

Innovation and research needed to bolster farming productivity

13TH MAY 2016 BY: MIA BREYTENBACH - CREAMER MEDIA WRITER



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EMPHASISED DELIBERATION Considerations at the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development included promoting the preference for sustainable, labour-intensive farming systems
Photo by: Bloomberg

A struggles with rising food prices, the effects of the worst drought in 20 years and water shortage, the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD) has highlighted how the country's agriculture industry can address some of the challenges from an agricultural and economic standpoint.

The third edition of the conference, organised by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centres, was held in Boksburg last month.

The conference aimed to promote effective, targeted investment, and to build partnership capacities and mutual

accountability at all levels of the agricultural system to meet the needs of resource-poor farmers and their communities.

Themes included scaling up from research to impact, demonstrating results, staying future-focused and the business of farming, as well as agricultural futures.

Speaking at the conference opening, South African Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries director-general for agricultural production, health and food **Mortimer Mannya** stressed that “research and innovation require collective efforts and partnerships to deliver the catalytic results on increasing productivity and competitiveness of the sector”.

With the National Development Plan envisioning that the agriculture sector should create at least one-million jobs by 2030, and the drive to expand production through irrigated agriculture, Mannya stressed the need to grow the smallholder farming sector to 300 000 members while reducing food insecurity.

However, this should be informed by evidence generated from studies and technology options, he said, emphasising that this should remain relevant and address the development needs of the national system.

“Agriculture sector development and the adoption of technologies are cornerstones of reviving agriculture, which can happen only when enabling an environment for research to play the role it’s created for”.

Mannya highlighted that the theme of the conference – No One Left Behind: Agrifood Innovation and Research for a Sustainable World – reiterated the six-point plan as outlined by the Roadmap for Change defined during the first GCARD held in Montpellier, France, in 2010.

This plan emphasised inclusive priority setting, equal partnerships, increased investment, proved capacities, improved development impacts and better communication of the achievements within the sector, Mannya said.

He added that the themes for the parallel sessions were stepping stones to create resilient farming systems in the wake of climate variability phenomena like the drought currently affecting farming communities in Southern Africa.

Key issues highlighted in the conference's opening address included agricultural research content and research approaches, noted by New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) Agency natural resources governance programme manager Dr **Hamady Diop**.

“Applied research and adaptation of new knowl- edge and innovation into local agricultural devel- opment systems [are] low-hanging fruit for the continent,” he said, noting that this included study into an enhanced and more informed understanding of local circumstances and the dynamic, innovative agricultural systems on the continent.

Concerns with regard to these systems included climate change, particularly in the context of local and system-based climate-smart agricultural practices. This highlights the need

to include crop and livestock varieties that are able to offer increased productivity in regions with changing temperatures and rainfall patterns, practices and technology to enhance water productivity along the agricultural chain, as well as using biofuels.

“In addition to enhancing research in agri-culture, the agricultural research fraternity has to innovate a mechanism to collaborate and embrace the relevant research from all the fields, such as in related socioeconomic management aspects,” Diop suggested. 🇳🇮

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