

## IITA Forest Center staff named among top 100 Young African Conservation Leaders

[IITA](#) Forest Center Manager and Conservation Biologist [Adewale G. Awoyemi](#), has been honored as one of the [Top 100 Young African Conservation Leaders](#). The conservationists were selected from 23 African countries in the first-ever Top 100 list for Africa.

The award is a collaboration between the Africa Alliance of YMCAs, the World Organization of the Scout Movement, the African Wildlife Foundation, and the World Wildlife Fund. The recognition empowers young, talented Africans and inspires other youth to lead the way in ensuring that nature and people thrive for generations to come.

According to the organizers, “The Award Certificate is proudly presented to Mr Adewale G. Awoyemi to express our recognition for your outstanding leadership and contribution to conservation in your community, country, and the entire African continent.” This is an honor and recognition of the IITA Forest Center’s good work in ensuring the sustenance of the earth’s natural resources, including plants, animals, microbes, land, water, and air.



Awoyemi was selected among the Top 100 Young African Conservation Leaders.

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## Credit access impacts productivity among Tanzanian youth agripreneurs

Horticulture, an aspect of agriculture practiced by millions of youths across Africa, has helped improve the livelihoods of a vast majority living in poverty and struggling to find employment. The continent hosts the world’s youngest population of around 200 million youths aged 15–24 years, with many of them in rural areas engaging in farming activities as a key source of livelihood.

Stakeholders have listed agriculture as a major tool for economic growth and food security, serving as an approach to addressing Africa’s youth unemployment crisis. Although opportunities abound in the sector, they are still unrecognized and inaccessible to most young people. For instance, the high demand for agricultural products creates good opportunities,

yet access to capital and credit for smallholders has been an existing problem, especially for young people.

In Tanzania, agriculture has strong ties to the country's economic growth and food security, as it employs almost 80% of the population. Still, low productivity characterizes the sector because of constraints. According to Huldah Too, an [IITA-CARE](#) young researcher, youth farmers experience inhibitions such as lack of inputs, limited access to credit services, inadequate knowledge, and low infrastructural development.

Research studying the perception small-scale youth tomato farmers have about credit and identifying the determinants of credit access among them discovered that men are more likely to access credit than women.

After analyzing the effect of credit access on tomato productivity among these youth farmers, Too revealed that the age, educational level, and sex of the farmer were significant factors determining farmers' access to credit in the Mvomero District of Tanzania, where she carried out the study. Other principal determinants were land size, farmer group membership, distance to the lending institution, and annual income.

According to the IFAD-sponsored study, being educated and belonging to a farmers' group increases the likelihood of a farmer's access to credit. At the same time, the farther the location of lending institutions, the less probable the farmers were to access loans.

Too concludes that governments and non-governmental organizations should promote education and literacy among farmers and farmer groups to give rural farmers greater access to credit. Financial institutions in Tanzania can consider reaching out to youth farmers living in rural areas to increase their awareness of lending services, borrowing procedures, and requirements. On the other hand, the government can explore avenues to

invest in education to boost literacy levels and limit obstacles to credit access.

The IITA-CARE project is focused on increasing the availability and use of evidence for youth policies and decision-making related to youth participation in the rural sector. The grantees are working in 10 countries across Africa to ensure youths are encouraged to adopt agribusiness and rural economy is improved.



*Credit access impacts tomato productivity among Tanzanian youth farmers.*

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Among other conservation initiatives, Awoyemi and his Forest Center team focus on research, education, and awareness creation among schoolchildren and adults. A part of their research focuses on the Ibadan Malimbe *Malimbus ibadanensis*, a bird endemic to the Ibadan area and classified as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) Red List of Threatened Species. This rare bird species, found in the IITA Forest Reserve, Ibadan, is one of the flagship species upon which the conservation work of the IITA Forest Center is based.

Awoyemi leads the Ibadan Malimbe research, which has led to multiple published papers. He recently contested in the Inqaba Genome Challenge <https://youtu.be/Nndqfvebw> to raise funding to pursue genetic studies of the Ibadan Malimbe, which will enhance its conservation.

A trained ornithologist, Awoyemi also coordinates the Ibadan Bird Club, a group of nature lovers, enthusiasts, and conservationists. The group meets monthly for birdwatching as a leisure activity and shares ideas about conserving birds and other biodiversity.



*IITA Forest Center Manager Adewale G. Awoyemi is an ornithologist and biodiversity conservationist.*

# Experts share opportunities in the Nigerian agricultural sector

On 5 July, the United Nations Private Sector Advisory Group (PSAG) in Nigeria launched the maiden edition of an agribusiness Master class series, themed “The Business of Agriculture in Nigeria”. The series educates Nigerians on the immediate, mid-, and long-term opportunities for Agri-Entrepreneurship in Nigeria to help potential entrepreneurs and investors understand its broad dynamics and potential. An [IITA](#) scientist—[Adebowale Akande](#), Head of Agribusiness for sub-Saharan Africa at [IITA](#), was one of the panelists.

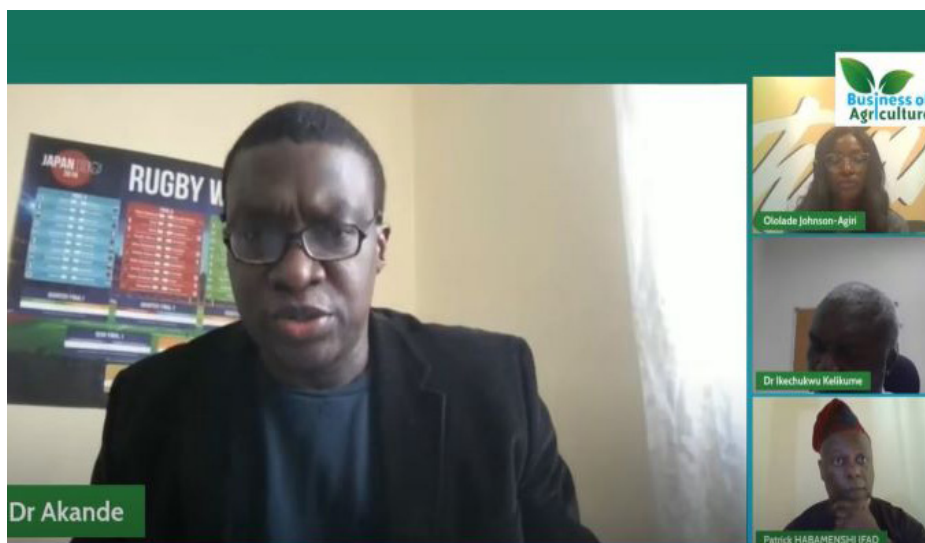
the sector. He advised that everyone take the opportunity to learn and ask the right questions for future action as there will be discussions on the structures in place to support young people to succeed.

During the panel discussion, Akande, also the Executive Assistant to the Governor of Oyo State on Agribusiness, shared opportunities in agribusiness. He described agriculture as a gold mine because of its eternal relevance to people’s well-being; hence, individuals can tap into various aspects such as production, value addition, and export.

Akande explained that specific skills must be learned, and knowledge gained for success in agriculture and agribusiness to be guaranteed. “Programs like this should be put in place to help change the mindset of youth and educate them on the challenges and opportunities associated with agribusiness,” he said. He added that seeking knowledge from peers who have made it in the sector despite the challenges will also help youth make better decisions regarding their engagement in the sector.

In her message, Senior Special Adviser to the President on SDGs, Her Excellency Princess Adejoke Orelope Adefulire, congratulated the leadership of PSAG for leading this effort and encouraging private sector participation in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in Nigeria. She was represented by her Senior Technical Assistant, Dr Bala Yunusa, who said, “I believe that this will provide insights on how to strengthen system-wide solutions beyond individual organizations to explore the potential business opportunities in agriculture and inspire Nigerians to engage in agribusiness directly or indirectly.”

In her closing remarks, Ololade Johnson-Agiri, General Manager at British America Tobacco Nigeria Foundation, who also moderated the session, highlighted some expert advice from the panelists, especially the need to analyze one’s strength, do a risk assessment, and study one’s environment to identify what is profitable before going into the business of agriculture.



*Dr Akande, sharing opportunities in agribusiness during the panel discussion.*

In his speech, Dr Bolaji Balogun, Chair of PSAG, said there are millions of youth in Nigeria, and the country focuses on delivering food security and converting valuable natural resources in agriculture into revenue and inclusive growth across rural and urban economies. “Nigeria has an incredible opportunity to convert agriculture into a source of foreign currency revenues for the economy. This makes it important for this event to be held,” he said.

Abimbola Okoya, Chair of Cluster Five and the Executive Director of British America Tobacco Nigeria Foundation, gave the opening remarks. She mentioned that the Senior Special Adviser to the President on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) supports the program to tap into profitable opportunities in agriculture, build wealth,

and achieve financial freedom to attain the SDGs in Nigeria. Okoya further explained that the rationale behind the series is to create awareness and develop capability in agriculture. “The series aims to awaken a social consciousness on the opportunities that abound in the agricultural sector and evoke a renewed interest in the industry, accelerate access to resources that exist, and establish as well as strengthen young agripreneurs in the sector,” she said.

Dr Patrick Habamenshi, Country Director for the International Fund for African Development (IFAD), delivered the keynote address. He said agriculture would be nothing if the creation of enterprises and employment is not encouraged. Hence, this master class allows everyone to discuss the challenges and different value chains in agriculture and find their place in

## Got a story to share?

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# I-Youth connects beneficiaries to employers and investors

As part of its post-training plan activities for beneficiaries across the three project states in Nigeria, the Innovative Youth in Agriculture (I-Youth) project (formerly known as Young Africa Works) organized a two-day conference in Lagos to link the beneficiaries in the states to investors and potential employers.

The conference, which focused on the project's entrepreneurship and employment track beneficiaries, brought together stakeholders in the agricultural sector to give guidance on marketing, input supply, accessing funds for agribusiness establishment, and job recruitment agencies for dignified employment placement.

While addressing conference participants, I-Youth Executive Manager Aline Mugisho sought the government's support to create an enabling environment with policies to help youths succeed in the agricultural sector. She said they would flourish along with other initiatives, including mentorship and coaching, technology, online business growth, and opportunities available with the State Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

The first day of the conference targeted the employment track beneficiaries, with representatives of various financial institutions guiding the youth on the best way to present their business plans for funding opportunities available in the banks. During the panel discussion on youth entrepreneurship and the current finance model in Nigeria, representatives of financial institutions agreed that a convincing business plan is the first and basic requirement for the youth to access loans. While encouraging the beneficiaries to form cooperatives for easy access to loans, the financial institutions all indicated their interest in providing the trained project beneficiaries with loan facilities.

Also, the Nigerian Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) representative, Chief Kola Akosile, stressed the possibility of linking the beneficiaries to off-takers.

The panel discussion on youth access to markets addressed the challenges, prospects, viable markets, and enabling environment. The panelists, who were all

players in agricultural marketing and input supply system, emphasized that studying and understanding the environment in which the agripreneurs operate is vital.

The second day of the conference focused on the employment track beneficiaries, where representatives from the recruitment and employment agencies participated and offered refresher courses to the youth, providing mentorship on developing CVs and guiding them through the interview process. Speaking on the facts and solutions to the employability of Nigerian graduate youth, the panelists all stressed that personal presentation skills in CV and cover letter writing form one of the major hindrances to young people securing employment.

To address this, the representative of Jobberman, one of the I-Youth project partners, provided a refresher session focusing on CV writing, attending interviews, salary negotiation, and personal presentation.

Highlights of the event included testimonies from beneficiaries who have started their businesses and secured gainful employment. There was also an exhibition of products from the beneficiaries.

A similar conference will take place in Kano and Kaduna in August.

The conference was also an opportunity for the beneficiaries to network among themselves and mentors who will guide them through growth.

In the first year of implementation, the I-Youth project has trained over 6,000 beneficiaries in Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos states. Some have established their businesses and others have secured employment in the agri-food sector. Some other participants have developed their business plans, which are being reviewed; they will be linked to one of the project's partners, Sterling Bank, for funding opportunities.



Top: I-Youth Executive Manager Aline Mugisho addressing participants at the conference.

Bottom: Panel discussion on youth entrepreneurship and the current finance model in Nigeria.

## Take responsibility! Stop the spread of COVID-19!

Always clean your hands; practice physical and social distancing; wear face masks properly; avoid crowds and public places; keep a 2-meter distance from the next person; and practice general sanitation and hygiene.

# BASICS II Stakeholders seminar: Progress to date and the way forward

On 7 July, the Building an Economically Sustainable and Integrated Cassava Seed System (BASICS II) held a virtual seminar, “Sustainable seed system through BASICS II: Progress so far”, as part of IITA’s West Africa seminar series. The seminar, moderated by [Sylvia Oyinlola](#), Head of Administration, IITA Western Africa Hub, highlighted key achievements of the project.

[Prof Lateef Sanni](#), BASICS II Project Leader, highlighted the project’s goals, which provide farmers with access to affordable, quality-assured seeds of cassava varieties. According to Sanni, establishing a commercially viable seed value chain across the breeder, foundation, and commercial sectors will build a sustainable integrated commercial seed system.

He said the concentration on the breeding level and advancing some varieties released by national systems to the private sector have been through the quasi-informal system. “That is why the model today in BASICS II is to promote, strengthen the operation of early generation seed companies, such as IITA GoSeed and Umudike Seeds,” he added.

As part of the models used, he stated that BASICS II has concentrated on commercial seed enterprise systems in Benue and Kogi states for the past few years. Likewise, the processor-led approach, where large-scale industries are strengthened to have their own soil laboratory and get the plantlets to their own seed producers, will replace disease-prone cassava varieties at that level.

With the successes recorded at the breeding level, including the renaming of cassava

varieties and new varieties released, the extensive scientific work of building efficient nucleus seed production systems from ex-vitro plantlets, and assembling early generation seed enterprises, the overall aim is achieve commercial seed level.

Sanni highlighted the key achievements of the seed systems being promoted, including the release of nine high-demand varieties, five new varieties released in 2020, nine varieties renamed and promoted, and three being tested. Also, efficient nucleus seed production systems have been built either from ex-vitro plantlets into semi-autotrophic hydroponics (SAH) production to mass produce plantlets and scale this innovation to the private sector. Other innovations promoted include pencil and green stem technology. “All the varieties developed were requested by the markets and industries using them,” he added.

He also mentioned progress with the early generation seed enterprises level. IITA GoSeed has been strengthened and supports four Nigerian enterprises producing and selling foundation seed to generate adequate revenues for sustainability. At the commercial seed level, “we have established 208 Commercial Seed Entrepreneurs (CSE) in Benue, Kogi, and other states, with about 37% females as seed entrepreneurs, although there is a target of 50% females, and women are encouraged to own this thriving business,” he said.

He reported that [Lava Kumar](#), IITA Head of Virology Unit, led the quality control and disease management together with Joseph Onyeka and Principal Scientist [James Legg](#).



*BASICS II Project Leader Lateef Sanni presented the key achievements in the cassava seed system.*

They worked with the National Seed Council and Tanzania Seed Council to strengthen the capacities of farmers, ensuring that farmers and seed entrepreneurs produce quality, disease-free, high-yielding, resistant cassava seeds.

He mentioned the commitment to work with BASICS II in all cassava programs, support, and fund capacity building of cassava growers in seed production in the 36 states of Nigeria as the key achievement with advocacy policymakers.

Concluding the session, he highlighted the need to commercialize less expensive, well-adapted stem multiplication technologies as alternative production systems to SAH as one of the lessons learned. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the movement and gathering of people, which was one of the challenges faced. “With the arrival of vaccines this year, we are optimistic that more progress would be achieved,” he said.



*Prof Sanni highlighted the progress with the commercial seed entrepreneurs.*