



## IITA successfully hosts Consortium Board meeting



*Consortium Board members with IITA and other CGIAR staff*

IITA Eastern Africa hub buzzed with activity this week as it hosted CGIAR Consortium Board meeting from 17 to 22 March. The event brought together the Board of Directors of CGIAR Consortium led by the Chair Dr Carlos Pérez del Castillo, members of the Fund Council, and the 15 Directors General from the 15 CGIAR centers.

The Institute organized a series of side events to give an overview of the wide range of research activities being carried out by IITA, other centers, and their national partners in the country. These included two one-hour science sessions, a welcome cocktail hosted by IITA as well as a field trip to see ongoing research on Roots, Banana and Tubers including work on cassava value addition.

### Welcome to the country

During the first science session CGIAR Consortium Board members were warmly welcomed to the country by various representatives of the government, and their support to boosting agriculture was lauded. The Assistant Permanent Secretary in the Tanzania Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, Irrigation and Cooperatives, Engr. Raphael Daluti led in this effort. He welcomed CGIAR delegation to the country and noted its contributions, through

its various centers, to the development of the agricultural sector in Tanzania since the seventies. He pointed out the work done on development of improved varieties of some of the most important crops for smallholder farmers in the country such as maize, banana, cassava, and beans.

“We have many examples of ways we have benefitted from the fruits of the centers’ agricultural research including improved varieties for maize, rice, sorghum, cassava, and agroforestry trees. These improved varieties are now grown by many farmers using recommended agronomic and plant protection packages and we are currently more food secure as a result of this,” he said. “Your institutions in partnership with my government have also greatly enhanced our capacity to do agricultural research.”

However, he noted that the agricultural sector still faced many challenges considering that it is mostly rain-fed and that the smallholder farmers were a majority of the poor. Therefore a lot still needed to be done to develop the sector as it was key to the country’s development agenda.

Also speaking at the event, Dr Fidelis Myaka, the Director for Research and Development at the same ministry who is also the current Chair of the Association

for Strengthening Agriculture Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA) also appreciated the support the regional body had received from CGIAR centers especially in capacity building.

“Agriculture is the backbone of the economies of the country under ASARECA and they are keenly investing in the sector. Agricultural research is important in supporting rural development through generating technologies and tools to boost production including biotechnology. And in this regard, we are grateful for the immense support from CGIAR and its centers,” he said.



*Consortium Board Chair Dr Carlos Pérez del Castillo thanks the government for support*

He informed the visiting team that ASARECA had developed a new strategy to respond to the current challenges in the agricultural sector including climate change and was counting on the support of CGIAR, one of its key partners to help achieve its ambitions for agricultural research in the region.

Dr Castillo on his part thanked the Tanzanian government for its support to CGIAR through the centers that were working in the country and those it was hosting.

“Nearly all the centers have activities in Tanzania. With five of them being hosted here including our host IITA. They have received very good support and collaboration from the Tanzanian government and we would like to also assure the government of our continued support to the country.”

### Out on a date

The second science session saw the Consortium Board members go on three dates with scientists from IITA and other centers working in the region. The three dates focused on some of the research activities being undertaken in the country: Roots, Tubers and Banana; aflatoxin control, and sustainable intensification of smallholder farming systems through the activities of the USAID-funded and IITA-led Africa RISING project.

### CGIAR dinner for partners

As part of the week-long meeting, CGIAR also hosted a dinner for its partners in the country including policy makers, members of the diplomatic community, universities, and national research institutions.

Speaking at the dinner, Dr Castillo once again thanked the Tanzanian government for her support to CGIAR. He noted that the country was one of the countries in Africa making steady progress in investing in her agricultural sector as spelt out in its vision 2025, and CGIAR through its



Poster exhibition session



Consortium Board members including Board Chair, Dr Carlos Pérez del Castillo; and the Chief Executive Officer of the Consortium, Dr Frank Rijsberman listening to a presentation

international research centers working in the country, was keen on continuing to support the government in these efforts.

“Almost all the 15 centers of CGIAR have activities in Tanzania. And they will continue to support the government of Tanzania and of other governments in the region in their efforts to tackle problems of hunger and poverty through research,” he said.

Dr Castillo further noted that this was a crucial time for CGIAR Board as it was starting to prepare for phase two of the reforms.

This was reiterated by Dr Frank Rijsberman, the CEO of CGIAR

Consortium, who praised Tanzania for her efforts to increase her funding to agriculture in line with the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) of the African Union (AU) in which, among others, African countries pledged to increase their investment in the agricultural sector to 10% of their national budgets.

He highlighted some of the successes of the research centers in improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the country. He pointed out research done by IITA in the past to control cassava mealy bug in the continent and its current effort to control the two deadly diseases affecting cassava production in the country as well as promoting its processing into high quality cassava flour.

Another example he noted was the development of new rice varieties by the Africa Rice Center—New Rice for Africa, NERICA that were high yielding, tolerant to diseases, and also tolerant to drought.

### IITA honored

The IITA Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga, speaking at the end of the week-long meeting said IITA was honored to host the important meeting in its Eastern Africa hub. He noted this was the first time the meeting was being held away from the headquarters of a center. He thanked all the staff at the hub for their hard work which ensured that the event was a success.



Consortium Board members with the Roots, Tubers and Banana (RTB) team

# We came, we saw, we marveled



*Alumni in a group photo with members of the Local Organizing Committee in Ibadan*

The 6th IITA Alumni Reunion has come and gone but the memories will not quickly go away. The excitement of the four-day event could be summed up in six words: “We came, we saw, we marveled.” Held for the first time in IITA Ibadan, the reunion attracted participants from Europe, the US, Africa, and Asia, reflecting the diversity of staff, which was and still remains, in the world’s largest crop research institute on Africa’s soil.

On the minds of many who participated in this year’s reunion, the questions were: “What remains of IITA? Are things getting better or worse? Are staff well motivated and committed? What is the quality of science? etc. These questions were valid for many considering that most of the alumni have lost touch with IITA over the last few years.

Mrs Ayo Abifarin, one of the earliest teachers could not hide her feelings in an interactive session: “The last time I visited, the campus was very filthy but now that has changed. While coming this time, I said to myself, let me come and see how much worse it may be. But I am happy there has been improvement. As a former teacher, I must commend the Director General’s keen attention to the crèche and I encourage all of us to always pray for him and his team.”

## **Is this the school?**

It was indeed an interesting time when the alumni first visited the IITA School and were entertained by a colorful display by the pupils, thanks to Ms Carole Inniss-Palmer, Head of IITA School and her team. Former pupils of the school had the opportunity to interact with the present pupils; also parents (former staff) appreciated the growth and transformation at the school.

For Anna Flinn, one of the first students of IITA School (1972–1974) who is currently based in Australia, it was a thrilling

experience coming back to IITA after forty years. Her joy overflowed when she saw one of her earliest teachers, Mrs Ayo Abifarin (1973–1976). What a reunion!

## **Visit to the labs and tour of IITA Campus**

The alumni visited the different labs including the Crop Utilization Unit, Germplasm/Virology, Pathology, Learning Center, Threshing Building, Genetic Resources Center, Biosciences Center, IITA Wellness Center, IITA Clinic, IITA Youth Agripreneurs/Seed Center, Yam Barn, and the IITA Business Incubation Platform (BIP). It was amazing seeing the expansion of the Clinic, Crèche, and the construction of the Wellness Center. The concept and the construction of the BIP were well received and supported by the alumni. The BIP signposts the future

of IITA and hosts the aflasafe™ factory, Nodumax for the production of inoculums, and GOSEED.

## **Let’s make IITA a country**

In a welcome address to the alumni, IITA DG Nteranya Sanginga called on the alumni to support the goals and vision of IITA, emphasizing that top of his agenda is to make “IITA a country.” His vision is to see IITA attaining United Nations status if possible, and “this desire can only come to pass if all the alumni throw their weight behind it.”

Responding on behalf of the alumni, Jim Gulley promised that the alumni would support the Institute.

“We are going to be behind you, support you, and ensure that IITA makes impact,” he said.



*Alumni at the BIP*



*Cocoa House: This tallest building in Ibadan was built with funds from cocoa*



*Ade Aderogba hurries to catch up*

**The future of IITA**

Dr Kenton Dashiell, Deputy Director General Partnerships and Capacity Development gave a talk on the vision of IITA as enshrined in the revised strategy. According to him, by 2020 the Institute aims to contribute to lifting 11 million people out of poverty and also reclaiming and putting into sustainable use 7.5 million hectares of degraded land. He explained that efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty were being stymied on several fronts, and challenged the alumni to be actively involved in helping to tackle this menace. This session dovetailed into a bout of brainstorming that finally came with recommendations on how the alumni and IITA could jointly advance and make impact.

**Reforestation**

The alumni also participated in the reforestation efforts of the IITA Campus by planting a tree. The oldest serving alumni present, Steve Lawani, planted the tree on behalf of the group. The tree planting was organized by the IITA Forest team led by Deni Bown who also conducted a walk of the IITA forest trail. The alumni were appreciative of IITA Management’s efforts in conserving the forest and its biodiversity.

**IITA has changed, Ibadan has changed**

A tour of IITA and Ibadan left the alumni in awe especially with the transformation that has transpired over the recent years. The expansion of the road network and infrastructural development combined with new investments could not be ignored. The alumni visited Cocoa House, Ibadan where the echoes of the contribution of agriculture and in particular cocoa to the Nigerian economy reverberated.

**IITA Women’s Group hosts alumni**

A dinner organized by the IITA Women’s Group further cemented the bond between the alumni, the current staff and their spouses. At the dinner, which was also a fundraising platform, the women highlighted some of the good causes the group has been involved in. The Chair of the Local Organizing Committee, Dr Olu Osiname, thanked the Women’s Group and IITA Management for the dinner, and for supporting the reunion.

In all, the reunion was a huge success. In the words of Alice Flinn-Stilwell, “We so enjoyed being back in Nigeria and in seeing IITA forging ahead with new and exciting research.”



*DG Sanginga seeks support*



*Jim Gulley on behalf of all alumni backs IITA*



*Alumni plant a tree*



*At a dinner*