

IITA Goodwill Ambassador Olusegun Obasanjo visits DRC President Félix Tshisekedi; discusses agricultural transformation in DRC

Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, IITA's Goodwill Ambassador, recently visited Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) President Félix Tshisekedi, 22 to 24 August 2022, at the presidential palace "Cité de l'OUA".

President Tshisekedi hosted former President Obasanjo in his office on 23 August. Their discussions focused on several high-profile themes, including the Agenda for the Agricultural Transformation of the Democratic Republic of Congo (ATA-DRC), an initiative of the Head of State, which the Ministry of Agriculture began implementing in February 2022. IITA-CGIAR and the African Agricultural Leadership Institute (AALI) provide technical assistance to the program.



DRC President Felix Tshisekedi (right) welcomes former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo.

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Security issues in DRC may impact agric sector results

During his recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), IITA's Goodwill Ambassador, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, met with DRC President Félix Tshisekedi in a formal visit on 23 August.

The two heads of state discussed, among other issues, the "Agenda de la Transformation Agricole de la République Démocratique du Congo" (ATA-RDC) program initiated by President Tshisekedi under the agriculture ministry with technical support from [IITA-CGIAR](https://www.iita.org) and the NGO African Agriculture Leadership Institute (AALI).



Baba Obasanjo (center) in an animated discussion with (left to right) DG Nteranya Sanginga, President Felix Tshisekedi, and DRC Presidential Envoy Pacifique Kahasha.

The former Nigerian President said the purpose of his visit was to congratulate President Tshisekedi for his accession to the presidency of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and to discuss some security problems in the eastern part of DRC. He added that efforts implemented to revive and invigorate the agricultural sector would not yield positive results if the country continued to be at war.

President Obasanjo, in a press conference after the meeting with the DRC President, explained that they

discussed, first and foremost, security issues, including food and nutrition security. In an interview, President Obasanjo said, "We cannot talk of food security and nutrition security without focusing on agricultural transformation, which I call agribusiness. Agribusiness because it moves from hoes and other equipment for land preparation through the value chains up to having food on the table. We are also talking about one of the problems we have in Africa today, which is another cause of insecurity—misbehavior on the

part of the youth." <https://youtu.be/o90XGquRzQg>

The youth can become the primary architect of insecurity because of lack of employment. If we are going to provide employment for our youth, one area we can cultivate is agribusiness and agricultural transformation, and President Tshisekedi has got it right with the Agricultural Transformation Agenda project!" President Obasanjo said.

Stories contributed by Michelle Kimpwene and Katherine Lopez.



Former President Olusegun Obasanjo presenting a gift to DRC President Feliz Tshisekedi.



President Felix Tshisekedi hosts a dinner for former President Olusegun Obasanjo, DG Nteranya Sanginga, and other guests.

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In addition to his crucial contribution to brokering peace in DRC, President Obasanjo has played an enormous and active role in mobilizing African heads of state as well as development partners in transforming the agriculture sector in Africa that benefits many countries like DRC. These efforts include the Zero Hunger project being implemented in Nigeria with IITA. It was within this framework that DRC President Tshisekedi responded favorably to the request of IITA Director General and CGIAR Continental Director for Africa, Dr [Nteranya Sanginga](#), to sponsor the inauguration of the Biotechnology Laboratory and support the IITA/CGIAR research campus located in South Kivu, Kalambo, DRC, named "President Olusegun Obasanjo IITA research campus" in 2019.

The ATA-DRC program is a multimillion-dollar project that aims to make the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sector in DRC competitive but not at the expense of the environment. The project allows DRC to focus on reviving its agricultural production, particularly food crops, such as beans, cassava, maize, soybeans, rice, etc. It is helping to



Clean cassava seedlings.

create sustainable jobs around the agricultural value chains, contributing both to food and nutritional security and wealth creation. The DRC Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, signed a technical assistance agreement with IITA for implementing ATA-DRC while building public sector capacity and facilitating public-private partnerships. The project covers six locations in DRC.

Work on the value chains of these crop sectors is expected to lead to the development of the animal protein sector, such as fish farming, poultry farming, pig production, sheep raising, and cattle farming because of the livestock feed. The country is giving impetus to agricultural transformation, and the involvement of the private sector will help spread successes and benefits to all segments of the population. <https://youtu.be/VtWPHzuHxXk>

ATA-DRC creating wealth and food security in DRC—Obasanjo

Before the end of his mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo visited one of IITA's partners, Centre de Recherche en Agrumiculture (CERAGRU), which has been producing healthy cassava seedlings using the [IITA-CGIAR](#) technology semi-autotrophic hydroponics (SAH, ex-vitro) as part of the ATA-DRC program.

ATA-DRC emphasizes the seed sector as the starting point for improving production. The program's vision is to set up a guaranteed seed system with available, certified, and improved seeds with high yield potential. The cassava stems have proven to be resistant to diseases, drought, and the adverse effects of climate change.

After visiting the CERAGRU cassava seed rapid multiplication facility, former President Obasanjo said that what he had observed inspired him



DG Nteranya Sanginga explains the technology behind SAH--semi-autotrophic hydroponics and how it can help create jobs in the cassava sector.

with investment ideas for Nigeria. The former President is a major economic operator in the Nigerian cassava sector.

The politician and businessman greatly appreciated the development of the

ATA-DRC program in the agricultural transformation of DRC.

He lauded the program for its efforts which are creating wealth, jobs, and food security within the region.

Increased private sector participation bodes well for agricultural transformation in DRC

Within the [IITA-CGIAR](#) technical assistance framework in implementing the ATA-DRC program under the Ministry of Agriculture in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the private sector intervenes in the rapid multiplication of cassava varieties using SAH technology. They are also involved in the intensive production of corn, rice, and soybean seeds.

The Centre de Recherche en Agrumiculture (CERAGRU), whose market is the Mongata agricultural site, produces planting materials for cassava seed fields for the city of Kinshasa and the Plantations des huileries du Congo (PHC). Their operations will progress to the multiplication of cassava seeds and the intensive production of maize, soybean, and rice seeds to cover the demand of the province of Tshopo and the former Equateur.

Other economic operators such as LAYUKA in the province of Kongo-Centrale and ECOSAC in the peri-urban part of Kinshasa that produce and sell fermented cassava flour, maize flour, and starch, will also participate in the ATA-DRC program as stakeholders to maximize flour production and guarantee supply in the Congolese market.

Government efforts now center around strengthening the environmental structures for agricultural transformation in the DRC, developing improved seed systems across the DRC through engagement with the public and private sectors, and improving production systems for cassava, rice, maize, soybeans, beans, and plantain. The government is also focusing on enhancing the value addition of priority agricultural products, especially those that lead to an increase in agro-industrialization and a reduction in dependence on food imports.

These activities by the government will enable the establishment of a favorable agricultural sector, attracting greater private sector participation and investment in DRC's agricultural value chains because of the increased financial potential. This bodes well for the country's agricultural transformation and would undoubtedly lead to a more robust economy.



Left to right: Chaka Kariuki (KURAMO shareholder), M. Mbilo (CEO, CERAGRU), Pacifique Kahasha (chargé de mission du président), Olusegun Obasanjo (former Président of Nigeria), Adewale Adeosun (Chairman, KURAMO, Capital management/ Majority shareholder PHC), Nteranya Sanginga (DG, IITA).



CERAGRU greenhouse for multiplying cassava seedlings.



Young researchers involved in rapid mass multiplication of cassava planting materials.

Interview with former President Obasanjo: Importance of research & innovation

How do you plan to mobilize African heads of state and development partners in transforming agriculture in the continent?

We have a basis for mobilizing African leaders and leaders of the world through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where Zero Hunger is one major objective. What This should be regarded as the responsibility of any leader in a country; it should be one of his major objectives.

In Nigeria, we took Zero Hunger and I was with IITA going from one state to another and getting other states because we have to bring it down to the community level. From the state, we can go down to local government level and to the community level. Ask them what do they need, what do they do, what are your plans/objectives? How an the objectives be reached? Are we bringing in everyone on board? Financiers? Researchers? Producers? Processors? Marketers, even exporters?

Where there is any hitch, we point it out to the leaders for them to correct. Each community, each state, takes a number of crops that they want to focus on. This approach has been extremely useful.

How do we meet the target of food security by 2030?

I believe that we have seen, happily or sadly, a war in Ukraine has exposed or revealed areas that are not doing enough. We had to have that war in Ukraine for us to know that we depended so much, so heavily and continue to depend heavily on Ukraine and Russia for wheat.

I was taken around in Ethiopia and shown what they are doing—they will be self-sufficient in wheat in the short term and be an exporter in the long term. I was impressed by what they are doing. We have been supported by the African Development Bank. The objective is to be able to be a net exporter of wheat in the next 2-4 years—in Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya. That, I believe, is good.

How important are the work and innovations from national, regional, and international research organizations like CGIAR and IITA?

I believe the CGIAR system has done tremendously good work in the past. They still need to continue the good work. I don't know how the attention to Europe will allow sufficient resources for these organizations



now that areas of inadequacies have been exposed. If a country like Ethiopia can become self-sufficient and in 3 years becomes a net exporter, I believe other countries in Africa can do the same.

One good thing that I can say about international research organizations is that technology has put in what we need through research and innovations in agriculture. What we need is getting those products of research to the farmers, and to encourage farmers to make use of them. If we do that, our banks will be full.

<https://youtu.be/tqHGHXtcpZc>



Left: IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga (right) welcoming Goodwill Ambassador Olusegun Obasanjo. Right: Talking to the press after the meeting.

