

Agriculture sector

'Local R&D expenditure lowest among Asian nations'

By Munawar Hasan

LAHORE: Expenditure on research and development (R&D) in the agriculture sector is the lowest amongst the Asian countries, and scientific innovation gets low priority in Pakistan among political framework.

This was informed in an interactive session held between leading agriculture scientists hailing from across the country and international key players. This consultative meeting was held here in a bid to highlight the need to promote innovation in agriculture for optimum production of various crops.

The interaction was organised by Punjab Agricultural Research Board (PARB) in collaboration with US Agency for International Development (USAID), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA).

PARB Chief Executive Dr Mubarak Ali apprised the participants that scientific innovation in Pakistan is lacking in the production system. "Our international competitiveness is low

and speed of innovation is slow," he observed.

He said that around Rs40 billion in subsidy for the agriculture is given but no expenditure on scientific innovation is being made through the scientific community. Scientific innovation has the solution to the worries of the nation regarding food security, he said. He observed that this is the way to come at par with the international community.

Dr Iftikhar Ahmad, Chairman of Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) apprised the participants that USAID intends to fund investment in agriculture in Pakistan and for that purpose PARC initiated a consultative process in 2011 with local as well as international experts.

"We need an effective, efficient and decent management system. We are taking international experts on board to overhaul our research system. Punjab has taken an initiative in this direction by establishing a research board in agriculture," he said.

"We are working on the proposal to establish such research

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boards in all the provinces and link these boards to PARC," he added.

Dr Khalid Mohtadullah, Country Director, IWMI Pakistan, in his address focused on investments in agriculture sector in Pakistan. "Without investment in land and water, which are two endowments for any production system, we cannot produce long term sustainable economic surpluses," he said.

He stated that studies have shown that investment in agriculture reduce poverty and enhance economic growth. He was of the view that investment in agriculture further needs to be strengthened.

Dr Rick Ward, representative of CYMMT said that this is an opportunity to harness the strategic goals with the help of international donors, to articulate visions and strategic parameters to resolve issues/problems.

First find some common grounds, amplify and keep working on those lines, he advised. This opportunity is a guideline for the next 10 years

for Pakistan to find rational, balanced and meaningful solutions of the issues.

David J Spielman, Senior Research Fellow at IFPRI gave a presentation on challenges, ideas and opportunities in Punjab. There is need to develop a coherent strategy for development of a better policy regime and a targeted investment plan, he said.

He said investments in new conceptual approaches i.e. innovative and integrated systems was required to streamline research activities. Besides, strengthening of evidence-based policy making, investment in human resource and organisational capacity building and expansion in international linkages should be given priority, he added.

Dr Kausar Abdullah Malik from FC College University focused on food security in his address. He said that 58% Pakistani are food insecure. It is an issue of accessibility and affordability besides availability. He said that a lot of information is already available on the issues but actual problem is political commitment.