

IITA and Mastercard Foundation to implement Young Africa Works in Nigeria

The [Youth in Agribusiness](#) office of [CGIAR-IITA](#) is partnering with the Mastercard Foundation in Nigeria to implement the Young Africa Works strategy. A joint [media release](#) on 16 June formally announcing this collaborative effort said that the partnership aims to enable 242,724 young Nigerian women and men to build skills and secure dignified and fulfilling work opportunities in the agrifood value chain over the next five years.

[Young Africa Works](#), developed in consultation with young people, policy-makers, educators, and entrepreneurs, is Mastercard Foundation's strategy that will enable 30 million young people in Africa to access dignified and fulfilling work over the next 10 years. In Nigeria, Young Africa Works aims to see 10 million young Nigerians, the majority being young women, in work opportunities by 2030.



Young agripreneurs ready to move their harvested produce to the market.

"Agriculture is at the heart of Africa's economic transformation. It will profoundly define the future of work. Work is all around us, especially in agriculture (production, processing, financing, packaging, and marketing). We're focusing on agriculture in Nigeria because we see these opportunities and we will work with partners like IITA to make them visible to young people," said Chidinma Lawanson, Nigeria Country Head at Mastercard Foundation.

The IITA project focuses on building innovative and inclusive agrifood systems for young people between the ages of 15 and 35 and will support them to

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Paper on using genome-editing tools to develop climate-smart banana varieties among the top-most downloaded

While banana is an important staple crop feeding more than 500 million people in the tropical and subtropical countries, its production is negatively affected by a myriad of factors including diseases and pests, declining soil fertility, and climate change.



IITA's Principal Scientist in Plant Biotechnology, Leena Tripathi.

Efforts to develop improved disease resistant and drought tolerant banana varieties are, however, slowed down by the low genetic variability, lengthy production cycle, and sterility of a majority of the cultivars commonly grown by farmers.

Therefore, banana scientists are exploring how to use modern breeding tools to complement conventional breeding to enhance the ability of banana to adapt to climate change by resisting both biotic and abiotic stresses.

A team from [CGIAR-IITA](#) reviewed the recent developments and the prospects for application of genetic modification and genome editing for developing climate-smart banana.

They summarized their findings in the paper, *Application of genetic modification and genome editing for developing climate-smart banana* (<https://doi.org/10.1002/fes3.168>), published in the March 2019 edition of [Food and Energy Security](#) and which has been among the most downloaded papers in the journal.

IITA's Principal Scientist in Plant Biotechnology, [Leena Tripathi](#), led the research team. Others involved in the study were Valentine Otang Ntui, IITA's Plant Biotechnologist, and Jaindra Nath Tripathi, IITA's Banana Transformation Specialist. The team has received a certificate of achievement from the publishers.

Tripathi says the team was delighted with the performance of the paper as reported by the publisher. In a congratulatory note, the publisher stated: "Among work published

between January 2018 and December 2019, yours received some of the most downloads in the 12 months following online publication. Your research generated immediate impact and helped to raise the visibility of *Food and Energy Security*."

Tripathi added that the popularity of the paper demonstrated the urgency to increase the productivity of important staple crops to feed the rapidly growing population amid the challenges posed by climate change.

"CRISPR/Cas9-based genome editing has been recently established for banana, paving the way for the development of improved varieties

resistant to diseases and pests, particularly when no host plant resistance is available among banana germplasm," she said.

The IITA team has spearheaded the use of genome editing for developing banana varieties that are resistant to various deadly diseases. These included recently, the first-ever use of CRISPR, a technology for genome editing, to develop plantain plants with high resistance to the banana streak virus.

The work was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the [CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas \(RTB\)](#).



The research team, L-R: Valentine Otang Ntui, Leena Tripathi, and Jaindra Nath Tripathi.

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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.



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secure employment or self-employment through entrepreneurship across three Nigerian states--Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos--over the next five years.

The project will leverage and scale existing IITA youth initiatives, including the Start Them Early Program (STEP). STEP is a mechanism that improves agricultural instruction in secondary schools in a manner that better directs career paths toward modern agriculture and agribusiness. Partnerships with the Commissions of Education in each of the focus states will lead to a massive outscaling of the STEP program.

In collaboration with the Enterprise Development Centre's online learning platform, the digital STEP program, delivered through Young Africa Works, is expected to revolutionize agriculture teaching in public institutions of education across Nigeria. The program will also scale access to vocational education for marginalized young people.

The project will be implemented with several partners and the state governments. Youth-sensitive loan and agribusiness support programs will be developed with financial institutions that recognize the specialized needs of young people, especially young

women, as agricultural borrowers. The program will aim to reduce the risks associated with young people obtaining credit for agricultural investment purposes.

"Our partners are well-positioned to provide the training, placement, and agribusiness support services required in the three target states of

Nigeria. This optimal mix of partners will ensure that the project approaches reflect the special attention that the Young Africa Works strategy places on young women. The project will apply special approaches to empower young women in Northern Nigeria while considering cultural sensitivities," said Evelyn Ohanwusi, Training Coordinator, Young Africa Works-IITA.



STEP Agribusiness training for young people in a secondary school.

ACAI partner establishes 492 training plots for scaling AKILIMO

The Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC), a primary partner of the [Africa Cassava Agronomy Initiative \(ACAI\)](#), has established and planted 492 validation trial sites for [AKILIMO](#). Also, TFNC set up 46 demonstration sites across the ecological zones covered by ACAI.

Planting took place between October 2019 and April 2020 because of the varying ecological and climatic conditions across the country that dictate the planting and harvest windows. The regime used in planting and monitoring the plots follows the

AKILIMO recommendations in [Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management and Best Planting Practices](#).

While the validation trials will be used to check the effectiveness of the AKILIMO recommendation when



Extension agents and farmers participating in a practical training organized by TFNC in Tanzania.

applied practically, the demonstration plots, on the other hand, will be used as a training location for farmers of the various aspects of the practices advocated by the AKILIMO tools. The organization will also use the validation trial plots for training farmers.

“Despite having our focus on best planting practices, we have received increased interest for all AKILIMO tool recommendations and therefore will include other use cases in our training,”

said Rhoda Mahava from TFNC. AKILIMO tools provide cassava farmers with tailored fertilizer recommendations, land preparation methods, weed management, planting densities, and fertilizer application best practices for intercropped cassava fields as well as planting and harvest dates for high cassava root starch quality and sustainable raw material supply.

TFNC has resorted to training individuals, rather than groups, due to

the coronavirus pandemic following the guidelines issued by health officials to avoid infection and transmission of the disease.

The trials and demo plots were established and planted in collaboration with select secondary partners, local government authorities, extension agents, and strategic farmers. The secondary and primary partners working with ACAI are required to be active players in the cassava value chain.

IYA partners with Oyo State Government to resuscitate rural training center

[IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) (IYA) is partnering with the Oyo State Government on revitalizing and using the Rural Community Development Centre (RCDC) in Awe, Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo town, as a satellite site for its youth-in-agribusiness related activities.



Some of the beneficiaries of various projects under IITA's youth-in-agribusiness initiative.

IYA proposed that the RCDC, which is located about 56 kilometers from Ibadan, be used for agribusiness incubation, an agribusiness park, the establishment of pilot learning enterprises, and a training center. The center, a farm training institute owned by the Oyo State Government, will enable IYA to expand its activities and allow young people to have hands-on experience on agribusiness.

The Governor of Oyo State, His Excellency Engr. Seyi Makinde was at the RCDC on 10 June to flag off the proposed IYA agribusiness incubation activities. Deputy Governor Rauf Olaniyan accompanied him, with the State Commissioner for Agriculture, Hon. Muyiwa Ojekunle, the executive adviser to the Oyo State Governor on agribusiness [Dr. Debo Akande](#), the chief of staff of Oyo State

Chief Bisi Ilaka, rural chiefs, and other top public officials of Oyo State.

In his welcome address, Ojekunle stated that the Governor is flagging off the project to fulfill his promise to use agriculture as one of the major drivers of the Oyo State economy. He said, “The effort is to start here today in Afijio local government and gradually spread to other parts of the State. This initiative will also help in building the capacity of youth who will pursue a career in the agricultural sector.”

Representing the [IITA](#) Director-General, [Dr. Kenton Dashiell](#), Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, stated that the Institute's efforts in engaging the youth have been impactful and have given birth to job creators and employers of labor.

He stressed that the Institute, with the support of the state government, intends to transform the facility at Awe into an agribusiness training center for the benefit of young people in the state and environs.

Outlining the plans of IYA for the center, Osun Idowu on behalf of IYA, said the agribusiness park will see young people operating businesses in a cluster. He said IYA would use the established pilot enterprises to conduct agribusiness incubation for the youth. However, he appealed to the governor to allocate some resources to renovate some of the facilities at the center.

Some youth who have benefited from the incubation program of IYA under different projects also gave testimonies. Oyinkansola Bamimure, a beneficiary of the Youth in Agribusiness and Sustainable Agriculture (YEASA) project, who processes maize into pap and custard powder, and Gbemisola Olawore, a beneficiary of the ENABLE-TAAT project, who owns a fish processing business, spoke about how the IYA program has helped in creating career paths in the agricultural sector for them. They also talked about their business challenges such as funding and verification of their products by the national food bodies, which would enable them to access a broader market.

In his vote of thanks, Akande appreciated IITA for its support and willingness to work with the Oyo State Government in resuscitating the Awe facility that has been moribund for many years. He said, “What we are doing is to change the narrative for youth in Oyo State and Nigeria so that our products will not only be in Nigeria but on the shelves of international supermarkets. I am sure that this place will yield millions of naira to youth every year.”