



## IITA DG: Institute makes big strides but challenges still abound

In the last 3 years IITA has grown tremendously. It has seen nearly a doubling of its staff and tripling of its budget. This has been a result of the Institute's drive to motivate and invest in its people, facilities, and partnerships. However, the staff should not rest on their laurels as there are still challenges ahead as IITA strives to deliver on its new refreshed strategy and to face further restructuring of the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs).

This was the focus of a talk by Dr Nteranya Sanginga, IITA's DG, to all the Institute's staff in Tanzania. The DG was in the country to recruit the Head of Advocacy and Resource Mobilization and, in line with his principle of openness and transparency, used the opportunity to brief staff on the latest developments and share his future plans for the Institute.

The DG briefed the staff on the outcomes of the recent Board meeting held in Uganda, 23-26 November, where he presented the Institute's achievements in the last 3 years under his leadership and also on his plans for the next 3 years.

"IITA cannot function without its people," he said. "They are one of our most important assets. In 2 years we were able to double our budget. We also looked into the promotion of staff...However, salary alone is not enough. So in addition



*DG Sanginga talking to staff.*

we strengthened our capacity building activities. We also started a Talent Grant program that gives people the opportunity to undertake courses they are interested in and which are useful to the institute" he said.

While IITA had taken big strides in many areas including increasing its budget from US\$47 million to 128 million, between 2011 and 2015, there are areas for improvement. For example, the project execution level was low, averaging 84%. This, he said, was denying the Institute much-needed income in terms of charging overheads—around US\$10–15 million annually.

"In 2015, major decisions will be made on the future of the CRPs. We need to position IITA very well and demonstrate where we are strong. For example, we are very strong in West Africa. In Tanzania, we can argue it is going to be the bread basket of Africa."

In his visit the DG was accompanied by Dr Ken Dashiell, the Deputy Director General for Partnership and Capacity Development; Dr Kristina Roing de Nowina, Proposal Development Coordinator; Toyin Oke, Head of Resource Mobilization, Protocol and External Liaison; and Lucy Omidiran, Human Resources Manager.

## CRP leads meet in IITA Ibadan

As part of the R4D (Directorate) plan for the year, the second meeting of the CRP Coordinators was held in Ibadan on 4 and 5 December. Present at the meeting were Dr Ylva. Hillbur (Chair), Bussie Maziya-Dixon (Agriculture for Health and Nutrition or A4HN), Stefan Hauser (Humidtropics), Arega Alene (Policies, Institutions and Markets or PIM), Michael Abberton (GeneBank), Peter Kulakow (Roots, Tubers and Bananas or RTB), Alpha Kamara (Water, Land and Ecosystems or WLE), and Manu Tamo (Grain Legumes or GL).

The Coordinators presented updates on their programs, administration and engagements, as well as interactions with lead centers. The strategy for the extension/second phase of the CRPs was also discussed. They also shared their achievements and exchanged ideas on how to overcome challenges.



*DDG for R4D Ylva Hillbur (third from right) met with the CRP leads including (left-right) Arega Alene, Alpha Kamara, Manuele Tamo, Peter Kulakow, Bussie Maziya-Dixon, and Michael Abberton.*

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

## Oyo farmers pledge commitment to join researchers in fighting aflatoxin

Maize farmers in Oyo State in Nigeria have pledged their commitment to continue to partner with IITA researchers to improve people's health and nutrition through the use of aflasafe™ to fight aflatoxin and its hazardous effects.

They made this commitment during the visit of the AgResults Aflasafe team comprising Natalie Gogue from Deloitte Monitoring; Debo Akande, Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, Lawrence Kaptoge, and Joseph Atehnkeng from IITA; and Dennis Mainville from Abt Associates to Igbeti in Olorunsogo Local Government Area of Oyo State. These farmers join others in northern Nigeria who are already reaping improved and healthy maize yields as a result of using aflasafe and improved crop management practices. Earlier in the day, USAID officials Xavier Preciado, Nduka Okaro, and Alefia Merchant reiterated the US Government's support for various projects in IITA.

Alhaji Ibrahim spoke for the farmers. He recounted the benefits that the use of the biocontrol product has had on their enterprise and said that the farmers were optimistic that the good days had begun.

"I am particularly willing to go all the way with IITA," he said, "because I understand what hazards aflatoxins pose, particularly cancer and death both for children and adults. The information about the menace led to an increase in our health consciousness and as a result, we are producing not only for financial gains but with the recognition that we are contributing to better living conditions for whoever consumes our produce."

Adetoro Oluwayemisi, another farmer, said, "Even in the face of the rainfall



L-R: IITA's Drs Ranajit and Joseph (third) in the company of implementers from DAK Farms examining the maize grown with Aflasafe.

irregularity that we have experienced this year, I can see the improvements on my field. The cobs are big, very neat, and weevil-free... Working with the AgResults Aflasafe implementers from Dak Farms has also improved my confidence to use aflasafe. I know I have an assured market for my aflatoxin-reduced grains."

Dr Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, IITA pathologist, who was delighted to hear the farmers ask questions, enjoined them to employ best management practices. This is particularly important to obtain the full benefits of the technology, he said. He advised them to consume the aflatoxin-reduced maize that they produce.

"Although you are cultivating with aflasafe to get premium prices, keep some of the grains for your household consumption. The grains are safe and will help in improving your household's health."

Ms Gogue also encouraged the implementers to help the farmers to surmount the challenges they continually experience in production by linking them to sources of inputs and supplies, particularly seed companies where they can have access to quality and drought tolerant seeds to purchase. They should provide technical assistance from pre- to post-planting and also monitor the farmers periodically to ensure adherence to standards, she said.

AgResults Aflasafe is working with Dak Farms and eight other implementers in Nigeria to reach about 4000 farmers in 2014 and provide inputs, training, and management advice to increase maize yields to up to 4 t/ha.

AgResults Aflasafe Pilot is supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Governments of Australia, Canada, UK, and USA.

## Gates Foundation team visits farmers in Kaduna State



Ms Leigh Morgan (standing), Mr Richard Lake (squatting), and Dr Alfred Dixon (in hat) with a group of women farmers at Igabi LGA in Northern Kaduna.

A team from the Gates Foundation visited two locations in Kaduna State to interact with the beneficiary farmers and monitor the field activities, achievements, and improvements in livelihoods on 3 November. The team, led by Dr Jacob Mignouna, Senior Program Officer, was accompanied by representatives from IITA. The farmers are beneficiaries of several projects: N2 Africa, Tropical Legumes II, aflasafe, and Integrated Striga Management (ISMA) which are being funded by the Gates Foundation. The team wanted to better understand the constraints farmers faced and solutions proffered by IITA especially with the Foundation's support. The team included Ms Leigh Morgan, the Chief Operating Officer of the Gates Foundation; Ms Jodi Nelson, the Director of Strategy, Measurement and Evaluation;

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## Gates Foundation team visits farmers in Kaduna State ... from page 2

Mr Richard Lake, the Director of Security; and Dr Mairo Mandara, the Country Representative.

At Kajuru Local Government area (LGA) in southern Kaduna State, the team met a group of 200 representative farmers (including District Heads and extension agents). The farmers were able to narrate their experiences and how the projects have changed their livelihoods. They also mentioned the existing challenges. Also present were the Directors of Kaduna State Agriculture Development Program (ADP). At the second site in Igabi LGA in northern Kaduna, the team visited a farmer's field which was completely infested with Striga weed. In addition to the Striga problem, the area has very poor soils, which has necessitated IITA's intervention in the area. The Gates Foundation team interacted with a group of 150 men and women farmers. They appreciated the livelihood

activities carried out by women farmers in Igabi LGA including postharvest value addition of the products from soybean and cowpea. They also interacted with the male farmers who narrated some of the successes achieved by the projects in their area as well as some of the challenges. IITA was represented by Dr Mel Oluoch (ISMA Project Manager), Dr Emmanuel Sangodele (N2 Africa Country Coordinator), Dr Alfred Dixon (Cassava Weeds Project leader), and the research staff, Bassey Ukem, Esther Chinedu, Sadiq Bako, Joseph Abikoye, and George Uchebe.

The farmers in the two communities are involved in producing Striga resistant maize, Striga resistant cowpea, soybean (inoculated with rhizobia for increased productivity), using aflasafe for control of aflatoxins in maize and groundnut, community seed production; and field

demonstrations of different project technologies.

The farmers mentioned many challenges that included lack of seeds, R4D products (aflasafe/inoculant) and tractors, the need for more farmers/groups' involvement in the projects, postharvest processing, e.g., threshing after harvesting, expanding utilization, and linkages to markets, which can be summarized as a need for scaling up and expansion of these projects to address some of the relevant challenges. Ms Morgan addressed the farmers in both locations. She recognized their achievements and challenges and encouraged more IITA intervention in their communities to address the challenges. She also recognized the magnitude of the Striga problem and called for a holistic approach.

The Gates Foundation funds several diverse Agricultural and Health projects in northern Nigeria.

## DDG Dashiell visits IITA-Zambia

From 1 to 2 December, Dr Ken Dashiell, DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Development, visited the IITA-Zambia station in Lusaka to make presentations and hold discussions with staff regarding the latest developments in the Institute, see the progress of the construction of the campus facilities for the Southern Africa Research and Administrative Hub (SARAH) and to participate in the contract review of Dr Hesham Agrama, Soybean Breeder.

At the meeting with IITA-Zambia staff, Dr Dashiell gave the presentation that DG Nteranya Sanginga made to IITA-Ibadan staff on 17-18 November. In the presentation, Dr Dashiell updated staff on the latest accomplishments, strategies, and vital reforms affecting the Institute.

He also reiterated Management's commitment to look after staff welfare, particularly in the area of skills development. He specifically encouraged the station staff to take advantage of IITA's annual Talent Grant, saying that NRS, especially in the regions, should maximize this opportunity for further skills training to advance their careers, whether at IITA or somewhere else.

Dr Dashiell was asked about tips to improve their chances of getting their Talent Grant applications approved, and replied, "Ask your supervisors for guidance, especially in framing your grant justification and budget. It would also help if you highlight how such training will help you to improve your current work and how it will contribute to realizing IITA's mission and vision. Remember that there are opportunities for everybody to win."

The previous day, the DDG visited the SARAH site at Kabangwe, Lusaka, to see the progress of the construction of the research and administrative buildings.



*Dr Dashiell having a lively discussion about a cassava machinery at the SARAH site.*

Dr David Chikoye, Southern Africa Regional Director, and Dr Pheneas Ntwaruhunga, Cassava Breeder, accompanied him on the tour of the site. "I am very sure that SARAH will be an impressive research facility once it is completed – probably one of the best and most advanced in the country and in the region, something that IITA will be proud of," Dr Dashiell emphasized.

At the site, Dr Chikoye briefed Dr Dashiell on the ongoing construction. He said that it was imperative to have the site ready in time for the next Board meeting scheduled for May 2015 which IITA-Zambia will be hosting. Dr Chikoye also showed the DDG some of the machinery and equipment temporarily housed at the site, ready for installation and use once the buildings are up, as well as the future

locations of the various crop research plots.

Meanwhile, Dr Dashiell attended the contract review of Dr Agrama on 2 December at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Lusaka and said, "Being a soybean scientist myself, I am very interested in the progress of soybean research in the southern Africa region, where Dr Agrama plays a key research role." The DDG sat as a member of the contract review panel.

At the conclusion of his visit, Dr Dashiell said, "I am really glad to have visited IITA-Zambia again. I must say that I am very impressed at the rapid developments here, both in terms of infrastructure and staffing, given that the Hub was established only about 3 or 4 years ago and started with just two staff. I am already looking forward to my next trip back here."

## Vitamin A Cassava model sales outlet launched in Ibadan

The fight against hidden hunger went one step stronger in Nigeria as a model vitamin A cassava sales outlet in Ibadan was launched by HarvestPlus-Nigeria in conjunction with its development partners and Nollywood actors led by Zeb Ejiro on 9 December at Idiase, opposite IITA, Ibadan.

The model outlet is part of the HarvestPlus strategy to ensure that Nigerians have access to the biofortified cassava crop to address the health challenges of vitamin A deficiency manifesting in poor vision, blindness, low immunity and poor body tissue development which commonly affects 30% of Nigerian children under 5 years and 20% of pregnant women.

With over 500,000 households currently planting and consuming the product across the country, and over 550 commercial farmers on board in the multiplication of the nutritious crop on over 1000 ha of farmland, the need to scale out the product to more Nigerians to make the crop accessible to them became the next line of action.

“This is just a model,” according to Paul Ilona, HarvestPlus Country Manager. “We need to establish 300 of these model sales outlets so that more Nigerians can enjoy the health benefits of the crop. We need partners to buy into this initiative to make it a reality across the length and breadth of the country.”

The model sales outlet will be known as the ‘Farmers’ Center.’ It will link suppliers of the product (farmers and processors) with demand agents (bulking agents, entrepreneurs, and consumers) of the product. It is therefore a one-stop sales outlet that will cater to all the products of vitamin A cassava – stems, roots, fufu mash, gari, fufu, packaged fufu flour, and confectionary (cakes, chin chin, titbits, and pies).



Baale of Idi-Ose officially opens the outlet assisted by Ina Schonberg and Paul Ilona.

Dr Ina Schonberg, Deputy Director, HarvestPlus, launched the shop jointly with the paramount ruler of Idiase, Ibadan. She said it was a flagship program in the HarvestPlus organization. A lot was expected of the Country Program to reach out to remote areas to make vitamin A cassava products accessible to all.

“We look forward to seeing Nigeria develop innovative strategies to scale up vitamin A cassava as well as vitamin A maize and build sustainability for the project in the country. That is why we applaud the support and partnership of the traditional chiefs and the Nollywood stars in attendance, as they will help to carry this message further to their people.”

The presence of Nollywood actors and film directors—Segun Arinze, Emeka Ossai, Chico Ejiro, and Zeb Ejiro—at the launching electrified the atmosphere

as their names were excitedly called by their fans. Zeb Ejiro, Nigeria’s ace movie producer, used the opportunity to commend HarvestPlus’ use of movies to promote awareness of vitamin A cassava.

Zeb Ejiro said the Yellow Cassava movie would be put on DVDs and CDs and featured on DSTV, and that it would be made in other Nigerian languages such as Urhobo and Kanuri apart from the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa versions that have already been produced. He also noted that a film on the making of the Yellow Cassava movie would be produced.

The launching of the model sales outlet was witnessed by scientists from IITA led by Dr Elizabeth Parkes, a Cassava Breeder, HarvestPlus development partners from Akwa-Ibom, Benue, Imo, and Oyo States, farmers, cassava processors, bulking agents, entrepreneurs, and members of the press.

## IITA holds end-of-year family day and marks 20 years in Tanzania

As a tradition, IITA in Tanzania held a family fun day that brought together all of its staff and their family members in Dar es Salaam to celebrate the end of yet another successful year for the Institute. Also in attendance were staff and family

members of the partner institutions hosted at the Hub including the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

The event was attended by over 250 people, reflecting the growth the Hub had experienced over the year. This was also noted by the Hub Director, Dr Victor Manyong, while addressing the participants during the occasion.

Dr Manyong said 2014 had been a successful year for the Institute which had seen it significantly increase its budget, projects, and human resources. He noted that the Hub had successfully hosted the CGIAR Consortium Board meeting in March, initiated new projects including one on banana research, and seen a significant increase in its staff numbers.

During the event, Dr Manyong cut a cake to mark 20 years of research in Tanzania.

He was assisted by Dr Edward Kanju, Cassava Breeder and one of the longest serving scientists at the Hub.

“This year is also a special year for IITA in Tanzania, Dr Manyong said, “as we mark our 20th anniversary of conducting research to improve the lives of smallholder farmers in the country. We have achieved a lot in our 20 years here and we are looking forward to having even more impact. I therefore take this opportunity to thank all the staff at IITA for their hard work and dedication and to wish them and their families a happy Christmas and prosperous New Year.”

The day-long event saw the staff, partners, and their families engaged in fun activities and games including beach volleyball, soccer, egg and spoon and sack races, and a tug of war. There was also plenty of food and music. All in all, it was a good way to end the year.



Teamwork during a tug-of-war.