

Efforts to reposition IITA excites BoT members... Annual Excellence Awards presented during R4D Week

Members of the Board of Trustees (BoT) of IITA have given the thumbs up to efforts made by Management towards repositioning the Institute for the tasks ahead.

Moving from a one-week research and development planning meeting in IITA-Ibadan to a town hall meeting with staff, the Board members threw their weight behind the current management under the leadership of Dr Nteranya Sanginga, and were excited over the high staff morale and infrastructural improvements across IITA stations and the headquarters.

Addressing staff during the town hall meeting, the Board Chair, Dr Bruce Coulman, said that the Board was not only impressed with the work staff were doing but would also support these efforts to ensure that the Institute achieves its goals of poverty reduction.

He also commended the quality of science at the Institute.

The Board meeting in Ibadan coincided with this year's R4D Week—an event that brings together IITA scientists across the world to Ibadan. Presentations by scientists provided a learning opportunity for Board members and other staff.

There were also one-on-one interactions with staff, which offered BoT members the opportunity to draw out the staff's perceptions about the changes that are happening in IITA.

Board Member Dr Trine Hvoslef-Eide said that participating in some of the presentations provided her with a better understanding of what staff were doing and the impact of their



Board Chair Bruce Coulman gives a report to staff at the end of R4D Week in IITA headquarters, Ibadan..

work on the society.

A special highlight of R4D Week was the red Ferrari lecture delivered by Board Member, Dr Roel Merckx. The seminar was titled "Farming in sub-Saharan Africa: too little science, too many myths."

R4D Week culminated in the town hall meeting where Dr Coulman made a brief presentation to staff on the highlights of the Board Meeting. During the meeting, the IITA Board also announced the recipients of the Annual Awards for Excellence for 2011 and

2010. They are:

2011: **Abebe Menkir**, Outstanding Scientist; **Titilayo Falade**, Outstanding Support Staff; **IT Services**, Outstanding Team; and the **R4D Review** edited by Katherine Lopez with co-editors Lava Kumar and Arega Alene, Outstanding Publication.

2010: **Ranajit Bandyopadhyay**, Outstanding Scientist; **Katherine Lopez**, Outstanding Support Staff; **HOTCAT Team**, Outstanding Team; and the journal article by **Leena Tripathi**, Henry Mwaka, Jaindra Nath Tripathi, and Wilburforce Kateera Tushemereirwe, titled "Expression of sweet pepper hrap gene in banana enhances resistance to *X. campestris* pv. *musacearum*", Outstanding Publication.

The Annual Awards for Excellence were initiated by IITA's Board of Trustees and launched in 2011 to recognize and reward the outstanding achievements of staff. Independent committees consisting of R4D and Support staff, and members of the Board reviewed nominations and made the recommendations prior to the Board meeting held last week back-to-back with R4D Week.

"The awards recognize and celebrate the hard work, commitment, and teamwork of IITA staff," says Lilian Mendoza, HR Manager. BoT Chair, Dr Coulman, led the conferment of the awards. Recipients were given plaques and diplomas.

2011: The Outstanding Scientist Award seeks to recognize the outstanding scientific impact of an IITA scientist. **Abebe Menkir** is IITA's Maize Breeder. His intense breeding work

.....continued next page



DG Nteranya Sanginga answering questions from staff during the town hall meeting at IITA-Ibadan.



R4D Week 2012 culminated in a town hall meeting attended by HQ-based staff and outposted scientists.

on maize have produced two Pro-vitamin A hybrids that were recently released in Nigeria; drought-tolerant maize (DTMA) hybrids and open-pollinated varieties (OPVs) jointly with CIMMYT, which led to the 2012 UK award; QPM maize varieties that have enhanced the nutrition status of millions in sub-Saharan Africa depending on maize as a major staple; *Striga*-resistant varieties (Inbreds, hybrids, and OPVs); varieties adaptable to different ecologies in sub-Saharan Africa which has resulted in large expanses of abandoned *Striga*-endemic fields being reclaimed by farmers. In addition, as part of his work, he has developed and disseminated hundreds of tons of breeder seeds to national partners and collaborators as foundation seeds for distribution to farmers; trained master's and PhD students and helped build national staff capacity.

Titilayo Diana Omozejele Falade received the Outstanding Support Staff Award for 2011 which recognizes outstanding service by a member of the support group in achieving IITA's goals. Titilayo joined the Pathology Unit of IITA in 2010 as Research Administrative Manager. She has been supervising all laboratory-related activities of aflasafe, a biological control product for use in aflatoxin mitigation in sub-Saharan Africa. She has excellent management and organizational skills in addition to being proficient in research. The lab, consisting of 60 people that annually handles more than 2 million microbiology steps, "could not have functioned as successfully as it did without Titilayo's hard work, dedication, commitment, and ingenuity." Some examples: In the absence of a large-scale aflasafe production facility, Titilayo organized and managed the production of 11 tons of aflasafe for Nigeria and 0.5 to 1 ton each for Burkina Faso, Kenya, and Senegal in 2011 in a span of three months and helped deliver the product to farmers and other end-users in record time. She developed and followed a system of on-line documentation which tracks all aspects of the work flow. On her own initiative, Titilayo has created an electronic filing system that holds documents from the pre-proposal to the close-out phase, including data, reports, analysis, and communication



Board Member, Dr Roel Merckx, making a presentation during the Red Ferrari lecture.



Ayo Enikankiselu, Transport Officer, FMS, asks a question during the open forum.

with partners. This has been an excellent resource for all scientists in the unit.

The Outstanding Team Award recognizes contributions of an outstanding IITA team that would result in impact or potential impact on IITA's target audience. The **IT team**, led by Jim Scott "is always helpful and responsive to all problems you take to them. They will repair electrical items, give advice on any number of topics, recommend solutions, and generally try to help out whenever possible. There is always a nice jovial atmosphere of team spirit whenever you go in and they socialize together as well. Jim heads the unit with a good sense of camaraderie and all team members seem to genuinely like and respect him, and one another; with good comprehensive service, delivered with a smile and always with courtesy."

The **R4D Review** is IITA's flagship publication first launched in September 2008. It is published every 6 months (in March and September). The publication is edited by Katherine Lopez and is a product of collaboration between the Communication Office and scientists that is intended as a communication medium between IITA and our partners for discussing, sharing, and building ideas to help develop tropical agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa. Co-editors for 2011 were Lava Kumar (germplasm health and climate change) and Arega Alene (social science and partnerships). The magazine documents the results of IITA's research in collaboration with partners, and promotes solutions to agricultural problems in tropical agriculture in a popular and easy-to-understand format. The magazine showcases IITA's outputs and impacts targeted at partners, collaborators, donors or investors, media, visitors, knowledge centers, and other stakeholders. It is also a vehicle for recognizing IITA's partners and supporters. More importantly, this publication promotes and nurtures partnerships. The publication transcends borders as its print and online (www.r4dreview.org) versions promote the accessibility and visibility of IITA's research and technologies even beyond sub-Saharan Africa.

2010: Ranajit Bandyopadhyay is a Plant Pathologist who has been with IITA since 2002. He is a highly respected scientist whose work has a broad impact within and outside the Institute. His research and advocacy work on aflasafeTM, a biocontrol technology for fighting aflatoxin contamination, has led to improved knowledge and awareness, more effective partnerships, increased advocacy, and greater impact for IITA.

The Outstanding Support Staff Award recognizes outstanding service by a member of the support group in achieving IITA's goals. **Katherine Lopez**, Head of Communication since 2009, is being recognized for her innovative leadership of Team CO, her ability to motivate and mentor colleagues, her good client orientation, and recent milestones in the Institute's communication work, which have resulted in greater awareness and more visibility for IITA, increased networking with media and partners, use of new tools and approaches, and more communication products and outputs.

The Outstanding Team Award recognizes contributions of an outstanding IITA team that would result in impact or potential impact on IITA's target audience. The **Hotel and Catering (HOTCAT)** team, led by Sami Mazumdar, has been a model for operational efficiency, cost efficiency, and team work. As a service unit, HOTCAT's mottoes are "Work is fun", and "Lead the initiative for excellence." These have helped make the service fully self-sufficient and attain full cost recovery since 2008.

The **Tripathi et al** publication, published in *Molecular Plant Pathology*, reports a major breakthrough—constitutive expression of the sweet pepper hrap gene in banana that confers resistance to the most devastating disease of banana in the Great Lakes region of Africa: Banana Xanthomonas Wilt. The article was published in a publication with a strong impact factor. It has been referenced in more than 40 national and international media outlets including Discovery News, Nature, and Guardian-UK. It is a joint effort with a national partner, National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), Uganda.



Abebe Menkir, Outstanding Scientist 2011, with Board Member Jill Findeis



Titilayo Falade, Outstanding Support Staff 2011, with DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Development, Kenton Dashiell



IT Services, Outstanding Team 2011, represented by Modupe Adeoluwa, with DDG for Research for Development, Ylva Hillbur



Katherine Lopez for R4D Review, Outstanding Publication 2011, with Board Member Xikombiso Mbhenyane



Ranjit Bandyopadhyay, Outstanding Scientist 2010, with Board Member Roel Merckx



Katherine Lopez, Outstanding Support Staff 2010, with Board Member Trine Hvoslef-Eide



Team HOTCAT, Outstanding Team 2010, represented by Michael Olanrewaju, with Board Member Tom Medlycott



Leena Tripathi, Outstanding Publication 2010, with Board Chair, Bruce Coulman and Lillian Mendoza, HR Manager

IITA cassava varieties show promise in tackling famine in Horn of Africa

Improved cassava varieties developed by IITA and tested in Ethiopia—one of the countries in the Horn of Africa—have high prospects of tackling the menace of seasonal bouts of famine in that region.

Under good conditions in Ethiopia, cassava's yield performance showed a high potential of 25 to more than 40 tons per hectare, although current farmers' yields are often well below these levels, according to preliminary trials.

"These results reinforce the fact that cassava can be grown and can provide food security in that part of the continent. More importantly, since the region is drought prone, growing cassava is one of the best options," said Dr Pheneas Ntawuruhunga, IITA Cassava Breeder, who carried out some studies in that region in collaboration with the national program partner.

Consumed by more than 600 million people in the developing countries mostly for its high carbohydrate content, cassava is resistant to drought and tolerant of biotic and abiotic stresses such as low soil fertility. These characteristics make cassava a good alternative for a region that highly relies on cereals and legumes.

The Ethiopian government has realized the importance of cassava and has given attention to cassava production intensification and promotion.

"Cassava is now on top of the agenda of

the government as a food security crop. And I must say that IITA contributed significantly to this development," according to Dr Solomon Assefa, the Director General of the Ethiopian Institute of Agriculture Research.

But from Assefa's point of view, more research is needed to maximize the full potential of the root crop.

In 2000, through the former Eastern Africa Root Crops Research Network (EARRNET) in collaboration with the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization / Southern Agricultural Research Institute (EARO/SARI), IITA introduced, first, 117 clones from Nigeria.

Out of these, 42 genotypes reached the preliminary yield trial by 2007. Another set of 46 clones resistant to cassava mosaic disease (CMD) was introduced in 2005 from EARRNET through the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Services (KEPHIS).

"Six clones were advanced directly into multilocation trials in six locations with good performance; the rest were evaluated at Awasa Research Centre," explained Dr Ntawuruhunga.

According to him, two clones (44/72 Red and 104 Nigeria Red) introduced from Nigeria in the 1990s were officially released and are being promoted through multiplication in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations and private



Cassava scientist with farmers in cassava field in Amaro district, south of Hawasa, Ethiopia

companies.

But since the end of EARRNET in 2007, Dr Ntawuruhunga said this collaboration ceased and no information has been collected from that country.

To move cassava forward, Drs. Assefa and Ntawuruhunga noted that additional efforts are needed to multiply, distribute the selected varieties, and scale up through participatory mechanisms along the value chain.

"Because of the increasing demand for cassava, there is a need to strengthen research. Apart from breeding new varieties, we also need to understand the agronomic practices associated with the crop," Assefa concluded.

IITA participates in priority setting and background analysis workshop for the Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) research program



RTB meeting participants, CIAT.

Researchers from IITA, Bioversity, CIAT, and CIP met last week at CIAT headquarters in Cali, Colombia, to advance geographic targeting and priority setting for CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB). The workshop focused on background analysis for the larger RTB priority setting process that extends into the middle of 2013. The aim of the work is to consider the geographic dimensions of priority setting for the RTB crops – potato, sweet potato, yam, cassava, banana, plantain, and others. RTB researchers include professionals from the GIS labs of the four partner centers, economists working in impact assessment, and several others. The team is analyzing problems and opportunities for RTB crop development, such as poverty and socioeconomic conditions where these crops are prevalent, biotic and abiotic constraints to crop production, and yield gaps.

The key activity in the analysis looks at the spatial coincidence of RTB crops with poverty, population, demography, drought, excessive heat, soil constraints, pest and disease problems, and other considerations affecting locations to target R&D interventions. Where should RTB focus efforts? What are the best bets for targeting technology to its ecological and socioeconomic niche? The team is working to answer these questions and many more. Other activities in the project include a broad-scale yield gap analysis for identifying the places where R&E might have the most impact, places where crop yields are well below their potential. Finally, the team is creating an online digital atlas on everything related to RTB crop development. IITA was represented by Tahiroou Abdoulaye, Kirscht Holger, and Tunrayo Alabi.

Welcome!

Mr Kwame Akuffo-Akoto, a Ghanaian national, who has assumed duty in IITA-Headquarters, Ibadan, as the Deputy Director General, Corporate Services. Mr Akuffo-Akoto has over 30 years experience in all aspects of finance, accounting, treasury and banking, auditing, human resources management and general administration. He is a certified chartered accountant (South West London College, UK).

Prior to this new appointment, he was the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer at the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Nairobi, Kenya. He started his international career with the CGIAR as the Financial Controller with the Africa Rice Centre in Liberia, rising to the position of Director of Administration and Finance. In 1996, he moved to the International Crop Research Institute for



the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in Hyderabad, India, as Director for Finance and then Director, Finance and Administration. From 2002 to 2007, he worked

at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), in Los Baños, Philippines, as the Director for Corporate Services.

He is accompanied by his wife Ama Serwa. He resides at No. 1 Tropical Crescent on IITA campus. His office is in room 207, Building 500. He can be contacted on extension 2773; secretary, 2609. His e-mail address is K.Akuffo-Akoto@cgiar.org.