

Routes to better partnership: A map of CGIAR research in Africa

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For several years now successive reviews of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in Africa have pointed out problems of redundancy, overlap and competition among research projects. While a number of suggestions on how to improve and restructure the organization of research resulted from these review, surprisingly little attention was paid to the fact that lack of ready access to project information might be one of the root causes of some of the inefficiencies. The solution was to create a database of all the research that was taking place, but in order to make this a tractable process it was decided that the database would only seek to answer the question: 'Who is doing what, with whom and where?' The first version of the database was created in mid 2007. While it answered the question within stipulated expectations for quality, it was not really accessible to anyone other than those that had created it. So in 2008 it was decided to make the database accessible through the World Wide Web.

Today, getting an overview of the research that the 15 International agricultural research centres of the CGIAR is doing in ESA is only a matter of three clicks on the internet. Having such information readily and easily accessible, doesn't just satisfy the curiosity of information hungry browsers, it's a keystone to fostering complementary research. It also helps in building networked and collective responses to complex challenges that a single project could not address, and directing investments to areas that seem to hold greater promise or that have been ignored. Finding out just how much interesting research is taking place is kind of fun too! The database exists on the Web as an interactive and easy to navigate map, which provides a geographical overview of where research projects are carried out. To facilitate collaboration, the information provided also includes the contact address of the scientist concerned; projects are also linked to the Medium Term Plans of the relevant CGIAR centres. In addition the map allows participating scientists to update their project information directly online and in real time.

Future developments involve monitoring the use of the information and the demands of the users, so that the resource should evolve and develop in the future, linking research findings and outcomes to the map as a means of accelerating technology dissemination in the region.

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CGIAR Research Map: http://ictkm.cgiar.org/cgmapTemplate/ESA_map.html