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**For immediate release**

## **Book announcement**

# **World Bank report calls for major rethink on agricultural research**

A newly published World Bank report has called for major changes in the way that support for the rural sector in developing countries is conceptualized and implemented.

The report, *Enhancing Agricultural Innovation: How to Go Beyond the Strengthening of Research Systems*, is based on a research project coordinated by Dr. Andy Hall of UNU-MERIT -- a joint research and training centre of United Nations University, and Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

Historically, investments in strengthening agricultural research systems have increased the supply of technology, but mechanisms to effectively use such technology to encourage innovations in agricultural production and supply chains have been very weak.

To provide effective and sustainable support for the rural sector in developing countries, the World Bank and other development agencies should move beyond the traditional focus on agricultural research systems. The overwhelming evidence from case studies of traditional as well as emerging export sectors in developing countries is that for innovation to occur there should be an explicit focus on building linkages between diverse actors. These include science and agro-industries, farmers associations and rural development organizations.

The study also underlines the role of the public sector in building such patterns of interaction. The market alone, even in case of very strong competitive pressure, does not seem to be able to provide the incentives to make this happen.

The study team believes that many of these changes can be achieved through better use of existing resources.

“Interventions that unite research-based and community-based capacity could cost relatively little, add value to existing investments, result in pro-poor innovation capacity, and achieve very high returns.”

### **A fresh look at innovation systems**

The study built on the innovation systems concept to re-examine agricultural policies and

other factors that enable and/or constrain innovation in the rural sector. A simplified diagnostic toolkit was developed that can be used by donors and development agencies to ensure that their interventions help to strengthen the capacity of agricultural innovation systems in developing countries. The toolkit was tested through field studies of:

- traditional agricultural sectors that are undergoing transformation (cassava processing in Ghana and Colombia; medicinal plants in India and small scale food processing in Bangladesh; and
- export-oriented sectors that have emerged more recently (shrimp farming in Bangladesh, vanilla in India, pineapple in Ghana and cut-flowers in Colombia).

Key recommendations arising from these case studies are:

- Development actors should incorporate a new focus on strengthening patterns of interaction across the whole range of actors involved in innovation;
- Rural development programmes should make major efforts to develop and adapt habits and practices that foster a capacity to innovate, and that integrate ‘pro-poor’ and ‘pro-market’ agendas;
- Intervention planning should focus on applying principles in locally relevant ways rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach to strengthening innovation capacity.

**The full text of *Enhancing Agricultural Innovation: How to Go Beyond the Strengthening of Research Systems* is available at:**

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTARD/Resources/Enhancing\\_Ag\\_Innovation.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTARD/Resources/Enhancing_Ag_Innovation.pdf)

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**About UNU-MERIT**

(United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and social Research and training Centre on Innovation and Technology)

[UNU-MERIT](#) is a joint research and training centre of United Nations University, based in Tokyo, Japan, and the University of Maastricht in The Netherlands. It integrates the former UNU-Institute for New Technologies (UNU-INTECH) and the Maastricht Economic Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (MERIT).

UNU-MERIT provides insights into the social, political and economic contexts within which innovation and technological change is created, adapted, selected, diffused, and improved upon. The Institute’s research and training programmes address a broad range of relevant policy questions dealing with the national and international governance of innovation, intellectual property protection, and knowledge creation and diffusion.

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[United Nations University](#) (UNU) is an international community of scholars engaged in research, postgraduate training and the dissemination of knowledge aimed at resolving the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare, in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Established in 1976, [Universiteit Maastricht](#) (Maastricht University) is the youngest university in the Netherlands. It has gained a reputation at home and abroad for its unique “Problem-based learning” approach. Approximately 12,000 students and 3,250 staff currently study and work within the University’s seven faculties.