



## Policy Brief

# Opening Access to Agricultural Knowledge

*Using information to power innovation*



*'CIARD partners have made a collective commitment to improving access to data and information and ensuring that it is used to the best effect, where it really counts – among the poor, particularly the rural poor.'*

Monty Jones, Chairman GFAR

Further information and resources can be found at [www.ciard.net](http://www.ciard.net), and <http://ring.ciard.net>.

## The Problem

*'There is so much valuable information generated that can guide decisions and resolve problems, but so little seems to be accessible when it is needed.'*

The volume of scientific and technical information is doubling every five years, but its accessibility to the public proceeds far less rapidly. In addition, the gaps that restrict knowledge flows between actors in agricultural innovation systems have not been bridged by the universal penetration of digital media.

Everyone has experienced frustration in trying to get hold of data and information to help them in their work, even in the so-called 'information age', with apparently easy access to the information-packed Internet. Frequently it proves impossible. In agriculture, there is a major barrier that effectively stops people getting what they need. Many agricultural innovation organizations invest only a small fraction of their resources in communicating their results and ensuring they are well adapted to the

needs of rural society, and most provide less than 10% of their available information on the Internet.

*'We produce results, but what happens to them? It seems that so much useful data and information never gets published and the farmers don't seem to benefit.'*

For scientists this might mean doing experiments, all the while suspecting that they have already been carried out elsewhere, but the results were never properly reported. Such unnecessary repetition represents wasted resources.

The lack of access to and use of agricultural data and information are serious because their application to rural livelihoods could go a long way to alleviating the hardships suffered by so many of the poorest.

*What can be done to address the all too common barriers to opening access to data and information?*



## The Solution

*'If only our institute had the policies and resources to enable us to harness the new digital technologies to make data and information more easily accessible, then they could be used effectively'.*

The CIARD movement is in a unique position to address problems associated with access to data and information. It is a collaborative venture among more than 150 of the world's leading agricultural agencies and can draw on expertise from all the important disciplines. So, CIARD harnesses all the relevant know-how.

*The CIARD movement promotes many free services, tools, and standards that can be applied to assist efforts to make information Available, Accessible and Applicable.*

CIARD aims to improve availability and accessibility of data and information through encouraging development of

appropriate organizational policies and by promoting standards for reporting. Through this two-pronged approach of policy and practice, CIARD contributes to building up the skills base and providing incentives for greater cooperation and sharing of data and information among organizations and individuals. CIARD's approach will lead to the application of data and information to solve real problems in agriculture and food security.

*'Data and information power innovation – restricted access represents a barrier to innovation.'*

*A collective effort will really help many smaller organizations to make information truly accessible and applicable as they can immediately adopt proven practices and open source tools without having to develop their own.*

## What Can CIARD Do?

CIARD brings together the world's leading agricultural agencies, regional forums, and national organizations to enable more coordinated approaches to opening up data and information. This partnership increases the impact and reduces the costs for organizations aiming to open up information, and provides practical resources to guide, train, and motivate their personnel.

*CIARD encourages all stakeholders to 'think global – act local'.*

### CIARD's three priority areas are:

- *To improve investment through introduction of sound policies and coordinated approaches.*
- *To develop the information-sharing capacities of organizations, and foster the formation of networks.*
- *To make data and information accessible by promoting open content and common standards and tools that support sharing of agricultural information.*

## An Agenda for Action

*All stakeholders need to become fully involved in the push to support more open sharing of data and information.*

The problem has been identified and the solution proposed – CIARD's problem-solving strategy covers three broad areas:

### 1. Policy and practice

- *Good practices are documented in the CIARD 'Checklist'.*
- *The CIARD 'Advocacy Toolkit' is offered to national stakeholders working to achieve policy change.*
- *Current initiatives and tangible benefits of sharing data and information are being documented in Case Studies.*

*'A sound policy framework has provided the basis of our institutes' communication activities.'*

### 2. Organization

- *Guidelines are available for organizations to use in capacity development, in the form of the CIARD 'Pathways'.*
- *Targeted e-Learning programmes are available to support skills development.*
- *Public institutions will enhance data and information flows in key agriculture-related areas, including registering their services on the CIARD 'RING'.*

*'Training has been a key part of our strategy to develop and maintain a global data and information network.'*

### 3. Technologies

- *Open services, tools and infrastructures are available to promote information generation, management and access.*
- *Open standards based on existing systems are continuously being developed through collaboration and applied as the basis of an effective technical framework.*

## Next Steps

### National authorities should take action to make agricultural knowledge truly accessible:

- Assess current capacities and barriers
- Define objectives and plan for investment

- Establish appropriate policies and organizational structures
- Develop individuals' capacities
- Develop partnerships to leverage resources and capacities

