Regional research priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean: FORAGRO experience for GCARD 2010

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Introduction

Both the Latin American and Caribbean countries (LAC) as much as the Latin American region have an important path in identifying research priorities in agricultural development and agricultural environment in which the heterogeneities between regions are considered, such as the Latin American tropical zones versus the north and south temperate zones.

In LAC, the priority of research efforts have focused - with more or less intensity – on analysis and discussions with future vision, including strategic foresight studies and strategic analysis. In this context, FORAGRO⁴ developed an exercise whose results were presented during the first Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD). The Conference led to LAC⁵ positioning in regard to its priorities, alliances, strategies and limitations to implement them.

GCARD 2010 objective and LAC expectations

LAC countries had great interest in GCARD 2010 because of their needs, the conjunction of interests between the Foro Global de Investigación GFAR and CGIAR, and as an effective means to contribute towards the achievement of one of FORAGRO’s objectives: increase the links with the international community, especially with GFAR and CGIAR. A renewed presence of CGIAR and the international centers in the region is being promoted through FONAGRO. This presence has weakened in the last two decades in terms of the attention given to the region’s priorities, center's participation in the sub regions and a reduction of investments in LAC. CGIAR approach to ALC can be found in FORAGRO Montevideo annual report 2008 ⁶. Also, it was important in order to try to understand CGIAR processes of change in terms of mega programs proposals - nowadays CGIAR–CRP Research Programs - and new alliances with national stakeholders’ participation.

Priority identification process

The process was carried out in four phases that were coordinated by FORAGRO Executive Committee and its Technical Secretariat at IICA⁷ with the Support of the IICA Office in Uruguay and PROCISUR.⁸ The exercise was co-funded by GFAR.⁹ CIAT supported the development of a regional face-to-face workshop. FORAGRO’s experience was useful for summoning participants from public, private and academic sectors, NGOs, producers associations, experts in research and innovation institutional themes, young professionals organizations, CGIAR centers with offices in the Americas, international organizations, GFAR, among others.

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⁵http://infoagro.net/archivos_Infoagro/Infotec/biblioteca/FORAGRO_GCARD.html
⁶http://infoagro.net/archivos_Infoagro/Infotec/biblioteca/Memoria%20FORAGRO.pdf
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The first step was the preparation of a background document on agriculture in LAC. This work was coordinated by FORAGRO with support of experts; to open the discussion key factors were proposed.\textsuperscript{11}

Subsequently, the consultation forum online “Transformando el conocimiento agropecuario en desarrollo con inclusión social en ALC” was carried out. 550 participants from 32 countries registered for the forum and there was a wide representation of all the interest groups mentioned above. The key factors of the background document were used as input for the discussion.

The next step consisted of a regional face-to-face workshop\textsuperscript{12} with more than 70 participants representing agricultural research and different interest groups. The objective was to analyze and validate the results of previous stages and to generate regional contributions, inputs and requirements for preparing the LAC positioning document.

Finally, FORAGRO Executive Committee prepared its positioning document based on the forum's previous works, on the consultation process and on members’ contributions. Said positioning document included also the process description, a brief context of agriculture and its contribution in LAC, regional and international technological institutionalism for technologic innovation, regional priorities and strategic elements for its implementation, strengthening of regional research cooperation mechanisms between countries and the establishment of an effective LAC linkage strategy with CGIAR and GFAR.

The specific needs of organizational developments require that the science, technology and innovation system (TIC) generate positive impacts in marginalized sectors (indigenous groups and farmers) to attend to their needs. It's been stressed that these conditions must be created so that TIC works “with” and not only “for” those sectors.

Specifically, in terms of institutionalism and capacities, the following aspects were emphasized: a) innovation, a complex social process, does not substitute a good development policy; b) education and access to resources and markets are critical factors for driving innovation; c) it is necessary to increase investment and public-private links in RDI\textsuperscript{14}; d) human resources capacity training is important (researches and producers) to promote successful innovation processes; e) it is necessary to develop a

\textsuperscript{11}FORAGRO, GFAR, IICA, PROCISUR. GCARD Revisión Regional para América Latina y el Caribe. (Salles Filho y otros. 2009. En http://infoagro.net/archivos_Infoagro/Infotec/biblioteca/GCARD_ALC/GCARD_Rev.pdf.


\textsuperscript{13}http://www.egfar.org/egfar/digitalAssets/3379_FORAGRO_Presentation_spanish.pdf

\textsuperscript{14}Research, development and innovation
research agenda for domestic agriculture with specific characteristics; and f) there must be better coordination of efforts and capacities between the existing research structures at national, sub regional, regional and international levels.

With respect to research agendas, the following was mentioned: a) sustainable use of genetic resources and new technologies, and need to integrate them with traditional knowledge; b) better use of productive resources (land and water); c) integrated pest management and biological control and d) bioenergy and their opportunities for small scale agriculture and small scale family agriculture.

As a central result of the processes mentioned LAC included in its positioning[15] seven priority themes and areas of action:

**Food and nutrition security:** a) Improve the quality of food; b) reduce losses due to biotic and abiotic factors and post harvest handling; c) Improve access of food for rural families; d) ensure the increment of basic food production for the population; and e) give more importance to urban food systems.

**Production and productivity increases:** a) Efforts in less attended species and traditional food crops; and b) better use of productive land and protection of fragile ecosystems.

**Diversification and differentiation of products and agricultural services:** a) Technologies and innovation development for market niches; b) valorization of species and varieties used very little at present; and c) quality stamp for domestic agriculture.

**Confront challenges of climate change:** a) Study for a better understanding of climate changes' impacts in agriculture in rural environments; b) development of climate change adaptation technologies and c) development of climate change mitigation technologies

**Conservation and sustainable management of natural resources:** a) Technologies and good practices for land and water use; b) use of friendly environmental practices; c) conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; and d) promotion of agro-ecological systems

**Development of bioenergy:** a) New sources of raw materials; b) second and third generation technologies; c) incorporation of domestic agriculture; and d) elaboration of impact studies

**Promotion of institutional innovations:** a) Integrated institutional innovation models; b) Capacity building; c) Inclusion of producers in innovation systems; d) development RDI networks; e) strengthening technological innovation systems; f) participation private sector and civil society; and g) investment in RDI and the importance of private-public linkages.

**Impacts (effects) of prioritization works with emphasis on GCARD 2010**

Impact evaluation in LAC has been aimed at research projects results, to a lesser extent in rural extension projects and in some cases at the impact of national research and technological development institutions, as well as of regional cooperation programs. However, impact evaluation of prioritization exercises is not frequent.

LAC research institutions have adopted a good number of the priorities indicated in previous exercises at regional level. Some of these have become programs or projects. As example we can name the technologies for adaptation to climate change in the central and southern regions development programs; in biofuel of the Jatropha network, lead by PROCITROPICOS; the innovation observatory - Observatorio de Innovaciones Institucionales – from Innovagro network and the work line in FORAGRO and IICA on institutional innovations (concepts, methodological guidelines and typologies) among others.

Specifically, the GCARD 2010 process prefers to talk about “effects” rather than impacts. In summary these are: a) shared vision of key agricultural themes to be resolved from a technological point of view and agreed by various groups of interest; b) identification of some priority themes not clearly stated in previous priority exercises; c) experiences gained from the need to homogenize previous knowledge while working with different cultures and giving nontraditional actors a better preparedness;


16Programa Cooperativo de Investigación, Desarrollo e Innovación Agrícola para los Trópicos Suramericanos
d) more knowledge of the changes that occur in CG, but frustration to see LACs low priority in the international system despite some centers in the region supporting specific programs for LAC; and e) experience for joint positions.

**Reflections/lessons learned**

The CGARD 2010-ALC allows some reflections and lessons learned:

- The need to promote institutional innovations is decisive to achieve an effective impact in development. However “development promotion” is a task for all society that goes beyond the possibilities of agricultural research/innovation.
- Future exercises should facilitate the intercultural dialogue with even more intensity. Also, it is evident that there is a need to find mechanisms so some excluded sectors can effectively express their needs. This is the case of civil society organizations, women and the actors of rural extension services, among others.
- The need to develop a regional research agenda and its implementation for domestic agriculture should be prioritized, so that the variability between and within countries, traditional knowledge inclusion and renovated forms of alliances are recognized.
- There are still gaps in the prioritization exercises such as GCARD 2010-LAC on how to promote and facilitate the access for actors with knowledge of new markets; and to decrease the risks for small scale and family scale and achieve their incorporation into food strategies.
- The presence of other interest groups such as consumers’ organizations should be included and more importance should be given to multidisciplinary research, the inclusion of social sciences and institutional innovation research.
- The efforts and capacities between the existing research structures in the national, sub regional, regional and international spheres should be complemented.
- In priority exercises such as GCARD 2010-LAC, it is relevant to take into account explicit strategic foresight analysis. Even so, strategic foresight is an input and a source of information and should not be prescriptive in policies, strategies and institutional development.

According to the emerging road map from GCARD 2010 there is not an explicit global implementation strategy in LAC. However, various priorities identified by the participative process previous to GCARD 2010 have been transformed into programs, projects and actions by FORAGRO constituents at national, regional and hemispheric level. Also, FONTAGRO\(^ {17} \) has used them to develop their prioritization efforts into plans and regional research projects. FORAGRO, on the other hand, included a line of work in its triennial operations plan regarding monitoring and application of GCARD\(^ {18} \) results. The support given to institutional organizations and strategy foresight works has intensified such as in the case of PROCISUR regional platforms.

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