

Consultative Meeting of the ISNAR-IFPRI Program Advisory Committee

Contribution to Panel discussion on Agricultural Science Policy theme.

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We are all living witnesses of the on-going rapid advances in technological innovation and scientific knowledge, the benefits and spill-ins of which are yet to reach those in dire need of such advances, especially the majority of the African population. In no other sector is this most apparent than in the agriculture, food and nutrition sector, as illustrated depressing statistics we are all too familiar with and characterized by poor and inadequate agricultural production and productivity, malnutrition, overt and hidden hunger.

Several factors account for this lack of impact of Science and Technology outputs on the life and livelihood of the majority of people in developing countries, and can be conveniently grouped into three categories: Inadequate investments in infrastructure and human resources development, less than optimum institutional arrangements and unfavourable policy and regulatory frameworks.

Many research and development organizations and agencies are addressing these issues, in order to improve the sector performance for the benefit of the population. The task before us now is to suggest ways and means by which the ISNAR could continue to effectively contribute to these efforts, and our contribution will focus essentially on the policy and regulatory framework issues.

The various background documents made available to us, provided sufficient information and raised a number of crucial questions that facilitated the task of making suggestions as to WHAT ISNAR should do and HOW it should go about it.

With regards to the WHAT? We suggest that the focus should be on bridging the research-policy formulation-implementation gap, because this will respond or address the objective of identifying the socio-economic, political and institutional factors that constrain and/or enhance sector performance, and developing policy options that would alleviate constraints and build on opportunities. The expected outputs from such a focused programme of research would be: firstly an enhancement of the contribution to Science and Technology progress from Africa, and secondly, direct and demonstrable impact on the life and livelihood of the population, since the impact of policy factors constraining the transfer of S&T benefits would have been alleviated.

With regards to the HOW, we suggest the following:

We note that institutions and governments jealously guard their prerogative to formulate and implement policies, and may sometimes view attempts to influence such prerogatives from outside with suspicion. Given the sensitive nature of policy formulation and implementation, ISNAR should perhaps de-emphasize the technical assistance approach in favour of a catalytic and/or facilitating modality. NARS, to a large extent, rarely have much of an impact or influence on policy formulation, and implementation. The research-policy formulation-implementation gap is therefore rather, particularly in Africa.

There is an urgent need therefore to continue on-going efforts to enhance the capacity of NARS to influence policy. ISNAR could contribute to these efforts in the following ways:

Networking and linking NARS to specialized policy research groups within or outside the region, to complement any specific training activities that might be carried out.

Implementation of case studies, syntheses and action research (in that order of priority) carried out in partnerships with strong and weak NARS alike to provide information backed by various policy option scenarios for consideration by local, national, and regional authorities. Some of the topics on which ISNAR worked in the past and which still remain relevant include: biosafety and biotechnology, investment in agricultural R&D, private sector participation (PPP), reversing the brain drain through innovative incentives and human resource motivation etc.

Effective communication of the outputs to target authorities using well-known communication approaches and tools, including **strong advocacy** in order to influence policy processes and address the objective of bridging the research-policy formulation-implementation gap.

Finally we would like to note that although it is convenient and perhaps necessary for a variety of reasons to present the future area of focus of ISNAR under three thematic areas, there are several issues common to the three themes. For example, policies may have a direct impact on institutional change and the organization of agricultural research systems and programs, and vice-versa. These cross cutting issues and linkages amongst the three themes should be given a special attention to reinforce the ISNAR programme.