRC.

In their special welcome, the youth Agripreneurs expressed delight in having Bamba on board as he is involved in many Agripreneur projects across French-speaking Africa.

Spotlight: Dr Norbert Maroya

Norbert Maroya is the fifth child of six from his mother within a polygamous family setting of three wives and a total of 16 children. In the battalion of children, he is the 12th. His father married his three wives after returning from World War II (1939 to 1945) and his mother was the 3rd wife. He recalled that his childhood was very painful and tearful. He lost his mother just when he started school at the age of 5, and wondered how a motherless 5-year-old child, whose father was a fisherman, could be successful in life.

Norbert's mother was a trader in clothes and was from a rich family.



She died at the early age of 36 and this led to some family issues. This caused his maternal family to take some drastic measures, separating him and his siblings. His maternal family took custody of his four elder siblings and left Norbert and his younger brother of 3 years with his father. Despite his socioeconomic situation, his father had to face the challenge of ensuring that he and his younger brother went to school. His father supported his education seriously by paying quarterly, part of his school fees after receiving his allowance as an "ancient combatant". At that tender age in primary school, he had no clear

objective for education. However, when he was admitted to secondary school, he was granted a scholarship (bourse) to support his education. The school grant was constantly used by his father as an example to advise him and his younger brother about the “impact of the day-to-day success on the overall welfare” of a person. That was one of the greatest lessons Norbert learned from his father before his demise when he was 17 years old in the 3rd class in secondary school.

His conviction was that good work pays off and brings happiness. After the death of his father, he decided to work hard towards becoming, in two years’ time, a teacher in his primary school. Fortunately, he failed the teaching exam and was forced to continue his education. In addition to school, he borrowed a small plot of land near his family house near the river, where he spent all his evenings and weekends as a gardener, growing local vegetables, carrots, and salad vegetables. This contributed to preparing him for his agriculture career. After his success in the university (Baccalaureate C), he felt his next step would be to serve one year, enroll in army training, then teach in a secondary school.

Briefly share with us your work experience, accomplishments, and work philosophy

After secondary school, I entered the university with a scholarship and registered at the department of Agronomic Sciences of the University National du Benin (UNB today UAC). After the first 4 years, I was sent to IITA-Ibadan training unit for one-month incubation in English documentation—that was the first time I entered an airplane because the borders between Benin and Nigeria were closed. After university, I was transferred in April 1985 to the National Directorate of Agricultural Research (DRA now INRAB) and in September, I was sent to the Food Crops Research Station of Niaouli. I had specialized in plant breeding and cropping systems at University and was given the responsibility of head of the cassava breeding program from November 1985 to July 2000. During those 15 years I developed a very good collaboration with the IITA Root and Tuber Improvement program, first with Dr John Otoo and later with Dr Alfred Dixon. During those years, I learned and gained experience, characterized

by quarterly backstopping visits to the IITA team on cassava breeding trials in Benin (5 locations) and sponsoring of my participation to annual collaborative meetings with partners to present our findings. In addition to my responsibility as the Head of the cassava breeding program at Niaouli, I have coordinated many research projects including three grants for IITA namely, the Regional Research Project on Maize and Cassava (RRPMC), On-Farm Adaptive Research on Cassava (OFAR-Cassava), and Ecologically Sustainable Cassava Plant Protection (ESCaPP). These were my years of close collaboration with IITA scientists and participating in international and regional root and tuber crop events.

My collaboration with IITA was what first attracted me to IITA. The technical backstopping in supporting data analyses and seminar presentations on collaborative research were the most important factors that pushed me to IITA. To be able to support young scientists and mainly backstop for national partners were among my objectives in joining IITA. After 15 years of service in Benin without any academic training or career plan, I decided to move with the opportunity offered to me by the GTZ to serve as Root and Tuber Crops Planting Materials Expert in the IITA/GTZ project West Africa Seed Development Unit in Ghana (WASDU) based in Kumasi. In less than two years, I applied at IITA for the newly opened position of Regional Coordinator of the West Africa Seed and Planting materials Network (WASNET). I was then a staff member of IITA based in Accra, Ghana (April 2002 to February 2017). With my position in Accra I decided to further my education (May 2004–April 2008) at the Department of Botany of University of Ghana, Legon, where I obtained my PhD in Breeding and Genetics. After the end of WASNET, I took the regional coordinator position at the West Africa Seed Alliance (WASA) at ICRISAT based in Bamako. From ICRISAT I applied for the position of yellow cassava breeder at IITA as that was my PhD research topic. I was selected and joined Ibadan in September 2010. I worked for less than two years as a cassava

breeder and was requested by IITA management in February 2012 to take the position of Project Manager of the Yam Improvement for Income and Food Security in West Africa (YIIFSWA). Based on the successes achieved in concluding YIIFSWA-I, IITA was granted a second phase (YIIFSWA-II) that I have been leading since 1 January 2017.

I am very passionate about the diversity in everything in life. There is no domain that is without diversity and there is a possibility for modification. That was exactly why I choose to work in breeding, so you can feel the effects of the modification or improvement you are bringing to help the world. Transforming sweet potato, cassava, and maize from white flesh to deep yellow flesh that impacts all the processes of production and health of consumers is impressive and I am passionate about that.

What would you consider your greatest challenge in your career with IITA?

My greatest challenge at IITA was moving from being a cassava breeder to being YIIFSWA project manager. I nearly quit; some colleagues who developed their proposal openly expressed their disapprobation at my nomination. Some months back, during this second phase, one of my colleagues asked me if I regretted moving to YIIFSWA and my answer to him was that “I don’t know what I would have done if I had still been in cassava breeding”. In all, the lesson is to accept whatever position you find yourself. It is good to face the challenge as the rewards are greater.

Share with us something (favorite pastime) only your close family/ friends know about you.

I like playing games (Ludo, cards, draughts, etc.) and can miss my meals because of games. I decided to stop playing outside my house as it was taking too much of my time. I like dancing with friends, that is why I am good in organizing parties.

Tell us your favorite slogan!

You don’t do anything in this life for other people. All that you do is for yourself. Whether you do good or bad, it will be on your name. Then do it well because you are doing it for yourself.

Contract Reviews

• **Zoumana Bamba** joined IITA in 2012 as the Head of Capacity Development Office in Ibadan and is now Country Rep in DR Congo. He had his contract review presentation on 3 April titled: "Promoting Agricultural Transformation in a challenging environment: The transition and action plan for the next three years".



• **Leena Tripathi** Plant Biotechnologist joined IITA in 2004 in the Research for Development Directorate. She currently doubles as the Country Rep in Kenya and Deputy Director for IITA, Eastern Africa Hub. Her contract review seminar was held in Nairobi on 3 April titled: "Application of genetic engineering and genome editing for improvement of RTB Crops."



• **Daniel Coyne** is a Soil Health Scientist who joined IITA in 2001. He had his contract review seminar in Dar es Salaam on 4 April titled: "Soil health and better bananas."



• **Godfree Chigeza** joined IITA in 2015 and is a Soybean Breeder. He had his seminar on 9 April titled: "IITA Soybean breeding: Strategies and tactical innovations to transform African agriculture."



• **Asrat Amele** is a Yam Breeder who joined IITA in 2015. He had his seminar presentation in Abuja on 11 April titled: "Expediting genetic gain in breeding yams for West Africa."



• **Arega Alene** joined IITA in 2003 as an Agricultural Economist. He is the Country Rep of Malawi. He had his contract review seminar in Malawi on 16 April.



• **Haruki Ishikawa** is a Plant Physiologist and joined IITA Ibadan in 2010. He had his seminar presentation on 23 April titled: "Beyond a droughty summer: Development community-based dissemination scheme for improved cowpea varieties."



• **Kathrine Lopez** Head of Communication, Research for Development Directorate, joined IITA Ibadan in 2008. She had her contract review seminar on 10 May titled: "Communication at the crossroads".



• **Ismail Rabbi** is a Molecular Geneticist/ Breeder and joined IITA Ibadan in 2009. He had his presentation on 17 May titled: "Accelerating cassava variety development through genomic selection - achievement and future prospects."



• **Mbaye Yade** is the Regional Coordinator of ReSAKSS-WA who joined IITA Ibadan in 2005. He had his seminar presentation on 18 May 2018 titled: "Operationalization CAADP mutual accountability: The Inaugural Biennial Review of the Malabo goals and targets".



• **Gbassey Tarawali** is the Outreach Coordinator based in Abuja. He joined IITA in 2005 and had his seminar presentation on 23 April titled "Transforming Nigeria's cassava, rice, and sorghum sectors: The role of CG-Centers and their national partners".



• **Richard Okechukwu** is a Cassava Commodity Specialist and coordinator of the ATASP project. He joined IITA Ibadan in 2004 and had his contract review seminar on 22 May titled: "Tactical innovations in delivery of the cassava commodity: Progress and prospects."



• **Laurence Kaptoge** is the General Technical Manager-BP and joined IITA in 2012. He had his seminar presentation on "From technology development to incubation & commercialization: An engineer's contribution to IITA's Africa agricultural transformation agenda" on 19 June.



• **Michael Abberton** is Head, Genetic Resources Center cum Deputy Director – West Africa Hub. He joined IITA in 2012 and had his seminar presentation on 4 June.



• **Allan Brown** is a Banana Breeder based in Arusha, Tanzania. He joined IITA in 2015 and had his seminar on 5 June titled "An improved breeding pipeline to respond to Fusarium and other threats to food security in East Africa."



• **Peter Kulakow** is a Cassava Breeder / Geneticist based in Ibadan. He joined IITA in 2009 and had his presentation on 21 June on the topic: "IITA Cassava Breeding - Variety delivery for modern and robust value chains."



• **Alejandro Ortega-Beltran** is a Plant Pathologist based in Ibadan. He joined IITA in 2015 and made his presentation on 22 June titled "Contribution to further expand the Atlasafe Initiative and other research programs at IITA."



• **Mateete Bekunda** is the Chief Scientist, Africa RISING East Africa based in Dar es Salaam. He joined IITA in 2012 and had his contract review seminar on 22 June on the topic "Current and future contributions of the East and Southern Africa project to the Africa RISING Program footprints."



Quotable quote
 "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader."
 - John Quincy Adams

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