



Realising ICRA's Full Potential in Building Innovation Systems



ICRA's Vision for the Future

ICRA's vision

is to be a centre of excellence that supports the building of effective pro-poor rural and agricultural innovation systems, and that is jointly owned and governed by the agricultural research for development stakeholder communities in Europe and the South, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

ICRA's mission

is to strengthen the capacities of people and organisations involved in development, research and education, to jointly realise knowledge-based rural and agricultural innovation in support of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

ICRA's goal

is to help end poverty and hunger and to promote sustainable resource use, by supporting balanced partnerships between stakeholders in pro-poor innovation from Europe and the South.



The 2008 'food price crisis' saw an abrupt rise in the cost of basic staples. Rice vendor in Ghana.

ICRA in brief

The International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA) was formed in 1981 as a joint project of the main European donor countries supporting international agricultural research for development (ARD). The Centre aims to help people and organisations in the rural sector to become more effective in working together to generate, share and use knowledge in order to accelerate rural and agricultural innovation in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so, ICRA adds value by merging its European donor countries' diverse intellectual traditions in ARD, and by aligning European capacity development initiatives with those of southern partners.

ICRA offers capacity building instruments to strengthen multi-institutional partnerships at national and regional level in the South. ICRA's work is thus embedded within partner countries' endeavours to build innovation systems. Within this context, it focusses on strengthening southern partners' abilities to offer such capacity building instruments themselves and adapt them to their own contexts. Rather than a service provider, this makes ICRA a long-term partner in change processes involving organisations with complementary roles.



ICRA focuses on strengthening partners' abilities to provide capacity building.

Institutional funding from members of the European Initiative for Agricultural Research for Development (EIARD; France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) provides about 45% of ICRA's budget. The rest is obtained through projects and tenders with partners in the North and South. ICRA has offices in Wageningen and Montpellier and regional representatives in southern Africa and Latin America. It sources its expertise from both Europe and the South. The Centre is governed by an international Board of Trustees composed of the main donors and co-opted members.

Why a new Vision for ICRA's future?

This Vision for ICRA's future follows from an in-depth external review of ICRA carried out in 2008. The review recognised ICRA's impressive achievements and value, but at the same time called for urgent changes to enable it to take advantage of its evolving context and to fulfil its full potential to strengthen pro-poor innovation capacity in the South. The Vision will serve as the main strategic guideline for ICRA's Board of Trustees and management. It also presents ICRA's view of the way ahead to its many European and southern partners in research and development (R&D), education, policy-making, the private sector, farmer organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and funding agencies, as well as the ICRA alumni.

The changing context for innovation systems approaches

Agriculture is back on the development agenda

The 2008 'food price crisis' abruptly ended a period of neglect of the agricultural sector's primary role in ensuring food security, reducing poverty and environmental degradation, and generating a surplus to fuel overall economic growth. Even if the crisis was overcome and overshadowed by the credit crunch that followed, the consensus view is that food availability will tighten in the near-to mid-term under the combined effects of increased demand for high-energy and protein foods, fossil fuel uncertainties, climate shocks, diversion of land and water to bio-fuels, and deteriorating natural resource quality and availability.

The need to integrate ARD with pro-poor innovation

It is now recognised that the goals of poverty alleviation¹, food security, social stability, climate mitigation² and agro-ecosystem sustainability³ cannot be reached unless the speed and effectiveness of rural innovation are hugely increased. In the context of rural development this calls for renewed commitment to more integrated and effective ARD⁴ with new ways of generating and exchanging knowledge, bringing together users and producers of knowledge as 'co-innovators'.

ARD should aid the analysis of rural development processes – leading to an in-depth understanding of the drivers of, and impediments to, sustainable rural development – and promote the innovation needed to improve smallholders' livelihoods. The co-innovators should include organisations across different scales and sectors to ensure that they coordinate their efforts to scale up innovation. New capacities and inventive organisational changes are needed to face these challenges and build effective 'innovation systems'. New ways of building capacity are urgently needed.



Agriculture is back on the development agenda. Harvesting tiger nut in Mali.

New institutional mechanisms for multi-stakeholder collaboration

Institutional arrangements in the field of ARD are also evolving rapidly. At the international level, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) remains a significant player and is currently undergoing a renewal of its mission, governance, performance management, funding mechanisms and accountability in partnership with the South. Important institutional developments that respond specifically to the need for multi-stakeholder co-innovation include the evolution of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), regional fora such as the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and sub-regional fora such as the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA). In Africa, continental policy guidelines, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) developed by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the corresponding Framework for African Agricultural Productivity (FAAP), call explicitly for a paradigm shift away from a technology package approach to one based on truly integrated ARD. This should ensure that researchers (national and international) work together with smallholders, pastoralists, extension agencies, the private sector, governments and NGOs to achieve impact

on the ground. These policy guidelines also recognise the need to strengthen corresponding capacities in people and organisations in Africa.

European policy responds to the need for change

At the European Union (EU) level, modes of collaboration with the South are changing in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (ownership, alignment and harmonisation) and with the EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labour in Development Policy. In the past, collaboration between Europe and the South has generally been one of two types:

- ◆ Technical assistance, through which European institutes are selected on the basis of a tender to assist southern institutes, or
- ◆ Channelling, whereby European ARD funds are channelled to multi-lateral organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the CGIAR.

In future this collaboration is expected to move to new forms with increased emphasis on:

- ◆ Partnership, through which European and southern research institutes collaborate on an equal basis, and
- ◆ Ownership, whereby southern institutes receive European ARD funds for core programme funding and buy in European or other expertise as necessary.

Important aspects of this changing context include the future of European support to ARD in general and to ARD capacity development in particular. At a policy level, the new EIARD strategy⁵ recognises that the impact of ARD on development is limited by a number of factors, including the weakness of research institutes and the lack of researchers, especially in sub-Saharan Africa; the lack of liaison between ARD and broader rural development efforts; the lack of involvement of users of research results in the definition, implementation and monitoring of research; and the fragmentation and duplication of efforts resulting from the lack of coordination between ARD efforts of European member states and the European Commission (EC). The EIARD strategy explicitly recognises capacity development, innovation systems approaches and stronger European collaboration as priorities to respond to the current challenges in the South. Consequently, it mentions ICRA as a potential collaborative instrument that could be supported by European member states and the EC.

Enhancing collaboration between European ARD programmes

The future of European support to ARD and related capacity development is also shaped by developments at the programme level in response to this changing policy context, for example, those piloted by the European Research Area for Agricultural Research for Development (ERA–

ARD) project. This EC-funded project aims to strengthen transnational collaboration between the national ARD programmes of the European member states and to raise awareness of the current inefficiencies at national level, where the responsibility for ARD is often dispersed between several ministries, public institutions and foundations. Thus, the European ARD community already recognises the need to better coordinate European research and capacity development programmes because of the potentially substantial efficiency gains. It also recognises that a systemic approach should be adopted in joint European ARD capacity development, giving more weight to the strengthening of innovation systems and organisational capacity in the South, rather than the current emphasis on individual degree training. These developments open opportunities in the specific niche in which ICRA operates and highlight its added value as a unique, transnational programme to build ARD capacity, thereby providing a solid base for future projects, partnerships and impact.

The commonality of challenges in building innovation systems

The context of ARD is also affected by increasing awareness that Europe and the South, despite large differences in operating conditions, in essence face similar challenges in building innovation systems. This is due to the globalisation of research agendas that are increasingly focussed on global challenges, which means that solutions to national agricultural problems need to be found within the global context of climate change, ecosystem services, energy and water scarcity, and food safety in global supply chains. As a consequence, European agricultural research, like ARD



Solutions to agricultural problems need to be found within the global context of climate change, ecosystem services, water scarcity and food security. Rice planting in Madagascar.

in the South, can no longer focus narrowly on productivity and rationalisation, which were the pillars of the post-Second World War agricultural success story in Europe. As shown by a recent workshop convened by the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) of the EU⁶, the organisation of European agricultural research is struggling with similar questions to those faced by the South: Who are the actors to be involved in innovation systems? What mechanisms need to be developed to involve these actors? How can the necessary capacity for this collaboration be developed? This similarity in challenges opens new opportunities for mutual learning between Europe and the South on a more level playing field. Through its multi-organisational innovation partnerships in the South and its bases in Europe, ICRA can play an important facilitating role in such exchanges, thereby broadening its niche.

ICRA's role in strengthening innovation systems

ICRA's assets

ICRA has significant assets to help build the capacity to link ARD to broader development efforts, involve users and producers of research results in co-innovation, and mutually adjust the supporting services needed to scale up innovation. Its approach to strengthening innovation systems – at individual, organisational and system levels – uses a suite of novel training, coaching and advisory instruments that are continuously adjusted to the latest insights, but also rooted in 29 years of practical experience. Uniquely, these instruments are all based on mutual learning *between stakeholders* who wish to improve their situations through joint action; and *between these stakeholders and supporting services*, such as research, education, advisory and financial services, policy makers and regulatory bodies.



Training, coaching and advisory instruments focus on mutual learning. Visualisation of some ICRA principles during the 2008 Anglophone programme, Wageningen.

The relevance of ICRA's time-tested instruments is recognised by leading developing countries that have engaged ICRA to support their change processes, often at the initiative of influential ICRA alumni. ICRA has over a thousand alumni who constitute one of its strongest assets. The Centre also has a reputation for respecting ownership on the part of its partners and aligning itself with the processes of institutional change in the partner countries. Staff and management at ICRA are highly qualified and motivated, while financial buffers protect it against fluctuations in income. ICRA's long experience of harmonising and aligning a joint European capacity building initiative with regional and national initiatives of southern partners gives it a unique potential to advance the principles of the Paris Declaration in the case of ARD.

ICRA's successful move South

These assets supported ICRA's successful move South in recent years. This move responds to increased demand from southern partners, resulting from the changing environment for ARD in their countries and regions. To meet this demand, ICRA significantly scaled up its work beyond its original courses in interdisciplinary teamwork for R&D professionals, which are implemented through coursework in Wageningen and Montpellier, while fieldwork at partner research institutes in the South enhances the partners' relevance to smallholder farming. In addition to these courses, research institutes and development agencies have also begun to request on-the-job training from ICRA, involving large numbers of their personnel in rural innovation processes. Furthermore, a number of universities have asked for support to incorporate rural innovation competencies into MSc and BSc curricula. Platforms such as FARA have regularly sought support from ICRA.

Rather than simply meeting these needs itself, ICRA sought ways to strengthen southern partners' capacities to provide this training and support. ICRA also brought partners together to promote broader changes in the innovation system, arguing that just responding to their individual requests was not enough. This resulted in national partnerships in ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa and a three-country regional partnership in Latin America. Besides research organisations, these comprise government ministries, universities, farmer organisations and other stakeholders relevant to rural innovation. The outcomes sought from these partnerships are shown in the boxes in Figure 1.

Success generates a 'growth crisis'

While ICRA has made a very successful move South, this experience has also shown that consolidation and further development of this partnership strategy demands urgent changes

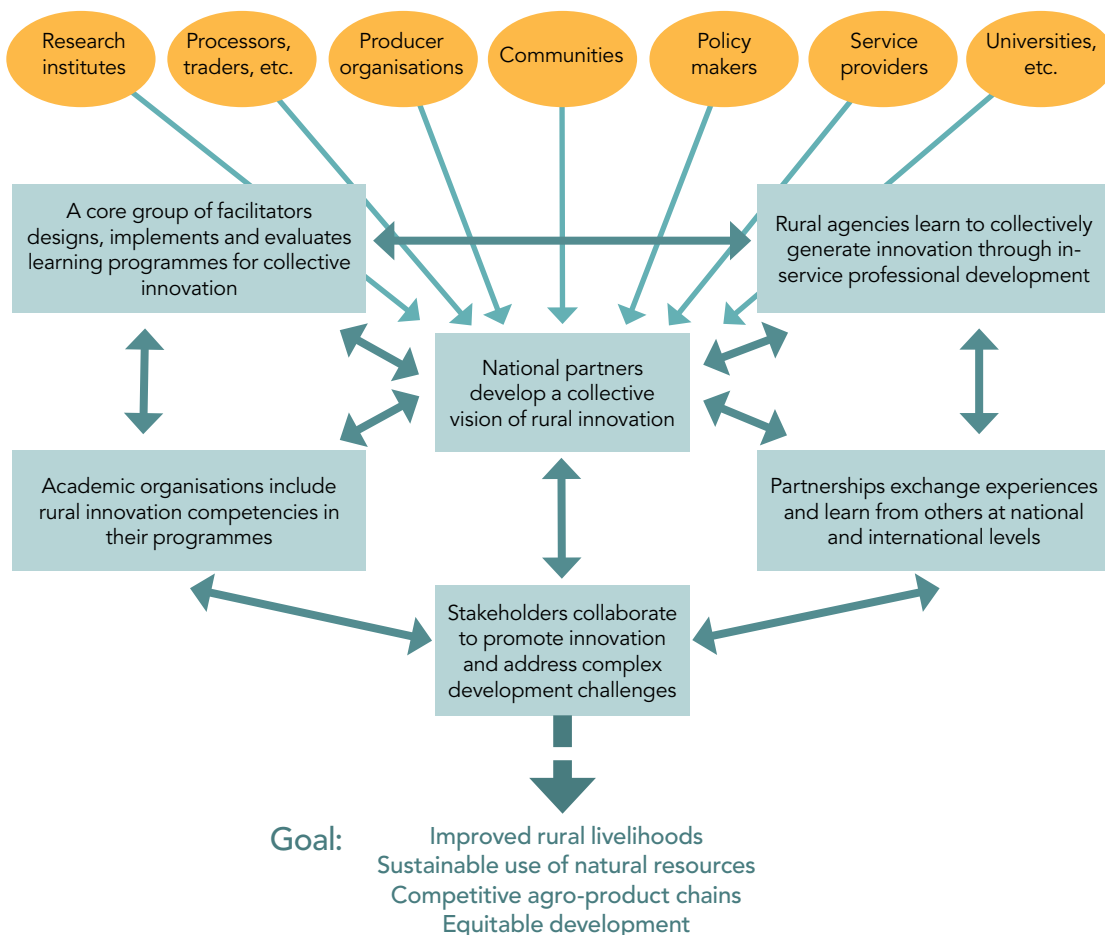


Figure 1. Desired outcomes of national ARD learning partnerships

in ICRA's organisational and funding model. As a non-employed organisation, ICRA could only move South by expanding the number of consultants it contracts, who now provide half of the professional staff time. This makes the centre vulnerable to loss of institutional memory and disproportionately increases demands on management and the few permanent staff. Also, due to

the lack of cross-sectoral funding for multi-stakeholder collaboration⁷, scaling up ICRA's activities in the South has relied on its exceptional success in obtaining complementary ad-hoc project funding and service contracts for specific components of these partnerships.

However, it is now apparent that funding long-term, multi-stakeholder partnerships in this fragmented way leaves gaps and is very time consuming, administratively complex and inefficient. Moreover, the separate funding projects are seldom synchronised. This funding model therefore causes too many discontinuities and imbalances in on-going partnership programmes. It also risks tearing ICRA apart, creating tensions between projects tailored to the needs of specific stakeholder groups and their respective donors, and gradually losing focus on the transverse stakeholder interaction and joint learning that are ICRA's defining characteristics. Finally, this funding model does not support ICRA's role in the long-term facilitation and nurturing of these partnerships.

ICRA is thus in a 'growth crisis' as the model underpinning its successful move South has reached the limits of its potential. To realise the full potential of its many assets and meet its partners' expectations of being a neutral, long-term partner in building national innovation systems and scaling up North–South exchanges of experience, it needs to reduce its dependence on short-term projects and increase the proportion of long-term institutional funding. It also needs to be able to employ its own staff, rather than working with a fixed number of people seconded by donors, and relying on consultants to meet the growing volume of work. Gradual further growth is no longer an option. It is the ambition of ICRA's Board and management to make the leap needed to put ICRA on a new growth curve.

ICRA's strategic directions for the future

Restructuring ICRA and strengthening funding

Steps are being taken to develop a new funding strategy and to make the required changes in ICRA's organisation. These include broadening the composition of the Board of Trustees to benefit from double guidance from both Europe and the South, as well as double guidance from representatives of donor and host institutions and high-level experts in research and education related to innovation systems.

Positioning ICRA in Europe

By having offices in Wageningen and Montpellier, ICRA is well situated to source European ARD expertise in English and French and to promote cross-pollination between the different ARD



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traditions of its European donor countries. In recent years, in moving South beyond its original training niche, ICRA has extended its collaboration with European research and higher education organisations by participating in joint tenders and service contracts. This aimed to mobilise the complementary expertise needed in its ARD partnerships in the South and to obtain funding for components of these partnerships. For these European partners, the added value of ICRA lies in its long-term investment in facilitating regional and national ARD partnerships in the South. These involve a wide range of stakeholders and provide a context in which the more specific roles of the European research and education organisations can be integrated in order to achieve greater synergy and impact in terms of pro-poor rural innovation.

Although ICRA's added value is recognised, for example in the Centre's role in the EC-funded Platform for African–European Partnership on ARD (PAEPARD), it needs further emphasis with European donors and platforms, such as EIARD. While ICRA is already networked with all these platforms, such interactions will be intensified to strengthen ICRA's position in Europe. In the coming years, ICRA will also further enhance its collaboration with European partner organisations and diversify the European partners with which it tenders. This will require further investments in networking and visibility to enhance recognition of ICRA as a European instrument and a bridge with the South with valuable practical expertise in applying new ideas of ownership, partnership, alignment and harmonisation in ARD capacity strengthening.

Positioning and networking ICRA in the South

To further strengthen its position in the South, ICRA will invest in its alumni network of effective change agents. With more than a thousand alumni, many of whom are in important leadership positions and still consider their ICRA training as a watershed in their professional development, this network is one of ICRA's greatest assets, but its potential is not fully utilised. The envisaged changes in ICRA's Board of Trustees, incorporating the double guidance from Europe and the South, will further strengthen ICRA's position in the South. To consolidate its move South, ICRA will also need more staff based in the southern hemisphere and a higher proportion of professionals from the South among its staff. The aim is not to create separate ICRA offices, but to base ICRA staff with partners in the South. Funding for these staff positions will be mobilised through grants from donors, service contracts and joint tenders with ICRA's national and regional ARD partners in the South. These partners will include networks of agricultural research and higher education organisations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

ICRA's added value for these organisations and networks is two-fold. As a neutral broker, ICRA can bring together partners with complementary roles who would otherwise not have



ICRA's alumni are one of its greatest assets. Participants at the 2004 Anglophone programme, Wageningen.

collaborated. Further, ICRA supports these partners to jointly strengthen their capacities to build effective multi-stakeholder partnerships and integrate their contributions to rural innovation.

Capitalising on ICRA's know-how

Through its 29 years of work on rural innovation systems in support of pro-poor development, ICRA has gained a strong theoretical and practical understanding of how to facilitate innovation. Nevertheless, this understanding remains largely undocumented and confined to ICRA staff and consultants. By engaging more systematically in innovation systems research and by playing a strategic role in documenting and sharing the lessons learned, ICRA will contribute to the growing global debate on how to improve rural innovation systems in practice. This knowledge will be made available to the wider community for training, testing, adaptation and up-scaling.

Improving ICRA's international visibility

To date, ICRA has hesitated to raise the visibility of its work with partners in the South for fear of stimulating demand far beyond what it could meet. While this low profile has helped ICRA to avoid overstretching its limited resources, it is now realised that consolidating recent

successes and achieving the goal of sustained growth require ICRA to substantially raise its international visibility. A communication strategy will be drafted and implemented with clear messages targeted at alumni, donors, partner organisations in Europe and the South, and the general ARD community. ICRA will commission studies to document success stories and publish the results through different media. Targeted bilateral talks and presentations to donors and future partners will underpin ICRA's fund-raising and networking strategy. Through side-events and presentations, ICRA will ensure its visible presence at important regional conferences and meetings. ICRA will also organise high-level North–South meetings to exchange experiences, knowledge and information on the capacity building and organisational change needed for effective pro-poor innovation systems. The alumni network will be mobilised through a new newsletter, exchange workshops and web-based interactions. This strategy will be supported by a well maintained, interactive website.

Endnotes

- 1 The World Bank (2007): *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*, The World Bank, Washington, DC.
- 2 IPCC (2007): *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Metz, B., Davidson, O.R., Bosch, P.R., Dave, R., Meyer, L.A. (eds). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York.
- 3 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005): *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis*. Island Press, Washington, DC.
- 4 International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (2009). *Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report* (approved in detail by the Governments attending the IAASTD Intergovernmental Plenary in Johannesburg, South Africa, 7–11 April 2008). IAASTD, Washington, DC.
- 5 EIARD (2008). *EIARD Strategy 2009–2013*. The European Initiative for Agricultural Research for Development, Brussels; <http://www.eiard.org/>
- 6 SCAR workshop on “Strengthening the links between knowledge and agricultural innovation in Europe”, Angers: 6–7 October, 2008; http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/index_en.cfm?p=3_whatsnew
- 7 There are many sector-specific funding windows that provide support separately to research, education, farmer organisations, NGOs and policy-making bodies, etc. Very few funding windows provide for joint activities of these various actors in an innovation system.

Acronyms

ARD	Agricultural research for development
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
EC	European Commission
EIARD	European Initiative for Agricultural Research for Development
ERA–ARD	European Research Area for Agricultural Research for Development
EU	European Union
FAAP	Framework for African Agricultural Productivity
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GFAR	Global Forum on Agricultural Research
ICRA	International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture
MDG	Millennium development goal
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PAEPARD	Platform for African–European Partnership on ARD
R&D	Research and development
SCAR	Standing Committee on Agricultural Research of the EU

Credits

Photos: ICRA

Writing, editing: ICRA and Green Ink

Design and layout: Green Ink (www.greenink.co.uk)

Printing: Pragati Offset Pvt. Ltd



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