

AfDB, CGIAR, and partners to develop platform to hasten delivery of improved agric technologies in Africa



Participants of the "Multinational CGIAR-Support to Agricultural Research Formulation Workshop" being held at the Conference Center, IITA-Ibadan take a break from their hectic schedule for a group photograph.

Representatives of the African Development Bank (AfDB), three CGIAR Centers – IITA, AfricaRice, and ICARDA, and national partners are convening at IITA-Ibadan to hammer out the details of a pan-African project aimed at developing a regional partnership-based mechanism that would expand and accelerate the pace and efficiency of delivering improved agricultural technologies to millions of farmers across the continent.

Called the "Multinational CGIAR-Support to Agricultural Research", the AfDB-sponsored project formulation workshop started on 31 January and is slated to end tomorrow, 5 February. More than 35 of the brightest minds from the participating organizations are gathered to discuss and agree on the project's objectives, strategies, performance indicators, activities, and implementation guidelines.

The proposed 5-year project would cover four of the six strategic commodities of the Comprehensive Africa Development Program (CAADP) – cassava, maize, rice, and wheat – and to be implemented in AfDB regional member countries (RMCs) that are

representative of the production areas of the crops.

The project is envisioned to impact upon rural livelihoods in the RMCs through technology development, testing, delivery and adoption, innovative partnership, capacity building, and marketing. It would work with the CGIAR, national partners, and other relevant key players to expand and accelerate the pace and efficiency of delivering improved technologies to over four million beneficiaries within the project's time frame.

DG Hartmann, in his speech at the opening of the workshop, cited the AfDB for its strong support of and commitment to the development of agricultural research in Africa.

"The needs of the region are very well defined," the DG said. "We have very solid support from AfDB, which is well appreciated. For the first time as well I am finding very strong support from our leaders around sub-Saharan Africa – extremely supportive. The support that we never had before are coming together, and the AfDB has been instrumental in bringing this commitment of our leaders together.

This proves that agriculture is no longer a secondary issue".

"We know the needs, we have the financial support, we have the commitment, we have the technology generators – there is no reason not to succeed," Hartmann emphasized.

Dougou Keita, Manager of AfDB's Agriculture and Agro-Industry Division, in an interview said that "we believe that through this project, we would be able to build regional research systems that would more effectively address critical agricultural issues in Africa that the CGIAR centers and national programs represented here would not be able to do alone. The challenges are too great compared to the individual resources available."

"Working together, we should be able to overcome these challenges. That is why we strongly believe in a strong partnership between the AfDB, CGIAR centers, and national programs working on research extension. After all, we have but one common vision of helping farmers in Africa build better lives," he concluded.

The importance of security in research productivity

Last year, research produce were stolen from the experimental fields at IITA-Ibadan. The Security Unit reported that on 2 August 2010 five bunches of plantains were stolen from BS3 and PMYT fields being managed by Dr Alexandra zum Felde. Two days later, three more bunches were stolen from the same area. Further attempts were thwarted when the Security Unit, in consultation with the Farm Office, deployed additional security measures covering all the experimental plots.

According to David Oluwadare, IITA Security Manager, these measures included the deployment of additional guards in affected areas, increased patrols and field surveillance, and dialogue with neighboring community chiefs to solicit their cooperation and assistance to curtail the incursions of armed poachers from their domains, among others.

He also revealed plans to put up two additional security watch towers equipped with binoculars for wider coverage, as well as the review of recruitment and access control process for casual staff members.

So far, these measures have met small successes as two dane guns have been confiscated from armed poachers, and four suspects arrested for the thefts.

However, these thefts have far-reaching effects than just the physical loss of research products.

In 2006, DG Hartmann, addressing a similar incident in an institute-wide memo, said that **“the loss of research will ruin the Institute**. Its consequences are severe. It means reduced output, reduced publications, scientist’s frustration, delays and lay-offs. All these will result in drastic reductions in donor support”.



The theft of research produce last year has led to more patrols and general heightened security. According to Hartmann, “the loss of research [through theft] will ruin the Institute”.

In another email, Hartmann expounds on how we can all pitch in to prevent these thefts: “As we try to reduce the theft on campus, you too have a role to play. Please lock doors whenever you leave. Too many of us are negligent. These open doors, especially after hours and weekends, mean the guards have to hang around to watch that particular office or lab, and that takes them away from some other routes. We need to drum this habit into everyone’s mind, just like the very nice habit of turning off the lights when leaving a room”.

Indeed, the shortsightedness of the people involved in these thefts would set back IITA’s research targets, drain increasingly-scarce financial resources to re-establish experiments, erode our credibility among donors in our ability to protect their investments, and impede the realization of our mission and vision.

The sentiments aired by the DG are more relevant now than ever given the uncertainties brought about by the

ongoing CGIAR Reforms and the dwindling financial support of donor countries towards agricultural research. We all should realize the gravity of such actions on our survival as an institute.

To address this, the General Directorate, through the office of the DDG for R4D Support, Dr Lakshmi Menon, will be initiating enhanced campus-wide security measures at IITA-Ibadan in the next few months to ensure that our research products and investments are protected.

“These increased security measures might make some people uncomfortable,” Dr Menon admits, “but this slight inconvenience is necessary if the Institute is to survive and if we are to maintain our long-term viability.”

The Communication Office will be reporting on updates of these enhanced security measures through a series of articles on security to keep staff informed and aware of their roles and responsibilities in this initiative.

CIALCA team welcomes new member



Emmanuel Njukwe

Emmanuel Njukwe will be moving from IITA-Cameroon to join the IITA-CIALCA team in Burundi from March 2011 as the new IITA associate scientist. He will coordinate its partnerships in the region with local research and development partners with a special focus on out-scaling technologies and training tools to the end-users.

Emmanuel has been working at IITA since 2001 and is fluent in English and French as a Research Associate. He helped in the development of project proposals, germplasm evaluation, seed systems, post-harvest techniques, and organizing partnerships with research,

farmer and development organizations in starchy staples (cassava, plantains and yam). He has co-authored several publications.

Piet Van Asten says the CIALCA team is excited to have Emmanuel on board and believe that his communication skills, technical expertise, and experience in building and maintaining partnerships will help to further improve and expand the R4D approach in the CIALCA project.

He has an MSc. Agronomy (Soil Science option) from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 2000.

Emmanuel is married to Irene and father of four: Ryan, Ketsie, Leslie and Blessing.