



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 Mwihaki 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.’



The people behind ICRA

Meet the team

Jon Daane



Two major themes run through Jon's career: integrating social and natural sciences in agricultural university education and stimulating faculty and students to go out and work with other players in rural R&D. Jon joined ICRA as Director in 1992, after working for many years as a coordinator of North-South inter-university collaboration projects aimed at strengthening agricultural education and research for development in Africa and Asia. 'ICRA's strategy gives me the opportunity to continue and scale up this life-long professional pursuit.'

Bob Booth

Trained as an agricultural scientist, Bob filled senior management positions at several international agricultural research centres before joining ICRA in 2003. 'This experience exposed me to the complexities of multidisciplinary and participatory research, team building and the management of institutional change and development – areas that remain of special interest in my work for ICRA.' Bob is currently ICRA's Deputy Director.



Nour-Eddine Sellamna

Based in Montpellier, Nour coordinates ICRA's francophone programme. 'My background in agronomy, extension and sociology, together with my PhD research on social organisation in collective farming, led to my continuing interest in how power and participation affect the outcome of R&D efforts.'



Juan Ceballos-Müller

Juan is an agricultural socio-economist. His experience with multidisciplinary teams, participatory research, project planning and intercultural communication equip him well for his position with ICRA as anglophone programme coordinator. 'My role is to challenge our participants to look beyond their own disciplinary boundaries, and to equip them with the skills they need to solve R&D problems with the active participation of stakeholders.'

Driek Enserink

As ICRA senior officer, Driek is responsible for developing tailor-made training activities (e.g. in Ethiopia and South Africa), overseeing field exercises in the Netherlands and managing ICRA's accounts. Before joining ICRA he worked for over ten years in farming systems research in Kenya and Tanzania and as a consultant for various international development organisations.



Richard Hawkins



With a career in agricultural research spanning Africa, Asia and Latin America, Richard joined ICRA to coordinate training programmes in the Netherlands and Mexico. He is

now a professional associate, helping to strengthen regional capacities at a time of accelerating institutional change.

Ans Brom and Saskia Vleer



Ans and Saskia share the position of office manager. In addition to the day-to-day management of the office, they oversee publicity material, monitor course applications and write some of the training materials. Ans is responsible for editing and translating texts, updating the website and managing the database. She has experience in guiding institutional development in national agricultural research systems in southern and eastern Africa. Saskia facilitates some of the anglophone learning modules. She is a rural geographer with experience in training and extension, small enterprise development and gender issues in Asia and anglophone Africa.

Toon Defoer



With a training in agronomy, over 20 years' field experience in research for development and a PhD in participatory innovation management, Toon brings a wealth of knowledge to his work for ICRA. A professional associate, he has a major interest in the development of interactive innovation approaches and tools for natural resources management.



Françoise de Chevigny

Before joining ICRA, Françoise worked with development projects in West Africa. 'I am the francophone course assistant and secretary and I look after the French side of ICRA's website and learning resources. And I'm responsible for keeping in contact with francophone alumni.'



ICRA also counts as part of its 'team' the 943 alumni who have participated in its learning programmes since 1981. We remain in contact with many of them through our website, newsletter, individual correspondence and follow-up seminars and visits.



ICRA and agricultural research for development

Towards a new R&D paradigm

Organisations and professionals engaged in agricultural and rural innovation and development are facing increasingly complex challenges. Just 10 or 15 years ago, their work would have focused on a single crop or a specific natural resource. Now, they are expected to contribute to a broader set of objectives, including poverty alleviation and environmental protection in addition to productivity increases. In the era of globalisation and the information technology revolution, it is becoming increasingly apparent that knowledge and knowledge sharing are the keys to agricultural, economic and social growth and development.

A new 'ARD' approach

At ICRA, we share with a growing number of partners worldwide the belief that research designed and implemented by teams drawn from different disciplines, institutions and stakeholder groups is better able to solve



complex problems and meet multiple objectives. In our experience, this kind of research is more likely to come up with the full range of technological, policy and institutional options needed if a broader set of users is to support and benefit from change. We call such research 'agricultural research for development', or ARD for short.

ICRA's ARD approach is not a method or a model. It is a way to guide thinking and promote attitudinal change. It provides the framework on which we base our learning

experiences. Users become familiar with a wide range of tools and, more importantly, develop the mindset needed to tackle complex issues. Such an approach encourages departure from conventional 'top-down' and linear thinking and helps move scientific knowledge and technology 'off the shelf' and into the field, thereby improving development impact.

What makes good ARD?

The essence of ARD is a participatory process that paves the way for agreed collective action at many different levels (e.g. community, policy, institutional, agro-industrial, etc).

The process:

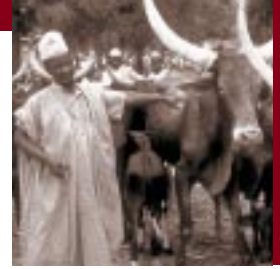
- fully involves all concerned stakeholder groups in addressing the problem (e.g. in identifying needs, finding a compromise strategy and evaluating solutions)
- applies a systems approach that incorporates the perspectives of different disciplines and stakeholder groups
- uses teamwork and partnerships to solve complex problems
- contributes to broader development goals than mere increases in productivity
- recognises that technological innovation by itself is not enough; research must lead to social, economic and political reform if it is to bring lasting benefits.

Changing the focus of grassland research in India

The Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute (IGFRI) has changed its focus since several of its staff attended an ICRA course. 'IGFRI previously had a very narrow academic focus and tended to ignore socio-economic factors, with the result that many new technologies were left on the shelf', reports researcher Ranjitha Puskur. 'The insights we gained from ICRA helped us refocus on the technical and socio-economic needs of client farmers, put greater emphasis on the poor, and look more at rainfed farming systems. ARD has become a household name!'



An impact assessment study showed that ICRA training has influenced a change of outlook in IGFRI, which has begun to adopt an ARD approach and to work in interdisciplinary teams in a more client-oriented and participatory way. 'The change is embodied in our mandate', explains Dr Prem Pathak, IGFRI Director. 'Instead of focusing solely on grassland and fodder research, we now aim to develop a range of forage-related technologies that can alleviate poverty and promote sustainable rural livelihoods. In addition, the enhanced research capability and professional attitude of our ICRA-trained researchers contributes to the overall development of the institute.'



ICRA's achievements

Making a difference

ICRA has played a pioneering role in building capacities in agricultural research for development (ARD). Our 'hands-on' style and 'real world' team assignments provide a unique mode of learning, while the analyses and action plans formulated during the field studies add value to the process. We have already begun to change outlooks: the need for a holistic and multidisciplinary approach implemented through teams and partnerships is much more widely accepted now than it was 20 years ago, when ICRA started. Since its inception, 943 professionals have participated in ICRA learning programmes and ICRA teams have completed 145 field studies.

Enhancing interaction and promoting change

Although ICRA's achievements are difficult to quantify, there have been demonstrable improvements in the capabilities of individuals and institutions. Individual participants have acquired a range of new skills, programmes have found new directions, institutes have enhanced their focus and, in some cases, broader development objectives have been met. While institutional change and development are likely to be the result of several factors (only one of which is ICRA learning), surveys of our alumni show that ICRA often plays an important role. Many ICRA alumni have become agents of change within their home institutions and have played key roles in redirecting research and development to improve the lives and livelihoods of smallholders and other rural poor.

Surveys indicate that 68% of ICRA alumni have gone on to train other colleagues. Many of them are being hired as consultants, used as resource persons in training programmes, participating in curriculum development, taking up additional responsibilities and serving on committees. For example, one alumnus in India is a member of a technology support

A network of ICRA alumni in Ghana

'Coming from a traditional research background, I had a niggling feeling that what I was doing in the field was kind of hit and run', remembers Joyce Bruce, a researcher at the Nyankpala Animal Research Institute in Ghana. 'The ICRA programme showed me a range of participatory research tools and gave me the confidence to use different methods. And my ability to compromise and search for common ground has been greatly strengthened.'

'I became a much better listener and teamwork manager following ICRA training in group dynamics', adds Naaminong Karbo, who heads the Nyankpala station. 'Since ICRA, we have put smallholder farmers much more in the driving seat and have introduced working groups consisting of many different stakeholders.'

As the numbers of ICRA alumni increase, their multiplier effect also increases. Joyce and Naaminong have been involved in forming a network of alumni who will work together to create a greater voice for change in Ghana.

The ICRA training course has helped in other ways too. 'We have seen an increase in the amount of contract research coming our way and this is vital for the survival of the institute, since government funding has decreased by a third in recent years and we have to make up the deficit', says Joyce. 'We are now being recognised as a team that does good work and delivers on time. Our ICRA experience has helped us work efficiently and our project proposals are usually successful in securing funding.'

unit, a consultancy group, a committee for re-orienting training courses, a participatory rural appraisal group, an international programme group (which seeks opportunities for international collaboration and funding) and an interinstitutional project development group!

On an institutional level, ICRA learning has helped to strengthen capacity, improve the quality and quantity of outputs, enhance performance and recognition, and stimulate change.

Fostering long-term collaboration

Over the years, ICRA's strategy has evolved from providing courses for individuals to engaging more continuously with institutions, helping to build teams and partnerships that

can influence institutional change and development in the longer term.

In the coming decade we will aim to build still further on these foundations, as we work to develop capacity building networks of education and R&D organisations that span both developed and developing countries. By building additional capacity for ICRA-style learning activities in the South, we can expand the scope of our activities and make best use of our limited resources.



Changing outlooks

Where ICRA alumni have become programme leaders, they have often brought about changes in the orientation of research. Tesfaye Shimber, head of the national coffee research programme in Ethiopia writes: 'Using my experiences at ICRA, I insisted on changing the research approach. We now involve various disciplines in planning the research process and conducting studies to address production problems.'

Walter Anyanga, a plant breeder in Uganda's national research system, states: 'I now take an interest in other stakeholders who have a role to play in delivering the technologies I develop to end-users. Because of this I have been appointed to the Board of Directors of one of the NGOs that is supporting national production of oil crops.'

Leonardo Salazar became a station director in Venezuela's National Fund for Agricultural Research (FONAIAP) and was asked to participate in a Latin America-wide initiative to promote institutional change. 'The concepts and approaches I learned at ICRA were invaluable to my role in the development of this potentially far-reaching initiative. We have multiplied the ICRA effect by using the ICRA learning materials to develop the skills of our researchers and extensionists. We have formed several interinstitutional research-extension teams and they are currently working with many different stakeholders and communities to formulate new projects. This experience will be used to develop further collaboration between development organizations in Venezuela and Mexico.'



ICRA's annual learning programmes

Building capacity for innovation

ICRA's learning programmes equip participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to address complex rural development problems. The emphasis is on 'learning by doing', and participants put their new found skills into practice when they form multidisciplinary teams and conduct fieldwork in a 'real world' situation in a developing country.

The programmes

ICRA offers two annual 28-week learning programmes, one in English and one in French. Participants in the annual programmes are generally mid-career professionals from different disciplines, organisations and countries. After learning new concepts, skills and tools during an introductory phase, they refine their teamwork approach during a supervised field exercise in Europe. Next, they undertake a 3-month professional assignment – again working as a team – with a partner R&D organisation in the South.



Programmes in languages other than English and French are provided in partnership with national and regional institutions. Such tailor-made programmes are designed to respond to specific needs identified by clients. These, too, involve a close-knit integration of learning events with fieldwork undertaken as part of the participants' regular work programme.

Key features of ICRA learning

ICRA learning programmes are based on the agricultural research for development (ARD) approach, which guides teams step-by-step through the participatory and planning processes. These are:

- *Client-oriented:* Participants learn to target their proposals to the needs of different stakeholder groups and to be more accountable to all of them.
- *Interdisciplinary:* Specialists in different fields learn to combine their expertise and exploit their comparative advantage to solve complex problems.
- *Teamwork-oriented:* Successful teamwork doesn't just happen. Participants learn skills in team organisation, group dynamics and decision-making, including dealing with conflict and reaching a compromise.
- *Interactive and participatory:* Participants learn to integrate their work into a broader process of change that is social, economic and political, as well as technological.
- *Geared to building partnerships:* These are critical to creating the consensus for change. Participants learn how to build lasting partnerships with and among groups that may at first consider each other to be enemies, not allies.
- *Focused on learning by doing:* Working on a real project in the field means that learning is applied, is a source of professional pride and provides a valuable service to partner institutions.

Programme evolution

We now focus on building the capacities of institutions as well as individuals. And we aim to attract groups of participants from different organisations that will develop

teamwork and partnerships during the programme, then continue to work together after the programme has ended. This will allow the learning experience to be slanted towards the specific needs of the group. The fieldwork will be even more 'real world' than before, as it will focus on the group's ongoing work in its host country. The difference will be in the group's approach: members will apply new and different tools and concepts, work more as a team and share their learning, becoming learning facilitators and spreading the ICRA message and approach still more widely.

By attracting groups of participants, we also hope to see more senior teaching staff and research managers attending ICRA – people

who have the authority to bring about change in their home institutions. It is also easier for a group to influence change than for an individual, who may face scepticism, hostility or outright resistance from his or her colleagues.

Long-term support

After the ICRA learning experience, participants and groups are encouraged to set up interdisciplinary teams, start interactive research and become agents of change in their home institutions. We keep in touch with our alumni, support their plans and aspirations and engage with them in institutional change and development processes.

Expanding horizons

Tanya Stathers attended an ICRA learning programme while working for the UK's Natural Resources Institute (NRI). 'When people ask me about ICRA, I reply that it has been the most important educational experience of my life so far, but also the toughest experience,' she explains. 'ICRA provides unique multicultural interaction and, especially during the intensive and frequently stressful field study phase, you are made to look at your own character and, perhaps unexpectedly, learn a lot about yourself. ICRA enabled me to look at a situation from a wider perspective and, if I didn't have the knowledge to understand it, to seek help from people who have different skills to mine.'

Since ICRA, Tanya has been surprised how often research projects are commissioned with no basis in the genuine needs of a community. She is starting to make changes in her home institution: farmers and other stakeholders are now involved in every step of the projects she manages, from setting the research agenda through to technology dissemination.



ICRA's learning resources

Re-tooling for change

ICRA's learning materials enable rural development professionals to acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes. These resources guide teams through the process of 'learning by doing' and encourage participants to open their eyes to new approaches in their work. All learning materials are designed to support the agricultural research for development (ARD) process developed by ICRA. Their aim is to enable users to establish and work in interdisciplinary teams and with multiple stakeholder groups.

We are continually developing and updating our learning materials, which are available on our website, on CD or as conventional hard copy. They are grouped in three categories: the ARD approach, learning modules and information resources.

ARD approach

These materials provide a pragmatic step-by-step explanation of the ARD approach and introduce the key questions and issues that teams of participants need to address at each phase of the problem-solving process. They also present a range of methodologies and tools that teams can choose from in conducting their research. And they define generic analytical outputs or milestones to be achieved in each phase.

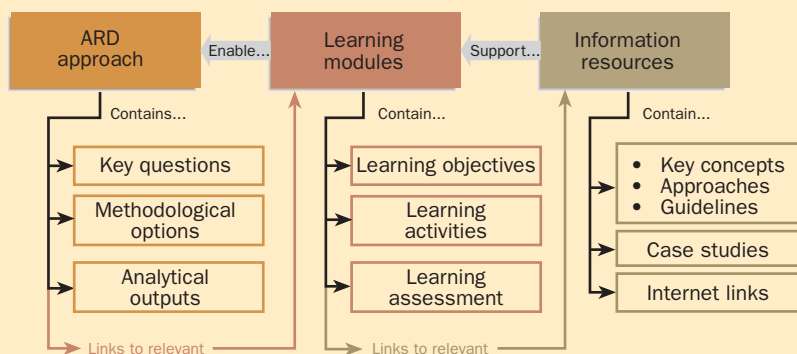


Learning modules

The learning modules guide the participants through the ARD process of developing solutions to complex problems. For example, users learn how to involve all stakeholders in the problem-solving process. They learn how to formulate joint strategies and identify research needs, how to combine local knowledge with more formal research-based knowledge, how to deal with conflicts between different perspectives and development objectives and how to prepare convincing research proposals. In addition, they learn how to translate

Learning materials on the Web

Besides a detailed description of the ARD approach, our trilingual website offers learning modules that support the ICRA learning programmes. It also features supporting information resources such as case studies and Internet links. ICRA's web-based learning materials can be accessed free of charge and users should feel free to adapt them to their needs. We do, however, appreciate being informed and acknowledged when these materials are used. And we welcome feedback on their usefulness.





research results into products or services that meet stakeholders' needs and will have a real impact on rural development.

Information resources

These support the learning modules by providing information on key concepts and approaches, tools, case study information and links to sources of further information.

Becoming a better team player

The ICRA learning experience had a huge impact on Julius Ayo-Odongo, a veterinary officer employed by Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO). 'ICRA has taught me to always look at both sides before taking action,' he says, 'and I have learned self-restraint, tolerance for others' viewpoints and how to make compromises. I have used these new skills not only in my R&D activities but also in everyday life, dealing with people. I have become a better manager of my personal life as well as my work and I feel more comfortable dealing with different types of people.'

The 'how' not the 'what'

'Although we achieved good results during the workshops and in the field study, the aspect I remember most is the process we went through to develop our skills,' says Arthur Mutsaers, Associate Professional Officer for FAO projects in Bolivia and Chile. 'It was the "how" that impressed me more than the "what" – we learned how to learn.'



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ICRA’s field studies

When it gets real

The field study is the climax of the ICRA learning programme. It’s often a life-changing experience for its participants.

Drawn from different disciplines, organisations and countries, participants are assigned to a team and live in the field for 3 months, working with a Southern institute on a real development problem. For example, a team may be asked to help a group of farmers establish a marketing chain; another may be charged with reconciling competing demands for water in a mixed crop–livestock production system; a third may be invited to come up with new ways of earning an income for people living in a severely degraded environment. To date, ICRA teams have conducted 145 studies with partner organisations in 37 countries.

Not ‘business as usual’

The field studies provide an opportunity for participants to ‘roll up their sleeves’ and collectively apply the approaches, processes and tools they have learned. At the same time, they help the host organisation investigate alternative ways of looking at a problem. Working together, the ICRA participants, the host organisation and other local stakeholders develop a study report, which provides a set of options for solving the problem and for triggering a continuous process of grass-roots innovation.

Field studies thus give individuals, teams and institutions the chance to experience new ways of doing business. They open doors and change outlooks, stimulating individual and institutional change and development.

Impact through change

Because they change people rather than things, ICRA’s field studies are powerful stimuli for innovation and many alumni become focal points for innovation and change initiatives once they return to their own institutions. Findings outlined in field study reports have been used in the formulation of national and institutional research strategies and for initiating research proposals and development plans.

Addressing a major constraint in Brazil

João Pedro Zabaleta is a researcher at the Temperate Climate Institute of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa). ‘The ICRA vision for agricultural development is new here’, he says. ‘It improves research efficiency and includes a broader set of actors in the process, but this meets resistance from some mainstream researchers, some of them board directors. But our simple fieldwork had a huge impact in the region and proved the value of the approach.’

Zabaleta was part of a group who worked on constraints to the commercialisation of onions affecting small family farms around



São José do Norte in southern Brazil. Although traditional research provided improved varieties, the lack of infrastructure meant that it was difficult to find a market for the crop. Zabaleta built on the

work done during the ICRA field study and continued working with stakeholders. Two years later, a farmers’ cooperative was established to market the region’s onion crop. The next step will be to form links with industry and even start processing themselves.

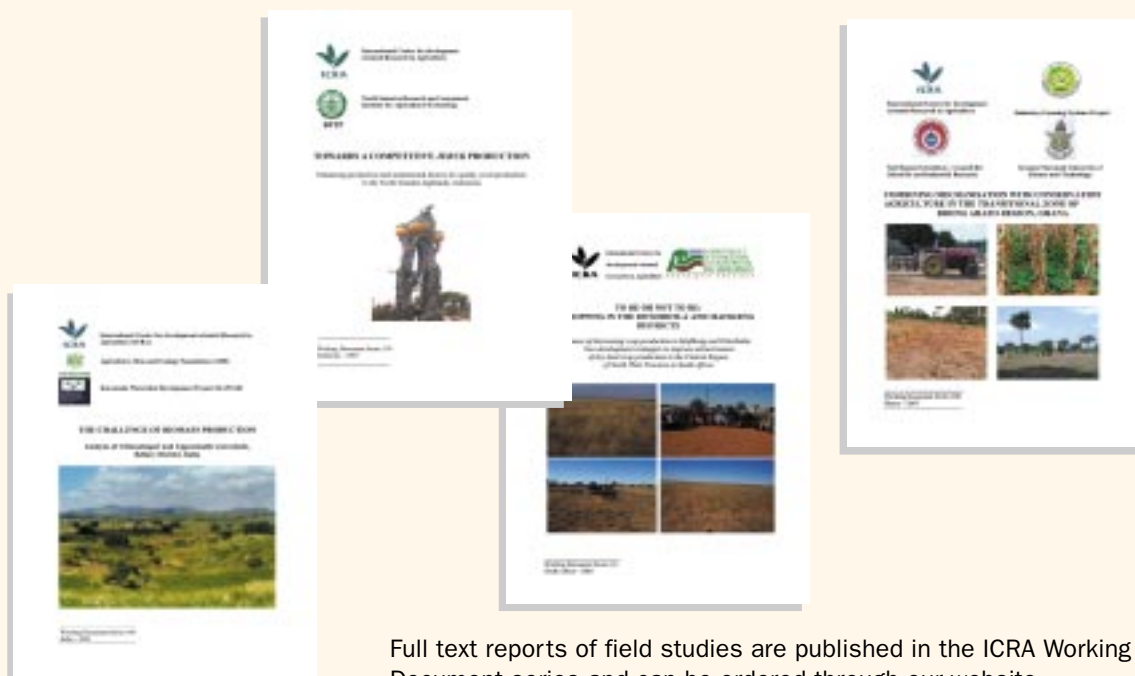
‘It wasn’t easy to change attitudes within the institute’, he remembers. ‘If we had more ICRA alumni here, there would be more support for change. Our fieldwork has led to real changes in people’s lives and I would like to see this happen in other commodities and regions.’

Introducing cash crops and water harvesting in Kenya

The Lare area in Nakuru District, Kenya has highly unreliable rainfall and families living there frequently need food aid in order to survive. Although several development agencies had conducted field surveys, there had been no satisfactory intervention. Farmers had tried rudimentary water harvesting in the form of ditches, but the water only lasted for a few weeks. In 1997, an ICRA field study team suggested new water harvesting technologies for collecting surface runoff from land, roadsides and roofs in simple pans. There are now some 2000 pans in the community and these provide almost year-round water for domestic use, livestock and irrigation. The ICRA team also introduced vegetables and fruit trees, which the farmers can sell at market.



‘Farmers are now investing in their land as never before’, says Ephraim Mukisira, Deputy Director for Research and Technology at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI). ‘Despite very low rainfall, they can now grow several different crops and they no longer have to call on the government for food aid. This story sets an excellent example for other similar areas in Kenya as well as in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.’



Full text reports of field studies are published in the ICRA Working Document series and can be ordered through our website.



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.'



Learning together in East Africa

Decentralising South

ICRA's new 'global partnership' strategy focuses on building long-term relationships with organisations in both the South and the North. For example, in Uganda we are working to foster collaboration between a national research partner, a university and ICRA, an association that has great potential for addressing both national and regional capacity building needs.

Refocusing agricultural research in Uganda

The Ugandan Government has recently introduced far-reaching policy changes that aim to modernise agriculture and promote sustainable economic development. These demand change in the national agricultural research system, which needs to become more market-responsive, client-oriented and demand-driven. Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) is starting to adapt and adjust in its efforts to better address the problems of the rural poor. This includes enhancing the ability of its staff to conduct interdisciplinary research in partnership with other stakeholders and to adopt a broader outlook in their work. Makerere University has also begun to develop its staff capacity and promote change in its curricula. Located in Kampala, it is the country's principal agricultural university and its graduates are often recruited by NARO and other organisations concerned with poverty reduction and sustainable development.

aims to satisfy the immediate needs of NARO while at the same time exposing Makerere staff to alternative learning approaches using IAR4D. This, in turn, should help increase the relevance of the university's curricula to employers in the rural development sector. By introducing new ways of working, the initiative will help research staff, farmers and other stakeholders to work together to tackle the complex problems of sustainable rural development through R&D strategies that are market-responsive, demand-driven and client-oriented.



Building capacity through collaboration

ICRA is consequently working closely with Makerere University and NARO in support of these change processes. The work includes enhancing the capacity of teams at both institutions to apply Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D) approaches. The three organisations have introduced a collaborative programme that

Spreading the benefits

The work in Uganda will provide an example of how institutional change and development can be enhanced through capacity building in IAR4D – an example that may serve to guide similar programmes in neighbouring Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. Projects and

The NARO–Makerere–ICRA Collaborative Initiative

The initiative is managed by a steering committee with members from all three collaborating organisations and ASARECA. The initial learning cycle of the first phase comprises a series of residential learning modules interspersed with field studies conducted as part of ongoing work to address a high-priority problem of rural development. The second phase is one of consolidation, mainstreaming and follow-up, where knowledge and lessons learned from the first phase can be applied to overall institutional change within NARO and to the educational programmes of Makerere. The third phase will focus on creating networks and expanding the initiative into the sub-region.

Jaap Kampen, consultant on a World Bank progress review of the Ugandan Agricultural Research and Training Project, was introduced to the NARO–Makerere–ICRA Collaborative Initiative on a recent review mission. He was very impressed by the concept. He writes: ‘I have been involved with agricultural research in eastern Africa for the last 15 years and I want to let you know that I was greatly impressed, both with the methodology and with the apparent impact – even at this early stage – on changing mindsets.’



programmes will be linked through a network with the help of the existing sub-regional organisation, the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA). Links with such an organisation will help facilitate cross-location comparisons and learning, promote synergy and enable the individual programmes to share common approaches and resources.



ICRA and the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme

Towards a better future for Africa's children

Sub-Saharan Africa is the world's poorest region and its largely rural population depends heavily on agriculture. The Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme is a bold new multi-partner initiative which aims to boost the impact of agricultural research on rural livelihoods. Now at the planning stage, the programme is part of a broader commitment by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) to foster collective action and is coordinated by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA).

New ways of doing business

ICRA is one of many institutions working with FARA on the programme's design. Like other partners, we are encouraged by the determination shown by the programme's stakeholders to find new ways of doing business. The paradigm adopted for the programme is called Integrated Agricultural Research for Development, or IAR4D for short. This approach is similar to the ARD approach used by ICRA in its learning programmes.

The obstacles faced by Africa's farmers, most of them smallholders, are formidable but not insurmountable. Among the most serious are land degradation, low and unstable yields, poor competitiveness, and weak market chains and support services. These interrelated problems can only be addressed through a holistic approach that both accounts for the needs of multiple stakeholders and draws on their skills and knowledge. The IAR4D paradigm shows every sign of being such an approach, providing all partners in



the programme with a common vision and framework for action.

the programme with a common vision and framework for action.

A role for ICRA

The Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme was inspired largely by two initiatives: the agricultural plan developed by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the 2001 Durban Statement in which African research organisations and CGIAR

The programme's key elements

- Programme vision: improved rural livelihoods, increased food security and better natural resource management throughout sub-Saharan Africa as a result of greater impact from IAR4D
- Holistic approach, in which biophysical, social, economic and policy dimensions are addressed simultaneously
- Contribution to the UN Millennium Goal of halving poverty by 2015 and the 'African vision' goal of reaching 6% annual growth in agricultural productivity by 2020
- Design of viable options for farmers that will intensify production and make their enterprises more competitive while protecting the natural resource base
- Capacity building in support of learning partnerships among diverse stakeholders
- ICRA support for Pilot Learning Teams and partnerships in the application of IAR4D.

centres affirmed their support for an 'African vision' of agricultural research.

The Programme will begin by establishing Pilot Learning Teams to define the range of problems to be addressed, identify the knowledge and skills needed to design solutions and determine the composition of

IAR4D partnerships. ICRA and its partners are well placed to assist with action learning and capacity building in these teams.

Africa's extreme poverty and heavy reliance on food aid are intolerable for humanitarian reasons. But they also threaten peace in the region and prevent the continent from



participating as it should in world trade and global environmental conservation. As Africans build a brighter future for themselves and their children, they and others with a stake in agriculture must fully participate in all aspects of rural innovation, including research. The Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme, supported by ICRA contributions, offers a promising way forward.

The FARA perspective

Ralph von Kauffmann is a scientist working for FARA on the programme proposal. 'In proposing IAR4D as the core of the proposed Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme the collaborators recognised that there will be a need for capacity building, not only for the partners immediately engaged in IAR4D projects but also for the wider stakeholders who will be relied upon to out-scale and up-scale the approach,' he says. 'ICRA's experience and expertise was, therefore, greatly appreciated when we formulated the capacity strengthening components of the programme. ICRA has already made a major contribution to raising awareness and interest in IAR4D. FARA looks forward to collaborating with ICRA in making the proposal a reality.'



The ICRA–NATURA Project

Mainstreaming IAR4D

Agricultural research in Africa must change radically if it is to become more effective at tackling the continent's complex problems of rural poverty, food insecurity and land degradation. Integrated agricultural research for development (IAR4D) is a new R&D approach that builds on the participatory and systems approaches developed over the past 25 years. It promotes a holistic way of addressing the needs of multiple stakeholders, covering production, marketing and policy issues. The Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has adopted this approach as the most promising way forward for promoting rural innovation. But a critical issue remains: how to create the partnerships needed to mainstream IAR4D among the region's many providers and users of research.

Challenges in promoting IAR4D

A massive awareness-raising effort is needed to explain the approach and the opportunities it presents. Because IAR4D is a new way of doing business there are, as yet, few broadly known examples of its successful application. The tasks of lobbying for its adoption and securing the necessary funding to spread the approach will therefore not be easy.

Rural development organisations will need to develop IAR4D-related capacity at both institutional and individual levels. Key challenges here are to convince stakeholders of the validity of the new approach and to create ownership of it.

African education likewise faces a major task in capacity building, both in specialised skills and in IAR4D approaches. Many of the skills needed for IAR4D cannot be acquired through conventional academic training focused on individuals. Universities and other institutions will therefore have to 're-tool', building new expertise and designing new learning materials and methods geared to promoting interdisciplinary teamwork and multi-stakeholder group action. New curricula are required that

promote a change of outlook among students – who are the rural development professionals of the future.



Highlights of the ICRA–NATURA action plan

- Draft an analytical framework as a tool for promoting IAR4D and launching starter projects
- Create a steering group led by ICRA and NATURA to stimulate IAR4D partnerships within Africa and between Europe and Africa
- Promote South–South–North networking via an IAR4D website
- Lobby African sub-regional research bodies to promote IAR4D and engage the interest and support of African farmer organisations
- Submit, in the near term, two or more interinstitutional project proposals to key African organisations responsible for coordinating research
- Mobilise a joint African–European effort to report on progress to key European and international donor agencies and secure their funding support.

The demand side of agricultural research consists not just of farmers but also of many other players in the production-to-consumption chain. In the past, many of these stakeholders, particularly poor women, were left out of the rural innovation process. A major challenge is thus to create the necessary platforms from which these heterogeneous groups can articulate what they need from research and learn about, and participate in, IAR4D approaches. This will require the formation and empowerment of multiple stakeholder groups.

Mobilising Northern support

To move forward in addressing some of these challenges, ICRA joined forces with NATURA, a network of European universities and research institutes with expertise in agriculture in the South. The partners have just completed a project entitled Mobilising a North-South Partnership to Develop and

Diffuse ARD Methodologies: Enhancing Europe's Role.

The project conducted a survey of current African and European experience with, and expertise in, IAR4D and held an international e-forum on the subject in French and English. It culminated in a workshop, held in the Netherlands in November 2003 and attended by 65 representatives from 11 sub-Saharan and 9 European countries. The project's most important outcome was an action plan for the promotion and adoption of IAR4D in Africa.

