

IITA strengthens long-term collaboration with the British Government

British Deputy High Commissioner in Nigeria, [Ben Llewellyn-Jones](#), visited [IITA-CGIAR](#) accompanied by the High Commission's Head of Prosperity, Kris Camponi, and Senior Advisor, Wale Adebajo, on 17-18 November. The delegation discussed IITA's long-standing contribution to the development of African agriculture, how the UKAid with HarvestPlus is helping scale biofortified seeds and food products to end-users, and ways to contribute further to the enhancement of food and nutrition security in Africa. [to page 3](#)



IITA West Africa R4D Director Michael Abberton (left) explaining IITA's research and delivery programs to the visitors from the British High Commission.

Scientists to upscale research on yam discovery and conservation

Scientists have agreed to increase inputs in discovering and conserving yam diversity and aim to upscale the progress made over the years in yam research as a crop widely consumed in Africa. They reached this consensus during a yam genetics and omics research workshop at [IITA-CGIAR](#) in Ibadan from 9 to 11 November.



IITA Yam Molecular Geneticist, Dr Ranjana Bhattacharjee (left), giving her presentation at the workshop, while Prof. Mubo Sonibare (right), Department of Pharmacognosy, University of Ibadan, looks on.

The three-day event, attended by 50 participants, was organized by a research group linkage program sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt (AvH) Foundation and gave scientists from Germany, IITA, and the University of Ibadan the opportunity to deliberate on vital areas of yam research, including diversity and evolution, conservation of genetic resources, yam breeding, bioactive agent and drugs research, and practical sessions on gene expression analysis.

During the workshop sessions, it was revealed that, with over 600 yam species identified, about 44 percent are red-listed and on the verge of extinction. With Nigeria being the highest yam producer, recording about 73 million tons annually, participants at the workshop examined some of the production challenges and opportunities in terms of climate change and pests and diseases.

In her presentation, the Head of the Department of Pharmacognosy, University of Ibadan, and co-convenor of the workshop, Prof Mubo Sonibare,

shared some of the results of yam phytochemistry research. According to Sonibare, yam is now confirmed to be a primary source of metabolites for medicinal purposes, among other crops.

Sonibare further explained in an interview that the workshop is part of a more significant project to strengthen the collaboration among researchers and encourage technology transfer. "With the ideas shared during the workshop, more projects on new and wild yam varieties will be initiated, and we would also want to partner with pharmaceutical industries," she said.

According to Dirk Albach, Professor of Biodiversity and evolution of plants at the Carl-von-Ossietzky University and Director of Botanical gardens (Oldenburg, Germany), the workshop aimed at improving the breeding of yam species globally and addressing essential research questions that require attention.

Along with other speakers, IITA Yam Molecular Geneticist [Ranjana](#)

[Bhattacharjee](#) emphasized the need to continually raise awareness, targeting pharmaceutical industries and prospective partners on yam's potential as a health and commercial crop.

Bhattacharjee said that yam has the potential to improve the world's nutrition and assist in combatting health-related issues.

During the workshop, 15 nominees were exposed to the Alexander von Humboldt fellowship opportunities and their perks. Dr Christian Siadjeu of the Department of Biology Systematics, Biodiversity and Evolution of plants, Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany, led the hands-on training sessions on yam transcriptomics, including RNA extraction and Data analysis.

Following the successful deliberations, yam is expected to gain more recognition like other staples globally. Hence, there is a need to promote research to develop cultivars to address food, health, and nutrition security worldwide. *Contributed by Tolulope Akinola*



The chief convener, Prof. Mubo Sonibare, Department of Pharmacognosy, University of Ibadan, giving an interview at the workshop.

IITA West Africa Hub Director and Head of Genetic Resources Center (GRC), [Michael Abberton](#), welcomed the team and highlighted IITA's focus on four broad areas of agricultural research and delivery—Crop improvement (breeding, biotech, and seed systems), Natural Resources Management (soil, agronomy), Plant Health and Plant Production, and Social Sciences, and Agribusiness. He added that the Institute utilizes funding from various partners for research, scaling, and delivery. IITA's Partnerships for Delivery (P4D) ensures its Research for Development (R4D) output is scaled to impact more beneficiaries positively.

Abberton briefed the team about the One CGIAR initiative designed to integrate the efforts of all research centers under CGIAR.

In his response, Llewellyn-Jones said the UK Government has a long-standing history of working with IITA. He said they are keen to learn about IITA's contribution to climate-smart agriculture, floods, and fertilizer; and to follow progress on the recent UKAid grant with HarvestPlus.

The two groups examined the challenges, shortfalls, and gaps in the current landscape of African agriculture and discussed possible engagement options to tackle them. Abberton shared both failed and successful projects of IITA's work driving sustainable development and food and nutrition security in Africa.

IITA Forest Center Field Supervisor, Ademola Ajayi, highlighted the

Institute's efforts in natural resource conservation and advancing agricultural development. Ajayi said the Forest Center does this through environmental education designed to develop love and respect for nature in school children and adults. The Forest Center also contributes to mitigating climate change through its reforestation projects sponsored by national and international donors.

The team wrapped up their visit with a tour of IITA Lake for a brief bird-watching activity. *Contributed by Folake Oduntan*

Keywords: IITA-CGIAR, UK Government, British Deputy High Commissioner, partnerships, collaborations, funding for agricultural development



IITA Forest Center Field Supervisor, Ademola Ajayi (in colorful shirt), leading the visitors to enjoy nature through bird-watching.

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.

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).



Private-sector partners seek IITA collaboration on extended agricultural grants

[IITA-CGIAR](#) considers the private sector a major stakeholder in the development of Africa's agriculture; therefore, the Institute welcomes collaboration with diverse private-sector entities. From 29 October to 1 November, IITA hosted delegates from [AgBiome Inc](#) and [5Metis Inc](#) at the Institute's headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria. The two US-based companies were exploring collaboration with IITA in the second phase of their grants from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) to develop novel crop protection solutions against plant diseases for smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

In a meeting with the IITA Management team, AgBiome Plant Pathology Head, Dr Mathias Twizeyimana, said that AgBiome partners with local and international research institutes to validate their technologies. He added that AgBiome worked with IITA in the first phase of their project and sought to continue the partnership during its second phase.

5Metis Inc Chief Scientific Officer, Dr Brian Green, communicated that 5Metis™ intends to collaborate with IITA for the first time on field trials in the second phase of the grant. Green mentioned that the Gates Foundation encourages collaboration on projects

among grantees. "For the early stage of our program, we are trying to get our initial field validation, and we are here primarily to work with IITA on solutions for banana black sigatoka," Green added.

Associate Director of Biology at 5Metis, Dr Luke Steere, stated that he expects to better understand the cropping system in Nigeria and neighboring countries, particularly how crops and the diseases that affect them are managed. "We want to understand the agricultural system here and work with IITA to conduct field trials to manage black sigatoka," Steere said.

The visiting colleagues also sought to understand how new technology, once proven and registered, makes it into the hands of end-users in the region. In his response, IITA Plant Pathologist [Alejandro Ortega-Beltran](#) said that IITA has significant experience in transcending technologies from the laboratory to the industry to benefit farmers and consumers at scale and that those experiences can help both companies.

IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, [Kenton Dashiell](#), said that the purpose of the visit was clear and the discussion is pointing towards success, but it

calls for hard work from all the parties involved. "As you go through the campus, you will meet with people eager and willing to work with you," he concluded.

During a post-meeting seminar, AgBiome and 5Metis shared their journey from inception, highlighting their activities and achievements. The companies also provided insights into their plans for seeking collaboration with IITA in the second phase of their projects. After the seminar, the teams from both organizations toured IITA's facilities.

In a wrap-up meeting with the IITA team, the visiting teams shared positive feedback about their visit. Drs Green and Steere lauded the top-notch hospitality and eye-opening experience that has given them a better understanding of the agricultural cropping systems. Dr Twizeyimana added that the tour was a valuable experience as scientists showed practical illustrations of their activities.

Following the four-day visit, representatives of both organizations confirmed their intent to commence project activities with IITA plant pathologists Ortega-Beltran and Yao Kolombia. *Contributed by Ochuwa Favour Daramola*



Left: Dr Yao Kolombia showing Banana Black Sigatoka symptoms to the visitors. Right: Visitors and Dr Yao Kolombia visiting banana field plots in IITA's West Bank to observe diseases of interest. Photos: IITA/Alejandro Ortega-Beltran

IITA Forest Center builds staff capacity in eco-tourism and hospitality management

The [IITA Ibadan campus](#) is fast becoming a leading eco-tourism hub in Nigeria. Beyond producing research-based products and services that enrich African agriculture, lives, and livelihoods, the campus also boasts a rich base for adventure tours, nature walks, and a relaxation center. The [IITA Forest Center](#) organized a workshop on 4 November to sensitize partners in the hospitality chain of [IITA](#) services on the tremendous potential IITA Ibadan holds for eco-tourism and hospitality.

Representatives from units that contribute directly and indirectly to the satisfaction of the Institute's eco-visitors—Hospitality and Travel Services (HOSTRAS), Facility Management Services (FMS), Security Unit, Human Resources Unit, and Communication Office—converged to brainstorm and share ways to upscale the current gains from eco-tourism and hospitality in IITA.

In her welcome address, IITA Deputy Director General for Corporate Services, [Hilde Koper-Limbourg](#), commended all units working together to provide excellent services for eco-tourists who visit IITA. She emphasized afforestation as a means to combat

environmental pollution, control climate change, and make the planet more adaptable and conducive for people.

Representing the Head of HOSTRAS, [Bridget Mangulama](#), Conference Services Manager Funke Ogunsola, said, "Tourism is a good business that can generate funds by attracting people to the tourist center." She added that there should be synergy between eco-tourism and hospitality, and we should all work together to create good impressions among IITA's visiting guests.

Security Unit Head David Oluwadare highlighted the risks associated with travel and tourism. He urged all participants to invest in being security-informed and always put their lives and safety first. IITA's Employee Services Officer Philip Velshik said, "Every IITA member must express the core values of IITA at work and with people. As an IITA brand ambassador, you must live the IITA core values—diversity, excellence, collaboration, respect, professionalism, integrity, equity, and inclusiveness—in all dealings with the Institute's stakeholders, both internal and external."

IITA Forest Center Field Supervisor, Ademola Ajayi, highlighted a Google search analysis showing promising records that many people search to choose IITA Forest Center as their go-to place for relaxation and nature walks. The online searches translate to actual visits as the chart of visitors' inflow also reflected an increase in the number of visiting guests to IITA Forest Center.

IITA Ibadan's calm ambiance with carefully tended green landscapes, golf course, lakes, 350-ha forest reserve, camping sites, adventure playgrounds, swimming pool, outdoor and indoor sports facilities, internet facility, lodging rooms, and more makes it a choice place for tourists and adventurers.

The training ended with the Forest Center management presenting gifts to IITA staff, who have been instrumental to the success of eco-tourism and hospitality in the Institute. The staff members were encouraged and motivated to do more to boost the eco-tourism and hospitality potential of IITA Ibadan. *Contributed by Anita Akinyomade and Folake Oduntan*



Top: Frontline staff engaged in an enlightening session. Bottom: Workshop participants after the training.