The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) is an accomplished research institute affiliated with the CGIAR. Since it was founded in 1967, IITA has grown in scientific reach and capacities that have impacted upon our understanding of tropical agriculture and our opportunities to increase agricultural production. Impacts from agricultural research depend upon the effective translation of findings into useful technologies and products; IITA works with governments, development partners, and with the private sector to better direct its efforts toward the wellbeing of farmers. As a result, IITA has pioneered technologies and cultivated networks across sub-Saharan Africa. Through this process, IITA has come to two conclusions, 1) African agribusiness recognizes the importance of Research and Development but has shortcomings in its execution because of insufficient capacity and resources, 2) considerations in product development are too often viewed as secondary by scientists, and strong research may end too soon after the successful demonstration of pilot technologies. As a result of this impasse, relevant science has not necessarily led to better livelihoods.

This situation suggested that IITA has need for institutional innovation and agribusiness incubation through close collaboration with and co-investment by the private sector. Toward this end, the concept of Business Incubation was born (Figure 1). The Business Incubation Platform develops profitable agro-enterprises around proven farm technologies and builds the capacities of entrepreneurs to more widely commercialize these products. IITA hosts potential investors and advances commercial potential in a manner that connects scientific advancement better, to the needs of poor farmers, through greater access to a new generation of farm inputs and tools. The BIP is located at IITA Headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria, and operates as a suite of collaborative business ventures to test market-pioneering products and provide technical training to the private sector, so that they quickly enter economic mainstreams. The BIP bridges the gap between pioneering technologies and commonplace products in a manner consistent with IITA’s mandate for impact delivery across a range of System Level Outcomes. In this way, the presence of a viable BIP will further provide incentive to the private sector to bring in additional cutting-edge technologies for African smallholder farmers to market. It can provide the engagement of stakeholders along the entire agricultural input value chain and include technical, marketing and logistic backstopping. In this time, IITA shows the three models of BIP project, and its results.

Figure 1. By dealing with the research to commercialization gap, IITA strengthens its impact delivery.