

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No: _____

Date: 12 April 2022

Venue: Ibadan, Nigeria

THE AU COMMISSIONER ESTI PAYS A COURTESY VISIT TO IITA



Within the framework of his working mission in the Pan African University Institute for Life and Earth Sciences including Health and Agriculture (PAULESI), the Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI), H.E. Prof. Mohammed Belhocine, paid a visit to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), on 5th April 2022. IITA is a partner institution of the Pan African University (PAU), working collaboratively with PAULESI in Agricultural research. It provides technical support to PAULESI in terms of expertise, equipment and facilities, which help students in

carrying out their research works in a very suitable environment and with a high level of supervision.



IITA is a non-profit institution that generates agricultural innovations to meet Africa's most pressing challenges of hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and natural resource degradation. Working with various partners across sub-Saharan Africa, it improves livelihoods, enhances food and nutrition security, increases employment, and preserves natural resource integrity. Its main priority is ensuring a food secure future for sub-Saharan Africa. In that purpose, it focuses on key research themes that address the improvement of staple food crops, such as banana and plantain, cassava, cowpea, maize,

soybean, yam, by developing seeds that are resistant to infectious and parasitic diseases.

The AU delegation led by the Commissioner was welcomed by Dr. Kenton Dashiell, DDG, Partnerships for Delivery, who delivered a welcome address after the usual introductions. A documentary was projected to summarize the role of IITA in promoting quality agriculture across the continent.



Taking the floor, the Commissioner for ESTI opened his address with a quotation: “Life is from the soil, Soil is life” to demonstrate the key role of soil as one of the most important natural resources on earth. He proceeded by expressing joy to visit the institute, a few months after his assumption of duties. He further appreciated the support of IITA, especially the use by PAULESI students of its facilities and laboratories within the framework of their research works and commended the fruitfulness of these collaborative efforts.

Referring to the current crisis between Russia and Ukraine, he laid emphasis on the negative impact it could have on the continent with regard to food security. So, he commended the work of IITA and urged all the stakeholders involved in agriculture to massively invest in agricultural production for sustainable development. According to him, this is the way Africa could avoid food dependence. He urged the audience to reflect on it and expressed the wish to strengthen collaboration between AUC and IITA.

IITA officials on their part, welcomed the message of the Commissioner and said the institute is also focusing on entrepreneurship as the future of the continent, relies on agriculture. They also expressed the wish to strengthen collaboration with AUC through a Memorandum of Understanding, mentioning that they are already working with the AU Semi-Arid Food Grain Research and Development (SAFGRAD).

Some IITA experts thereafter made presentations on topics such as pest and disease challenges, genetic resources Unit, BioScience Center, Aflasafe Unit-Resistance of maize to aflatoxin.

The delegation also seized the opportunity of their visit to IITA to meet some PAULESI students working there within the framework of their research works. During exchanges with them, some presented their research works and underscored their relevance in fostering sustainable and quality agriculture on the continent.

Natacha Julienne Quenum, is currently carrying out research to evaluate the genetic potential of existing taro varieties in Benin through agro-morphological and molecular characterisation. Her research will contribute to the conservation of endangered plant genetic resources in Benin and, above all, open up a path for the development of resistant varieties to combat tragic fungal diseases.

Espérance Kodjia is another student who is working on some African cassava genotypes for carotene yield and Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD) resistance. The aim of her study is to improve cassava for high beta-carotene (a precursor of Vitamin A) content through bio fortification to help reduce Vitamin A Deficiency on the continent.

Abdoul-Raouf is another PAULESI student involved in research activities with IITA. His research work focuses on the “Diversity among *Phytophthora colocasiae* isolates and Taro [*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott] Populations from Nigeria and the Republic of Benin and some Prevalent

Microflora”. The objective of this work is to revive Taro production in Nigeria and Benin Republic for the development of disease management strategies.

The Commissioner congratulated the students on their innovative and relevant research works that would certainly benefit the whole continent. He wished them well in their studies and left IITA with great satisfaction.



For further information please contact:

1. Mrs. Esther Azaa Tankou | Head of Information Division | Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | Mobile: +251911361185 | E-mail: yamboue@africa-union.org
 2. Ms. Claudette Chancelle BILAMPASSI MOUTSATSI | ESTI Department, African Union Commission | Tel: +251 115 517 700 | E-mail: BilampassiC@africa-union.org
 3. Mr. Gamal Eldin Ahmed A. Karrar | Senior Communication Officer | Information and Communications Directorate | E-mail: GamalK@africa-union.org
- Information and Communication Directorate**, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org
Web: www.au.int | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | **Follow Us:** [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)