



Expanding ICRA partnerships

The quest for a multiplier effect

Institutional change is taking place all over the world in response to financial pressures and globalisation. As awareness of the need for change grows, so do the demands on ICRA. We need to take a new approach – one that substantially multiplies the supply of learning opportunities, thereby making more effective use of our limited resources. As part of our new ‘global partnership strategy’ we are therefore casting our net more widely: although we still form relationships with individual partners, we are aiming to capitalise on these partnerships to build networks of education and R&D organisations – both in the South and in the North.

Shifting ICRA’s centre of gravity South

ICRA aims to work with new and existing partners in the South to offer demand-driven services based on learning by doing. These services will be provided by national and regional networks of partner education and R&D organisations. Together, we will develop learning materials, conduct research on different ways of facilitating learning, build the skills of facilitators and evolve alternative R&D approaches that are widely adopted by other institutions besides ICRA’s immediate clientele.

The role of the North

At the same time, we will strengthen alliances and collaboration with and among cells of interest and expertise in ARD in Europe and at the international agricultural research centres. These are sources of support for capacity building in ARD. For example, through the ICRA–NATURA project, we are mobilising European interest in supporting innovation in R&D in sub-Saharan Africa; and we are working with the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) on the people-centred management of plant genetic resources.

Closing the gap

ICRA is addressing the need to improve the relevance and narrow the gap between tertiary education and the needs of agricultural R&D institutions – starting with organisations we’re already involved with. For example:

- The National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) and Makerere University in Uganda: a collaborative initiative to learn together for change
- Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and several educational institutions in South Africa: Strengthening capacities within the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods division of ARC and its partners in rural development
- The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) in Central America: enhancing support services to rural development projects
- International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) and the national agricultural research institutes of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia: helping to place people at the centre of main-taining agrobiodiversity in North Africa



Linking education and research

Capacity development efforts need strong educational partners, as these are the institutions that supply the next generation of R&D professionals. In turn, universities can sharpen the relevance of the education they provide by bringing academic staff and students into contact with other stakeholders who share the challenges of people-centred rural development.



When requests for ICRA involvement in developing ARD capacity come from educational institutions, ICRA will encourage stronger links with research and other stakeholder groups. Conversely, when re-

quests originate from research, extension or development groups, ICRA will help them form partnerships with educational institutions.

Building collaboration in Nepal

Devendra Gauchan found many obstacles in his way when he returned to Nepal's National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) after his ICRA learning. 'Fixed hierarchies, frequent changes of key managers and limited understanding of participatory research virtually prevented me from using my new knowledge', he says. 'More recently, pressure for reform, mainly from donors, has meant that I have been able to use my experience to bring about changes in research approaches and strategies. Our research policy now focuses on partnerships with different stakeholders from both public and private sectors. We are also forming links with other institutions involved in participatory research. Collaboration is the key to maximising the impact of scarce human and financial resources.'

Re-designing the approach to development in South Africa

Aart-Jan Verschoor, a manager in the ARC's Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Division, attended an ICRA course in 1995. He was inspired to investigate how economic diversity and cost-reducing mechanisms could be integrated into agricultural development strategies. 'This study represents the culmination of a 9-year journey, which started in 1995, when I was introduced to agricultural development. Participating in an ICRA course changed my professional life, redirecting me to serve the resource-poor farming community of South Africa. I am grateful for the role that ICRA staff played in enlightening me as to the complexities of small-scale agriculture and the uneven playing fields on which smallholders must operate.'



After conducting detailed studies in South Africa's North West Province, Verschoor was able to re-design his research approach in a way that empowers farmers, addresses the diversity of farmers' attitudes and aptitudes, gives them ownership and integrates them into the production

chain. 'This approach is more cost-effective and enables even resource-poor farmers to contribute to economic growth and development.'