

# IITA

*Transforming African Agriculture*

# TALKING DRUMS

Special Issue

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## IITA celebrates gender balance on 2019 International Women's Day



IITA staff celebrate International Women's Day

Over the past few decades, the global community has made significant progress in inspiring and engaging more women and girls in science. Similar efforts are ongoing to ensure gender balance and equal access in other professional and social situations. International Women's Day is a worldwide movement that gives center stage to these endeavors as women are celebrated annually on 8 March.

This year, IITA joined the global community in a call to build a gender-balanced world with the theme, "Balance for Better". This, along with the United Nations (UN) theme of "Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change", put innovation by and for women and girls at the heart of efforts to achieve gender balance. The 2019 IITA International Women's Day celebration was facilitated by Lilian Mendoza, Ranjana Bhattacharjee, Anna Carluccio, Katherine Lopez, Helen Adeniji, Sougrynoma Sore, and Wole Oladokun. Both male and female staff of the Institute marked the day with a short walk and a program that paid tribute to the successes and outputs

of women colleagues. Furthermore, ladies from BioScience coordinated by Ranjana Bhattacharjee and Anna Carluccio performed a beautiful flash mob in the conference center with a tweak on Michael Jackson's "We are the world" and Shakira's "Waka waka".

In his keynote address, IITA Director General, Nteranya Sanginga, recognized women taking on leadership roles in the Institute. "I am proud of our IITA women and I can say it anywhere without fear," he declared. He further said that he was pleased with the qualitative output of female staff and noted that women have a lot more to do in getting IITA to play a more significant role in research and in the world. He requested a standing ovation for Lilian Mendoza, the Head of Human Resources for her great leadership navigation over the years. Sanginga also acknowledged Patricia Adaju Ogunsanya and Olubunmi Deborah Ajamu of Virology/Germplasm Health Unit and other notable women across the Institute for their exploits in branding IITA positively.

Hilde Koper-Limbourg, Deputy Director General—Corporate Services, spoke of the need for a mindset change in everyone towards achieving a balanced world. "There are ways to deal with biological and sociocultural factors which restrain women, other than not hiring them," she noted.

IITA provides equal opportunities for women in employment and empowerment in the workplace in consonance with the organization's mandate of gender equality. The Institute also recognizes that the challenges of poverty, hunger, and malnutrition in Africa cannot be addressed without considering the constraints faced by women farmers.

The crux of the International Women's Day is to encourage and support women to reach their full potential by being pioneers of innovation and change, in spite of national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic, or political divisions.



Mrs Sanginga aka "Mama C" and Staff walk from Wellness center to the Conference center



DG-Nteranya Sanginga delivering his keynote address



DDG - Corporate Services, addressing IITA Staff and partners



Bioscience ladies performing IWD flash mob



Lilian Mendoza - Head of HR, receives standing ovation from IITA Management and staff



DG-Nteranya Sanginga celebrating outstanding IITA Women



IITA staff group photo

## IITA Women's Group-Kalambo celebrates International Women's Day with Katana Women

In commemoration of the International Women's Day (IWD), IITA Women's Group (IWG)-Kalambo comprising staff and spouses, students, and consultants paid a courtesy visit to the community Center of Agribusiness and Agro-Service at Katana I (CAAS Katana). CAAS Katana was established by the Crop-livestock Integration project (CLiP) in Eastern DRC, South Kivu Province and comprises the Umoja women group, a subset of CAAS Katana. The visit, attended by 20 women, was led by Mrs Kungwa Merveille, Chairperson of the IWG delegation to CAAS Katana.

IWG-Kalambo members interacted with the women of CAAS Katana sharing experiences and celebrated the IWD by appreciating the role that IITA plays in the Katana community to empower local women. The chief of Kankule sub-village, Mr Salamu Djuma, led other members of his



IITA Women's group-Kalambo and CAAS Katana women celebrates the IWD

Katana youth to join in the event and commemorate the auspicious event with the ladies.

Mr Djuma, applauded the good work achieved by the Umoja women group and promised to give his full support when needed.

The CAAS-Umoja women's group president Mrs Tumusifu Mupenda gave an overview of the group's objectives and activities to increase income and promote women empowerment in the community. Mrs Mupenda said the group has been acquiring skills on integrated farming agribusiness for income generation.

We are currently working along the maize and beans value chains, piggery, and growing mushroom as a group under the support of IITA that helped us establish this group," she said.

IWG-Kalambo visited different enterprises based at CAAS-Katana including (1) the piggery owned by 10 women, (2) the poultry owned by 10 youth, including 2 girls, (3) the cassava processing facilities (inherited from the closed AfDB-sponsored cassava project) owned by 3 businessmen, (4) the veterinary office (call center and veterinary drug shop) operated by 6 veterinary technicians, (5) the vegetable garden for demonstrating mushroom and vegetable production for household consumption and sales and for feeding livestock with the residues, and (6) the Information and Communication technology (ICT) network facility that connects CAAS enterprises to input and output markets and other service providers.

Speaking on behalf of IWG-Kalambo, Mrs Merveille Mufungizi

commended the CAAS Umoja women for the initiatives happening at the center and the positive impact they have created in their community.

Prior to the sharing and exchange visit, the IWG-Kalambo had participated in the Provincial Government's official ceremony to mark the day at Independence Place with the theme "Think equally, build intelligently, innovate for change" at the provincial level while the national theme was "Together promote peace, security and gender through access to quality public services".

The IWG made a donation towards the piggery business owned by the CAAS women group and pledged a long-term partnership with the Umoja women's group. The day ended with a special dinner at CAAS Katana to the delight of IITA Kalambo women and CAAS members.

## Rwanda committed to increase number of female scientists

On 8 March, IITA-Rwanda joined the rest of the world to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD) under the theme "Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change", emphasizing the need to put innovations "by women and girls, for women and girls", at the heart of efforts to achieve gender equality.

In Rwanda, IWD is keenly observed, as gender equality is widely supported at national level, mainstreamed, and institutionalized with strong Government commitment.

The good work performed by women working at IITA Rwanda was recognized as they were given a bouquet of flowers, and honored their achievements by expressing respect, appreciation, and love.

During a special lunch, women and men of IITA Rwanda held a very constructive conversation around existing efforts within and outside the office (at the field) that facilitate women to accomplish their tasks, challenges, and ways for improvement.

The discussions concluded that women at IITA Rwanda have full institutional support to perform their professional duties effectively. However, we identified some gaps to be filled, including few or no female scientists and a limited number of women applying for IITA Rwanda sponsored MSC and PhD studies, due to lack of timely information and updates about existing scholarship opportunities.



Rwanda staff demonstrating #balanceforbetter IWD 2019

Resolutions to fill these gaps include partnership with Universities to give seminars within various associations and clubs, particularly the ones attended by female students, to draw their attention to opportunities for further studies in the agriculture sector through IITA Rwanda sponsored MSC and PhD programs.

Women at IITA Rwanda shared their experiences at work:

"IITA's work environment is conducive. Our fellow men and scientists believe in us and consider our ideas. My dream is to see more female scientists and increase special scholarship offers for women in agriculture. Furthermore, I would suggest creating an IITA female forum, as a platform for women to meet and share ideas/opportunities

for their development". Ishimwe Aline, MSC student at Ghent University (Belgium) under the CIALCA project.

"At IITA Rwanda, we are treated respectfully and equally. But we still need more female scientists and postdoc fellows." Sandra Gatete, IITA Rwanda Administrative and Finance Assistant.

"I appreciate the IITA work environment. It helps us women to work hard and feel that we are contributing to the progress of the organization. In future, I wish to see more projects led by women and this will be achieved through facilitating them to pursue further studies in agriculture subjects". Ritha Bumwe, IITA Rwanda Communication and Research Assistant.

# Women of IITA Cameroon and female staff of sister institutions celebrate International Women's Day



IITA Cameroon celebrates International Women's Day

Female workers of IITA Cameroon joined their counterparts nationwide to mark the 34th edition of International Women's Day (IWD). In a break from tradition, the female workers of sister institutions within the Station organized a debate with a focus on gender parity. The theme of this year's celebration in Cameroon was "Think fairly, build smart, innovate for change". The ceremony, which took place in the IITA Conference room, started with a welcome address by the representative of the Country Director Dr Komi Fiaboe who expressed gratitude to all the female workers for their contributions made so far at the work place and which have enabled the institution to meet up with its set objectives.

The floor was then open for the panelists to make their contributions. Introducing the program, Mrs Tchouta Francine, Communication Officer for the Enable Youth project in Cameroon, presented the panelists and the different topics of discussion. The panelists were Regine Kamga, the Liaison officer for the World Vegetable Center (AVRDC); Pamela Tabi, a Research Assistant for CIFOR; Emerencia Mbounda, the Librarian; and Sergine Ngatat, Head of the Biomolecular Laboratory. The topics of discussion were: Who are my models/mentors and how have they influenced my vision of a gender-balanced world? Can women make a positive change without men? Gender inequality begins at home, is the assertion true and what are your suggestions on reversing some of them in our everyday lives? The debate was enriching as the panelists presented interesting points. Towards the end of the panel discussion, there was an interactive phase among participants, including the IITA Station Administrator, Mr Simila Boubakari.



Panel of discussants at the IITA Cameroon International Women's day celebration

The last question that was thrown open for causes of inequality to be identified and recommendations made on measures to be taken to improve work quality in a gender-balanced, scientific research institution, turned out to be captivating. One could observe a balance of opinion in views exchanged by men and women. Some of the points raised were: Misunderstanding comes when a woman thinks she can take the place of a man. Inequality in the distribution of labor and assigned tasks plus stereotypes account for the marginalization of female workers in the society.

In terms of recommendations, participants proposed the following: At home, there should be alternation in task distribution between the girl and boy child. Children should also be educated and given orientation of a balanced society as well as guidelines to make them think fairly. Women participants proposed that women should be encouraged to acquire technical training and granted scholarships that will enable them to

specialize in certain fields. Professionally, the women were challenged to control their emotions and collaborate with their male counterparts to ensure progress at the work place.

In conclusion the women were challenged to be role models to the society and generations to come. They were also enjoined to transform knowledge received from their parents into fruitful opportunities to help build a balanced and better society.

## Quotable quote

*"We need leaders and builders; if a woman plays that role, she cannot be left behind." - Nteranya Sanginga*

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