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Worldwide research initiative launched to tackle global crises in water, food and the environment

New program expects initial funding of around US\$75 million per year to investigate how agricultural production can be intensified whilst protecting natural systems

LONDON (27 March 2012)— An ambitious new research program, launched today by the world's largest consortium of agricultural researchers, aims to address some of the world's most pressing problems related to boosting food production and improving livelihoods, whilst simultaneously protecting the environment.

The CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems is a ten year commitment to bring about a radical transformation in the way land, water and natural systems are managed. It is being led by the International Water Management Institute, which has just been named this year's Stockholm Water Prize Laureate.

"We believe that there is enough water and land in the world's major breadbasket regions to adequately feed the world's population at least until 2050, but only if we improve the way we manage global ecosystems," says Dr. Simon Cook the new director of the research program. "While we still have acute crises of hunger, ecosystem degradation and water scarcity in many areas, we have many of the solutions already at hand. This program will focus on capitalizing on these opportunities, minimizing risks and helping the world's poorest farmers maintain and improve their livelihoods and the ecosystem services that sustain them and others"

The research team are clear that major new sources of finance will be required if this ambition is to be fulfilled. That will mean attracting not just bilateral donors, but private sector money as well.

"What this research program is all about is providing the information needed to make investments happen," says Dr. Cook. "To get such investment, we must clarify the risks and benefits to poor farmers of increasing their yields and reducing their environmental footprints. So we have to look at all aspects of food supply chains in such a way that consumers, food companies, marketing groups and farmers can see the benefits of how better land and water management can increase the bottom line and bring environmental benefits. This is what the new program is designed to do."

A good example of underinvestment in the face of soaring demand is agriculture in Africa. It currently operates at a fraction of its potential: only 5% of sub Saharan African fields are irrigated. But there are some bright spots where things are changing. In

Ethiopia for instance, credible scientific data on water flows has helped open up political discourse between Addis Ababa and the downstream countries of the Blue Nile. This has given investors confidence. Egyptian money is now being used to develop Ethiopian agriculture. A similar openness between Ghana and Burkina Faso on the Volta River, underpinned by sound scientific data, has catalysed small reservoir development in the region. Many lessons are being learned from Latin America about the potentials for improved management of ecosystem services.

The research program has five main themes:

- **Irrigation:** researchers will explore new strategies for increasing its use in Africa, whereas the focus in South Asia will be to develop greater efficiency through integrated governance and technical approaches
- **Rainfed** agricultural systems which account for 90% of African agriculture can benefit from the use of supplementary irrigation plus improved supply chains, markets and finance. The researchers will aim to find out how this can be achieved as there is huge scope for improvement in African rainfed agriculture to meet future demands for food from a rapidly expanding population
- **River basins management** research will look at how intensifying agricultural production can be attained without harmful offsite impacts to environment and downstream water users
- **Resource reuse and recovery:** understanding how we can turn waste water and sewerage into valuable resources for farm use, whilst the cash generated can be ploughed back into sanitation.
- **Information** research will explore how new technologies like cell phones can get information to poor farmers about soil and water and how to bring together natural resource data from across CGIAR and its partners and deliver it in innovative ways to those who need it.

“If we look locally, southern England is experiencing its worst drought in a generation,” says Dr. Cook. “And extreme weather events like this are likely to become more common as climate change takes hold. The UK will hopefully have the wherewithal to deal with these new challenges, but this research program is targeted at some of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable, such as the millions of people in the African Sahel who are enduring one of the worst droughts in living memory.”

The new research program is the latest in a series of initiatives designed to promote more joined-up-thinking on agricultural research for development at CGIAR. One such approach, the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food, has been running since 2002. Its ground breaking, cross disciplinary paradigm has paid handsome dividends, providing valuable insights into what needs to be done to ensure food security whilst maintaining the environmental systems on which farmers rely. Some clear lessons have emerged from this work. More effective, equitable and environmentally sensitive pricing of natural assets like water needs to be mainstreamed. At a larger scale the project has drawn attention to the complete fragmentation of how river basins are managed. Different sectors, such as agriculture, industry, environment and mining, are considered separately rather than as interrelated and interdependent. A re-think is needed.

“The problems of food security, water scarcity and environmental degradation are intimately connected,” says Dr. Colin Chartres, Chartres director general of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), which is the new research program’s lead agency. “We can no longer continue to address them as separate entities. This new approach, which envisages unprecedented levels of collaboration between the various

international research centres of CGIAR, aims to deliver innovative research that can have real impact on how we manage natural resources and ensure food security for the world's population, predicted to grow to 9 billion people by 2050."

Journalists attending the London Planet Under Pressure Conference are invited to attend the official launch of the CGIAR Research Program on Water Land and Ecosystems Research Program and meet the new director at the CGIAR exhibition booth on Tuesday 27 March at 5.30pm. Alternatively one-on-one interviews with Dr Cook and Dr Chartres can be arranged.

More information on the program can be found at <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/CRP5/index.aspx>.

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The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is a nonprofit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of land and water resources in agriculture, to benefit poor people in developing countries. IWMI's mission is "to improve the management of land and water resources for food, livelihoods and the environment." IWMI has its headquarters in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and regional offices across Asia and Africa. The Institute works in partnership with developing countries, international and national research institutes, universities and other organizations to develop tools and technologies that contribute to poverty reduction as well as food and livelihood security. www.iwmi.org

CGIAR is a global research partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for sustainable development. CGIAR research is dedicated to reducing rural poverty, increasing food security, improving human health and nutrition, and ensuring more sustainable management of natural resources. It is carried out by the 15 centers who are members of the CGIAR Consortium in close collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations, including national and regional research institutes, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector. www.cgiar.org