

The Rural Innovation Institute

A Valuable Partner for Building Sustainable Livelihoods

Our Products and Services

- **Effective approaches for:**
 - Fomenting agroenterprise development
 - Farmer participatory research
 - Applying new information and communications technologies (ICTs) to rural innovation
 - Formation of learning alliances
 - Rural planning
- **Advice, training, and follow-up assistance in applying these approaches.**

These products and services are designed especially for individuals and organizations working with farmers, their associations, and rural communities on food security, agroenterprises, and the use of ICTs for development, with particular emphasis on rural women and indigenous people.

Fostering Rural Innovation

On a recent morning at Muguli village in southwestern Uganda, a group of about 35 men and women gathered on a narrow strip of land separating a muddy mountain stream from the steep slopes on which these people pursue a precarious agricultural livelihood. They are members of a local organization called “Muguli, Let’s Fight Poverty.”

The coordinators of various committees took turns reporting on their work, which is supported by an alliance of research and development organizations. The research coordinator explained local experiments aimed at determining how best to raise soil fertility in bean crops, which are vital for food security in the village. Similar experiments are being conducted in a nearby mountaintop meadow, where the enterprise committee has planted pyrethrum flowers (which contain natural insecticidal compounds) for sale to a local processing plant. The committee also promotes poultry and egg production.

Those and other efforts grew out of a collective “visioning” exercise, which resulted in an action plan. Using this map of its possible future, the Muguli group guides the community along a path leading to economic and social benefits for all.

Their progress along that path is the result of a social learning process that is the essence of rural innovation. Through this process rural people work together to find novel solutions to problems and to seize new opportunities. At CIAT we offer a unique set of products and services that can foster rural innovation in different ways in the communities where you work.

If the purpose of your organization is to help rural people make their journey to sustainable livelihoods—whether in Africa, Southeast Asia, or tropical America—then you’ll find that CIAT’s Rural Innovation Institute is a valuable partner.

For more information contact:

Andrés Palau

(a.palau@cgiar.org)

or

Jacqueline Ashby

(j.ashby@cgiar.org)

CIAT, A.A. 6713

Km 17, Recta Cali-Palmira

Cali, Colombia

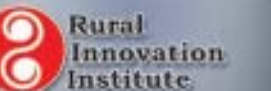
Phone: +57 (2) 4450000 (direct) or +1 (650) 8336625 (via USA)

The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) is a not-for-profit organization that conducts socially and environmentally progressive research aimed at reducing hunger and poverty and preserving natural resources in developing countries. CIAT is one of 15 centers funded mainly by the 58 countries, private foundations, and international organizations that make up the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

For details on our staff and partnerships,

consult our Web site:

www.ciat.cgiar.org



Creating Competitive Agroenterprises

To build sustainable rural livelihoods is more than a matter of earning power. Even so, farmers in developing countries must find ways to raise incomes if they are to achieve food security, meet other basic needs, and afford the luxury of protecting natural resources for society's current and future benefit.

Fortunately, rising demand for a wide variety of tropical products, in both domestic and export markets, is creating new opportunities for rural communities to boost earnings through profitable agroenterprises. To seize those opportunities, farmers must create strong market links either by adding value to their traditional crops or by diversifying into new enterprises.

But not just any agroenterprise will do. Rural communities need a mix of options that enable both women and men to compete in markets, offer benefits to the community's least fortunate members, and are friendly to the environment.

To help rural people identify and pursue such options, CIAT has devised an approach whereby farmer groups, with the aid of local organizations, can develop clusters of rural agroenterprises in a given territory, such as a watershed or municipality.



Our Territorial Approach to Agroenterprise Development

- Form or strengthen groups consisting of farmer leaders, local development professionals, and representatives of the private and public sectors, all committed to agroenterprise development.
- Identify and analyze market opportunities for current and alternative crops, resulting in a portfolio of high-potential options.
- Devise strategies for farmers to capture added value, based on participatory analysis of production-to-market chains.
- Strengthen local networks of business support services, such as credit, technology, and information.

The Approach in Practice

Recent experience in Honduras and Peru shows that farmers using the territorial approach for agroenterprise development can significantly boost their incomes. In Honduras, for example, a group of coffee farmers negotiated a 50 percent premium on their product. In Peru producers of black pepper ended up with price gains ranging from 20 to 100 percent over prices paid to other farmers.



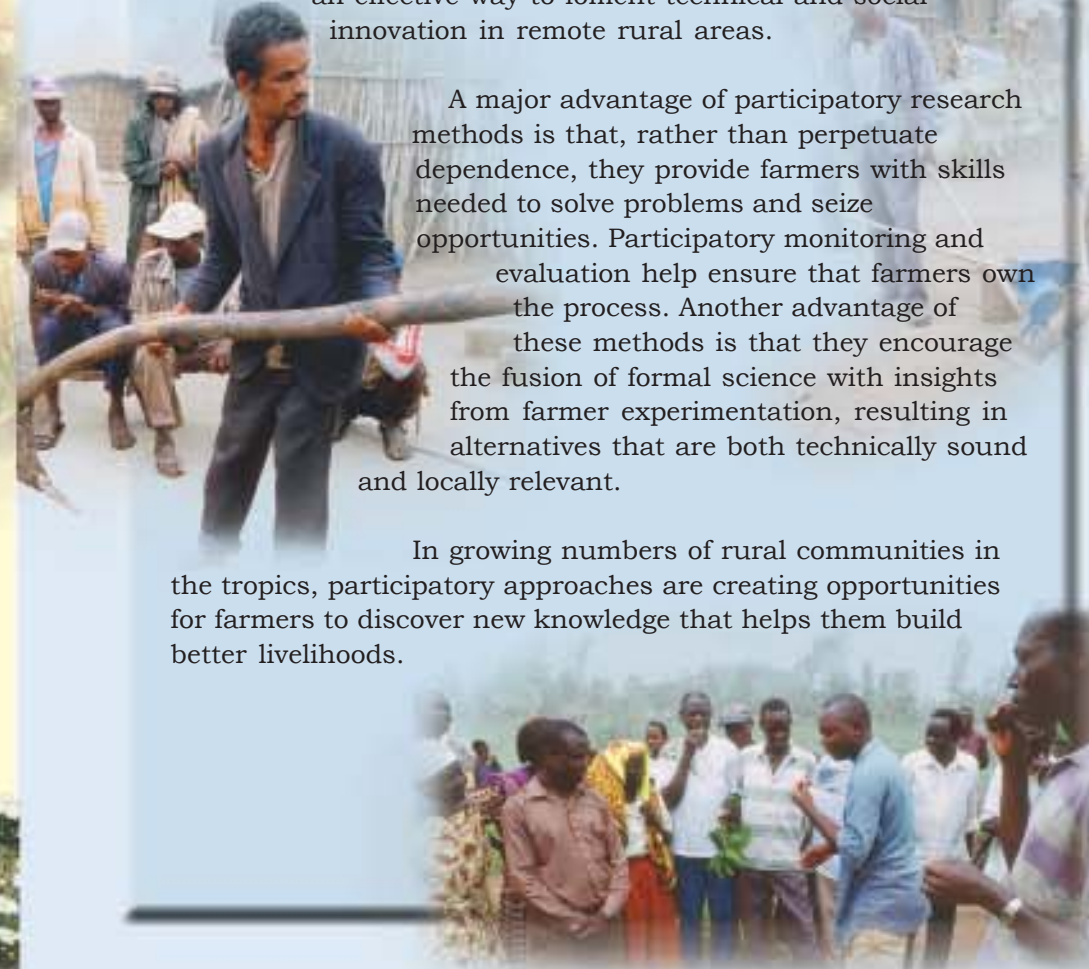
Blending Scientific and Local Knowledge

To create an entrepreneurial culture, rural communities must be able to solve problems in production and processing through local experimentation. At CIAT we know from much experience that rural people can conduct sound research, and we have devised participatory approaches that enable them to do so.

The work of many international and national organizations, including numerous NGOs, suggests that these approaches offer an effective way to foment technical and social innovation in remote rural areas.

A major advantage of participatory research methods is that, rather than perpetuate dependence, they provide farmers with skills needed to solve problems and seize opportunities. Participatory monitoring and evaluation help ensure that farmers own the process. Another advantage of these methods is that they encourage the fusion of formal science with insights from farmer experimentation, resulting in alternatives that are both technically sound and locally relevant.

In growing numbers of rural communities in the tropics, participatory approaches are creating opportunities for farmers to discover new knowledge that helps them build better livelihoods.



Our Approach to Farmer Participatory Research

- Form or strengthen groups of farmers interested in experimenting with new options.
- Diagnose research needs through community brainstorming sessions.
- Set a research agenda, conduct experiments, and report results to the community with assistance from a researcher, extension agent, or paraprofessional farmer.
- Conduct participatory monitoring and evaluation of the research process.
- Form higher order associations of farmer groups to facilitate communication among them, develop strategies for sustainability, and replicate the approach.

The Approach in Practice

Four thousand farm families in six Southeast Asian countries have introduced highly productive and nutritious tropical forages into their farming systems, using a participatory research approach. The resulting innovations have boosted livestock production and incomes, lowered grazing pressure, and reduced the drudgery involved in fodder collection, especially for women and children.



Opening Pathways for Communication and Information

The "Let's Fight Poverty" group at Muguli, as they build the knowledge needed to pursue their action plan, are using the Internet and other new information and communications technologies, or ICTs, at a community telecenter in the nearby town of Kabale. Moreover, group members who belong to a local theater troupe are sharing that knowledge by presenting it through their plays.

ICTs are not yet widely available to rural communities in developing countries. But privately run Internet cafes are proliferating in small towns, and growing numbers of governments and NGOs are extending Internet access to remote rural areas through socially progressive connectivity programs. Moreover, some organizations are finding innovative ways to link the use of ICTs with more conventional or traditional communications channels, such as community radio and theater.

If rural people are to make more than superficial use of those technologies and tools, local organizations must help incorporate them into a community-based process of technical and social innovation through well-focused training, orientation, and content development.



Our Approach to Applying ICTs for Rural Innovation

- Establish community telecenters, supported by local organizations, offering public access to ICTs.
- Form or strengthen groups of innovative farmers and development professionals dedicated to seeking out and sharing information that can help their communities build sustainable livelihoods.
- Construct Web-based information systems that combine important knowledge from farmers' experience with relevant information provided by local organizations.

The Approach in Practice

Experience in Colombia and Bolivia shows that community telecenters, when well managed by local NGOs, are a powerful mechanism for linking the use of ICTs with diverse local initiatives, ranging from the defense of human rights to the development of agroenterprises. This experience also demonstrates that community telecenters can achieve financial and social sustainability.



Learning Alliances and Planning for Change

The various approaches offered by the Rural Innovation Institute are not fixed recipes for success. Rather, they are versatile tools for learning that open the way to technical and social innovation.

To adapt and apply those tools in diverse rural communities requires the active participation of numerous partners. For this purpose the Institute is entering into a series of "learning alliances" with major international NGOs and other organizations.

A central objective of those alliances is to refine, adapt, and apply participatory approaches like those described here on a large scale in Africa, Southeast Asia, and tropical America. They also provide us with new channels by which to offer the improved crop varieties and knowledge resulting from our research. The learning alliances thus provide a broad framework in which we can collaborate with an expanding array of rural development actors.

Another path to partnership, one that parallels the learning alliances, centers on rural planning. In recent years CIAT has developed a systematic approach to this task that combines close consultation in local communities with the use of geographical information systems (GIS). Designed for municipal governments and other local organizations, the approach seeks to make them more responsive to rural communities and more relevant to rural innovation.

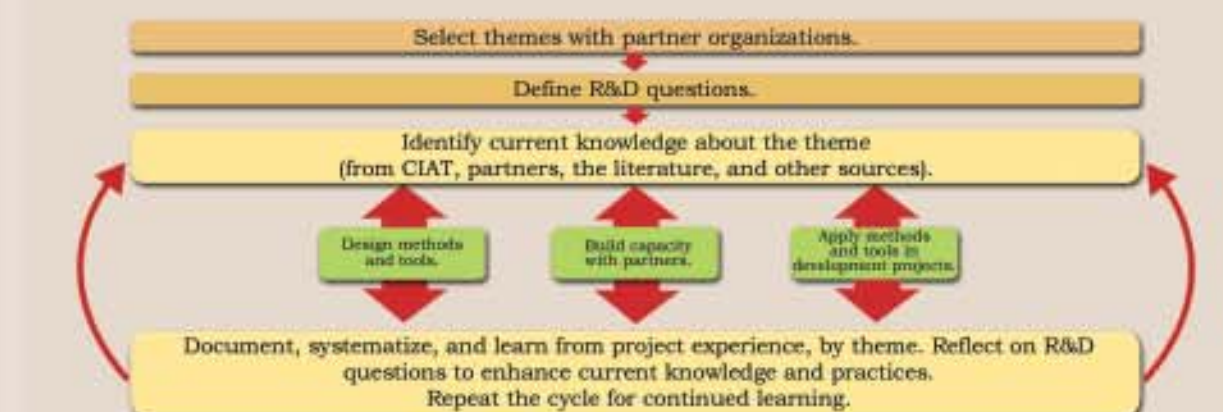
Our Approach to Building Learning Alliances

- Seek out partners and negotiate terms of the alliance.
- Identify good development practices, evaluate their contributions to improved livelihoods, and devise improved approaches to foment rural innovation.
- Build local capacity to apply those approaches and support their application in the field.
- Document local experience with the approaches, evaluate impacts, and identify lessons learned, leading to new cycles of collaborative experimentation.

The Approach in Practice

Through alliances with CARE International and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), our agroenterprise development approach has been scaled up for widespread application to diverse production-to-market chains in Central America and East Africa. New alliances are being formed in other regions.

The Learning Alliance Process



Our Approach to Rural Planning

- Form or strengthen a group of stakeholders in the development of a given rural territory.
- Define a desirable future based on community needs, using a cross-sectoral systems approach.
- Based on careful consideration of multiple options, design appropriate actions, with the aid of GIS, by which this collective vision can be made a reality.
- Determine opportunities and plans for research in support of the action plan.
- Identify policy obstacles to local innovation and devise strategies for addressing these.

The Approach in Practice

Our work on rural planning in Colombia has generated a large demand for training, which has been provided to 300 government officials so far. This has led to case studies in four regions for designing rural development programs, using our participatory approach. The collaboration has been expanded to Bolivia, Peru, and Senegal.

Becoming a Partner

If you or your organization would like to work as partners with us, here is how you can get started:

- Request or enroll in a training course. For the Rural Innovation Institute, training is never a one-off affair. We continue to provide mentoring and follow-up with participants, as they implement action plans devised during the training.
- Ask for technical development assistance. We work closely with clients to design the right combination of approaches and to organize support in applying those approaches through service contracts.
- Develop a project proposal and seek funding for it in collaboration with us.



- Creating Competitive Agroenterprises
- Blending Scientific and Local Knowledge
- Opening Pathways for Communication and Information
- Learning Alliances and Planning for Change

