

Knowledge partnership in sub-Saharan Africa - The IARC/NARS Training Group (INTG)

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International Agricultural Research Centers (IARCs), operating under the guidance of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, seek to increase agricultural production in a sustainable way in collaboration with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS). Training is an important complement to research. Because approaches are similar among institutions, persons responsible for training joined in an informal IARC/NARS Training Group (INTG) to strengthen training, coordinate activities, and share resources. Members of the INTG are distributed worldwide, even though at the moment most - not all - actions concentrate on Africa. The INTG opens challenges and perspectives of knowledge partnership for research and education in sub-Saharan Africa ... and beyond.

Keywords: International Agricultural Research Centers (IARCs), Training, IARC/NARS Training Group (INTG).

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IARCs. For more than 30 years, international agricultural research centers (IARCs) have been working on research problems in tropical and subtropical areas. Presently, 16 IARCs operate under the guidance of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR; Boxes 1 and 3). Additionally, other IARCs work with similar objectives outside the CGIAR.

IARCs seek to increase agricultural production in a sustainable way, in order to alleviate poverty through improving the nutritional status and well-being of people in developing countries. IARCs conduct research and training, provide information, collect and exchange germplasm, and encourage transfer of technology. In their mandate areas, IARCs work in partnership with national agricultural research and development programs; all over the world, IARCs maintain collaboration with scientific institutions of relevance to their research agenda.

Successes led to the so-called Green Revolution and, in 1960, to the Nobel Peace Prize for one of the leading scientists, Dr. Norman Borlaugh. Economic rates of return indicate that many success stories documented within Africa are associated with technologies identified and disseminated through partnership with IARCs.

Box 1: From CGIAR Annual Report 1998

"The CGIAR is a global agricultural research network - the largest scientific partnership in this field. Established in the early 1970s, the CGIAR works to promote food security, poverty eradication, and the sound management of natural resources in the developing world. It pursues these objectives through the diverse activities of 16 international research centers located throughout the world and a small secretariat located in the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

CGIAR members - 58 industrial and developing countries, private foundations, and regional and international organizations - provide financial assistance and technical support. A host of other public and private organizations work with the CGIAR as donors, research partners, and advisors."

Training. The IARCs became an important knowledge base of agricultural, forestry, fisheries sciences, and associated disciplines. For more than a generation, IARCs reached scientists and policy makers in developing countries through research collaboration, information services, and training. National agricultural research systems (NARS) appreciate the experience with training of their scientists at IARCs as an essential aspect of research. In regions of limited availability of training, IARCs may be the most cost-effective source of capacity building tailored for scientific excellence.

Since the initiation of IARCs, training is an important complement to their research. IARCs offered thousands of formal and informal training opportunities to scientists, managers, and research support staff. In spite of diversities in research, approaches to training are similar among IARCs. In 1988, training officers from 18 IARCs - mostly CGIAR centers - met for a first time at the International Potato Center (CIP), Lima, Peru, to analyze challenges, identify common goals, and plan collaboration. A smaller meeting followed in 1989 at the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR).

Subsequent meetings in sub-Saharan Africa promoted links among training officers. In 1993, training officers designed concrete action plans. An informal "Intercenter Training Group" (ICTG), consisting mostly of centers of the CGIAR, continued annual meetings of two to three days (Box 2).

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Box 2: Annual meetings (for acronyms see Boxes 3 and 4)

1993	ICRAF, Kenya
1994	IFPRI, Malawi
1995	WARDA, Côte d'Ivoire
1996	CMRT/CIMMYT, Kenya / ISNAR, Netherlands (special meeting)
1997	IITA, Nigeria
1998	ILRI, Ethiopia
1999	IFPRI, Ghana
2000	ASARECA
2001	ICRISAT, Niger (to be confirmed)

INTG. A few NARS scientists participated in most meetings. The emergence of three regional research associations in sub-Saharan Africa (ASARECA, CORAF, SACCAR; Box 4) opened new ways for international and regional collaboration. In 1997, two NARS scientists presented keynote papers:

- G.O.S. Ekhaguere, Association of African Universities: "Regional cooperation in agricultural training and research"
- M.A.B. Fakorede, University of Ife, Nigeria: "IARC-NARS collaboration in human resource development in sub-Saharan Africa: The role of universities"

In 1997, the paradigm of the training group shifted from ICTG to INTG, the "IARC/NARS Training Group", to reflect a wider responsibility for training. IARCs and NARS together designed terms of reference for future training partnership. Strong leadership of NARS institutions is expected to improve the relevance of training and to build training and research capacities at national and regional levels.

The INTG is committed to better communication, information sharing, and partnership among its 45 members and observers. An INTG listserver (INTG@cgiar.org) facilitates communication. Among the subscribers are all IARCs of the CGIAR (Box 3).

Box 3: IARCs belonging to the CGIAR

CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture, Cali, Colombia
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research, Jakarta, Indonesia
CIMMYT	International Center for the Improvement of Maize and Wheat, Mexico City, Mexico
CIP	International Potato Center, Lima, Peru
ICARDA	International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, Aleppo, Syria
ICLARM	International Center for Living Aquatic Resources, Makati City, Philippines
ICRAF	International Center for Research in Agroforestry, Nairobi, Kenya
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, India
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC, USA
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Nigeria
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute, Nairobi, Kenya
IPGRI	International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, Rome, Italy
IRRI	International Rice Research Institute, Los Baños, Philippines
ISNAR	International Service for National Agricultural Research, The Hague, Netherlands
IWMI	International Water Management Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka
WARDA	West Africa Rice Development Association, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Terms of reference. According to its terms of reference, the INTG is an informal association of representatives from organizations that conduct training related to agricultural research and development in sub-Saharan Africa. The representatives are from both IARCs and NARS, including universities, research institutes and networks, extension services, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector (Box 4).

The goal of the INTG is to strengthen the capacity of its members to conduct, manage, and sustain quality research and related training for the benefit of agricultural research and training.

The purpose of the INTG is to strengthen agricultural research and related training through collaborative activities which enable IARCs, NARS institutes, and regional research associations to coordinate their activities and mobilize and share resources in ways that reduce duplication of effort, improve access to training, and enhance national institutional research and training capacities, based on comparative advantages and on regional priorities.

Specific objectives, guiding priorities, and organizational guidelines give more detail on the terms of reference.

Box 4: INTG members and observers

Members

- Interested IARCs with training activities in sub-Saharan Africa, including representatives of the IARCs listed in Box 3
- Regional research associations representing NARS:
 - ASARECA (Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa)
 - CORAF (Conférence des Responsables de Recherche Agricole en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre)
 - SACCAR (Southern African Center for Cooperation in Agricultural and Natural Resources Research and Training)
- Faculties of agriculture

Observers

- AAU (Association of African Universities)
- Donors

Activities. The INTG has no special resources for operation other than the allocation of staff time and funding offered through core support from the IARCs, NARS, and regional associations. Each year, one organization acts as a convener of the annual meeting (Box 2). The 1999 convener (November) is the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI's) regional office in Accra, Ghana. At annual meetings, members of the INTG volunteer for continuing and new assignments. During the year, members share training activities, databases on products and trainees, and other important information (Box 5).

For the past five years, one tangible example of the INTG's successes and the role of NARS and regional associations has been a training workshop on agricultural research management, guided by ISNAR. Many years ago, the ICTG - now INTG - recognized training on agricultural research management as important for conducting and managing research for the benefit of the users of research results. Research management cuts across the interest and expertise of most member institutions. Research program leaders are an important target group for such specialized training. The workshop includes four priority areas: leadership in the management of research; research program formulation; planning, monitoring, and evaluation of research projects; budgeting and financial management.

Several IARCs, research networks, and NARS from more than 30 African countries joined this initiative. Trainers from sub-Saharan Africa trained by ISNAR deliver the training either in English and French. The 1999 workshops (August and October) are conducted in collaboration with, and at the Institut de l'Environnement et de la Recherche Agricole (INERA) in Burkina Faso, and the Mananga Management Centre in Swaziland.

Box 5: INTG activities - and responsible IARCs

- Database on training courses and workshops offered by INTG members for the current year - IITA
- Annual training workshops on agricultural research management - ISNAR
- Database on training materials available from INTG members - ICRISAT
- Promotion of partnership in the production of training and extension materials - IITA, ICRAF, NARS
- Database on NARS staff of sub-Saharan Africa trained since 1977 - ILRI
- Database on resource persons available in sub-Saharan Africa - IITA
- Compilation on training categories and remunerations applied by IARCs - ILRI
- Information on training facilities and resources available in sub-Saharan Africa - IITA, ICRAF, SACCAR, AAU
- INTG home page, information, public relations - ISNAR, ILRI, ICRISAT
- Case studies on training partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa - CIP
- Integration of principles of participative research and gender analysis in training - PRGA Group/CIAT
- Tools for monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment in training - ISNAR
- Communication within the INTG - ILRI

Funding. The demand for training and the number of actual and potential INTG activities are considerable. Since the INTG has no special resources, training depends on the funding available at individual member institutions; the associated activities depend on the availability of staff time.

In recent years, funding and staff cutbacks affected IARCs and NARS. Training programs became particularly vulnerable. Timely and proper accomplishment of INTG assignments became difficult. However, collaboration among INTG members helped to use financial and human resources efficiently and effectively. Small regional IARC bases in Africa far away from headquarters can draw on expertise and facilities of IARCs located in Africa.

In 1994, the INTG discussed a first funding proposal for a special intercenter training program. At annual and special meetings, the group continued to develop the proposal under the guidance of ILCA - later ILRI -, the encouragement of institute directors, and the collaboration of NARS colleagues. The proposal envisages the management of training through three regional training committees, coinciding with the three regional associations ASARECA, CORAF, and SACCAR. It covers:

- group and individualized training
- support to NARS for the analysis of training needs
- design and production of training materials
- coordination and linkages between NARS and IARCs

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At a time of budget and staff reductions external funding is required. The INTG continues its efforts to acquire such funding.

Challenges. The INTG learned to work together as a team with clear goal and objectives. Especially the expansion of the ICTG into the INTG helps to reach these goal and objectives. Team spirit and challenges keep the INTG alive and active.

Through intensive communication, INTG members plan and execute collaboratively their assignments. In spite of difficulties, the INTG achieved many of its challenges (Box 5).

A major challenge remains the regionalization of activities and assignments in sub-Saharan Africa through the regional research associations. Only SACCAR had a training officer, however funding constraints eliminated this position. All three regional research associations depend on the IARCs for funding their participation at INTG meetings.

The INTG is gaining visibility. Individual persons and institutions approach the INTG with requests for collaborative activities. The question arose whether the INTG is restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, members of the INTG are distributed worldwide, even though at the moment most - not all - actions concentrate on Africa.

Participants of the *Deutscher Tropentag* may use the INTG to explore new partnerships. "Established" as well as recently settling countries offer promising challenges. African scientists are eager to collaborate with German institutions.

The relevance of training to agricultural research continues. The INTG opens challenges and perspectives of knowledge partnership for research and education in sub-Saharan Africa ... and beyond.

For further information and specific contacts see <www.cgiar.org/intg>.