

ENABLE Youth Cameroon agripreneurs win awards during IITA's strong showing at SIALY 2021

Agriculture is an economic powerhouse in Cameroon, engaging more than 50% of the nation's economically active population. [IITA](#) has been working in the country for several decades, promoting best practices and introducing technologies to improve productivity in the sector and increase the income of smallholder farmers, in particular.

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The IITA exhibition attracted about a thousand visitors during SIALY 2021.

BEST Cassava project marks excellent progress as it aims to finish strong

Over 1,000 acres of land in major cassava growing areas of Tanzania have been planted with new, improved cassava varieties. Nearly all the seeds of improved cassava varieties produced during the 2021 planting season have been sold. These were among the highlights reported by the Building an Economically Sustainable Seed System for Cassava in Tanzania (BEST Cassava) project. As the name suggests, the BEST Cassava project seeks to build sustainable seed systems that enable farmers to access new and improved varieties in Tanzania.



A cross section of the participants at the BEST-Cassava meeting.

Stephen Magige, the BEST Cassava Country Project Manager, noted that the project's marketing efforts of new, improved varieties had seen 97% of cassava seeds produced during the 2021 season sold. He added that many farmers in project areas had started using seed from registered commercial seed multipliers.

"We have been popularizing new varieties for a while, and our efforts have started to pay off. Already 1,132 acres have been planted with new varieties by cassava farmers," Magige said.

Magige and other team members shared the projects' highlights during a recent semi-annual review meeting that brought together implementing partners to share updates and achievements from the various project components, including superior varieties, quality assurance, commercialization, and the advocacy and mainstreaming component.

[Mennonite Economic Development Associates \(MEDA\)](#) leads the BEST Cassava project with [IITA](#) and [Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute \(TARI\)](#) as key implementing partners, collaborating closely with the [Tanzania Seed Certification Institute \(TOSCI\)](#), which ensures the quality of the seeds produced.

The project manager at MEDA Headquarters, Nadira Sale, and Program Officer Lawrence Kent of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, expressed their pleasure on the excellent implementation and good collaboration with project partners.

Sustainability as project nears end

The project team further brainstormed on the sustainability of project activities once the project ends. This included strengthening collaboration with other projects, such as the upcoming Muhogo Bora project, which will build on the efforts of the BEST Cassava project.

The team will continue popularizing the newly released varieties by establishing demo plots in all major cassava-growing zones for farmers to get familiar with the varieties. The adoption of these varieties will boost cassava production and productivity in their respective areas.

The assistant project manager from IITA, Bahati Maregeri, said that, as part of efforts to promote new, improved cassava varieties, the project plans to continue conducting farmers' field days for variety assessment to appreciate the benefits of using improved varieties.

He added that the project would continue to work with the media to increase awareness of these new varieties among farmers.

Supporting cassava commercialization in Tanzania

A representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, Upendo Mdeme, also presented the National Cassava Development Strategy, developed in collaboration with the BEST Cassava project. She said the government wants to promote and facilitate cassava commercialization through strengthening cassava product markets and marketing infrastructure and farmers' access to financial services.

"We are going to have a dialogue with financial institutions so that they can increase their financial services to our farmers and stakeholders," Mdeme added.

The Annual Review meeting assessed the project's implementation progress over the past six months and planned for the remaining period before the project phases out in December 2021. Different partners, including representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, MEDA, IITA, and TOSCI, attended the meeting.



Participants visiting a cassava seed producer as part of the meeting.

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From 5 to 11 July, IITA participated in the 7th edition of the Yaoundé International Agribusiness Exhibition (SIALLY 2021) held at the National Museum. The Institute showcased IITA's innovations in the development of agriculture, particularly in seed system, IPM, and soil fertility management.

IITA-Cameroon staff responded to questions and inquiries from the visitors at the Institute's stand for seven days. One of the highlights of IITA's exhibition was the workshop organized as a side event. This emphasized IITA's mission and its main achievements in the development of agriculture in

Cameroon. The exhibition also gave some aspiring Agripreneurs of ENABLE Youth Cameroon an opportunity to display their products and talk about their enterprises.

IITA's participation was a resounding success, with about a thousand people visiting the stand during the seven exhibition days. Visitors to the IITA display included the Cameroonian Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Mr Gabriel Mbairrobe, the representative of GIZ Director Christine Schuster, and the representative of the Canadian High Commissioner to Cameroon Richard Bale.

The Institute experienced even more positives as the aspiring Agripreneurs won four out of the seven Prizes of Excellence awarded by Cameroon's Enterprises Upgrade Office (BMN: Bureau de Mise à Niveau des Entreprises au Cameroun) at the end of the fair. The winning agripreneurs were MAC Food Sarl for its sorrel wine brand, Le Bon Augustin; Isiflour Group for their corn porridge; Walakwe Food Sarl for the bitter cola syrup brand, WEP Syrup; and NANKOUA with its brand, Poulet pour tous. They won the first, third, fourth, and fifth place prizes, respectively.



(L-R) IITA-Cameroon Country Representative Dr Cergele Masso, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Mr Gabriel Mbairrobe, and the Chief Inspector at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.



MAC Food Sarl won 1st Prize for its sorrel wine brand, Le Bon Augustin.

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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.

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.



New project to improve over 5,000 smallholder coffee farmers' livelihoods in the Mount Elgon Region

In Uganda, the GIZ Employment and Skills for Development in Africa (E4D) program partnered with [IITA](#)-Uganda and Olam Food Ingredients (OFI) to improve the livelihoods of 5,000 coffee farmers in the Mount Elgon region of the country.



Smallholder Coffee farmer in Ugandan.

Instead of blanket support provided through traditional service delivery models, the partnership will co-design a suite of scientifically tested living income strategies tailored to the diverse needs of coffee farmers in Uganda.

The project, which started in February 2021 and will continue for two and a half years, aims to improve farmers' livelihoods by enabling them to optimize their investment in coffee, earn more from other on-farm activities, and thus reduce the living income gap by 20 percent.

IITA-Uganda Climate-Smart Agriculture Team Lead Sarah Margiotta said, "IITA researchers will build on existing experience and data from Olam, IITA, GIZ, the LI Community of Practice (LI COP), and other publicly available information to determine specific farmer typologies within a sample set of 2,000 farming households in the OFI farmer network." In line with past research showing many variances

between farmers, the project will conduct a farmer segmentation exercise to identify different clusters of farmers with similar characteristics. "By better understanding specific farmer characteristics, the private sector can more effectively target extension service delivery models," Margiotta added.

The project implementers will identify, test, assess, measure, and apply the most efficient living income strategies for different farmer segments to reduce the living income gap and enable them to afford a decent standard of living for all members of their households.

"As the backbone of Uganda's economy, the agriculture sector is critical to the country's economic development, and this growth will be realized when smallholders increase their yields and incomes. By implementing this project, E4D contributes to the Ugandan Government's target to increase coffee production from 4.6 million bags a year to 20 million bags a year by

2025," said Donald Agaba, E4D Team Lead.

According to Yves-Pascal Suter, Senior Strategist, OFI Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability, the project will achieve this by considering the very diverse realities of farming households to provide tailored and specific advice and services. Working on the ground with the coffee farmers will illustrate the importance of looking at the farm as a whole, showcase the best pathways to improve the livelihoods of these families. It will also show how to exploit the potential synergies between crops and livestock and highlight the different existing resources and social structures.

"With OFI as a partner, the project will be looking at all this through an economic lens in terms of return-on-investment for the farmers. Crucially, this innovative project is also scalable and should help guide and inform further actions in the region, as well as globally," Suter concluded.

A life-changing experience with I-Youth - Series 2

The [Innovative Youth in Agriculture \(I-Youth\)](#) project recently completed its first year of operations in three states across Nigeria—Kaduna, Kano, and Lagos. Beneficiaries of the project are already speaking out about their experiences and I-Youth’s impact in general. The project runs a “life-changing experience with I-Youth” series; the second part focuses on Samsudeen Kabir Balarabe.

Balarabe is from Kaduna State and a graduate of Ahmadu Bello University, where he studied Business Education. He had hoped to secure decent employment after his graduation but encountered the reality currently experienced by many Nigerian graduates. Having completed his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program in 2019, he could not find a job.

He had looked for opportunities in several companies that could engage him full-time or part-time without yielding any positive results. He also tried to get menial jobs to ensure a means of livelihood.

While Balarabe was still searching for job opportunities, the I-Youth project rolled out its training program in November 2020 to train unemployed young people like him. He was selected under the employment track. The employment track training equips participants with the skills set needed to compete in the labor market.

Relaying his experience during the program, Balarabe said that the knowledge gained from the training equipped him to secure employment at Value Seed, a seed-producing and marketing company in Kaduna State.

“After my training, I was deployed to Value Seed for my internship program.

I tried to showcase all I had learned at my training, and this distinguished me among the others. I was retained at the company as the customer care and dispatch officer. I am happy to be employed. I never thought an opportunity like this would happen because I had lost hope,” he said.

Balarabe also spoke about his experience while unemployed, recalling that it was the most frustrating period of his life.

“My father always looked at me and compared me with other friends who had jobs after they graduated. I was usually the only one at home at that time because I had nowhere to go,” he added.

Earning a reasonable income now allows Balarabe to take care of his immediate family. He was one of the millions of Nigerian youth with big hopes and few opportunities to prove their worth in the labor market. Now, programs like I-Youth are preparing such young people for meaningful work in the labor market, restoring their hope.



I-Youth beneficiary, Samsudeen Kabir Balarabe successfully completed the training and secured employment with a seed-producing and marketing company in Kaduna State.

Reinforcing Team Capacity in the African Union Project: Field data collection training workshop

Twenty field technicians from the National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT) and [IITA](#) participated in a one-day capacity building workshop at the IITA headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria. The training aimed to provide them with the necessary tools for data collection in field trials established in various locations under the project: “Enhancing nutritional quality of plantain food products through improved access to endophyte primed and high pro-vitamin A plantain cultivars under integrated soil fertility management practices in Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon”.

The training followed previous online sessions given to all technical teams working on the project at IITA and NIHORT in Nigeria, IITA and the University of

BEAU in Cameroon, and the Institute of Agronomic and Forestry Research (IRAF) in Gabon. However, this field training had only Nigerian-based participants, 5 from NIHORT and 15 from the IITA Plantain and Banana Improvement Program (PBIP), due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project, funded by the African Union (AU), has the goal of initiating a biocontrol program against major banana biotic constraints in the context of integrated pest management (IPM) and integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) against the banana weevil (*Cosmopolites sordidus*), the burrowing nematode (*Radopholus similis*), and black Sigatoka (causal pathogen, *Pseudocercospora fijiensis*), in Cameroon, Gabon, and

Nigeria. Achieving this required field technicians to be trained in standardized agronomic and pest data collection. IITA Banana Plant Pathologist Yao Kolombia convened the meeting.

The Head of the IITA plantain and banana breeding program in Ibadan, [Delphine Amah](#), gave an overview of the project, buttressing the relevance of data collection to the project and the need to take data at the appropriate time for the ongoing IPM and ISFM field trials.

In his opening remarks, Kolombia highlighted the key parameters to be collected and the parameter definition, emphasizing the need to follow the data collection guidelines regarding [MusaBase](#) and the recording sheet established.

The trainees visited the IITA plantain field where the practical demonstration sessions on agronomic data collection, black Sigatoka scoring, sample collection and root scoring for nematode evaluation, and the corm scoring for the weevil damage took place. Participants learned how to use the harmonized recording sheets for data collection.

At the end of the field training, participants continued with feedback, remarks, and observations at a practical data mining session. The participants lauded the efforts of IITA and the AU in sponsoring this workshop.



Top: IITA Banana Plant Pathologist Dr Yao A. Kolombia briefs attendees on the training objective and data collection.
Bottom: Participants on the field learning to collect agronomic data collection.