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**IFAD**  
**INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**  
**Governing Council – Twenty-ninth Session**  
Rome, 15-16 February 2006

**ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSIONS**

**ADAPTIVE RESEARCH IN SUPPORT OF PRO-POOR INNOVATIONS IN  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

This note is intended to provide information on IFAD's role in promoting pro-poor innovation. The development of sustainable agricultural technologies of direct relevance to IFAD's rural poor target groups is a major objective of the Fund's grant programme. An important vehicle for reaching this objective is the establishment of synergy and coherence between IFAD's grant-financed research and its current and future loan-financed development projects, many of which are located in marginal rainfed agro-ecosystems.

The round table will discuss experiences from the IFAD-financed research programme, review success stories, lessons learned, and challenges ahead, with the participation of leading international authorities on rural development. The impact of such applied and adaptive participatory research in country programmes will also be discussed, as well as implications for the development portfolio of IFAD, other international organizations, governments and civil society.

### A. Why Adaptive Research Matters for Poverty Reduction

1. Raising the incomes and food security of the rural poor is essential to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Success will depend upon finding new and better approaches to rural development and poverty reduction. Rural economies have been caught up in new processes of globalization and rapid change. Old failures and new challenges call for new solutions in approaching rural poverty. This indicates an important role for research – but in effective innovation systems, such that the relevant knowledge generated by research becomes effective in rural transformation.

2. IFAD's grant programme has focused on the development of innovative approaches to addressing technical and institutional issues affecting the rural poor in the area of agricultural technology and, increasingly, organizational and institutional development (e.g. rural finance, market linkages and pro-poor policy formulation). The programme has drawn significantly on the resources of regional and international centres of excellence by commissioning specific poverty-relevant research programmes (not core institutional funding). This strategy notes that: (i) the institutional and technological problems faced by the poor in marginal, resource-poor areas of the developing world are similar; (ii) some issues involve resource mobilization beyond the capacity of many national organizations; and (iii) cross-country learning is essential in order to respond to the challenge of practical innovation and to bring the best available knowledge to the service of the rural poor, building on the rich diversity of local knowledge of the rural communities themselves.

3. The importance of adaptive agricultural research for rural poverty reduction has been recognized by IFAD since its inception. The Fund's current strategic framework identifies "improving equitable access to productive natural resources and technology" as one of the three strategic objectives to enable the rural poor to overcome their poverty. IFAD's emphasis on livelihood development and its promotion of the *filière* approach and novel mechanisms for pro-poor rural financial services, draw another strategic objective (increasing access to financial services and markets) into the grant portfolio. Importantly, however, IFAD has advocated the principle of community involvement and helped develop practical ways of bringing the voice of rural people into the early conceptualization and research programme design process, in line with its third strategic objective (strengthening the capacity of the rural poor and their organizations).

4. The innovation-driven activities supported by IFAD's grant programmes are pro-poor in that they are associated with high returns to the rural resource-poor and small-scale rural producers. Significant pay-off has been achieved in terms of improvement in the quality and production of staple crops, livestock and aquaculture, thus resulting in food security and improved living standards for poor farmers, livestock owners and fishing communities. These grants have led to the development and adoption of time- and labour-saving technological innovations that aim at reducing the workload of poor rural people, especially women, resulting in an increase in productivity and income-generating capacity.

5. Since its inception, IFAD has supported agricultural research and development (ARD) targeted at improving the generation and impact of pro-poor technologies. Its loan and grant programmes have improved the livelihoods of rural poor people through building on readily-adoptable opportunities for income diversification based on increased productivity, value-addition and market access. IFAD has pioneered effective poverty reduction approaches in ways that are now finding wider relevance in national poverty reduction strategies and in science and technology plans to contribute to the MDGs. The MDG pledge is strongly reaffirmed at every major international forum and it is reassuring to see some recent positive movement in investments targeting pro-poor research and development (R&D). An increasing number of new investors in agriculture and rural development are slowly appearing on the horizon.

## B. IFAD's Role in Promoting Pro-poor Technologies

6. IFAD continues to play a leading role in highlighting the need for targeted research and improving the impact of pro-poor technologies. As a cosponsor of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)<sup>1</sup>, IFAD continues to support a research portfolio that is driven by a clear 'pro-poor innovations' agenda. Examples are given below.

7. IFAD-financed, CGIAR-led research and development (USD 130 million over two decades) began with an emphasis on supporting the varietal improvement of pro-poor crops (cassava and new rice varieties in Africa; faba beans in the Near East; durum wheat in North Africa; minor millets in South Asia; sorghum, plantain, yams, cowpeas and agroforestry in West Africa; rainfed rice, pigeon peas and bamboo in South Asia; and potatoes in Latin America and Africa). This resulted in an increase in smallholder productivity through improving attributes such as drought tolerance.

8. The Fund also supports a wide range of R&D on complementary rural, but off-farm, activities. These include innovative institutional arrangements and policy research (e.g. farmer-managed irrigation systems involving water users' associations) geared towards the strengthening of remunerative and inclusive input and product markets (including payment for ecological services), as well as rural financial markets. The landless and other disadvantaged groups are involved in innovative input delivery markets.

9. IFAD has supported community-based and farmer-driven testing and validation of post-harvest processing technology of relatively neglected crop species that the poor rely upon for their food security. Such crops include highly nutritious coarse grains such as finger millet in India, and cereals such as fonio in West Africa and quinoa in Latin America. With a well-known non-governmental organization (Sasakawa Africa Association [SAA–Global 2000 Programme]), community-based adaptive R&D in the Sahel has developed a number of post-harvest sorghum and millet technologies. In North Africa, efficient livestock feed delivery systems have been developed. IFAD consistently draws attention to demonstrating the **impact** of promising research outcomes on rural poverty, both in terms of improved productivity and higher incomes, nutritional security and socio-economic empowerment – including that of rural poor women.

10. All this means not only focusing on agricultural production and productivity improvements but also strengthening rural institutional support systems of post-production parameters – value-chains and market access – in such a way that IFAD's primary target groups can directly benefit from that value addition. Consequently, for IFAD, one prerequisite is also putting in place mechanisms that promote better market access for the rural poor producer – an important component in its lending strategy.

11. IFAD has led several initiatives that foster a progressive paradigm shift of ARD towards a holistic 'knowledge-intensive agriculture' accessible to small and poor farmers. The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) is a global initiative that IFAD has helped to establish. Among the elements that IFAD shares with the GFAR philosophy are principles of subsidiarity and complementarity; of research that is demand-driven and implemented through productive and meaningful partnerships among key stakeholders; of research agenda priorities set with a focus on poor farmers' and rural community perspectives; and of research design and technology diffusion that fully engages intended users and beneficiaries. These stakeholders include national programmes, agricultural universities, farmers' organizations, the private sector and donors, all promoting the

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<sup>1</sup> The CGIAR is a strategic alliance of countries, international and regional organizations, and private foundations supporting 15 international agricultural research centres that work with national agricultural research systems and civil-society organizations including the private sector. The alliance mobilizes agricultural science to reduce poverty, foster human well-being, promote agricultural growth and protect the environment.

development of promising pro-poor technologies, drawing on their comparative advantage and strengthening synergies.

### **C. IFAD and the CGIAR – An Example of Effective Partnership**

12. In the context of CGIAR-led ARD, IFAD's investment in pro-poor innovation has been to support the generation and diffusion of sustainable agricultural technologies through participatory approaches in resource-poor and disadvantaged environments. Evaluation studies provide strong evidence that these investments can be among the most effective contributors to rural poverty reduction. They have led to widespread impact on small-scale agriculture throughout the developing world and have contributed to CGIAR's attention to priority issues of concern to the rural poor in resource-poor areas and on traditional crops and commodities under difficult agro-climatological conditions.

13. IFAD plays an active role in the CGIAR Executive Council, as a cosponsor member. The Fund has contributed to the dialogue on the CGIAR reform agenda and its programmatic and organizational alignment, intended to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the group's R&D processes to impact on the rural poor. Indeed, all of the research supported by IFAD, focused as it is on rural poverty, directly facilitates the achievement of the group's reform agenda.

14. A promising analytical perspective in this context is offered by the institutional learning and change initiative, which IFAD is supporting with the other like-minded CGIAR partners. Trends in IFAD's support to research have evolved from an original focus on bio-physical technologies appropriate to poorer farmers and on pro-poor commodities, to a systems approach, including attention to developing methodologies for the active involvement of farmers in all stages of the research process. Institutional issues matter increasingly. Within that framework, IFAD's support emphasizes elements that empower the rural communities; environmental sustainability; multi-disciplinarity; multi-institutional partnerships and wide stakeholder participation; gender equity issues; and technology validation and diffusion.

15. IFAD has engaged with various ARD stakeholders and led many initiatives that foster a progressive paradigm shift in ARD towards a holistic 'knowledge-intensive agriculture' that mobilizes the knowledge and experience of small/poor farmers and scientists as partners in innovation systems. Furthermore, IFAD-financed loans and the systematic linkages established with them by the research programmes are not only a platform for dissemination of research outputs, but may also provide the field context in which downstream research can be designed and adapted.

### **D. Suggested Questions for Discussion**

16. What is the specific role of the various stakeholders (government, farmers' organizations and other community-based organizations, the private sector and donors) in promoting new technologies?

17. What is the best way to promote innovation? In which way can IFAD improve its impact on poverty reduction?

18. What role do partnerships play in the development of new technologies? For example, what is the role of the CGIAR in this context?

19. Is adaptive research 'scale-neutral' in the sense that it benefits all producers irrespective of their farm size?

20. What are the main lessons learned from the design and implementation of programmes on adaptive research and agricultural technology?

