South Africa to Burkina Faso: African Agricultural Innovation in a Changing Global Environment

This was the theme that brought together more than 700 hundred diverse participants for the 5th Agriculture Science Week and Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) General Assembly, held 19-24 July 2010 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The FARA Science Week has become a major event in the African agriculture scene and has successfully expanded its stakeholder base beyond the national agricultural research systems to include NGO, government, farmer organization and some private sector participants, as well as several ministers of agriculture.

One of the highlights of the week was the discussion on the role of the private sector in implementing the activities of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). A panel composed of various ministers of agriculture, among others, said that - rather than wait for external support - African countries need to provide structured leadership in agriculture, form thematic groups, and mobilize resources.

The increasing interest in South-South cooperation and partnership was evident by the launch of the Africa-Brazil Agriculture Marketplace. This initiative seeks to promote knowledge exchange, promote investment and support agriculture research and development in the two regions. Up to seven joint project proposals are expected to be selected in October for funding.

The need for access to knowledge, formation of partnerships and adequate allocation of resources to communication, as well as the coordination of regional agriculture research was echoed by various presenters. The CGIAR Collective Action’s CGMap Ongoing Research in Africa, which responds to these needs, demonstrated the use of the map at one of the week’s events. Participants commended the CG for its efforts in sharing and opening up its research activities, and there was interest in the adoption of the map and the use of the tool to synchronize agriculture information in Africa.

The week saw a diversity of side events – nearly 30 in total – many of which were proposed and facilitated by the stakeholders. Among the many side events there was one on technological foresight, and one on an assessment of lessons learnt from the sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Program. A side event organized by ILRI, WorldFish, CIAT and ICARDA to help shape the new CGIAR mega program on livestock and fish attracted many participants and allowed for valuable partner interactions.

The general mood of the week was one of things happening and opportunities to be captured: Africa’s economies are growing; important infrastructural investments (ports, roads, railways, internet, etc) are taking place; and direct foreign investment is picking up, particularly with the interest of foreign investors in large scale commercial farming. At the political level the CAADP compacts are being signed by more and more African countries, and advancing regional economic integration is creating new market opportunities. Overall, the FARA Science Week presented a very positive picture about the development of Africa’s agricultural sector.

More highlights of the FARA Science week can be found here: http://faraweek2010.blogspot.com/

For further information about the Mega Program on livestock and fish: www.livestockfish.wordpress.com