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Our one-on-one continues in this edition with Dr. F.I. Ojiekpon, the Officer in Charge of the RRIN Sub-Station at Gashua, Yobe state.

Q. Who is Dr. F.I. Ojiekpon?

A. My name is Dr. Fredrick Imhanrhebhue Ojiekpon. I was born into the family of Mr Gabriel Ojiekpon Iwenamen on 16th April, 1967 at Idumu-Agbor village Ewatto Kingdom in Esan South East Local Government Area of Edo State. I am happily married with children. I started my early childhood education at Odinwe Primary School Ewatto in 1971 and graduated with Primary School Leaving Certificate in 1976. Same year, I entered Saint John Bosco's College Ubiaja where I obtained my Senior School Certificate in 1981. I obtained my National Diploma (ND) in Agriculture from the then Bendel State College of Agriculture Anwai-Asaba in 1985. The same year, I obtained admission into the University of Benin, Benin City to study Agriculture and graduated with a second-class upper honours B. Agric degree in 1990. In 1995 I obtained a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) from University of Benin, Benin City Nigeria majoring in Finance. I attended the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria and obtained MSc. and PhD Agronomy in 2003 and 2013, respectively.



Dr.F.I. Ojiekpon during the parley

I joined Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria Iyanomo, Benin in 1993 as a Research Officer in Training. I have risen through the ranks to

the position of a Research Director and presently, the Officer in Charge, Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria Gum Arabic Sub Station Gashua, Yobe State. I am one of the pioneering RRIN staff that started gum arabic research and development in 1994. In 2021, I was honoured with a traditional Title 'Wambai of Agana Land' by Lawan Alh Ibrahim Ali and Agana Traditional Council Bade Emirate Council Yobe State for my commitment, stewardship and dedication to the service of the people of Agana Community, being one of RRIN Gashua host communities.

Q. Please can you enlighten us on your role as the Officer in Charge of the Gum Arabic Sub-Station Gashua?

A. My role as Officer in Charge RRIN Gum Arabic Sub-station Gashua includes but not limited to the followings: I am responsible to the CEO/Executive Director, I take charge of day to day administrative duties at RRIN Gashua; provision of liaison services between RRIN and Gum Arabic Sub Station host communities; out sourcing of funds to finance gum arabic research and development from individuals and corporate entities of local or international repute; co-ordination of gum arabic research projects and provision of intellectual leadership; advising on gum arabic research programmes and policies; preparation of annual or periodic progress reports; part of preparations and purchase of gum arabic scientific equipment, chemicals and consumables; rendering consultancy and technical services to industry stakeholders etc.

Q. What challenges have you encountered as Officer in Charge of the Sub-Station and how have you addressed them?

A. We have encountered countless number of challenges ranging from insurgency, trespass of our experimental gum arabic plantations by free range

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domestic animals and their herders, cattle rustling, banditry, robbery, high temperatures, scanty rainfall, frequent drought, inadequate research personnel, poor funding, lack of land for expansion etc. however, God has been faithful to us. Thank God for Sirki Bade Alh Abubakar Umar Suleiman who worked tirelessly with Joint Task Force (JTF) to ensure security of lives and properties in Gashua and its environs during 'Boko Haram' invasion of North East. There were few incidences of 'Boko Haram' attacks in Gashua, but thank God, no RRIN staff life was lost all through the period. With regard to incessant trespass of experimental plantation by herdsmen, we embraced dialogue as a way of finding lasting solutions to the problem. We had several security parley meetings with leaders of RRIN host communities and 'Myetti' Allah Cattle Breeders Associations. During the meetings, the need for peaceful co-existence was emphasized. The Sub Station Management eventually signed a treaty with 'Myetti' Allah Cattle Breeders Associations in Bade and Jakusko Local Government Areas of Yobe State, in which, they promised to keep their animals away from the Institute's facilities. This worked for some time. We also promised to continue to provide water for them and their animals and other corporate social responsibilities where possible. To prevent local thieves that steal gum arabic, the institute experimental plantations were fenced with barbed wires and angle bars and with the cooperation of Nigerian Police and Alkalis of local courts many of these thieves have been arrested, tried and jailed. For the thieves that steal grains, livestock and lately electricity armoured cable from staff quarters we have not been able to arrest anybody because they carry out the act at odd hours of the night. Gum arabic is a resilient species with innate adaptation mechanisms. However, for staff we only try to cope with the weather situation. The indigenous people and local residents also complain about the weather. With regard to poor funding the autonomous funding option instituted by present RRIN Management is helping out in meeting Sub Station day to day running cost outside capital projects. For extreme weather conditions, climate change and its impact, these are global problems that require appropriate government policies and programmes to mitigate or adapt to the effect.



Dr. F.I. Ojiekpon and the Editorial Board Committee member during the interview

Q. How do you maintain effective communication and collaboration with the Executive Director/CEO, RRIN HQ in Edo State to ensure alignment with the overall goals and objectives of Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria?

A. Today with internet facilities the world has been reduced to a global village without boundaries, so, we are taking advantage of the world without borders. Besides, I have direct communication with the Executive Director/CEO, RRIN. The job schedule specified its channel of communication and submission of periodic reports. Through these channels, I communicate and interact with the CEO before taking action on some matters. For this, I give credit to the Chief Executive Director, Dr. L. N. Dongo even if you fail to call her, she will call you to find out how the staff are faring in Gashua. The goals and objectives of Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria is the same regardless of the station that you are located. The difference between RRIN Gashua and RRIN Iyanomo is geographical location and the commodity. Gum arabic research and development component of RRIN mandate are restricted to Gashua, Yobe and northern gum arabic producing states because of environmental requirements which are naturally abundant in those areas. Gashua, Yobe state located in Sahel ecological zone of Nigeria are best suited for gum arabic production. Also, Nigeria agricultural research system is administered through Departments and Programmes, by default, this system automatically organizes scientists at RRIN Gashua and Iyanomo Benin in groups with common research interests. The scientists involved communicates more through internet facilities to carry out any assignment or research work without having to travel except where it becomes absolutely necessary.

A. Unlike when we started this research and development journey decades ago, when one has to make physical contact with books and journals to access scientific information, today, the internet has transformed and simplified that. One can now seamlessly access books and journals in different formats online anywhere in the world especially those that are free. As a scientist I belong to different professional bodies and Non-Governmental Organizations such as Agricultural Society of Nigeria (ASN) and Network for Natural Gums and Resins in Africa (NGARA). During meetings which are sometimes on-site or virtual, knowledge and country experiences are shared. Also, one is investing heavily on electronic gadgets and internet connectivity such as laptops, tablets android phones, cameras etc to stay updated with scientific information in the ever-changing information and communication technology world.

Q. In your opinion, what are the key opportunities for further development and growth within the gum arabic sector?

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grades of gum arabic. Currently estimated global annual demand for gum arabic is put at 150,000 metric tons while supply by all gum arabic producing countries is estimated at 100,000-120,000 metric tons. Sudan presently holds between 60 and 70% share of the world market for gum arabic. From early 2000 to 2010 before 'Boko Haram' insurgency invasion of North East which is the major gum arabic producing zone, Nigeria hitherto occupied second position in the world supply of gum arabic retaining about 27% of the market share. With escalation of insecurity such as banditry, kidnapping, herdsmen attack, cattle rustling, etc to other gum arabic producing regions of North West and North Central Nigeria, gum arabic production dropped drastically to less than 10,000 metric tons per annum. Pushing the country to about the 4th position after Chad and South Sudan. However, with the sustained effort of Federal Government of Nigeria, International Joint Task Force, NGOs, private and public-spirited individuals in rebuilding the affected communities, peace is gradually returning to the region. Business, commerce and agricultural production in the affected communities are gradually picking up as some of the internally displaced persons return. In the same vein, gum arabic production and price have picked up. Interestingly national output has gone up to between 12,000 -15,000 metric tons/annum, while the price climaxed at #5million/ton at the peak of 2024 gum arabic sales season. Nigeria has the climatic and soil requirements for the cultivation of different grades of gum arabic in 15 North West, East and Central states of Nigeria. Over 95% of Nigeria gum arabic is exported as crude without value addition. The gum arabic used in foods, beverages, confectioneries, pharmaceuticals etc by multi-national companies and conglomerates operating in Nigeria is imported. Nigeria is one country among Africa gum arabic producing nations that has a dedicated research institute that is into gum arabic research and development funded by Federal Government of Nigeria. I am proud to say the institute is turning out innovations that help to increase gum yield, quality and income. Arising from the foregoing, it is clear that huge market for gum arabic exist in Nigeria. It is up to the industry entrepreneurs and other players to tap into above listed opportunities to scale up production or engage in enterprises that add value to the commodity.

Q. What are the current bottlenecks or obstacles hindering the expansion of gum arabic production in Nigeria, and how can they be addressed?

A. Nigeria is a consuming nation with little interest in production. Sudan has continued and will continue to maintain the lead in global gum arabic production because of implementation of policies and programmes that favour gum arabic cultivation. Deliberate policy was made by government of Sudan for afforestation of Sahel region following the prolonged drought the country suffered in the 70s. In Nigeria, the Federal Government is trying on its part to promote policies and programmes that support gum arabic production and utilization. In this regard, the

Federal Government of Nigeria established a dedicated research institute for research and development of the commodity, funding of production of improved planting materials annually, training of farmers etc but the response from other tiers of government, private and corporate entities in gum arabic producing regions is not encouraging. Many private individuals and corporate organisations approached by the Sub Station to go into gum arabic estate development rebuffed it even with the introduction of technologies that guarantee inflows of income during the plantation's immaturity period. They always said they will rather invest their money in other ventures (politics, trading etc) with short payback period than tie their capital in a 4-5-year gestation period crop. Another bottleneck is the insecurity in gum arabic production regions. Whereas it was 'Boko Haram' insurgency and herdsmen attacks in North East from 2010 - 2020, today North East, West and Central gum arabic producing states have been under siege by bandits, kidnappers, cattle rustlers, herdsmen attacks etc. The bushes are no longer safe for cultivation of crops. The Sahel region of gum arabic producing states is bedeviled by frequent drought, scanty rainfall, drying up of water bodies, food scarcity for humans and livestock etc resulting in out migration of pastoralists. In the process herders trespass farmers farmlands leading to outburst of farmers-herders' conflicts.

To address the problems, everyone must be involved, the role of government is to provide enabling environment for businesses to thrive. In the advanced world research is funded by industry. Research is capital intensive. Scientist must buckle up their shoes and search for funds from local or international donor agencies. Currently because the insurgents, bandits etc have occupied the bushes, farmers should be encouraged to start planting gum arabic trees in the boundaries and as demarcations in their arable farm lands. Increased funding of research and intensification of research that promote intercropping with crops consistent with food and cash crops needs of the region should be encouraged. Present research focus of reduction in the immaturity period of gum arabic trees should be pursued to a logical conclusion. Donor agencies, NGOs. government etc at all levels should make effort to construct earth dams and ranches in the domains of pastoralists. State government of gum arabic producing states have to key into gum arabic estate development. Farm settlement approach particularly for internally displaced persons who have lost their loved ones and presently returning home without any means of livelihoods should be applied.

Q. What advice would you offer to aspiring researchers or entrepreneurs looking to enter the gum arabic industry?

A. Gum arabic research and development is still at infancy stage in Nigeria. Remember gum arabic production is an all Africa affair. There are 16 gum arabic producing countries in

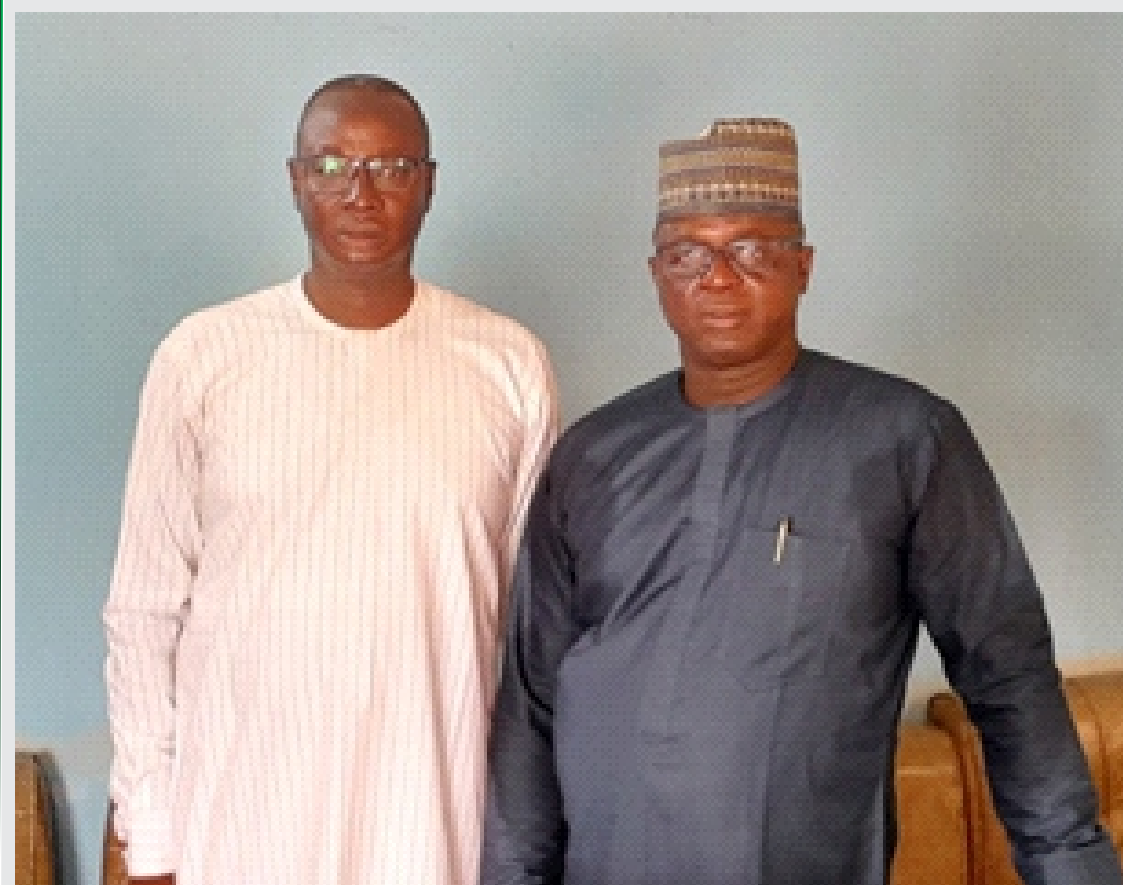
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Africa including Nigeria. The West is mostly involved in gum arabic utilization and product development research. It is therefore a fertile ground for easy research break through irrespective of your research interest. However, for field-based scientists you will have to endure extreme weather conditions prevalent in the production regions especially Sahel region. For an entrepreneur wishing to enter gum arabic industry, gum arabic business is an economically viable venture. There are different enterprises within the gum arabic value chain. There is gum arabic plantation establishment and development; gum arabic commodity trading as a retailer or wholesaler, gum arabic export etc. The sub sector that has not been explored in Nigeria is the gum arabic utilization and value addition. For those wishing to go into gum arabic plantation establishment and development, gum arabic husbandry is a business with good return on investment. It is a long term venture whose stream of earnings spread over several accounting seasons (years). When you establish the plantation, it will take the next 4-5 years before you start harvesting gum, and hence, income from the enterprise. However, RRIN has developed technologies that enable farmers intercrop the avenues of the trees with food and cash crops that could be harvested and sold in the first year of establishment up to the 4th year when the trees canopies start closing. Income realized from such sales can cover the variable cost incurred in management of the plantation annually. Tapping of the trees, harvesting of gum and sales will begin at the 4th or 5th year increasing steadily up to the 15th year then stabilize till the 20th year before it starts to decline. By the 25th year many of the trees would have died due to pests and disease attacks, wind damage etc. Beyond this period, it is no longer economically viable to keep maintaining the plantation because the trees have out lived their economic life span.



Dr. F.I. Ojiekpon and a member of the Editorial Board Committee after the parley

It is advisable at this stage to cut down the trees and replant. Before going into the business try to visit the RRIN Gum Arabic Sub Station Office Gashua for the business guide and access to the on-shelf technologies regarding your chosen enterprise. For those who wish to go into gum arabic commodity trading as a beginner you will need to work with existing market structures. Large consignments of the commodity are not displayed in the open market. Therefore, you have to buy your stock through agents, retailers or wholesalers located in the villages, towns and state capitals of the producing states. For exporters, they will have to go through the same channels to source the gum. However, exporters must provide facilities for warehousing, cleaning, sorting, grading and storage of the gum. This is necessary because most gum arabic traded in Nigeria market are collected/harvested from gum arabic trees from the wild where the various species that produce different grades of gum arabic grow side by side. Studies have shown that gum arabic value chain actors smile home with good margins from their enterprises annually.

RRIN holds August edition of her Monthly Seminar Series (MSS)

The August edition of the RRIN Monthly Seminar Series (MSS) took place on the 28th of August, 2024. It featured two presentations as is the norm.

The first presentation by Mr. A.O. Ohifuemen was on **"Foresight, foresight tools and their applications"**. It was a feedback to the Research Staff and others present on a training Workshop which he attended. In his presentation, he defined foresight as a set of approaches that helps to explore, understand, imagine and anticipate the **"future"** in an open and structured way. Foresight he said can help identify and explore challenges and opportunities emerging from multiple signals and drivers of change shaping the future and that it is critical in decision making, acting as a trigger for developing strategic options in a context of several unknowns.



Mr. A.O. Ohifuemen during his presentation

Editors: Dr.(Mrs) O. A. Emuedo, Dr. N.M. Fakuta, Mr. T. Mkor, Dr. (Mrs) C. Okwu-Abolo, Mr. P. O. Igbako and Mr. E Obasuyi.

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Foresight tools according to him, aid in strategic planning and policy formulation for organizational systems and that insights derived from historical data and future scenarios will serve as a guide to decision-making on research priorities and strategic plans.

Some foresight tools he listed are as follows; Rich Picture, Futures Triangle, Future Wheels, Emerging Issue Analysis, Causal Layered Analysis, Scenario Building, Collective Visioning and Backcasting.

He concluded that foresight tools and methods are used to inform the thinking processes of staff in an organization so that better and wiser decisions can be made about future strategy. They seek to develop a long-term framework, outside the business-as-usual constraints of the present, within which thinking about potential strategic options can occur.

The Workshop was organized by the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARC/N) for Research Staff between the 1st and 4th July, 2024 at the Denis Hotels, Njamena Crescent, Wuse 2, Abuja.

The second presentation by Dr. (Mrs). E.O. Uzunuigbe, was on **"Synthesis of gum Arabic surface modified cadmium telluride quantum dots"**. In her presentation, she explained what Water-soluble cadmium telluride (CdTe) quantum dots (QDs) were and how they are capped with gum Arabic (GA), a non-toxic, water-soluble glycoprotein polymer commonly used in the food and pharmaceutical industries. The GA was used to stabilise cadmium telluride quantum dots (QD-GAs) and capped the QDs for biological and biomedical applications.



Dr. (Mrs). E.O. Uzunuigbe during her presentation

These QDs, she concluded, were found to be highly luminescent and very useful medically in determining sites of cancer cells invasion in the body system.

At the end of both presentations, there were comments, reactions, inputs from the Executive Director/CEO, Dr. L.N. Dongo,

Management Staff, and other Staff present. Questions and comments were also entertained from members of Staff.



Cross section of members of Staff during the seminar

RRIN holds September edition of general prayer meeting

The September, 2024 edition of the RRIN prayer meeting took place as usual, on Monday the 2nd September, 2024. It started with the usual opening prayers to thank God for bringing everyone to the 9th month of the year and for His grace and sustenance by Engr. G. Izevbigie, followed by praise and worship, led by Mr. I.J. Ugiagbe. Thereafter, the prayer session which was led by, Dr. A.M.D. Uwumarongie commenced. He started by thanking God for always being there for us all. Taking his Bible text from Psalm 103:1-5, Dr. Uwumarongie thanked God for his goodness to us and how He has kept us from all harm, recognising the Hand of God in our daily activities. All we have and are, he said, belongs to God and that God is our source. He prayed that we should never disconnect our selves from God, no matter the trials and tribulations we face. Hebrews 12:1-2 he said buttresses this fact, that we should look away from our trials and look unto God, the author and finisher of our faith. He finally uplifted the Institute to God Almighty, praying that it shall regain its lost glory. He ended by asking all Staff present to make their own private petitions to God.

Mr. V. Ilumah rounded off the prayer session and concluded by sharing the grace.



Cross section of members of Staff, during the prayer session.

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RRIN holds September edition of her Monthly Seminar Series (MSS)

September 11th 2024, saw RRIN holding its Monthly Seminar Series (MSS) with two presentations. The first presentation by Mr. B. O. Asemota was on 'Ridge parameter estimation technique: the classification-based approach'. He said the need to address the pitfall or risk of analyzing data in the presence of multicollinearity was the essence of the study and that scientific results have been shrouded in violation of underlying statistical principles. A common violation among several assumptions of the multiple linear regression, he opined, is the dependence of two or more independent variables which leads to the problem of multicollinearity and the Ridge parameter estimation technique therefore is a panacea to this problem. The Ridge regression technique operates by adding a degree of bias to the regression estimates that reduces the standard errors. The Ridge estimator has been proven to have a smaller mean square error (MSE) than the ordinary least square (OLS) estimator. It was the concept of *Various Kinds*, introduced into the classification of Hoerl and Kennard Ridge parameters to give most efficient estimates.



Mr. B.O. Asemota during his presentation

The second presentation was on the topic 'Evaluation of growth parameters and yield of local and exotic strains of *lentinus squarrosulus* cultivated on two different sawdust types supplemented with oil palm fruit fibre' by Ms. G. A. Evueh. In her presentation, she explained that the performance of *Lentinus squarrosulus* (an edible macrofungi) in cultivation to a large extent depended on the type of substrate used as well as the age of mycelium in culture. The study, she said was aimed at evaluating the potential of cultivating both local and exotic species of *L.*

squarrosulus using sawdust of *Hevea brasiliensis* supplemented with oil palm fruit fibre (OPF) and *Triplochiton scleroxylon* supplemented with oil palm fruit fibre as substrates. The local white species of *L. squarrosulus* cultivated on *H. brasiliensis* sawdust mixed with OPF gave the highest yield of 70.58g, while no data was recorded for the exotic strain of *L. squarrosulus* as the mushroom did not grow on either substrate.



Ms. G.A. Evueh during her presentation

RRIN gets approval for new mandate crop

Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria (RRIN) under the leadership of Dr. Lelia N. Dongo is pleased to announce that The Honorable Minister of Agriculture and Food Security through the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) have officially approved an additional mandate crop (*Tamarindus indica*). This significant milestone was officially confirmed on the 4th of September, 2024. Based on the foregoing, RRIN has been mandated to undertake a two-year preliminary research study on *Tamarindus indica* and provide a progress report on their findings for consideration and final approval. This significant approval aligns with RRIN's commitment to advancing agricultural research and contributing to the diversification of agricultural development and sustainability in Nigeria.



Tamarindus indica tree

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Tamarindus indica, commonly known as tamarind, is a leguminous tropical fruit-bearing tree belonging to the Fabaceae family. The tree's adaptability to different climatic conditions makes it a valuable crop for sustainable agriculture. Tamarind has diverse uses in food, medicine, and various industrial applications. Thus, the proposed Research into *Tamarindus indica* will provide insights into the crop's potential to enhance food security, promote health, improve livelihoods, generate economic value and promote sustainable agricultural practices across the country.

Consequently, the first phase of RRIN's research efforts will be directed towards understanding the distribution, variations of the species, agronomic requirements, phenotypic and genetic diversity, and value-added potentials of *Tamarindus indica*. This will include assessment of their distribution and conservation status, developing improved propagation techniques, investigating agronomic practices, studying its environmental adaptability and exploring its uses in food products and other commercial applications. The research is expected to provide valuable insights that will benefit farmers, industries, and policymakers.



Fruits and seeds of Tamarindus indica

The approval marks a significant step forward in RRIN's research agenda, expanding its focus and demonstrating readiness to explore innovative avenues in agricultural sector. We are enthusiastic about the opportunities this new mandate crop presents as well as committed to working closely with ARCN and other stakeholders to ensure that research on *Tamarindus indica* yields tangible benefits for the agricultural sector and contributes to the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

The Executive Director and Internal Management Committee, RRIN express their gratitude to ARCN for entrusting them with this important additional mandate and look forward to making significant contributions to the body of knowledge surrounding *Tamarindus indica*.

RRIN Hosts Management Retreat, 2024

The Internal management staff of RRIN convened at Peemos Place Hotel in Sapele, Delta State, from the 4th to 7th September,

2024 for the maiden Annual Management Retreat. The retreat featured a welcome address by the Director/CEO, RRIN, Dr. L.N. Dongo and group formation for the Team building activities.

The three-day event focused on leadership development, corporate governance, and refining the institute's organizational structure, all aimed at promoting a more efficient and cohesive management team.



Dr. L.N. Dongo giving her welcome address

These activities include:

Leadership and governance in managing programs

One of the retreat's primary objectives was to equip participants with advanced leadership skills. Through a series of interactive and expert-led sessions, management staff was introduced to modern approaches to decision-making, communication, delegation, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking. These sessions were designed to empower the Heads of Department (HOD) to navigate the complexities of managing teams and driving the vision and mandate of RRIN forward.

Corporate Governance (CG)

The second major focus was enhancing corporate governance by carrying out operations fairly, transparently, and in the best interest of the people. In a nutshell, CG is about compliance. Management staff explored best practices around

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transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership. In doing so, the retreat provided the team with actionable strategies for improving decision-making processes and increasing organizational efficiency. Participants engaged in discussions around the \$Ps of Governance (People, Purpose, Process and Performance), under the area of process, risk register and organization structure was emphasized which will foster a culture of ethical responsibility within the institute.

Organizational Structure

A review of RRIN's organizational structure was conducted during the retreat. In implementing the process of organizational change you will require the impact of culture, technology, policies and internal control and procedures. In an organization, one must figure out availability, speed, adaptability and adoptability with the following steps as guide in starting the organizational change process. Team building, mentoring, communication skill, discipline and attitude to work, hierarchy, reward for excellence and hard work, reliable are qualities to watch out for in every staff. During the breakout session, the team was able to identify and draft out potential areas for improvement in communication, processes, first milestone, evaluation. Recommendations were made to streamline certain processes and clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure the institute operates at optimal capacity.

Team Building

The retreat also included team-building activities that encouraged collaboration and open communication among participants. These activities served to strengthen bonds within the management team, ensuring a unified approach to the institute's mandate.

Way forward

The lessons learned and draft action plans outlining the steps needed to implement changes in the Department, including time schedules, Staff responsible for each assignment/activity and a marketing plan/strategy for cutting edge technologies developed during the retreat will be crucial in shaping the coming years ahead. By focusing on leadership, corporate governance, and organizational structure, the management Staff are better positioned to achieve RRIN's mandate. The success of the retreat underscores Internal Management

Committee's commitment to continuous improvement, and they are excited to implement the recommendations made during the sessions to further enhance RRIN's operations in attaining its vision to become more visible as a center of excellence in providing high-quality scientific technologies to the global end users.

Thereafter, Dr. (Mrs.) Lelia N. Dongo gave her closing remarks and thanked all for participating. The Management Staff also took part in some outdoor game activities as a form of relaxation after the academic exercise.



Dr.L.N. Dongo and her Team after the retreat

The retreat came to a successful end with the visit to Essential systems global concerns limited Rubber factory, RRIN's institutional partner on the 7th September, 2024. This rubber factory is into exporting rubber crumps and it is fully automated. The Purpose of the Visit was to strengthening the existing partnerships, exposure to their rubber production line/processes, assessing the opportunities for collaboration in research and industrial activities and most importantly evaluating the operational procedures for possible integration into RRIN's projects.

The chairman, Mr. Eugene Inoaghan during the factory tour described the areas of the factory toured, such as the processing units, raw material storage, production line and packaging. He made mention that one of the best coagula used in his factory was obtained from RRIN. The tour came to a successful end with a closing remark from Dr. K.O. Omokhafa.



Dr. L.N. Dongo and members of her Team, during the tour of their facilities.



Technical session during the retreat

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The Key Insights from the visit was discovering potential areas of collaboration and knowledge sharing between RRIN and the factory, and possibilities for capacity building.



Dr. L.N. Dongo and the Management staff at the Essentials Systems Global Concerns

Opreation own your Institute: Back to farm

In line with the announcement made by the Director/CEO, Dr. L.N. Dongo at the first general Staff meeting for this year and subsequent communications, RRIN Staff trouped out in their numbers on the 18th of September, 2024, to plant *Phaeseolus vulgaris* (beans) on the sides of the Institute's main access road. The plots were allocated on Divisional basis. This crop will serve as a cover crop to help restrict the growth and proliferation of weeds on the sides of the access road as well as promoting food security and/or generating income for the Staff.



Some members of Staff during the planting

Health Corner

Marburg (Marburg Virus Disease)

A rare but severe hemorrhagic fever, Marburg virus disease (MVD) affects all primates. MVD is caused by the Marburg virus,

a genetically unique zoonotic (animal-borne) RNA virus of the Filovirus family. The six species of *Ebola* virus are the only other known members of the Filovirus family.

It was first discovered in 1967, when outbreaks of hemorrhagic fever occurred simultaneously in laboratories in Marburg and Frankfurt, Germany and in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia). Those initially infected were found to have been exposed to the Ugandan imported African green monkeys or their tissues while conducting research. Over thirty persons (initially laboratory workers and then several medical personnel and family members who had cared for them) were eventually infected, with seven deaths reported.

The African fruit bat, *Rousettus aegyptiacus* is the reservoir host of Marburg virus and the infected bats, like the other primates which hosts the viruses that cause other hemorrhagic fever, shows no obvious signs of illness. Primates (including people) can become infected with Marburg virus, and may develop serious disease with high mortality rate. It is not certain how the Marburg virus first spread from its animal host to people; however, unprotected contact with infected bat feces or aerosols may be the most likely routes of infection.

Once the virus has moved from the host animal to humans, transmission then occurs through one-on-one contact, through broken skin or mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, or mouth, contact with blood or body fluids (urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, amniotic fluid, and semen) of a person who is sick with or died from Marburg virus disease. Transmission can also be through contact with objects contaminated with body fluids from a person who is sick with or has died from Marburg virus disease (such as clothes, bedding, needles, and medical equipment) or with the semen from a man who recovered from MVD (through oral, vaginal, or anal sex).

Though statistics on Marburg virus is inadequate, it is however, known to persist in the testicles and inside of the eye, similar to ebola viruses. Since both viruses are of the same family (*Filoviridae*) it can be assumed that persistence of the Marburg virus in other immune privileged sites (placenta, central nervous system) may be similar. There is however no evidence that Marburg virus can spread through sex or other contact with vaginal fluids from a woman who has had MVD.

Symptoms: After exposure to the virus, there is an incubation period of 2-21 days. Symptom onset is sudden and marked by fever, chills, headache, and myalgia. By the fifth day after the onset of symptoms, a maculopapular rash, most prominent on the trunk (chest, back, stomach), may occur. Nausea, vomiting, chest pain, a sore throat, abdominal pain, and diarrhea may also be experienced. Symptoms can become increasingly severe and may include jaundice, inflammation of the pancreas, severe weight loss, delirium, shock, liver failure, massive hemorrhaging, and multi-organ dysfunction.

Treatment: As it is with other viral diseases, there is no specific treatment for the Marburg virus disease. However,

supportive hospital therapy should be utilized, which includes balancing the patient's fluids and electrolytes, maintaining oxygen status and blood pressure, replacing lost blood and clotting factors, and treatment for any complicating infections.

Prevention: Records of preventive measures against Marburg virus infection are not well defined, but avoiding fruit bats (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*), and sick non-human primates is one way to protect against infection. Measures for prevention of secondary, or person-to-person, transmission are like those used for other hemorrhagic fevers. If a patient is either suspected or confirmed to have Marburg virus disease (MVD), infection prevention and control measures should be used to prevent direct physical contact with the patient. These precautions include wearing protective gowns, gloves, and masks; placing the infected individual in strict isolation; and sterilization or proper disposal of needles, equipment, and patient excretions.

MVD is a very rare disease in people. However, when it occurs, it has the potential to spread to other people, especially healthcare staff and family members who care for the patient. Increasing awareness in communities and among healthcare providers of the clinical symptoms of patients with MVD is critical. Better awareness can lead to earlier and stronger precautions against the spread of Marburg virus in both family members and health-care providers.

This paper was written by Dr. (Mrs) O.A. Emuedo with content source from the following: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID), Division of High-Consequence Pathogens and Pathology (DHCPP), Viral Special Pathogens Branch (VSPB)

PENSION MATTERS

Insights on The Pension Mortgage Loan - Guidelines for Accessing Equity for Residential Mortgage

The PenCom guidelines on accessing Retirement Savings Account (RSA) balance towards Equity Contribution for Residential Mortgage by RSA holders is in line with the provisions of section 89(2) of the pension reform act (PRA 2014). This allows RSA holders to utilize 25% of their RSA as **"equity contribution"** for the purpose of securing a **Residential Mortgage**

The objectives of these guidelines are:

1. Set eligibility standards for allowing RSA holders utilize part of their RSA for the purpose of equity for residential mortgage.
2. Improve the standard of living for RSA holders under the contributory pension scheme (CPS) by facilitating their ownership of residential homes during their working life.

The Process

Please take note that based on these guidelines, every RSA holder under **All PFAs** is eligible to apply as long as they meet the eligibility criteria which are:

1. RSA holder must have more than 3 years to go in active service.

2. RSA holder must have been contributing for more than 60 months (5 years) with a substantial balance.

A major part of the process is carried out by the Mortgage company who helps the RSA holder put their application together and submit to their respective PFA for submission to PenCom for approval.

Upon PenCom approval the PFAs pay to the mortgage company to help the RSA holder acquire their homes through mortgage.

The RSA holder is placed on a payment plan after the mortgage company has assisted in acquiring the home by completing the payment for the property.

The RSA holder is placed on a repayment plan as the 25% RSA balance of most RSA holders cannot acquire a property, hence the mortgage company provides the funds to fund the outstanding payment of the house.

For instance, if a house cost 10 million Naira and the RSA holder can only get 2.5 million from his RSA, the mortgage company will pay the balance 7.5 million to acquire the house.

A repayment plan would then be drawn for the RSA holder to repay the 7.5 million over some years.

Misinformation About the Process

1. Only specific PFAs can help RSA holders process 25% mortgage: This information is false as all RSA holders through their PFA can access the 25% mortgage if they desire as long as they meet the earlier stated criteria and follow the guideline for application.

2. PFAs partner with mortgage company: This information is false as PenCom has approved some mortgage companies to facilitate the process. All PFAs accept application from these companies.

Dangers of Collecting 25% RSA Through Illegal Means

It is a known fact that there are mortgage companies who offer RSA holders the opportunity to collect 25% of their RSA balance through this process.

Please, note that it is a risk as there is no record of a loan repayment as this can be termed as fraud as this can easily be tracked

Using the Credit Bureau Portal if PenCom so desires.

In conclusion, kindly note that it is a risk that **"You alone"** will bear as the process is largely controlled by the mortgage companies who facilitate payment for a fee and not the PFA.

Emmanuel A. Aiwekhoe

Principal Admin Officer (Pensions)

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Staff of the Month

Our Staff of the month is Ms. Hilda E. Agbonlahor. She joined the services of RRIN in February, 2014 as an Agricultural Superintendent on CONRAISS 7/2 with a BSc degree in Microbiology from the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and was deployed to the then Crop Improvement and Management Department.

She has risen through the ranks and is presently a Principal Agricultural Superintendent 1 in the Research Operations Department.



Ms. Hilda E. Agbonlahor

She is a well-focused and result-oriented Staff, who is always quick in discharging her assigned duties.

Announcement

It is with a heavy heart and deep sorrow that we announce the passing on to glory of one of our Staff, **Mrs. Nneka Eugenia Okore.**

Mrs. N.E. Okore joined the Institute as a Higher Library Officer in January, 2000 and rose to the position of a Principal Librarian and the Head of the Library and Documentation Division of the Institute as at the time of her demise. An HND, Library and Information Science graduate of the Federal Polytechnic Oko, Anambra State, she obtained her Master in Library Science (MLiS) degree from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra and was in the process of obtaining her PhD in Library Science from the same University. She was also a certified Librarian from the Nigeria Librarian Registered Council



Mrs. N.E. Okore

She was a friendly, fearless and determined Staff, who allowed nothing to deter her in achieving her goals and is survived by her husband, Prof. I.K. Okore and twin daughters.

Picture Galery



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Editors: Dr.(Mrs) O. A. Emuedo, Dr. N.M. Fakuta, Mr. T. Mkor, Dr. (Mrs) C. Okwu-Abolo, Mr. P. O. Igbako and Mr. E Obasuyi.

info@rrin.gov.ng rrin.gov.ng 09151557810