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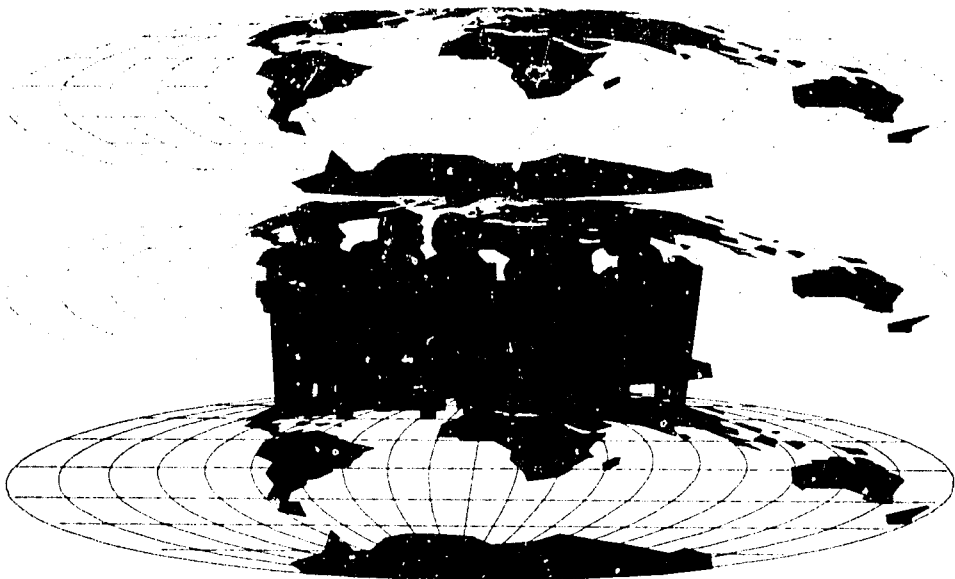
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Future Challenges for National Agricultural Research: A Policy Dialogue

**Proceedings of the international conference
*Challenges and Opportunities for the NARS
in the Year 2000: A Policy Dialogue***

Berlin, 12-18 January 1992



ISNAR

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**International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR)
The Hague, The Netherlands**

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Challenges and Opportunities for the NARS in the Year 2000 and Beyond: A Policy Dialogue

Opening Address by
The Honorable Mr. H. P. Repnik
Deputy Minister of Development Cooperation
and Secretary of State
Federal Republic of Germany

With great pleasure I accepted the invitation to officially open this important international workshop, which has been organized jointly by the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) and the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), and with support from our agricultural section and from GTZ.

I take this early opportunity to convey my sincere thanks to all those involved in the preparation of this workshop. I am especially enthusiastic about the wide range of experiences coming together on this occasion. Communication across the usual professional borders is all too often not happening — and this then leads to unwanted results; it even hampers progress now and then.

Studying the list of participants, one can only come to the conclusion that this must be a timely and highly necessary subject for an international workshop on development issues. Otherwise it would not have attracted such an esteemed group of participants and such outstanding speakers. Let me convey our thanks to all of you, who came from long distances in order to stimulate and promote the essential strengthening and improvements in such an important field of North-South cooperation, which does not always attract the responsible personalities. This time we have succeeded, and I take this as the best possible indication for a successful workshop.

Before elaborating on the subject matter, let me briefly voice a few remarks about the place of venue and the timing of this international workshop.

Berlin, our capital, is again a place of central importance with regard to commerce and trade, to industry and administration, to arts and culture.

Berlin these days demonstrates what politics can achieve — it recombines and integrates what had been separated for more than forty years. So Berlin in itself is an excellent selection, a splendid place for such an important international workshop, a place where one expects the unexpected to happen.

With regard to the timing, it is no secret that the meeting in its last phase coincides with Berlin's International Green Week — an agricultural exhibition for more than 60 years. This fair always opens its gates early in the year, right in the middle of wintertime in Europe. (I apologize that there is no snow right now, and the temperatures are rather moderate, but occasionally there are some organizational shortcomings — unexpected ones, of course.) And there is a quite simple reasoning behind this time schedule: it is much easier for farmers to leave their fields in winter, when there is no outdoor work to be done. So the International Green Week has always attracted many, many farmers, who take advantage of collecting as much information about the latest technology developments as possible.

Nowadays International Green Week is no longer a purely agricultural exhibition, however. It has turned into a food fair of international reputation, attracting many exhibitors from all over the world, and not only for primary products.

International Green Week over the years, and because of its attractiveness, has also experienced increasing importance with regard to workshops and seminars — both on a national and on an international level — dealing with new technologies as much as with the latest challenges from agricultural policies and politics and from technology developments.

It is by no means accidental that I have taken the liberty of talking about Berlin and its International Green Week to such an extent. Berlin and its International Green Week are a fascinating environment for an international conference aiming at nothing less than promoting national agricultural research for an improved standard of living for millions of people.

With these introductory remarks I want to emphasize that this workshop's topic is of central importance to agriculture and rural development, even with regard to economic development in general. At the same time, it becomes rather obvious that such a policy dialogue requires an atmosphere geared towards open and frank discussion if promising recommendations are to be achieved.

Now let us turn to the core of our program, to the challenges and opportunities for the national agricultural research systems in the year 2000 and beyond.

But let us first of all discuss some issues of the development policy of the German Federal Government, in general, and with regard to agricultural research, in particular.

The Federal Government emphasizes three areas as major challenges for its development cooperation:

1. poverty alleviation;
2. environmental issues;
3. education and training.

It is a well-established fact that development requires predictable and stable conditions that give people the opportunity to freely develop their skills and abilities. Sustained economic growth and scope for individual initiatives, active participation in political decision making, and last but not least, respect for human rights, are factors which affect and influence each other very strongly. One might even say that one is the precondition for the other.

Recently, fears have been expressed in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that the latest developments in Europe and in Germany could lead to a reduction in political interest and to a weakening of cooperation with the countries of the Third World. This is by no means the intention of the Federal Government. The Government emphasizes that cooperation between East and West and between North and South are *not* mutually exclusive, but mutually compatible. A unified Germany will, from its very beginning on, fulfil its responsibilities towards developing countries, as it has in the past.

A reliable, self-sufficient food supply continues to be one of the primary aims of the development cooperation of the German Federal Government. Lasting effects in this field will only be achieved where site-specific production methods designed to preserve natural resources are being promulgated.

Traditional food crops that are preferred by broad sectors of the population have a noticeable influence on the rotation of crops. Similarly, the integration of crops, trees, and shrubs is essential. Guaranteed yields at a relatively high level — even in the face of negative impact from weather — are the goal being sought with the development of new and improved farming methods.

An elementary prerequisite for successful agriculture promotion is a producer-friendly marketing and price policy that will stimulate production.

Cooperation in the field of agriculture also covers, among other things, the establishment and running of extension services, an efficient seed supply system, agricultural credit organizations, the cultivation and processing of

agricultural products, and the all-embracing area of marketing, which also includes timely and sufficient supplies of commercial production inputs.

If the world's population continues to grow at predicted rates, then reliable food supplies will only be achieved if applied agricultural research is supported to an even greater extent than before. In this context, the foremost aim must be, in particular, reliability of yields under conditions of temporary drought and in the face of severe pressure from diseases and pests. Increased attention will likewise need to be paid to research into achieving optimal site-specific systems of production. With regard to this aim, the German Federal Government has supported the international agricultural research system of the World Bank Consultative Group since its early stages. I visited one of its outstanding research institutes recently, and I do not hesitate to admit that I am very impressed by the work done there.

But, nevertheless, since the implementation of new knowledge and research results are our aim, the strengthening of national research institutes is of utmost importance.

Small-scale farmers are less able to take risks. For this reason extension services need to be assured that their recommendations are well tested and thus safe for the farmer. For this purpose well-targeted investigations into site-specific cultivation methods need to be promoted still further.

As indicated before, it is a generally accepted fact that well-functioning national agricultural research systems are of crucial importance. May I just remind us that surpluses in the agricultural markets in the northern hemisphere are directly linked to progress and achievements from applied research.

It is also well understood that a straightforward technology transfer from North to South, even from one region to another, even on the same continent, seldom yields the expected results.

Agriculture under tropical and subtropical conditions is a rather complex activity that can only be improved by site-specific recommendations and solutions. This, on the other hand, does not imply that every country and even every region within a country needs its own full-fledged agricultural research system, dealing with every crop, with livestock and fisheries at the same time.

Since we are all aware of the severe budget constraints for national agricultural research systems, we shall support initiatives to coordinate and cooperate at a regional or interregional level. Burden sharing in this case can only be to the advantage of the ultimate target group. Burden sharing means

splitting responsibilities for specific tasks between individual partners with comparable environmental conditions.

Agriculture will only be able to fulfil its potential role as the backbone of an economy if the decision makers allocate the necessary resources for the support structure; i.e., to the national research system, including agricultural faculties and colleges at the same time. Sustainable progress is only to be achieved if the exchange of information and experiences between the different institutions involved are strengthened. External support to NARS will be granted only where national planning authorities have this item high on their priorities list.

Priorities for research programs and investigations need to be based on national demands. Therefore, a thorough planning process is the starting point for improvements. Today it goes without question that not simply yield increases are aimed at, but that sustainable production systems need to be studied, comprising agroforestry activities as well as the integration of livestock into a crop production system.

Finally, let me just mention the time factor. Agricultural research and strengthening national agricultural research systems, in particular, are by no means fashionable. They are essential, though, and they require substantial and lasting support — from government, from donors, and from the commercial sector, too. Fashionable activities and the latest technologies might be useful tools, but they should never be regarded as a potential source of miracles.

With these remarks I have intended to stimulate your discussions, and I am confident that during the forthcoming week you will find some very important recommendations in order to turn the challenges into real opportunities.

I wish you a very successful meeting.