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The Changing Roles of International Agricultural Research Centers

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Abstract

International agricultural research increasingly has to demonstrate its effectiveness in reducing rural poverty in a sustainable way. In order to achieve this, and so to respond to the increase in societal accountability and to the change processes imposed by certain donors, research centres within the CGIAR need to reposition themselves. As a commodity-based centre the Africa Rice Center (WARDA) has a long history of developing and promoting rice-based knowledge and innovations. Fund allocations no longer depend merely upon outputs (such as new varieties) but upon the uptake and impacts of such outputs, and so the Centres are likely to promote and disseminate knowledge and innovations generated by their own scientists more readily than those developed by other actors in the rice sector. A range of institutional innovations, such as rice TIME, described in this paper, will be required in the future to allow WARDA and other commodity-based centres to play a role as source-neutral knowledge-broker in regional innovation systems. International agricultural research centres (IARCs) will increasingly need to ensure local knowledge and innovations are valued, built upon and shared through south-south and south-north exchange mechanisms. If they do not have the in-house capacities that are needed to achieve this, partnerships with appropriate actors should be aimed at to make this happen. Brief details of some example of effective partnerships of this kind will be included in my presentation. Commodity-based IARCs should also extend their role to build national capacities to develop effective learning tools and strategies that enhance production, quality and marketing. This will require them to open up to different types of professionals, partnerships and learning alliances. Stimulating IARCs to expand their roles in national and regional innovation systems will at the same require donors to create more flexible (project) learning environments and move away from logical frameworks with pre-set quantifiable targets. The examples that shall present provide some clues for donors and others as to the way in which these goals may be pursued.

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