

UN Deputy Secretary-General visits IITA Headquarters in Ibadan



UN Deputy Secretary-General Hajia Amina J. Mohammed (center), flanked by IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga (left) and DDG-P4D Kenton Dashiell (right).

The UN Deputy Secretary-General, Hajia Amina J. Mohammed, paid an official courtesy visit to the [IITA](#) headquarters in Ibadan as part of plans to address some developmental issues, including the acceleration of the sustainable development goals and climate change in Nigeria.

Meeting with IITA Director General [Nteranya Sanginga](#) and some Directors, the UN Deputy Secretary-General went on a tour of the Institute's activities and an exhibition of the innovations being developed and outscaled by IITA to address food insecurity in Africa.

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Tanzanian Minister pledges support for IITA's research and capacity building efforts



Tanzania's Agriculture Minister, Hon. Prof Adolph Mkenda, addressing IITA staff as IITA-EA Director Leena Tripathi looks on.

Tanzania's Agriculture Minister, Hon. Prof Adolph Mkenda, has expressed his appreciation for the scientific endeavors of [IITA](#), which have had a significant impact in finding sustainable solutions to the challenges facing the country's agriculture sector and assured the Institute of his government's support.

The Minister particularly commended IITA's work on cassava and banana, which led to the release of new, improved high-yielding, disease-resistant varieties. He praised the Institute's efforts to build the capacity of researchers in the country, train students, and attract young people to agriculture through the IITA Youth Agripreneurs program to address youth unemployment.

The Minister was on his first official visit to the IITA offices in Dar es Salaam on his way to a meeting of stakeholders in the cassava starch industry to discuss how to support cassava commercialization in the country. The Ministry of Agriculture organized the meeting in partnership with IITA through the Building an Economically Sustainable Seed System for Cassava in Tanzania (Best Cassava) project on 30 November.

During the visit, the Honorable Minister was received by the IITA's Director for Eastern Africa, [Leena Tripathi](#), who made a presentation on the Institute's activities in the country and led the Minister on a tour of the research facilities, including the laboratories. The Minister also met and addressed all the Institute's staff at the end of the tour.

"The aim of my visit was to learn from you. I have talked to your scientists, and what I have seen and heard is very inspiring. Our main challenge

in agriculture is low yield and low productivity. Our farmers need better varieties and agronomy. I am happy that many of the solutions are here. Let us work together to take the research outputs to farmers," the Minister said.

Leena Tripathi thanked the Minister for the visit and the government's support over the years that had seen Tanzania become the Institute's headquarters for Eastern Africa.

During her presentation to the Minister, Tripathi shared some of the Institute's successes in Tanzania. These included the release of thirty improved high-yielding cassava varieties and four first-ever banana hybrids from collaboration with the Tanzania Agriculture Research Institute (TARI).

Other successes were supporting over 90 Tanzania nationals to study at MSc and PhD levels to build their research capacity and engaging over 1,000 youth in agriculture to create employment for themselves and others.

The Minister lauded these successes, which he said were well in line with the government's aspirations. He said the government recognized the importance of research in finding solutions to the challenges facing the agriculture sector. Towards this end, he said, the government had, in its recent budget, doubled the funding to TARI and hoped to increase the funding over the years.

Another priority for the government, the Minister said, was to build human capacity in science, technology, and medicine. He congratulated IITA for supporting so many students from Tanzania to pursue higher education in universities both in and out of the country and host them at IITA for on-the-job practical training. He urged IITA to keep this up, support even more students, and support government efforts to strengthen the extension system.

"In all your projects, work with the government extension workers so you can build their capacities, and they will continue sharing the knowledge with farmers once the projects are finished," he urged.

He also said that the government was keen to learn best practices to attract youth to agriculture as the unemployment rates in the country are high and agriculture holds great potential to create income for youth.

IITA Emeritus Director [Victor Manyong](#), who was also part of the reception team, explained that through African Development Bank (AfDB) support, IITA was running a program to attract youth to agriculture, providing technical know-how for agriculture production and processing, and linking them with banks for loans. The program ensured gender parity and that an equal number of men and women participated.

The Minister also expressed interest in the soil test kits assembled at the IITA soil laboratory under Dr Frederick Baijukya, which were more affordable and easier to carry around and use by the agriculture extension officers. He said the government had been importing kits, but it was better to buy from an institute in the country like IITA.

Hon Prof Adolf Mkenda concluded by requesting a two-day conference next year with the research team at IITA to understand the range of IITA research work in the country and discuss ways to strengthen collaboration for scaling the work to impact more farmers.

The Minister was accompanied by Nyasebwa Chimagu, the Director for Crop Development and Upendo Mndeme, Senior Agricultural Officer and Cassava Focal Person, both from the Ministry of Agriculture.



Hon. Prof Adolph Mkenda tours IITA facilities.

During the visit on 4 December, Hajia Mohammed said, "There is so much going on at this level, I am not sure it informs the global level, so we need to be demand-driven. We need to know what is expected from countries like Nigeria, as there is a huge science space, and we need to respond to these demands rather than just sort of share the north-south divide."

At the exhibition, DG Sanginga said IITA is deliberate about including the innovation of climate-change-resistant agriculture through the ongoing research at the Genetic Resource Center (GRC). He also mentioned that the [Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation \(TAAT\)](#) program aims to grow the agricultural sector, improve food security, and encourage inclusive growth by focusing on more women and youth involvement.

According to the IITA DG, the [Start Them Early Program \(STEP\)](#) aims to build the next generation of agribusiness leaders in Africa by

strengthening agribusiness learning, upgrading facilities, and changing mindsets in secondary schools in DR Congo, Kenya, and Nigeria.

The group comprised Prof Adeshola Adepoju, Director General of Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN); Dr Rosemary Obike, Nigeria's representative on the Executive Board of the World Health Organisation (WHO); Mohamed Yahya, Resident Representative to Nigeria for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Edward Kallon, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria; and [Kenton Dashiell](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery; [Hilde Koper](#), IITA Deputy Director General, Corporate Services; [Prof Michael Abberton](#), Director, IITA West Africa; [Katherine Lopez](#), IITA Head of Communications; and Toyin Oke, IITA Resource Mobilization.

The group also visited the IITA Forest Center. The IITA Forest Center manages and utilizes forest resources

for conservation, research, education, and training within the 1000-ha IITA Ibadan campus, with the primary function of preserving wildlife and nature.

During the tour, Hajia Mohammed stated that one of the areas addressed during the Food Systems Summit was how the science space in countries could be strengthened. "There is quite a healthy one at the global level but not as productive as when each country comes together. I hope IITA can do something with about, as it is a different approach to how we address the food system, not just agriculture but to take the full environment," she said.

IITA is open to sustainable partnerships with a track record of delivering on partnerships forged in the past. "The institute has the technology and research to deliver results that will change the narrative in the science and agricultural space in Africa with the right partnerships," stated Dr Sanginga.

Commenting on the research innovations during the tour, "If we are going to achieve the SDGs, there is need to understand how, while considering the multiplier effects on jobs, gender, and nutrition. What we have seen here today is a good pathway that has been developed. So we would be very happy to have that conversation as a follow up to this meeting on the pathways and the food systems we want to try to achieve by 2030," the UN Deputy Secretary-General said.

According to the UN Deputy Secretary-General, science is a big part of research capacity, and it has to be demand-driven. The mapping and data that IITA has and the available technology are crucial for agriculture and the food chain across Africa and the world.



Hajia Mohammed looking at a Forest Center exhibition of nursery plants.

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.



AKILIMO goes to prison

The [African Cassava Agronomy Initiative \(ACAI\)](#) recently organized sensitization training in a correctional facility in Akorede, Ibadan, in Southwest Nigeria. The prison's Agricultural Service Officer Ibikunle Alonge granted the invitation. Alonge, an experienced extension agent who had previously worked with IITA, works with the Department of Correctional Service (DCS) to train and sensitize farmers.

The correctional facility has a community service program helping people, especially farmers, by giving them land around the prison to cultivate. They also provide them with the necessary training, sensitization, and farming exhibitions to encourage, impact, and improve their knowledge about farming to reduce the crime rate.

In view of this, ACAI Scaling Specialist [Thompson Ogunsanmi](#) and Research Support Supervisor Ademola Adebisi facilitated the training event.

Several farmers came to the event to learn about AKILIMO and its application.

AKILIMO is a tool developed by the ACAI project which gives agronomic advice to cassava farmers. The tools provide tailored recommendations to farmers on aspects of cassava cultivation such as fertilizer application, steps to cassava weed management and the best planting practices, intercropping cassava with sweet potato (for Tanzania) and maize (for Nigeria).

The farmers in attendance at the event came with the expectation to learn more about modern-day agriculture and technology. They noted that this is also an opportunity to expose other farmers to these best practices. Some also mentioned that they would like to learn about mechanized farming, tools to ease farming, and modern seeds that can be used to hasten crop production.



The AKILIMO tools promote improved cassava cultivation practices to optimize productivity and income from growing cassava.

The sensitization included discussions about AKILIMO, its features, and other digital tools. Best planting practices and fertilizer recommendation videos were shown to enlighten the farmers about the importance of farming practices and accurate fertilizer application.

One of the farmers, Pastor Odewale, from the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), noted that the program was enlightening, exposing them to fertilizer use and weed management and improving their farming knowledge. Another farmer, Kehinde Tijani, mentioned that he was exposed to the types of cassava available and new information about planting and waiting periods before harvesting.

IITA joins with Tanzania's Ministry of Agriculture to organize starch stakeholders' meeting to expand cassava commercialization

As part of efforts to realize the national cassava commercialization strategy, IITA, through the BEST Cassava project, co-organized a starch meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture under the Honorable Minister, Professor Adolf Mkenda. The meeting brought together cassava producers, starch processors, importers, and various institutions in trade and regulatory bodies.



Minister of Agriculture, Hon Prof Adolf Mkendi (center), addressing the participants. He is flanked by the Chairperson of Tanzania Cassava Producers and Processors Association (TACAPPA) Ms Mwantumu Mahiza (right) and MP, Handeni Rural, Hon. John Michael Sallu (left).

The objective of the meeting was to facilitate discussion to understand the starch needs of importers and identify market opportunities available for cassava producers, creating demand for commercialized, high-quality planting material of superior cassava varieties. The event took place on 30 November in Dar es Salaam and was graced by the Hon Minister.

The Minister said he had convened the meeting to learn from the starch importers their needs in terms of quality and quantity. This information will help the cassava producers to meet the market demands and reduce importation.

Upendo Mndeme, the Ministry's cassava desk officer, indicated that the event is part of efforts to commercialize cassava in the country, as spelled out in the recently launched National Cassava Development Strategy. IITA, through her BEST Cassava project, played a key role in its development, publication, and launching.

"Currently, most cassava grown in Tanzania is for home consumption, yet it has great potential as a cash crop and can improve lives of rural communities," said [Regina Kapinga](#),

BEST Cassava Project Leader and Head of Advocacy and Resource Mobilization Unit. Furthermore, she said researchers had developed high-yielding improved varieties with moderate to high-starch content.

"The presentation made jointly by IITA and the Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute (TARI) showed clearly that many released cassava varieties have high dry matter content and so can be a good source of starch. And if we are searching for cassava market, then the first place is the domestic market, and one such product is cassava starch," said the Minister.

Dr Esther Masumba, a cassava breeder and national root/tuber crops coordinator from TARI, indicated that the new varieties could be processed into quality starch used for food, textile, and pharmaceutical purposes due to low amylose content.

Victor Kabegu, a youth businessman and Chief Executive Officer of JV Biotech, a starch processing factory, said the three criteria for starch importers were the consistency of supply, quality, and the types of starch.

Victor noted that most starch processors produce native starch

instead of modified starch primarily used in industries. He suggested that the producers invest more in modified starch.

"The starch importers need to tell us the quality they need so that we can improve starch production. IITA and TARI have done a good job of training and supporting us on good agronomic practices of cassava production, and I am sure they will not abandon us now. We are ready to learn and invest just as we were taught on cassava production," said Sharifa Abebe, a cassava producer, and processor from Handeni District.

During the meeting, stakeholders suggested that cassava farmers be equipped with an agripreneur mindset and support with mechanization. "We need mechanization and processing of cassava to reduce food loss on the farm. Also, invest in cassava warehouse just like those we have for other crops," recommended Frederick Baijukya, Agronomy scientist at IITA.

The stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to brainstorm with the government on challenges currently facing cassava farmers and starch importers. "This meeting was useful because it gave us the chance to brainstorm with policymakers on how cassava can reduce starch importation costs. Therefore, I call upon the youth to grab the opportunity in cassava production," explained Victor Kabegu.

The BEST Cassava project seeks to develop Tanzania's commercial cassava seed system. Through the commercial seed system, farmers will have timely access to quality-declared, disease-resistant, and disease-tolerant varieties in the right quantities and at a price they can afford. The adoption of these superior varieties will support farmers in producing high-yielding cassava in the face of increasing disease pressure.



Freddy Baijukya, IITA's coordinator for the ACAL project, making a contribution during the event.

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