

## IITA and Sierra Leone sign agreement to boost national crop production and food security

IITA has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Sierra Leone Ministry of Agriculture, to partner with the government on reduction of malnutrition and ensuring food security in the country. The MoU entails the introduction of new crop varieties and cultivation techniques, the reopening of IITA station in Sierra Leone, as well as the creation of employment for young people. The final meeting, held on 12 February, was attended by IITA Director General, [Nteranya Sanginga](#); Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery (DDG-P4D), [Kenton Dashiell](#); IITA project coordinators; unit heads; and the team from Sierra Leone.



L-R: IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga, Sierra Leonean Minister of Agriculture Joseph Ndanema, and IITA DDG-P4D Kenton Dashiell.

With an estimated population of 7.8 million people, Sierra Leone is one of the countries in the world experiencing up to 37% malnutrition level, affecting pregnant women and children. Priority areas of collaboration include transformation of the rice sector, initiative on cassava, production, and marketing of cowpea. One focal point of discussion was about developing the cassava industry to produce high quality flour, good for pregnant women and children, which can in turn be processed into foods such as garri and pastries. Other principal aspects of the MoU are the production of maize and yam, biofortification of seeds, and youth empowerment.

While presenting his proposal, the Sierra Leonean minister of agriculture,

Joseph Jonathan Ndanema explained that the agricultural sector in Sierra Leone is experiencing a long-term decline, resulting in inadequate food supply for natives. To combat this, the incumbent government is focused on transforming the agriculture sector into a productive one, which caters for the needs of citizens and allows for export of agricultural products to generate revenue. “The Sierra Leone government wants to partner with IITA because of its technologies which can help the country’s agricultural sector and the [Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute](#) (SLARI). There is great potential in collaborating as well as strengthening and enhancing the existing partnership with IITA in the

development of agriculture in Sierra Leone,” Ndanema said.

Speaking at the signing of the MoU at IITA Ibadan, Sanginga praised Ndanema and all delegates from Sierra Leone for being keen about creating sustainable agricultural development that will benefit all. He also said, “I agree with all you propose, and will relay it to the appropriate quarters.”

Prior to the signing of the MoU, IITA scientists and unit heads made presentations on the ongoing research programs and activities of the Institute. Afterwards the Sierra Leonean delegates were taken on unit tours.

### Got a story to share?

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# MEDA, IITA, and Tanzania's seed certification agency train extension workers on cassava seed inspection

The [Building an Economically-Sustainable Seed System in Tanzania for Cassava \(BEST Cassava\)](#) project has trained over 70 agricultural extension officers on cassava seed inspection and certification to become certified cassava seed inspectors.

This is part of the project's efforts to ensure that farmers in Tanzania have access to high quality planting materials of high-yielding, disease-resistant, improved cassava varieties to counter the current major threat to cassava production including the two devastating diseases--cassava mosaic disease (CMD) and cassava brown streak disease (CBSD).

BEST cassava project, led by [Menonite Economic Development Associates](#) (MEDA) with [IITA](#) and Tanzania's Ministry of Agriculture as main partners, seeks to set up an accessible and affordable commercial cassava seed system for quality assured planting material of improved, disease-resistant varieties to increase farmers' productivity and incomes.

The training was conducted by a team from IITA and MEDA in partnership with the [Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute](#) (TOSCI) in the Eastern, Lake, and Southern zones of Tanzania.

"We are training the extension officers to become authorized inspectors able to certify cassava seeds in the cassava growing regions of Tanzania. This will ensure we have sufficient experts to effectively work with farmers and TOSCI to inspect and certify cassava seeds," said Juma Yabeja, IITA Research Associate who coordinates the training and quality assurance component of the BEST Cassava project.

The training covered all aspects of crop inspection from identification of cassava varieties in the field to inspection of cassava seeds. It also included identification of cassava viral diseases using NURU, the free mobile-app developed by IITA and [The Pennsylvania State University](#), which uses artificial intelligence to accurately identify cassava diseases.

On the progress of the BEST Cassava project, Juma said a significant number of farmers are adopting and planting the quality declared seeds, a promising indicator in the efforts to boost cassava production in the country.



*Agriculture extension officers learning how to inspect cassava seeds in the field.*

BEST Cassava project is also working to ensure sufficient flow of information among the farmers, certified cassava seed producers and seed inspectors, and other stakeholders. The project has introduced and is promoting the use of

Cassava Seed Tracker, a digital web-based application developed by IITA that connects seed producers, seed traders, and seed quality certifiers, in Tanzania in partnership with the TOSCI and MEDA.



*Agriculture extension officers receive training on how to use NURU to detect cassava diseases.*

# Students enlightened on industry expectations at university's SIWES pre-placement orientation

The [University of Ilorin](#), Kwara State, held the 2019 edition of their Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) Pre-placement Orientation Program on 7 February. SIWES is a mandatory program designed to enable students from Nigerian tertiary institutions, acquire professional skills by active participation in industry. The goal of the scheme is to bridge the gap between theory and practice by enhancing classroom learning with practical experience from the workplace.

SIWES exposes students to technologies, machines, equipment, industry processes, and work ethics rarely available at the universities but which increase their skill sets and opportunities for employment after graduation.

In his opening address, Dr W.O. Raji, Director of the SIWES Unit, emphasized the importance of partnership between academia and the industry. "Building such relationships allow for sharing knowledge and technology transfer, which are essential for the growth and development of both sectors," he said.

[IITA](#), being one of the partners that accept and train university students annually, was present at the program, represented by the Head of IITA Capacity Development Office (CDO), Sougrynoma Zainatou Sore. In her remarks to the students, Sore talked about IITA and how CDO manages students in terms of their SIWES or IT.

As a research institute and a center for training young scientists and students, IITA has long-standing partnerships with Nigerian universities. Being an institute with the mandate to transform African agriculture, IITA recognizes the pivotal role of developing and strengthening the capacity of young and future African scientists and professionals to boost the agricultural sector in Africa. For this reason, IITA receives and trains hundreds of students from those universities every year.

In 2018, 354 students started their industrial training/SIWES at IITA with about 50% being females. The institute also accepts young graduates carrying out their mandatory year of service as part of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). In 2018, 54 NYSC members (22



*Sore receives award of recognition presented to IITA by the University.*

female and 27 males), joined different units of IITA and gained practical skills in the following areas: (1) laboratory techniques and research, (2) agronomy, (3) bioscience, (4) virology, (5) breeding science, (6) agribusiness, (7) information technology and communication, (8) administration, and (9) food processing. Upon successful completion of their training and internships, some of the students were employed in IITA in their varied fields of practice.

The Pre-placement Orientation Program

was meant to educate and prepare the students for the scheme and lay out the expectations of their university, the companies as potential placement sites, and the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), a federal body in charge of promoting and funding industrial training of students.

At the end of the program, the Vice Chancellor of the University, Prof. Sulyman Age Abdulkareem, presented awards of recognition to companies present at the seminar including Seven-Up Bottling Company and IITA.

## Publishing partner offers IITA discount across full range of publications

The recently published book by [Burleigh Dodds Science Publishing](#), 'Critical issues in plant health: 50 years of research in African agriculture' is a collection summarizing 50 years of research on plant health by IITA to improve the health of crops in Africa. It is part of the rapidly expanding Burleigh Dodds Series in Agricultural Science, which provides standard references in various frontiers of agricultural research and cultivation.

In addition to delivering knowledge for the global scientific community, Burleigh Dodds makes specific contributions to [IITA's](#) research as a publishing partner as well as a resource provider. Continuing this trend, Burleigh Dodds announced a 20% discount offer to IITA on all the books in their catalogue. With over 50 published titles and an extensive forward program, the Burleigh Dodds catalogue covers the major crops and livestock types. To redeem the discount, use discount code IITA20.

# IITA signs training agreement to “tractorize” Nigeria

To support the quest for attainment of Nigeria’s agriculture mechanization goal, [IITA](#) has signed a training agreement with [Origin Tech Group Nigeria Ltd](#), a private sector investor who is interested in bridging tractor and agriculture equipment deficit in Nigeria. Origin Tech Group Nigeria is a local agricultural value chain company providing value-technology in agricultural advisory, civil engineering/construction of farm estates, farmland clearing, and manufacture of farm machines among others.

The agreement signing ceremony was held on 10 February at the [Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development](#). The event was chaired by the Honorable Minister of Agriculture (HMA), Chief Audu Ogbeh. The Managing Director, Bank of Agriculture (BoA), Dr Kabiru Adamu; and Director, Federal Department of Agriculture (FDA), Dr Amin Mohammed Babandi, were also present.

The training agreement is part of the Origin Group initiative aimed

at establishing a world class farm equipment leasing company in Nigeria. The training component, which will be executed by IITA, involves capacity building for youth in tractor operation and farm equipment servicing and repairs.

Explaining the rationale behind the project, the Group Managing Director and CEO, Mr S.J. Samuel said, “the Project is developed as a response to the high rate of drudgery and low yield of farmers in Nigeria.” Samuel was accompanied by Training Coordinator Anthony Agbonlahor and General Manager Shepherd Kondo.

Gbassey Tarawali, Head, IITA Abuja Station, expressed IITA’s readiness to deliver on its commitment in the agreement. In addition to Ibadan, he stated that IITA is well positioned to effectively deploy its facilities that are strategically located in Abuja, Kano, and Rivers States in contributing towards the achievement of the Agriculture Promotion Policy of the Federal Government. Project Administrator Ijie Ben Asuelimen accompanied Tarawali.

Responding to the various comments and presentations, Chief Ogbeh lauded the initiative and thanked Origin Group for partnering with IITA in implementing the novel Tractorize Nigeria Project. He enjoined the organization to work with FDA and BoA, who are already implementing agriculture mechanization activities. He appreciated the fact that the machines and equipment will be sourced from Brazil and India, and that the operators will be adequately trained by IITA. This, according to the minister will guarantee a longer life span of the machines and equipment from the present average life span of 2 to 3 years to a minimum of 20 years.

Under the agreement, IITA will design, develop, and conduct best-in-class international standard expert training for participants in the Tractorize Nigeria Project. This is in addition to conducting practical exercises and capacity building activities for Nigeria youths among others.



IITA team with Minister of Agriculture, Chief Audu Ogbeh (center) and officials of Origin Group Nigeria at the signing ceremony.