Breakout Session P3.1: Innovation for Better Livelihoods – Briefing paper

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Context – the problems being addressed

The Green Revolution has helped increase incomes and provided food security for many billions of people. Yet despite these successes some one billion have been left behind and continue to live on less than a dollar a day - many of them in rural areas. This persistent rural poverty has sparked recognition of the need to embrace new sources of innovation if we are to move beyond more conventional technological solutions and improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable rural households.

Unlocking this innovation represents a major challenge. The farmers, fishers and herders who live on less than a dollar a day live complex, highly adaptive lives where individual technical solutions in and of themselves have limited impact. Recognizing this complexity and the importance of working with stakeholders to understand and design solutions that work for them, a diversity of approaches grounded on participatory action research have been developed including notably the concept of Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D).

Despite the conceptual agreement around these approaches and the promise they hold, there are also concerns, not only regarding how these approaches can have impact, but also how they can they do so at scale. Participatory approaches to agricultural research have often been judged to be slow and costly “boutique solutions” confined to the sites where they work directly. As a result their impact on poverty is considered by some to be marginal when compared with commodity research targeting many millions of people.

This Session explores these issues by considering how investment in agricultural research can be strengthened to increase its contribution to poverty reduction and improve the lives of those that more conventional approaches have failed to reach. In doing so we will consider the specific issues of partnerships and the role that they play in strengthening the quality of our work and the ultimate scale of our impacts.

Current activities presented and discussed in the Session

Chair (Rodney Cooke): The Chair will open the Session by setting the topic of this Session in the context of the GCARD Roadmap and the themes of GCARD2.

The livelihoods policy context:
Rodney Cooke will provide a brief summary of key issues emerging from the IFAD rural poverty report 2011. This will cover the state of rural poverty, the key role of smallholders, and what needs to be done to improve their livelihoods by confronting the challenges of sustainable agricultural intensification and by creating opportunities in the non-farm rural economy.

Stakeholder approaches to AR4D. The panel of speakers:
Dave Alpa Narendrakumar and Ann Waters-Bayer will present their views from their different perspectives on effective partnerships to deliver AR4D innovations

Putting the approach into practice: establishing effective livelihood research partnerships for impact at scale
Patrick Dugan will provide a summary of the partnership approach being taken by the CGIAR research program on aquatic agricultural systems (AAS). This will highlight the poverty focus of the system based CGIAR research programs and the importance of effective partnerships for impact at multiple scales from communities to the international development policy arena. This multi-scaled approach is needed to translate the results of research at household and community level to impacts nationally and internationally.

William Payne will provide an overview of the Dryland Systems CRP, which begins with the premise that successful dryland agricultural production systems have evolved through an integrated approach that includes the right mix of innovative partnerships, diverse technologies, and appropriate policies. Dryland Systems uses a systems approach based on sound principles of the biophysical and socioeconomic sciences, development theory, and project management to develop the right mix of partnerships, technologies, and policies to improve targeted dryland systems in major dry areas of the developing world.

Working with national innovation pilot learning sites and inter-regional innovation platforms Adewale Adekunle will provide perspectives on these issues in the SSA humid tropics (CRP 1.2). Graham Thiele will indicate such perspectives for the CRP 3.4 on Roots, Tubers and Bananas.

Reflection on the issues raised will be provided by Susan Nour.

Intended outcomes

- Greater understanding of the importance of diverse partnerships for reducing rural poverty and improving rural livelihoods at scale;
- Commitment of participants to strengthen global partnerships that reflect the needs of local, national and regional actors and work to achieve impacts at scale.

Commitments to collective actions in 2012-2014 (national, regional or international)

i. With existing resources

Initial development of regional partnerships for scaling in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. A global network of practitioners, researchers and policy actors concerned with innovative approaches to improving rural livelihoods in complex agricultural systems.

As part of this work global networks established that bring together partners committed to: (i) gender transformative approaches in agricultural research and development; and (ii) innovation in monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment.

Improved collaboration between the CGIAR and global networks engaged in improving research and development for improving rural livelihoods.

ii. With additional support

- Regional partnerships established for scaling in additional regions;
- Opportunities for regional and global networks developed through specific events at regional and/or global scale.

iii. With specific large scale programme investment
Establish a global partnership of NGOs, research institutions, international development organizations, and others concerned with working to improve rural livelihoods at scale through development interventions in complex farming systems and natural resource management. This partnership will work to distil learning from a wide range of projects and programs to inform policy and practice at local, national, regional and global levels. It would work through existing regional and global networks wherever possible.