

Crisis in food prices calls for writing a new chapter in the agrifood sector

IICA's most important annual in-house meeting, which will focus on the topic of food safety, got under way today.



The Director General of IICA Chelston Brathwaite advocated the adoption of a new model for development during his opening remarks at Representatives' Week.

“Every once in a while, there is a moment in history that defines the future of a nation, a region or a discipline. Given the current situation, characterized by financial turbulence, climate change, rising food and oil prices and food insecurity, this is the moment to write a new chapter in the agrifood sector.”

With these words, the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Chelston Brathwaite, welcomed the Institute's senior management staff, Representatives in the 34 Member States and Regional Specialists to “Representatives” Week,” and invited them to discuss how best to support the region in dealing with the crisis in food prices, and to identify those practices that will enable the Institute to collaborate in that effort.

Representatives' Week, which began today at IICA Headquarters in San Jose, Costa Rica, and will run through October 29, is the Institute's most important in-house meeting. It is held annually and involves more than 100 people from 34 countries.

During his opening remarks, the Director General stated that today's global challenges, including the crisis in food prices and food insecurity, will require long-term solutions since the causes of many are rooted in the past.

Those causes include less attention to and funding for the agricultural sector by governments and development banks over the last 25 years. Many governments have dismantled their agricultural extension services and have invested in rural areas, where forty per cent of the population lives, an average of only 6% of their national budgets.

Faced with this situation, some are calling for a new Green Revolution. Braithwaite advocates the adoption of a new model for development, one in which food security, a fundamental right of all people, is a key component of the national agenda, and policies for the modernization of agriculture and rural life are promoted.

He also called attention to the need to increase investment in the sector and to reform the ministries of agriculture, ensuring that they look after the interests of both food producers and consumers. He recommended, in addition, new policies on nutrition and food consumption, with a view to reducing dependence on imported products and using more of the products readily available in our countries.

Continuing, he called attention to the need for change in the curricula of the agricultural education system, which still view agriculture in terms of primary production, despite the fact that it accounts for only 5% of the economy. Today, it must focus on the expanded agricultural sector, which contributes up to 20% of the gross domestic product in some countries.

The Director General of the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CAITIE), Jose Joaquin Campos, invited to address the meeting, agreed with Brathwaite as to the need to “change paradigms both at the local and global levels,” noting that the development of agriculture and natural resources in rural areas must be well thought out.

Julie Ann MacDonald, an expert with the World Food Program, also invited to speak, underscored the need to link short-term measures intended to assist those most vulnerable to the crisis with politically viable long-term solutions.

IICA's Director of Trade and Policies, Julio Paz, who spoke on the policy framework for food security, recommended making improvements in agricultural research systems, increasing investment in rural infrastructure, promoting investment in agribusiness and developing instruments to reduce the risks of small-scale farmers.

During the first two days of the event, presentations by the Directors of Regional Operations and Integration will focus on the crisis and its repercussions for each region of the hemisphere. To conclude this first segment of Representatives' Week, Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management, James French, will sum up the strategies IICA must promote at the hemispheric, regional and national levels.

In pursuit of better Institute

In addition to discussing food security, and in light of the technical cooperation model implemented by the Institute under the Brathwaite administration, participants in the meeting will discuss those practices that have helped to improve the IICA's performance and could be adopted throughout the Institute.

Their discussions will focus on corporate management, relations with strategic partners, securing resources, communications and institutional image and other topics.

Representatives' Week will conclude on October 29 with the presentation of the Director General's Awards for Excellence, honoring outstanding contributions by individuals and teams throughout the hemisphere.

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Ministers of Agriculture and Environment of Belize participated in Forum for Leaders

The delegation, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister of Belize, said that the event had exceeded his expectations and expressed his interest in working more with IICA.



“Informative and educational” were the words used by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Belize, Rene Montero, to describe the Forum for Leaders in Agriculture. The Forum was held for the high-level delegation from Belize on 17 October at the headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), in Costa Rica.



The Forum is part of an innovative effort being promoted by IICA through its Center for Leadership in Agriculture to provide recently appointed ministers of agriculture and senior executives in the agricultural sector with useful information, through dialogue, so that they can build a modern vision of agriculture and rural life in the XXIst century.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Belize and Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Gaspar Vega, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Gabino Canto, and the Deputy Chief of the Belize Forest Office of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Marcelo Windsor, participated along with Minister Montero.

Ministers Vega and Montero are part of Prime Minister Dean Barow's government, which took office in February this year.

At IICA, the visitors were met by the acting Director General, Francisco Barea, and a group of directors from the technical area, with whom they held talks on the most pressing challenges for agriculture and rural life worldwide and, specifically, in Belize, and on how IICA, as a specialized agency of the Inter-American System, might continue assisting this Central American country.

1. The high-level delegation from Belize, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister of that country, took part in a Forum for Leaders of Agriculture.

2. As part of the visit of the Belizean delegation, the Center for Leadership in Agriculture conducted a field trip to “La Esperanza”, an integrated farm devoted to organic production.

The Director of Technology and Innovation of IICA, Enrique Alarcon, opened the discussion referring broadly to the global challenges, including food insecurity and climate change. He went on to explain that a modern and broad-based vision of agriculture could be useful in facing these challenges.

"We can no longer view agriculture merely in terms of production; we must see it as part of a chain involving several levels. A Minister of Agriculture no longer works to contribute to five per cent of the country's economy; rather he or she works for a sector that is much more vast, with linkages to the rest of the economy, and that contributes 20 per cent or more to the Gross Domestic Product. Building a new institutional framework that is tailored to this new situation is the challenge we face," the Director said.

The Coordinator of the Center for Leadership in Agriculture, Hernán Chiriboga, the specialist in agricultural health, Ana Marisa Cordero, and the specialist in natural resources and environment, Jeanette Cardenas, gave an overview of the activities carried out by their technical units.

The high-ranking government officials from Belize said how impressed they were with the vision and information shared at the Forum, which, according to the Deputy Prime Minister of Belize, had "exceeded our expectations". He further mentioned the joint and complementary efforts being waged by IICA and the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), which they had visited the day before.

He further expressed a desire to increase cooperation between IICA and his country, especially in subject headings which included the introduction of technologies to increase production and productivity, post-harvest techniques and training. He also wished to enlist its support with the successful introduction of products on the international market.

"We would like to have additional assistance, advice and support from IICA which has specialists in topics that relate to our agro-environmental priorities. We are highly interested in increasing our joint work ", the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, said.

In turn, the IICA Representative, Salvador Monge, said that "the Deputy Prime Minister's presence gives political support to these initiatives ".

He added that the fact that the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Agriculture were part of the delegation and belonged to portfolios that historically could have been viewed as antagonistic among conservationists and productivists, demonstrated the importance that the Government of Belize attached to giving an agro-environmental approach to production..

After the Forum at IICA, the delegation held talks with the Costa Rican Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Javier Flores and the Deputy Minister, Román Solera, and with the Deputy Minister of Energy, Julio Matamoros, to discuss challenges and opportunities facing these portfolios in the two countries and identify cooperation ties.

As part of the visit, the Center for Leadership organized a field trip to the La Esperanza farm specializing in organic production and to the Central American School of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry which provides training for careers in forestry and wild life management, food technology, agro-ecotourism and animal production.

Hernan Chiriboga, Coordinator of IICA's Center for Leadership in Agriculture, said that the purpose of these activities was to learn by doing, to see technical knowledge applied in practice. The field trips are organized on the basis of specific requests from each minister and they provide an opportunity to learn about local experiences and initiatives that have been spearheaded in their areas of interest.

In December this year, the Center for Leadership will also give a training course to Belizean farmers in biogas production, sustainable agriculture and leadership.

It will also support training to be provided by the Ministry of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica for officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources of Belize in carbon fixation and capture, under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism.

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Eighth Caribbean Week of Agriculture

Around 200 people attended the event, including the ministers of agriculture of 12 Caribbean countries.

“Agriculture today is in a state of transformation and stands at the epi-center of international trade issues.” Those were the words echoed by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, the Hon. Montgomery Daniel, of St. Vincent and the Grenadines as he officiated the 8th Caribbean Week of Agriculture (CWA), “Innovative Agriculture and Industries – Fueling Sustainable Development,” in Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This year’s event highlights the critical need for technology innovations in advancing the ‘new’ agriculture in the Caribbean.

Minister Daniel reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to modernize the agriculture sector. “Within recent years, the high cost of inputs, the soaring food prices and the sky rocketing of oil prices have led every one in the rural and urban areas; every leader and every minister of agriculture; to understand and recognize the very importance of the role of the agricultural sector in our economies,” he stated. During the six day conference, participants hope to make advancement on issues such as the rising food prices; alternative sources of energy; agricultural input supply; rural poverty and the rural urban migrations and rural employment; the binding constraints under the Jagdeo Initiative and other agricultural strategies in the wider CARICOM Region and OECS subregion.

Conceptualized by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the CWA serves as a facility for increasing the prominence of agriculture and rural life, so that key decision makers would be better able to acknowledge their importance to the economy, social infrastructure and environmental stability. The CWA also presents an opportunity for stakeholders to forge a common vision for the repositioning of agriculture on the national agendas in the Caribbean.

For the Honorable Dr. Jerrol Thompson, Minister of Telecommunications, Science Technology and Industry, recognizing the linkage of agriculture to tourism is of critical importance. “We must continue to realize a vision for agriculture.” He also said, “We must also focus on food nutrition and security, and public-private partnerships.” He continued, “These actions will help to ensure that our farmers and rural communities are beneficiaries of the regions overall agricultural and tourism sectors.”

Guest speaker, the Honorable Dr. Douglas Slater, Minister of Health and the Environment reminded the audience that in order to drive the sustainability of the agricultural sector in for the region, we must ‘eat what we grow and grow what we eat.’ In this regard, the Minister challenged the region to pay more attention on the issues of chronic and non-communicable diseases that are affecting the people of the region. Min. Slater also pointed out that agriculture is part of a ‘wellness revolution,’ and encouraged further engagement at both the public and private sectors.

The Caribbean Week of Agriculture concluded with an exhibit on October 12.

For further information, please contact alondon@icawash.org or visit <http://www.cwanaie08.com/>



Nobel Laureate warns of the threats to agriculture due to climate change

“Climate Change is real - In all likelihood, the primary impact will be on food itself ...”, said Thomas C. Schelling, 2005 Nobel Laureate, Economics.



On 1 October, The OAS celebrated IICA Day for the third consecutive year.

Members of the Organization of American States’ (OAS) Permanent Council and invited guests today were stimulated by the sobering realities of science based observations by Dr. Thomas C. Schelling, 2005 Nobel Laureate in Economics and Distinguished Professor at the University of Maryland. IICA Deputy Director General, Christopher Hansen, recommended specific actions in light of the threat created by climate change to agriculture and food security in the western hemisphere.

Held during the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture's (IICA) third Annual 'IICA Day' activity at the OAS, Professor Schelling served as keynote speaker and reminded his audience of the dire need to continue additional research on the effects of climate change. He warned, the climate change is real and the most devastating impact of climate change is likely to occur in agriculture. He said, "In all likelihood, the primary impact will be on food itself ... the provision of food, the distribution of food and on the people."

Most importantly, Schelling warned his audience that the adverse effects of climate change will accrue to the descendants of those living in 'developing countries.' He said, "Many of these countries depend on agriculture for a third or half of their gross product while as much as two thirds of the population may depend on agriculture for a living." Moreover, Schelling emphasized that the need for additional resources to cope with potential consequences of climate change related to health, disease, development, population growth, and food production and distribution should come from the developed countries.

Referring to a video produced by IICA, he reiterated that climate change has been well understood and articulated for over 100 years. Animals and plants are being forced from their surroundings. Glaciers are melting, and the number of devastating droughts and storms are on the rise. Schelling also stated that while the current situation poses a challenge for the countries of the region, it also offers an opportunity to strengthen agriculture in the developing world.

For IICA's Deputy Director General, Christopher Hansen, climate change and food security are inter-linked. Emphasizing that the food security challenges we face today are not of a short term nature, Hansen called for the need of a new development model. He said, "Complex challenges such as climate change are facing farmers, consumers and policy makers on a global basis." He continued, "We need a new development model that integrates agriculture and the rural economy into the development agenda... one that recognizes its contribution to food security, energy security, employment, the preservation of the environment and natural resources, and the provision of social peace and social stability."

According to IICA, food security must become a central component of development planning and must be linked to agricultural development policies that are part of the National Development Goals and should have 5 components that include:

- State policies that support a multidimensional, multi-sectoral focus on agriculture and rural life.
- Strategies to increase investment in agricultural research, innovation and technology transfer.
- A new agricultural educational curriculum.
- Institutional Reform of Ministries of Agriculture.
- New Policies on Food Consumption and Nutrition.

As indicated by Hansen, only by implementing long term strategies can the countries of the Western Hemisphere achieve the Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty by half 2015. He also emphasized the critical need for the modernization of the rural sector, the strengthening of rural communities, educational systems, health care infrastructure and access to technology and credit so that the poor can step away from poverty.

In closing, IICA's Assistant Deputy Director General, Director of the Strategic Partnerships and IICA Representative in the United States, David C. Hatch, said now is the time for increased investment in agriculture and Latin America and the Caribbean is the place.

"The level of investment in agriculture technology and innovation in the 21st century will play a key role in determining the progress towards eradicating poverty; providing adequate quantities and quality of food; reducing the amount of civil and political unrest in developing countries and generally strengthen the economies at the local and country levels and beyond," he said.

Hatch concluded by reminding the audience that the return on investment in the western hemisphere could exceed any return elsewhere over the next few generations.

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IICA and Cornell University to explore joint cooperation in agriculture for the Americas

“We hope to exploit synergy between IICA and Cornell University so as to forge a logical cohesive framework for agricultural development in the Americas”. Chelston Brathwaite



Susan Henry, Dean of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of IICA.

Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) led a delegation of IICA senior officials to Cornell University to explore areas of collaboration aimed at fostering linkages, promoting rural development, the transfer of relevant information, technology and skills between the Institute and the University.

“We recognize that there are considerable benefits when graduate students are offered opportunities for conducting research abroad,” said IICA’s Director General. “We will work with Cornell’s faculty and staff to ensure that efforts are made to expand opportunities towards this objective.”

Brathwaite, a graduate of the university himself, says the initiative is part of the Institute’s efforts to establish closer ties with centers of academic excellence thus contributing to the development of the agricultural sector in the Americas.

The University’s College for Agriculture and Life Sciences (CAL S) has been a strong force in agriculture and rural development. Under the direction of Ronnie Coffman, Ph.D., the Office of International Programs has paved the way for promoting international collaboration. For Coffman, IICA’s visit is timely. He said, “With the crisis of rising food prices and its implications for consumers, producers and the rural poor, our task is to join forces with entities who can contribute to finding solutions that will improve food security and promote sustainable environments.”

Through its 66 years of service, IICA has been recognized for its competence and experience, by having assisted agricultural sector institutions implement initiatives designed to develop their capabilities and national development efforts. Of critical importance to the Institute are its strategic alliances with other public and private, national and international institutions. During the past year, IICA continued to furnish leadership and contacts to leverage resources for agriculture and rural development activity. It focused on developing cooperative agreements and mutually beneficial partnerships that provided new forms of support to its management units and the Offices in the countries, so that producers and policy makers in all 34 IICA Member States can enhance their capacities for change.

During the week, discussions will be held with professors and deans of the university in areas of mutual interest including: agribusiness management and training; research in biotechnology and bio-fuels; climate change and natural resources; leadership in agriculture and an exchange of information and library services. The two organizations hope to work together on programs to facilitate continued professional growth; the development and flexible use of distance learning education; the conduct of workshops and training seminars; the linkage of websites and databases of the two organizations and staff exchange along with exchange of experiences between Cornell University and IICA staff.

In efforts to bring awareness to the Institute’s practices and programs, today IICA’s Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management, Dr. Jim French gave a hemispheric overview of agriculture and food security to a group of students and faculty. He emphasized the critical importance and need for investment in the sector. He also warned of the global imbalance of resources allocated in the fight against poverty and rural development, “Trade balance is in general positive for Latin America and the Caribbean.” He said, “However, they continue to have the lowest growth rate among developing regions.” French reiterated that countries need to develop more sustainable agricultural systems and more sustainable management of their natural resources.

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IICA Director General's Visit to Ottawa: Strengthening Relationships with Canadians

Chelston Brathwaite, Director General of IICA discussed ways to strengthen Canada and IICA collaboration on rural development, trade and agri-business and leadership during his visit to Ottawa.



The Director General of the Institute, Chelston Brathwaite, is pictured with IICA's Representative in Canada, Michael Bedoya, and representatives of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Chelston W.D. Brathwaite, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), met with key senior Government of Canada officials from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to discuss ways to strengthen collaboration between Canada and IICA on rural development, trade and agri-business and leadership.

“Canada is an important partner for IICA and our Institute is looking forward to supporting the Canadian Government in its cooperation in the Americas”, said Brathwaite. “Canada is a leader in many agriculture areas, such as trade, food safety and animal health. Further collaboration between Canada and IICA could bring substantial benefits to the hemisphere”, he added.

Congratulating Canada for the adoption of the *Engagement Strategy for the Americas*, IICA's Director General indicated that the Institute is well positioned to assist in the implementation of its agriculture components. He also reaffirmed the Institute's commitment to continue working with all IICA Member Countries to advance their interests in the Americas.

“In today's globalized world, it is of critical importance for the countries of the Americas region to act together. We will need all our strengths and resources to be in position to respond to current and future agricultural challenges” Brathwaite said. “To this effect, the Canadian experience is of strategic importance and I would like to thank the Government of Canada for its key support in the realization of many of our projects in the Americas.”

During the meetings, Government officials reaffirmed their support to IICA and indicated interest in working closer with the Institute on important issues including food security, animal health and food safety. The experience, technical knowledge and efficiency of the Institute are recognized by the Canadian Government.

At the invitation of the Group of Latin American Ambassadors in Canada (GRULAC), Brathwaite spoke of the importance for governments to continue investing in agriculture, noting the contribution the agricultural sector makes to the sustainable growth of countries' economic and social development. “A modern agricultural sector is key to the battle to reduce rural poverty, food insecurity and urbanization issues that most of our countries are struggling with today”, he said.

The Director General of IICA returned to the theme of challenges later that day during his public lecture on *Global Food security Crisis: A Perspective from the Americas*, delivered at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management of the University of Ottawa.

The lecture, which was attended by Government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, professors and students, allowed Brathwaite to discuss causes and effects of the current food security crisis and propose ways to prevent a new crisis to happen in the future.

“I am convinced that we need a new development model that can unleash the talent, the energy and the enterprise of the people of the Americas so that the agricultural and rural sectors can compete internationally and which facilitates a culture of excellence which results in the provision of information, knowledge, leadership and technical support that contribute to improving the lives of people and to ensuring prosperity of the nations of the hemisphere”, Brathwaite said.

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Agreement to form consortium for cooperation in agribusiness, agricultural science and technology in the ECS signed

The IICA Saint Lucia will serve as Secretariat of the Consortium.

Eleven agencies whose work impact on agricultural development in the ECS signed a historic Agreement for Cooperation during a two and a half days workshop which was held at the Bay Gardens Inn, in Saint Lucia. The workshop also focussed on the concept of implementation of an Information Observatory which provided stakeholders with information on the benefits that can accrue from the development and use within the OECS.



Some of the agencies that signed the Agreement.

The main objectives of the Agreement are:

- Completion of research activities and experimental achievements;
- Support for the implementation of the operations of agricultural and rural development, and transformation of the products;
- Support for the researchers and technicians;
- Scientific and technical training; support in activities of research and demonstrations such as, but not limited to, conferences, seminars, workshops;
- Capacity building for empowerment, policy development and implementation among actors along the agri-food chain and for transformation of agricultural and rural spaces;
- Programme Development and Resource mobilization; and
- The development of regional cooperation, and more generally any form of cooperation approved by the parties.

The Agreement will remain in force for an initial period of four years. The IICA Saint Lucia will serve as Secretariat of the Consortium, to provide logistical support for the implementation and coordination of activities of the Consortium.

Over 60 participants attended the workshop from the Ministries of Agriculture and Planning, the Statistics Department, farmers and farmer organisations and other private sector stakeholders from the OECS countries as well as Costa Rica, France, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Trinidad and Tobago.

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The topic of human prosperity was discussed during the negotiations for the Fifth Summit

As an institutional partner in the Summit Process, IICA participates in all the meetings of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) and the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG).

Human prosperity, one of the three main issues addressed in the proposed Declaration of Port of Spain, was the main topic discussed during the meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) held 18-19 September in Barbados.

The draft declaration under discussion, entitled “Ensuring the future of our citizens by promoting human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability” is the document that the Heads of State and Government will be signing at the Fifth Summit of the Americas, due to take place next April in Trinidad and Tobago.

The meeting reinforced the idea of agriculture and rural life as key factors for sustainable development and food security. “This idea was proposed and supported by Jamaica and Colombia and was included in paragraph 15 of the draft declaration,” said the Director of IICA’s Office of Follow-up to the Summit of the Americas Process, Bernardo Badani.

The declaration also reaffirms the political commitment to developing national and regional strategies for implementing the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan, a task that ministries of agriculture in the hemisphere carry out with support from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and other institutions.

During the event, representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and IICA all made presentations on topics related to human prosperity.

Mr. Badani focused on the strategic issue of food security and also addressed the question of rising food prices and IICA's response to the situation. "The presentation was well received. The Member States realize the importance of agriculture and rural life for sustainable development in view of the situation created by high food prices," he said.

Before the hemispheric meeting that will bring together the Heads of State and Government of the Americas next April, the SIRG will be holding meetings in October, November and December of this year in Antigua and Barbuda, Washington and El Salvador, respectively, to put the finishing touches to the draft declaration.

There will also be dialogues with civil society and further interaction at the beginning of 2009. As an institutional partner in the Summit Process, the Institute has taken part in all the meetings of the SIRG and will continue to support the process, the IICA official said.

Barbados also hosted the meeting of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG) that took place on 18 September. The meeting was chaired by the Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Albert Ramdin.

At this second meeting, Badani explained the progress made and IICA's participation in the Summit Process. He also stressed the need to generate mandates that could be implemented with the financial backing of international institutions and the countries themselves.

On the road to Jamaica 2009

The mandates issued at the Fifth Summit of the Americas will be discussed by the ministers during the Fifth Ministerial Meeting, due to take place next year in Jamaica, which is considered the most important hemispheric-level meeting on agriculture and rural life.

"The preparatory work for Jamaica has already begun. The countries continue to engage in dialogue, review documents and reach agreement on the schedules for the activities," said Badani. Next week, during the 2008 Caribbean Week of Agriculture, a meeting will be held to prepare the final version the document "On the road to Jamaica 2009."

During this operational meeting, the participants will also study a provisional schedule for the different phases of the ministerial process in 2009.

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Strong call to boost agricultural science and technology in Latin America and the Caribbean

Four hundred international experts, 43 of them from Latin America and the Caribbean, took part in a global assessment. The findings were unveiled during a webcast from Costa Rica.



From left to right, Celso Garrido, Inge Armbrecht, Hector Ginzo, Hugo Centrangolo and Mario Ahumada, in charge of the presentation of the report, which took place in Costa Rica.

A “critical but fair” assessment suggests that over the last 60 years the Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology (AKST) System has been successful in generating knowledge and technological innovations that were adopted and used by certain producers to help raise agricultural productivity and production.

However, the AKST System did not prioritize topics related to the environment, social inclusion, hunger and poverty alleviation, diversity and cultural affirmation, nor allocate sufficient resources to them.

These are the conclusions set out in a document unveiled on Thursday, 25 September during a webcast from Costa Rica. The report on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) forms part of the “International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development” (IAASTD).

The LAC report is one of five regional reports. The others deal with Central, West and North Africa; East, South Asia and the Pacific; North America and Europe; and sub-Saharan Africa. There is also a lengthy Global Assessment.

The assessment’s findings were presented, via videoconference, to decision makers and journalists in Argentina, Mexico, Peru and the Dominican Republic, as well as Costa Rica, from the Distance Education Center (CECADI) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), located in the Costa Rican capital.

The speakers included experts María Cristina Plencovich, Mario Ahumada, Hugo Cetrángolo, Celso Garrido, Inge Armbrecht and Héctor Ginzo, all of whom formed part of the group of 43 specialists from 15 LAC countries involved in preparing the study.

An ambitious global assessment

The IAASTD was sponsored by various institutions, including the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Global Environment Fund (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO).

IICA and UNESCO facilitated the production of the documents for Latin America and the Caribbean. The working documents were drafted, revised by external experts and editors, and then disseminated among relevant agents.

This unique combination of international agencies highlights the central role of knowledge, science and technology in agricultural development and, in particular, the role they play in combating poverty, hunger and undernutrition.

Four hundred researchers took part in this ambitious project, nominated by the different stakeholders (representatives of 30 governments and 30 civil society organizations, such as NGOs, producers’ and consumers’ groups, private entities and international organizations).

The LAC countries signed a declaration in which they stated that the assessment was a constructive initiative and an important contribution on which all the countries should build in order to ensure that agricultural knowledge, science and technology realized their potential for helping to meet development and sustainability targets.

Strengthening the Knowledge System

To contribute to development and sustainability goals, the assessment suggests ways of better managing and strengthening the Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology System and refocusing its agenda.

One of the main conclusions of the regional assessment is that society and governments face the challenge of reappraising the importance of agriculture, not only as an engine of economic development that generates employment and income, but also because of the many functions it performs.

The document states that the growth in agricultural productivity in the region since 1950 has not reduced poverty (which affects 37% of the inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean) or malnutrition (10%). Nonetheless, agricultural knowledge, science and technology have the potential to reduce hunger and poverty by improving local livelihoods and adopting an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable development model.

The report adds that the AKST System alone cannot overcome the political and economic constraints that restrict development. However, investment in the sector can contribute to, and facilitate improvements in, the living standards of Latin Americans, in particular in the rural sector, where poverty is extreme.

The authors of the study say that sweeping changes are needed to evolve toward a system of innovation and participatory development that incorporates, in particular, small-scale, agro-ecological and indigenous producers.

The environmental situation calls for urgent efforts to transition toward sustainable models that harness the knowledge used in traditional/indigenous, agro-ecological and conventional/productivist production systems.

At the same time, to meet the urgent needs of the rural poor, giving them and the inhabitants of marginalized regions access to the benefits of development, territorial rural development strategies are needed that will lead to a reappraisal of both the productive aspects of rural areas and the lifestyles of rural dwellers.

The assessment calls for efforts to prevent pollution and preserve genetic diversity, and advocates policies to regulate access to genetic resources and ensure equitable distribution of their benefits.

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Virtual course on agro-ecotourism

Around 105 students will take the 14-week online course, which was organized by IICA and the OAS.

An online professional refresher course on agro-ecotourism, developed by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Organization of American States (OAS), got under way on 10 September, with 96 students in 21 countries of the Americas.

Students are taking part in Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela, all of which are Institute member countries.

The course, which was developed by IICA's Distance Training Center (CECADI) and the Department of Human Development of the OAS, will be spread over a 14-week period and will be given online via the Virtual Classroom of the Educational Portal of the Americas.

“The people interested in this training are the inhabitants of rural or remote areas, who find it difficult to take part in onsite educational courses,” explained James French, IICA Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management, who, together with Marie Levens, Director of the Department of Human Development of the OAS, welcomed the virtual students.

The program is the result of coordinated work by specialists in the Web and multimedia graphic design and experts in education, training and curriculum and instructional design. The IICA specialist in agro-ecotourism was also involved, along with a geographer specializing in nature tourism and territorial management.

The course, entitled “[Agro-ecotourism: Basic elements for implementing an innovative](#) tourism project,” is targeted at entrepreneurs, farmers, technical personnel and/or inhabitants of rural areas interested in the development, planning, organization and administration of agro-ecotourism enterprises.

After completing the course’s eight modules, students will have acquired the theoretical and practical knowledge needed to plan, coordinate and implement projects that make sustainable use of the social, natural and cultural resources of their surroundings.

The participants will be equipped to use the technical terms related to agro-ecotourism, conduct feasibility studies and impact assessments of their projects and use the best practices available for market studies and marketing.

IICA’s Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management urged all the course participants to maintain constant and effective communication. “Both things are essential to achieve the objectives set in the course,” he said during his opening remarks.

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