



Board commends IITA Management team

The Board of Trustees of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) has commended the Management team of IITA under the leadership of Dr Nteranya Sanginga for the excellent management of the Institute.

Addressing staff during a Town Hall meeting in Ibadan, Chair of the Board,

Dr Bruce Coulman said, “IITA is well-managed.”

“We are very impressed with the growth of the institute... And IITA is fortunate to have dynamic leader,” he added.

The verdict of the Board received a loud ovation from staff.

Dr Coulman reiterated that the research

by the “Institute is relevant and clearly demonstrates that IITA is Africa’s agricultural research leader.”

The Town Hall meeting also witnessed the recognition of scientists who have distinguished themselves in various disciplines and the presentation of awards to deserving staff.



BoT Chair Coulman addresses staff during Town Hall meeting in Ibadan

Refreshed IITA strategy aims to raise 11 million out of poverty, restore 7.5 million hectares of degraded land

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture has refreshed its strategy, with a vision of raising 11 million people out of poverty in the tropics and also redirecting 7.5 million ha of degraded land into sustainable use.

The refreshed strategy has been approved by the IITA Board of Trustees and emphasizes the need for scientific research to achieve results at the farm level

In Ibadan, addressing more than 200 national and international scientists during the week-long annual planning week (otherwise known as Research-for-Development Week), Dr Nteranya Sanginga, IITA Director General, called on scientists to ensure that the outcome of their research is creating this favorable impact.

In his presentation, It’s time for IITA, Dr Sanginga gave a picture of the constraints to development in the tropics, particularly in Africa. He highlighted factors such as poor natural resource management (soils, water, and biodiversity), yield gaps, postharvest losses, and pests and diseases as major constraints to the growth of the region.

The unfolding scenario has placed responsibility on IITA as a research Institute



Sanginga

to help tropical nations to overcome the challenges.

“Everyone is looking up to IITA to provide solutions to food insecurity in Africa,” he said.

Dr Sanginga who assumed office two years ago also gave a progress report, highlighting the successes recorded, the problems, and the task ahead.

During the period, the Institute’s research reputation soared to a record high. Three scientists were honored for their achievements. Dr Charity Mutegi won the 2013 Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application; Dr Georg Goergen was honored by eminent international fruit

fly taxonomists of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (MRAC) and the Natural History Museum, London, England; Dr Tahirou Abdoulaye received an award from the Purdue University for protecting precious cowpea grain from pests in storage. Funding to the Institute has doubled and the number of scientific publications in high impact factor journals has risen.

Central to the growth is also the upgrade in human and infrastructural resources. In the last two years, a modern Science Building has been built and commissioned in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; the IITA headquarters in Ibadan has gone through a remarkable upgrade. The Institute has also begun the construction of the building in the Southern Africa Hub. Staff welfare has also received close attention while attention is being given to retaining and motivating excellence.

Dr Sanginga said that the growth of the Institute had never compromised research quality but emphasized that researchers should not rest on their laurels but ensure that delivery is sustained.

“There is no excuse... we must deliver and deliver,” he said.

More than 200 researchers in Ibadan for R4D



Hillbur welcomes staff

About 200 scientists and staff converged on Ibadan between 25 and 29 November for the 2013 annual planning week, otherwise known as Research-for-Development Week (R4D Week).

Researchers and staff were welcomed by the Deputy Director General (Research), Dr Ylva Hillbur, who also gave a summary of activities for the week.

She explained that the event was aimed at promoting interactions and knowledge sharing among staff, and collectively planning ahead.

This year's theme for the week-long

event was "It is IITA's time". The theme was adopted from pronouncements earlier made by the Vice Chair of IITA Board of Trustees, John Griffith, during the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for the IITA building for the Southern Africa Hub in Zambia.

The week provided opportunity for researchers to make presentations on current programs and projects, discuss new initiatives, hold workshops on specific research themes and CGIAR Research Programs, present posters, hold meetings, and socialize.

Addressing the capacity gaps in Africa



Dashiell

The need for partnerships and capacity development was brought to the fore during a thought-provoking presentation by Dr Kenton Dashiell, IITA Deputy

Director General (Partnerships and Capacity Development). He highlighted the abysmally low number of scientists per million of population in sub-Saharan African countries.

While China has 1071 researchers per million people; Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Togo have (each) less than 50 scientists per million.

Dr Dashiell said part of the reason why the PCD Directorate was created was to help address this gap through training.

The Directorate comprises the following Offices: Communication, Project Administration, Partnerships Coordination, Proposal Development, and Capacity Development.

The Deputy Director General highlighted the achievements of the Directorate and also introduced the Business Incubation Platform (BIP)—a new initiative under the Directorate that will provide opportunities for scaling up technology with a private sector perspective in view.

Comments



Melba Mussagy, Agroenterprise Development Specialist –

"This year's R4D Week was, in my opinion, better than last year's in terms of the scientific content. However, I think the poster presentations could have been better organized. Probably next year, make the poster sessions a mandatory activity that people must attend and appreciate."

Gezahegn Tessema, Associate Professional Office – "R4D Week is a good opportunity for us to know what other scientists in the different stations and Hubs are doing. This bringing together of professionals is very educational, especially for the new staff."



Yukiko Kashiwara, Postdoctoral Fellow - Yam Breeder –

"Apart from the chance to meet different IITA scientists from the various stations of IITA and know what they are doing, R4D Week gives us a great opportunity to see where we could collaborate with other researchers, especially in the same field. I liked the poster session, I think it is better organized than last year's session."

Debo Akande— The meeting has been very interesting and an eye opener for me as a new scientist. The R4D Week provides the opportunity for me to understand the mode of operations of IITA and also gives a deep insight in my program and other projects as well.



What is ready, what is cooking?

The Corporate Services Directorate gave progress report to scientists and other staff at the 2013 R4D week in Ibadan.

Mr Kwame Akuffo-Akoto, Deputy Director General (Corporate Services) gave a presentation, “Providing cost-effective support services to impact-driven research: What is ready and what is cooking”, to highlight the achievements made by each of the Units under the Directorate.

Some of the achievements include the upgrade of staff, review of per-diem and travel policy, refurbishment of infrastructure and labs, and improvement in internet services, among others.

Mr Akuffo-Akoto reaffirmed the commitment of the Directorate to give greater attention to staff welfare and morale, and to keep up the refurbishment



Akuffo-Akoto

of the Institute’s infrastructure and laboratory facilities. The Directorate comprises the following components: Hubs Administration, Facilities Management Services, Human Resources Services, Supply Chain, Information and Communication Technology, Hotel and Catering, and Security and Plant Protection.

IITA must deliver to remain on top says the Director of Finance



Sholola

The Director of Finance, Mr Omoshalewa Sholola, has said that IITA had a strong financial base with positive growth rate but added a caveat that researchers must fully implement projects for the Institute to sustain its growth.

While giving financial updates on the past, present, and future, Mr Sholola described 2013 as a successful year for IITA, emphasizing that projections were in line with targets.

“We are doing pretty well...,” he said.

Kenneth Oraegbunam unfolds IITA E-Research Roadmap

To harness the power of advanced Information and Communication Technologies, IITA is developing a roadmap on E-Research.

Kenneth Oraegbunam, Senior Technical Analyst, explained that the vision is to develop an infrastructure for managing the data from agricultural research to improve R4D and service delivery by supporting the entire chain from the laboratories to smallholder farms, leading to rural poverty reduction, food security, and economic growth.

Addressing researchers and staff at this year’s R4D Week, Mr Oraegbunam shared some of the expected outcomes of the E-Research platform, as follows:

- Improved management, collaboration, sharing, joint working, and monitoring research programs and outputs
- Availability of a virtual research environment with on-line tools, high-end and distributed computing, systems and processes, data, modeling, and visualization resources
- Increased collaboration with partners, including the private sector and farmers’ organizations



Oraegbunam

- Improved data and information management to support research programs, including access to research outputs
- Improved management of resources (human, material, and financial) and
- Improved R4D data management in sub-Saharan Africa through the leadership of IITA.

The E-Research platform will integrate into a common platform the various database systems across the Institute, such as PromisCRM system, Training DB system, Bibliography database, Staff Profile, HR4U, as well as a website facelift and will become a one-stop shop.

Michael Abberton— The meeting has been very good. The focus on science is a good idea, and the general atmosphere for discussion has



been positive and constructive ... it has been a good opportunity to meet people from the other side— from both a social and a professional context.



Tamo Manuele — I am very positively impressed. Last year was ok but this year is better, maybe because of the logistics in presenting the papers. This year has more

concentration on good science so far.

This is also a good opportunity to see old and new colleagues. I am very pleased to be here, without reservations.

Manson Nwafor — It has been a great effort, providing cross-fertilization of ideas, learning from one another, seeing how we can support each other. There isn’t an easy



opportunity to do that when we get working in your different stations. So far, so good.



Penina Mouki — The program is very intense. I am happy to see science coming back to the R4D program and in particular to see young scientists

Support for IITA's strategy

This year, IITA refreshed its strategy for the next 10 years during which it aims at getting 11 million people out of poverty and rehabilitating 7.5 million ha of land into productive agricultural use. Several programs at the institute have in turn developed their own strategies spelling out how they will contribute and support the institute to reach its goal. These include Biotechnology, Natural Resources Management (NRM), Social Science and Agribusiness, and Agronomy and Plant Health Management. These were shared by the various team leaders on the first day of this year's R4D week.

Investing in soil fertility to feed and reduce poverty in Africa



Vanlauwe

To achieve its vision of getting 11 million people out of poverty and rehabilitating 7.5 million ha of land, IITA must address the problem of Africa's poor soils where smallholder farmers have depleted the nutrients without replenishing them for many years.

The population is growing faster than the expansion of agricultural land in all African regions and the smallholder farmers are struggling to grow their crops on farms that are becoming smaller in size. Therefore, to ensure that there is food for all without forests being cleared to increase the area for agriculture, there is a need to intensify the farming systems to enable these farmers to produce more from land of the same size.

Bernard Vanlauwe, IITA's Central Africa Director and leader of IITA's Natural Resource Management efforts, says that although intensification is necessary it cannot take place without addressing the problem of poor soils.

Furthermore, the efforts must be targeted down to the farm level to address the variability of soil fertility within farms.

He said the institute had refreshed its NRM strategy to guide its efforts to improve soil health to raise production through Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM), Sustainable Land Use Management, and climate change. These will be undertaken through the Humid Tropics, Climate Change Agriculture, and Food Security (CCAAs), and the Water Land and Ecosystems (WLE) CGIAR Research Programs.

He said the institute would further focus on creating enabling environments for the smallholder farmers, such as by improving access to knowledge and inputs in small affordable packaging, use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS), and in working with agro-dealers.

He added that the institute would work through partnership platforms bringing together all the diverse relevant actors.

presenting their work. That is capacity building, a key pillar for IITA, starting from home even before we go to the wider audience. The amount of time given to gender issues is commendable: this cuts across CRPs.



Yemefack Martin — It has been a very good interaction to know what people are doing, from the very beginning of the conference till today. What is going on is quite all right and commendable; everything is well timed. I am pleased to say that I presented a poster on the soil atlas of Africa which was published this year.

Leena Tripathi — On the science day, it was very good to see many presentations and posters. This is a new thing this year which I found interesting.



Increasing social science research for greater impact

For IITA to achieve the four CGIAR Strategic System Level Outcomes (SLOs) of increased food security, reduced rural poverty, under-nutrition, and sustainable land use management, it is critically important to understand the social context in which it operates to ensure that its research and technologies are relevant.

Victor Manyong is the Director for Eastern Africa and leader for social science research at IITA. He said, "Social sciences therefore have an important role to play in guiding the Research for Development efforts of the Institute for better impact."

IITA social scientists had developed a refreshed social science and agribusiness strategy and their vision was to become a reliable source of knowledge for social science and to provide the prototypes and blueprints for agribusiness.



Manyong

"Our strategic objective is to conduct strategic and applied research in social science to improve productivity, competitiveness, and the nutrition of smallholders through IITA CRPs. In the process, International Public Goods

(IPG) will be generated that guide the development of technological, institutional, and policy innovations at the institute for impact."

In the strategy, social science research at IITA will have six strategic and interlinked objectives based on strategic studies, impact evaluation, and outcome evaluation. These include making ex-ante impact assessments to assist the Institute to prioritize interventions despite limited resources; conducting research at household levels to understand poverty dynamics; looking at the gender issues in the adoption of technologies and innovations; assessing input and output market systems, farmers' organizations, and agribusiness management; scaling up technologies, and conducting ex-post impact assessments to learn lessons in accountability.

Strategies to reduce the yield gaps in smallholder farmers' fields



Chikoye

Yields of smallholder farmers in Africa are way below their potential. One aspect of the IITA strategy to get 11.5 million people out of poverty and rehabilitate 7.5 million ha of land is by reducing this yield gap through better agronomic practices and plant health management.

The factors that prevent the farmers from attaining the optimum yield possible from their crops include pests and diseases, weeds, and the lack of water and adequate nutrients.

For example, Dr David Chikoye, IITA Director for Southern Africa and team leader for the agronomy and plant health research, said "Smallholder farmers in Africa harvest 1-t/ha of maize but researchers get 5–12 t/ha in their research fields following good management practices.

It's therefore important to understand all the various factors that contribute to such low yields and to identify the best crop

and pest management practices to increase yield.

The vision of the agronomy and plant health management scientists at IITA is to: "Increase the productivity and sustainability of smallholder agriculture by innovative agronomic and plant protection options. The mission of the group is to develop and deploy tools, products, and technologies to improve crop and pest management practices."

The planned priority areas of research include assessing the various causes of the yield gap, finding how crops adapt to stressful conditions, discovering water and nutrient management options, knowledge-based weed management practices and crop models, and decision support systems.

The Institute will build on to some of its past successes in this field. These include the Biodiversity Center in Bénin that has a collection of 350,000 insect specimens and its bio-pesticide and bio-control solutions as part of sustainable Integrated Pest Management (IPM) options.

The group further identified four strategic areas on which to focus: researching innovative crop management options; environmentally friendly pest management options such as bio-pesticides; technology, knowledge, and information sharing including the development of ICT tools for the diagnosis and surveillance of emerging pests and diseases; and establishing innovative partnerships and capacity building.

Dr Asiedu presents the Biotech strategy

Dr Robert Asiedu, IITA Director for Western Africa, presented the Institute's work-in-progress biotechnology strategy and called for contributions from scientists and staff.

The premise of the draft strategy is to enhance the efficiency of crop improvement, conservation, and characterization of biological diversity and plant health management.

The vision of the strategy is to transform the Institute to a leading partner in sub-Saharan Africa for innovation and discovery and to function as a knowledge base for the effective application of biotechnology for increased agricultural productivity and the sustainable management of natural resources.

Dr Asiedu said the focus was on three strategic objectives:

1. Enhancing the management, characterization, and use of plant genetic resources
2. Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of plant breeding



Asiedu

3. Ensuring the efficient diagnosis and monitoring of biological systems

Crosscutting themes include:

1. Partnerships and capacity strengthening for enhanced application of biotechnologies
2. Deployment of products and knowledge

Awardees



Aflasafe Team Leader, Dr Ranajit Bandyopadhyay (R) receives Best Team award from Amos Namanga Ngongi



Piet VanAsten (R) receives Best Scientist award from Trine Hvoslef-Eide



Ismail Rabbi (R) receives Best Scientific Paper award from Roel Merckx



Kayode Awobajo (R) receives Best Support Staff award from Xikombiso Mbhenyane

IITA Board and Management visit BIP



BoT Members and IITA Management at BIP

Members of the Board of Trustees paid a visit to the IITA Business Incubation Platform (BIP) and made a tour of the facilities. The BIP, which is still undergoing construction, comprises the Aflasafe, Nodumax, and Goseed factories. Drs Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, Abebe Menkir, and Mahamadi Dianda with Mr Lawrence Kaptoge took time to explain the proposed and ongoing activities at the various sections.

Board members witnessed the production of Aflasafe that would be deployed to farmers to help fight the menace of aflatoxin that is damaging both health and trade, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Bruce Coulman, BoT Chair, on the sidelines said he was impressed with the initiative and work at the BIP.

On completion, the BIP will serve as a model for attracting the private sector in agriculture. It will also provide training and job opportunities and help to amplify the benefits of IITA research to smallholder farmers.

Photos



BoT Member Trine Hvoslef-Eide in a chat with James Legg



BoT Members and IITA Management at Town Hall meeting in Ibadan



BoT Members comparing notes during coffee break

Cassava breeders meet ahead of R4D Week



Parkes makes a point at the meeting

the year and also to chart a way forward.

The theme of the meeting was: “Developing IITA cassava variety pipelines for major outcomes: deploying new strategies and tools for breeding.”

Dr Peter Kulakow, IITA Cassava Breeder, gave an update of breeding efforts, citing the dissemination of vitamin A cassava varieties in Nigeria as part of major outputs in the year. Other breeders also had the opportunity to give updates on their work, highlighting opportunities and challenges.

Dr Elizabeth Parkes said the event provided an opportunity for stronger team cohesion and an avenue for colleagues to know what others are doing.

The event, the meeting of IITA cassava scientists ahead of a strategic meeting such as R4D Week, is the first in history.

Researchers working in the cassava breeding program in IITA held a special session ahead of this year’s annual planning week to review activities during



Cassava breeders