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“Technological and Institutional Innovations
for Sustainable Rural Development”

Technological and Institutional Innovations for Sustainable Rural Development

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Abstract

To alleviate world poverty and environmental degradation, a new approach to agricultural research is needed. The conventional research model moving from basic to strategic to applied and adaptive research - whose products are then taken up by extension staff and disseminated, fails to address the complex local circumstances and realities of farmers and other private and public stakeholders. The new research-for-development model that is emerging focuses on enhancing the adaptive capacity of research providers and farming communities alike for ‘problem-solving capability on the move’. It incorporates into the research/innovation process participatory approaches, multi-scale analysis and intervention, systems analysis and information management and impact assessment. Being more socially accountable than traditional research models, the process involves many partnerships engaging users throughout in order to identify research needs, mobilise resources, conduct the research and evaluate the outcomes.

The Africa based International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and its many partners conduct research at the intersection of livestock and poverty. Keeping livestock helps half a billion poor people in developing countries to secure assets, and thus provides a pathway out of poverty. This paper examines ILRI’s strategic response to the changing environment in which international research is being carried out. Focal research areas and paradigms are both changing. ILRI has reorganised its research into five interlinked themes to implement a revised strategy that emphasises innovation systems, participatory research, a strengthened social science capacity, partnerships and interdisciplinary teamwork.

ILRI is committing itself to a socially distributed knowledge system, where research is conducted always within the context of application and with the imperative of poverty-alleviating knowledge products present from the start of the innovation process. To produce a stream of innovative, creative, demand-driven and competitive knowledge products has required that ILRI reorients its culture from traditional supply-driven disciplinary science to demand-driven community-based transdisciplinary scientific applications.

Keywords: Research themes, research-for-development model, transdisciplinary scientific applications