

**Regional Training Workshop  
Cairo, Egypt  
17-20 May 2009**

**Report on sessions related to CIARD and  
development of national agricultural information systems**

**1. Format of sessions**

Two sessions were dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the new international initiative on Coherence in Information on Agricultural Research and Development (CIARD). The first of these was a short presentation on the key aspects of the Manifesto and Principles followed by a discussion in plenary. The second session comprised a breakout session with three facilitated working groups, which then reported back in plenary.

**2. Review of CIARD Manifesto and Principles**

Members of all three Working Groups unanimously expressed their appreciation of and support for the CIARD initiative, and they recognized the potential contribution that it could make to development of national information systems. Furthermore, the participants identified the following as particularly important aspects of the Manifesto/Principles:

- The CIARD Manifesto underlines the need for national strategy and policy frameworks with implementation plans.
- The CIARD initiative has a clear potential role in providing a point of reference for platforms/forums for collaboration within and between countries at regional level.

Some suggestions were made for points where clarification would be appreciated.

- The role and support of the international core partners<sup>1</sup> should be made evident, as the principal basis of the sustainability of the initiative, as well as the informal nature of the partnership and lack of any legal agreement/entity.
- The relationship between CIARD and existing initiatives such as AGRIS, RAIS, etc. should be explained.
- There should be a clear statement that CIARD will not comprise a database or information system requiring input.
- A special registration page should be developed, with a statement inviting institutions to register with and become partners in CIARD, and explaining that such a membership will not involve any obligations (financial or legal). An open invitation letter from the core partners should be made available in pdf format.
- The benefits and value addition that participating institutions can derive from the CIARD initiative should be articulated, on the site and in the above open letter. The following specific suggestions of possible practical benefits and incentives were made: (a) increasing promotion and awareness of your own content and services; (b) ensuring

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<sup>1</sup> CABI – CAB International; CGIAR – Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research ; Cirad – Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement; DFID – Department for International Development, UK; FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization; GFAR – Global Forum on Agricultural Research ; IAALD – International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists; MAE – Ministère des affaires étrangères, France,

interoperability of your system(s) with others; (c) increasing your awareness of other content/services.

- The practical support that the core partners in the CIARD initiative can/will provide at the national institutional level should be defined – in the areas of advocacy, capacity building, and content management and the context of a possible CIARD “Help Desk” was raised.
- The nature and complexity of the targets for CIARD advocacy need to be more clearly recognized, with four groups of national actors recognized (in no particular order): (a) research managers (including policy and decision-makers), (b) researchers, (c) information professionals, and (d) intermediaries between research institutions and farming communities, such as rural extension and advisory services.
- CIARD promotional material etc highlight the need for institutions to share information in all languages.
- CIARD should highlight options for particular system(s)/toolset(s) – emphasizing the need to support sharing and exchange not just *management*.
- The CIARD initiative should support creation/adoption of international standards for information objects other than documents.
- Existing accessible information systems/content should be highlighted through CIARD.
- The CIARD initiative should emphasize the need for national actors to make available adequate IT infrastructure nationally (hardware, bandwidth, and human skills).

The Working Groups also identified some specific questions to the international core partners:

- Can institutions that are not information/data users rather than owners be CIARD partners?
- Is CIARD going to introduce measures of information/data quality, and if so how will they be measured and by whom?
- How should advocacy in institutions be undertaken – bottom-up, top-down, or a mixture?
- How can institutions gain support from key national actors outside the research community?
- What will be the role of international and regional actors in advocacy at national and institutional levels?

### **3. Review of CIARD Checklist**

Participants found all the Checklist items to be highly relevant, and they made the following specific suggestions for addition/modification:

- The reliability and quality of information/data should be mentioned in the Checklist.
- Approaches to full-text re-usability and licensing should be less prescriptive.
- Overly specific standards or approaches to areas such as output formats or for digitization would limit options for potential CIARD partners.
- The acronyms in the Checklist are not familiar to many people, and should be expanded or removed.
- The CIARD Checklist could be used to set some boundaries – minimum acceptable criteria – in managing/sharing information that define conditions for full membership for its partners. Some questions related to this point were then raised:

- Is it fair that partners which do not make their information accessible still benefit from those that do so?
- Can partners be excluded because they are not “conforming” to some minimum criteria? Is so, who would make those decisions?

Working group 2 then examined the Checklist on some detail, and considered how easy it would be to achieve the items in the list. The combined opinion of the group is provided in the table below.

	<b>Developing Institutional Readiness</b>	<b>Difficulty of achievement</b>
1.	Gain support for the CIARD Manifesto and Principles from key actors in your institution.	<b>5</b>
2.	Have your institution recognised as a CIARD partner through (a) online registration on the Partners page ( <a href="http://www.ciard.net">www.ciard.net</a> ), (b) linking from your web site to the CIARD site, (c) registration of your collection/repository in the CIARD 'Web Ring'.	<b>2</b>
3.	Adopt a formal institutional strategy to ensure the enhancement and long term sustainability of its digital information content and systems, and to ensure the quality of its content.	<b>2</b>
4.	Develop the capacities of your institution to achieve the CIARD Principles – in terms of policies, institutional structures, individual skills and technology infrastructure.	<b>4</b>
5.	Develop national/local partner networks of institutions to share resources and skills related to achieving the CIARD Manifesto.	<b>3</b>
	<b>Increasing the Availability, Accessibility and Applicability of Research Outputs</b>	
1.	Develop the digital availability of scientific information in multiple forms (e.g. text, images, data, geospatial information) guided by internationally documented best practices.	<b>3</b>
2.	Plan and develop institutional or thematic information repositories as open archives in compliance with the OAI-PMH protocol.	<b>4</b>
3.	Use documented metadata standards (e.g. Dublin Core, AGRIS Application Profile, Darwin Core, etc.), which tell other systems about the elements contained in your metadata.	<b>3</b>
4.	Allow other systems to talk with, and exchange data with, your system by implementing the appropriate protocols (e.g. OAI-PMH, SRU/SRW, RSS harvesting, Tapir, etc.).	<b>4</b>
5.	Use widely accepted agricultural vocabularies and thesauri (e.g. FAO-AGROVOC, CABI or NAL) for indexing your content, which make it easy to find and use across different services and platforms.	<b>2</b>
6.	Develop a clearly defined licensing policy for your content, that allows “use, reuse, and redistribution” of your digital content.	<b>2</b>
7.	Optimize the structure and the content of your web sites for global and specialized search engines.	<b>2</b>
8.	Share your metadata and give access to your full content by participating in publisher and other international systems that maximize accessibility and allow your outputs to be openly available through both proprietary and non-proprietary systems (e.g. AGRIS, Consortium for Spatial Information, AgriFeeds, CAB Abstracts, PubMed, FSTA, etc.).	<b>3</b>
9.	Use ‘social’ Web 2.0 media applications as entry points to your content and to help your content to travel.	<b>4</b>
10.	Work with intermediary partner organizations and individuals that have communication skills to repackage your research outputs for different audiences using a range of formats and media (e.g. print, web, phone, video, radio, TV).	<b>3</b>
11.	Build formal and informal networks to stimulate dialogue and collaboration between your researchers and their various audiences in order to enhance the uptake and application of your research outputs.	<b>4</b>