



International agric chiefs commend high quality of research at IITA



L-R: Dr Bruce Coulman, Carlos Pérez del Castillo, Nteranya Sanginga, Jimmy Smith, Frank Rijsberman, and Kenton Dashiell in IITA Ibadan.

The Chair of the Consortium Board of CGIAR, Dr Carlos Pérez del Castillo, has commended the high quality of research work being undertaken by IITA, emphasizing that this is needed now more than ever to tackle the challenges to food security of tropical nations not only in Africa but also the rest of the world.

Dr Pérez del Castillo was at the Ibadan campus of IITA last week for an official visit. He was accompanied by the Chief Executive Officer of the CGIAR Consortium, Dr Frank Rijsberman; IITA Board Chair, Dr Bruce Coulman; and the Directors General of two other CGIAR Consortium Centers: Dr Papa Seck of AfricaRice, and Dr Jimmy Smith of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).

Dr Pérez del Castillo said, "We are very impressed with our interactions with IITA scientists and the high quality of science they are doing in various fields. Their degree of commitment and passion to IITA's mission of eradicating hunger and poverty through their science is nothing short of amazing. We are extremely happy with what we've seen during this visit."

He particularly cited IITA's "food production systems" approach to addressing agricultural constraints,

stressing that such a strategy would greatly benefit farmers and help feed the world's growing population.

Rather than addressing agricultural development bottlenecks on an individual commodity basis, the "production system" approach integrates the diverse options available such as crop improvement, markets, and natural resource management, among others. It is a holistic way of thinking that seeks to improve livelihoods, increase incomes, and promote sustainable development.

"In the past, most of the research was centered around either commodities or natural resource management, but the production system approach—which brings together all the components from different centers—will deliver better impact on the livelihoods of the poor in different ecosystems. This different way of doing things will certainly bring about solutions that couldn't be achieved on an individual mandate," Dr Pérez del Castillo explained.

CGIAR leadership visit University of Ibadan

Dr Carlos Pérez del Castillo, Chair of the CGIAR Consortium Board, and Dr Frank Rijsberman, Chief Executive Officer of the CGIAR Consortium, paid a courtesy call on the University of Ibadan (UI)—one of IITA's partner universities.

The CGIAR team was accompanied by IITA Board Chair, Dr Bruce Coulman; and the Directors General of two CGIAR Consortium centers: Dr Jimmy Smith of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI); and IITA DG, Dr Nteranya Sanginga.

IITA Deputy Director General for Partnerships and Capacity Building, Dr Kenton Dashiell, was also part of the visit.

In their remarks, the team underscored the need for partnership with institutions such as universities, national agricultural research systems, nongovernmental organizations, and farmers' groups. Emphasizing the role of partnership in the reformed CGIAR, Dr Pérez del Castillo said the Consortium is giving partnerships a higher degree of emphasis than in the past.

"This is because while we are convinced that research will produce



CGIAR Consortium leaders and CGIAR Center officials visit the University of Ibadan, Nigeria

international public goods for our beneficiaries, unless they are picked up by the national research institutions, universities, and farmers' organizations, and partners, we will not have impact on the ground," he explained.

At the moment, 25 postgraduate students from UI are carrying out their research work in IITA. Dr Dashiell said IITA plans to double that number in the next few years.

UI Vice Chancellor, Prof Isaac Adewole, said the university is open to partnership to develop the personpower that would help tackle present and future challenges in agriculture.

To demonstrate the commitment of both institutions, UI had earlier visited IITA to refine the existing memorandum of understanding, which seeks to strengthen the relationship of the two institutions.

Nigeria releases vitamin A maize to improve nutrition

The Nigerian Government has released two new maize hybrids that can provide more vitamin A in the diets of millions in the country, raising optimism about stemming the menace of vitamin A deficiency in the years ahead, especially among children, pregnant women, and mothers. Provitamin A is converted by the body into vitamin A when the maize is eaten.

The hybrids, which are the first generation vitamin A-rich maize, were released on 4 July by the National Variety Release Committee of Nigeria as Ife maizehyb 3 and Ife maizehyb 4. They are recognized as IITA hybrids A0905-28 and A0905-32, respectively.

"The hybrids are a product of nearly a decade of breeding for enhanced levels of provitamin A," says Dr Abebe Menkir, IITA maize breeder, who led the development of the new hybrids.

The hybrids outperformed local checks with yields ranging from 6 to 9 tons per hectare compared with 2 tons per hectare recorded on most farmers' fields.

The vitamin A hybrids were developed by IITA in partnership with the Institute of Agricultural Research & Training (IAR&T) using conventional breeding in a project funded by the HarvestPlus—a Challenge Program of



Provitamin A maize varieties

CGIAR as part of strategies to address the prevalence of vitamin A deficiency. Other collaborating partners include the Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR), Zaria; University of Maiduguri; International Maize and Wheat Center (CIMMYT), University of Illinois, and University of Wisconsin.

In Nigeria, vitamin A deficiency afflicts about 30% of children below five years of age, almost 20% of pregnant women, and 13% of nursing mothers. Vitamin A deficiency lowers immunity and impairs vision, which can lead to blindness and even death.

Researchers say the two hybrids can supply enhanced levels of vitamin A in the diets. Maize is consumed by millions of people throughout Nigeria, whether roasted and eaten off the cob or as a dish prepared from fermented maize flour.

According to Menkir, maize is the most frequently consumed staple in Nigeria with about 20% of households consuming it at different times within a week.

"These hybrids will provide not only increased amounts of provitamin A but also improve productivity in farming communities," he says.

Farmers who participated in the on-farm trials indicated that they liked the varieties, so there is a high prospect for quick adoption.

IITA and IAR&T, in partnership with private seed companies, now plan to multiply these hybrids so that they can begin distributing them to farmers by 2014, and to continue to develop higher levels of vitamin A in maize by conventional breeding.

"We plan to target areas where maize consumption is high to help address the problem of vitamin A deficiency in Nigeria," says Dr Samuel Olakojo, a maize breeder with IAR&T, who worked with Menkir.

Sportsfest 2012 ends with a call to re-channel strength to research

The Sportsfest 2012 came to a close this week with a call on staff to re-channel their energies towards rebuilding IITA.

The sportsfest started in May and included activities such as trekking, volleyball, badminton, tennis, table tennis, football, swimming, chess, and scrabble, among others. The closing program was attended by more than 800 spectators from IITA and outside.

Addressing staff after the final match, IITA Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga said the event unveiled several talents that could be tapped for the benefit of the institute.

He called on staff to be united and committed to the goals and aspirations of the institute which include poverty reduction and wealth creation.

Deputy Director General, Partnership and Capacity Building, Dr Kenton Dashiell commended the sportsmanship displayed by participants during the tournament.

The event featured the presentation of prizes to winners of all events and the best teams. The Red Team, with 4 golds, 4 silvers, and 1 bronze medal, was the overall champion, followed by the Yellow Team with 3 golds, silvers, and bronzes; and the Blue Team with 3 golds, 1 silver, and 5 bronze medals.

Adeniyi Jinodu, who won three medals, said he was filled with joy, explaining that his achievement was a product of personal training.

Joshua Oyekanmi, who won a medal in badminton, said, "I always find it easy to win a gold medal because of the interest and the zeal I have in the game."

The staff commended IITA for



The Red Team coordinator, Olubakin Olayinka, holds up the overall championship trophy presented by DG Sanginga (left), while the winner of the women's trekking event gets her trophy (right). Below: The closing program also featured an exhibition football match dubbed "battle of the biggies".



organizing the event saying that it provided a platform for unity, interpersonal relationships, and cross-fertilization of ideas.

The sportsfest was supported by MTN Nigeria, Indomie, Guinness Nig Plc, Seven Up Nig Plc, Nigerian Bottling Company Plc, and Big Stuff Ltd.