



Introducing ICRA

New demands call for new thinking

Over the past 25 years the challenges facing agricultural and rural development have grown more complex and more daunting. The fight is on, not just to grow more and better food, but also to tackle poverty at its roots and to reverse accelerating environmental decline. While new technologies will be needed, the overriding demand is for a change of approach, which requires new policies, new institutions and new ways of working.

Rural innovation needs new capacities

Organisations and professionals engaged in rural development need highly specialised skills. But, because they are being asked to tackle broader issues, they can no longer work in isolation. They need to interact with each other and with stakeholder groups such as farmers, extensionists, policy makers, private businesses, traders, non-government organisations (NGOs) and donors. They need skills in team building, negotiation, conflict resolution and resource mobilisation. An integrated multi-disciplinary approach using participatory methods must replace the linear and top-down ways of the past. Organisations must also learn to work together in effective partnerships – they can no longer go it alone.

Developing and applying such approaches may be especially difficult for mid-career professionals who have been trained in conventional research and development methodologies. ICRA's programmes are designed to help such people open their eyes to new approaches and 're-tool' to deal with today's development demands through working together in interdisciplinary teams and multi-institutional partnerships. ICRA also works closely with educational organisations in the South, where it supports a change in outlook among the professionals of the future.

ICRA has to change too

When ICRA was first founded, awareness of the limitations of conventional commodity-focused research and development was only



What is ICRA?

The International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA) was founded in 1981 by European members of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a consortium of donor agencies and other institutions committed to ending world hunger, poverty and environmental decline. ICRA is currently supported by France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK. It is based in Wageningen, the Netherlands and Montpellier, France.

ICRA's mission is to enhance the capacity of individuals and institutions to work together to develop and disseminate innovations that will improve and sustain rural livelihoods.

just dawning. So, over time, we too have had to change – and we continue to adapt our programmes and services to reflect emerging needs.

Today, our ‘centre of gravity’ is shifting South and our capacity building programmes are focusing more on institutional change and development. We are also responding to growing demand for our services by forging new partnerships in research and education with developing countries and by strengthening the links between these and centres of expertise in the North. Through



these changes we seek to increase our impact by fostering collective learning and by enabling professionals and institutions to contribute to a broader set of development objectives.

Gaining knowledge, boosting confidence

Esther Mwhaki Njuguna is a socio-economist at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI). Attending an ICRA course gave her the knowledge she needed to improve the relevance of her research and boosted her confidence in managing projects. It also enabled her to challenge traditional viewpoints.

‘The ICRA experience gave me the foundation for my work and one of the most important things was the confidence. The fieldwork was interesting and challenging and has been a life-changing experience for me. I learned many different concepts and approaches and tested them – working through the process of managing a research project. There is nowhere else you can get this kind of learning. It challenges the approaches that are passed on by older staff. This sometimes creates problems, but we are making progress in institutional change. I can now work much more efficiently.’