

Combating COVID-19-induced shortfalls: IITA reveals strategy to strengthen financial health and secure research goals

To manage potential funding shortfalls due to the global COVID-19 crisis, IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) has outlined options through which the Institute can strengthen ongoing research and ensure sustainable planning as well as strategic resource mobilization.

After strenuous consultations with different stakeholders, including staff and donors, Sanginga communicated the decisions during a virtual town hall meeting with Institute staff in all locations.

With analysis based on cashflow projections and scenario mapping, the DG explained some of possible outcomes of different scenarios that include reduced budgets and financial deficits throughout this pandemic

period. Sanginga said that the Institute is devising ways to ensure that all staff keep their jobs and that the vision of transforming agriculture in Africa is sustained. He reiterated that IITA staff

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DG Nteranya Sanginga at a virtual town hall meeting, explaining IITA's funding shortfalls due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

IITA promotes natural solutions during International Day of Biodiversity

On 22 May, [CGIAR-IITA](#) joined the global community to mark the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB), an annual observance to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. In line with this year's theme, "Our solutions are in Nature", the Institute hosted a semi-virtual event to highlight the importance of biodiversity and plants to human health and nutrition.

The event took place at the IITA Forest Center's Ethnobotanical Garden in Ibadan, Nigeria, and included a short interactive session with featured speakers, a question and answer session, and a tour of the medicinal plant garden, showcasing some of the natural solutions to health problems found in our ecosystems. A small number of people

were present at the venue, with most participants joining via online media platforms, such as Facebook Live, due to the restrictions imposed by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite technological advances, human society is dependent on a healthy and vibrant ecosystem for health, food, water, medicine, fuel, clothes, shelter, and energy, among other areas. The IITA Forest Center manages and utilizes forest resources for conservation, research, education, and livelihoods in the Ibadan headquarters. The ethnobotanical garden is part of the center's conservation efforts to create awareness and teach the younger generation about the importance of conserving forests and protecting nature.

The Director of Technical Programs at the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), Dr Joseph Onoja, and IITA Deputy Director General Corporate Services, [Ms Hilde Koper-Limbourg](#), both delivered their remarks through online video streams. In her talk, Koper-Limbourg said that biodiversity is vital to human existence, and it is necessary to commemorate this event every year

to create awareness and help conserve IITA's natural treasures. Forest Center Project Officer Wale Awoyemi said that the IITA Forest Reserve is not big but is the best protected and only urban forest in the region, and is thus invaluable.

Onoja underlined the continuing collaboration between IITA and NCF, and how conservation and conservation education work being undertaken by IITA is important in ensuring that future generations will benefit from IITA's work.

In his remarks, IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, [Kenton Dashiell](#) said, "It is important that the next generation is taught the significance of biodiversity and forest conservation to create the needed mindset that will ensure that this legacy will be in good hands in the future."

The Head of the IITA Genetic Resources Center, [Dr Michael Abberton](#), also talked about the importance of maintaining agrobiodiversity and explained the crucial work that genebanks, which conserve seeds and planting materials of important African foodcrops, are doing to maintain food security in the world.

The IITA Forest Center presently has on record over 450 plant species, 272 birds, 236 butterflies, 48 mammals, and 28 reptiles and amphibians. This year's event focused on traditional medicinal plants and its many benefits.

Speaking during the tour of the garden, Olukunle Olasupo of the Forest Center said, "There are so many important indigenous medicinal plants in Nigeria that research can take advantage of to produce supplements for healthy living and the ethnobotanical garden has so many of them."

One of the plants he spoke about, the *Thaumatococcus daniellii*, is known locally for wrapping local delicacies such as *moin moin* and ofada rice, yet many people are unaware of its fruit that serves as a natural sweetener.

The IITA Ethnobotanical Garden is partnering with schools across Nigeria through extracurricular clubs for young people to raise awareness and teach students about the forest and biodiversity conservation, and the need to teach others as well, explained Ademola Ajayi of the Forest Center.



Humans rely on the resources of nature for many solutions to health and nutrition problems.

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continue to be the Institute's most important assets and their health and well-being and that of stakeholders like farmers and farming communities depending on IITA's research remain a priority.

The DG explained that the twin strategy of budget reduction and resource mobilization will be employed to ensure that the Institute comes out stronger and better from the global COVID-19 crisis.

According to Sanginga, IITA will review the financial situation every month and would consider several options, such as reduction of expenditures, staff contributing a percentage of their basic salaries to support the Institute's finances over a seven-month timeline, starting in June 2020, savings on operational costs, and reimbursement of deductions made.

"The ongoing crisis has created huge opportunities for agriculture in Africa,

and IITA is positioned to ensure that this does not lead to a food shortage crisis on the continent," he stated.

He added that the IITA Board of Trustees and Management have learned from past financial crises and have ensured that IITA will emerge stronger from these challenges. Sanginga also said that the 2020 CGIAR financial modeling of the COVID-19 impact was also taken into account as part of the steps to address the shortfall in the Institute's finances.

Youth under IITA-CARE tackle agricultural challenges

Despite the ongoing global crisis, grant recipients of the [Enhancing Capacity to Apply Research Evidence \(CARE\)](#) project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) are working against odds and around the challenges to deliver cutting-edge agricultural solutions to achieve Africa's goal of zero hunger.

With the supervision of scientists from [CGIAR-IITA](#), these young people are working on ways to address various challenges along the agriculture value chains, from horticulture in Tanzania to livestock farming in Nigeria and across several other countries in Africa.

The IITA-CARE project, with a 3-year timeline, has strengthened the capacity of these young Africans to harness the opportunities inherent in agriculture while aligning their research solutions to policy making to help governments on the continent understand the importance of research in policy formulation.

As noted in a [recent report published by the InterPress service](#) (IPS), these awardees are provided learning programs on research methodology, data management, scientific writing, and the production of research evidence for policymaking. The awardees carry out research in areas such as what it will take to involve youth in agriculture, a sector projected to be potentially worth \$1 trillion in the next 10 years. With an estimation that could surpass the present earning rate of crude oil, a lot of African economies are exploring agriculture as a means to strengthen their economies.

The IPS report said that some of the 80 young African scholars under the IITA-CARE project are giving agriculture in Africa a new twist as their research is also addressing youth involvement in the sector.

Esther Alleluyanatha, one of the awardees interviewed by IPS, is researching youth migration and remittances and the implications on rural livelihoods and agriculture productivity in Africa, while Adewale Ayoola, is exploring how lucrative the poultry business is for young Africans. According to Ayoola, the study will provide insight into how commercial agricultural programs are sustainable as well as provide direction into how commercial

agriculture can be harnessed in the African context.

These young researchers are part of a group of young people across Africa creating the awareness required to give a youthful boost to the agriculture sector with its aging practitioners. In some places, the mean age of farmers has been recorded as 60 years.

According to Gilberthe Uwera, another awardee interviewed by IPS, "Through my findings I will be able to prove wrong the youth who see agriculture as the work for old and village people, and other people

who still think that agriculture cannot improve incomes."

While IITA is committed to transforming agriculture in Africa and fostering partnerships across the globe to address zero hunger, youth involvement in agriculture is part of the Institute's goal under the leadership of Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#).

Under CARE, IITA is working with IFAD to build an understanding of poverty reduction, employment impact, and factors influencing youth engagement in agribusiness, and rural farm and non-farm economies.



*Top: Youth participation in agriculture is projected to be a big income earner.
Bottom: More African countries are exploring agriculture as a means to strengthen their economies.*

COVID-19 highlights the importance of farmers' associations

[Uganda](#) is one of the few countries that has not reported any deaths from COVID-19. However, there are movement restrictions and stay-at-home orders in place. What do this pandemic and subsequent control measures mean for banana farmers in the country? We talked to [Brigitte Uwimana](#), a molecular banana breeder based at [IITA Uganda](#). Below are excerpts of the interview:



Brigitte Uwimana,
IITA molecular banana breeder, IITA Uganda

Q: The rainy season has started, which means farmers are busy in their fields. Should they worry about COVID-19, or is it for people in urban areas?

A: COVID-19 should be a concern for everyone. Farmers should not necessarily “be worried”, but they should take all the precautions to keep themselves, their families, and their neighbors safe.

Q: If yes, what precautionary measures should farmers take to keep themselves and their families safe – both in the farms and elsewhere?

A: All the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are valid both in urban and rural areas. The use of sanitizers might not be affordable or available for rural areas. Still, farmers should wash hands properly with soap and water, even in the fields, especially for those who hire labor from different homes. Farmers should also take care to practice physical distancing by assigning work in a way that keeps the workers away from each other, and everyone should wear a mask. Field

tools shared among workers should be washed with soap before sharing them. Banana farmers in Uganda already know about sterilizing tools; they have been doing this during the fight against [bacterial wilt](#).

Q: Countrywide lockdowns have restricted the movement of both people and goods. How can banana farmers cope with limited access to inputs such as fertilizer, manure, or mulch?

A: Access to towns to buy farm input is indeed limited, but times like these show the importance of farmer associations. The associations can purchase inputs in bulk and then distribute them according to individual needs and means. Given the current circumstances, farmers cannot approach sellers individually, but they can leverage the benefits of economies of scale.

Q: What improved varieties or agronomic practices from IITA research can farmers adopt to improve yield, especially during this pandemic?

A: IITA does not have the mandate to

release varieties; we work with the National Agricultural Research Systems in our host countries. In Uganda, the Banana Research Program of the [National Agricultural Research Organisation](#) (NARO) based in Kawanda has released seven improved varieties that are resistant or tolerant to the major pests and diseases and are as tasty as the landraces. These are known as ‘KABANA6H’ (known as ‘Kiwaangazi’ by farmers), ‘KABANA7H’, ‘NAROBan1’, ‘NAROBan2’, ‘NAROBan3’, ‘NAROBan4’, and ‘NAROBan5’. More improved varieties are in the pipeline and will be released soon.



Banana field.

Take responsibility! Stop the spread of COVID-19!

Wash your hands regularly with soap and water; practice physical and social distancing; wear face masks; avoid crowds and public places; keep a 2-meter distance from the next person; practice general sanitation and hygiene.

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.

