

A Message to GCARD from USAID Administrator, Dr. Rajiv Shah
Montpellier, France
March 29, 2010

Thank you and Good Evening to all. I was recently appointed a Special Advisor to USAID Administrator, Dr. Rajiv Shah and to stand in for him at this meeting.

It is an honor for me to be here with you today, and particularly to come before you carrying a message from Dr. Shah. The U.S. has long placed agricultural research and technology as a priority both domestically and in our contribution to global development. Throughout its history, USAID has provided sustained support to research and to building the institutions of higher education and research in countries ranging from India to Brazil to Egypt. These institutions remain important training centers in agriculture for many studies. Its support to agriculture is particularly well known to this audience.

If I may offer a personal and anecdotal testimony, I owe a great deal of personal gratitude to USAID. My entire education from high school, college, and through graduate school was supported by USAID and most of my 31 years of sorghum research.

Here is the message from Administrator Shah:

In his inaugural address, President Barack Obama pledged that the United States would work as a partner with farmers in the developing world to make their fields flourish. The President is following through on his commitment. There is global agreement that it will take a larger and more integrated approach to solve the scourges of hunger and poverty. And in this global vision, agricultural science and technology plays a prominent role alongside empowering small scale producers with better tools and knowledge, enabling them to access markets, helping governments make informed and strategic decisions, and sustaining growth through judicious management of our natural resources. All of these are essential to reaching our goals of accelerating progress to cut hunger and poverty.

I am here today with a message of encouragement from Dr. Shah, but also one of challenge, one of greater support, but also a greater expectation of impact. The U.S. Government will more than double its support for research from the global to the local: spanning the CGIAR, partnerships with U.S. universities, to sub-regional research networks, to national agricultural research systems and pluralistic systems of extension. Next year, 8% of our support for agricultural development will go to global research, multiplied by expected investments at the national and regional levels. We see value in the partnership and synergy that would develop from these diverse partnerships. Our plan is global in scale but recognizes that ultimately all gains must also be local; most of our resources will support country-driven strategies. We support countries that place priority on research within their agricultural growth plans. Achieving greater impact from our investments in research will require strengthening the institutions at all these levels, but will also require holding our partners accountable at all levels to better integrate technology into the broader system of agriculture, where producers have access to technology, but also to the credit, extension, and markets that are necessary to translate improved technologies into increased incomes.

Working across USAID and USDA we have been defining an agenda for support to global agricultural research—one that will be informed by broad consultations and debates such as will take place this week at GCARD. Three overarching research themes have emerged: Strengthened Systems, Enhanced Staple Food Production, and Local-Regional value chains.

Strengthening systems puts technology into a broader context, spanning biophysical, policy and social elements of key farming systems and including cross-cutting issues around soil fertility and conservation agriculture to enhance resilience and increase productivity. Enhanced food production places high priority on crop improvement including core breeding as well as tackling specific constraints to productivity gains in crops, livestock, and aquaculture. Key research topics include genetic improvement of major cereals against drought, heat, diseases and pests in rice, wheat and maize, pursuit of productivity gains and pest resistance in grain legumes to improve nutrition, combating pests and diseases in bananas, roots and tubers; enhancing both the quantity and quality of animal feed, addressing key livestock diseases in species of relevance to the poor to reduce risk associated with zoonotic disease and increase availability of animal source foods in the diet to enhance child nutrition.

We will look to build programmatic synergies between systems-level research and that focused on specific commodities as we know that the impact of these investments must be greater than the sum of their parts—social science research on impact pathways and technology adoption will help us realize these opportunities. Finally, our Local-Regional value chain investments will emphasize postharvest and market research aimed at increased access to, and efficiency of markets, as well as the role of policies and investment strategies in fostering greater participation in reliable markets.

Fundamental to sustaining support for elevated funding is our greater accountability for impact, including in research. This means we will be re-thinking our programmatic structures to place more emphasis on ensuring that advances and technology are delivered into the hands of small-scale producers. We recognize that this cannot happen without stronger human and institutional capacity, particularly at the regional and national levels. Strong partners must contribute to setting the agenda and drawing global advances down to the farm level. We will integrate capacity development in the agricultural innovation system into our program development. These include strengthening individual and collective capabilities, improving organizational processes, and fostering networks and linkages among agents of innovation. We all recognize this as an area that has suffered over the past two decades, but I am very glad to say that it is a central objective in our strategy.

It also means we will look to elevate our investment in extension, the weak or missing link in the cycle of development and deployment. We will support the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services, an important platform for creating greater attention to this issue. We will also prioritize support to governments that are tackling public extension in new ways and that are creating platforms for private service delivery. We must work together to strengthen these core systems that deliver new technology and information to producers.

This message of support linked to accountability for impact also extends to the U.S. investment in the CGIAR system. USAID's funding for CGIAR core research programs will be double this year over what it was just two years ago, and we plan to make an even more substantive increase next year.

This increased support is predicated on the premise that CGIAR reforms will prioritize results-based strategic global public goods and management reforms. USAID funding for the CGIAR will emphasize the core productivity research in crop improvement, where the contributions have already been enormous and where science is opening new avenues that will help the world meet the challenge of producing more food on less land in a more environmentally-friendly manner.

The definition of the mega-programs must be a transparent process based on solid analysis, leading to coherent lines of research, impact pathways, and intended outputs and outcomes. Programs on crop staples, including but not limited to the rice, wheat and maize, need to move forward. Grain legumes, clonal crops such as cassava, potato and banana, and stress-tolerant grains like pearl millet and sorghum all deserve increased investment. Other programs, including those that are best addressed through cross-cutting approaches, such as gender and climate change, should move ahead now to assist in the development of other mega-programs.

Certainly one of the most challenging areas for new efforts is agricultural systems, drawing on global public goods research but placing them in a specific regional or sub-regional context. Technical and institutional challenges are complex, and partnerships that span research for development will be needed. While some CGIAR centers are well placed to lead in the development of these programs, they need to proceed very deliberately, with clear technology and management practice strategies, appropriate national and regional partners, and support from development oriented resource in the regions.

The U.S. will focus greater attention to the importance of women in agriculture across its investments, and research is no exception. We will target research that seeks to narrow gender disparities in the adoption of new technology and will measure the ultimate outcomes on income of both men and women to ensure we are having impact, not just counting outputs. We also will seek to elevate the leadership of women researchers themselves. In this respect, I am pleased to announce USAID will more than double funding for our partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in support to the AWARD programs—African Women in Agricultural Research for Development, recently visited by both Secretary of State Clinton and Dr. Shah. Looking ahead, we would like to learn from the

African example to see how we can work with partners to foster similar opportunities for women in science from other regions as well.

Global hunger is a moral issue and a fundamental problem too big to ignore. It limits the potential of individuals, communities and nations—for generations. It also undermines all other development investments by and on behalf of poor nations. The political and social stability of all nations, poor and rich, can be compromised by national, regional, and global hunger.

The challenges we face are, therefore, great, but so will be the rewards of working together in more effective and efficient ways, taking advantage of the new science, new ways of sharing information and collaborating across great distances that even a few years ago would have been more difficult. We believe it can be done, and will do what we can to increase the chances of our collective efforts.

On behalf of Dr. Shah and myself, thank you.