

### Programme data

Period evaluated	1979 - 2001
Total TAG grants	199 (39 ongoing)
Total costs	USD 171.541 million
Average TAG size	USD 1.35 million
Regional profile	Africa 41 percent; Near East and North Africa 29 percent; Asia 17 percent; Latin America 10 percent; global 3 percent
Institutional profile	35 international agricultural research centres

#### Beating the Cassava Mealybug

Cassava is the staple crop for 200 million Africans. In the 1970s the Cassava Mealybug began to devastate cassava crops in Africa. An IFAD agricultural research TAG helped fund research carried out by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) that identified a natural enemy of the bug – a tiny wasp from Paraguay. The wasp was released in Africa in the 1980s with very good results. Two phases of TAG funding later, the wasp had been released in all cassava-producing countries in Africa. By 1994, around USD 27 million had been spent but without any recourse to expensive pesticides; the benefit to poor farmers was valued at USD 4.5 billion. Reasons for this success include:

- early identification of the threat
- long-term support from IFAD and other donors
- strong institutional capacity and technical expertise at IITA
- IFAD's ability to identify and address gaps in research
- efficient flow of funds from IFAD to IITA
- low costs for poor farmers

- **enhance poverty and institutional impact** of the TAG programme by building national capacities for participatory research, getting farmers and non-government organisations (NGOs) more involved as effective partners in setting research priorities and implementing research programmes – including monitoring and evaluating their impact
- **strengthen policy dialogue and advocacy** to reinforce IFAD's global innovation role and influence donor efforts in addressing new and innovative pro-poor research areas and methodologies.

#### Setting a research strategy

There are many positive trends in the TAG programme's approach to agricultural research such as an increasing concern for poverty and gender, a greater attention to appropriate technology and a higher awareness that poor farmers should be involved in the research process. The TAG programme needs, however, to carve out a niche for itself by setting a more focused research agenda and adopting a more

## Agricultural innovation Defining IFAD's role

### IFAD's Technical Assistance Grants Programme for Agricultural Research

In providing technical assistance grants (TAGs) for agricultural research to national and international research institutes, IFAD plays an important policy and advocacy role in promoting pro-poor agricultural research. Between 1979 and 2001, IFAD allocated USD 171.541 million for 199 TAGs to 32 international agricultural research centres. Of these, 16 were affiliated to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), set up in 1971 with donor funding to develop a global agricultural research system. Key aims of the TAG programme include: developing appropriate and sustainable technologies for poor farmers; promoting partnerships with agricultural research centres worldwide, strengthening their research capacity and encouraging pro-poor research; and generating knowledge concerning appropriate agricultural technologies and practices.

IFAD's approach to the TAG-funded agricultural research programme has changed over the years which has led to a wide-ranging interpretation of the programme's role within IFAD and by IFAD's partners. The programme now finances research in a wider range of sectors than it did initially involving a much greater diversity of research topics and institutions. In addition, the research is more short-term, more multidisciplinary, more participatory and more localised. The evaluation found most grant-funded projects to be well-designed; implementation, however, is varied in terms of achieving goals and objectives. It also found that the programme is attempting to achieve too much given its limited resources.

The programme now faces three main challenges. Firstly, better use needs to be made of limited resources by sharpening its focus and prioritising areas that balance longer-term strategic research with short-term problem-solving solutions. Secondly, ensuring consistently good performance of the research is essential by paying greater attention to capacity-building at a national level. Thirdly, there is a need to enhance the poverty impact of TAG-funded research. In response to these three challenges, key recommendations from the evaluation include the need for IFAD to:

- **develop a research strategy** that ensures a more selective and priority-focused approach by building on IFAD's Strategic Framework, the regional research strategies and the new TAG policy
- **strengthen linkages** between grant-financed research and its investment programmes so that new research and technology products are used to a greater extent by IFAD-funded projects



Farmers attend a training session in growing mulberry bushes (for silk worms) in Naru Muru, Kenya. IFAD provided a technical assistance grant (TAG) for agricultural research to a programme entitled, Trial and Validation of Promising Income Generation Options for Rural Communities in Africa – based on sericulture and apiculture technologies. The implementing agency was the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology, based in Nairobi, which has received several grants from IFAD for agricultural research since it opened in 1970.

### Participatory research in Peru

The International Potato Centre in Lima is implementing a learning-based approach to field testing managed by farmers. During the first cropping season farmers learn about integrated pest management, the potato cycle and causes of Potato Late Blight. They conduct experiments to test technologies to control the disease. In the second season Farmer Field Schools take over and encourage farmers to use and experiment with concepts and ideas learned in the first season. The schools advocate farmers' participation in research and their model has a proven track record in speeding up the adoption process by several years. Farmers' involvement ensures that technology is appropriate to their needs and preferences. TAGs are increasingly involving farmers and taking their research results and decisions into account when developing and refining technology products.

selective approach. A research strategy would help guide IFAD's contribution to agricultural research, thereby increasing its effectiveness. It would stipulate what kind of research IFAD needs to finance and the types of organisations it should support. A new strategy would also cover the extent to which TAG-funded research would be expected to contribute to IFAD's loan programme, prioritise research areas (thematically and regionally) for funding, identify technology gaps and concentrate on innovative research that can be adapted and replicated.

## Putting research into practice

Linking IFAD's agricultural research grant portfolio to its loan portfolio is central to the agricultural research TAG programme. IFAD loan projects are expected to use relevant technology and new ideas developed by agricultural research TAGs to increase their impact on poverty alleviation. Difficult to achieve, the evaluation found that such linkages are more likely to occur when farmers are active in setting research priorities, carrying out research and implementing new ideas. Longer-term research will usually have a time-lagged, indirect input. Seventy-eight percent of the reviewed Executive Board proposals for agricultural research TAGs named the loan projects that would benefit from the TAG; 46 percent showed evidence of linkages; while 36 percent were successful in achieving linkages. However, there is evidence that the relevance of the TAG programme to poverty and to IFAD's loan portfolio is growing. Establishing a joint grant-loan planning system is essential to increase the likelihood of successful linkages. Grant-loan interaction would also benefit from better information-sharing between IFAD Country Programme Managers, grant managers, project staff and research centres regarding technology needs and research outputs. IFAD's networks, such as FidAmerica, would help: active information networks can capture and communicate technical innovations and non-technical insights regarding institutional partnerships, research methodologies, the sustainability of technology adoption and so on.

## Strengthening impact

Impact should have two main dimensions: poverty reduction and institutional capacity-building. The impact of TAG-funded agricultural research on poverty was hard to assess and attribute to IFAD alone given the many factors involved, the limited number of impact assessments undertaken by the research institutes and until recently, the poor quality of data. The evaluation was able to ascertain, however, that very few of the reviewed TAGs had completed the development of pro-poor products or prepared the way for their dissemination and adoption. The impact on institutional capacity was clearer especially among national-level research organisations and to a lesser extent in NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs). The need for further national capacity building is urgent given that international institutions often play a larger role in field research than do national institutions whose capacity is uneven. IFAD has, however, played an important leadership role in the development of methodologies for assessing the poverty impact of agricultural research, including contributions at international conferences and support to the CGIAR standing panel on impact assessment.

It will be important to assess national research capacities and encourage further participatory research. Increasing TAG duration to up to five years would allow adequate time for situational assessment (of socio-economic conditions in particular) and for impact assessment once research has ended. Systematically including farmers, NGOs and CBOs as partners in setting research priorities and implementing research programmes is critical to achieving effective impact and sustainability.

## Global innovation role for IFAD

CGIAR is an informal association of 63 members that supports agricultural research and related activities carried out by 16 autonomous research centres. CGIAR is financed by members' contributions: members include industrial and developing countries, foundations, and international and regional organisations. IFAD plays an important global policy and advocacy role through agricultural research activities and the CGIAR mechanism. In collaboration with its partners IFAD has helped promote the poverty focus of CGIAR research organisations; it is a founding member of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research, is taking a lead role in CGIAR's Special Programme for Impact Assessment and is a formal co-sponsor of the CGIAR system. IFAD should build on this experience and continue to influence donor efforts in identifying new and innovative research areas that will enhance poverty impact such as introducing conservation methods of tilling soil prone to erosion, harvesting water and designing better tools for women farmers, older people and children (in particular where demographic patterns have changed due the spread of AIDS, for example) ■

### Further information

*Evaluation of IFAD's Technical Assistance Grants Programme for Agricultural Research, Report #1377, April 2003. Office of Evaluation, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Via del Serafico 107, 00142 Rome, Italy. The full report and Profile are online at [www.ifad.org/evaluation](http://www.ifad.org/evaluation); email [m.keating@ifad.org](mailto:m.keating@ifad.org); telephone +39 06 5459 2048*