

The season to celebrate

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year.” So goes a line from a famous song, celebrating the Christmas season, with a melody that just goes on and on in your head. And for us here at IITA, it is indeed a most wonderful time to celebrate!

You see, I feel that 2014 has probably been the most successful year in IITA’s recent history. In my report to staff at our HQ in Ibadan, as well as to the Board of Trustees, 2014 marks the completion of Phase 1 of the implementation of our Refreshed Institutional Strategy which started in 2012 and ends in 2020. During this first phase we have been able to successfully align our own research with the more general Consortium Research Programs (CRPs) of the CGIAR and to mobilize more resources and source more funding for our R4D work.

After these past 2 years and culminating in 2014, we now have a more concerted research effort with our sister centers in the CGIAR as well as more available resources for our R4D work. This, in turn, means better opportunities to help our target beneficiaries—the resource-poor farmers—to get out of poverty.

To put things in context, our Vision of Success as outlined in our strategy has two aims: raise more than 11 million Africans out of poverty and redirect 7.5 million hectares of degraded land into sustainable and productive use. We intend to achieve this in three phases. And this year we pencil off Phase 1.

The holiday season is known to be the time for the young and the young at heart. This year also marks another watershed in our efforts to bring the



Dr. Nteranya Sanginga

youth back into the arms of agriculture, particularly through our IITA Youth in Agribusiness (IYA) program aka the Agripreneurs. We have expanded this program to the Congo, Burundi, and Tanzania; IITA-Zambia has also initiated contacts with various youth groups and private and public sector partners to start their own version of IYA. From all of these initiatives we have learned that to change the mindset of the youth about agriculture – which is not very favorable at the moment – we need to connect IYA to excellent sources of related technology and knowledge, as well as to provide a forum for counseling them and providing technical advice to motivate them to engage in agriculture.

Internally, staff morale at IITA is at an all-time high. Staff are more motivated now than ever before to contribute to the mission and vision of the Institute. We were able to achieve this by giving the staff opportunities to further their skills through various trainings and training grants. We have also continued to recognize outstanding people who have

shown exceptional initiative and performance in their work. After all, its people are the Institute’s greatest and most important asset.

In all, I am happy to say that we are now a “re-engineered” Institute, where research funds continue to grow, infrastructures are upgraded, morale is high, and partnerships flourish. As we move into 2015 and Phase 2 of our strategy implementation, I encourage everyone to build upon these successes and continue to strive towards a better future for our Institute but even more for the people that we serve. Indeed, it is the most wonderful time of the year!

And as we go about celebrating this festive season, I enjoin everyone not to forget to say a little prayer for those who have less. We are, after all, here because of them and for them.

So, from our family to yours, here’s wishing you the Best of the Holiday Season and Glad Tidings for the coming New Year. See you next time!



Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions every Wednesday to Andrea Gros (a.gros@cgiar.org), 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).

IITA Forest Project opens a new Ethnobotanical Garden

The IITA Forest Project, which protects and maintains one of the last remaining and best protected forests in southwestern Nigeria, has a new Ethnobotanical Garden to showcase native plants of Yorubaland, their uses, and conservation. The garden was opened on 12 December by IITA Director General Dr Nteranya Sanginga before an invited audience, including six traditional rulers of Yorubaland, herbalists, scientists, sponsors, and IITA staff and students.

During his opening address, Dr Sanginga said the new Ethnobotanical Garden and the IITA Forest Reserve were part of the natural heritage and resources for Ibadan and Nigeria, holding priceless biodiversity, including some rare and endangered species. He supported the significance of the garden by sharing his experiences both as a student and as Director General of the Institute.

“The conservation of the IITA forest dates back before 1981 when I was a student here. From IITA’s earliest days it was realized that if this portion of our campus was not preserved then the resources and biodiversity that our unique Forest conserves today would be lost...as DG I have had the privilege of hosting students and high political officers, including Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the former Nigerian President, and they were all overwhelmed to see the richness of the IITA forest.” He added, “To preserve this heritage, IITA is taking a cue from the forest conservation lessons of the DR Congo which conserves forests not only for the nation but for the



Deni Bown introducing the Garden and its importance to Yorubaland and the region

world, and not only for the benefit of today but for generations yet unborn.”

Deni Bown, Manager of the IITA Forest Project, also reiterated that a concerted effort was needed to halt the trend of deforestation in the region.

“High demand for exotic forest products by the international market is speeding up deforestation today. For instance, in 2 years, more than 80% of forests in Nigeria where the Rosewood trees grow have been cleared for the Chinese market. This statistic, joined with the other trends experienced every day, sounds a clarion call to save the plants that save us.”

The new Ethnobotanical Garden will

help to increase awareness of vanishing plant resources. Its aims are to:

- cultivate, propagate, and display plants of practical and cultural importance in Yorubaland, record the uses of native plants, and encourage the setting up of other gardens,
- provide materials and information for training, education, and research,
- store seeds of ‘at risk’ species in IITA’s Genetic Resources Center,
- partner with other organizations in the conservation of indigenous plants, and
- organize guided walks, garden programs and hire of the garden for the enjoyment of the Yoruba plant heritage.

ISMA Project delivers research output in northern Nigeria

The project *Integrated Striga Management in Africa* (ISMA) has used an innovative approach through sustainable partnerships and communication strategies to help scale up the dissemination of technologies to small-scale farmers. Public and private sector partnerships have been established in both Kenya and Nigeria to exploit the synergy

of the diversity of partners for the successful implementation and scaling up of activities to increase adoption and sustainability.

A Mid-term and Cost-benefit survey study in Nigeria identified field days, participation in on-farm demonstrations, extension agents, and crop yields as the most important factors that influence the adoption of *Striga* management

technologies on-farm. Using the results of this and additional studies, such as surveys of farmers’ perceptions and exercises for mid- and end of season feedback monitoring, the project has used the lessons learnt to re-orient its dissemination approaches to heighten the impact of the technologies being disseminated.

IITA and the project partners, Kano Agriculture and Rural Development Authority (KNARDA) and Bauchi State Agricultural Development Program (BSADP), organized on-farm field days at the local government and community levels as a dissemination strategy to enhance quality adaptive research and to demonstrate and encourage the adoption of these improved technologies to increase agricultural productivity. The project partners identified and joined with progressive lead farmers and other producers (both crop and seed) who are already applying “best management practices” to help scale out the *Striga* technologies on-farm.



L-R IITA’s Dr Mel Oluoch (Second) and Reuben Solomon, Research Supervisor (third) with Dr Dauda Abdullahi, (sixth), Luka Daniel (second) and other Directors of Bauchi ADP and Traditional Leaders during a field day exercise in Bauchi State.

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During September and October, 86 field days (30 in Kano State and 56 in Bauchi State) were organized and attended by a total of 5457 farmers (2430 in Kano and 3027 in Bauchi).

In addition, the leading partners from BSADP, KNARDA, lead farmers, and Dr Mel Oluoch, the ISMA Project Manager, gave several live radio and television interviews (at national, State, and community levels). The strategy has helped to reach thousands of policymakers, NARES, private sector personnel, and farmer beneficiaries and

helped to increase awareness on *Striga* management technologies in northern Nigeria.

Within the last 3 years, the ISMA project has directly reached over 270,000 smallholder farmers in northern Nigeria and 120,000 in western Kenya with thousands more being reached through the mass media and other channels. With these established broad partnerships, the ISMA project is poised to scale out project outputs beyond the target areas in the coming years.

The project leverages on a broad range

of partners to promote the use of proven technologies to smallholder farmers in Bauchi and Kano States. These include planting herbicide resistant maize coated with imazapyr, intercropping cereals with the specific *Striga*-suppressing forage legume *Desmodium* (push-pull), planting *Striga* resistant maize varieties and hybrids, rotating maize with soybean or cowpea, intercropping legumes with maize, and testing and validating the efficiency of the biocontrol of *Striga* with a fungus (*Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. Strigae*).

IITA trains Syngenta technicians, staff, others



Training participants with facilitators in a group photo

A training course on the conduct and management of field trials, seed processing and marketing was organized by IITA, 1-5 December, to upgrade the skills of Syngenta staff and partners in Nigeria. The training course involved 23 technicians and seed production specialists as well as Seed Production Managers drawn from Syngenta, the CBOs, and Agricultural Research Institutions in Nigeria. The course offered a rare opportunity for the staff of Syngenta and partners to upgrade their skills in the production of hybrid seeds, marketing, seed business management, and the conduct and management of field experiments.

Hilde Koper, Head IITA Project Administration Office, represented Dr Kenton Dashiell, the Deputy DG Partnerships and Capacity Development. In her welcome address she said that the training was an important step in the collaboration between both

organizations. IITA's long involvement in agricultural research was at a stage where collaborations with the private sector showed the promise of facilitating agricultural solutions to hunger, poverty, and natural resource degradation throughout the tropics.

"Over the last few years IITA has come to realize that to reach our mission, farmers all over sub-Saharan Africa need access to all the results of our research... For that to happen, it is important that we work with the private sector. Our collaboration with Syngenta is one of the first partnerships of this type and we are very happy that we have this opportunity," said Hilde.

She added, "We are looking forward to Syngenta assisting us in Nigeria (and hopefully further afield in future) to get good quality seeds, farm inputs, and improved technologies to both small and large-scale farmers in all corners of the country."

Dr Baffour Badu-Apraku, IITA's

maize breeder, also said that the training employed both practical and theoretical approaches and specifically aimed at upgrading the technical capabilities and skills of field technicians, seed specialists, and production managers of Syngenta in the conduct and management of field trials, seed processing, packaging, conditioning, testing, marketing of maize, and seed business management. "We expect that through this training, participants will have a full grasp of the factors limiting maize seed production and deployment in West Africa and be able to lay out field trials successfully using different experimental designs, analyze and interpret field data, harvest, test, process, package, and profitably market maize seeds," said Dr Badu-Apraku.

Dr BaffourAsafo-Adjei, IITA's breeder, delivered a lecture entitled *Importance of maize and biotic and abiotic constraints to production in West and Central Africa*. He highlighted the fact that maize was a prominent feature in both human and animal diets. The crop offered diverse uses for households and industries and generated employment for the teeming population. However, production in the region was greatly constrained by problems such as the shortage of seeds of improved varieties, inputs, markets, as well as low soil fertility, *Striga* infestation, and a host of other biotic and abiotic factors.

Other resource persons of the training course were Drs Tahirou Abdoulaye, Prof. M.A.B. Fakorede, Michael Aderounmu, Sam Ofodile, Prof. J.E. Onyibe, and Prof. Ajayi who all gave lectures on various subjects.

Announcement

This is the last Bulletin issue for 2014 from the IITA Communication Team. Publication will resume on 9 January 2015. We wish you, our esteemed audience, a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year in advance.

