



## Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

**For further information, please contact:**

Catherine Mgendi at + 254 726 243 046 or [c.mgendi@cgiar.org](mailto:c.mgendi@cgiar.org) or  
Jeff Haskins at +86 136 931 76573 [jhaskins@burnesscommunications.com](mailto:jhaskins@burnesscommunications.com)

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### **Gates Foundation Funds Unprecedented \$13 Million Effort to Unleash Expertise of African Women in the Agricultural Sciences**

*New Program to Fast Track the Careers of African Women Scientists; Seeks to Fix “Leaky Pipeline” of Women Agricultural Researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa*

**NAIROBI, KENYA (5 DECEMBER 2007)**—Confronting the disparity between the role of African women in farming and their limited presence in the agriculture sciences, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Gender & Diversity Program today launched an unprecedented \$13 million effort that will support at least 360 agriculture research fellowships for African women scientists. Participating countries include Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The Nairobi-based African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) program is being funded with a four-year grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The grant represents the Foundation’s belief in the importance of engaging women at every level in agricultural development. Today, women farmers produce 60 to 80 percent of crops critical to feeding the people of Africa. Yet women comprise less than 20 percent of agricultural researchers.

“We cannot fight hunger and poverty in Africa, particularly in the struggling regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, unless women have a strong voice not just on the farm, but in the lab,” said Vicki Wilde, head of the CGIAR’s Gender & Diversity Program, at the CGIAR Annual General Meeting in Beijing where the grant was announced. “It is urgent that we increase the number of African women in agricultural research. We are thrilled that the Gates Foundation is funding our work in this area.”

“Women bear much of the responsibility for cultivating crops in Africa and they face challenging and changing conditions,” said Rajiv Shah, director of agricultural development for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “African women scientists can help bring practical, sustainable improvements to the African farm sector so smallholder farmers - most of whom are women - can build better lives for themselves and their families.”

The AWARD Program will address many of the barriers—including a lack of role models and mentors, and institutional biases—that in the past have prevented African women from playing a more active role in agricultural research.

“It is a plain fact that the young woman scientist continues to face a scary and tormenting situation in deciding whether she should pursue her career {as a scientist} or maintain her family,” said Miriam G Kinyua, Associate Professor of Agriculture at Moi University. “I believe it should not be so. I believe that with the right balance, she can succeed in both.”

While other programs provide academic support, AWARD is different. AWARD nourishes the African talent pool with a *career development series* designed to strengthen both science and leadership skills of women in agricultural research at three critical career junctures – upon completion of their BSc, MSc and PhD degrees.

Specifically, the program seeks to achieve a:

- 25 percent increase in African women with BSc degrees participating as members of research teams in at least 20 agricultural institutions in sub-Saharan Africa;
- 50 percent increase in African women with masters degrees managing research teams and producing improved farm technologies at these institutions;
- 50 percent increase in African women PhDs serving in influential leadership roles and as role models and mentors to younger women;
- Significant increase in the number of African girls and young women inspired to pursue careers in agricultural research and development; and
- Significant increase in the number of men and women aware of the importance of women’s voices and contributions to agriculture in Africa.

Many of the strategies to be employed in the AWARD initiative were first developed in two smaller, pilot programs administered by the CGIAR’s Gender & Diversity Program in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation, the US Agency for International Development, and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture. Launched in 2005, these efforts have provided career-boosting support for 75 women agricultural researchers in Africa. But there is a clear need for expansion, as qualified applicants for the fellowships have far exceeded available positions.

One lesson from the pilot programs is that mentoring is critical to cultivating a strong cadre of women scientists. Each fellow selected to participate in the AWARD initiative will be assigned a senior scientist to serve as her mentor to guide her research and training. During the second year of her fellowship, each AWARD woman in turn will mentor a more junior woman from her organization, creating a spread effect and boosting yet more women.

“I strongly feel this mentoring program has a multiplier effect and its impacts are definitely changing lives and most specifically the lives of women..... The Gender & Diversity Program is a nurturing powerhouse,” said Jenipher Bisikwa, Pilot G&D Fellowship Winner from Uganda.

The mentoring program also is intended to get men involved. While they are not eligible for the AWARD fellowships, Wilde said men are being encouraged to become mentors. In exchange, they will be offered the opportunity to participate in special AWARD events, such as courses that teach leadership skills, science writing, and proposal writing.

Fellows also will have access to a range of resources to ensure they have maximum opportunity to make a long-term commitment to agricultural research. Today, the proportion of women studying agriculture sciences in Africa steadily declines as students move from undergraduate to masters and on to PhD programs. To counter this “leaky pipeline” problem, the AWARD program is providing a variety of resources to encourage women to stick with their research pursuits.

For example, each fellow gets subscriptions to online science journals and, as they get their research papers published, the funds to attend and present at scientific conferences. Fellows also

will be offered internships in a variety of research settings, including the CGIAR Centers and a number of universities in Africa.

The push to strengthen their presence in the agricultural sciences comes as African countries are embarking on an historic effort to reduce poverty and hunger by boosting production on the continent's farms, which are predominantly small-scale operations struggling to keep pace with population growth. Almost no country has managed a rapid rise from poverty without increasing agricultural productivity.

“The CGIAR started the G&D Program to heighten the role of women in international agricultural research and help them advance their careers as scientists. We also wanted to ensure that the results of our work are reaching African women, who produce between 60 and 80 per cent of the continent's food,” said Kathy Sierra, Vice President of Sustainable Development at the World Bank and Chair of the CGIAR. “This new commitment will greatly further those goals. There is talent everywhere in the world, and we must tap into it.”

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#### **About the CGIAR**

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), established in 1971, is a strategic partnership of countries, international and regional organizations and private foundations supporting the work of 15 international agricultural research Centers. In collaboration with national agricultural research systems, civil society and the private sector, the CGIAR fosters sustainable agricultural growth through high-quality science aimed at benefiting the poor through stronger food security, better human nutrition and health, higher incomes and improved management of natural resources. [www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org).

#### **About the Gender & Diversity Program**

The purpose of the Gender & Diversity Program is to help the CGIAR Centers leverage their rich staff diversity to increase research and management excellence. The program promotes such activities as diversity-positive recruitment, international teamwork, cross-cultural communications and advancement for women. For more information, please visit: [www.genderdiversity.cgiar.org](http://www.genderdiversity.cgiar.org).

#### **About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people -- especially those with the fewest resources -- have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.