

IITA DG and Board Chair visit IFAD President to strengthen IFAD-IITA partnership

On 13 December at the IFAD headquarters in Italy, [IITA Director-General, Nteranya Sanginga](#), and Board Chair, [Amos NamangaNgongi](#), met with Gilbert Hougbo, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The purpose of the meeting was to brief the IFAD President on IITA's progress in scaling up technology and engaging youth in agribusiness with IFAD support and discuss future collaboration.

Since 1979, IFAD has provided 41 large grants to IITA for a total amount of US\$35.9 million, with four currently ongoing. Also, the total current fund amounts approximately to US\$7 million. However, there are three new projects in the pipeline with a budget of US\$9.5 million. These projects are aimed at broadening partnership between the two institutions and consolidating partnership for impact.

In the recent past, IFAD and IITA has been collaborating on the development of agribusiness enterprises as well as building the capacity of poor, unemployed youth in agriculture-based enterprises. Youth employment is a key aspect of IFAD's inclusive rural transformation strategy.

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IITA Board Chair Dr Amos NamangaNgongi, IFAD President Gilbert Hougbo, and IITA Director General Nteranya Sanginga.

Why it's essential to pay attention to plant health

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH). The objective of IYPH is to raise global awareness on how protecting plant health can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development. IITA joins the rest of the world in commemorating IYPH. Over the last 50 years, [IITA](#) and its partners have contributed tremendously to improving plant health.



IITA Director of plant health, David Chikoye.

The FAO estimates that up to 40 percent of food crops are lost to plant pests and diseases annually. This leaves millions of people without enough food to eat and damages agriculture—the primary source of income for rural communities. Also, expanding international trade and travel increases the risk that plant pests and diseases will spread into new areas.

“Plants are important and deserve special attention because they provide the oxygen we breathe,” says [David Chikoye](#), Director of plant health at IITA. [He further states](#) that pests and diseases lead to annual losses of over US\$200 billion.

IYPH will focus on preventing plant pests and diseases from spreading, just as with human health, preventing disease is far more cost-effective than managing a full-blown health emergency.

To raise awareness, IITA will share information on how our research over the last 50 years has contributed to protecting plant health.

IITA’s first-ever award was in plant health research. In 1970 there was an outbreak of maize streak virus (MSV) disease, which could have entirely wiped out the crop. Faced with this crisis, IITA’s research focus, which

had been increased productivity, was diversified to include plant health. IITA and partners worked tirelessly to combat MSV and, by 1985, high yielding MSV cultivars and hybrids with different maturity classes, grain colors, and textures for different zones in Africa were released. To breed these MSV resistant varieties, IITA, CYMMYT, and 36 national partners got germplasm from Thailand and Central and South America. Because of this concerted effort to overcome MSV, IITA received the CGIAR King Baudouin Award in 1986. This award, coupled with never-ending plant diseases, invigorated the Institute’s commitment to plant health.

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As a result, IFAD negotiated the participation of IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA) at the Family Farming Symposium hosted by FAO in 2018. The IITA Agripreneurs won the “International Innovation Award for Sustainable Food and Agriculture”.

Congratulating IITA Agripreneurs for their victory, IFAD President said that he is pleased to see the impact of IFAD’s early support to IITA to promote young Agripreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa. “This award recognizes IITA’s commitment to improving both agribusiness opportunities and creditworthiness of youth across Africa,” he said.

Being the only CGIAR Center with a presence in Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region, IITA has been a valuable partner to IFAD for NARS capacity building in the region. IFAD and IITA are broadening their partnership to include three areas of

importance to IFAD, which are policy engagement; development and pilot testing rural youth employment models and supporting innovative youth and business hubs; and development of seed standards, systems, and seed delivery for smallholder farmers.

However, to undertake specialized research considering context-specific and emerging challenges, IITA has established two centers of excellence, which are the Climate Change Center in Benin and the President Olusegun Obasanjo Research Campus in Kalambo, Bukavu.

The IFAD President encouraged that in the future, IITA should focus on the research areas that are within IFAD’s lending context, acknowledging that the three projects in the pipeline hold a lot of promise in delivering development impact when scaled up through IFAD funding. He also advised that IITA approach IFAD Country offices

so that new technologies can be scaled up under IFAD Country programs.

IFAD invests in rural-poor populations by helping them expand their businesses and take charge of their own development, with the goal of improving food security and reducing poverty. In its projects, IFAD particularly seeks to address the cross-cutting topics of climate, gender, nutrition, and youth. IFAD attaches high importance to knowledge generation and sharing from grant investments.

IITA is one of the 15 [CGIAR](#) Centers conducting agricultural research to develop technologies that will reduce hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and natural resources degradation. As an international financial institution and a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries, IFAD has been in a long-term partnership with IITA.

Got a story to share?

Please send your story with photos and captions every Tuesday to iita-news@cgiar.org or Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org) and Uzoma Agha (u.agha@cgiar.org) for headquarters and Western Africa, Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org) for Eastern and Southern Africa, and David Ngome (d.ngome@cgiar.org) for Central Africa.



IFAD-CARE contributing to policymaking through research

With Africa's population set to double by 2050, according to [a report](#) from the [Population Reference Bureau](#) (PRB) in Washington, there is a growing sense of urgency about the need to address the issues of food insecurity, youth unemployment, and poverty across the Continent. Studies have shown that to address these key issues, which can all be linked to agriculture, recommendations and innovations derived from research results are pivotal.



A group of IFAD-CARE grant recipients.

The transformation of the agricultural sector is critical, since it will continue to be the primary sector to stimulate economic growth. A strategic involvement of Africa's youth in rural development, agriculture, and natural resource management will boost economic growth across Africa, as the youth of today will likely be the future drivers of the world's food systems and markets.

As a growing wave of programs, agribusinesses, and agripreneurs moves across the continent to address these issues of food security, youth unemployment, poverty, and zero hunger, there are attendant challenges associated with these developments. Of specific note is the lack of research and evidence-based information concerning the nature of the problem and potential solutions, to guide both policy development and program implementation.

Policy development can be impacted positively if research recommendations are adopted to address challenges inherent in the society, and even more

so if the recommendations are founded on evidence-based research.

Currently, the agricultural sector is witnessing the rise of youth who are taking advantage of agricultural research and the new technologies being developed and tailored to African agroecologies. African young people are discovering that they can make farming a profitable career, yet there is a huge need to strengthen the system to ensure sustainability of the transformation process to achieve the goal of youth employment, poverty alleviation, food security and zero hunger. In addition, there is little youth-specific research on self-employment and the need for more scholarly research on factors affecting rural economic activities in Africa.

To address these, the [Enhancing Capacity to Apply Research Evidence \(CARE\) in Policy for Youth Engagement in Agribusiness and Rural Economic Activities in Africa](#), a three-year project funded by the [International Fund for Agricultural Development](#) (IFAD), is strategically positioned to contribute to the growth of a new paradigm for

knowledge creation that will lead to the development of effective policies and agribusiness development in Africa.

The project is implemented by the [IITA](#) and provides grants and support for young African scholars who aim to acquire a Masters' or Doctoral degree while strengthening their capacity in generating, appraising, and disseminating evidence-based results to inform future action plans for national governments, the international community, the business sector, and local communities.

One of the grantees, Dolapo Adeyanju, a Nigerian national and a research Masters' student, explained that research recommendations are essential for practical policy makings. Adeyanju currently studies at the Department of Agricultural Economics of the University of Nairobi, Kenya in collaboration with the University of Pretoria, South Africa and her recent research work focuses on the impact of agricultural programs on youth agripreneurship performance in Nigeria. "Policy makers cannot operate in a vacuum. Sometimes, they do not have enough knowledge to develop appropriate policies which call for relevant evidence ,which comes from research results and recommendations," she stated.

"In recent times, many young people have come to see and accept agribusiness as a sustainable and profitable career choice. Even though it can be said that there is still a lot to be put in place in terms of creating an enabling environment for young agribusiness owners in the form of policies and interventions that could help young agripreneurs and prospective ones".

Suleiman Umar, another grant recipient and research fellow at the Institute for Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, stated that there is need for continuous reinforcement of mindset change, coaching, and mentoring of young people in Africa to understand the importance of agriculture and youth can engage in agribusiness. Umar, who is researching the factors affecting rural to urban migration and its effects on the society, notes that the implication is that youth engagement in agribusiness

will have an increasing effect on the economy and the larger society, in terms of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP), and other indicators.

The CARE project, which presently has 30 beneficiaries, ultimately aims to improve the availability, exchange, dissemination, and use of research findings in the field of agribusiness and rural economic activities from young African scholars. The objective is to influence policy and practice in support of economic growth and achievement of the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals](#), working at local, national, and regional levels in Africa.



Grant beneficiaries at a capacity building workshop.

IITA-ACAI trains Liberian extension workers on weed management and agronomy best practices

As part of efforts to transform the Liberian cassava sector, a team from the [IITA-led African Cassava Agronomy Initiative](#) (ACAI) trained about 70 extension service providers from across Liberia in Bentol, Montserrado County. The training, which took place in October 2019, centered on the IITA-ACAI developed agronomy toolkit known as the *Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices* which, when applied, helps farmers to potentially double their cassava yield per hectare.

ACAI Principal Weed Scientist, [Friday Ekeleme](#), conducted the training along with Digital Extension and Advisory Services Specialist, [Godwin Atser](#), IITA Head of Mechanization, [Peter Kolawole](#), and IITA Country Representative in Liberia, [Michael Edet](#).

The training was carried out within the framework of the Smallholder Agriculture Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization (SAPEC) Project of the Liberian Ministry of Agriculture with funding from the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) and the [African Development Bank](#) (AfDB).

The 4-day training exposed participants to the successes of the IITA Cassava Weed Management Project, the basics of agronomy in cassava farming systems, calibration and the use of the IITA Herbicides Calculator, safe use of herbicides, an overview of mechanization, and cassava varietal identification.

SAPEC Coordinator, William Kawalawu, described the training as an excellent

program that would help transform cassava in Liberia and provide incomes to farmers.

Like Nigeria, the cassava sector in Liberia has been undermined by poor weed control. Hand weeding, often carried out by women, is not only backbreaking but also limits farm sizes in Liberia.

Edet said the workshop was intended to provide participants with basic knowledge of cassava production and especially weed management.

“This is part of what we are supposed to do in the SAPEC Project, to empower the farmers, the focal persons, technicians with the knowledge on weed control because weeding consumes a lot of money and as such farmers run away from cassava farms as the result of the huge cost of the control of weed,” he said.

Mrs Abibatu Kromah, a director with Liberia’s Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI), appealed to IITA to provide support to help Liberian farmers tackle weeds. “Do not leave us alone,” she pleaded.

The training attracted participants including County Agriculture Coordinators (CAC), SAPEC focal persons, technicians, farmer-based organizations, cassava farmers, the National Cassava Production and Commercialization Union, and stakeholders with an interest in cassava farming.

The participants were drawn from eight of Liberia’s 15 counties including Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Margibi, Montserrado, and Sinoe.



Liberian extension workers at the training.