2009: THE DIFFICULT ROAD AHEAD

After the doom and gloom that ended the last year, 2009 can’t get much worse. Or can it? In this month’s LINK LOOK, Kumuda Dorai gives her list of 10 things to watch out for in 2009. Some are worrying, some are cheering and there are some old perennials thrown in for good measure.

1. FINANCIAL CRISIS: WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE NEW PHILANTHROPISTS

Truth be told, the maelstrom that is the global financial crisis probably underlies almost every one of the 10 points we have to make about the year ahead. Since the credit crisis of 2008 unfolded $6.9 trillion has disappeared from the global economy, according to the World Bank’s final December 2008 estimate. With no end to the crisis in sight, and no one apparently unaffected, one thing that is clear is that the trend of dwindling assets and depreciating currencies that started in 2008 will have a significant effect on decisions and actions made well into 2009.

In the December 2007 edition of the LINK News Bulletin we came up with an “innovation wishlist” for aspiring philanthropists (visit http://innovationstudies.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=37&Itemid=99999999 to download), who we felt were set to become the biggest grant-givers to agricultural science and technology for development. That list, and the vast budget we envisioned would fund it, will probably have to be revised in 2009, with reports already emerging that some foundations are considering reducing amounts given in grants because of shrinking endowments.

While we don’t foresee a drastic decrease in funding in 2009 from the larger foundations — i.e., Gates, Rockefeller, Ford, etc., what we might witness is some caution being exercised in the kinds of initiatives and organisations being funded as the ‘philanthro-capitalists’ wait to ride out the crisis. Indeed, in an annual letter sent out in January 2009 (http://www.gatesfoundation.org/annual-letter/Pages/2009-bill-gates-annual-letter.aspx), Bill Gates announced an increase in spending from $3.3 billion in 2008 to a proposed $3.8 billion in 2009. This, while admitting that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation suffered a 20% decrease in asset value over 2008.

And, what about other, smaller, donors? Foundations that have a similar charter to “spend down their assets” rather than “spend a percentage of their assets” may also be adequately prepared to at least meet existing commitments. However, when it comes to new initiatives, we reluctantly play pessimist and predict a longer lag time before projects are approved and extra caution when it comes to supporting organisations the philanthropists haven’t funded already in the past. In other words, on the face of it, it might appear to be business as usual in 2009, with the undercurrents of the crisis becoming visible only in 2010 and beyond.

What we can be optimistic about is that all this doom and gloom may force organisations to be creative when it comes to spending the funds available to them. We hope this means that organisations will have to cooperate rather than compete with...
**FIRST FIPWG MEETING TO TACKLE FODDER SCARCITY**

The first meeting of the Fodder Innovation Policy Working Group (FIPWG) — constituted as part of LINK’s Fodder Innovation Project with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) — is being held in Anand, Gujarat, India on February 24. The meeting is being hosted by LINK’s South Asia partner CRISP (the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy) in collaboration with India’s National Dairy Development Board.

The Fodder Innovation Project — with funding from the UK’s Department for International Development — is in its second phase and aims to explore the question of fodder scarcity from the perspective of local and national networks, and policies that mobilise ideas and information to improve fodder availability. The research agenda of the Fodder Innovation Project deals with the central questions emerging from recent efforts to use the innovation systems concept to address some of the shortcomings of commonly-used agricultural research practices. The main purpose of the project is to understand how to strengthen the capacity of the system (and not only of individual organisations and institutions) to access and apply fodder-related information and knowledge or in other words, enhance the capacity of the system to innovate.

This is being done through:

- Action research in three select locations in India (Bhilwara, Ahmednagar and Puducherry), to draw principles on how to strengthen fodder innovation capacity
- Undertaking a macro institutional and policy study at the national level mapping of the existing national fodder innovation system and the linkages and processes at work and identification of key weaknesses and,
- Organising a Fodder Innovation Policy Working Group (FIPWG) as an interface between the Project and policy relevant actors playing an advisory and promotional role

The purpose of the FIPWG (which is expected to be organised once every six months) will be to share the findings and insights emerging from this research project and to allow policy actors and practitioners to contribute to the type of questions this research asks and to help promote the findings of this research.

For more on the project visit our website at [www.innovationstudies.org](http://www.innovationstudies.org) or visit the project website at [www.fodderinnovation.org](http://www.fodderinnovation.org).

---

**2. OBAMA: YES, BUT CAN HE?**

On January 20, the first sign that a change had indeed come to the White House was the new [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) website, which laid out an optimistic agenda before the new US President and his team. Among other things, the new administration promises a doubling of foreign assistance (to $50 billion) and a renewed focus on climate change (rather than a blatant denial of it). At first glance, this doesn’t sound too impressive. After all, when public and private American support for global health, development, and humanitarian assistance is combined, the United States still ranks only among the middle range of EU donors. However, as a possible shifting of priorities away from militaristic spending, we can read so many positives in terms of larger policy implications. In the past American ODA has been reflective of the political slant of its administrations (population growth, AIDS prevention, security, etc.) rather than the needs of developing countries. No doubt, President Obama will continue this trend, but this time round, we can’t help but feel caught up in the general feeling of hope and change.

If Obama’s history in the Senate is anything to go by, there are positive signs. In 2007 President Obama was one of three senators to introduce the Global Poverty Act of 2007, which called upon the Bush administration to develop a strategy for meeting the poverty-elimination challenge of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He has, during the campaign and since, stressed time and again his belief in funding for scientific research and in climate change programmes. In a recent report Obama’s science advisor asserted that proposed spending on global health alone should increase steadily, doubling to $15 billion annually by 2012.

We would like to know more about his proposed Add Value to Agriculture Initiative (AVTI) but are encouraged by promises to streamline, restructure and expand USAID — particularly given that half of the agency’s foreign service direct hires are eligible to retire in five years! U.S. House leadership is pushing an FY09 omnibus spending bill that allocates $36 billion to the 150 Account (the international affairs budget) for foreign assistance spending and seeks to bolster USAID and the State Department.

[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

[www.barackobama.com](http://www.barackobama.com)

---

**3. CGIAR: CHANGES COME INTO EFFECT, NOW OR NEVER**

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is at long last, as it promises us, in a transitive period. At its December 2008 Annual General Meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, the CGIAR Members adopted a proposal for a “revitalised” CGIAR, the culmination of its Change Management Initiative. We highlighted CGIAR reform in our list of initiatives to watch out for in 2008. Twelve months later, the proposal was finally approved after, no doubt, going through several revisions. Given how long it’s taken to reach even a consensus that change of some sort was desperately needed, we won’t be holding our breaths for a dramatic transformation. However, given the CGIAR’s size and its history of institutional inertia, we are encouraged by even a tentative step forward.

Among the changes proposed, the CG plans to replace “Donor Sovereignty with Donor Harmonisation, Center Autonomy with System Coherence, and Decision by Consensus with Results-Oriented Rules for Prioritising and Managing research guided by independent advice that integrates science with partnerships and development outcomes”. Admittedly, management-speak always makes us a little suspicious, but given that bureaucratese is the lingua franca in the CG system, we’ll just have to wait and see how this translates into change.

Continued on Page 3
Microsoft chairman Bill Gates unleashes a jar of mosquitoes, to highlight the issue of malaria in developing countries, into the room during the TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Conference early in February.

Photo courtesy TED

Continued from Page 2

The figure that accompanies this piece (courtesy the CG transition blog) explains how the new proposed structure would work. Within a proposed deadline of October 2009, the CG hopes to have its ‘Consortium of Centres’ — united under a ‘chief executive officer — and a new CGIAR Fund established two months later. The CG promises that this will differ from current management in that the proposed consortium of the different centres will be legally constituted and hence be able to enter into binding programme performance contracts with the CGIAR fund (to consist of research funders). This sort of contractual accountability is expected to reverse the trend toward restricted funding and donor oversight. During the transition, changes will be monitored to ensure that they meet the criteria of clear strategic focus; increased research output, outcome and impact; greater efficiency, effectiveness and relevance; simplicity and clarity of governance; enhanced decentralised decision-making; and active subsidiarity to capitalise on complementarities between the CG centres.

However, despite its promises of greater decentralisation, we are not entirely convinced if this can be the case given that the consortium board will still be responsible for overall strategy formulation. The CG promises that this strategy will be formulated, through consensus, at a biennial conference on agricultural research for development (which will replace the AGM). While the ‘what’ of research being funded remains nebulous, what is promising is that the CG proposes to completely revamp the ‘how’ of funding, promising sustained and stable support for its research projects.

www.cgiar.org

4. RIU: RIP?

The DFID-funded Research Into Use (RIU) Programme has been a high profile attempt to learn how to plug the gap between agricultural research and innovation and has raised great expectations. We included the Research Into Use programme in our list of ‘Innovation Initiatives to Watch out for in 2008’ and decided that in its second year of existence the programme needed to prove its critics wrong by making a useful contribution to the practice of and discussions about enabling agricultural innovation.

We are not sure if RIU quite managed to shush the voices of its critics over the course of last year. If we may dare ask the question again: Will 2009 be RIU’s last chance to break through or will it fall along the wayside and get buried along with so many other great ideas for innovation and development that have failed to fulfill their promise?

www.researchintouse.com

5. RESEARCH COMMUNICATION: NEW PANACEA?

Research communication” seems to have become a (re)new(ed) catchphrase in the world of agricultural development recently. Some donors such as the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) have started to require the programmes they fund to allocate a portion of the budget to research communication. Others don’t state this objective as explicitly, but the basic idea remains the same: increasingly, research communication is being viewed as necessary to ensure that research makes a difference.

In theory, research communication seeks to address a widely-perceived gap between research and its uptake, especially in terms of policy, by ensuring that research is both useful for and is used in policy and practice. In practice, however, this might prove more difficult to accomplish, given that oftentimes research is conducted in isolation from policymaking circles — sometimes even when they share an organisational space. In a working paper on its communication strategy DFID, for instance, has acknowledged that there was some criticism from its reviewers that research commissioned by the agency did not adequately inform its own policymaking processes.

A number of conferences and meetings towards the end of 2008 (for example, the UNESCO conference in November 2008 on ‘sharing research agendas on knowledge systems’ and the CGIAR meeting a few days later on making research outputs more accessible) discussed this issue in some detail. Among the themes debated were questions concerning research uptake, communication technologies and researcher collaboration and communication. In what might be an upcoming subdued financial year, we see research communication becoming more popular as a tool among donors and organisations as a means of making the most (better impact as well as better profile and branding) of funded research. DFID, for example, already promises that in the next five years it will develop a communication programme as a stand-alone set of activities as well as integrated into other research programmes. By 2010 at least 30% of the agency’s research budget will be allocated to getting research communicated and into use.

http://www.research4development.info/communicationsCorner.asp

http://www.imainternational.com/img/coursef/7.pdf


6. DFID RESEARCH STRATEGY TAKES OFF

We mentioned DFID’s research communication strategy in the previous point, and if anything, it serves as an illustration of the development agency’s commitment to shake things up in the development world through its new research strategy for 2008-2013. We noted DFID’s commitment to spending £1 billion on research over the next four years in our January 2008 edition of the LINK News Bulletin (http://innovationstudies.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=38&Itemid=999999).

As the research strategy starts to kick off in 2009, no doubt everyone in the development
7. POST IAASTD: WHAT NEXT?

After three years of international collaboration and deliberation the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) finally released a report in 2008 calling for radical change in agriculture to "serve the poor and hungry if the world were to cope with a growing population and climate change while avoiding social breakdown and environmental collapse". According to the report, in order to meet the challenges, it was necessary to place institutional, economic and legal frameworks that combine productivity and the protection and conservation of natural resources.

In the weeks that followed the publication, a necessary analysis of its findings found itself being subsumed by more urgent concerns — the food crisis, the impending financial meltdown, etc. However, the IAASTD report is far too important to ignore for long, and we hope the development world turns its attention back in 2009 to the recommendations it put forward. Significantly, the report could read as a serious portent for the crisis that was to blow up a few months later. However, the IAASTD report is far more than a warning. It is an invitation to do things differently, and to learn from past mistakes, we hope the report finally does signal an important transformation in how agriculture science and technology research is conducted. Let’s see how the development world was to cope with a growing population and climate change while avoiding social breakdown and environmental collapse". According to the report, in order to meet the challenges, it was necessary to place institutional, economic and legal frameworks that combine productivity and the protection and conservation of natural resources.

There is much for us to delight in and agree with in this relatively new publication — especially its well-thought out and (importantly!) opinionated editorials on the very topics that we are very often concerned with — research agendas and development aid, for instance. We are amazed that it managed to fly under our radar for so long and look forward to reading it regularly in 2009.

http://www.thebrokeronline.eu

9. KIT: TREASURE TROVE OF INNOVATION RESOURCES

In 2008, the website we found ourselves turning to most often was the Royal Tropical Institute’s (KIT) rural innovation systems portal. The KIT website is a virtual doorway into the world of rural innovation systems, with its pulse on the latest news and events from around the world.

This is not to say that this is the website’s only forte. What makes the KIT website so valuable is that it is on its way to becoming a virtual treasure trove of information on any and everything concerning the innovation systems approach — from a glossary of terms, to dossiers on important topics and themes to a detailed bibliography for further reading. KIT’s value as a resource and communication source cannot be overstated and we expect to turn to it increasingly in 2009 as it expands its database of information.

http://www.kit.nl/smartsite.shtml?ch=FAB&id=7587

10. SUSSEX MANIFESTO REVISITED

In the August 2008 edition of the LINK News Bulletin, Norman Clark reflected on the Sussex Manifesto — a document put together in 1970 by a group of analysts from the then newly-created Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU) at the University of Sussex and designed to set out a proper role for science and technology in international development. The piece was a reaction to recent news that the STEPS Centre and its partners were preparing to revisit the arguments put forth then through a new project on innovation for development.

Forty years from the publication of the original document, the worlds of innovation and development have evolved beyond recognition. The new project aims “to bring cutting-edge ideas and some Southern perspectives to current policy”, and will recommend new ways of linking science and innovation to development for a more sustainable, equitable and resilient future. Integrating lessons learned since the original document, the new document, which will be published in 2010, will investigate current debates in science and technology for development through a series of background papers with a forward-looking slant, attaching recommendations for action. The themes covered will include: the global redistribution of innovative activity, growth, industrialisation and equality, as well as hi-tech grand challenges and the new philanthropy. Subsequent papers covering agriculture, health, water, environment and energy will translate these recommendations to sector-specific issues.

Through 2009, the Steps Centre will continue to organise a series of events around the world, and the debates that emerge will contribute toward the final document.

We eagerly await the new manifesto and hope it will provide some practical suggestions for deploying science technology and innovation for development. We also hope that the decisionmakers who largely ignored the first manifesto take more notice this time round.

http://www.steps-centre.org/manifesto/index.html

For further details on LINK activities and publications, visit our website at www.innovationstudies.org or contact us at info@innovationstudies.org. The LINK News Bulletin is edited by Kumuda Dori and Andy Hall.

For more information on UNU-MERIT, visit www.merit.unu.edu.

http://innovationstudies.org

For more information on UNU-MERIT, visit www.merit.unu.edu.