

Highlights
IITA Board Meeting
November 21 & 23, 2017
Ibadan, Nigeria

- The IITA Board of Trustees met in Ibadan from 21 - 24, 2017 in conjunction with Research for Development Week, the 50th Anniversary Conference: “Towards Food and Nutrition Security for the next Half Century: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies” and Open Day. The last two events marked the conclusion of 2017, IITA’s 50th Anniversary Year. All trustees were in attendance and were joined by new Trustee, Bruno Delvaux, from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.
- To carry out its mandate, the Board reviewed the Institute’s operations, programs and finances. They received a report on R4D and specific presentations on the KPIs, the IITA genebank, Excellence in Breeding and Big Data Platforms, and the development of the CGIAR Program on Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals. They also received presentations on ongoing research by early career scientists. Under P4D, the Board heard about the latest developments on TAAT and the Youth Agripreneur program, and the Business Incubation Platform. In the finance/audit area, they received an evaluation of the financial situation and the impact of the recent reductions in Windows 1/2 and USAID, as well as a report from the Internal Auditor. In the human resources area, they received updates on gender mainstreaming and work-life balance and approved a new Work-Life Balance policy.
- In his report, the Board Chair informed the Board on activities in the CGIAR, the dwindling Window 1-2 funding and current discussions among Center Directors and Board Chairs about re-branding and repositioning the CGIAR in the changing global context as a way of responding to areas of interest in donor countries in order to attract funding to the centers. Many of the issues that IITA has been grappling with over the last five years—employment and economy, technology transformation, one health, employment and migration—are on the table for further discussion and consideration in the overall CGIAR agenda.
- The Director General presented a score card on progress at IITA since 2011 in key areas—impact, finances, research for development and partnerships for development. In this respect he referred to the progress against the KPIs, (poverty and sustainable land use), the publication rate, the rapid growth in funding, the growth in the number of partnerships, the breakthrough in next generation cassava and Aflasafe delivery. IITA’s focus in the coming years, he said, was to focus on synergies between R4D and P4D, ensuring it is a culture that is widely adopted throughout the institute in order to achieve agricultural transformation through the TAAT. Strengthening relationships with sub-regional organizations and collaborating and aligning with national governments at high levels will be critical. At the same time the Institute will be working with the World Bank and building centers of excellence for training on the continent in key areas of IITA’s expertise. In the current climate of dwindling CGIAR funding, the strategy is to diversify its funding base and position the Institute to leverage resources through development bank loans to national governments.

Simultaneously, the Institute will continue to seek grant support through major foundations that have demonstrated interest in supporting African agricultural transformation as conceived under TAAT.

- Highlights in the Audit and Finance area were the high level of performance of the Internal Audit Unit and the extent of its audit coverage in spite of the carryover of audits from 2016. In addition, there was good progress made with respect to automation and transition of the finance system to International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), and efforts to ensure that a risk management culture is embedded in all the Institute's locations through awareness building and training. The expectation is that IITA will achieve a balanced budget in 2017 and a marginal increase in the number of reserve days. It was noted, however, that there are vulnerabilities to be managed stemming from project overruns and a less than optimal project execution rate of 84.8% versus 95.3% in 2016. With the understanding that the 2018 budget will be revisited at the April 2018 Board meeting, the Board approved a 2018 expenditure budget of \$115,960 million, a surplus of \$750,000 and a capital expenditure budget of \$1.0 m.
- The Board was pleased to note that IITA is well managed. It concluded that IITA has appropriate programs in place to address its mission and objectives and these programs showed considerable progress in 2017. IITA's finances are sound and the Institute did not subject itself to any serious risks. The HR team continues to improve HR processes and services to staff and is putting mechanisms in place to address the gender balance. An employee engagement survey done in 2017 showed greater workplace satisfaction for IITA than other CGIAR centers. The quality of science at IITA has improved significantly. In the words of the PC Chair, he has witnessed a marked improvement in the quality of science since he joined the Board, raising the level to that of Advanced Research Institutes (ARIs), a status it has achieved through deliberate and dedicated effort. On the future operations of the Business Incubation Platform, the Board suggested that IITA management explores options for establishing the BIP as a LLC and subsidiary of IITA, separating the BIP operations from those of the center and to begin the search for private sector investment to finance its operations.
- To replace trustees who have recently retired and are about to retire, the Board selected Dr. Shuichi Asanuma from JICA, Japan and Dr. Joyce Cacho from the United States. A soil scientist by training, Dr. Asanuma has extensive experience in agriculture and rural development in sub-Saharan Africa. Dr. Cacho's professional experience is anchored in economics, computer science, and corporate finance applied to investment decision-making in agribusiness.
- And finally, before meeting in-camera, the Board said farewell to Roel Merckx of KUL Leuven and thanked him for his immense contribution to IITA over the many years he has been associated with the Institute. In the early days he was a science collaborator, professor and mentor to a number of students who passed through IITA. As a Trustee, he was a strong advocate of IITA with the Belgian Government.