

Zambian President commends IITA's youth-in-ag initiative

Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI) recently facilitated an exhibition program with the theme: "Crop diversification and alternative food". A team of young people under the ENABLE-TAAT compact of the [Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation](#) participated in the event to showcase the modern cassava value chain technologies. Zambian Head of State, His Excellency, President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, was at the event to see various modern technologies for agricultural advancement in the country.



The IITA team, led by Dr Chikoye, at the exhibition.

The ENABLE-TAAT compact, implemented by [IITA's](#) Youth-in-Agribusiness office, showcased agricultural commodities and products such as High Quality Cassava Flour (HQQF) with all its nutrient-fortified snacks and foods. Some of these are supplied to chain stores like Shoprite,

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NEXTGEN Cassava breeder receives Cornell Africa Fund Fellowship

A member of the Next Generation Cassava Breeding Project (NextGen Cassava), Moshood Agba Bakare, has been awarded the Cornell Africa Fund Fellowship for his PhD program at Cornell University. The plant breeding and genetics researcher went to Cornell from [IITA](#), Ibadan, where he worked with [Peter Kulakow](#), head of Cassava Breeding .

Bakare is researching to determine if cassava breeding programs targeted at specific agroecological zones would yield improved results instead of breeding

varieties designed to adapt to Nigeria's broad ecological zone.

NextGen Cassava, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, aims to produce model cassava breeding programs, improve and expand the breeding programs' population to ensure a solid foundation for future genetic gains, release improved cassava varieties that meet the criteria for quality acceptability, and sustainably improve smallholder farmer livelihoods, among others.



Cornell Africa Fund Fellowship awardee, Moshood Agba Bakare.

Bakare's course adviser, Jean-Luc Jannink of the US Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS), said Moshood has diligently expanded his skills since he came to Cornell. He said his willingness to develop new approaches rather than stay with the familiar holds a bright light for his future as a lead researcher for crop improvement and economic development in Nigeria.

Responding to the Fellowship, Bakare said, "I am thrilled and honored to be the recipient of the Africa Fund Fellowship from Cornell University. This award will not only support me in my research fieldwork but also motivate me to apply various skills and knowledge acquired in the course of my studying towards optimization of available resources in the cassava breeding program in Nigeria. I am deeply appreciative of Cornell University for considering me worthy of this award."

The Fellowship Fund covers his full tuition and nine months' stipend and benefits at Cornell's Graduate School.



Moshood Bakare in the field at IITA.

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Pick 'n' Pay, and various food outlets in different parts of the country. They also showcased their cassava chips that was supplied to food and beverage companies like Zhonghai International Ltd, Zambia Breweries, and other processors that use cassava chips as a raw material to manufacture various products like ethanol, glue, and beer. At the youth's exhibition stand, President Lungu applauded IITA for its youth-in-agribusiness initiative, which engages young people in agriculture

and channels a career path for many of them to be self-employed or become employers of others. He was impressed to see graduate youth producing and showcasing agricultural commodities and contributing their quota to ensure that the nation's agricultural sector thrives. President Lungu commended ENABLE-TAAT for its collaboration with various established youth groups in Zambia. According to him, these partnerships will extend the technologies and impact beyond the walls of IITA.

At the end of the exhibition, the youth presented a hamper of assorted cassava-based products to His Excellency. The President was especially delighted with the cassava bread, which he described as a good initiative. President Lungu's interest in the cassava bread stimulated some attendees' interest. Their testimonies showed a mindset change and a desire to be included in agribusiness incubation initiatives and the establishment of agribusiness clusters.



Representatives of the ENABLE-TAAT youth group.

IITA partners with Nigerian Breweries to reforest Olokemeji



IITA staff, Nigerian Breweries representatives, Ogun State Ministry of Forestry representatives, and members of the community from Olokemeji Forest Reserve on a souvenir photo at the start of the project.

Every year, the world loses 10 million hectares of forest to indiscriminate poaching activities and the felling of trees. The depletion of our natural resources and increased emission of greenhouse gases contribute to climate change.

The [IITA Forest Center](#), the Nigerian Breweries, and the Ogun State Ministry of Forestry are undertaking a 10-year project to reforest the Olokemeji Forest Reserve in Ogun State. The Forest Reserve is one of the largest in southwest Africa, covering 6,018 hectares of land. Community members have encroached on this forest area by clearing different portions of the land for various farming activities. The project aims to sensitize and encourage the community members and other stakeholders to reforest the area.

A community entrance and familiarization event took place in March to launch the initial phase of the project. The project aims to provide community members with training on environmental conservation and multiple income generation sources through school conservation clubs, bee-keeping, and vegetable and herb gardening. These will help engender a sense of ownership over the project among the locals.

As part of International Forest Day celebrations, the project launched its first activities by planting trees in selected portions of the forest reserve. Men and women of the Olokemeji community, school children, and staff representatives from [IITA](#) participated

in the activity. [Hilde Koper](#), IITA's Deputy Director General for Corporate Services, appreciated everyone present and emphasized the need for everyone's cooperation to improve the forests for healthy living. [Sylvia Oyinlola](#), Head Administration, IITA West Africa hub, captioned the goal of the day's reforestation activity as 'Reforest for a better forest for a better world.'

IITA Forest Center's Ademola Ajayi, speaking on the effects of deforestation and the need to use our forests sustainably, said, "The unbearable heat we feel lately are effects of cutting down forest trees. Animals, insects, and birds that should help pollinate our plants migrate from our forests when their habitats are threatened. People suffer from diseases previously unknown to man because we upset nature's balance through various deforestation activities." He added that the way to use nature's resources is to use them sustainably, "If you cut a tree, you should replant three," he said.

In an earlier town hall meeting with community members and other stakeholders, Tayo Adelaja, Nigerian Breweries Public Affairs Manager West/MidWest, affirmed his company's commitment and responsibility towards the project. He asked for everyone's cooperation to bring about the project's success, saying that the fruitful outcomes of the first phase would determine their continued collaboration for the project's sustainability.

Apart from planting trees to restore

the degraded land, the project will provide jobs for community members trained in various aspects of biodiversity conservation and forest protection. Members of the local communities themselves will be in charge of maintaining the project. The sustainability course was especially entrusted to the children who would be members of School Conservation Clubs where they would interact with Club members from other schools and be exposed to the world of conservation. They were enjoined to be ambassadors of the program and transfer the same knowledge of conservation gained to their peers and others.



DDG-CS Hilde Koper participating in the tree planting.

CGIAR focuses on integrated pest and disease management in IYPH webinar

The third of four webinars earmarked by CGIAR to celebrate the International Year of Plant Health was held on 10 March 2021. The webinar focused on “Integrated Pest and Disease Management” and examined the different collaborative approaches employed in the sustainable management of transboundary pests and crop diseases, looking at how they impact our food systems, gender balance, and social inclusions.

Robert Bertram, Chief Scientist, Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, USAID, who facilitated the webinar, said that in the last 10-11 years of Feed the Future, the world has dealt with Maize lethal necrosis, Fusarium wilt of tropical race4 banana, Fall armyworm, the locust outbreak, and Wheat blast in Asia and Bangladesh. He pointed out that we live in a shrinking world and the interactions of trade, travel, climate change, and climate variability drive uncertainty and vulnerability for farmers worldwide. Countries and global partners like CGIAR need to work together to seek better ways to prioritize the damage caused by these pests and diseases and proffer innovative solutions.

Four panelists reflected on the one-health approach in protecting plants and

people. Dealing with plant pests and diseases from a one-health perspective involves ensuring healthy plants, environments, animals, and ultimately, humans. Prasanna Boddupalli, Director of the CIMMYT Global Maize Program, speaking on the successes and challenges of tackling transboundary diseases and insect pests of crop plants, said, “Over 140 wheat varieties with improved agronomic traits, disease resistance, and climate resilience have been deployed in 11 ‘at-risk’ countries over the past 10 years.”

At the CGIAR level, there has been the proactive deployment of disease-resistant varieties. CIP (International Potato Center) partners across different continents have identified, cloned, and developed major resistance genes for main viruses affecting potato and sweet potato. It has also seen advanced sensitive and field-deployable diagnostics developed in managing various other pests and diseases. Solutions to combat the Fall armyworm, which affects maize in Africa and Asia, include biopesticides and native genetic-resistant varieties.

However, inadequate integration and lack of wide-scale deployment still exist in fighting these pests and diseases.

Several challenges remain, including the spread of new and more aggressive pathogens and pests emerging and spreading globally. Integrating People’s Mindsets (IPM) as an approach to globally and locally combat plant pests and diseases remains a significant challenge.

The webinar was interactive, with participants contributing what they consider the greatest challenges and successes they have encountered in implementing integrated pest and disease management initiatives. Both participants and presenters agree that a global surveillance system is needed to manage and control crop pests and diseases. And there is a need to strengthen partners’ capacities, especially in low-income countries with targeted and passive surveillance, risk assessment, diagnostics, data sharing, and communication at local and global levels.

Other panel members include Nozomi Kawarazuka, Social Anthropologist, CIP; Regina Eddy, Coordinator, Fall Armyworm Interagency Task Force, USAID; and Annet Abenakyo Mulema, Senior Program Officer, International Development Research Centre (IDRC).



Some of the webinar participants in a virtual group photo.



An Integrated Pest and Disease Management approach will have far reaching consequences for farmers and food security, emphasized the speakers at the webinar.

COVID-19: Leading the fight from the front lines



Director General Nteranya Sanginga receives his vaccination from the IITA Medical Clinic.

IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) and other frontline staff were among the first to receive the vaccine as the vaccination rollout begins at the

Institute. The vaccination at the IITA Clinic is part of the first wave of the vaccination program in the country, after Nigeria has taken delivery of the

first batch of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines.

IITA has requested local government authorities for staff and dependents to be included in the vaccination program. IITA's Medical Unit has been participating in COVID-19 vaccination training with the nearest (Akinyele) local government (Moniya) primary health center. The AstraZeneca vaccine has been allocated for frontline staff and was administered at the Clinic, beginning on 29 March. Frontliners included medical, security, and hospitality staff, media, drivers, and school teachers.

Watch DG Sanginga speaking about the efforts to keep staff safe: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeSFxWJkBmc>.

An intense awareness drive has also been ongoing with face masks and personal hygiene campaigns to stop the coronavirus spread. In this other video, IITA West Africa Hub Director [Michael Abberton](#) speaks about adopting safeguards and best practices to curb the pandemic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZFRM-J3j04>.