

Private Sector Mechanism Position Paper

September 2013

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR

1) Global challenge: recruiting talent back into agriculture

- a) Human capital and talent are critical drivers of growth, sustainability and security across the entire food chain.
- b) CFS is ideally placed to highlight constraints, opportunities, and recommendations which include:
 - Improving the mechanisms for sharing knowledge, adaptive strategies, and more sustainable techniques is the means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (and beyond), food security and nutrition, and improved livelihoods.
 - High degree of knowledge needed in farming to manage multiple variables.
 - Improving impact on sustainable development of all forms of agriculture.
 - The centrality of education and skills to sustain food production in the face of the vagaries of weather, climate change, political instability, market volatility, and increasing pest pressures.

2) Knowledge, skills and nutrition security

- a) There is a lack of appropriately-trained and work-ready people in the agriculture sector, a factor contributing to food and nutrition insecurity.
- b) Some of the primary skills lacking are numeracy, agronomics, communications, business management (specific to the food and agriculture sector), marketing, finance, logistics, food processing, and broad, yet critical, teamwork and management skills.
- c) Nutrition is a valuable part of the training and education process which has the capacity to improve health at a household level.

3) Re-investment in the next generation of farmers and agribusinesses

- a) There is a need to recruit new talent, particularly youth, to agriculture.
- b) Despite the recent modest renewal in public sector investments in agriculture, there have been disinvestments in extension programmes and agriculture education – at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels - at the same time universities have disinvested in agriculture colleges.
- c) In many developing countries, especially in Africa, the higher agricultural education system is experiencing serious problems of low quality, irrelevancy, lack of funding, poor infrastructure, low faculty morale, and high graduate unemployment.
- d) Among the existing agriculture universities and colleges, there is a serious disconnect between agriculture education and the marketplace.
- e) Extension services need fresh models that make use of best practices, new technologies and more inclusive approaches.
- f) Support and incentives are required for young people entering agriculture and generational transfer.

4) R&D

- a) Consistent with GFRAS recommendations, implement improvements to rural advisory services in these key areas: (1) focusing on best-fit approaches, (2) embracing pluralism, (3) using participatory approaches, (4) developing capacity, and (5) ensuring long-term institutional support.
- b) Increase extension activities through farmer, co-operative, private, and public engagement and use of communication technologies.
- c) Develop more decentralized, farmer-led, and market driven systems.
- d) Build upon the indigenous knowledge of conservation and resource management that farmers already possess.
- e) Ensure programming meets the unique needs of women smallholder farmers.
- f) Increase public agricultural R&D on nutrition and agricultural innovation.
- g) Promote private agricultural R&D through grants and tax credits, including R&D supported by farm groups and co-operatives.

5) Knowledge to minimize the ecological footprint of agriculture

- a) Building capacity in agriculture to better safeguard natural resources such as land, water, and biodiversity.
- b) Higher priority needs to be placed on process innovations.
- c) Promotion of best practices such as water management, animal welfare, manure management, integrated crop management, integrated pest management, and nutrient management is required.
- d) Furthering the resilience and adaptive capacity of farmers is needed to meet the demands of climate change and shifting weather patterns.

6) Knowledge to modernize the farms of tomorrow

- a) Further access to scalable information technologies for farmers, including women and young farmers, to receive weather, crop, and market alerts, as well as other early warning systems, to help them make the right decisions for sustainability and productivity.
- b) Improved access to technologies and techniques to improve farm productivity and reduce the footprint of agriculture.

7) Knowledge to focus on the value chain

- a) Programming on marketing, basic business skills, and primary processing can help address poverty.
- b) Concrete measures are needed to reduce post-harvest losses through proper storage, transportation, and other techniques.
- c) Increasing the linkage of rural producers to regional and urban consumers will further the capacity for farmers to earn a fair living.