The **International Institute of Tropical Agriculture** (IITA) is a non-profit international organization founded in 1967. It is a member of CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food secure future[^1], and the first such center to be based in Africa. Its mission is to enhance the food security, income and well-being of resource-poor people in sub-Saharan Africa by conducting research and related activities to increase agricultural production, improve food systems and sustainably manage natural resources, in partnership with national and international stakeholders. It focuses on smallholder cropping and postharvest systems and on the following food crops: cassava, cowpea, maize, banana, soybean and yam.

## Contents
- History
- Research on bananas
  - Banana breeding
- References
- Also on this website
- External links

## History

IITA was founded in 1967. Discussions between the Ford and Rockfeller foundations on the establishment of a research centre whose mandate would be increasing the production and improving the quality of tropical food crops other than rice go back to 1962. Their first choice for the location of such an institute was Nigeria. The campus of the University of Ibadan was proposed and the development of a proposal jointly sponsored by the two foundations was authorized at a December 1963 meeting. By March 1965, an agreement had been reached on a proposal for an International Institute of Tropical Agriculture located in Nigeria[^2].

The outbreak of civil war in 1966 led many people to question the decision to locate IITA in Nigeria, but the two foundations stood by their decision. The Institute was formally established as an autonomous, nonprofit organization on 24 July 1967. Construction of IITA headquarters began in 1968 and the first building was inaugurated in April 1970, three months after the end of the civil
In 1975, when the institute felt the need for a high-rainfall station in an acid-soil area, the government of Rivers State allocated an 80-hectare site at Onne, near Port Harcourt. In 1985, IITA officially opened a station in neighbouring Benin.

Research on bananas

IITA has historically focused its research on genetic improvement and plant health of important African staple crops, including bananas. The institute maintains banana collections in Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda that contributes through its genetic improvement efforts through conventional breeding and genetic transformation.

Banana breeding

In 1991, IITA set up the Plantain and Banana Improvement Program in response to the increasing pest and disease pressure on the crop. It has produced improved Plantain hybrids (PITA) as well as banana ones (BITA). It is also collaborating with the National Agricultural Research Organization of Uganda to improve East African highland bananas. The hybrids are called NARITA, for NARO and IITA.

References

1. Official website of the CGIAR

Also on this website

Musapedia pages on research organizations:
Bioversity International
Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement - CIRAD
Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza - CATIE
Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária - Embrapa
Fundación Hondureña de Investigación Agrícola - FHIA
International Institute of Tropical Agriculture - IITA
Taiwan Banana Research Institute - TBRI

External links

Official website of IITA
IITA's work on bananas
Official website of CGIAR

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