

Opening Access to Agricultural Research

A Triple-A Approach to Make Research Available and Useful

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The Independent Review of the CGIAR recently suggested that its centers should be encouraged to “make their research available and useful for development” – as well as to international science.

Preliminary studies show that many of the CGIAR’s research outputs are not widely accessible (though they are high quality). They are not (yet) international public goods. The same is true for other public research outputs produced across Africa, Europe and elsewhere.

This session explores how research outputs can be made much more accessible - not just to well-connected scientists and funders, but to development actors in Africa and beyond

Research-oriented organizations cannot be satisfied just knowing they have produced high quality science. It is essential that the outputs of research are communicated and put to use, in the village, on the ground, in the lab, or across the negotiating table.

Recent discussions as part of the CGIAR change process identified a tension between producing high quality public goods (through science) and delivering development impact. Positioning research on this science to development continuum is also on the agenda of all other research organizations whose role is to bridge science, practice, and policy.

The CGIAR independent review argues that the “CGIAR can achieve development impacts where they matter — for farmers, families, and societies — only by being part of an international public goods delivery system.” At one end, the CGIAR needs access to global knowledge, at the other it needs access to “adaptive and delivery agents” and partners who will “turn outputs into outcomes and impacts.” The relationships and partnerships and the strong capacities of the partners are thus vital elements in this strategy.

Also vital is a guarantee that the outputs of research – data, information, knowledge – will be made widely available and openly accessible, now and in the future. Only then can they be applied by others.

How can we make research outputs more accessible?

Like the CGIAR Review team, we recognize that publications are “extremely important ... because the sharing of knowledge is basic to the production of the public good.”

We also know that most of these published outputs are not easily accessible, especially in developing countries. Other, more accessible, forms of sharing are also emerging. While publications are a good way to share high-quality science, they are often not the most accessible way.

We can, however, do things to make publications and other outputs, and the messages they contain, much more accessible.

This session starts from the premise that research outputs can – and must - be much more open and accessible. For this:

- We need to give priority to the ‘accessibility’ as well as to the ‘quality’ of research outputs.
- We need a better overview of the various research products and the ways and means we can make them accessible.
- We can use a ‘triple A’ policy and action checklist to maximize both the accessibility of these outputs and the chances that they will be applied and put to use.
- We need to build communication partnerships with the ‘adaptive and delivery agents’ that will take and apply knowledge from research, reinforcing their capacities as required.

The session draws on expertise from three partners – the CGIAR ICT-KM Program, FARA, and the DFID/R4D project led by CABI.

- We will demonstrate the ‘accessibility gap’, showing how truly inaccessible some research outputs actually are.
- We will illustrate ‘paths to accessibility’, showing concrete changes that help to make research outputs more accessible.
- We will co-create and share ideas and approaches to test and tackle these issues on a more systematic basis.
- Participants will take away a checklist of questions and actions to help assess and improve the accessibility of their research.

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