



## IITA and WACCI in a strategic alliance to increase plant breeders in Africa



*Prof Eric Danquah making a presentation in IITA-Ibadan*

IITA and the West Africa Center for Crop Improvement (WACCI) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at training plant breeders in Africa—a strategic move to boost the number of plant breeders on the continent.

Under the agreement, WACCI, a center at the University of Ghana, will send postgraduate students to IITA for 3 years to carry out research in plant breeding. Students will have access to IITA facilities and will be supervised by senior IITA scientists.

WACCI and IITA see this alliance as a panacea that will halt the dwindling number of plant breeders in Africa.

"African breeders will train on the problems facing African crops with the hope that they will remain in Africa," Prof. Eric Danquah, Director of WACCI, said.

"We need an African approach to address Africa's food productivity challenges," he added.

Over the years a dearth of capacity in plant breeding has hit Africa with the best breeders training abroad but never coming back to the continent. Breeders on the continent are equally getting old and most of them are entering retirement age. Africa, which desires to have its own Green Revolution, is plagued by a plethora of problems including biotic and abiotic stresses that limit productivity. To address these problems, Africa needs seeds that will overcome these stresses.

"This means breeding seeds that will perform well and give farmers better returns in the face of these challenges," Danquah said.

"To get the manpower that will be able to do the task requires new thinking and new strategies," he added.

The alliance with WACCI will boost IITA's role in building capacity in Africa.

In its 45 years of existence as Africa's leading research partner, more than 74,000 people in Africa and elsewhere have received training in IITA. Some of these beneficiaries today occupy strategic positions in Africa.

Dr Kenton Dashiell, Deputy Director General (Partnerships and Capacity Building), said that building capacities of breeders would help in ensuring food security in Africa.

He welcomed the alliance with WACCI, noting that IITA alone cannot do it all, hence, the need for partnerships.

WACCI was established in 2007 as a center for crop improvement similar to the Africa Center for Crop Improvement (ACCI) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Both centers receive funding support from Rockefeller Foundation and the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). The centers recruit students from national agricultural systems of 15 countries across East, West, and Southern Africa.

To date, 42 PhD students from 11 countries have graduated from ACCI, 128 students have been enrolled in both centers, and a further 30 will be enrolled in the next 2-3 years.

Graduates have already released 23 new crop varieties in Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Burkina Faso, and have published 85 research papers internationally.

Prof. Danquah visited IITA with Prof. Sam Kwame Ofei, Associate Director of WACCI and Provost of the College of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences.

## Sportsfest 2012: Beyond fun is good health

For some, the ongoing 2012 sports fest is a time for fun. Some see it as a platform for unity and internal cohesion. Still others perceive it as a tool for motivation. For IITA medical team, Sportsfest 2012 provides health benefits for staff.

The event offers diverse sporting activities to staff ranging from football, tennis, volleyball, board games, and trekking.

Last Friday, staff trekked 8 km around the campus in the first walkathon. Doctors say exercising by trekking could have a positive impact on an individual.

"Exercising is good in managing illnesses such as high blood pressure

and diabetes... it is good for staff to imbibe the culture of exercising to remain healthy," says Dr Samson Adeleke, Head of IITA Clinic.

The 8-km trek exercise attracted the highest number of participants in an event in the history of the sports festival.



*Staff on the 8-km trek in IITA Ibadan*

# IITA bids Lakshmi Menon and Subash Marcus farewell

A send-off in honor of Dr Lakshmi Menon, IITA Deputy Director General (DDG-Support), and Subash Marcus, Head of GIS, was held on Thursday. The program was led by Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG, Partnerships and Capacity Building.

The event offered staff the opportunity to thank the couple for their work in IITA and provide well wishes as they move on.

Colleagues described Lakshmi as an achiever, and a highly competent administrator with an analytical mind and good team building expertise.

Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA Director for West Africa, commended Lakshmi and Subash for their work and commitment to the institute's goals.

In her response, Lakshmi expressed appreciation to the Unit Heads under Support, scientists, and the general staff for the support given her during her tenure.

She also thanked Drs Paula Bramel (former DDG R4D) and Peter Hartmann, former Director General, for the opportunity given her to serve.

Subash also said he appreciated working for IITA and the intellectual and sociocultural diversity in the institute.

Lakshmi joined IITA in 2007 as DDG-Support, having worked with the UK Department for International Development, and Care International. Subash, who is Lakshmi's husband, took over the leadership of the GIS lab

in 2010.

Lakshmi will be joining the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Rome as the

Director of Corporate Services.

Ken Dashiell presented them with plaques of appreciation from the Institute.



*Subash (left) and Lakshmi (right) receive their plaques of appreciation from Ken*



*Staff in a group photo with Lakshmi and Subash*

## IITA International School marks 40th anniversary; Women's Group raises funds for good causes

Last weekend, the IITA International School held an Open House—an event that draws parents, pupils, and guests to the school—as part of its activities to mark the school's 40th anniversary.

The Open House, which is an annual event, allows pupils to display the skills they have acquired during their club meetings. They range from dancing to karate. Parents and friends

attend the Open House to watch their children display these talents. Carole Inniss-Palmer, Head of IITA International School, explains that the event gives pupils the opportunity to showcase their development. This year's event was no exception as the children performed well in front of a large audience. In addition, this year, the Open House took on a Funfair theme not only to celebrate the school's anniversary but also to raise funds. Raffle tickets were sold and many games were played.

This event also offered the IITA Women's Group the opportunity to raise funds for good causes. The women baked various items for sale. Mrs. Charlotte Sanginga said funds raised would be used for projects for this year, which include the provision of scholarships to students and visits to the motherless babies' homes in Ibadan. Mrs Sanginga thanked the International School for allowing the Women's Group to raise funds at this year's Open House.



*Pupils of IITA International School displaying their talents to mark the school's 40th anniversary during the Open House*