

Head of IITA's banana breeding program receives dedicated scientist award at the international banana conference

The Head of IITA's banana breeding program, [Rony Swennen](#) received the "Dedicated Scientist Award for his exemplary commitment to banana research" during an [International Conference on Banana](#) held in Trichy, India, on 22–25 February 2020.

Swennen also gave the first keynote presentation of the conference on "Breeding plantain and cooking banana (Matooke and Mchare) hybrids for Africa utilizing approaches of global relevance." The paper's co-authors were IITA scientists: [Delphine Amah](#), [Brigitte Uwimana](#), [Trushar Shah](#), Michael Batte, Hassan Mduma, [George Mahuku](#), and [Allan Brown](#).

Other IITA scientists who participated and presented at the conference included [Leena Tripathi](#), Plant Biotechnologist based in IITA-Kenya, who presented on "Application of transgenic and genome editing technologies for improving banana wilt disease" and Brigitte Uwimana, Banana Molecular Breeder based in IITA-Uganda, who presented on "Molecular approaches in banana improvement: Success of 'Breeding Better Bananas'".

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Rony Swennen receiving the award.

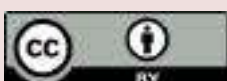
Agribusiness: Way out for youth rural–urban migration



A youth agripreneur in a maize field.

Research has associated the increase of rural–urban migration among youth in Africa with lesser food expenditures and the incidence of poverty. The major reason for this rural–urban youth migration is unemployment.

The recent study funded by the [International Fund for Agricultural Development](#) (IFAD), under the [Enhancing Capacity to Apply Research Evidence](#) (CARE) in Policy for Youth Engagement in Agribusiness and Rural Economic Activities in Africa project, focuses on the rural-urban migration profile of youths in Nigeria, and the impacts on the welfare of the rural households, governments, and stakeholders in Nigeria.



Oluwaseun Oginni, a research fellow under the CARE project, said that governments and development partners must consider and embrace the creation of an enabling environment for the private sector to invest in the rural areas as this will help with addressing the issue of unemployment and poverty.

While many youth are leaving the rural areas because of unemployment, they see agriculture as a poor man's job. The study proffers solutions that will help governments, together with development partners, address the challenge of unemployment in rural areas and migration to urban areas. Oginni lists creating awareness on professionalization of agricultural activities and making it less of a "hard work, low paid job" and more of a "profit-making business", with access to services and resources such as improved varieties and new technologies to increase productivity, as part of measures to address this challenge.

The study also shows that rural-urban migration of youth causes household farm income to be reduced considerably as a result of a shortage in family labor and an increase in the cost of hired labor.

Oginni suggests that the government of Nigeria, where the study was carried out, can unlock the potential of rural development by creating infrastructure that supports private sector development. This can be achieved through measures such as building roads to facilitate market access, promoting a labor force through vocational training, and building technical capacity targeted at increasing the skills of the local labor force. The study recommends access to finance and providing training on credit utilization that can have a positive influence on farming activities.

According to the study, despite the importance of remittances to average households, and with migrant youth a little bit more educated than those that

did not migrate, only a few households are actually receiving remittances since most youth are not gainfully employed in the cities.

Focusing on the rural-urban migration profile of youth in Nigeria and its impact on the welfare of the rural households, the research states that the government of Nigeria and development partners should consider and embrace the creation of an enabling environment for the private sector to invest in the rural areas.

According to the study, youth will make use of access to services and resources such as improved varieties and new technologies to increase productivity and efficiency to become more involved in agriculture as a major source of livelihood in rural areas thereby helping address rural-urban migration. Sensitization on the prospects of agribusiness also helps create an enabling environment for agribusiness activities.

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The [Indian Council of Agricultural Research](#) (ICAR) organized the conference in conjunction with the [National Research Centre for Banana](#) (NRCB) and [Bioversity International](#), with the theme "Innovations in Sustainable Production and Value Chain Management in Banana."

The conference provided a forum for banana researchers, policymakers, students, and other stakeholders to discuss the opportunities, challenges, and threats faced by the banana industry and develop mitigating strategies, identify research gaps, and provide solutions.

Another objective of the conference was to pave the way for inter-institutional germplasm exchange and collaborative research programs on banana improvement, production and

protection; and to provide a platform for students, aspiring scientists, and entrepreneurs to exchange knowledge, ideas, and experiences; and help to establish linkages and partnerships in research and business.

IITA's banana program has, over the past 30 years, focused on the delivery of high yielding hybrids of plantain, Matooke and Mchare bananas, for food and income security, especially of smallholder farmers in Africa.

Related publications on the IITA banana breeding program

Research Collaboration Stimulates Plantain Cultivation in Burkina Faso, <http://www.coraf.org/2019/06/12/research-collaboration-stimulates-plantain-cultivation-in-burkina-faso/>

Promising High-Yielding Tetraploid Plantain-Bred Hybrids in West Africa, <http://www.coraf.org/2019/04/29/just-out-promising-high-yielding-tetraploid-plantain-bred-hybrids-in-west-africa/>

NIHORT evaluates IITA plantain hybrids for possible distribution to farmers <http://bulletin.iita.org/index.php/2020/03/16/nihort-evaluates-iita-plantain-hybrids-for-possible-distribution-to-farmers/>

Promising High-Yielding Tetraploid Plantain-Bred Hybrids in West Africa, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2019/3873198>

Crossbreeding East African Highland Bananas: Lessons Learnt Relevant to the Botany of the Crop After 21 Years of Genetic Enhancement, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpls.2019.00081>

Bananas and Plantains (*Musa* spp.) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59819-2_7

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.gha@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.



IITA Tanzania celebrates International Women’s Day and launches local chapter of Women’s Group

From the doctor who is often referred to as a nurse because a doctor is expected to be male, to the architect whose construction workers will not follow her instructions without checking what the “engineer” (who is expected to be a male) says, and the entrepreneur who is always asked who is the man behind her successful business—these were some of the issues highlighted by a panel of women drawn from different backgrounds at an [IITA-Tanzania](#) event to commemorate this year’s International Women’s Day (IWD). This year’s theme was “Generation Equality: Realizing women’s rights for an equal future.”

The event was attended by staff and partners based at IITA Eastern Africa hub offices in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and female students from nearby secondary schools—Academic International School and Mikocheni Secondary School—and Ardhi University, accompanied by their teachers. The event was held on 12 March.

While making the opening remarks, the Director for Eastern Africa Hub Victor Manyong said that IITA was committed to achieving gender equality in the workforce across all levels including management. He pointed out that in Tanzania, there were more female managers than men.

Also, highlighting the progress of the IWD, the IITA Senior Scientist and Gender Specialist, [Steven Cole](#) noted that while this year marked 25 years since the Beijing Declaration, no country had achieved gender equality. He cited men and boys’ involvement as a key factor driving back gender equality and challenged everyone in the audience to think about constraints to achieving gender equality.

The panel discussion on “Generation equality: Progress and bottlenecks” brought together five women from the various fields of medicine, media, construction, and agribusiness. They shared their experiences on how they had made it in their fields and challenges they had to overcome as women to motivate the female students present to “soldier on” to achieve their dreams. Cole moderated the discussion.

During the panel discussion, Dr Victoria Heilman, an Architect and Chairperson for [Tanzania Women Architects for](#)



Top: Students from Ardhi University in a group photo at the International Women’s Day event. Bottom: IITA Eastern Africa Director and representatives of IITA Women’s Group – Tanzania chapter cut the cake to mark the event.

[Humanity](#) (TAWAH) said that the casual laborers she was supervising at construction sites often ignored her instructions on technical work and told her they were waiting for the engineer (referring to a man) to give them instructions.

This was echoed by Dr Faith Mdee, a gynecologist who noted that most people in the community did not understand that a woman could be a doctor. Therefore at the hospital, she was always referred to as “nurse”.

Joyce Shebe, the Chief Editor at Clouds Media and Chairperson for Tanzania Media Women Association, also said that equality has been a big challenge in the newsrooms. Female journalists are usually assigned lighter roles such as covering soft news, while men are assigned to cover investigative and economic news.

“Women need to be aggressive to reach higher positions because men still dominate in newsrooms as well as in media organizations,” she said.

Hadija Jabir, a Business Administration graduate who is a farmer and runs a successful export agribusiness said, "Many people don't believe that I founded my business of selling vegetables to European countries by myself. They think there was a man behind me, because they don't believe a woman can stand on her own and be successful. And in Europe, they don't believe, as an African woman, I can be running a successful business by myself."

"So I want to tell you, don't let people define what you can and can't do," she advised the students.

Another panelist, Mwantumu Omari, an IITA Research Assistant and Chairperson of the IITA Women's Group Tanzania chapter, said women need to be responsible when they are given opportunities to show they are capable. "Determination and focus are key to success; have confidence in who you are and what you want to become."

Commenting on the panel discussion and slogan of IWD 2020, Mirna Mussa, a form six student at Academic International School, said awareness on equality is important in the society so that people will know that there should be fairness between females and males. "Women are undermined despite the critical role they play; it is not fair. People have to be educated to understand the importance of equality."

"Women will show their capabilities if they are given the same opportunities as men. Exercising equality will also reduce women's harassment in the society," said Marysiana George, a 4th year student at Ardhi University pursuing a BA in Building Economics.



Top: Attending students take a tour of the IITA laboratories. Middle: Joyce Shebe, the Chief Editor at Clouds Media and Chairperson for Tanzania Media Women Association, speaking at the event. Bottom: Hub Director Manyong welcoming participants to the International Women's Day event.

IARSAF holds the maiden edition of its journal club for 2020

On 28 February, the [International Association of Research Scholars and Fellows](#) (IARSAF) of [IITA](#) held the maiden meeting of its journal club for 2020. The purpose of the meeting was to help participants gain new knowledge in various scientific fields through research-paper review and build their communication and presentation skills.

The Head, Administration, IITA Western Africa Hub, [Sylvia Oyinlola](#) initiated the IARSAF journal club in 2015. The meeting takes place on the last Friday of every month, during which research scholars make constructive reviews of

published scientific papers, looking at their strengths and weaknesses and concluding on future directions for the research.

The authors of the papers reviewed and professionals in the field were present to clarify information on their research. They were [Christian Fatokun](#), IITA Legume Geneticist/Breeder; Oyatomi Olaniyi, Seedbank Manager; [Paterne Agre](#), Molecular Breeder; and Taofeek Adegboyega, Research Fellow.

The meeting provided knowledge on winged bean (*Psophocarpus*

tetragonolobus [L.] DC.) and cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata* [L.] Walp.). Many questions were asked and valuable contributions were made. Faith Bankole, IARSAF General Secretary, said "This is the best journal club I have ever attended."

Giving closing remarks, Fatokun said that the meeting was an opportunity to learn from younger ones. "If the first is as good as this, I believe others will be better," he said. Fatokun advised IARSAF members to stay focused and consistent because the future is bright.



A presentation on winged bean, during the Journal Club.

Nigerian Export Promotion Council pays study visit to IITA

A delegation from the Export Assistance Office, Southwest zone of the [Nigerian Export Promotion Council](#) (NEPC) paid a study visit to IITA Headquarters in Ibadan to explore possible ways in which the Council can further strengthen collaboration with the Institute.

The visit began with a meeting to establish its purpose and highlight the various areas IITA is working on to address food security in Africa. It also explored how the NEPC can tap into the available structures in place at the Institute to promote the export of agriculture commodities such as cassava, soybean, cowpea, plantain, and banana, which are IITA's mandate crops.

Kenton Dashiell, IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, while chairing the meeting stated that IITA is ready to work with the Federal Government of Nigeria to address the

issue of food security and production of quality commodities for export. "We are interested in working as a team in this partnership to ensure that some of the challenges encountered in producing

export-worthy commodities are addressed," he stated.

Speaking on behalf of the NEPC delegation, Southwest Regional



NEPC delegates in deliberations with Kenton Dashiell and IITA scientists.

Coordinator, Samuel Oyeyipo, who is also a Deputy Director at the Council said, "The Council is working with a 'one state, one product' approach, as part of a plan to ensure that each state in Nigeria is focused on a mandated commodity, and IITA has the technology and capacity to influence export quality especially in Southwest Nigeria."

Following a tour of some of IITA's facilities such as the Business Incubation Platform, cassava processing center, soybean trial sites, Aflasafe and Nodumax factories, the delegation further identified areas such as capacity building, provision of improved varieties as well as backstopping and advisory services on postharvest processes and machines for collaboration.

IITA Director for Development and Delivery, Alfred Dixon, who was also present at the meeting, said that the study visit is a welcome development for both parties following a partnership

MoU that had earlier been signed. "If Nigeria can successfully address some of the challenges that have been identified in this meeting, it is certain that the rest of Africa would be able to record success stories as well," he added.

The 10-man delegation agreed to follow up on the action plans identified during the visit while Dashiell assured the delegation of IITA's commitment to food security and transforming agriculture in Nigeria and Africa.



Delegates of the NEPC at the IITA Cassava processing unit during the study visit.

SARO-Zambia to partner with IITA on cassava processing equipment

Senior managers from [SARO Agro Industrial Ltd](#) recently visited [IITA](#) to explore the possibility of partnering with the Institute. The team consisted of Milind Amin, senior General Manager, and Calvin Salah, Agricultural Advisor-Technical. SARO is one of the global leaders in the design, manufacturing, and distribution of agriculture and processing equipment.

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in cassava production and processing by the Government of Zambia, leading to an increase in cassava production industries. Consequently, there is a need for simpler and more affordable processing equipment for smallholder farmers to make cassava chips and flour to enable them to supply big processors/industries. The company is interested in taking up this challenge in collaboration with IITA.

[David Chikoye](#), [Emmanuel Alamu Oladeji](#), and [Pheneas Ntawuruhunga](#) welcomed the team and briefed the visitors on IITA's activities, emphasizing the cassava crop value chain, capacity development, and youth in agriculture. After that, there was a brief discussion on the status of cassava production, processing equipment, and cassava-based industries in Zambia. The experience of IITA on cassava equipment manufacturing and use was also explained.

The visitors had a chance to visit the Cassava processing center at the IITA hub in Lusaka to see the various cassava processing equipment. Cassava is the second staple crop in the southern Africa region and has a high potential for industrial use in bakeries, livestock feed mills, starch, ethanol, and beer production.

Zambia breweries have started manufacturing cassava beer, while other companies are investing in starch

and ethanol production. The main challenge, however, is that most of the production and postharvest activities are still labor-intensive, justifying the need for mechanization.

The visitors were impressed by IITA's work on cassava, and they described the work as "very exciting". They further expressed an interest in partnering with IITA to explore ways of developing mechanized options for cassava processing in Zambia.



Group photograph of the visitors after the tour of IITA-Zambia cassava processing center.