

## Nutritious Food Fair 2019 calls for intensified efforts to ensure adequate nutrition for everyone

The fifth edition of the [HarvestPlus Nutritious Food Fair](#) (NFF) with the theme “Nutrition is everybody’s business” took place in Ibadan, Nigeria at the [IITA](#) Headquarters. NFF is an annual flagship event of HarvestPlus Nigeria, which aims to drive the production, consumption, and marketing of nutritious food in Nigeria. This year, the fair took place from 13 to 15 November.

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Partners of HarvestPlus Nigeria preach the message of nutrition.

## DG Sanginga appointed as Grand Patron of Naija Farmer Reality TV Show

In recognition of his invaluable contribution to modern Agriculture and the well-being of ordinary Nigerians and Africans, NTA-Startimes in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has appointed [IITA](#) Director General, [Dr Nteranya Sanginga](#) as Grand Patron/Partner of “Naija Farmer Reality TV Show.”



Gbassey Tarawali receiving the Reality TV Show team in the Board Room.



Receiving the Certificate of Partnership on behalf of the DG, Head of Abuja Station [Gbassey Tarawali](#), after reading out the inscription on the certificate said, ‘Our DG will be delighted to receive the certificate, which is well deserved. IITA is ready and has the much-needed capacity to be grand patron/partner of the Naija Farmer Reality TV Show.’ He further commended the effort, which he believes will go a long way to strengthen the IITA Youth initiative pioneered by Dr Sanginga.

In his response, the promoter and CEO of the Reality TV Show, Dr Chigbo Okoli, requested that IITA Abuja Station be used as a meeting center for their committee meetings in preparation for the Show. He emphasized the role of IITA in the Reality Show saying, “Choosing IITA to train the housemates is mandatory because we want the training to be of a world-class standard and IITA has the expertise and technology to lead the Show.”

The Presentation of the Certificate took place a few days after the inaugural meeting for the proposed NTA-Startimes Naija Farmers (Agricultural) Reality TV Show held at the end of October 2019 in the Honorable

Minister’s Conference Room. Participants at the meeting included the Hon. Minister for Agriculture, Alhaji Mohammed Sabo Nanono, members of National Assembly, representatives of other federal ministries and parastatals, and other stakeholders such as IITA, the [African Development Bank](#) (AfDB), and the World Bank Group.

The Reality TV show intends to provide a mix of entertainment, education, and advocacy aimed at producing expert celebrity farmers. Eighty beneficiaries will be selected as housemates along with 10 existing farm-owners (spread across the six geopolitical zones), and 100 non-resident trainees (10 from each neighborhood of the selected existing farms).

The main objectives of the project are to:

- Solve the challenge of food insecurity and import substitution on agro-products, while helping to improve foreign reserves and tax income for Nigeria.
- Provide a solution to the challenge of youth unemployment with over 35 million unemployed graduates and 500,000 new graduates every year.
- Resolve the problem of insecurity due to youth restiveness and joblessness.



*Tarawali accepting the Certificate of Partnership from Reality show CEO, Dr Chigbo Okoli .*

The Reality TV show is a win-win for all participants; there will be winners and no losers as all participants will become farm owners after the training while mentorship continues.

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In his opening remarks, [Kenton Dashiell](#) IITA Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, described IITA and HarvestPlus as “family”, because both have a mission to improve the health and nutrition of people all over Africa and the world. “We’re here to change things, and every year we should be able to see at least a change, an improvement in the health and nutrition of our people,” he said.

[Arun Baral](#), Chief Executive Officer of HarvestPlus, was pleased to see that many stakeholders are taking nutrition and health more seriously, and according to him, “taking

biofortification to the next level—where biofortified foods are available on everyone’s table.” He added that the food fair platform is unique to Nigeria, thereby setting the country as a model to the world on how to solve nutrition problems.

Paul Ilona, Country Director, HarvestPlus Nigeria, said, “HarvestPlus is multisectorial and multidisciplinary.” With over 60 partners in the public and private sectors, research institutes as well as foundations and civil societies, HarvestPlus works on large-scale food fortification, scaling up the nutrition business network, improving national

government policies, a postharvest loss alliance for nutrition, and better diets for children.

This year’s NFF reiterated the importance of biofortification as well as availability and accessibility of biofortified crops, as nearly 50 million people in Nigeria are Vitamin A deficient. Erick Boy-Gallego, Head of Nutrition, HarvestPlus described biofortification as: “An evidence-based intervention to tackle micronutrient malnutrition.” HarvestPlus and partners are working to ensure that nutrition is on the table whenever agricultural productivity comes up.



*Group photo of HarvestPlus Nigeria team, partners, participants, and guests.*

# Early career researchers benefit from CONNECTED's capacity development efforts

The [Community Network for African Vector-Borne Plant Viruses](#) (CONNECTED) and IITA organized a training program at the [IITA](#) Ibadan campus, from 4 to 8 November. Seventeen early career professionals from 10 African countries received training on the application of molecular diagnostics for plant virus surveillance.

CONNECTED is a vector-borne disease network with a mandate to develop the capacity of early career researchers. Its goal is to build a sustainable network of scientists that will tackle vector-borne and plant diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa. CONNECTED is funded by the UK government as part of the [Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council](#) (BBSRC) [Global Challenges Research Fund](#) (GCRF) that supports research on global issues affecting developing countries. The network is led by Bristol University and Newcastle University.

Representing the Directorate of IITA-Western Africa Hub, [Michael Abberton](#), Head of Genetic Resources Center and Deputy Director, encouraged the trainees to make use of the opportunity by gaining new knowledge

and practices to strengthen their own work and the capacity of their parent organizations.

Introducing the course curriculum, [Neil Boonham](#) from Newcastle University, Co-Director of the CONNECTED project, stated that farmers have to make informed decisions through the help of researchers; as a result, the course will cover such areas as diagnostics, identification, monitoring, and surveillance. "We are trying to generate data using diagnostic technologies that will help farmers make informed decisions," he said.

Highlighting the need for diagnostics in virus control, [Lava Kumar](#), Head of Virology and Molecular Diagnostics Unit of IITA and Deputy Chair of CONNECTED management board,

emphasized the importance of strategy and selection of appropriate surveillance methods to obtain best results and ensure optimum use of resources. He presented examples of emerging viruses, the importance of diagnostics for effective surveillance, and introduced new ICT innovations that combine diagnostics with ICTs for surveillance and reporting. Kumar also emphasized lack of awareness as a major cause of virus spread.

The course trained participants in the identification of insect vectors using DNA barcoding, detection of viruses using LAMP and RPA assays, sampling and sample storage methods, primer design, and scenario simulations for application of surveillance and diagnostics. Goncalo Silva, Research Fellow from [Natural Resources Institute](#) (NRI), University of Greenwich, UK, explained isothermal methods for virus detection in plant samples.

Participants shared their experience throughout the training period, including the opportunity to visit the largest gene bank in Africa. Solomon Ayebofo Otu from Ghana said he came with an expectation to learn



*A learning session during a field visit.*



how to identify insect vectors and his aspiration has been met. Kamis Ally Issa from Tanzania also expressed his excitement about working with a team. "People from different backgrounds worked together to achieve a goal. I liked the competition between groups as every group wanted to be the best," he said.

IITA was chosen to host the training in West Africa because of its conducive environment and good facilities.

According to Rachael Gwokyalya, one of the early career professionals from Uganda, "IITA has all the facilities anyone needs to live comfortably." Philip Abidrabo from Uganda, said, "IITA has well-maintained lawns and well-equipped laboratories. The only painful thing is that I will be going back soon."

While appreciating the IITA virology team for their excellent contributions, Boonham mentioned that the team

is well resourced to host advanced training courses. He added that CONNECTED looks forward to long-term funding such that more training courses can be organized on different topics in various countries of Africa. Underlining the benefits of the network, Boonham stated that being a member of CONNECTED exposes scientists to multiple training opportunities and materials. Members can also access materials of missed trainings on the website.



*Practical session in the laboratory.*

## Events

**1st Aflasafe for Africa Conference**, Arusha, Tanzania, 4–5 November

**Food Security Synthesis Caravan Conference**, IITA headquarters, 5 November

**International Plant Protection Congress (IPPC) 2019**, Hyderabad, India, 10–14 November

**5th Nutritious Food Fair**, IITA headquarters, 13–15 November

**Board Meeting and R4D Week**, IITA headquarters, 18–22 November



## Got a story to share?

Please send your story with photos and captions every Tuesday to [iita-news@cgiar.org](mailto:iita-news@cgiar.org) or Katherine Lopez ([k.lopez@cgiar.org](mailto:k.lopez@cgiar.org)) and Uzoma Agha ([u.agha@cgiar.org](mailto:u.agha@cgiar.org)) for headquarters and Western Africa, Catherine Njuguna ([c.njuguna@cgiar.org](mailto:c.njuguna@cgiar.org)) for Eastern and Southern Africa, and David Ngome ([d.ngome@cgiar.org](mailto:d.ngome@cgiar.org)) for Central Africa.

# IITA Bioscience Center hosts training on molecular techniques

IITA Bioscience Center in collaboration with the [Capacity Development Office](#), organized a five-day training workshop on molecular biology techniques, for National Agricultural Researchers (NARs) across Universities and Research Institutes in Nigeria. The training, which was targeted at familiarizing students and researchers with the science of biotechnology through hands-on training, took place on 4–8 November at the [IITA](#) Ibadan campus.



Top: A training session taken by IITA Molecular Geneticist, Ranjana Bhattacharjee.  
Bottom: Participants during a practical session in the lab.

IITA Bioscience Center organizes training annually to give students and researchers the opportunity to gain practical knowledge of biotechnology. A lot of people have the theoretical knowledge but have not been exposed to first-hand experience due to lack of facilities.

The Bioscience Laboratory Manager, Yemi Fasanmade noted that IITA has excellent facilities for practical experience. "Since we do this on a daily basis, we decided on extending the training to national researchers to understand the practical aspect of biotechnology," she said.

In his welcome address, Head of Genetic Resources Center [Michael Abberton](#) enjoined the participants to maximize the opportunity and learn as much as possible to take back with them to their various institutions. "I wish you the very best during your stay throughout this course," he said.

As the second training for the year, the workshop was on molecular biology techniques, involving both the dry and wet lab sessions. The training entailed an overview of DNA extraction, sample preparation for electrophoresis, quantification of extracted DNA using Nano-Drop Spectrophotometer, Polymerase Chain Reaction, Introduction to molecular markers and their application in Biotechnology, Sanger DNA Sequencing, Diversity Arrays Technology (DARtseq), and analysis of Quantitative Polymerase Chain Reactions (qPCR).

Describing her experience, Bibitayo Faluyi from the Department of Medical Microbiology Parasitology at Babcock University, said the trainers used simple language and this helped her to gain new knowledge that will be used back in her university. "I look forward to coming back for another training next year," she added.

Another participant, Yigasira Barile, a Microbiologist from the Afe Babalola University, said that despite the number of participants, everyone had the privilege of individually experimenting, "giving us a deeper and clearer understanding of what we have been taught in the classroom." After the training and tour of IITA facilities and research fields, he highlighted how pleased he was to have visited the Institute. "I would recommend that people come to IITA and see the beauty of science," he included.

The participants received certificates after the evaluation of the effectiveness of the training. Aside from serving as a evidence of hands-on training, the certificate has the added advantage for participants who plan to study abroad and for job employment. One of the participants from ABU Zaria confirmed it when he said, "this training is a prerequisite for promotion in my organization."