

The IARSAF Impact Digest

A Publication of IARSAF, IITA: Stories, Science, and Scholars Shaping Africa's Future

Fourth edition

April 2025 – June 2026



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Message from the Editor-in-Chief



Ayoola, Ayooluwa Samuel

Dear IARSAF Family,

I'm delighted to share with you the 4th edition of The IARSAF Impact Digest: Stories, Science, and Scholars Shaping Africa's Future.

Annually, this magazine celebrates the amazing success within our dynamic community, from innovative research to motivational personal stories. As Editor-in-Chief, I'm delighted with the range and richness in this edition: tales of perseverance, impactful science, and IARSAF's increasing voice globally.

Our editorial team has laboured long and hard; editing articles, laying out pages,

and bridge building between teams, to create a newsletter that embodies IARSAF's spirit: teamwork-oriented, creative, and community-focused.

I invite you to read with intent; not as a reader, but as a change-maker. May these pages inform, motivate, and birth new ideas.

A sincere thank you to contributors. Your voices are building the future of African development and science.

Best regards,

Ayoola, Ayooluwa Samuel
Editor-in-Chief, IARSAF 2025/2026

From the President's desk



Victor A. Diekade

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the fourth edition of the IARSAF e-newsletter, a publication that continues to showcase the passion, excellence, and resilience of early-career scientists across IITA and the wider OneCGIAR community. This edition marks a special milestone in our journey, as we officially rebrand our newsletter from *The Prospective* to the *IARSAF Impact Digest*. This new name reflects our evolving identity and growing commitment not only to highlight promising futures but also to document the real, measurable impact that young scientists are making in agricultural research and development. As the world faces unprecedented challenges, including climate change,

food insecurity, resource degradation, and emerging health threats, the role of young researchers in agricultural science has never been more critical. We are not just the next generation of scientists but rather the current drivers of innovation, resilience, and transformation in agriculture. In achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), our collective efforts as emerging researchers must be intentional, enlightening, and impactful. Agricultural research remains central to sustainable food systems, and the responsibility to continue the work is steadily passing from our mentors and predecessors to us. This is a season of responsibility! As the mantle of agricultural research continues to shift from older generations to ours, we must rise to the occasion intellectually, professionally, and ethically. We must develop solutions that are evidence-based, scalable, and relevant to the communities we serve. IARSAF remains committed to supporting its members on this journey. We will continue to build capacity through targeted professional trainings, knowledge-sharing events, and strategic networking sessions designed

to enhance both technical expertise and leadership skills. I therefore encourage all members to make the most of the opportunities available through IARSAF and stay committed to excellence. The future of food systems, environmental sustainability, and global health depends on the work we do today. This newsletter captures some of the impressive strides made by our members, featuring recent publications, fellowships, research breakthroughs, and event highlights. I encourage every member and reader to engage with every part of this edition, as it reflects our shared progress and the limitless potential we hold as a scientific community. As I conclude, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the entire IARSAF editorial team, skillfully led by Mr. Ayoola Ayooluwa Samuel (Editor-in-Chief). Their dedication, creativity, and tireless efforts in compiling this edition have been invaluable. Your hard work continues to amplify our voices and showcase our contributions to the global research community. Let us stay inspired, stay connected, and stay committed to shaping a better future through science.

Warm regards,

Victor A. Diekade
President, IARSAF 2025/2026

Postgraduate Fellows wow audience with Three-Minute Pitches at IARSAF Symposium 2025.

One of the standout features of the IARSAF Annual Symposium was the 3-Minute Pitch (3MP) Competition, designed to challenge researchers to communicate complex ideas with clarity, impact, and relevance within a limited time frame. The competition showcased innovative research spanning crop genetics, public policy, and nutrition.



Saliu, Iswat Adenike



Three-Minute Pitches Presentation

MSc Plant Genetics and Molecular Biology, University of Ibadan

Pitch Title: Genetic Assessment of Parents and F₁ Hybrids of Tolerant and Susceptible *Zea mays* L. (Maize)

Iswat presented a compelling study evaluating genetic variability and drought tolerance in maize using both phenotypic and molecular approaches. Her research involved characterizing 14 parental accessions, assessing drought-tolerant and susceptible traits, conducting DNA extraction and PCR analysis, and developing F₁ hybrids through controlled crosses. The work lays a strong foundation for breeding climate-resilient maize varieties for future evaluation.



Oluwatuase, Ifeoluwa Esther



Three-Minute Pitches Presentation

PhD Public Policy, University of Ibadan

Pitch Title: Implementation of the Cancer Health Fund and Survival Among Women Farmers Living with Cervical Cancer in South-West Nigeria

Ifeoluwa delivered a powerful policy-focused pitch highlighting the intersection of health, agriculture, and food security. Her research examines whether Nigeria's Cancer Health Fund (CHF) effectively reaches rural women farmers diagnosed with cervical cancer. By assessing awareness, accessibility, and financial impact of the fund, the study seeks to generate evidence to strengthen health policy implementation and protect the livelihoods of women who form the backbone of Nigeria's agricultural workforce.



Olajumoke Racheal Adedeji



Three-Minute Pitches Presentation

Pitch Title: *Bambara Nut: A Local Answer to a Global Nutrition Challenge*

This pitch spotlighted Bambara nut as an underutilized indigenous crop with immense potential to address nutrition insecurity. The presentation emphasized its resilience, nutritional value, and relevance in building sustainable, locally driven food systems in Africa.

The 3-Minute Pitch Competition reinforced IARSAF's commitment to innovation, interdisciplinary thinking, and science communication, while providing a platform for emerging scholars to translate research into real-world impact.

Three-Minute Pitches Winners

The IARSAF Impact Digest

Members achievement and progress in the past one year



Muhammed Jimoh Jamiu

Name: Muhammed Jimoh Jamiu
University: Czech University of Life Sciences Prague
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. Michael Abberton
Achievement: Doctoral Scholarship
Title: Doctoral Scholarship in Tropical Agrobiolgy and Bioresources Management
Date of achievement: 1/2/2025



Uzoma Chizaram Oluebube

Name: Uzoma Chizaram Oluebube
University: University of Ghana
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre (GRC)
IITA Supervisor: Prof. Michael Abberton
Achievements: Award; Grant; Co-authored publication
Title: VACS Scholarship for MPhil at University of Ghana; Co-authored Review Paper
Date of achievement: 10/1/2024



Olaoye Omotola Dorcas

Name: Olaoye Omotola Dorcas
University: West Africa Center for Crop Improvement, University of Ghana / IITA
IITA Unit: Cassava Breeding Unit
IITA Supervisor: Dr. Ismail Y. Rabbi
Achievement: Awards
Titles: Best Oral Presentation – 15th ISTRC-AB Symposium; NAPB–APBA Norman Borlaug Award for Outstanding PhD Students in Africa
Dates of achievement: 2/7/2025 and 10/6/2025



Gbaruko Gift Chinonye

Name: Gbaruko Gift Chinonye
University: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture / University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. Michael Abberton
Achievement: Degree / Graduation; Grant / Funding
Title: M.Sc. in Plant Breeding and Seed Production; Bayer Foundation Fellowship 2025
Date of achievement: 15/11/2025



Nwogwugwu Precious Amarachi

Name: Nwogwugwu Precious Amarachi
University: Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. Michael Abberton
Achievement: Grant / Funding
Title: Research Fellowship at the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading (UK)
Date of achievement: 10/1/2025



Favour Ayorinde

Name: Favour Ayorinde
University: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture / University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: Pathology / Aflasafe
IITA Supervisor: Dr. Titilayo Falade
Achievement: Award
Title: Best Poster Award for Early Scientists
Date of achievement: 11/27/2025



Victor A. Diekade

Name: Diekade Victor
University: University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: Maize Improvement Programme
IITA Supervisor: Dr. Menkir
Achievement: Grant / Funding
Title: Bayer Foundation Fellowship (Jeff Schell); Value Seeds Travel Grant – NPBA Conference
Date of achievement: 6/24/2025

Scholar of the year



Victor A. Diekade

Victor A. Diekade is an exceptional early-career scientist whose academic distinction, leadership, and dedication to agricultural transformation have earned him the title of 2024 IARSAF "Scholar of the Year".

Victor began his journey in agricultural research at Landmark University, Omu-Aran, where he graduated as the overall best student from the College of Agricultural Sciences. His academic excellence earned him the prestigious Pan African University Scholarship, through which he pursued a Master's degree in Plant Breeding at the University of Ibadan. Among his cohort, he was the only Nigerian selected.

During his graduate studies, Victor received a Graduate Research Fellowship at the Genetic Resources Center, IITA, where he contributed to food security efforts by screening Bambara groundnut accessions for drought tolerance. This work led to the identification of potential parental materials for future crop improvement.

Currently, Victor is a PhD student in the Department of Crop and Horticultural Sciences, University of Ibadan, and serves as a Doctoral Research Fellow in the Maize Improvement Program (MIP) at IITA. His

research focuses on developing climate-resilient and nutritionally safer crops capable of withstanding environmental and biological stresses, work that directly aligns with the goals of global food and nutrition security.

In addition to his research output, which includes two peer-reviewed journal articles, a conference proceeding, and multiple abstract submissions, Victor is widely recognized for his leadership and mentorship. He is committed to training interns and supporting young researchers, and is known for his selfless service to the research community.

Victor's passion, excellence, and integrity earned him the trust of his peers, who elected him as President of IARSAF, entrusting him to lead the association into a new era.

Scholar of the Year

Graduation



Akpojotor Ufuoma Lydia

Name: Akpojotor Ufuoma Lydia
University: Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. M. T. Abberton
Achievement: Degree / Graduation
Title: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Plant Science
Date of achievement: 12/13/2025



Chizaram Oluebube UZOMA

Name: Chizaram Oluebube UZOMA
University: University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. M. T. Abberton
Achievement: Degree / Graduation
Title: Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Plant Breeding and Seed Production
Date of achievement: 11/15/2025



Gbaruko Gift Chinonye

Name: Gbaruko Gift Chinonye
University: University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. M. T. Abberton
Achievement: Degree / Graduation
Title: Masters of Science (M.Sc.) in Plant Breeding and Seed Production
Date of achievement: 11/15/2025



Ojetola Aishat Omobolade

Name: Ojetola Aishat Omobolade
University: University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: PBIP / PATHOLOGY
IITA Supervisor: DrYao Kolombia
Achievement: Degree / Graduation
Title: Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Plant Pathology (Distinction grade)
Date of achievement: 11/15/2025



Ilodibia Chioma Blessing

Name: Ilodibia Chioma Blessing
University: University of Ibadan
IITA Unit: Genetic Resources Centre
IITA Supervisor: Prof. M. Abberton
Achievement: Degree / Graduation
Title: Masters of Science (M.Sc.) in Plant Breeding and Seed Production
Date of achievement: 11/15/2025

Photographs and Captions from IARSAF Events and Members Activities



IARSAF Executives and Alumni at the 28th Annual IARSAF Symposium



IARSAF Executives at the 28th Annual IARSAF Symposium Dinner



Participants at the 28th Annual IARSAF Symposium Dinner.



Group photograph of IARSAF members at the Early Career Researchers (ECRs) Conference 2025 held at IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria.



Picture of Diekade, Omoboluwape Mary, a PhD research fellow, participating in a panel discussion with the Director General of CIMMYT at the Africa Food Systems Forum 2025.



IARSAF's December 2025 Road Trip – Lekki, Lagos State, Nigeria

Latest Publications by IARSAF Members



Akpojotor, U., Oluwole, O., Oyatomi, O., Paliwal, R., & Abberton, M. (2025). Research and developmental strategies to hasten the improvement of orphan crops. *GM Crops & Food*, 16(1), 46-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21645698.2024.2423987>

Salvador, O. F., Ellis, R.H., Oyatomi, O.A. et al. Two-step drying of soya bean seed germplasm often improves subsequent storage longevity. *Genet Resour Crop Evol* 72, 9577–9590 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10722-025-0251-w>

Ayoola, A. S., Jekayinfa, S. O., Idowu, D. O., Lung'aho, M., Mushoriwa, H., Adesokan, M., & Alamu, E. O. (2026). Drying kinetics, energy efficiency, and moisture diffusion characteristics of African walnut (*Tetracarpidium conophorum*) during cabinet and oven drying. *Frontiers in Food Science and Technology*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frfst.2026.1794521>

Ayoola, A., Jekayinfa, S., Idowu, D., Lung'aho, M., Mushoriwa, H., Adesokan, M., & Alamu, E. (2026). Advances in drying kinetics and energy optimization of

African (Nigerian) walnut (*Tetracarpidium conophorum*): A rapid review. *Cogent Food & Agriculture*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311932.2026.2683184>

Elumalero, G. O., Akinrinde, E. A., Akinbile, O. O., Apenah, M. O., Ogun-bela, A. A., Akinde, B. P., **Diekade, V. A.**, Folarin, M. T., Chibuogwu, C. C., & Somoye, R. A. (2026). Effects of Bio-char and Compost on Soil Nutrient Dy-namics and pH in Alfisols across Two Cropping Cycles at Ibadan, Nigeria. *NG Agricultural Sciences*, 2(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.66132/ngaso20101>

Research Briefs / Lab-to-Field Updates

1. Agroecological Interventions for Sustainable Production of Bambara Groundnut (*Vigna subterranea* (L.) Verdc.) Accessions in sub-Saharan Africa

Muhammed Jimoh (muhammed@ftz.Czu.cz), PhD Researcher; Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague

This research explores agroecological interventions to improve the sustainable production of Bambara groundnut (*Vigna subterranea* (L.) Verdc.), an underutilized yet climate-resilient crop in sub-Saharan Africa. The study investigates the role of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi inoculation and conservation tillage practices in enhancing soil health, nutrient uptake, and Photosynthetic efficiency across different Bambara groundnut accessions. By assessing growth, yield stability, and soil nutrient dynamics under varying environments, the project aims to identify best-fit management practices.

The practical outcomes of the research include the development of sustainable agroecological practices that enhance soil health, nutrient use efficiency, and yield stability of Bambara groundnut. These findings will support climate-



resilient production systems, promote cost-effective bio-input applications, and provide evidence-based recommendations for smallholder farmers to improve productivity and sustainability in sub-Saharan Africa.

The research involves collaboration with the Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague (Faculty of Tropical Agrisciences, Department of Crop Sciences) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, Nigeria.

2. Agricultural Fair Initiative

From the Lab to the Field: Creating Awareness About Nematodes

Kicking off the fair with a strong start! IARSAF scholars focused on bridging the gap between research and practice by raising awareness about nematodes; a hidden but significant challenge in agriculture.

Through interactive sessions and field demonstrations, IARSAF, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Eastern Africa Hub, scholars continues to connect science with solutions for farmers and agri-stakeholders.



3. Quantification of Biologically Nitrogen-Fixed Bacteria and Agronomic Performance of Cowpea Varieties at different Phosphorus application levels in Tanzania

Mustafa Bakari Mgula

(mustafamgula@gmail.com),
Tanzania Agriculture Research
Institute, Tanzania

This research is a screen house and a field experiment. The screen house experiment involved assessing the levels at which cowpea fixed atmospheric nitrogen by bacteria following the phosphorus application levels. The field experiment was conducted in three locations to assess the agronomic performance of cowpea varieties treated with four phosphorus application levels.

The practical outcomes of this research are having the cowpea variety which can produce more even in low phosphorus in

the soil and having the appropriate level of phosphorus to be applied in cowpea crop for better productivity in Tanzania. The research is a collaboration between Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania Agriculture Research Institute and Legume for Development project.

4. Genome-Wide Association Mapping and Phenotypic Evaluation of Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) Landraces for Resistance to Taro Leaf Blight (TLB) in Nigeria, with In Vitro Conservation of the Genotypes

Diekade Mary Omoboluwape
(M.Diekade@cgiar.org), PhD
Researcher, University of Ibadan/IITA

Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) is a nutritious and culturally important crop in Nigeria, but its production is severely constrained by Taro Leaf Blight (TLB), caused by *Phytophthora colocasiae*. This study aims to identify resistant taro landraces and develop an optimized in vitro propagation protocol for their conservation and multiplication. About 200 landraces were collected from diverse agro-ecological zones across Nigeria for phenotypic screening and molecular characterization. A participatory survey involving farmers was conducted to identify key production challenges, with TLB emerging as the most significant constraint. The project is expected to identify resistant genotypes, discover key resistance loci, and establish reliable conservation methods to enhance taro productivity and food security.

This study will identify taro landraces resistant to Taro Leaf Blight (TLB) for use in breeding programs and to develop high-yielding, disease-resistant varieties to enhance farmer productivity and reduce losses. By involving farmers through participatory engagement, the research ensures that breeding priorities reflect both farmer and consumer preferences, promoting sustainable taro cultivation and improved food security.



5. Breeding for drought-resilient Bambara groundnut using integrated phenotypic and genomic approaches

Ihuoma Ogechi

(oihuoma@wacci.ug.edu.gh), PhD Researcher, IITA / WACCI / Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUA)

My research focuses on elucidating the drought tolerance mechanism of Bambara groundnut, a drought-tolerant opportunity crop, using phenotypic (agronomic traits related to drought tolerance) and genomic approaches (GWAS and RNA-sequencing technologies). This was done by phenotyping one hundred and fifty accessions of Bambara groundnut under field conditions in two locations in Nigeria, followed by genotyping and subsequently, a GWAS was conducted and later few susceptible and tolerant

accessions were used for the RNA-sequencing to determine differentially expressed genes that are implicated in drought tolerance in the crop.

The knowledge gained from this research will inform breeders on the response of Bambara groundnut to drought, the mechanism it adopts to tolerate drought and the genes responsible for this responses, together these will help to breed for more resilience in the crop for stable yield in the face of climate change.



6. Optimizing Energy-Efficient Drying Methods for Enhanced Nutritional Quality of Nigerian Walnut

Ayoola Ayooluwa Samuel

(A.Ayoola@cgiar.org), PhD
Researcher, International Institute of
Tropical Agriculture (IITA) / Ladoké
Akintola University of Technology
(LAUTECH)

Nigerian walnut (*Tetracarpidium conophorum*) is an important indigenous crop with high nutritional and economic value, widely consumed across many communities in Nigeria. However, postharvest handling, particularly drying, remains a critical challenge, often leading to quality deterioration, reduced shelf life, and postharvest losses.

Ongoing research is focused on improving drying approaches that balance energy efficiency with product quality retention. The study explores how different controlled drying conditions influence the preservation of key quality attributes of Nigerian walnut, with emphasis on maintaining its nutritional value and desirable physical characteristics.

Preliminary observations indicate that drying conditions have a significant effect on product quality, particularly in terms of moisture reduction efficiency and overall material integrity. These findings highlight the importance of adopting more efficient and well-controlled drying systems in order to reduce losses and improve value addition in walnut processing.

The study is expected to generate practical insights that can support farmers, processors, and agro-allied stakeholders in improving postharvest handling practices, ultimately contributing to food security, reduced energy use, and enhanced commercialization potential of Nigerian walnut.



Event Highlights / Technical Sessions

1. Mendeley for Thesis Writing Workshop

Hybrid session | May 2025

The session on using Mendeley for thesis writing concluded successfully, equipping participants with essential skills for organizing references, managing citations, and improving academic writing efficiency.

Key Highlights:

- Facilitated by Dr. Mazo KONE, sharing practical strategies for thesis and academic writing.
- Hands-on guidance for early-career researchers and graduate students.
- Active participation and engagement from all attendees, strengthening research skills and scholarly productivity.



Group photo of participants at the conclusion of the Mendeley Workshop.

2. IARSAF at the Networking Conference for Early Career Researchers

IITA, Ibadan | May 15, 2025

IARSAF members participated in the **One-Day Networking Conference for Early Career Researchers in the Food-Energy-Water Nexus**, connecting with peers and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration.

Key Highlights:

- Presentations by Nasirat Akanfe and Ayooluwa Ayoola sharing their success stories as early career researchers and how IARSAF activities supported their growth.
- Insights from organizers and speakers on the importance of networking and collaboration for career advancement.
- Recognition of IITA leadership for supporting the next generation of scientists.



IARSAF members in a group photograph with Prof. Laura Schmitt Olabisi during the Early Career Researchers Networking Conference.

3. Journal Club & Research Discourse

IITA, Ibadan | 29th May 2025

The **Journal Club and Research Discourse** brought together emerging scholars to share cutting-edge research and foster intellectual exchange.

Key Highlights:

- **Akpojotor Ufuoma L. (PhD)** presented "*Genome-Wide Association Studies for Yield and Agronomic Traits in Winged Bean*" under the guidance of Prof. J.T. Obapode and Prof. Michael Abberton.
- **Gift Chinonye Gbaruko** shared insights on "*Genetic Variation for Agronomic Traits Among Common Bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris* L.) Accessions and the Relationship Between Seedling Stage Drought Tolerance and Photosynthetic Efficiency*", under Prof. Michael Abberton and Prof. Victor Adetimirin.
- Rich discussions and feedback from participants enhanced knowledge sharing and collaboration among early-career researchers.



Group photo of presenters and participants at the Journal Club and Research Discourse.

4. IARSAF Mentorship Session – 1st Edition

IITA, Ibadan | 11th June 2025

The inaugural **IARSAF Mentorship Session** brought together emerging researchers and scholars across Africa for an inspiring discussion on career development in research.

Key Highlights:

- Featured Prof. Laura Schmitt Olabisi (Michigan State University), who shared practical guidance on navigating a successful research career as an African scholar.
- Participants gained insights into career planning, professional growth, and building networks across disciplines.
- Both in-person and virtual attendees actively engaged, making the session a resounding success.



Group photo of participants with Prof. Laura Schmitt Olabisi at the IARSAF Mentorship Session.

5. Mental Health Awareness & Stress Management for Early Career Researchers

IITA, Ibadan | 18th June 2025

The IITA–IARSAF meeting hosted an impactful session on mental health and stress management for early-career researchers, facilitated by Dr. Olafimiha Victoria, Family Physician at IITA.

Key Highlights:

- Explored the pressures and expectations faced by early-career researchers and the impact of stress on professional and personal well-being.
- Shared practical strategies for managing stress, including structured planning, setting boundaries, taking breaks, and celebrating small achievements.
- Emphasized resilience as a key tool for growth, adaptation, and long-term success in research careers.
- Engaged participants in interactive discussions, providing guidance and encouragement for maintaining mental well-being.

Special thanks to Dr. Olafimiha Victoria for her expert facilitation and to Dr. Adeleke Samson for supporting the session.



Group photo of participants with Dr. Olafimiha Victoria at the Mental Health Awareness session.

6. IARSAF x Alumni Networking and Collaboration Event

IITA, Ibadan | July 2025

The maiden **IARSAF x Alumni Networking and Collaboration Event** successfully convened industry experts and IARSAF alumni to share practical insights, experiences, and guidance for early-career researchers.

Key Highlights:

- Panel discussions with IARSAF alumni; Dr. Abidemi Talabi, Dr. Anthony Job, Dr. Innocent Iseghohi, Dr. Jean M. Mondo, Dr. Olakunle Sansa, Dr. Bolaji Thanni, and Dr. Mark Adero, offering lessons on academic–industry transitions and career development.
- Participants gained clarity on research pathways, networking, and collaboration opportunities across disciplines.
- Engaging conversations and shared experiences highlighted the importance of mentorship, industry linkages, and interdisciplinary collaboration.



Cross-section of speakers and participants at the IARSAF x Alumni Networking and Collaboration Event.

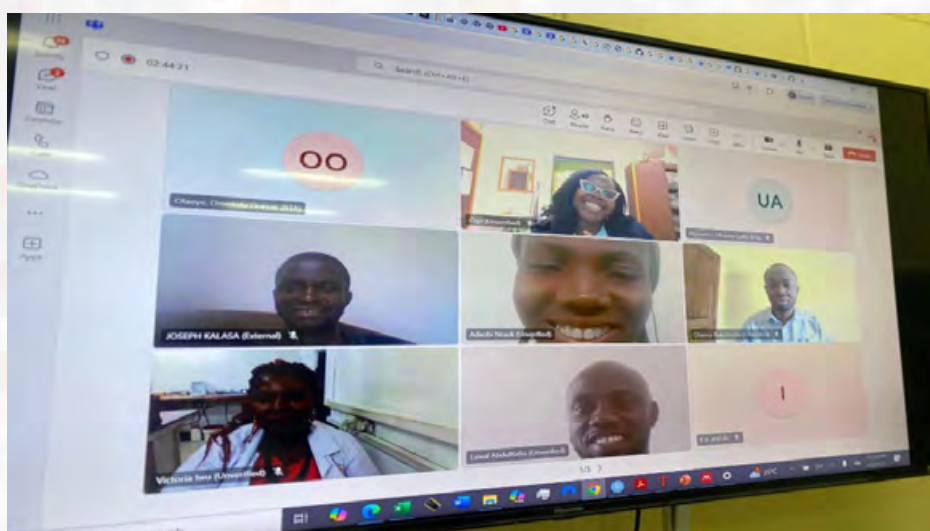
7. GWAS Training: Mastering Genome-Wide Association Studies for Crop Improvement

ZEA Room, IITA Ibadan & Virtual | 7th August 2025

The **GWAS Training Session** equipped participants with practical knowledge on applying **Genome-Wide Association Studies (GWAS)** for crop improvement. The session was facilitated by **Omotola Dorcas Olaoye**, a Doctoral Researcher at WACCI, University of Ghana, and Fellow at the IITA Cassava Breeding Program.

Key Highlights:

- Practical insights into GWAS concepts and applications in crop improvement.
- Discussions on integrating genomic selection, phenotyping, and data-driven approaches in breeding programs.
- Interactive engagement that strengthened participants' understanding of modern plant breeding tools.



Group photo of participants and facilitator at the conclusion of the GWAS Training session.

8. IARSAF Research Discourse: Celebrating Scholarship & Collaboration

IITA, Ibadan | August 2025

The IARSAF Research Discourse convened scholars and supervisors, including **Dr. Alejandro Ortega**, **Dr. Agre Paterne**, and **Prof. Michael Abberton**, for an engaging exchange of ideas.

Key Highlights:

- **Amal Messadia** presented on genetic diversity among **yam (*Dioscorea spp*)** in West, East, and Central Africa, highlighting implications for conservation and breeding.
- **Michael Iduh** shared research on *Cercospora spp.* associated with cowpea leaf spot disease, focusing on developing a protein-based biocontrol product in partnership with Biotalys.
- Interactive discussions and Q&A enriched learning, fostered cross-disciplinary collaboration, and strengthened mentorship relationships.



Group photo of presenters and participants at the IARSAF Research Discourse.

9. IARSAF Research Discourse & Journal Club

Zea Room, IITA Ibadan & Virtual | 18th September 2025

The IARSAF Research Discourse & Journal Club convened fellows for an engaging exchange of research findings and policy-relevant discussions across agricultural and socio-economic themes.

Key Highlights:

- **Joseph Kalasa** presented findings from a farmer household survey on maize preferences, diversity, and yield potential in Simulemba EPAs, Kasungu District, Malawi.
- **Oche Akpa** shared insights on coping mechanisms with *Tuta absoluta* and their implications for food security among tomato farmers in Kano State.
- Interactive discussions enriched understanding of farmer decision-making, pest management challenges, and food security outcomes.



RESEARCH DISCOURSE

IITA
Transforming African Agriculture

Oche Akpa
Coping Mechanisms with *Tuta absoluta*:
Determinants and Effect on Food
Security Status of Tomato Farmers in
Kano State

Joseph Kalasa
A farmer household survey to establish preferences for local
maize, diversity and yield potential of those local maize
varieties in and Simulemba EPAs, Kasungu District, Malawi.

THURSDAY
18TH SEPTEMBER 2025

ZEa ROOM, IITA HQ
10:00AM - 12:00PM (WAT)

IARSAF Research Discourse & Journal Club: featuring presentations by Joseph Kalasa and Oche Akpa.

10. IARSAF at the 3rd NPBA International Conference, Abuja

NICON Luxury Hotel, Abuja | 24–25 September 2025

IITA–IARSAF members participated in the 3rd International Conference of the Nigerian Plant Breeders Association (NPBA) themed "*Crop Improvement for Food Security, Sustainable Agricultural Systems, and the Environment.*" The conference brought together scientists, policymakers, industry leaders, and farmer organizations to discuss innovations in plant breeding and sustainable agriculture.

Key Highlights:

- Engaged with researchers and development partners across disciplines, sharing insights from ongoing IARSAF research.
- **IARSAF President, Mr. Victor Diekade**, presented on the upcoming IARSAF Symposium (28–31 October 2025).
- Gained insights into climate-smart crop varieties, resilient food systems policies, and the role of science in shaping sustainable livelihoods.
- Reinforced IARSAF's commitment to collaborative research, capacity development, and actionable solutions for Africa's food systems.

Special thanks to IITA management and the Capacity Development Office for sponsorship, and to NPBA for travel grants supporting member participation.



IARSAF members at the 3rd NPBA International Conference, Abuja.

11. 28th IARSAF Annual Symposium

Hybrid event; IITA Headquarters, Ibadan, Nigeria, icipe, Nairobi, Kenya & Virtual | 28–31 October 2025

The 28th IARSAF Annual Symposium brought together scholars, fellows, graduate students, and early-career researchers to explore “Science and Systems Thinking: Driving Climate Resilience and Nutrition Transformation in African Food Systems.”

Key Highlights:

- **Keynote Addresses** delivered by distinguished scholars, inspiring participants on climate-smart research and nutrition transformation.
- **Lead Paper Presentations** and **Technical Sessions** showcased cutting-edge research across multiple sub-themes.
- The **3-Minute Pitch (3MP) Competition** challenged early-career researchers to concisely communicate their work, highlighting innovation and clarity.
- Engaging Q&A sessions, panel discussions, and networking opportunities strengthened cross-disciplinary learning and collaboration.
- Participants from both **Nigeria (IITA Ibadan)** and **Kenya (IITA/ICIPE, Nairobi)** contributed to knowledge sharing and international dialogue.
- Flag off IARSAF symposium travel grant support and announcement of 12 awardees

The symposium reinforced IARSAF’s mission to **foster research excellence, mentorship, and impactful solutions** for Africa’s food systems.



Group photo of keynote speakers, presenters, and participants at the 28th IARSAF Annual Symposium.

12. IARSAF Research Discourse & Journal Club (1st Edition, 2026)

Zea Room, IITA Ibadan & Virtual | 22nd January 2026

The International Association of Research Scholars and Fellows (IARSAF), IITA, successfully held the first Research Discourse and Journal Club meeting of 2026 at the Zea Room (Building 401), IITA Headquarters, Ibadan.

The session featured engaging presentations from fellows whose work addresses critical challenges in sustainable crop production and soil management:

- **Babatunde, Abosede Busayo** presented a study on *developing site-specific fertilizer recommendations using digital soil mapping for maize (Zea mays) production in Ekiti State*.
- **Adelugba, Olayinka Ilesanmi** discussed the *effect of bio-inputs on the growth, yield, and nutrient uptake of cowpea and soybean in Ibadan, Nigeria*.

The discourse stimulated thoughtful discussions and knowledge exchange among participants, reinforcing IARSAF's commitment to promoting research excellence and collaborative learning.



IARSAF Research Discourse & Journal Club (1st Edition, 2026): Group photo featuring presenters Olayinka Ilesanmi Adelugba (second from right) and Babatunde Abosede Busayo (third from right).

13. IARSAF Agricultural Outreach Inspires Students in Ibadan

Army Day Secondary School and Ojoo High School, Ibadan | 11 February 2026

On 11 February 2026, the IARSAF at IITA, Ibadan organized a successful Agricultural Outreach Programme in Army Day Secondary School and Ojoo High School, Ibadan, reaching approximately 200 students.

The programme focused on promoting agricultural awareness, food safety education, and youth engagement in agriculture. Interactive sessions covered agriculture and career opportunities, gender roles in agriculture, food safety, and underutilized crops. Students actively participated in discussions and asked insightful questions throughout the event.

Educational souvenirs, including mathematical sets, customized exercise books, and information pamphlets, were distributed to participants. The outreach also featured displays of underutilized crops sourced from IITA's Genetic Resources Centre.

The programme successfully inspired students to explore opportunities in agriculture while increasing awareness of food safety and sustainable food systems.



14. IARSAF Elects New Leadership Team

Genetic Resources Center (GRC) Conference Room, IITA, Ibadan | 17th April 2026

IARSAF successfully conducted its leadership election and transition ceremony on 17 April 2026, marking an important milestone in the association's continued growth and development.

The election resulted in a smooth transition of leadership from the outgoing executive team led by Diekade Victor Adelodun to the newly elected team headed by Muhammed Jimoh. Members commended the outgoing executives for their dedication and contributions to the association during their tenure, while expressing confidence in the incoming leadership's vision for the future.

The transition ceremony provided an opportunity to reflect on past achievements and reaffirm IARSAF's commitment to professional development, collaboration, and service. Members welcomed the new executive team and pledged their support as they begin implementing their agenda for the association.



Outgoing and incoming IARSAF executives with members of the Electoral Committee following the successful leadership transition on 17 April 2026.

IITA-CGIAR Scientist named one of Africa Food Prize 2025 Laureates for breakthrough in Cassava and Yam Seed Systems



Dr Mercy Diebiru-Ojo.

IITA–CGIAR proudly celebrates the recognition of Dr Mercy Diebiru-Ojo as one of the 2025 Africa Food Prize Laureates, honouring her outstanding contributions to advancing Africa’s agricultural transformation through the

widespread promotion of a novel node culture technology for cassava and yam called Semi-Autotrophic Hydroponics (SAH). Dr Diebiru-Ojo’s work is shaping a new frontier in rapid crop multiplication, transforming SAH from

a scientific breakthrough into a scalable enterprise model that directly benefits farmers and seed entrepreneurs across sub-Saharan Africa. The technology accelerates the production of clean, disease-free planting materials, ensuring that improved varieties of cassava and yam; two crops that feed hundreds of millions of Africans—reach farmers faster and more efficiently. Through her leadership, SAH has transitioned beyond research to practical application, supporting the development of stronger seed systems in multiple countries. This achievement is not only boosting agricultural productivity but also creating opportunities for youth and women agripreneurs, strengthening food security, and opening new pathways for sustainable livelihoods.

Read more here: <https://www.iita.org/news-item/iita-cgiar-scientist-named-one-of-africa-food-prize-2025-laureates-for-breakthrough-in-cassava-and-yam-seed-systems/>

IITA and United Nations Join Forces to Accelerate Food Security in Nigeria



IITA Director General and CGIAR Regional Director for Continental Africa, Dr Simeon Ehui with United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria, Mohamed Malick Fall.

As global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) intensify, IITA-CGIAR is reinforcing partnerships to ensure that agricultural research delivers real-world impact. Leading this charge, IITA Director General and CGIAR Regional Director for Continental Africa, Dr. Simeon Ehui, engaged with Mohamed Malick Fall, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria, to chart strategies for advancing food security and agricultural innovation. During his recent mission to Abuja, Dr Ehui met with Fall for a high-level strategic dialogue focused on advancing science-driven agricultural solutions,

youth agripreneurship, and financing for sustainable food systems. Dr. Ehui provided an overview of IITA-CGIAR's research impact and major milestones achieved in recent years, emphasizing the Institute's contributions to

addressing critical challenges in Africa's agrifood systems; particularly in soil health, seed systems, and plant health. He highlighted innovations such as the Semi-Autotrophic Hydroponics (SAH) technology, which recently won an

international award for its contribution to improving crop propagation and productivity. Read more here: <https://www.iita.org/news-item/iita-and-united-nations-join-forces-to-accelerate-food-security-in-nigeria/>

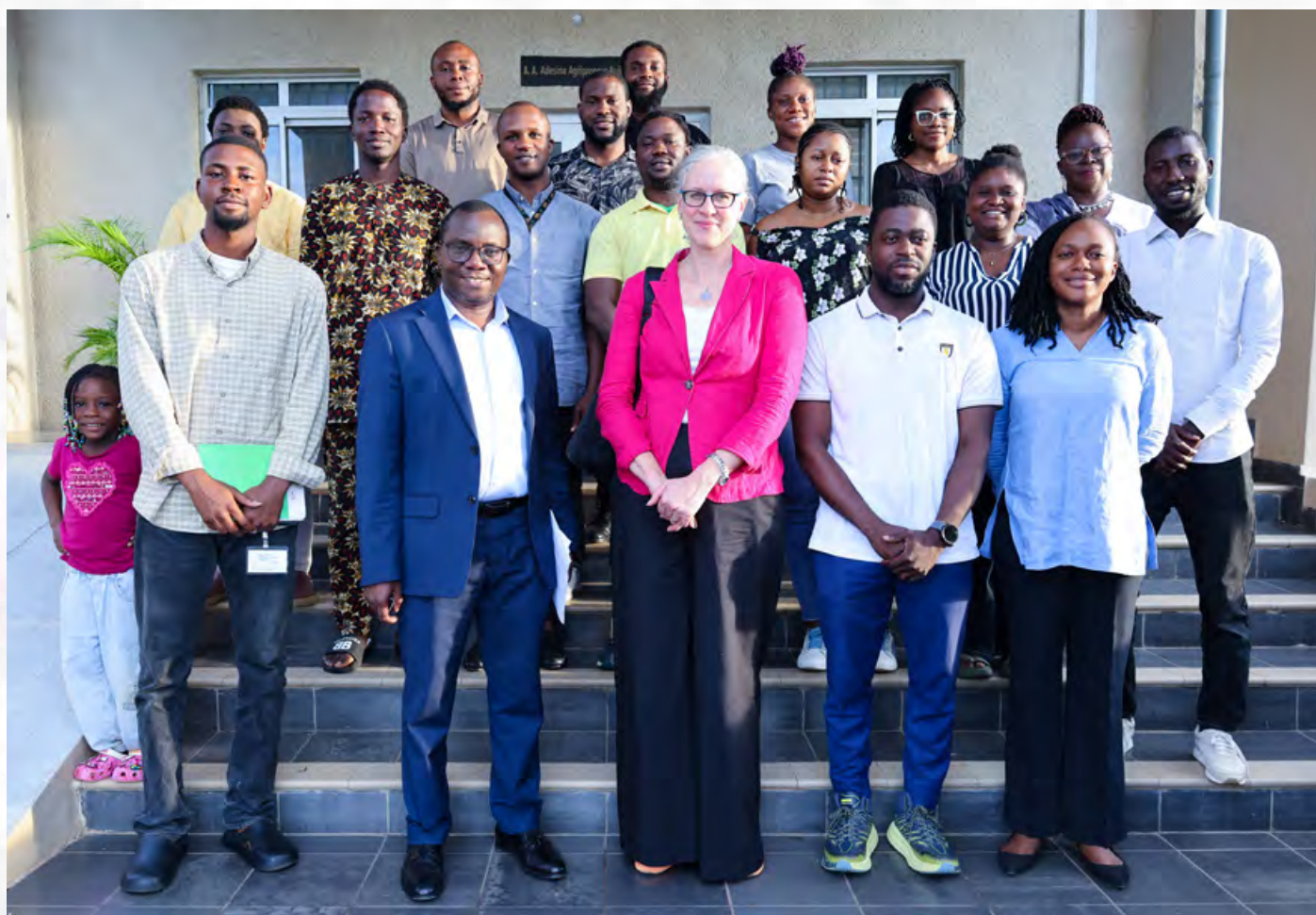
World Bank Delegation Visits IITA to Strengthen Collaboration on Agriculture and Youth Engagement Initiatives

From 24 to 26 September, IITA-CGIAR hosted a World Bank delegation at its headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria, for a three-day visit designed to strengthen collaboration on agricultural development projects and showcase the institute's groundbreaking research and innovations. Welcoming the visitors, IITA Director General and CGIAR Regional Director for Continental Africa, Dr Simeon Ehui, expressed appreciation for the World Bank's continued partnership and commitment to advancing

agricultural transformation across Africa. He reaffirmed IITA's dedication to fostering innovation and impact-driven collaborations that support farmers, strengthen food systems, and empower young people. "Our doors are always open to our partners," Dr Ehui said. "With the assistance of the World Bank, we intend to take technology from the lab and the field directly to the farmers. That is how we can truly transform African agriculture." During his remarks, Dr Ehui also highlighted IITA's

work in soil fertility management, youth engagement in agribusiness, and its growing partnerships with several African countries, including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Read more here: <https://www.iita.org/news-item/world-bank-delegation-visits-iita-to-strengthen-collaboration-on-agriculture-and-youth-engagement-initiatives/>



The World Bank delegation with the IITA Youth in Agribusiness team.

Picture Highlights









About IARSAF

IARSAF is an acronym for International Association of Research Scholars and Fellows. It is an International body of Postgraduate students in areas of Agriculture and related disciplines, conducting their research at IITA or any of the CGIAR Research Centers based at IITA in close collaboration with hundreds of partners under the co-supervision of CGIAR researchers and their respective Universities across the globe.

Vision statement

Ensuring poverty eradication, nutrition and food security, and improving natural resources and ecosystems through a global research partnership for a food-secure future.

Mission statement

Continuous collaboration with researchers to advance agricultural science and innovation and improve productivity and resilience in managing economic growth, natural resources, and other challenges.

Statement of objectives

IARSAF is a non-political association seeking to

1. Provide a forum for exchanging academic and research ideas among its members.
2. Establish and promote a spirit of friendship, tolerance, and humility among its members through social activities.
3. Discuss, suggest, and seek solutions to problems affecting members.

Membership of IARSAF

1. Membership shall be by virtue of an appointment as a research scholar, research fellow, or visiting research student of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) or any CGIAR consortiums.
2. Membership of IARSAF shall be voluntary.
3. Only registered members shall benefit from the association.

IARSAF Partners Information

IARSAF partners with International, National, and Regional Research Institutes, Civil Society Organizations, Academia, Development Organizations, Governments and the Private Sector.

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IITA-IARSAF



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