Science for Development: Mobilizing Global Partnerships

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Investment in agricultural research has consistently delivered high rates of return in terms of increasing productivity, improving nutrition, and reducing poverty.¹ This is the mandated aim of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). A route therefore exists through agricultural research to boost food resources, improve livelihoods, enhance quality of life, and underpin the stability of societies in the developing world. Supporting quality and relevant agricultural research must be a priority for all development cooperation as well as stability and security agendas.

The challenges to food security in developing countries are great, but so are the opportunities for developing solutions. The number and scope of possible avenues for research are extensive. They range from scientific problems, where the focus is on bio-molecular and biophysical research, to regional- and global-level challenges, where meshing technological innovations with social, institutional, and economic research dominates. Demands exceed the funds available. The importance of selecting strategic research directions that will have the greatest impact is clear. The CGIAR invests in research that increases the productivity of agricultural and natural resource systems in the developing world. Tactical partnerships are vital to conduct and to inform the research. Entering into partnership arrangements that present a genuine value-added proposition has been central to the CGIAR’s successes in its impact-oriented research.

Partnerships that connect development-focused agricultural research with the extensive research capacities of the developed and emerging economies can increase the returns on donor countries’ broader investment in research. The CGIAR has been leveraging donor funds through its strategic investment choices for almost half a century. As a consortium of 15 agricultural research Centers, largely situated in developing countries, and supporting several major collaborative research programs, it is uniquely positioned as a partner in research.

Planning and conducting global public goods research requires highly effective partnerships between the appropriate providers of ideas, new knowledge, technology, social science understanding, and policy processes. Ensuring that pathways to disseminate useful advances are available will equally require cooperation between the CGIAR and other parts of the research community that help to translate and adapt research results to ensure on-the-ground impact.

In its current phase of growth, the CGIAR is committed to building stronger, better, and more inclusive partnerships to strengthen impact. The Science Council (which now, in recognition of this imperative, has become

¹Investment in agricultural research has delivered an average rate of return of 43% in 700 development projects evaluated in developing countries. For the poorest people, GDP growth originating in agriculture is about four times more effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth originating outside the sector. World Development Report 2008, Agriculture for Development, The World Bank.