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AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH POLICY IN AN ERA OF PRIVATIZATION

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The objective of this mini-symposium was to review contemporary experience on public and private sector roles in funding and executing agricultural research in developing countries in an era of general privatization. Two of the sessions assessed public–private collaboration in financing research through commodity levies and public–private collaboration in provision of research services through joint ventures and other types of partnerships. The final session focused on public sector responses to privatization. In each part, case studies were used to draw out major lessons for agricultural research policy. While the studies were largely drawn from the developing world, one from industrialized countries was included in each part to provide a comparative perspective.

The first meeting focused on public–private collaboration in funding of research, using the example of farmer financing through commodity levies. The three case studies critically examined how levies, combined with farmer empowerment over research priorities, have affected the efficiency and effectiveness of research. John Brennan and John Mullen (‘Producers’ and government joint funding of agricultural research in Australia’) described producer funding through commodity levies combined with matching grants from government. This long-established system has undergone a number of changes resulting in the formation of commodity-based research and development corporations in which farmers have a major stakeholder interest. Ruben Diario, Rafael Posada and Federico Holmann (‘Producers’ funding for agricultural research in Colombia’) showed how commodity associations for a range of cash crops have used levies to fund research in a variety of institutional settings, some in which work is conducted in-house and some in which it is contracted out. Finally, Mario Allegri (‘Producers’ and government joint funding of agricultural research in Uruguay’) stated that a levy system on all agricultural products was established in 1990 to co-finance a national research institute. A clear lesson emerging from all of the studies is that strong producer organizations are needed to ensure successful implementation of levies.

Three studies of public and private sector collaboration in carrying out research were presented in the second session. The Netherlands initiated efforts to strengthen such partnerships more than a decade ago. As shown by Kees van der Meer (‘Public–private cooperation in the Netherlands’), they are now part of the culture of the research system. Javier Ekboir and Gabriel

Parellada ('Public-private interactions in developing zero tillage innovations in Argentina') showed how producers, local agribusiness, multinational companies and national and international public research organizations interacted in the development, adaptation and transfer of technology. Finally, work by Andy Hall, R. Sulaiman, N. Clark, M.V.K. Sivamohan and B. Yoganand ('Public-private partnerships in Indian agricultural research') reveals the cultural gap between the public and private sector in developing viable partnerships. Together the case studies illustrate the adjustments that both public and private sectors must undergo for effective collaboration.

In the final session, public sector responses to growing privatization of research were presented. Paul Heisey (USA), S. Chittur and C. Thirtle (UK) ('Privatization of plant breeding in industrialized countries') provided an overview of public sector responses to privatization of plant breeding, with emphasis on major food crops. Public breeding programmes are redefining their roles and clients, and applied breeding work is rapidly shifting to the private sector. The next paper, by J. Huang and R. Hu (China), C. Pray and Scott Rozelle (USA) ('Public sector agricultural research reforms in China'), reviewed public sector agricultural research reforms in a period of market liberalization, culminating in a major effort to privatize many R&D activities and restructure those remaining in the public sector. A final paper, by Ken Fischer (Philippines) and Derek Byerlee (USA) ('Intellectual property rights; implications for public research organizations'), considered the growing use of intellectual property rights to protect new technologies, especially in biotechnology, using examples from Brazil, the Philippines and other developing countries. Together the papers in this session illustrated a wide range of public sector responses, which have been implemented with varying levels of success.