

Enrica Maria Porcari



Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

e.porcari@CGIAR.ORG

In her role as Chief Information Officer, Ms. Porcari is responsible for leading the development and implementation of a system-wide strategy which sees the integration of the CGIAR Information Technology, Information Management and Knowledge Management systems to optimize value for members, clients, partners and other stakeholders.

Prior to joining the CGIAR, Ms. Porcari was attached to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) where she was responsible for the ICT operations in the field. While with the WFP, she was awarded a fellowship at Stanford University to develop a model for transitioning technologies from emergency situations to the development context.

Previous to working with WFP, Ms. Porcari worked with CGNET, a US-based company that provides communications solutions for organizations serving development needs, with the United Nations Development Program, with Inter Press Service and with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

GRL2020 Position Paper

The CGIAR system together comprises 15 International Agricultural Research Centers, including system-wide programs and initiatives, employing some 8,500 scientists and staff and with a total annual budget of approximately \$ 520 million USD (2008).

The CGIAR as International Public Goods Creator: The mission of the CGIAR is to contribute to food security and poverty eradication in developing countries - through research, partnership, capacity building and policy support.

CGIAR Centers produce a variety of 'goods' from these activities. Encapsulated as outputs, these goods are typically new knowledge and technology (from research), enhanced skills and capabilities, and stronger institutional arrangements and policy evidence leading to change.

The CGIAR has recently re-positioned itself on the 'Research for Development Continuum' – as a creator and provider of international public goods (IPG) that have the potential to be used by others to provide local, national and regional public and private benefits. These IPGs will be produced and put to use in partnership with many other actors and partners.

This shift recognizes the important roles that other actors have in the wider development process. The idea is that CGIAR Centers should be less involved in creating local or national public goods. It is less critical that the CGIAR itself 'delivers' outputs to rural communities and farmers for whom the research was conducted.

For the CGIAR 'information' community, this means that research outputs of the CGIAR need to be readily accessible to 'intermediary' actors (national research, extension, NGO's, etc) who will adapt, improve and apply CGIAR knowledge in their situations

"In the 40 years since the first international agricultural research Center was established, knowledge, information, and data management have been important activities of the CGIAR.

Today, each Center has a library, websites, publishing capabilities and communication programs. Hundreds of research teams publish reports and articles, generate and collect scientific and spatial data which is made available through collective services. Genetic data on plants are kept in trust and indexed through a global system of genebanks. Library catalogs can be queried through a federated search engine and scientists can track world science through coordinated journal and database subscriptions (CGIAR Virtual Library). The CGIAR organizes numerous conferences and workshops, it facilitates networking and it supports innovative approaches to knowledge sharing and institutional learning. Altogether it comprises a series of productive, dynamic and innovative knowledge systems.

Yet, it faces challenges:

- Not all the products of CGIAR research are available in digital format. There is, as yet, no reliable research output archive for the future. Many older materials are still only available in paper form.
- Although there are a wide range of formally-produced and published reports, books and articles in digital format and on the Internet, many of these are difficult for our developing country partners to access. They may be available but not easily accessible.
- The catalogs of the libraries do not index all the outputs of a Center. Some outputs are listed in 'publications catalogs.' Some are published online but are not listed in any Center database. There are numerous ways to search for a Center's outputs; none offer a guarantee of completeness.
- Most of the publications and library catalogs are not 'open and harvestable' and the content cannot easily be picked up by other services.
- One of the metrics for measuring the CGIAR center's research quality is the number of externally peer-reviewed publications. This metric has a tendency to exclude other products (e.g. grey literature) thus encouraging scientists to publish in (frequently) closed access services.
- Collective efforts provide access to certain types of data across the system (genebanks, GIS) however documenting individual datasets of scientists is less developed.
- Producers of data and information, both the CGIAR Centers and partners, do not all tag their data and information, using standardized methodologies so that these data and information can be harvested, integrated and easily accessed.
- Libraries suffer from a 'support' syndrome; their basic roles and functions are generally undervalued.

The CGIAR is a partner in the Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development (CIARD) Initiative. To enhance the availability, uptake and use of agricultural knowledge, the Initiative aims to make public domain agricultural research information and knowledge accessible to all. The idea is that organizations concerned with the effective application of agricultural knowledge in development will combine and align their various efforts, working towards some key priorities and principles set out in a joint manifesto.

An investment plan is being formulated to "ensure that ideas and knowledge derived from CGIAR research will be made available and accessible for public use, interrogation, and application, as widely, rapidly and effectively as practicable."

To begin in 2008 and run through 2011 the plan will support activities designed to maximize the availability and accessibility of CGIAR research outputs. Likely actions include:

- Developing a shared vision on the availability, accessibility and applicability of CGIAR research outputs and the delivery of international public goods.
- Establishing open and harvestable repositories of Center's research outputs across the CGIAR system. These will likely merge current publications and library catalogs. It represents a move towards publicly accessible information and content.

- Educating and encouraging managers and scientists on ways to make their products open and accessible (and open access), mobilizing political buy-in and resources.
- Digitizing older material and books and make them available on the web.
- Modifying publishing practices to ensure publishing workflows include automatic storage of data and information in Centers' Institutional Repositories.
- Experimenting with and extending the use of social media / web 2.0 applications that embed research outputs in dynamic participatory networks and extend their visibility.
- Shifting the role of libraries from 'catalogs' and 'subscription agents' to meeting spaces and 'mash ups' that support and connect scientists in their information and communication behavior, and help partners in their uptake of CGIAR information and knowledge.

We are working concretely now towards an open, collaborative, global research library. We will not have achieved all by the end of the planned investment plan in 2011. However, by organizations working collaboratively together towards this common, shared vision, we can envision an exciting, effective global research "library" by 2020.