

Empowering Congolese women: IITA participates in UN Women's conference

As part of its interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), [IITA](#) participated in the 13th edition of "Café Genre" on women empowerment through the processing of local agricultural products. The [United Nations Women](#) organized the conference on 5 July in Kinshasa, with the National Minister of Gender, Family and Child, her Excellency Mrs Chantal Safu serving as Chair of the occasion.

IITA's contribution centered on its technologies in the improvement of cassava processing. Cassava Processing Specialist Ir Simon Lukombo represented the Institute as he reminded the participants of IITA's vision and objectives in addition to giving general information on cassava, such as its introduction to Africa by the Portuguese.

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Simon Lukombo at the Café Genre with representatives from other organizations.

Belgian Ambassador to Tanzania impressed with IITA's research work

IITA's research efforts to address some of the major challenges in the agriculture sector have impressed the new Belgian Ambassador to Tanzania.

He expressed this after a tour of the [IITA](#)-Eastern Africa's hub Headquarters in Dar es Salaam to familiarize himself with the Institute's research activities and innovations and to explore avenues for strengthening the existing collaboration.



The Belgian Ambassador listens to Gloria Ceasar of the Plant pathology lab explaining ongoing research on cassava diseases.

IITA is one of the [CGIAR](#) centers receiving financial support from the Belgian government.

During his visit, the ambassador, His Excellency Peter Van Acker, was warmly welcomed by hub Director, [Victor Manyong](#), and guided on a tour of the research facilities that include four laboratories—Molecular, Plant pathology, Soil, and Food science.

The research team also showed him innovations developed to address challenges in the agriculture sector such as the SeedTracker—an app designed to provide agriculture stakeholders with information on improved and certified cassava seed and link them to markets. Other apps shown were the NURU app, which is used to diagnose cassava pests and diseases; and Akilimo—an app designed to give farmers information on soil fertility and fertilizer usage.

The Ambassador also interacted with the Aflasafe team and learnt about the safe and effective solution to control aflatoxin in maize and

groundnut, and with the Tanzania Youth Agripreneur team that exhibited the various products made from processing cassava and soybean they were involved in as part of income generating activities.

His Excellency Van Acker noted that the Belgium government has had a long working relationship with IITA and other CGIAR center programs toward research-for-development projects. Apart from financial support, IITA has been receiving expertise from the Belgian University in its banana projects. He singled out [Prof Rony Swennen](#), Senior Scientist and Head of IITA banana breeding program who was from Belgium and spearheading efforts to strengthen collaboration between Belgian universities and the banana breeding program.

“I am impressed with several things including Aflasafe because it is a commercialized product, which will ensure that maize and groundnut are safely aflatoxin-free. Also, the NURU App, which can scan cassava leaves for diseases is really incredible!” he said after the tour.

Manyong thanked the Ambassador and invited him to plan for another visit to the IITA youth center at Kwembe.



Neema Mbilinyi demonstrating the NURU app to the Belgian Ambassador.

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Today, its adoption has spread to make it one of the most important food crops in Africa.

In addition, Lukombo noted that the DRC is the second largest cassava producer in Africa, after Nigeria, thanks to IITA’s efforts in the fight against cassava diseases. He informed the audience that IITA processing technologies are gender sensitive, improve product quality and hygienic conditions, and reduce drudgery.

Lukombo highlighted the business opportunities that cassava offers to Congolese women. This resulted in discussions with Ms Awa Ndiaye-Seck, UN Women DRC Country Representative, who wished to deliberate with IITA on how the Institute could help her organization in empowering women. Mr Dries van Bertten from the Agriculture Department of the Belgian Embassy also sought to establish contact with IITA for possible future collaboration.

Other participants at the conference included women members of the National Assembly and Senate, leaders of women’s associations of the provinces of Kinshasa, Kwilu, North Kivu, and North Ubangi, members of the Congolese national press, and the Minister Delegate of the Belgian Embassy in the DRC.



Cross-section of participants at the Café Genre.

Bells University delegation discusses partnership possibilities with IITA

A team of delegates from [Bells University of Technology](#) visited [IITA](#) on 4 July to discuss areas of possible partnership with the Institute.

The team, led by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Jeremiah Ojediran, comprised top officials of the university. They were received by [Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery.

The delegates requested IITA's hand in partnership on research, business incubation, and capacity development.

Bells University is expanding its frontiers into more robust agricultural studies and agribusiness, with the newly introduced Bachelor's program in Agripreneurship. This has been as a result of the influence of IITA ambassador, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who is also a Bells University proprietor.

The team was taken on a tour of IITA facilities including [Aflasafe](#) and [Nodumax](#) production factories, [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) (IYA), and iWET water management demonstration sites.



VC Prof Ojediran (in blue suit) explaining the purpose of his visit to Kenton Dashiell, DDG-P4D.

Dashiell said, “We are delighted to receive you and partner with you. We already have superb collaboration with the University of Ibadan, and we are sure that partnership with Bells University would yield success.” VC Ojediran also believes that partnership between IITA and Bells University would speed up the pace

of agripreneurship and agricultural studies in the university.

In addition, it was agreed that delegates from IITA would be sent to Bells University to see the Agripreneurship Center and have further discussions on when a Memorandum of Understanding that guides both parties would be signed.



Bells University delegates with IITA staff.

IITA facilities impress Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Dr Mohammed Bello Umar, Permanent Secretary of Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), paid a courtesy visit to IITA Ibadan with some top officials on 12 July. Although, his presence in Ibadan was purposely for an engagement at the University of Ibadan, he decided to visit IITA to get first-hand experience after hearing a lot about the Institute.

However, going on a tour, he was impressed by the facilities of IITA, especially the artificial lake, recreational centers, and staff residences. "IITA is an integrated settlement with everything required for human habitation," he said. He also referred to the farming areas, including research demonstration farms, and advised that IITA maintain the structure that is in place as it is a good agricultural learning center for those outside the Institute.

"We want more IITA farms and settlements to be replicated in all the states of Nigeria and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa." Dr Umar

noted this while pointing out that the Federal Government is not merely in partnership with IITA but a board member of the Institute. As a result, a number of IITA centers are being set up in various parts of the country.

Furthermore, he stated that being a part of the government has made him part of IITA but noted that this visit is his first physical visit to the Institute. "I have passed by the gate of the IITA for well over 30 years without entering, being a former resident of Ibadan," he said. He therefore saw his coming to Ibadan as an opportunity to visit the Institute, and "my encounter beat my imagination", he added.



Dr Mohammed Bello Umar, FMARD Permanent Secretary, with Michael Abberton, Head of Genetic Resources Center, IITA.



The Permanent Secretary with IITA Senior Management Staff and top National and State officials.

Got a story to share?

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Dutch Trade Mission visits IITA

A trade mission delegation from the Netherlands visited [IITA](#) on 11 July to discuss critical success factors for agricultural growth. The delegation was led by Loek Hermans, Chairman of Top Sector, Horticulture and Materials, and received by [Frederick Schreurs](#), Chief Executive Officer, [IITA Business Incubation Platform](#).

At the opening meeting, [Sylvia Oyinlola](#), Head of Administration, IITA Western Africa Hub, welcomed the delegates and gave a formal introduction of IITA. She said, "IITA does a very important work that fits into what [CGIAR](#) does. Our research translates to development; we then convert it to business through the Business Incubation Platform where it is scaled up."

The Dutch Trade Mission is made up of about a million members from universities, biofood companies, vocation institutes, entrepreneurs, and NGOs.

The mission has begun to have contacts with Nigerian companies for collaboration and is exploring opportunities for partnerships in agriculture, for Nigeria and Africa at large. Hermans said, "It's important for us to meet the Institute because they have the knowledge of African agriculture and economy which can be combined with our expertise."

According to Schreurs, the Dutch Government is looking to spot sustainable businesses in sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel. Hermans also said, "Discussions are ongoing between the

Dutch food and agricultural sector, which is very strong, and we want to give aid to the agricultural sector in Nigeria."

The delegation had visited Abuja where they met with some farmers and saw new seed that can provide better quality vegetation.

Schreurs said, "There has been a solid relationship between the Dutch Government and the BIP, and I can say that the Dutch Government is interested in deepening the existing relationships between the Netherlands and Nigeria, through the establishment of new businesses and partnerships."

As part of the visit, the team toured the Institute's facilities, exploring technologies including Aflasafe, GoSeed, and Nodumax. This was to present areas in which collaborations can be made. Afterwards, there was a question and answer session as well as an exhibition of technologies.



Frederick Schreurs addressing the Dutch Trade Mission delegates in the Agriserve meeting room.