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The Global Forum on Agricultural Research

Knowledge for All

Developing farmer-based innovation

Farming is becoming more knowledge-intensive. New agricultural knowledge is crucial for increasing smallholder productivity and improving rural livelihoods. But, despite considerable investment in agricultural research globally, extension in developing countries has struggled to get research findings across to the wider farming community.



Image: Ajit Maru

Global Forum stakeholders have recognized the need for radical change. Researchers and farmers should now join forces in developing technologies relevant and useful for smallholder agriculture on the ground. Farmers are themselves a source of innovation and agricultural science, and should take centre-stage in its development.

A key constraint to this process is farmers' lack of ability to access new knowledge. The Global Forum aims to tackle this so that farmers can contribute effectively to agricultural innovation.

Improving access to knowledge

The Global Forum facilitates access to agricultural knowledge in many different ways, as follows.

International networks

By making it easier to build new networks for agricultural development and strengthening those that already exist, the Global Forum makes it possible for farmer associations and other Forum members and stakeholders to collaborate and build their capacity for knowledge exchange.

Networks and projects in which the Forum is involved include the Global Partnership Programme on Promoting Local Innovation (Prolinnova). Through this, the Forum showcases successful examples of knowledge-empowered agricultural communities, thereby sharing their experiences around the world. Other examples are the Global Partnership Programme on Linking Farmers to Markets, and the Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development (CIARD) initiative, which is working to

improve access to agricultural information in the public domain.

Yet another example is the DURAS project, which wrapped up its activities in 2008. This worked to understand information flows for agricultural innovation. In addition, the Global Forum's support for the Inter-Regional Network on Cotton has helped share knowledge about this crop around the world.

Raising the agendas

The Global Forum actively works through a wide range of Conferences and International Consultations to raise awareness about the need for improved access to knowledge. This includes organizing workshops on specific issues related to information and communication management. At the Global Forum's 2006 Triennial Conference, delegates recognized the importance of farmers and traders who add value to agricultural

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products. If these people were better equipped to access new agricultural knowledge, they could make the process of innovation quicker and more efficient, directly benefiting the incomes of farmers.

Among the several Consultations and workshops co-organized by the Global Forum are the I and II Expert Consultations on International Information Systems for Agricultural Science and Technology, various regional workshops on information and communication technologies (ICTs) in agriculture and, most recently, a workshop on "the Adoption of ICT Enabled Information Systems for Agricultural Development" at the World Conference on Agricultural Information and IT in 2008.

Development of on-line communities

Agricultural knowledge flows through social networks built by agricultural communities. Via its website (www.egfar.org), the Global Forum supports this process with discussion boards, monthly newsletters, directories of agricultural expertise, an open platform for web publishing and an extensive document repository. And, it commissions and supports the development of other online resources such as blogs and customized search engines.

The "ICM4ARD" Global Partnership Programme

Improving information and communications for agricultural research is at the forefront of the Global Forum's agenda. From 1998 onwards, the Forum has provided a global platform to discuss and plan action to improve information sharing and exchange for agricultural research globally. A good example of this is the ICM4ARD programme.

ICM4ARD stands for Information Communication Management for Agricultural

Research for Development. This program was the result of wide-ranging regional and global consultations among those involved with the role of agricultural research in development between 2002 and 2004. It has four main aims: (1) to increase and improve investments in agricultural information and communications management (ICM); (2) to build the capacity of information systems managers at the institute, regional and national levels; (3) to bring greater integration and coherence to agricultural information and its flows; and (4) to improve the governance of information flows for more equitable access.

Since the ICM4ARD programme kicked off in 2005, it has made key advances. In partnership with partners such as the CGIAR and FAO, the Global Forum has advocated increased investment in ICM through workshops and seminars. It has also contributed to the training of information managers in national agricultural research systems, to improve their information-management skills. As a result, such national research systems have improved their information management through use of ICTs and have established their own web sites.

The Global Forum's Regional Forums now have the governance structures they need to help improve ICM among members. And, via the ICM4ARD programme, the Global Forum has teamed up with FAO and Wageningen International to establish standards, tools and mechanisms to make information on agricultural research more accessible to everyone.



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