

Austria and Finland ambassadors at IITA-Ibadan, cite staff's work ethics

From 24 to 26 September, delegations from the embassies of Austria and Finland were at IITA-Ibadan for an official visit to the institute. The Austrian delegation was led by His Excellency Ambassador Dr Joachim Oepfinger with Ms Marisa Mercado, Liaison Officer, and Ms Nella Hengstler, Commercial Counselor of the embassy's Commercial Section. The Finnish delegation was led by Her Excellency Ambassador Mrs Riita Korpivaara, who was accompanied by Dr Heikki Valisuo.

The guests were welcomed by Dr Nteranya Sanginga, Director General, and members of IITA Management with a dinner at the International House on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, the visitors toured IITA's Genebank, the new Aflasafe Manufacturing Plant, the Seed Processing Unit, Youth in Agribusiness Unit, the Cassava Processing Unit, and the cassava and maize experimental farms. In each facility, the visitors were briefed by the unit managers and also interacted with staff.

Before leaving on Thursday, the delegates held a meeting with IITA Management, during which the ambassadors expressed their appreciation of the enthusiasm of the scientists and staff about their work.

"I am really impressed by the passion of your scientists and staff in what they do," Ambassador Oepfinger said to DG Sanginga. The envoys especially cited the facilities for producing Aflasafe and the specialized equipment for crop processing from the units they had visited on campus.

"I would also like to cite your Communication Office for their excellent work in producing the materials that we got. They were



Top: Ambassadors Korpivaara (6th from left) and Oepfinger (6th from right) with DG Sanginga and other members of IITA management; Bottom: Lawrence Kaptoge, Aflasafe Process Engineer, (2nd from left) explaining to the guests how the new Aflasafe pilot plant operates.

very informative and well-designed," Ambassador Korpivaara added.

The ambassadors also emphasized that they were looking forward to their respective countries collaborating with IITA on projects on common areas of mutual benefit.

16 named for 2013 IITA Talent Development Competitive Grant

Sixteen staff from various Hubs and units of IITA have emerged winners of the 2013 IITA Talent Development Competitive Grant.

The winners of this year's grant and their respective training courses are: Gbenga Oloyede, FMS on *CentraVac Electronic Control*; Oluwole Oguntade, Germplasm Unit on *Advanced Training in Phytosanitary Measures*; Folarin Soyode, GRC on *Genomics & Bioinformatics*; David

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Got a story to share? Please email it with photos and captions to Andrea Gros (a.gros@cgiar.org), Katherine Lopez (k.lopez@cgiar.org), Jeffrey T. Oliver (j.oliver@cgiar.org), Godwin Atser (g.atser@cgiar.org), or Catherine Njuguna (c.njuguna@cgiar.org).

Zambia FtF R&D Program completes 2013 review & planning exercise

Implementing partners of the IITA-coordinated Zambia Feed-the-Future (FtF) Research and Development Program gathered at the Protea Hotel in Chipata, Eastern Province of Zambia on 18-20 September to review progress of the program and develop work plans for 2014. Gracing the exercise was the Honorable Robert Sichinga, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, who also accompanied the delegates on a tour of two project sites in Chanje and Chiparamba districts.

In his opening talk, Minister Sichinga highlighted the program's diversification efforts. "We all know that Zambia is highly dependent on maize. Although this has always been the case, it also makes the country's food security vulnerable to factors that may affect the production of maize," he said.

"I laud this program's efforts in promoting crops and technologies that will enable our maize farmers to diversify their production not only to enhance their incomes and nutrition, but more so to provide a food security safety net for Zambia," he emphasized.

"However, I also appeal to the scientists present here not to be too caught up in the development of the technologies themselves. More importantly, I ask you to focus on delivering these technologies and making sure they are adopted by farmers if we are to effect real and meaningful change in their lives. Otherwise, all these will be for nothing," the Minister added.

In Chanje, the minister and delegates saw an exhibition of products and improved varieties under the *Orange-fleshed Sweet Potato* and *Mitigating Cassava Disease Threats* projects being implemented in the district. In Chiparamba, the delegation saw an exhibition of the *Sustainable Intensification of Maize-Legume Systems for Zambia (SIMLEZA)*, *Improving Groundnut Farmers' Incomes and Nutrition through Innovation and Technology Enhancement (I-FINITE)*, and *Aflatoxin Mitigation* projects. In both sites, the visitors also interacted with the farmers participating in the projects.

About 40 representatives from the program's six implementing organizations: IITA, CIMMYT, CIP, ICRISAT, HarvestPlus, and the Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI), as well as private seed companies and NARS participated in this year's review and planning exercise.



Top: Agriculture and Livestock Minister Robert Sichinga (6th from right in light blue shirt) listening to one of the cassava growers in Chanje District participating in the Cassava Mitigation Project component of the Zambia FtF R&D Program; Bottom: Participants to the 2013 Review and Planning Workshop of the Zambia FtF R&D Program pose with Minister Sichinga (front row, 4th from right) at the start of the 3-day exercise at the Protea Hotel in Chipata.

16 selected for 2013... from previous page

Oluwadare, Security Unit on *Risk, Crisis and Disaster Management*; Robert Oduor, IITA-Kenya on *MSc in Finance*; Korede Lawal, Finance Office on *ICAN Examination*; Felix Farinola, Research Farm Office on *Database Certified Web Programming*; V. Arthur Geh, IITA-Liberia on *Internal Control*; Idowu Ifaturoti, Telecoms Unit on *Telecoms Architecture and Info Tech*; Omolara Salako, International School on *Creative Teaching*; Sylvester Owobu, Supply Chain Unit on *Master in Business Administration*; Abosede Pelemo, Telecoms Unit on *Microsoft Certified IT Professional*; an IITA-Cameroon staff on *Communication and Client Focus*; Anthony Fulani, Medical Unit on *Masters in Health and Safety Education*; Kayode Awobajo, Project Administration Office on *USAID Federal Rules and Regulations: Grants and Coop Agreements*; and Olabode Olumide Olaoluwa, Communication Office on *Film Making and Video Production*.

The pilot grant began last year as part of the staff development plan, with DG Sanginga allocating US\$40,000 additional funding for staff training.

Zoumana Bamba, IITA Head of Capacity Development, described the grant as "the first initiative of its kind since IITA's inception." The grant supports staff who wishes to undertake training or study for qualifications that are related to their work. It aims to create the critically needed human resource base to address the constraints of development.

With the approval of the pilot scheme, the Capacity Development Office (CDO) set out guidelines and called for applications from staff with their choice of training courses, which ended on 31 May. The CDO received 67 applications with a total training cost of US\$203,261.

The CDO and the Human Resources Service (HRS), through a selection committee, then reviewed all applications. The committee was composed of representatives of NRS staff associations and staff from HRS, R4D, and CDO. On 10 June, the committee made their selection of the 16 final grantees.

IITA Eastern Africa Hub holds retreat

Staff of the Eastern Africa Hub gathered in the sleepy seaside town of Bagamoyo, Tanzania for three days of serious contemplation of issues affecting the hub while at the same time have some fun in the Hub's first-ever retreat.

The idea of a hub retreat was hatched during last year's annual planning meeting in Ibadan. A team composed of Danny Coyne, Morag Ferguson and James Legg was then constituted to plan the same.

The 3-day program was a mixture of discussion on key issues affecting the hub from how to make its 10 year strategy in line with the institute's, preparation of the annual report, staffing issues, resource mobilization, communications, and purchasing.

Dr Victor Manyong, R4D Director for Eastern Africa, said that the retreat was very important to strengthen the relationships and collaboration amongst all the scientists. He noted it was especially a good orientation for the new scientists at the hub as it allowed them to interact with fellow scientists and support staff. He cited the event's organizing team for doing a good job.

"The retreat was very successful. We can say we have all gotten to know each other better. We have better understanding of the different activities each of us is involved in in the different countries and even ways to strengthen collaborations. We also discussed some of the important issues affecting the hub and ways to resolve them," he said on the last day of the hub. "We will therefore have this hub retreat as an annual event."

The highlight of the retreat was the fun activities held in the afternoon after the day's discussions. These included games such as volleyball and a visit to a nearby performing arts school where the staff had to develop a dance and perform it in front of the students.

A dinner was also held in honor of Charity Mutege, winner of this year's Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application, during which she was presented with a plaque by Eveline Odiambo, Hub Administrator. On her part, Charity said her work was as a result of team effort. She also thanked Dr Manyong for his leadership and faith in her and her partners at the institute, at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute, and at the Africa Agricultural Technology Foundation.



The 'fun retreat': The team building exercises during the IITA Eastern Hub retreat included dancing (top left) at a performing arts school and sports competitions (top right). (Bottom) Charity Mutege, winner of the 2013 Norman Borlaug Field Award, receiving a plaque from Eveline Odiambo given on behalf of the Hub.

Africa RISING holds learning event at ILRI in Addis

More than 60 project implementers, partners, and other stakeholders took part in a 3-day learning event hosted by the International Livestock Research Institute for Africa RISING (Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This event is the first for the 5-year USAID-funded program. It aims to provide participants with an environment for learning and understanding the program, the key concepts and principles driving it, and activities already undertaken; identify critical issues around approaches and goals of the program and some best-bet actions/interventions to tackle; and document collective learning, discuss and prioritize implications for projects, identify actions to address challenges that surfaced during the event, and set out a learning agenda for the program as a whole.

The activity used an open learning format, which promoted self-learning and discovery, and provided opportunities for cross-site learning, sharing and exchanging of experiences in the different projects; reflection on issues and challenges; and articulation of action steps. Reflections on the learning will be used to put the project back on track, and also help prioritize action steps and follow up on important issues.

Dr Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon, who leads the West Africa and East and Southern Africa components of the program said, "I think this learning event is very important and timely. We are now ending the second year of the project, and this is a good opportunity to bring all the three projects and partners together and share experiences and learning. As project coordinator, the most important expectation I had from this meeting was the buy-in from partners, which is expected to lead to better understanding of the project and the various issues involved in project management, and better and timely reporting."

Dr Kenton Dashiell, DDG for Partnerships and Capacity Development, said "I thought this



Participants during the bus-stop learning session that focused on a discussion of research outputs.

was an exceptionally good meeting. Some of the key learning from the meeting are that we need to have R4D platforms operating well in target communities of project countries and that we need to make a special effort to ensure good communication among partners."

He said that the real benefit of the learning event to the project was that in addition to the learning and sharing that took place, "we were able to look at the action steps that would make sure that R4D platforms are set up, that gender is integrated, that partners/stakeholders can make sure that there is a team of people working together to ensure impact on the lives of the project communities."

The Africa RISING Program Coordination Team, headed by Dr Dashiell, met after the learning event to discuss important issues for follow up and other strategic program management concerns.

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