



## Online consultations to enhance agricultural research for development



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### Broad representation and trust

Stakeholder engagement is crucial to successful reform. Where we often fail is in developing and cultivating the indispensable networks and connections that allow us to involve a representative range of stakeholders actively in the reform process. This is further exacerbated by deeply institutionalized perceptions, norms and behaviors in regard to other actors of change. One consequence of these is the lack of trust among actors, which then leads to confidential side conversations that undermine the efforts for inclusive and transparent consultations around a reform.

Getting balanced representation and earning trust are two challenges in the ongoing efforts of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), a global multi-stakeholder forum on agricultural research for development (which includes the CGIAR), to organize in consultative processes for GCARD and CGIAR reform.

Although virtual environments have the great advantage of allowing for broader engagement than physical meetings, holding e-consultations does not guarantee that the desired range of actors, sectors and regional views are represented. And even if broad representation is achieved, distrust among participants and absence of face-to-face interactions can make it difficult to reach consensus in virtual environments.

### The promising case of GCARD

"GCARD aims to develop greater synergy between research and development processes," says Mark Holderness, GFAR's Executive Secretary, "by bringing together diverse partners to develop agendas, capabilities and ways of working in agricultural research for development." While a series of regional and multi-lingual e-consultations are being distilled in regional face-to-face meetings (another round of e-consultations may be organized), a "global team" is analyzing and compiling the regional reviews and reports for a face-to-face global conference to be held in Montpellier, France, in March 2010. In this way, the organizers hope to ensure that any action plans and declarations made by those attending the Montpellier conference are broadly representative of stakeholder views. Holderness expects such consultative processes to help kick-start "a variety of public, private and civil agricultural research for development pathways".

GCARD is one of the pillars of the CGIAR reform, providing broad feedback by all stakeholders of the CGIAR towards development of the "Strategy and Results Framework" and "Mega-Programs" in the new CGIAR – which are the focus of various consultations among CGIAR stakeholders.

### GCARD consultations gain momentum

The first GCARD e-consultation round surpassed expectations by engaging more than 1500 participants from all over the world in discussions. The e-consultation evaluation survey with 231 responses shows that 86% of the respondents feel that they have increased their understanding of AR4D issues in the region. 86% rate the e-consultation as excellent (29%) or good (57%).

In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, the enthusiasm created around the e-consultation is evident. **500** members from **65** countries signed up for the event and as FARA's Myra Wopereis-Pura puts it: Up to the moment, the GCARD-Africa dgroup is still very active. We don't know how to stop people!

While some professionals might suffer from a consultation fatigue, it is important to also see the novelty for others. As a member of the central Asia and the Caucasus CAC forum puts it: "This is the first time ever we experienced such an e-consultation among all the researchers of the region for one goal i.e. AR4D. It's great to learn and improve towards further steps in GCARD process."

The process has demonstrated the wide reach of regional research fora such as CACAARI, FARA, APAARI, FORAGRO, AARINENA and EFARD, while also disclosing some gaps in a balanced representation. Invitations to regional stakeholders to join the e-consultations received better responses from some sectors, sub-regions and R&D areas than others. GFAR and the regional fora now have the opportunity to engage under-represented regions (such as China) and sectors (private and civil society) in assessments on research needs for development. In parallel GFAR is pushing the research community very hard to be prepared to listen to and act on the voices of those it serves. Obtaining broad representation and trust ultimately depends on the capacity of the research community to listen well to those it is ambitious to engage.

### Inclusiveness and transparency

To be as inclusive and transparent as possible, GCARD is employing social media in addition to its listservs and web-based consultation platforms, which require registration. GCARD has developed a blog (<http://gcardblog.wordpress.com/>) and Twitter account (<http://twitter.GCARD2010>) to share updates, stories and summaries. GCARD plans to use many more social media tools during its Montpellier gathering so that those who cannot physically go to the event can engage via mobile phone messages, podcasts and videos. But we shall also need to start practicing "social media listening", where we engage our stakeholders online on their own interactive platforms.

For more information about GCARD visit: <http://www.egfar.org/egfar/website/gcard/>

## Contribute to shaping the future of agriculture!

Register for the GCARD 2010 regional e-consultations. Join the regional electronic consultations happening now! The consultations give you an opportunity to debate and build on from the reviews of current policies and research needs identified in your region, and to put forward your point of view.

Each region will be discussing the answers to questions such as:

- What agricultural research does your region need to lessen poverty and boost development?
- What kinds of mechanisms and partnerships are needed to make this happen?
- What is preventing the poor from benefitting more from agricultural research?

Check the available regional reviews at:

<http://gcardblog.wordpress.com/2009/08/28/check-now-dates-and-background-readings-for-regional-e-consultations/>

More information:

<http://www.egfar.org/egfar/website/gcard/updates/item?contentId=2894>

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