

IITA and partners discuss alleviation of agroclimatic challenges in the Sahel

IITA-Ibadan hosted a 3-day workshop on 12–14 March to promote the development and implementation of agricultural research, capacity building, and delivery programs in the Sahel.

The key participants were representatives of the national agricultural research and development systems of Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal; representatives of [CORAF](#), the private sector, and the [Islamic Development Bank](#) (IsDB) as well as [IITA](#) management and staff.

During the opening ceremony, IITA Director General, [Dr Nteranya Sanginga](#)

said that the people who benefit the most from IITA's research are Africans, especially those in the Sahel region, one of the most vulnerable regions of the world, where the agriculture sector is under strain due to the many risks that are likely to deteriorate in the face of climate change.

Participants discussed national and regional priorities for research and

development as well as IITA's research and technology delivery efforts that are highly relevant to the Sahel region. The workshop also featured presentations on country priorities and plans by representatives and presentations on IITA programs as a basis for discussion and future action.

One highlight of the meeting was the identification of cross-cutting and country-specific challenges including productivity, climate change, value chain, importation, youth empowerment, biorisk management, conservation, and food quality. After much

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DG Sanginga addressing participants at the workshop.

Central Africa Hub delegation visits new DRC Chief of Staff

A delegation from the [IITA](#) Central Africa regional hub paid a courtesy call on the Chief of Staff of the President's Office of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mr Vital Kamereh, at the Palais de la Nation on 7 March. [Bernard Vanlauwe](#), Director of the Regional Hub for Central Africa, led the delegation.

The purpose of the meeting was to congratulate the team of the President on their success at the presidential elections. Vanlauwe also used the opportunity to present IITA's activities in DRC, and in the wider African context.

Vanlauwe spoke briefly about IITA's ongoing interventions in DRC, including research on

crop varieties tolerant and resistant to cassava brown streak disease and the maize legionnaire larva. He also outlined innovative approaches including national capacity building through diploma training in different value chains, the integration of youth in agribusiness, and the expertise of other CGIAR centers in the framework of joint projects for more impact in the beneficiary communities.

Vanlauwe presented Kamerhe with a document summarizing the activities of IITA in the DRC, results obtained, gaps and challenges identified as well as the new perspectives.

Kamerhe appreciated IITA for the visit, welcoming the Institute's activities in the DRC and pledged the country's support

for IITA's activities for the Congolese community.

The members of the IITA delegation included [Zoumana Bamba](#), DRC Country Representative; [Nzola-Meso Mahungu](#), Project Coordinator; Eric Irengé, Operations Officer; and Michèle Kimpwene, IITA Communication Consultant.



IITA delegation and the Chief of Staff, Mr Vital Kamerhe (Third from left).

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deliberation, the group agreed that the most important factors for partnership with IITA in the Sahel are:

- Increased production and productivity
- Empowerment of and increased employment opportunities for women and youth in agriculture
- Enhanced resilience to climate variability and climate change
- Improved value chain efficiency and reduction of postharvest losses
- Increased access to and efficiency of irrigation systems.

During the closing ceremony, [Abdou Tenkouano](#), Executive Director of CORAF, said, "This strategic partnership has all the success ingredients it needs. IITA and CORAF have demonstrated strength. And together, we cannot fail."

In her final comments, [May-Guri Saethre](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Research for Development (DDG-R4D) said, "This workshop has united counterparts from different countries in the region; now let's spring into action so that

this meeting does not become a waste of time."

The Sahelian region of West Africa is one of the four impact zones for implementation of IITA's R4D agenda in line with its 2012-2020 strategy. Hence, IITA and partners are making contributions through collaborative projects to improve livelihoods, enhance food and nutrition security, increase employment, and ensure the preservation of natural resource integrity in the Sahel.



Workshop participants gather together for a group photo.

IITA partners with Rwanda to develop cassava clean seed standards

The Rwanda Standards Board (RSB) has launched the cassava clean seed standards along with 292 other standards in different sectors at a colorful event held in Kigali on 7 February. The cassava seed standards was one of the three standards showcased during the launch. The other two were on mosquito repellants and good financial grant practices.

The launch aimed to raise public awareness about the standards and had several stakeholders in attendance including the Government of Rwanda represented by the Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB), the RSB, cassava farmers, processors, and seed multipliers as well as the media.

Since the start of 2018, RSB has worked through several stages of developing the standards, working in partnership with key stakeholders in the cassava seed value chain in Rwanda. IITA-Rwanda participated fully in the process through the IFAD-funded Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) Control Project.



Silver Tumwegamire, Cassava Breeder at IITA-Rwanda, explains expected gains from launched cassava seeds standards.

Speaking at the launch, [Silver Tumwegamire](#), IITA Cassava Breeder based in Rwanda, described the seed standards as timely and impactful. “The launch of the cassava seed standards in Rwanda is timely. About two to three years back, there was a big national outcry because cassava had been seriously affected by the disease that had come from neighboring countries, particularly Uganda and Tanzania,” said Tumwegamire. He added that these diseases affected cassava production, causing much hardship for farmers and consumers alike.

IITA used its experience to provide technical support in the process of developing cassava seed standards, “IITA borrowed experiences from other countries where it has intervened with cassava seed standards to give knowledge on what is needed to be included in the standards. We gave technical backstopping to the whole process,” added Tumwegamire.

The cassava seed standards set guidelines for cleaner seed for breeders, multipliers, and farmers. They are expected to play a key role in preventing further spread of existing cassava diseases in Rwanda such as CBSD and Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD), raise agricultural production and productivity, improve food security, and increase incomes. Cassava Coordinator at RAB Dr Athanase Nduwumuremyi said, “Everyone is producing seed, but we do not know whether it is clean or not. So through that engagement it was realized that Rwanda needed

to develop seed standards, and IITA, through the project, was to facilitate that process.”

The support of IITA in developing these standards was highly appreciated by the RAB. Dr Charles Bucagu, RAB Deputy Director, noted, “We worked with IITA in developing cassava seed standards so that farmers cultivate clean seed and that is an achievement we are proud of.”

RSB Director General Raymond Murenzi added that these cassava seed standards are a milestone because there were no standards of the kind before. He said, “We spent a year preparing them together with research institutions that have responsibilities in cassava crop development. These standards are ready; what remains is to implement them starting from seed multipliers.”

Cassava is an important staple food in Rwanda and is among the seven crops prioritized by the government to commercialize agriculture in the country. To realize this vision, the Government of Rwanda financed the establishment of Kinazi Cassava Plant in the cassava-growing Ruhango Province, to process quality cassava flour targeting local, regional, and European markets. About two years back, the plant nearly shut down due to lack of roots for processing as a result of CBSD outbreak.

Kinazi Cassava Plant CEO Emile Nsanzabaganwa said, “This provides assurance to believe that no other problem will arise in cassava because everyone used to say that they have cassava seed simply because they had cassava stems. This has changed and there are now guidelines to follow, giving investors assurance in the cassava production chain.” He added that through discussions with IITA, the flour factory expects the development of a cassava variety with a low root-to-flour ratio.

Got a story to share?

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IITA in the spotlight: A fellowship award from the Wellcome Trust Foundation in the UK

IITA Molecular Entomologist [Rousseau Djouaka](#) has been awarded a fellowship from the prestigious British foundation, [Wellcome Trust](#). The foundation conducts a highly competitive selection process, choosing Fellows for funding from scientists working on topics related to human health.

Djouaka, who is based at [IITA-Cotonou](#) in Benin, will be receiving funding for the next 5 years (till 2024) from Wellcome Trust-UK to carry out research on the use of synthetic agrochemicals by farmers and their contributions to insecticide resistance selection in the malaria vectors. Mosquitoes that transmit malaria are becoming increasingly resistant to the chemical



Fellowship awardee, Dr Rousseau Djouaka.

insecticides used to control them and this might be due to the inappropriate use of the same chemicals in farming to kill crop pests.

During the 5-year International fellowship, Djouaka will determine the resistance status of mosquitoes breeding around different types of crops found in West and Central Africa, comparing them with those breeding in areas with no agricultural activity. He will also identify which cropping system has a greater risk of contributing to resistance in mosquitoes that transmit malaria.

His research activities will be conducted at IITA stations in Benin and Cameroon, at the [Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine](#) (LSTM-UK), and at the [University of Crete](#), Greece. Information from this research will be useful for agriculture workers and malaria-control decision makers.

Visit this link for more details: <https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/people-and-projects/grants-awarded/do-agricultural-insecticides-utilisation-west-and-central>

Project makes progress in developing sustainable seed systems in Mozambique

Project Manager for [Feed the Future Mozambique Improved Seeds for Better Agriculture](#) (SEMEAR), [Carlos Malita](#), gave a presentation on 22 February at [IITA-Nampula](#), Mozambique, in which he highlighted the project's achievements, prospects, future plans, and its contribution to economic development.

The contract review seminar titled "Formal & informal seed systems – one or another? Their roles in increasing access and use of improved crop varieties," focused on the strategies that have been deployed to increase access and use of improved technologies for enhanced productivity and food security of rural households in the "Feed the Future Zone of Influence" (FTF ZOI) in Manica, Nampula, Tete, and Zambézia provinces.

Malita noted, "Despite technological improvements in the agriculture sector today, farmers still face a lot of challenges that include climate



Américo Sisseque (local seed multiplier) and his wife trading seeds at a Fair.

change, pests and diseases, high cost of certified seed, and inaccessibility of suitable seed (resistant/tolerant to pests, disease, drought).

“SEMEAR is catalyzing the informal seed systems, alongside improving and strengthening linkages with the formal seed system through capacity building, partnership, demand creation, seed production and distribution, technology use, and outreach,” he added.

Speaking on strategies for scaling seed systems, Malita said, “I am optimistic that if all these strategies are enhanced, farmers will have increased access to improved seed varieties which will in turn translate to the quantity of their crop yield and level of income.”

With the objective to increase production and distribution to reach 500,000 people (300,000 directly, 200,000 indirectly, and made up of 35% women), SEMEAR’s interventions pay attention to the roles of both formal and informal seed systems as important avenues for sustainable seed systems development.

SEMEAR relies on public-private partnerships to implement project activities like partnering with private seed companies, and with farmers, and developing informal seed system initiatives that will link with the formal

systems for production and supply of improved seed to rural households. SEMEAR supplies early generation seed to its partners, provides business development services, and establishes functional linkages with seed authorities, buyers, and sellers while engaging partners in seed multiplication activities.

In the future, SEMEAR will continue pursuing activities aimed at improving both systems through development of partnerships with the public sector, private sector, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders, which have proven to be crucial for the sustainable improvement of the national seed systems.



Certified seeds produced from SEMEAR improved varieties.



Formal training of stakeholders on best management practices.