

GCARD-Europe Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The timing of the GCARD initiative is very relevant to the EU political agenda as it takes place in the middle of discussions on the future of EU agricultural and research policies. In 2014, the EU will have a new agricultural policy and a new Framework Programme for Research (FP8). Discussions on the FP8 starts under the Swedish presidency of the EU during the second semester of 2009 while the first EC communication on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2013 is scheduled for the summer of 2010 (the legal proposal will be published together with the financial perspective mid 2011). It is the first time that both EU agricultural and research policies will be discussed concurrently.

Over the past two years, a number of key ‘official’ reports on agricultural research have been prepared at both European and global levels. It appears that a consensus is emerging on the current weaknesses and the future challenges of agricultural research in general and agricultural research for development (ARD) in particular, both in terms of drivers (‘what’ areas require new knowledge) and mechanisms (‘how’ should new knowledge be disseminated and used). In other words, it seems that the phase of “*assessment of the current situation*” is already well advanced (save for the very latest implications on agriculture of the current global recession) and the next phase will be to formulate appropriate policy recommendations and associated priority research topics.

In addition to reviewing these key reports, we also sourced many documents through internet search engines, personal contacts etc. As far as is possible with available documentation, the review provides a synthesis of the current situation and future challenges facing agricultural research for development (ARD) from an “European” perspective. Because of Europe’s dominant role in supporting ARD in the developing world, we also included in the text the concerns expressed in the reports regarding the nature of the research European donors currently support and the processes which they employ to implement the research and its adoption, particularly as these address the needs of poor farming communities at the global level.

With regard to addressing the agricultural research needs of poor communities in Europe, we took the liberty of dividing the region into western and eastern components. Because of the significant differences between the developmental status of eastern and western geographical ‘halves’ of Europe (socio-political systems, old/recent membership of the EU, agricultural policies, agricultural performance, research systems, levels of poverty etc) the review deals separately with the issues faced by the poor and smallholder farmers in these two sub-regions and their associated research challenges. The review could have been divided into EU and non-EU countries in Europe but for reasons alluded to later in the text we opted for the former geographical division.

We were conscious of the fact that some readers of this report might not be aware of the state of agriculture in Europe so we composed some general introductory text, annexed to this summary, to help put the review into context. The first two chapters of the review proper deal with the issues indicated in the TORs; respectively, and in brief, these deal with: ‘what’ agricultural research issues are being undertaken in the 2 sub-regions; and ‘how’ agricultural research outputs are disseminated and taken up by users. Chapter 3 identifies the concerns of the poorest rural sectors in the region and the extent to which national and regional agricultural research and associated policies address them. Because of the key relevance of identifying appropriate researchable areas, we wrote a lengthy annex on the issue of rural poverty in Europe (see Annex 1), the incidence and prevalence of which may not be well-known to development workers outside the region. The final two Chapters deal respectively with: the gaps between current agricultural research efforts in Europe and the needs of the poor (rural smallholder farmers and

other poor people in society) – Chapter 4; and in Chapter 5, we highlight the many challenges facing the R+D community, including policy makers, if the needs of the poor are to be addressed and resolved. We believe that these challenges can contribute to the issues to raise at the e-consultation with the stakeholder community in mid-September, the conclusions of which will feed into the face to face consultation at the end of that month.

Outputs of Review - in brief.

At the global level, the drivers which affect current/future global agricultural development issues are well formulated and agreed on. However, most of the reviewed documents do not provide details of researchable issues; research needs are normally mentioned at a very high level (as ‘drivers’ or ‘challenges’) such as: food insecurity, climate change; biodiversity; eco- and evolutionary science & management; soil and water management; plant breeding and biotechnology; animal welfare; forestry; fisheries; nutrition; rural vitality; and new technology (impact assessment); and more generally: generation of local knowledge; rural socio-eco research; biotechnologies; ICT; geomatics; carbon-trading; and agro-ecology. However, it is clear that the identity of researchable issues is dependent on who is asked.

It is also clear that agricultural R+D processes are weak. With regard to ‘how’ research is programmed and implemented by European countries for ARD in developing countries, there is a clear lack of coordination between donors – despite the presence of several informal and formal initiatives aimed at facilitating greater collaboration. Knowledge management is also acknowledged to be very weak, under-resourced and generally not fit for purpose. Knowledge transfer problems are acknowledged to exist at all levels – and the need to boost expenditures and change the approaches for knowledge management/extension service systems are proposed by all reviewers.

In Europe, there are a diversity of development and agricultural issues facing rural farmers. Levels of absolute poverty are low in comparison with the developing world but relative poverty levels are high, and increasing.

In Western Europe, the following **researchable issues** which address poor farmers were either stipulated or else identified from interpretation of the most recent texts we could find. This is not an exhaustive list and is not in any particular order but could be edited and prioritised by the upcoming e-consultations and face to face meetings:

- Further efficiency gains required in light of escalating input costs and reduced sale price of farm commodities
- Pros and cons of specialisation vs mixed enterprises on small farms in light of greater demands by consumer groups
- How can the negative perception of farming and farmers in the mind-sets of consumers, policy makers and the media be improved?
- Realistic alternative roles for the future of small farms – agro-tourism, carbon trading, commodity specialisation etc
- Coping with and mitigating the effects of climate change at the small farm level.
- Addressing land degradation through minimum tillage and loss of biodiversity through set a side etc.

In Eastern Europe, the research priorities which address poor small holder farmers include:

- Guidance for small semi-subsistence farmers to enable them to decide whether to intensify their farming enterprises, to diversify their income, to ‘hobby farm’ or to exit farming.
- Innovative approaches to non-farm employment – policies/practices/technologies
- Role of organic agriculture/agro-processing/labour intensive industries/part-time activities in

- addressing the needs of poor producers
- Improved productivity on-farm; research on specialisation vs mixed farming approaches
- What features of food safety can small farmers adopt to ensure agri-food competitiveness and public health and compliance with EU entry rules?
- What innovations can poor farmers adopt to mitigate/or adapt to climate change?
- What productivity gains can be made at the small farm level with current information?
- Collection of contemporary information on ‘new’ issues faced by poor rural farmers
- Innovations to improve small-farm productivity
- How to access credit and sustain viable commodity markets?
- How to establish and maintain a credible and well-informed agricultural advisory service?
- Innovations to help the ageing population of farmers on small-holdings
- How to improve the perception of agriculture and agricultural education in society and policy institutions?

In addition to these technological/social issues, a number of **research process** issues were also raised that have both **European and developing country dimensions**. These include:

- Should ARD institutions review their role? Researchers are often considered to be an exclusive clique by many development stakeholders – civil society, private sector, farmers associations etc. So perhaps it would be more attractive to these stakeholders, and encourage them to contribute to agricultural development strategies (and attend meetings), if the focus of the ARD initiatives was more inclusive: the establishment of Communities of Practice or ‘inclusive regional fora for agricultural researchers and development professionals - for development’?
- How can more joined up research effort be encouraged in Europe to improve global agricultural development and poverty reduction? There may be collaborative initiatives but can rhetoric be converted into action?
- How can it be ensured that research addresses well-defined audience groups such as the poor?
- Who represents the value chain stakeholders in Europe? –eg how influential are small and commercial farmers and their associations, consumer groups, civil society, policy groups and parliamentary associations, the media in contributing to ARD issues?
- Extension issues – public and private – farmer first or farmer only systems?
- Marketing of research findings – whose role is this? Researchers or Marketing/Extension specialists? In many developing countries, researchers are expected to disseminate their findings to users. Is this an appropriate role for them? Unfortunately in public sector research, marketing specialists don’t exist and resources for market research and research output promotion/dissemination are minimal. Is it any wonder that research does not get into use?
- Need for European level databases in ARD – and make the information accessible to global ARD communities in the developing world. Current ERA-ARD initiative in this area is stalling for lack of funds.
- Unfortunately, in most Member States, the specific policy measures that can directly affect poverty do not have the *rural poor* as a target. How can this be changed?

Based on the foregoing, a series of key challenges and related questions were composed which we suggest could form a component of the e-consultation and, subject to the response, provide guidance to the questions to be posed at the face to face meeting in late September. The challenges are grouped around 4 main topics identified by this review:

i) **Research prioritisation and programming**- how to address the current lack of joined up thinking and coordination on ARD issues associated with the ‘lack of common vision, long-term research agenda and implementation plan’;

ii) **Knowledge creation** – how to facilitate a broad electorate of stakeholders across Europe to prioritise research issues, especially in light of the recent turbulence in the economic and labour markets and the new socio-political realities;

iii) **Knowledge transfer** - how to tackle the acknowledged weaknesses of the current system of knowledge transfer and innovation pathways; and

iv) **Focus on the poor** -how to address the concerns of the poor, including the future of smallholder farmers across Europe and the ‘pressure’ on NMS, CCs and PCCs to converge with the membership rules of the EU.

These and other key issues are in need of wide public consultation, discussion and verification by a wide stakeholder community.