



Beneficiaries commend IITA-AGRA training course

Beneficiaries of the AGRA-IITA training course on good laboratory practices and laboratory information management systems have commended the two institutions for building their capacities, saying that the training they received was helping to make them more efficient.

During a visit by AGRA-IITA team to the Nigerian Institute of Science Laboratory Technology (NISLT), Samonda, Ibadan; one of the beneficiaries, Nkem Michael-Uwaje, who is also a staff of NISLT explained how she has been able to put into effective use the knowledge she gathered from the training and how this has positively affected the quality of her work and those of her colleagues especially with the tips on how to generate internal control samples with the aid of certified reference material.

“Before the AGRA-funded training, protocols/laboratory operations in the unit were poor, but this situation has improved,” she said while taking the team comprising Marie Rarieya, AGRA Program Officer, and Joseph Uponi, Manager, IITA Analytical Services Lab, on a tour of her laboratory.

“Also during the training, I met and networked with other professionals from different countries in Africa. Since then, our network has grown. I am now able to keep a close tab on my colleagues and compare my work with what they are doing in other African countries. This way, I have been able to monitor how well my work is going. It was really an exciting time for me,” she added.



Dr Rarieya (fifth from right), Uponi (fourth from right), beneficiaries, and staff of NISLT

Nkem is just one among the several persons trained this year, thanks to funds from AGRA. Also in attendance during the visit were two other beneficiaries of the training from the Institute of Agricultural Research and Training (IART) Ibadan, namely Ms Tayo-Aruna Abidemi and Mr Popoola Joseph.

Receiving the team, Dr Ighodalo F. Ijagbone, Director General, NISLT, said the Institute’s collaboration with IITA and AGRA in training and research had been very productive, especially as laboratory practice was concerned.

As a regulator of lab practice, Dr Ijagbone said, “We will support whatever role you want us to play. One of our core functions is capacity building and we have our members across universities, institutes, and polytechnics.”

Dr Rarieya said the aim of the visit was to strengthen partnerships across the institutions.

“AGRA strongly values partnerships and networking...And for us to create impact, we need to build capacity, from farmers to laboratory technicians. In AGRA we are constantly thinking of how we can work with partners to increase productivity,” she explained.

She pledged to strengthen the partnership already established with the institute especially as NISLT will be hosting the in-country course in soil and plant analysis in January 20–24, 2014. Similar in-country training will also take place in collaboration with Kwame Nkrumah University from January 6–11, 2014 for laboratory technicians in Ghana.

Workshop on ISFM held in Ibadan



Participants at the workshop on ISFM

More than 30 researchers converged on the Conference Center of IITA Ibadan campus for a 3-day conference tagged: “Supporting soil health consortia in West Africa: facilitating wider uptake of better adapted Integrated Soil Fertility

Management (ISFM) practices with visible positive impacts on rural livelihoods.”

The goal of the workshop is to improve agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers by promoting the uptake of appropriate ISFM technologies.

The event was declared open by Dr Ylva Hillbur, IITA DDG (Research), who introduced participants to IITA’s ongoing research, mission, and milestones achieved over the years as well as happenings across all hubs.

Dr Marie Rarieya, AGRA Program Officer, Education and Training Soil Health Program (SHP) underscored the importance of soil health in the agricultural value chain, and attributed the low agric productivity in Africa to declining soil fertility.

She noted that AGRA has taken a huge step in addressing this gap but pointed out that there has to be a consensus on goals and more concerted efforts by all stakeholders involved.

“Research must be upscaled to meet up with the agricultural transformation in Africa and this can only be achieved through a synergetic effort of all partners” she said.

The meeting was facilitated by Stefan Hauser (Root and Tuber Systems Agronomist) and Zoumana Bamba, IITA Head of Capacity Development.

IITA co-hosts the 6th International Nitrogen Conference in Kampala, Uganda



Participants at the nitrogen conference

IITA co-hosted the successful 6th International Nitrogen Conference from 18 to 22 November 2013 in Kampala, Uganda. It brought together 168 delegates from 37 countries, including scientists, agriculturalists, environmentalists, industrialists, economists, and policy-makers, to discuss issues linked to nitrogen management. These included food security, human health, agriculture, and the water cycle.

On the last day, participants at the conference developed the Kampala Declaration on global nitrogen management. Details will be announced soon.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Prof Mateete Bekunda, the Convener of the conference, challenged the participants to come up with a Kampala Declaration that was an “Agenda for Action” in response to the conference theme: “Let us aim for Just Enough Nitrogen: Perspectives on how to get there for “too much” and “too little” regions.”

Also present during the opening ceremony

was Dr Bernard Vanlauwe who relayed the goodwill message from IITA’s Director General to the participants and gave the first keynote address on Nitrogen fixation intensification and Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM).

Other speakers included Prof. Mark Sutton, the Chair of the International Nitrogen Initiative (INI). He said that the challenge of reactive nitrogen management encompassed many sectors, including agriculture, fossil fuels, waste water, and our own dietary choices.

He added, “In western countries there is a debate between conventional foods and organic foods which completely exclude nitrogen fertilizers. The general sense at the conference was that there is a need to explore and market options that get the best of both approaches.”

Another high profile personality who gave a keynote speech was the World Food Prize Laureate, Prof Pedro Sanchez, who

said that enabling government policies must facilitate private sector development across the food value chain from soil to the fork.

Conference presentations highlighted the benefits of nitrogen for agriculture and the threats from too much and too little. Delegates discussed the development of sustainable ways of managing nitrogen. It was noted that while developed countries needed to learn to manage nitrogen resources more effectively, those in sub-Saharan Africa needed to increase their input of nitrogen fertilizer to meet food security goals. However, they also needed to take care to avoid nitrogen pollution.

The conference was the world’s first to offer Nitrogen Neutrality. Nearly two in three of the delegates signed up to the scheme to offset the nitrogen footprint of organizing the Conference by paying 50 dollars to an N Neutrality project, the Ruhira Millennium Village.

The conference was hosted and supported by the International Nitrogen Initiative, Makerere University which provided the Secretariat, Uganda’s National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), and IITA. Other supporting institutions were International Fertilizer Association (IFA), International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI), Africa RISING, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Global Partnership on Nutrition Management (GPNM), N2Africa, European Commission, and the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). Conference abstracts and sanctioned Power Point presentations are being uploaded on www.n2013.org.

DDG (CS), Akuffo-Akoto, commends IITA administrators



Station administrators with DDG Akuffo-Akoto

Kwame Akuffo-Akoto, IITA DDG (Corporate Services) held a special session with administrators during the R4D Week, and lauded their contributions to the Institute’s mission and goals.

“I am pleased with the work you are doing at the stations,” he said.

He, however, noted that there was need for improvement in view of the task ahead.

The meeting provided the administrators the opportunity to rub minds, compare notes, review the past and re-strategize for the future.

NRS-MSA walk for productivity

IITA NRS Management Staff Association (MSA) held a 5-kilometer walk tagged, “Walk for Productivity,” the first of its kind by the association, on Friday, 6 December 2013.

The walk was part of efforts to encourage good health through regular exercises.

NRS-MSA President, Kayode Awobajo, said besides enhancing good health, the event also promoted unity among staff, a necessary ingredient for productivity.



Staff on “Walk for Productivity”