



IITA must remain the leading research partner in Africa, says DG Sanginga

The goal to transform IITA and position it as Africa's "leading research partner facilitating agricultural solutions to overcome hunger and poverty in the tropics" is a task that must be accomplished, says IITA Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga.

Presenting an update to all staff on the progress made so far in building the new IITA on 30 April, Dr Sanginga said there was no reason why IITA would not take the leadership of research, and called staff in all categories to play their roles towards the realization of this goal.

The commitment of staff is critical, the director general said, but IITA's research must have impact at the farm level.

"That is, the research must be relevant... it must address the constraints of development facing farmers," he said.

He frowned at the low project execution, stressing that 'the situation is unacceptable.' To improve the implementation of projects, the DG called on staff to make themselves relevant to the ongoing transformation.

To have a better understanding of IITA, Dr Sanginga urged staff to be familiar with the Institute's refreshed strategy.

He also announced plans for further updates, including the criteria for upgrading staff, which would benefit more than 120 staff in the Institute.

The DG said that the present administration would encourage and reward innovators that contribute to the vision and mission of IITA.

On the failed investment of 2007-2008, the DG said that the Institute had the option of axing 200 NRS and 26 IRS. Rather than downsizing, the Institute recruited more staff, promoted some, and also increased staff salaries.

He reiterated that for the Institute to grow, there was a need for transparency and effective communication at all levels.

Following this meeting, the other directorates met with staff on 2 May to review some of the concerns and issues raised during the DG's presentation.

The review aimed at taking a retrospect and identifying areas of improvement for the future. More importantly, the meeting sought inputs/ideas on how to improve on project execution.



Meet the DG: DG Nteranya Sanginga met all staff on 30 April in two batches to provide an update on progress in building the "new IITA" and discuss important issues.

FMS engineers meet scientists to design an inoculum plant

The new Business Incubator Platform on the IITA campus in Ibadan continues to expand with the planned construction of a new inoculum plant. Last week, engineers from the Facilities Management Services met for two days with scientists from IITA and Wageningen University, the Netherlands, and a commercial inoculum producer from the UK, and collectively designed the plant's structure and anticipated operations.

The N2Africa project on promoting legume technologies among smallholders in Africa and other projects have demonstrated clear productivity and economic benefits of soybean seed inoculation with nitrogen-fixing rhizobia. Even with

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Participants to the workshop that designed the rhizobium inoculant plant in IITA, Ibadan.

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the so-called promiscuous soybean varieties that have been bred to nodulate with rhizobia naturally present in the soil, significant yield responses to inoculation have been observed in the majority of test fields in northern Nigeria and Ghana.

There is currently no commercial inoculant production in West Africa, and imported inoculants are often unavailable to farmers and come in packet sizes inappropriate for smallholders. Given the large potential of this technology on the 0.5 million ha of soybean grown in Nigeria, IITA will construct a pilot inoculum plant with assistance from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded N2Africa project.

Building upon experiences on inoculum production in Kenya and the UK, as well as the aflasafe™ plant

at IITA, the objective of the new plant is to produce high-quality, sterile inoculum for soybean farmers using innovative technologies. To do so, IITA staff will receive training on inoculum production and quality control at Legume Technology, a commercial inoculant producer in the UK, in the coming months.

When the construction of the newly designed inoculum plant is finished in October this year, inoculum production will start immediately at a modest scale using imported sterile sachets with carrier material that will be injected manually with locally produced rhizobia. In a next phase, the production of sachets with carrier material can be localized and the filling of sachets with rhizobia can be automated, increasing the scale of production and reducing risks of

contamination. An applied research program to optimize the production process and guarantee quality control will be established alongside. The plant will serve as a business model for private investors in Nigeria and other African countries.

Like legumes and rhizobia working in symbiosis with each other, FMS engineers and scientists greatly benefited from each other's complementary expertise needed to design a functional inoculum plant. The building has to be sufficiently flexible to allow for changes in the production process over time and include climate-controlled rooms for product curing and storage. The participants were very satisfied with the final design and look with great excitement to the work ahead and developments around the plant.

IITA officially launches its aflatoxin biocontrol project in Mozambique

A launch meeting for a new aflatoxin biocontrol project was organized in Nampula, Mozambique, on 15–16, April to sensitize Mozambican national partners about the project. The meeting followed the signing of a 4-year grant agreement between IITA and the United States Agency for International Development Mission in Mozambique (USAID-Mozambique). The United States Department of Agriculture – Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA-FAS) was instrumental in negotiating the grant with the Government of Mozambique.

The project aims to address the aflatoxin problem with biocontrol in maize and groundnut in Mozambique. Participating national partners at the inception meeting included the Mozambican Farmers' Cooperative "IKURU", Mozambican Ministry of Agriculture through the Division

of Pesticides and Fertilizer at the Department of Plant Protection, Universidade de Lurio (UniLurio), Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM), Instituto de Investigação Agrária de Mocimboa (IIAM), CLUSA, AgriFuturo, Meconta district agricultural services, together with representatives from USDA-FAS, USAID/USDA-South Africa and the USDA-Agriculture Research Service (ARS), University of Arizona.

The objectives of the meeting were to (re)introduce the project to potential national partners including universities and agricultural public institutions, private sector and farmers' organizations, NGOs and other interested stakeholders; refine objectives and work plans based on feedback from potential national partners; identify potential key national partners and define responsibilities

for the smooth implementation of the project; discuss timeline for all the project's activities, and exchange ideas and deliberate on important issues.

The Director of the Nampula Provincial Directorate of Agriculture, Engr Pedro Zucula, inaugurated the meeting, emphasizing the need to integrate the project into various ongoing agricultural programs in the province and to ensure that farmers are the ultimate beneficiaries of the biocontrol technology. He also stressed how aflatoxins directly affect our lives, trade, food security, and farmers' income.

Dr Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, IITA Plant Pathologist, spoke extensively about the impact of aflatoxins on health and trade and reviewed the activities to be undertaken during the project implementation. Dr Peter Cotty, project collaborator, from the USDA-ARS underscored the principles and impact of aflatoxin biocontrol, led the discussion on project feedback from participants, and announced the possibility of recruiting a Mozambican MSc/PhD student for training in the United States as part of national capacity building.

Representatives of national partners also gave presentations. One of the major outcomes of the meeting was the design of a crop sampling plan and delineation of roles and responsibilities of the various participating institutions.

The closing remarks were delivered by Dr Steve Boahen, IITA country representative, who highlighted the positive impact of the project on the agriculture sector of Mozambique. He expressed his appreciation to all the participants, especially those who traveled from outside Nampula City.

Most of the project activities will be carried out along the Nacala corridor, a major maize and groundnut growing area and potentially an aflatoxin hotspot area. The project will be managed by Dr Joao Augusto.



Group photo of the participants at the aflatoxin biocontrol inception workshop in Nampula, Mozambique.