



REGIONAL COLLECTIVE ACTION: ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

It has been three years since the establishment of Regional Collective Action in Eastern and Southern Africa, and in this issue of Collective Action News we look back at the achievements to date.

The goal of the Regional Collective Action program is to foster the emergence of a coordinated, cohesive program of agricultural research in Eastern and Southern Africa that produces clear economies of scale and scope at low transaction costs, to successfully address regional priorities. Collective Action involves a network, which includes the fifteen CGIAR Centers, sub-regional organizations, FARA, regional networks and voluntary partners (primarily from national agricultural institutes and universities) in order to add value to ongoing and future agricultural research in the region.

The two most visible outputs – the CGIAR Research Map for Africa and this newsletter – have been highly praised. The Research Map (<http://ongoing-research.cgiar.org/>) allows access to up-to-date information about the research projects undertaken by CGIAR centres throughout Africa. It is a collaboration between Collective Action, the ICT-KM Program of the CGIAR, CGIAR centres and over 250 scientists who have contributed their research information. The newly released map gives users the unique opportunity to carry out a more specific and targeted query based on different key fields, link the data to project outputs and other relevant documents while allowing project managers to have complete ownership over their information.

Fifteen issues of Collective Action News (see all back issues here) have been published since 2008. The newsletter aims to alert agricultural researchers and professionals in Africa to the importance of collective action in research. It does so by highlighting successful cases of collective action, and has reported on collective research on food prices, crises response, urban farming and agricultural markets among other topics. It is distributed to an estimated 9,830 recipients including agricultural researchers in CGIAR centres, staff in partner organisations, donors, and government policy advisers.

In terms of collaborative research, the Collective Action program is expressed in four Flagship Programs, each coordinated by a CGIAR scientist, namely: (1) Integrated natural resources management (led by ICRAF); (2) Policies, institutions and information for achieving impact at scale (led by ILRI); (3) Conservation and enhancement of agricultural biodiversity for improved agricultural production (led by Bioversity); and (4) Improving impact of emergency response on agricultural livelihoods in highly stressed and unstable systems (led by ICRISAT). Recent reflections by Flagship Coordinators suggest there have been useful insights in engendering collective action through low key, low cost consultation processes, and that the use of the Flagships as platforms for consultation will continue to be especially important as the CGIAR goes through its process of change.

One particularly successful example of collaborative research has been the CGIAR's response to the food price crisis in 2008. The Regional Collective Action program and ASARECA responded quickly to assemble a group of leading researchers from the region to analyse the regional implications and trends of the crisis. The research showed it would be erroneous to assume that global food price trends were being replicated in any similar way across the region. In fact, the responses were diverse and heterogeneous, and brought with them the need for a differentiated set of policy responses. This kind of integrative analysis of complex problems, where a true picture only emerges through connecting various 'islands' of knowledge, is what the Regional Collective Action program was set up to deliver. The collective response to the food price crisis is the best example of a response that was both policy relevant and timely.

Another example of the program's work is the bringing together of leading researchers and practitioners involved in agricultural markets to review over two decades of pilot activities. The program, through its Flagship 2 on markets and institutions, played a major role in organizing an international conference, funded by Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa in Nairobi in May 2009. The conference brought together 150 of Africa's and the world's leading scholars and development experts to recommend priority actions in developing the continent's national and regional agricultural markets. The presentations covered a wealth of topics ranging from addressing marketing challenges to development of profitable value chains. The conference organizers are developing a synthesis of key outcomes and the results will be reported in a forthcoming issue of Collective Action News.

Breaking down the walls of the CGIAR centers and enabling collaboration, both within the CGIAR and with partners, is perhaps the greatest achievement of the Regional Collective Action program. In Mozambique, collaborative support to the national agricultural research institute, IIAM, led to the establishment of a Platform for Agricultural Research and Innovation with initial funding support from USAID. This initiative started when the Government of Mozambique hosted the Annual General Meeting of the CGIAR in Maputo in December 2008, and used the occasion to request assistance from the Alliance of Centers of the CGIAR in developing the country's agricultural sector. These types of collaborative efforts will prove to be particularly important in the on-going CGIAR Change Process.

Further information about Regional Collective Action for Eastern and Southern Africa is available at: <http://www.ilri.org/regionalplan/index.php>

Newsbyte

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has pulled together a unique synthesis of major successes in agricultural development spanning the past 50 years. The book *Millions Fed: Proven Successes in Agricultural Development*, commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, examines large-scale programs, policies, and investments that have had a proven impact on hunger and food security in the developing world. The book describes a total of 20 case studies from around the world. Following its launch in November 2009, the book has been shared with policymakers, researchers, donors, and development practitioners in London, Addis Ababa, Beijing, New Delhi, Dhaka, and, most recently, Nairobi in a seminar co-organized by IFPRI and the CGIAR Regional Collective Action Program. <http://www.ifpri.org/millionsfed>

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Newsletter team:
Kate Longley, Michael Hailu, Rebecca Selvarajah-Jaffery, Susan MacMillan, Yvonne Otieno and Reagan Sirengo

Questions, comments, feedback? Please email:
r.selvarajah-jaffery@cgiar.org

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