

# **ICRA's Response to the Recommendations of the 4<sup>th</sup> External Programme and Management Review**

*December 2008*

The Board and Management of ICRA express their gratitude to the External Programme and Management Review (EPMR) Team for their comprehensive, frank and analytical assessment of the centre's programme, management and governance. The review report is well written, and the conclusions clearly documented, with a good strategic assessment.

We are pleased with the Team's endorsement and appreciation of ICRA's ARD partnership strategy to enhance the contribution of agricultural research and higher education to pro-poor rural development by strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration in innovation processes. We appreciate the Team's recognition of the impressive progress made in implementing this strategy and 'moving ICRA's centre of gravity south' in response to the previous EPMR and of the evolving role of ICRA that this move entails: from training to supporting institutional change. We feel encouraged through the Team's recommendations to intensify this strategy by building on ICRA's niche and on the recognition of ICRA's unique role by its southern and European partners.

We concur with the Team's conclusion that making further progress with this strategy and realising the full potential of ICRA's unique European and international networks, ARD approach and multi-stakeholder learning methodology, require urgent changes in ICRA's institutional funding and structure, which currently constrain further growth. In our view, the need for these changes is a direct consequence of ICRA's success in implementing the recommendations of the previous EPMR as clearly documented in the report. The EPMR report therefore comes at an opportune moment. ICRA is now going through a delicate and critical phase in the life of successful organisations as it is faced with the consequences of rapid growth in recent years. We share with the Team the sense of urgency for change and agree with the recommended actions.

In our view some of the questions that the Team was asked to address but that were not part of the original terms of reference have not received a complete answer, in particular those concerning improvement of ICRA's international visibility and concerning ways to develop the capacity of southern institutions to partner with ICRA. These issues call for further thinking from the Board and Management.

Finally, the Board and Management are dedicated to work together in the implementation of the changes required in ICRA in order to fulfil its unique position as a European and southern double-footed knowledge institution dedicated to ARD capacity strengthening and innovation system development. The first step will be the development of an ambitious vision on ICRA's future, which will guide the actions of the ICRA Board and Management in the years to come.

## ***Recommendations and responses***

The EPMR Team made five main recommendations, each comprising a number of sub-recommendations that, together, address the main ones. These recommendations are highly interdependent and often overlap to some extent. Many of the recommendations are therefore intended to be implemented in combination with others. Success in implementing one is needed to achieve success in implementing another and vice versa; e.g. a critical condition to the implementation of many of the recommendations is the success of the new fundraising strategy recommended. Dealing with the recommendations one by one, as we do below, therefore does not do full justice to the comprehensive nature of the actions recommended. In order to remedy this to some extent, in giving our responses, we make frequent cross-references to other recommendations of which the implementation is closely related.

### **1. *Focus on windows of opportunity that have opened in the global development context***

As ICRA's partnership approach clearly answers to the renewed interest for strengthening ARD and rural innovation among development actors, ICRA should maximise its use of the windows of opportunity that open up as a result.

- 1.1. The global development context has changed significantly over the last few years. Without being exhaustive, one may point at a renewed, strong interest in agricultural development and food security; increased demands for multi-stakeholder collaboration on rural and agricultural innovation; and a shared understanding that small and medium entrepreneurs, amongst which small farmers, play a crucial if not decisive role in 'making poverty history'. The World Development Report 2008 and the Economic Partnership Agreements debates have put agriculture – and the international impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Policy of the EU – squarely back on the economic development agenda. The current global food crisis serves as a dramatic reminder. *The ICRA partnership approach emerges as an unmistakable asset to anyone who takes up these new agricultural and rural development challenges.*

***Accepted.*** ICRA is fully aware of these positive changes in the global development agenda and will continue to monitor and make use of these opportunities to promote its mission. Jointly with its partners, ICRA will raise visibility of its partnership approach and its potential to meet the new agricultural and rural development challenges among the wider R&D, development and donor community. This increased awareness of ICRA's assets and potential is an essential condition for the successful implementation of many of the EPMR's recommendations.

- 1.2. EU development policy and practice is changing. A strong emphasis on defining issues of common interest, donor coordination and division of labour since the adoption of the EU Consensus on Development, the EU Code of Conduct and the Africa EU Joint Strategy for Development. All of these required a re-appraisal of EU cooperation on agricultural development and agricultural research. The EU and its partners are looking for harmonization of the many fragmented bilateral efforts currently existing between individual European and southern research institutes and universities; joint European capacity development and, alignment of EU capacity

development instruments with regional and national initiatives of southern partners. One of the Accra High Level Summit roundtables in September will address ‘ownership and capacity development’ specifically. *ICRA has developed a uniquely inspiring, practical approach and methodology of how this can work in practice for ARD.*

**Accepted.** ICRA’s efforts to raise visibility of its assets and potential will underline that ICRA represents a concrete and successful European instrument and answer (*‘avant la lettre’*) to the 2007 EU Code of Conduct on (Complementarity and) the Division of Labour in Development Policy. ICRA will also continue to emphasise that it represents a rare example of a truly “transnational” programme for ARD capacity strengthening that therefore is of interest to EIARD and the ERA-ARD.

- 1.3. FARA and by extension other regional entities have taken the lead in strengthening capacity for ARD within Africa through the provision of both pedagogy and field work that result in publications in scientific / referenced journals and impact on agricultural and economic performance and reduction in rural poverty. At the same time, demand is growing for strengthening ARD in selected target countries to address agricultural productivity improvements through collaborative research to impact on rural poverty, building on the strengths of various national and regional organizations. Capacity building in ARD in developing countries focuses on field experience in managing and implementing collaborative ARD projects within an innovations systems perspective and demonstrates impact through shared learning. *What ICRA has to offer squarely fits this bill.*

**Accepted.** ICRA is involved in these developments and aware of its current and potential role in these. It will further intensify its work with FARA and other regional entities in agricultural research and higher education in Sub-Sahara Africa to strengthen African capacity to build capacity in ARD/IAR4D (Integrated Agricultural Research for Development). Through this intensified collaboration and increased visibility ICRA will build the support of African networks to advocate with policy makers and donors for continued and expanded institutional funding for ICRA.

- 1.4. Mobilizing financing for ARD is again on the international agenda, however, there is increasing emphasis on having southern partners manage the funds e.g. EC funding for FARA and SROs and the joint EU/ACP programme EDULINK for funding networking among EU and southern higher education institutions. There are also other international players operating e.g. the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, China and Brazil that are working directly with southern partners. Through its partnership and international networking approach, *ICRA is uniquely positioned to build capacity and support southern partners in documenting lessons on ARD and rural innovation processes. ICRA should seek long-term institutional financing rather than project funding for capacity building on ARD through project proposal submissions together with its national and international partners.*

**Accepted.** This recommendation will be implemented in the context of the fund raising strategy that ICRA will develop in response to recommendation 4.2 and requires a stronger and more permanent presence of ICRA personnel in the south to identify and seize opportunities when they arise. It is one element, but not the only one, needed to secure the required long-term financial sustainability of ICRA.

## **2. Increase investment in the key assets that set ICRA apart**

2.1. *Recognise ICRA as EU instrument: by means of its partnership strategy and approach, ICRA has set a standard and gained valuable practical experience with joint EU programming and implementation fully in line with modern thinking on ownership, partnership, complementarity and division of labour in the European Union. It provides a unique platform to integrate the specificities of the ARD approaches of the different EU member states and to link it up to Southern owned national and regional initiatives. This has been recognised already by 12 developing countries, 5 Anglophone, 4 Francophone and 3 Hispanic speaking. EU Member States and EU Institutions need to be informed about this.*

**Accepted.** ICRA will promote this recognition among EU Institutions, EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway, as part of its activities to raise visibility of its assets and potential mentioned in ICRA's response to recommendations 1.1 and 1.2.

2.2. *Continue to invest in up-scaling activities towards multi-stakeholder institutional change. ICRA has achieved a specific and well established niche and, methodological and training offering to support agricultural research and education to improve their contribution to rural innovation in small-holder farming areas. This has met with growing recognition by leading developing countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Mexico and Venezuela who have engaged ICRA to support their institutional change for agricultural innovation programmes. ICRA needs to continue to build on this growing recognition on the part of its partners.*

**Accepted.** ICRA is acutely aware of the high strategic importance of this growing recognition and will continue to build on this by up-scaling its partnership strategy through the various activities described in the responses to recommendations 3.1-3.6 and supported by a restructured funding base resulting from the fund raising strategy developed in response to recommendation 4.2.

2.3. *Continue to invest in a strong European and international network presence, through its alumni, many of whom are in key government and private positions now; through active participation in relevant international and regional fora, such as GFAR, EFARD, FARA, ERA-ARD, and through its roots in a variety of European research and education institutions. The role ICRA plays in these networks is appreciated by European and southern researchers alike. One key aspect why ICRA can play this role is because it combines in-country and in-service training with providing a European international platform through its seminars and courses in Montpellier and Wageningen.*

**Accepted.** ICRA will continue to invest in its strong presence in European and international networks.

2.4. *Invest more in researching and documenting the understanding (theoretical and practical) that ICRA as a European organisation gained of how to facilitate rural innovation systems dynamics in support of pro-poor development. So far, this asset has hardly been documented and remains mostly tacit knowledge confined to the*

brains and bodies of ICRA staff and consultants. By engaging more systematically in innovation systems research, international exchange of knowledge and experience and by playing a strategic role in documenting and sharing relevant lessons learned, ICRA could generate invaluable inputs into the growing global debate on how to improve rural innovation systems in practice.

**Accepted.** ICRA recognises that there is great value in documenting and publishing its understanding and its rich and varied experience (with partners and not just as a European organisation) of how to facilitate rural innovation systems dynamics in support of pro-poor development. Research on this and publishing the results are also very important to raise awareness of ICRA's assets and potential. Ensuring the minimum critical mass of personnel needed to engage in research (e.g. by supervising PhD students in collaboration with partner universities), requires that ICRA expand its personnel and provide them with more secure and longer-term employment relations. Realising these conditions depends on ICRA's success in securing the institutional funding needed for a knowledge organisation to function.

### **3. Build ICRA's niche and strengthen its unique role**

- 3.1. *Make ICRA's assets work for the EU and ARD:* ICRA, its Board Members, management and staff and, its founding institutions have an important responsibility to recognise what has been built up over the past years and to try to connect these assets to the obvious opportunities and southern demands emanating from renewed global attention for agricultural and rural development and ARD.

**Accepted.** ICRA will respond to this recommendation through its responses to recommendations 1.1 to 1.4, 2.1 to 2.3, 3.2 to 3.6, 4.4 and 5.1 to 5.4.

- 3.2. *Continue to strengthen the implementation of the ICRA partnership strategy and programme:* continue moving the 'centre of gravity' of ICRA training and learning cycles to the South. Increase in-service tailor-made training, in-country learning cycles and seminars with its partners in the South to make the training more cost effective.

**Accepted.** ICRA will continue to move its centre of gravity south. For this to be cost-effective, ICRA will expand its pool of resource persons in the south through on-the-job training and coaching of ARD learning facilitators. It will also expand its own personnel located in the south. The implementation of ICRA's partnership strategy goes well beyond the provision of individual training and learning cycles in the south. It focuses on strengthening collaboration between the principal actors in rural innovation (research, education, policy makers, producers and other agro-enterprises and service providers) and emphasises building national capacity to promote ARD learning between these actors in selected countries or regions. Cost effectiveness of this partnership approach will be increased by a sustained investment in capacity strengthening and institutional change to demonstrate the value of ARD learning to pro-poor rural innovation, achieve a multiplier effect and institutionalise ARD. The required long-term funding will be mobilised through the fund raising strategy developed in response to recommendation 4.2.

- 3.3. *Develop a clear rationale for using different types of seminars and training in a complementary manner:* ICRA should not abandon Europe-based courses and seminars entirely. Rather, ICRA needs to develop a much clearer rationale for using different type of training and seminars in a more complementary manner – Europe-based tailor-made training courses and field-based in-service learning cycles and ad-hoc seminars – and differentiate more clearly which participants are to be trained in what, where and why. This might include for example, bringing Southern ARD research managers and policy makers to Europe for 2-3 weeks or allowing (would-be) European ARD researchers to participate in courses in the South to receive in situ ARD application training in ICRA's southern partnership programmes.

**Accepted.** ICRA will develop more differentiated capacity strengthening activities, some of which include activities in Europe, and clearly define the rationale for offering these to different audiences, based on considerations of cost-effectiveness, expected multiplier effect and potential impact on institutionalisation of ARD in partner organisations and countries. ICRA's capacity to stick to this rationale will, however, require reduced dependence on incidental project funding and stronger institutional funding. Due to logistical and pedagogical complexities, the participation of (would-be) European ARD researchers in courses in the south may only be feasible in specifically constructed cases.

- 3.4. *Intensify the work with Southern and some interested European universities to develop strong ARD learning components – i.e. promote the ICRA formula of combining theory and practice – in strategically chosen, relevant Masters' programmes e.g. build on experiences with KNUST in Ghana.*

**Accepted.** ICRA will continue its current work and, intensify this where the required resources for a longer-term involvement can be mobilised in a cost-effective manner. ICRA also intends to expand this collaboration to include the co-supervision of PhD students involved in research on ICRA's partnership approach to strengthen multi-stakeholder rural innovation and ARD/IAR4D.

- 3.5. *Be more pro-active in mobilising the ICRA alumni networks:* Annual or biennial seminars or workshop with alumni and colleagues from EU will contribute to a long-term process of relationship building to contribute to building a global community of practice between South and North, sharing experiences and generating lessons learned on improving the role of agricultural research and education in rural innovation.

**Accepted.** ICRA will make strategic use of its alumni networks and organise exchange and capitalisation workshops with alumni where the required resources for this can be mobilised in a cost-effective manner.

- 3.6. *Engage systematically in research, documentation and exchange on ICRA core business:* ICRA needs to complement its reflexive action with documentation and research so that the lessons it learns with its partners on improving rural innovation can be identified and shared more easily and timely with other practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

**Accepted.** See the responses to recommendations 2.4 and 3.4.

## 4. Urgently deal with main institutional challenges

ICRA Board and management should urgently deal with the main institutional challenges that stand in the way of its continuity and growth as an independent European institution.

4.1. *Board, supporting institutions and management should urgently negotiate an end to ICRA's status of a non-employing organisation:* In order to deal with the challenges ahead, ICRA needs to become an autonomous organisation, so it can develop into a strong institution able to respond to the enormous demands and opportunities ahead, ensure its own fundraising and employ its own people, by free selection on the basis of objective criteria and creating the right incentives for them to keep investing in ICRA's development.

*Accepted.* ICRA will change its articles of association to allow it to employ staff and will gradually assume fuller autonomy in the employment of personnel as new staff joins and as some of the currently seconded staff and consultants take up employment with ICRA. Implementation of this recommendation is dependent on the success of the fund raising strategy developed in response to recommendation 4.2 as personnel employment requires more secure long-term funding than ICRA currently has.

4.2. *Board and management should articulate a renewed fundraising strategy that aims at securing a solid basis of multi-annual institutional funding to ensure further development and consolidation of ICRA as an independent centre in accordance with abovementioned recommendations.*

*Accepted.* This is a key-recommendation. Much of ICRA's response to the recommendations of the EPFR is dependent on its success in diversifying its funding base with the right balance between institutional funding, longer-term comprehensive funding for its ARD learning partnerships and short-term ad hoc project funding for components of these partnerships. ICRA's Board and Management will therefore articulate a new fund raising strategy aimed at reducing the current overdependence of ICRA's partnership approach on fragmented project-funding linked to *individual* stakeholder constituencies and increasing earmarked longer-term and comprehensive project-funding for capacity strengthening of *multi*-stakeholder partnerships. In addition, the new strategy will aim to secure multi-annual institutional funding for ICRA's public good functions as a knowledge centre, such as investing in new modes of learning, training programmes and learning materials; stimulating alumni networks; and capitalising on ICRA's capacity strengthening experience with partners in the form of research. The new funding strategy will pay due cognisance to the fact that project-funding is channelled more and more through the south and needs to be mobilised jointly with southern partners (see recommendation 1.4), and that many funding sources require that partners contribute 15-20% of the project costs from their own institutional resources.

4.3. *The Board of Trustees should review its composition in terms of its functionality for securing institutional and financial continuity of ICRA as an organisation*

*Accepted.* The Board will strengthen its links and intensify its interaction with donors, while also inviting new kinds of members to intensify its role as a platform and meeting point between European R&D and higher education institutes and

between them and their partners in the south (see response to recommendations 4.6 and 5.4).

- 4.4. *The Board and supporting institutions should ensure policy backing at the EU donor level to ensure the success of ICRA institutional fundraising and to enable it to respond to the challenges in the global agricultural and rural development arena.*

**Accepted.** The Board and the institutions that currently support ICRA will engage in a high level, prolonged and consistent policy initiative to build a new, strong, joint commitment of European donors and R&D and higher education organisations in ARD to support ICRA and a shared vision and joint strategy to use ICRA as a European instrument. Success in implementing this recommendation will be essential for the success of the new fund raising strategy and is supported by the actions to increase ICRA's visibility and mobilise southern advocacy in support of ICRA.

- 4.5. *The Board and management should consider focusing the ICRA partnership strategy more on regions and countries that face serious MDG challenges if that helps to ensure successful fundraising.*

**Accepted,** to the extent that this does not interfere with long-term commitments to current partners. If and where such fundraising opportunities exist, ways should be found to link ICRA's current partners to the capacity strengthening of the new partners, so that ICRA can continue its commitments to strengthen the capacity of the current partnerships, while also serving the new ones.

- 4.6. *The Board should play an active role in facilitating the organisational transition process to a truly independent organisation and in developing new, more professional links with interested European research and education institutes.*

**Accepted.** The Board will actively facilitate ICRA's organisational transition to an employing organisation and the development of new, more professional links with interested European R&D and higher education institutes as indicated in the response to recommendations 4.3 and 4.4.

## **5. Ensure the sustainability of the ICRA partnership strategy**

- 5.1. *Bring financial support for ICRA in line with modern donor thinking:* Financial support for ICRA needs to be brought better in line with modern thinking on complementarity and division of labour in Europe, ownership and alignment with partner priorities. This requires more predictable financial support and less restricted regarding the (sub) sector in which it can be spent. For a small independent foundation, ad-hoc project funding can be complementary to more long term strategic funding but it can't replace it. It causes too many discontinuities in ongoing partnership programmes.

**Accepted.** The new fund raising strategy that will be developed in response to recommendation 4.2 will – *inter alia* – aim to mobilise predictable, harmonised and comprehensive donor funding for the ARD capacity strengthening partnerships that is aligned with the partners' priorities and respects their ownership. This recommendation will be implemented through ICRA's responses to recommendations

1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 5.2 to 5.4 with a key role for Board members with close links to donor organisations, EIARD and ERA-ARD.

- 5.2. *The Board and supporting institutions should ensure the continuity of ICRA as an original EU instrument:* ICRA has developed a truly European instrument and proven its value to improving innovation systems for rural and agricultural development in the South. EU member states should be involved in ensuring continuity.

**Accepted.** The Board and supporting institutions will mobilise the involvement of EU member states, Switzerland and Norway in ensuring continuity of ICRA through ICRA's responses to recommendations 1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 4.2, 4.4, 5.1 and 5.3 to 5.4.

- 5.3. *The European Commission – Aid Co/DG Development/DG Research – are to be invited to take a more active stake in ICRA:* ICRA has developed a role model, and gained valuable experience with EU collaboration and division of labour in development. The European Commission as EU lead agency on the implementation of the Paris Declaration and the EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labour must therefore be invited to take a more active stake in ICRA and its proven partnership strategy, both financially and in terms of technical support.

**Accepted.** The Board and Management of ICRA will invite AidCo, DG Development and DG Research to take a more active stake in ICRA and its partnership strategy as an integral part of the fund raising strategy.

- 5.4. *ICRA needs to develop closer links with European donor agencies:* ICRA should disentangle its relationships with technical ministries and executing agencies while expanding its links with donor agencies. The first are very important to enable ICRA to play its articulating role in creating a European approach to ARD, but are restricted in their ability to fund ICRA. The latter can fund ICRA and engage with ICRA in policy dialogue on their role in development, but can not ensure ICRA's European network and role. ICRA should review how both types of agencies and ministries can complement each other in supporting its mandate and strategy.

**Accepted.** ICRA needs to simultaneously strengthen its relations with donor agencies in the field of international cooperation and its position in the European institutional ARD web. Completely disentangling ICRA's relationships with technical executing agencies therefore does not seem appropriate, unless this specifically refers to the current institutional links through seconded staff positions.