

Summary of the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD)

GCARD Aims

The first Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development will be held in Montpellier, France, 28-31 March, 2010. GCARD is the first of the Global Conferences on Agricultural Research for Development, which will be held every two years to bring together all those who are actively involved in agricultural development and to share their views.

GCARD Processes aim to promote effective and targeted investment at all levels of the agricultural system to ensure that agricultural research will meet the needs of resource-poor farmers. They follow an active philosophy of working with and for the people and better connecting science with the development needs of societies. The process leading up to GCARD will refine and clarify regional and global agricultural research priorities identified by diverse stakeholder groups and representatives in each region.

GCARD Organization

GCARD is organized by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research, which brings together all constituencies involved across the entire continuum between agricultural research and development. Within these, the Regional Research Fora (covering Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and West Asia, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and North America) have been managing a detailed and systematic consultation process across all partners, public, private and civil, to review existing development plans and research priorities. This has taken place through review of existing policies and documents, e-consultations and face-to-face meetings. Taken together, these refine and present regional priorities and needs and lead towards solutions to make the impact of research in development more effective.

The GCARD effort for 2009-2010 consists of several different elements, connected by open and inclusive consultation. The framework was developed under the direction of the GCARD Taskforce which meets fortnightly by teleconference and includes representatives of the GFAR Steering Committee (to which it reports), the CGIAR Alliance and the host country. Local arrangements in Montpellier are supported through Agropolis International.

The GCARD processes are completely decentralized, with strong emphasis on ownership from the regions concerned. Regional Research Fora have been directly commissioned, through funding from the World Bank, together with Asian Development Bank and the EC via EIARD and GTZ, and empowered to deliver processes considering key issues, to a standard format and template devised by the GCARD Task Force. Consultant lead authors have been identified by the Fora from within each region and e-consultations have been professionally facilitated, with support commissioned from the CGIAR ICT-KM group.

GCARD elements

The elements of the GCARD consultation include:

1. Regional review through synthesis and analysis of existing national and regional documents to produce a regional development context and refreshed set of regional agricultural research priorities
2. Electronic consultations and face-to-face dialogue to provide perspective on the priorities and on how improvements to research systems and innovation pathways may be able to create more, and faster, development impact
3. Development of thinking within the international research community around the specific role and purpose of international research (consultation around the CGIAR SRF and large-scale programmes) and discussion of the role of advanced science in international development (Science Council Science Forum, June 2009)

The consultations in each region have explored four key issues:

- What are the needs and priorities for agricultural research in delivering defined development impacts?
- What mechanisms and partnerships are required in innovation pathways turning research into development impacts at scale?
- What are the key blockages, barriers and bottlenecks that prevent research from benefiting the poor?
- How best should these be resolved and what enabling investments, policies and capacities are most needed?

Associated actions

GFAR is also commissioning a series of pre-meetings and studies to create issues papers informing the content of the GCARD, in particular in regard to systematic changes occurring or required in agricultural research for development. Subjects being considered for specific additional attention include:

- A desk study of the scale and returns from agricultural research investments around the world
- The role of women in research and research for women farmers
- Changing and reshaping agricultural education to meet future career needs in agricultural research and innovation systems
- Work to identify required partnership qualities for more equitable and effective research and research funding mechanisms to strengthen partnership from the outset
- Examination of the role of the fast growing economies, in learning from the implications of economic growth for agricultural research and the role of national providers in regional agricultural research and advisory systems
- The scale of need in new advisory systems and opportunities for strengthening rural advisory services

Towards Montpellier

Global plan and Montpellier agenda

A group of four global expert authors has now been identified and confirmed. These bring a range of strategic perspectives to the formulation of the global view and preparation of a draft action plan and for formulating the global needs identified from each region.

The GCARD Agenda will present these priorities and the experiences and lessons learned from each region. The first part of the GCARD program will be a summit of invited senior policy makers from governments, international agencies and key stakeholder organizations. Participants will focus on the development policies and changes required to strengthen dynamic and effective national agricultural research for development systems, able to generate, access and use knowledge to create positive impacts for the poor.

Subsequent days will focus on looking at the opportunities from each region, having taken stock of the key challenges and ideas moving forwards. These will be matched against the findings from the SRF to determine the areas of fit between the global frame and the roles desired of the CGIAR by its partners and intended beneficiaries. This will follow a logical progression into the third day, which examines the tools and changes necessary to make agricultural research systems more effective in impacting end-users and how to boost learning and change across regions, to ensure that research that is most suitable can be sourced from around the world, human capital strengthened and incentives instituted for focus on impact for the poor. It is anticipated that around 450 people will attend the event.

The final day will wrap up the meeting, by capturing ways forward as an agreed Action Plan for Strengthening Agricultural Research for Development on which to deliver the priorities as set out by the regions. It will also establish a Montpellier Declaration, highlighting the anticipated roles, accountabilities, behaviours and modalities required for agricultural research to become more effective in development.

Mutual accountability and beneficiary empowerment are central yet understated issues in the role of agricultural research for development. GCARD 2010 aims to spell out a clear action plan and a framework for improving agricultural research globally, incorporating the recent discussion on the reform of the CGIAR and behaviours that are pertinent to the entire agricultural development system, including more open relationships and collaborative action, mutual trust and accountability and new tools and information directly relevant to the end-user.

Current status

Regional processes are still underway, but there has been excitement at the recent level of public engagement with these innovative e-consultations, which attracted over 1800 respondent individuals and organisations taking part and with the following breakdown, 530 from Latin America

and the Caribbean, 500 from Africa, 291 from Asia Pacific, 211 from North Africa and the Middle East, 198 from Europe, and 102 from the Central Asia and Caucasus region.

More recently, the Face-to-Face meetings have built on this early excitement and whilst the e-consultations were expected to finish just prior to the Face-to-Face meetings, they have actually increased in engagement as participants seek to engage more alongside the meetings. Meetings have already taken place in Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Central Asian region, but the final meetings from Asia Pacific and West Asia are either underway or due to take place within the next two weeks.

The CGIAR SRF draft was made immediately available once it was released. Various speakers from the CGIAR have introduced the document at the regional face to face meetings. However, it is in too early a draft at the moment for substantive feedback from partners, beyond the generic issues it raises.

Participants in the face-to-face meetings were selected and invited direct by the Regional Forum concerned, while the Task Force provided direct guidance to the regional fora that the consultation meetings should contain balanced representation among small farmers, NGOs, private sector and public sector research and development institutions and by gender.

Regional drafts are made available as they are approved by the relevant regional organization. Early drafts from each region are available on the GCARD website at www.GCARD2010.net .