

DRC to partner with IITA in transforming its economy through agriculture

[IITA](#) partners with various African governments and the private sector to transform African agriculture, alleviate poverty, increase food security, and improve livelihoods. Over the years, IITA has developed new technologies and programs that draw the Institute closer to its goal. [to page 3](#)



IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga (left) and management team in a meeting with Presidential delegates from DRC.

Improved yields in demonstration plots build farmers' trust in AKILIMO tools

The performance of [AKILIMO](#) tools in cassava cultivation has facilitated its widening acceptance and increased farmer adoption of this technology. Thanks to the [African Cassava agronomy Initiative \(ACAI\)](#) project for developing and spreading this technology country-wide, the tools are helping many cassava growers to adhere to good agricultural practices (GAP). Through that, cassava harvests at the Kitumbi Demonstration Plot in the Handeni district have been plentiful.



A happy farmer showing off her impressive harvest despite insufficient rainfall.

Despite the insufficient rainfall during the last planting season, this demonstration plot produced a larger yield of 6 tons per acre. Farmers attributed this achievement to the efficient use of AKILIMO tools.

AKILIMO offers a suite of tools and materials for cassava growers, extension workers, and organizations that promote improved cassava cultivation practices.

According to Scaling Promoter Augustine Deogratias, the experience from the past shows that farmers in Kitumbi applied poor farming methods. For instance, they were not considering using improved cassava seeds, which led to a poor harvest, often below 4 tons per acre.

“With this year’s drought, if farmers did not recognize the benefits of using AKILIMO, the yield on this plot would not have reached even 1 ton per acre,” Augustine said.

Kitumbi demonstration plot was established by scaling AKILIMO project to demonstrate FR and Weed Management use cases of AKILIMO to help farmers achieve profitable production. The farmers practically participated in the entire cultivation process, including selecting the site, hiring the tractor to plow and put ridges, applying fertilizers, applying pre-emergence herbicide, and harvesting.

The farmers are so happy with the yields they have obtained while also

believing that the practical uses of AKILIMO tools will open more opportunities for them to increase production and increase their income. Farmers assure the continued use of this technology based on the training they have received and promise creating awareness among fellow farmers on the benefits of this technology in enhancing cassava yields.

ACAI is a 5-year project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in five African countries—Nigeria, Tanzania, DRC, Ghana, and Kenya. The project aims to increase the availability of appropriate and affordable technologies to sustainably improve short and long-term agricultural productivity in cassava in the target countries.



AKILIMO tools promote good agricultural practices leading to increased yield.

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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.

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This activity has increased the interest of governments of various African countries to partner with IITA in improving their country's economy through agriculture and agribusiness.

H.E. Felix Tshisekedi, the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is interested in partnering with IITA. He will work with IITA and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to transform agriculture in Congo from subsistence to commercial. The President sent delegates to look at IITA's technologies and ongoing programs and observe areas where the government can work with IITA on the new project.

Mr Pacifique Kahasha Birindwa, an adviser to the DRC President, and his Assistant Mr Felix Karume Ntwali visited IITA Headquarters from 9 to 15 January. Following discussions with [Dr Nteranya Sanginga](#), IITA Director General, and the management team about a partnership in upscaling agriculture in Congo, they visited various laboratories to see available technologies.

At the Genetic Resources Center (GRC), they saw the seed banks, long- and short-term storage rooms, and laboratory for seed selection and preservation. At the Bioscience Lab, they saw various machines—sequencing machine, PCR machine, Real-time PCR machine, Ploidy analyzer, and Lyophilizer. Other laboratories visited include the Virology and Molecular Diagnostics Lab and Germplasm Health Unit (GHU) - Import and Export Lab.

The delegates were also interested in the Institute's youth programs. They visited the youth group, including [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) (IYA) for young graduates and the [Start Them Early Program](#) (STEP) for secondary school students. Following presentations from the team leads to highlight their activities—how they started, challenges faced, and successes achieved—some project beneficiaries showcased their products, shared how they started, and how far they have gone with IITA's assistance.

The delegates also visited projects under the youth programs that have

been established in communities around the Institute. Visiting Fasola Secondary School under STEP, they toured the upgraded and newly built facilities like classrooms, borehole, agribusiness hub, and ICT training facilities, refurbished by IITA to make the learning environment more conducive for students. Students also gave testimonies of what they have learned in crop production, value addition, ICT training, and how they have started their own agribusinesses with support from IITA.

At Awe under IYA, Mr Pacifique and his assistant visited a two-hectare cassava field; a vegetable greenhouse for cucumber, tomato, and pepper; an animal pen for goats and sheep; and a processing center. Through a short presentation, the team showed the work being done in capacity building for youth on agriculture, production for commercial purposes, and how the Awe Community has benefited from the project.

The delegates also visited other IITA units of interest, such as the Business Incubation Platform. They learned about Aflasafe, a product that IITA produces to manage aflatoxin in crops, and NoduMax for increasing plant yields. At the Cassava Breeding Unit, there was an exhibition of various machines such as the peeler/washer, grinder, presser, and dryer for manual and modern cassava processing into multiple products. There was also an exhibition of products from cassava such as boiled vitamin A cassava, cake, chin-chin, and cassava flour.

Impressed with the technologies and programs, Mr Pacifique said, "We want DG Sanginga to replicate these programs not only in DRC but also in other countries of Africa. We want to train people who will train others so that we can take control of our economy."



Top: Exhibition at the IITA Cassava Breeding Unit, showcasing the various final products from cassava. Bottom left: Mr Pacifique, assessing the processing center while on a tour of the facilities at Awe. Bottom right: A student at Fasola, sharing how she started her branding business after undergoing ICT training under the STEP program.

Reforestation project brings fire mitigation training to host community

As the re-planted tree seedlings continue to grow in the degraded Olokemeji Forest Reserve, the [IITA Forest Center](#) recently conducted a fire mitigation and prevention training and practical session for residents of the host community, Olokemeji. The reforestation project staff residing and working in Olokemeji also participated in the demonstration.

During dry seasons, fire outbreaks are common where untended fire sources can grow wild, consuming entire fields, properties, and lives. According to WHO, “Wildfires and volcanic activities affected 6.2 million people between 1998 and 2017 with 2400 attributable deaths worldwide from suffocation, injuries, and burns, but the size and frequency of wildfires are growing due to climate change.”

The IITA Security Unit carried out the fire sensitization training with Fire Safety Officer Sola Ayinde anchoring the session while Olusoji Babatunde interpreted for him. The Baale of Olokemeji’s representative, Akinyinbola Maruff, was among several dignitaries, including the Ogun State Ministry of Forestry representatives. The training took place at Methodist Primary School, Olokemeji.

The Ministry of Forestry Representative, Oluwaseun Alli, urged the community members to stand together and take responsibility for the project. He highlighted the possible causes of fire outbreaks—carelessly dropping smoked cigarettes and burning bush for land clearing. He asked the whole community to protect the planted seedlings on the project land and their various farmlands.

Ayinde reiterated the causes of fire outbreaks, the different factors that fuel fire spread, and the different ways to put out various degrees of fire. He demonstrated how to put out fires safely using a fire extinguisher.

The Baale’s representative Maruff acknowledged the progress Olokemeji has enjoyed since the project’s inception in the community. He gave assurances of the community’s continued support of the project.

The Chief Ranger of Olokemeji, Paul Awen, congratulated the community’s residents for enjoying the benefits of the reforestation project’s progress already. He encouraged farmers to report to the rangers if they see anyone igniting a fire to burn up fields. He urged them to carefully burn their weeds after land clearing and ensure they do not leave their fields unattended while their gathered weeds are still burning. They must completely put out any intentionally lit fire in their fields.

Forty-four community members (33 males and 11 females) participated in the training and gave feedback. One respondent, Lamidi Nojim, identified cattle herders as one of the community’s leading causes of fire

outbreaks. He said they do so to cause new sprouts to come up to feed their cattle. Another participant, Ijaduola Adelani, appealed for the project to employ security officers to monitor the area at night and help spot possible fire outbreaks for rapid response and quick mitigation.

Other respondents expressed their satisfaction with the training. They acknowledged the project’s impact in the community through employment and other opportunities bringing development and progress to Olokemeji.

After the training, the project donated three fire extinguishers to the community to respond rapidly to fire outbreaks.



*Top: Fire Safety Officer Sola Ayinde demonstrating how to extinguish fire safely.
Bottom: Participant contributing to the conversation at the training.*