

Restructuring Research at CIAT to Better Address New Challenges

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The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) reorganized its research agenda to increase its competitiveness and generate new products of world coverage.

The agenda that for many years focused on 14 major projects in multiple areas will now concentrate on six product-based programs (knowledge and technologies) that aim to support the poor farmers of the tropics in their pursuit of a more competitive agriculture.

Beans, cassava, forages, soil management, and high-value crops will be the Center's priorities with worldwide mandate, while it will continue research on rice for Latin America.

Restructuring has been on the table since late 2005 when the need to target the Center's research to better address new global realities became evident. In tandem, donor contributions worldwide have been showing a new trend regarding the funds allocated to Latin America. For example, in year 2000 Latin America received 25% of international aid worldwide, while in 2006 it only received 8.5%.

"This reduction obeys political reasons. At no time has the scientific quality of CIAT been questioned", clarified Director General Joachim Voss. "Although the work conducted in Latin America has important benefits for other regions of the world, direct relationships cannot always be seen," continues Voss, explaining that most aid funds are currently allocated to Africa and Asia where the levels of poverty are much more acute than in Latin America.

The necessary budgetary adjustments and the reorganization of the research agenda have implied staff cutbacks. Starting this year, the new operational model involves multidisciplinary teams whose mission is to produce international public goods that benefit the poor of tropical Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

"With this new model, we can begin to identify the needs of resource-poor communities and help find solutions. This comprehensive multi-stage process begins with basic research and culminates with the development of products that have a positive impact on the end user. CIAT is not the only actor in this chain of activities. It involves advanced research institutes, national governments, the public and private sectors, and many local and international NGOs", explained the Director.

CIAT is an international organization established 40 years ago in Colombia, with headquarters in Palmira, Valle del Cauca. It works with the contributions of 60 donors worldwide.