

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

### **IITA Board of Trustees Meeting**

#### **27 to 30 April 2020**

- The IITA Board of Trustees convened in a virtual meeting due to the travel restrictions imposed worldwide to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. All Trustees participated from their home locations. Dr. Ngongi Namanga, chaired the meeting from his home in Buea, Cameroon. IITA's Trustee Emeritus, Bruce Coulman, and IITA's management staff from east and west Africa also participated. Regrets were received from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. COVID-19 had imposed severe constraints on his time preventing his participation.
  
- Chairing his last meeting as an IITA Trustee, the Board Chair highlighted the critical period the Institute is going through with the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to protect the Institute's staff and assets, the transition to the One-CGIAR and the transition in Institute leadership to take place in 2021. He highlighted the progress and the excellent results that had been achieved under the leadership of Dr. Sanginga both financially and programmatically with a doubling of the budget and the expansion of its programs to scale up delivery. In a recent call that the Board had with IITA's key funders, they recognized IITA's leadership in a number of areas and highlighted its work in roots and tubers and legumes, in breeding, excellence in agronomy and sustainable intensification, plant health and its link to one health, and delivery and gave strong assurance of continued support. They were all without exception fully behind the One-CGIAR and its longer-term vision of a unified system for effective collaboration among centers and for governance under a One-CGIAR Board. Transition to One-CGIAR will take place between 1 July 2020 and 31 December 2021 during which major elements of the new system will be put in place with the system fully functioning by 1 January 2022. By July 1, an Executive Management Team will be appointed to lead and be collectively responsible for managing the change. The One-CGIAR Board will be appointed by September 2020. All centers will transition and be governed by the One-CGIAR Board as of October 1, 2020. In the specific case of IITA, the center will be governed by a Board that consists of 1/3 of its current members and 2/3 from the One-CGIAR Board.

The Chair also reported that the Search Committee for the recruitment of the next Director General has been established and has begun discussions on the process. Its main goal is to recruit an individual with proven leadership and management skills, who inspires confidence in funders and in colleague Directors General and able to work with African governments. Preserving the advances made in the last eight years and capitalizing on the opportunities of One-CGIAR on country collaboration and impact as priorities.

- The Board thanked the Director General for his thoughtful presentation on his vision for the one and half years left of his tenure. Focus will be on ensuring that the next leadership of IITA inherits a strong and healthy institute, that IITA is well positioned to address the needs of the continent over the next ten years and that staff confidence is maintained throughout the transition without disruption that sometimes can occur with a change in leadership. With these goals in mind, attention will focus on: (1) full alignment with the unified system of governance and the business plan of the One CGIAR as it relates to research, country and regional alignment and partnerships for delivery; (2) resource mobilization and focus on development banks and country loans, securing IITA as the preferred technical assistance

partner, as well as expansion to new sources of funding to include the private sector and non-traditional donors; (3) Updating and strengthening the Institute's financial systems and procedures with automation fully implemented; and (4) phased succession planning of staff to key positions in the Institute.

- The issues emerging from the Audit & Finance Committee meeting were primarily the consequences of COVID-19 on the Institute's financial and human resources in 2020 as donor funding may be diverted to issues related to the pandemic. Various scenarios for cost reductions have been prepared and submitted to the CGIAR. IITA has also proactively considered various scenarios that it can implement if funding reductions do materialize, in addition to aggressively pursuing alternative sources of funding to mitigate any shortfalls that may occur. Based on the recommendation of the Audit & Finance Committee, the Board approved the 2019 audited financial statements and the appointment of Deloitte & Touche as External Auditors for the 2020 audit.
- The Hub/Science Directors presented the Program Committee with their plans for the period up to 2021 and for period beyond in the new environment of a unified CGIAR system. The large programs that are at the forefront of IITA's participation in the new CGIAR are the Crops to End Hunger, the Excellence in Breeding Initiative led by IITA, the 2Degree Initiative which captures IITA's work in plant health, and the DryArc initiative in partnership with ICRISAT and ICARDA reflecting IITA's increasing involvement in the Sahel. The PC noted the remarkable success of the hubs in attracting many large projects. It was also pleased to note the ongoing negotiations of all hubs with development banks and countries to advocate for IITA's role in technical assistance and backstopping of development projects financed by loans to countries. The challenge in their view will be to ensure the incorporation of research into these development project agendas.
- In the Partnerships for Development Committee members discussed the activities of the directorate against its broad goal of scaling out IITA's research innovations to meet end user needs. They highlighted the underlying challenges from engaging in high level finance, to risk management to address agricultural risks associated with scaling, the implications of engaging with the private sector and even extending its work to include disaster relief, as well as the range of other activities needed to ensure P4D fulfilled its mandate effectively. They strongly recommended partnerships with investment banks and private equity funds through BIP as a fully established LLC, and engagement with the African Risk Capacity insurance as one of the mechanisms for mitigating agricultural risks. In the Committee's view a key for attracting the private sector is to have understandable and convincing business plans for proposed ventures and adherence to high level professional business standards inclusive of gender. Monitoring and control of dispersed staff, tracking studies of the first batch of agripreneur business ventures, aligning with country priorities, ensuring that P4D had high level negotiation and financial skills were also raised for attention.
- In the Human Resources Committee, members discussed the transition to a single grading structure under the One-CGIAR. They concluded that in moving to the harmonized salary structure, the salaries of existing IITA staff should only trend upwards. On Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion, they were concerned IITA was below the CGIAR benchmark of 35% representation of women in professional roles. While Human Resources had taken several steps to increase gender representation, in the Committee's view the institute had to go beyond policies to elevate the role of GDI. It required cultural change to eliminate the silent bias across all levels of the Institute. The Board was pleased to learn about the Institute's

succession planning and availability of highly qualified individuals ready to fill critical positions currently occupied by staff nearing retirement. The Board recommended that consideration be given to women in the succession plans.

- Following the establishment of BIP as a Limited Liability Company effective 1 January the Board approved the appointment of two of three external candidates to the 7 member BIP Board, one of whom will be appointed Chair. A third candidate has yet to be confirmed. Given the emphasis on ensuring a gender balanced Board, gender will be one of the key criteria for selection. As the major stakeholder, the four internal appointments on the Board will consist of the BIP CEO, the DDG P4D, a successor to the DDG (R4D), to be appointed by the Director General, and a representative of the IITA Board. The Board will follow with the appointment of its representative soon after other appointments have been confirmed respecting the importance of a skills as well as gender balanced board.
- The Board Chair informed the Board on new developments from Technical Advisory Group 3 on Governance to be finalized and confirmed at the System Management Board meeting May 5-7, 2020. The main issues relate to the synchronization of the responsibilities between the One CGIAR Board, the Executive Management Team, and the Directors General. As the Director General's representative to TAG5 on Regional and Country Alignment, Kwesi Attah-Krah followed with the work undertaken by the TAG, its plans to deliver on its terms of reference for improving CGIAR alignment and collaboration at the regional and country levels, the process it has engaged in and the deliverables it has identified. The Board Chair informed that Christian Borgemeister will be joining TAG7 that deals with resource mobilization.
- In the Governance Committee Trustees selected Bruno Delvaux to succeed Christian Borgemeister as Program Committee Chair and Rhoda Tumusiime to succeed Josephine Okot as Human Resource Committee Chair.
- Following a presentation on the activities of the Search Committee since its inception in February 2020 the Board concluded that the major responsibility for recruitment of the next Director General will be undertaken by the Search Committee with a central role to be played by the whole Board. (Members of the committee consist of the Board Chair and the four Chairs of the Board sub-committees, plus the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture representing IITA's host country, and Rhoda Tumusiime representing Africa outside of Nigeria.) A search firm will be contracted whose responsibility will be primarily to undertake due diligence of the final list of candidates and provide backstopping. Given the new configuration of the IITA Board under the One-CGIAR, the Board also agreed, effective immediately to appoint the Board Chair as Chair of the Search Committee with the GC Chair as the engine that drives the process. A timeline has been developed with the launch planned for July 2020.
- This Board meeting being the final meeting of Board Chair, Ngongi Namanga and Human Resource Committee Chair, Josephine Okot, the incoming Board Chair, Christian Borgemeister expressed appreciation to them on behalf of the Board and IITA for their dedicated and outstanding service to the Institute and invited them to attend the fall Board meeting to bid farewell in person. Both Trustees followed by sharing their appreciation to the Board, the Director General, and the staff for the opportunity to serve an Institute dedicated to the needs of the continent.