



Brussels Rural Development Briefings
A series of meetings on ACP-EU development issues

Briefing session n° 15
From Global Food Crisis to Local Food Insecurity

Wednesday 9th December 2009 – 8h30 – 13h00

Lessons Learnt from Agricultural Successes
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Executive Summary

Learning from successes in agricultural development is now more urgent than ever before. Progress in feeding the world's millions has slowed, while the challenge of feeding its future billions remains enormous and is subject to new uncertainties in the global food and agricultural systems.

In late 2008, IFPRI, with support from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, embarked on a project, Millions Fed: Proven Successes in Agricultural Development, to identify and assess policies, programs, and investments in agricultural development that have substantially reduced hunger and poverty.

Following a rigorous review process, the project ultimately identified 20 proven successes in agricultural development.

These successes are global, regional, and national in scope – 12 of them are in Asia, 5 in Africa, 1 in South America, and 2 are global (see list on next section). They span from interventions enhancing productivity to combating diseases and pests, conserving natural resources, expanding market opportunities, diversifying out of major cereals, improving human nutrition, and improving the policy environment.

What were the key factors that brought about these successes?

1. Science and technology – long-term investment in agricultural research and development is vital to developing-country agriculture;
2. Complementary investments – sustained public investment in rural roads, education, market infrastructure, and regulatory systems is critical;
3. Private incentives – policies that encourage farmers, entrepreneurs, and companies to invest in agriculture increases the likelihood of success;
4. Cooperation and collaboration – partnerships among diverse actors in the agricultural sector including research institutes, community-based organizations, private companies, government agencies, and international bodies are evident in almost all successes;
5. Timing and planning – many successes result from good timing, whether by chance or by design;
6. Experimentation and evolution – often successes emerged from localized experiments that allowed participants to learn, adapt, and evolve their approaches;
7. Community involvement – vesting communities with a stake in ownership of a development process contributed to long-term sustainability;
8. Leadership and dedication – champions, both renowned and anonymous, are essential ingredients for success.

Investments in agricultural development have generated sizeable dividends for society, demonstrating that agriculture is not only an important means of reducing poverty but also a worthwhile investment portfolio.

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Millions Fed: Proven Successes in Agricultural Development²

1. Fighting a “Shifty Enemy”: The international collaboration to contain wheat rusts
2. Transforming Agriculture: The Green Revolution in Asia
3. Breeding an “Amaizing” Crop: Improved maize in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe
4. Resisting Viruses and Bugs: Cassava in Sub-Saharan Africa
5. Seeing the Forest Through the Trees: Community forestry in Nepal
6. Re-Greening the Sahel: Farmer-led innovation in Burkina Faso and Niger
7. Innovating in the Pampas: Zero-tillage soybean cultivation in Argentina
8. Leaving the Plow Behind: Zero-tillage rice-wheat cultivation in the Indo-Gangetic Plains
9. Pumping up Production: Shallow tubewells and rice in Bangladesh
10. Pushing the Yield Frontier: Hybrid rice in China
11. Improving Crops for Arid Lands: Pearl millet and sorghum in India
12. Navigating through Reforms: Cotton reforms in Burkina Faso
13. Unlocking the Market: Fertilizer and maize in Kenya
14. Counting on Beans: Mungbean improvement in Asia
15. Conquering the Cattle Plague: The global effort to eradicate rinderpest
16. Connecting the Milk Grid: Smallholder dairy in India
17. Farming the Aquatic Chicken: Improved tilapia in the Philippines
18. Crossing the River While Feeling the Rocks: Land-tenure reform in China
19. Exiting from Collective Agriculture: Land-tenure reform in Vietnam
20. Diversifying into Healthy Diets: Homestead food production in Bangladesh

² For more information, see Spielman, D. J. and R. Pandya-Lorch (editors), 2009, *Millions Fed: Proven Successes in Agricultural Development*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. www.ifpri.org/millionsfed