

Highlights

IITA Board of Trustees Meeting

6 to 10 May 2019

- Hosted by Institute's Eastern Africa Hub, the IITA Board of Trustees held its Annual Spring 2019 meeting in Arusha, Tanzania from 6 to 10 May 2019. Activities began on the first day with a ½ day Board Retreat, interactions with members of the External Review Panel and a visit to Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology where Rony Swennen presented an overview of IITAs activities in North-Central Tanzania. Thereafter a tour of the banana research program laboratories and fields was given by Allan Brown, IITA banana breeder. On the second day, the Board traveled to three Africa RISING (Africa Research for Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation) research project sites in the Babati District of the Manyara Region, where the project is implementing action research with farmers to validate agricultural technologies geared to improving farmer livelihoods. During the field visit, the Board and the staff interacted with project staff and partners and received feedback from farmers.
- Two highlights during the week were: (1) the official signing of a Technology Transfer and Licensing Agreement with A to Z Textile Mills Limited on the commercialization of Aflasafe in Tanzania and (2) the signing of a MOU between IITA and the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology covering joint collaboration on Research for Development Projects, capacity building and germplasm exchange.
- The Board welcomed four new Trustees to the meeting—two ex-officio Trustees representing our host country Nigeria (the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, M.B. Umar, and the Vice Chancellor of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Francis Ogbonnaya Otunta)—as well as Cathie Martin of the John Innis Centre in the UK, and Stanford Blade of the University of Alberta, Canada.
- The Chair of the External Review Panel, Eric Kueneman and two members of the External Review Panel, Marie Rarieya and David Governey spent the first three days of the week with the Board followed by the fourth member, Rodomiro Ortiz. A half day was devoted to the panel's preliminary findings and a discussion with Board members and staff. At the suggestion of the Board Chair, the Panel agreed to provide an Executive Summary of the main findings for discussion by the Board by mid-June with the final report to follow at an agreed upon date in July.
- The Board Chair highlighted his activities since the November 2018 meeting that included a visit to Abuja where he met with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Permanent Secretary, and a visit to the IITA station where he addressed the IITA staff and other center staff stationed in Abuja. He also visited the Cameroon Station in Yaoundé to meet with the IITA Country Representative and also to get an insight into CGIAR country collaboration. Except for the World Agroforestry Center, all CGIAR Centers in Yaoundé are hosted by IITA, thus providing an ideal opportunity for CGIAR center collaboration. He noted however, that collaboration is only in the administrative areas with little evidence of programmatic collaboration. This lack of collaboration was further noted at the General Assembly of Centers held in Indonesia in late January. While there was increasing discussion on mergers and alliances, the centers continue to exert strong expressions of independence. In the Chair's view, consolidation and bold reform are needed and may eventually be driven by the availability of resources.

- As a member of the System Management Board (SMB), and the System Reference Group (SRG), the Chair attended their meetings in April in Montpellier. The SMB approved several important programs, such as the Crops to End Hunger and Gender Platform and outlined a process for preparing the 2020-2030 CGIAR Business Plan. The Chair encouraged IITA to participate actively in its preparation and explore opportunities to play leadership roles in specific initiatives of the Business Plan. The focus of the SRG Meeting led by the funders was more on process and moving the system towards a common understanding. With the growing emphasis within the System on delivery—an area where IITA has taken the lead, it offers IITA an opportunity to consider how it might position itself for the future in the context of the CGIAR.
- The Director General's Report focused on two areas – (1) alignment with the CGIAR Business Plan which now includes service and delivery—an area that the DG has been a strong proponent of—and (2) positioning IITA as the African Center for Research Delivery. One case for IITA as the Center for Research Delivery in Africa is based on IITA's extensive presence in SSA with the current hub structure for research and delivery including BIP, and now its extension into the Sahel. The other is its leadership of the Technologies in African Agriculture Project (TAAT) through the alliances formed with governments, regional organizations, CGIAR centers, development banks and the private sector. The ongoing External Review was commissioned with the objective of strengthening IITA's position as the future African Center for Research Delivery and to steer IITA into the next decade.
- In the Partnerships for Delivery Committee, Trustees discussed the TAAT, the Business Incubation Program and a Protocol for Youth Engagement. The Committee appreciated the transparency in reporting on challenges of the TAAT service model and advised management to put the required processes in place to ensure payment for all services provided by the project. The Committee was pleased with the rapid progress made on the transformation of BIP into a legal entity. For the future they looked forward to the provision of plans for the establishment of commercial enterprises, information on monthly financial performance, cash flow status against budget, and capital expenditures. The Committee noted the overall expectation for 2018 of a positive outcome of approximately \$150,000, the continued improvement in customer interest in BIP products, and the debt repayment schedule from BIP to IITA. The Committee also welcomed the protocol on youth engagement and recommended rolling it out to hubs and partners to establish their own procedures and avenues for whistle blowing.
- The Audit & Finance Committee discussions covered a range of issues from the automation project to risk management, the conversion to international financial reporting standards (IFRS), compliance with legislation and other regulations, internal auditor and external auditor reports and a report from the Director of Finance. The Board was pleased to learn from both Internal and External Auditors that there were no significant issues to report and that the controls were operating satisfactorily. The Board approved the 2018 audited IFRS financial statements with a revenue of \$96.9 m and a surplus of \$0.419 m noting the unqualified audit opinion by PwC. It also approved the revised 2019 expenditure budget of \$109.5 million (from \$118.8 million) and an expected surplus of \$0.750 m. The Board noted the cash flow challenge was largely the result of having to pre-finance expenditures due to delays in donor receivables and advised the institute to revisit its strategy with donors to advance payments rather than reimbursement of costs. The Board recognized the significant amount of work done by the Finance Team in

transitioning to IFRS reporting and congratulated the Internal Audit (IA) team for the excellent results of the external quality assurance exercise.

- The Program Committee (PC) appreciated the comprehensive report of the DDG (R4D) and were particularly pleased to hear about IITA's involvement in the CGIAR Business Plan development and the new initiatives in the Sahel. The PC appreciated the detailed analysis on scientific publications and was pleased that the publication rate is being maintained and IITA scientists are continuing to contribute to the community of science. The PC discussed IITA's grant proposals and agreed that it was important to maintain the right balance between large and small grants. While the latter might be administratively cumbersome, they often supported important areas of work and key partnerships that had the potential to leverage significant follow-on support. Management was encouraged to consider providing greater administrative support to scientists to assist with proposal development.
- The Board was very pleased to see from the Hub Director reports the integration of Partnerships for Development (P4D) with Research for Development (R4D) thus reflecting the fact that research for impact is well inculcated into the Institute's culture. The Board was impressed by IITA's rapid response to the Mozambique cyclone and its involvement in the recovery efforts. The Board was equally encouraged to see the balance in IITA's activities between upstream and downstream research and referred to the partnerships with development banks on loan projects—a very difficult task but a very important funding avenue for centers in the future—and at the same time, the collaboration with science donors. Also highlighted as important achievements were the Institute's ability to attract funds for research investment and the work with growing startups in the digital farming area as a way of delivering technologies in future.
- The Board was encouraged by the high standard of presentations by four early career scientists from the region and congratulated them for well delivered presentations. The presentations covered the following: New insight for banana resistance to *Xanthomonas vasicola* pv. *Musacearum* by Nakato Valentine; Potential of KASP genotyping as a molecular tool for diagnosis of cassava-colonizing *Bemisia tabaci* by Wosula Everlyne; Tackling the threat of soybean rust in East Africa by Harun Murithi; and Postharvest processes of edible insects in Africa: Processing methods, and the implications by Christopher Mutungi.
- At the recommendation of the Governance Committee, the Board agreed to appoint Ahmadou Mbaye of the University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal to join the Board in May 2020, and the appointment of Joyce Cacho as Chair of the Governance Committee effective November 2019.
- The Board Chair concluded the meeting by thanking all IITA staff involved in the organization of the meeting and extended special thanks to the Hub Director, Victor Manyong and his staff for their hospitality and excellent arrangements.