



R4D Week 2015 focuses on science and relevant issues

IITA scientists from all over sub-Saharan Africa met in the Institute's headquarters in Ibadan for R4D Week, 22-27 November, to discuss breakthroughs in science, the progress in agricultural research, and how IITA's impacts can be better achieved to meet its goals.

R4D Week 2015 featured keynote presentations by [Nteranya Sanginga](#), IITA Director General, on IITA's progress in developing an index for measuring the impact of its projects and poverty reduction. He also gave a report on the Institute's financial status as well as directions for action in 2016.

The hub directors/research theme leads and scientists working on the different research themes (plant production and plant health, natural resource management, social science crop breeding and biotechnology) (see excerpts in the following pages) gave presentations during the science sessions, with poster presentations; and a panel debate on seed systems. Lunch seminars were also conducted on relevant topics of concern that included Open Access, intellectual property, and capacity development. [Ylva Hillbur](#), DDG Research, presented



Elizabeth Parkes, Cassava Breeder, highlights major research breakthroughs.

on the status of the next generation of CGIAR Research Programs (CRP), followed by side meetings on the various CRPs, research themes, new projects, and communication; and a seminar on full cost recovery.

This year's Red Ferrari lecture on "Global Futures and Strategic Foresight: Quantitative modeling to inform decision making in the CGIAR and its partners" was delivered by Keith Wiebe, Senior Research Fellow, [IFPRI](#). IFPRI's Director for Africa, Ousmane Badiane, also presented on "Economic

growth and recovery in Africa: Trends, drivers, and Implications for agricultural research and technology generation for successful implementation of the CAADP agenda".

IITA's Board of Trustees (BOT) also held their meeting from 25 to 27 November.

R4D Week concluded with a town hall meeting led by the IITA BOT Chair Bruce Coulman, who also announced and gave out plaques to the winners of the Annual Board Awards for Excellence for 2013 and 2014.

Tracking our impact and bringing the social into our science: Social Science team

How will we track IITA's progress in achieving its current ten-year mission of lifting 11 million people out of poverty and rehabilitating 7.5 million hectares? Will the transformed banana that are resistant to Banana Xanthomonas Wilt, which have been developed by IITA researchers and partners in the Great Lakes region and are poised for release in a few years, be accepted by the public? What are the lessons we have

learned so far in our efforts to engage with policy makers, and how are we tackling gender empowerment in our agricultural research efforts?

These were the topics of discussion in the [presentation](#) by the social science team led by Victor Manyong, the Director for Eastern Africa hub and also head of the social science team at the Institute. Manyong, when introducing the session, shared the progress made by the team

in developing methodologies to help the Institute monitor and evaluate the impact of its research on reducing poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.

This was followed by presentations from scientists in the team on some of the exciting research areas they were all involved in that had been published in various journals. John Ainembabazi, a postdoc fellow at IITA Uganda, shared the results of work to determine the

perception of farmers and consumers on transformed banana that are resistant to Banana Xanthomonas Wilt which was devastating the crop in the region. His [research](#) shows that over 80% of the farmers were positive they would grow and eat the banana if they were tasty.

Next was Marc Schut, a social scientist based in Bukavu, DR Congo, who focused on experiences in setting up innovation platforms in agricultural

research and development to promote the uptake of technologies.

Amare Tegbaru, IITA Gender specialist based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, talked about the ongoing efforts to empower women in agriculture [research](#) while Edidah Ampaire, Coordinator of the Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation project, led by IITA, talked about her [experiences](#) in trying to influence policy makers in Uganda and Tanzania to develop policies on climate

change resilience in relation to food security.

The final presentation was by Tahirou Abdoulaye, Agricultural Economist based in Ibadan, Nigeria, on the association between ownership of assets and the adoption of cassava varieties in Nigeria. This was followed by a one-minute pitch by the social science research team who were taking part in the poster session and then the poster session itself.

We are alert and ready for new plant pests and diseases!

Crop pests and diseases cause significant yield losses to smallholder farmers within sub-Saharan Africa.



David Chikoye gives an overview on the status of research on plant production and health.

More than 16% of farm productivity losses are attributable to crop pests; this is expected to get worse with the effects of climate change in the region. What is IITA's response to these challenges? Is the Institute already investing resources to respond to them?

The IITA Plant Production & Health Management (PPHM) [Strategic Plan](#) (2012–2020) presented by David Chikoye, Director for Southern Africa and for PPHM, is a masterplan of IITA's response to these important questions. The Institute plans to respond by offering smallholder farmers innovative crop management options, environment-friendly pest management options, technology,

and knowledge sharing as well as establishing effective partnerships through which coordinated actions can be implemented to ensure a food-secure Africa.

Progress is already being realized with integrated *Striga* management in maize, weed management in cassava systems, and aflatoxin mitigation in maize and groundnut. Some of the emerging crop pests and diseases that the IITA PPHM team have trained their sights on for future action include pesticide resistance in *Maruca*, *Alectra* in soybean, maize lethal necrosis disease, banana fungal wilt (TR4), yam tuber beetles, spittle bugs on maize, and papaya mealybug (cassava).

It is not only about how many improved crop varieties we have developed...

There is no doubt that IITA has been involved in the improvement and subsequent release of various improved crop varieties across sub-Saharan Africa. However, the focus of the Institute especially when it comes to its biotechnology strategy and crop improvement strategy is now shifting with an eagle-like focus on what impact the already released improved varieties have had and what the soon-to-be-released ones will achieve.

Biotechnology and genetic improvement are like the two sides of a coin through which IITA aims to offer smallholder farmers improved crop varieties that are well placed to cope with various biotic and abiotic stresses. During the thematic session on Biotechnology and genetic improvement, Robert Asiedu, Director for Western Africa, offered a glimpse

into the [strategic orientation](#) of the Institute on this subject that he is leading. In his primer presentation for the session, he gave an overview of some of the ongoing efforts by the crop breeding and biotechnology research team at IITA.

Some of the impressive work conducted by the team and highlighted during

the session included: Genebank data and information management system; advances in phenotyping advanced drought tolerant and *Striga* resistant maize genotypes for tolerance to drought and heat stress; regeneration and genetic transformation of yam; banana breeding and genetics; and enhancing proVitamin A in cassava breeding using new tools.



Robert Asiedu presents on IITA's biotechnology and genetic improvement strategy.

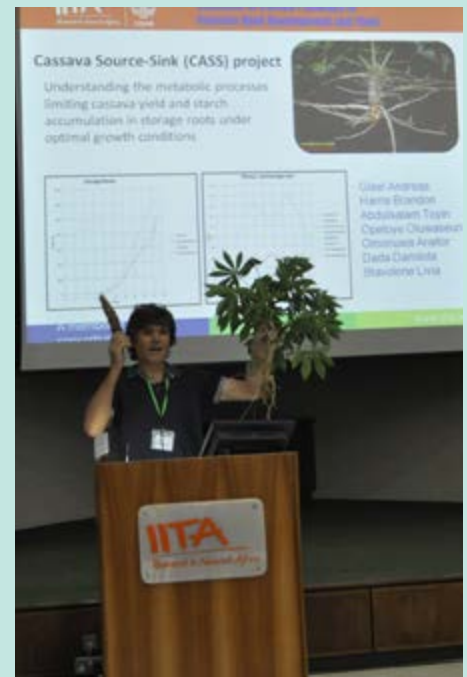
NRM, teamwork vital to achieving IITA's mission

"My take home message is that IITA will need a multi-pronged NRM approach, and probably more importantly teamwork, if we are to achieve our mission of returning 7.5 million hectares of degraded agricultural land back into sustainable use." This was the focus of the presentation of Bernard Vanlauwe, Regional Director for Central Africa and Director of IITA's Natural Resource Management (NRM) Program, in his summary of his team's presentation highlighting recent research achievements during the NRM session.

The NRM research highlights presented included household analyses and consequences for integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) by Piet van Asten, progress on cassava agronomy by Christine Kreye, advancements in soil microbiology by Danny Coyne, progress on legume intensification by Theresa Ampadu-Boakyee, and cocoa and coffee

intensification and conservation by Richard Asare. The presentations were preceded by an overview of IITA's NRM strategy and implementation by Vanlauwe.

Vanlauwe also emphasized the importance of fitting together IITA's research work not only within individual programs but also across the different programs. "Our NRM work—just like the work being carried out in the other programs—should dovetail into each other. We are already midway through our 2012–2020 institutional strategy and there is still a lot of work to do. However, echoing what the DG said regarding working together as a football team, we all need to do our part to achieve our overall mission and vision. IITA, oyeeee!" he concluded.



Andreas Gisel brings a live cassava plant for his poster presentation.

Key voices

We have done it before, we will do it again!



DG Sanginga reassuring scientists that the Institute is properly positioned to achieve more impacts.

Why is IITA repositioning its science to achieve its mission of reducing hunger and poverty?

Africa is changing. Take Nigeria, for example. Everybody realizes now that crude oil stocks are going down and people are not even buying Nigeria's oil on the international market...when I visited the Governor of Osun State last week, he told me that the allocation he had received was not enough to

provide for his people. According to him, the only alternative for augmenting the meager state allocation was to use the vast land in the state for agriculture. What we are trying to do is to reposition IITA to be the institution where agricultural solutions will be available for Nigerian states and the entire continent. To achieve this, we have to change our strategy and mindset.

What strategies will management change or revise?

We adopted a strategy in 2011 when I came in as DG. Prior to 2011, I had thought about this strategy for almost 5 years and it was because of it that the BoT hired me to be DG.

At that time though, the BoT did not believe that IITA could implement the strategy, but that notion has since

been cleared. Today, in terms of human resources and interventions in African countries among others, IITA continues to soar high.

This year alone, due to the financial crisis, some CGIAR centers cut down the size of their staff but IITA did not. Instead, we have seen many countries like Kenya, DR Congo, and highly placed individuals contributing to the budget of IITA. Also, many donors' trust in IITA's ability to deliver has really increased. The business incubation platform (BIP) has received full authorization to

commercialize aflasafe and NoduMax. We realize now that because of these results, most countries are asking IITA to come and replicate some of these structures for them. The challenge we have will be, basically, if we will be able to respond to these demands. So in terms of refreshing IITA's strategy, we are not entirely changing but being more tactical, changing some steps, and regrouping others to deliver on our mandate.

With the budget cuts, can IITA still raise its budget to \$200 million in 2020 as

envisaged?

We did it before by increasing our budget from \$47 million to over \$100 million and I had said the BoT assumed I was not being realistic when I told them we could achieve that. Based on that experience, why should it be difficult to achieve \$200 million if our strategy is correct and our mindset changed? In fact, we could have reached \$40 million less than the target if we did not have all the financial setbacks in 2014 and 2015. I am optimistic that we will achieve that goal.

Women scientists can only be as productive as their work environment permits

How do you feel as a young female scientist working in a male-dominated field?

It is a good experience that has its challenges largely because the society has not gotten there yet in terms of appreciating young women scientists. In many instances in the broader community, women have to keep proving themselves, and going the extra mile to feel recognized. I must also acknowledge that this does not happen within IITA because there are many initiatives that are recognizing young female scientists. Also the male scientists here have been very supportive so that's exciting.

Please tell us the challenges and opportunities you face as a female scientist in IITA?

Opportunities are there. IITA in itself as an institution has tried to leverage these. Mentorship is there from our senior scientists, the working environment has improved a lot, and the leadership is very sensitive to us especially as mothers. For example, I can talk to my boss about flexi-time, and he understands that I cannot perform well in my science if there are unsettled issues in my personal life. This has made my productivity very good within IITA. We also have very good leadership within IITA. The DG totally knows what we young female scientists are doing, he knows us by name, he knows us by our project and



Charity Mutegi, East Africa Coordinator for Aflasafe and one-time winner of the Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application.

takes time to write an email to all of us and update us, for example, on what he's taking to the board so we feel integrated with the system. The management takes time to come and see what we are doing right there in the field which gives motivation; management is recognizing whatever little we are doing toward the vision or the mission of IITA. The response we get to our requests from the management is really encouraging; we don't think that because we are female or young we are not central. The response from the senior management comes to all of us in good time, so all those things contribute to our well-being.

My challenges as a woman are not necessarily within IITA. I was fortunate to come into IITA when the leadership was focused on nurturing us as new, young women scientists. If I were to talk on challenges as a woman

scientist elsewhere, that I can easily bring on board. For example, in one of the places where I worked before I got 2 weeks' maternity leave. At IITA, I have been able to overcome very difficult and strenuous situations because of project leadership. If I call my boss today and tell him I want to travel with my daughter to the field because I need to watch over her at my expense, he is okay with that because he understands the need for me to be psychology or mentally at peace for me to be able to perform. So on several occasions I have taken my daughter to the field.

What can IITA do to institute a mentorship program; what strategy would you encourage IITA to take, in terms of building up young scientists?

I think IITA is fortunate in terms of a resource base for mentors. We need not look far; we have seasoned scientists who might just win the World Food Prize because they are that good in IITA. The advantage there is that we have a pool where the young scientists can start from. I think the thing is to structure young scientists who are mostly very shy to approach these mentors, by giving them a system that links them up to these people. IITA can develop a mechanism to do that and that will be a very good starting point. That way, mentors can work with young scientists and regularly check on their performance in a structured system.

From the Board of Trustees: IITA's results...very impressive



Bruce Coulman addressing staff and scientists during the town hall meeting in Ibadan.

During a town hall meeting that brought R4D Week to its climax, Bruce Coulman, Chair, Board of Trustees, IITA, said that despite the biting cuts in the core funding of CGIAR, IITA's success in 2015 was impressive

"When the Board meets, we have an agenda where we review all aspects of all the Institute's operations. Having the meetings here allows us to dive deeper into the scientific work of IITA. I am happy to say that the Board is very impressed to learn about methods being developed to evaluate the progress in IITA's goals of uplifting

people out of poverty and bringing land to sustainability and these we found to be very interesting. It is ground-breaking research; it will be very much of interest to other centers. We also discussed the budget situation and how it is being managed and we support IITA's way of handling it. We will be showing a small surplus this year unlike other centers who are going to be in a deficit position this year."

Coulman also highlighted that IITA is at the forefront of taking impacts from research and translating them into usable forms by poor farmers.

"Donors and people involved in agriculture research in the developed world are really looking at the ability to make research products available to end users. A lot of emphasis is also being placed on how this is done... IITA has been able to answer this because of its Business Incubation Platform which allows us to increase the use of technologies and work with private industries and partners within the national program to get these products into the hands of farmers." He ended by saying that he expects the Institute to break more ground in 2016.

Vox pop: What are your impressions about R4D Week?

Paul Dontsop-Nguezet, SARD-SC

Project Impact Economist, IITA Bukavu

This year's R4D was special and an improvement to the 2013 R4D in different aspects. The



poster arrangements, the organization, in terms of logistics was a bit more impressive. And this kind of arrangement in terms of presentation, organization, and the content of presentations were also impressive.

Sika Gbegbelegbe, Agricultural Economist, IITA Malawi

The R4D week has been great. I have

learned a lot of things, made new contacts especially for the work I am doing, and I was able to learn some new important things

to consider for the work that I will do for IITA hubs, especially to meet the key people I should work with in 2016.

Gbenga Akinwale, Manager for Soybean Program in Malawi.

The impression from the R4D week has been really great because formerly I worked with Africa Rice. I have attended a lot of science weeks, but R4D is so unique compared to what we used to have in my former center.



The experience has been so wonderful.

One of the things I really appreciate in R4D Week was seeing the DG

all through, following up, and giving directions on what to do and how to package our results. I was able to meet our colleagues and network with them, learn about what others are doing. The presentation so far has been so unique and I enjoyed it.

Renee Bullock, Postdoctorate Fellow and Gender Research Assistant, IITA Bukavu



It has been a great experience in that we as biophysical or social scientists are getting together and seeing each other's work and also being motivated by what we are hearing about some ongoing research and developments.



It is great to have all of us together, whether it is in a formal setting, the presentations, and also the opportunity to sit and discuss after hours. It is a rare opportunity to have all of us in one place together.

Patchimaporn Udomkum,

Postdoctorate Fellow working on Food Science and Nutrition, IITA Bukavu



This is a great time for me. This is my first time attending R4D Week and this is a great time to share and learn experiences from other IITA staff.

For me, during R4D week I have learned from others in areas outside of my field of expertise.

Adane Tufa, Soybean and Aflasafe Agricultural Economist, IITA Malawi



It is very nice and helpful to know new things. I got to know a lot of information, a lot of colleagues and scientists, in different locations and hubs. I got to know the activities in different hubs and those related to my area, and a lot of information from different scientists that worked in my area.

Kpaka Henry,

M&E specialist, IITA Tanzania I have been in IITA for about five months now. I can say, I knew IITA from



a distance and this week provided a good opportunity to know more about what the institution does and how it hopes to make the impact that it wants to make.

It is important to know the goals IITA wants to achieve and this has been a very good time to articulate the goals'

progress. It had been good to hear people express in various ways what they want to achieve.

Regina

Kapinga, Head of Advocacy, Country Engagement and Resource Mobilization, IITA Tanzania



So far, the R4D Week has been good. I joined the program this year and so getting together to know people was very good. Sometime back, I was a student here but now I can see how IITA has grown in diversity, in the work many people do, even more exciting with the youths and other people.

Haruna Braimah,

Country Manager YIFSWA, Ghana The R4D week is a good program, it brings together a lot of scientists, and we meet new faces.



Yes, the R4D Week has been a surprise for some of us because we didn't have a hint on how the week would look before we came here, and it has been a bit difficult trying to get around doing things. It is a learning process though.

Edidah

Ampaire, Project Coordinator for the Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation, IITA Uganda



The R4D Week was remarkable; it was very important and interesting, looking at science happening, from IITA as an institution which was very interesting, because so much is going on. I did not know till I got to know through R4D Week the different work they do in different countries. I was able to link up with different colleagues. It was an opportunity for me because I had to network with different people.

John Ikeorgu, YIFSWA Agronomist, IITA Abuja

R4D Week 2015 is my first. I am very impressed. I told someone that the R4D Week was of high standard and I had to settle down and learn new

things. I have learned quite a lot within these few days. I also appreciate the organization. It was wonderful. Yeah, interacting with both junior and senior colleagues was great. I was a research fellow here in the 80s and I have seen that people here are now doing so well. The standard of research has been impressive.



Nouhoun

Belko, Crop Physiologist, IITA Kano

This is my first R4D Week. My feeling is that it is such a good and wonderful program bringing together more than 200 scientists from IITA including all hubs and stations. You meet new people and colleagues from different disciplines and research areas. It is also good for knowledge sharing through presentations; as such one can combine these new learnings to improve one's activities and science.



Allan Brown,

Banana Breeder, IITA Tanzania R4D Week is an exciting opportunity to meet some colleagues, and interact. I am



looking forward to exploring some talent in IITA. Wonderful week so far... The sheer scope of the people here and the work that they do, and the opportunities that we have to make positive impacts on people's lives have impressed me.

Pamela Pali,

Policy Action on Crop Intensification Project Coordinator, IITA Uganda

My impression of the R4D Week, is that it is quite well organized. I have found the science presentations quite inspiring. We have a multicultural and disciplinary team and I think there I still have room for improvement. Next year, I am looking forward to having a specific session on, for example, gender, to show how

our strategic research is going to translate into the practices of integrating gender into our different projects.

Anderson Kehbila, Regional Scientist on Agricultural System Intensification, IITA DR Congo



It is my first time here and I am delighted. It has given me an opportunity to meet senior scientists and listen to what has been done in the past and explore ways of using them to improve our way of thinking, and increase our productivity. I am really impressed about that.

Mastewal

Yambi, Policy Scientist, IITA Uganda



My impression is very positive. I really enjoyed the discussions and the diverse areas of research IITA is involved in. It was a learning experience for me since I am a new staff in IITA. There are many interesting issues; on the genetics of cropping system, breeding; the new interest in integrating gender in the different research components was interesting for me.

Marc Schut, Humidtropics Social Scientist, IITA, Burundi



It is a first time for me to experience a science week. I have met many new colleagues; I have been provided an opportunity to present my work, which I really liked and which was also very exciting. I got very good response about my work from people. I have been to Ibadan a couple of times but every time I am amazed by the beauty of the campus. I love to go running in the morning around the lake and this morning the Youth Agripreneurs invited me to give

a talk about my work and my view on “agripreneurship”, opportunities in the agricultural landscape. So far, it has been a really beautiful experience so far.

Rajesh Manoharan, Postdoctorate Fellow Yam tissue Culture and Genetic Transformation, IITA Nairobi



It is a nice opportunity. I have met more experienced scientists and had the opportunity to discuss ideas, meetings and challenges, research communication, and to know one another. It was a nice experience and I have learned a lot.

Piet Van

Asten, Systems Agronomist, IITA Uganda



My impression so far about R4D Week is that it is has been a lot more science-focused than we had in the last years. It is really nice to see the diversity and the strength of IITA science. I think that is the machine that keeps IITA running. It was also great to see from DG Sanginga’s presentation about how IITA managed to deal with all the fund crisis, and the CRPs. I think the strategy at IITA is taken by really focusing much more on the users, donors based here in Africa, and trying to get the funding from them directly by convincing them that we can deliver and are ready for the challenge. That was very inspiring and it has been very successful. That is one of the biggest take-home messages from this week.

Marimagne Tchamba, GRC, IITA Ibadan



This is my first R4D week and the impression I have is that the week is science-oriented and focused on how to bring in new technologies to support science work. It is really constructive and we are on

course in fulfilling our mandate to help the African population to come out of poverty. It is really encouraging.

Hyeladi Gaya, Postdoctoral Fellow, Maize and Humidtropics Project The R4D Week



was quite interesting, challenging, and full of experiences that I have enjoyed. I have seen senior scientists present papers and the most interesting thing I have seen is that gender is becoming a common thing and people are coming to understand and appreciate its importance. I think this knowledge will also help me appreciate, integrate, and mainstream gender into my activities here in IITA.

Asrat Amele

Yam Breeder, Africa Yam Project, IITA Abuja



My impression is excellent. R4D Week gives us the whole picture of what IITA is doing all over the African continent and also it is a good forum for listening to other scientists and understanding what they are doing. You are also able to see where to position yourself and your contribution to the big role IITA has to play.

Latifou

Idrissou, West Africa Flagship Manager, Humidtropics



I have a very good impression of the Week. I like the programs and presentations, the communication. The presentations made me know a lot of what my colleagues are doing, and where they are. This also helped me to reflect on my own work in line with the bigger IITA goal to know how to redirect, share experiences, or improve.

Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org), or Adaobi Umeokoro (a.umeokoro@cgiar.org).