



## **IICA Director General sets priorities for 2008**

*The most important actions include strengthening the Institute's technical expertise and its program for training leaders.*

On 23 January, Chelston Brathwaite, the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), discussed and shared with his Cabinet the priorities set for this specialized agency for 2008.

The Director General said the staff should draw inspiration from the Institute's technical achievements and the member countries' positive attitude towards it. The personnel's continued dedication and commitment would ensure that the organization continued to make good progress in 2008 and expand the application of the tools it had developed over the previous six years.

Brathwaite, a citizen of Barbados who has been in charge of IICA since 2002, cited the institution's financial position as clear evidence of the countries' satisfaction with the organization. Thanks to the States' contributions and quota payments, the Institute was better placed financially than at any time in the last 21 years. The budget, which had remained frozen for 12 years, had even been increased slightly in 2007.

For 2008, the Administration has set seven major objectives:

1. Strengthen the Institute's technical capabilities even more
2. Set up the new financial system (SAP) in the countries (it is already in operation at Headquarters, in Costa Rica)
3. Promote the renewal and updating of the staff's knowledge by implementing the new policy on sabbaticals and training programs
4. Fine-tune the tools for supervising and providing follow-up to actions at the hemispheric, regional and national levels
5. Implement and expand the program for the development of leaders of agriculture in the hemisphere
6. Strengthen relations with strategic partners, especially with the IDB, FAO and CATIE
7. Prepare the plans for the next Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture, due to be held in Jamaica in 2009, and the Institute's contribution to the Fifth Summit of the Americas, scheduled for Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, at the beginning of 2009.

Brathwaite urged his Cabinet - made up of the directors of the technical and administrative departments - to build on the Administration's achievements in 2008. This Administration has focused on transparent and prudent financial management; technical cooperation geared to the needs of the countries; the creation of a modern, value-driven institution committed to accountability and a culture of excellence in the workplace; and the development of a new vision for agriculture and rural life in the Americas.

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## **New IICA Web portal harnesses state-of-the-art technology**

*The Institute's own professionals and technicians were tasked with developing the site.*

The new website ([www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int)) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) includes a number of improved features, including better access to information and knowledge about agriculture in the hemisphere, which can be shared and updated more efficiently.

IICA's Director of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management, James French, said "This innovative portal is designed to showcase our internal capacity to envision, assess and react to the new global trends in the development of agriculture, and to respond in an effective, timely manner to the technical cooperation needs of the Member States."

"The site is a key component of IICA's internal and external knowledge management efforts and has been redesigned with that in mind," he added.

Using a system called SharePoint Portal Server, [www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int) is an intelligent site that links, users, computer equipment and know-how. The revamped portal can be navigated in Spanish or English, and French and Portuguese versions will soon be available.

This innovative system will permit users to obtain and utilize information from the Institute's different priority areas of technical cooperation and the Web pages of the Offices in the 34 Member States. It provides simple access to documents, projects and the latest information about the institution's different activities.

"The portal makes it possible to conduct fast searches and organize documents and information by subject matter. One of its biggest advantages is that it allows users to select the content of greatest interest to them," said IICA's Head of Informatics, Emmanuel Picado.

The site was created with input from the Institute's different professional and technical personnel, overseen by the Directorate of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management. In 2007, a Web Committee was tasked with designing and preparing a proposal that would meet IICA's technical and institutional projection needs and offer state-of-the-art technological facilities to visitors to the site.

### **The portal's features**

The search engine, located in the upper right-hand corner, and the main menu, on the left of the screen, offer easy-to-use browsing options.

The core component of the portal is the "Hot Technical Topics" module, which highlights five priority areas of the Institute's work: Biosafety, Cooperation for Technological Innovation, Avian Influenza, Getting ready to export agri-food products and the Doha Round.

The "News" section affords access to the automatic updates uploaded by the administrators of the different technical units at IICA Headquarters or in the Offices in the countries.

A third module displays the "Press Releases" section, used to disseminate the most important news items. The redesigned "Press Room" section contains different communication products, such as the IICA Connection e-bulletin, the Agroenlace radio program and the technical journal COMUNIICA.

The main menu is divided into two sections: institutional and technical information. The first includes basic data about the Institute, information on the Director General's different activities, the reports of the ministerial meetings and an agenda detailing IICA-organized events in the Americas.

Links were also created to the different websites of IICA's Offices and the ministries of agriculture in the Member States, and there is a section for the Center for Leadership, one of the current Administration's most important projects for 2008.

The second section of the main menu contains material related to IICA's technical cooperation, including the Knowledge Center, where information is available by subject and country, in multimedia or text formats.

The page also offers direct access to IICA's hemispheric agricultural programs, cooperative programs, the INFOAGRO information system and the e-learning initiative. This last tool uses multimedia to promote training and learning in areas related to agriculture and rural life.

During 2007, [www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int) received over one million unique visitors, over 90% of whom accessed the site from the 34 Member States.

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## **Haitian women triumph through microcredit scheme**

*The IICA Office in Haiti has just documented a unique credit experience with rural women based on solidarity.*

Although many of them are unable to read or write, all of them know how to pay. Haiti's rural women have demonstrated their capacity to repay loans through KrediFanm, a system that provides them with microcredit for productive activities, designed, improved and supervised with the active and democratic participation of the women themselves.

The Office of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Haiti recently documented the experience of this successful project in three languages –Spanish, English and French. The initiative, which began 13 years ago, has made a significant impact on the quality of life of Haitian rural families living in poverty.

Since its inception KrediFanm has recovered 99% to 100% of the loans it has granted. With that money the participants have boosted the profits of their small businesses by 50%, helping to increase investment in trade, agriculture and livestock within their own communities, thereby expanding their opportunities and those of their families.

Due to the diligence of its members in repaying debts and the good use given to the loans, the KrediFanm Fund has grown at the rate of 27% annually, a very significant figure for a country considered to be the poorest in the hemisphere.

These women have applied their intelligence and skills in order to become self-sustaining and generate their own funds through the creation of a savings scheme, whose capital grows by 183% annually.

All these efforts have led to improvements in their quality of life, their housing, their children's education and their own self-esteem.

### **Adopting their way of being**

The KrediFanm method began in Haiti in 1994 and, although it is inspired by the Grameen Bank, founded by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, it is unique because it is based on the popular customs of Haitian women and was developed by and with them in a participatory manner, respecting their occupations, ambitions and circumstances.

The initial experience, implemented in a community called Village de la Montagne, was financed with a contribution of just US\$200 provided by IICA officers in Haiti.

Since that date, IICA has played an active role and several of its staff members have dedicated vital efforts to support the project.

Within the structure of the revolving credit system, the “Katel Mama” (group leader and treasurer) is the great protagonist. She is the pillar that ensures the cohesion of the group members and her tasks include collecting payments, granting loans, checking the prices at the point of sale and, most important of all, influencing her “daughters” so that they pay their dues.

The “Mama” is responsible for overseeing all the transactions of the Katel, a subgroup consisting of five members –including her – which is the basic unit of the microcredit system based on solidarity. Although some of the women cannot read or write, they record their interest amortizations and regular payments with their fingerprints.

The loans are granted to one of the Katel members per month, and if one member delays her repayment, the Katel Mama makes sure that the next individual does not receive her loan until the arrears are paid.

For these women, the most important thing is to show solidarity, since failure to make a payment not only affects the debtor herself, but also the entire group to which she belongs, which must take on the debt. This means that trustworthiness and a good reputation are vital requirements to participate in KrediFanm – far more important than a mortgage guarantee such as those required by the banks.

The Katel Mamas submit their accounts to the *ajanriral kredit* ARK, a local credit agent who reports on the status of the loan payments to the KrediFanm Group. The ARKs are women elected by the KrediFanm members and are chosen for their good reputation and their ability to read and do basic mathematical operations. They are responsible for recording payments in the repayment books and coordinating the work of the Credit Committee composed of all the ARKs and all the Katel Mamas of the KrediFanm group.

Within this democratically-developed system, the women have shown what great businesspeople they are and ensure that loans are only approved for profitable activities. No loans are granted for consumption, only for productive activities.

Although KrediFanm began by lending at an extremely low interest rate, the women themselves soon decided to significantly increase the percentage of interest in order to obtain greater profits; however, this has not resulted in a decreased number of loan applicants. Furthermore, as a result of this decision, the women have gradually become qualified borrowers by having a good track record in repaying loans with interest similar to those of the commercial banks.

During these 13 years of experience, Haitian women have succeeded in establishing and consolidating a fairly comprehensive structure in KrediFanm, which little by little has become independent from the institutions that initially supported it, and is now practically self-sustaining.

### **Systematizing their experiences**

The way in which these women display their business skills, their solidarity and their spirit of struggle – even during the time of the coup and the international embargo, when the initiative was born- is described in the publication “KrediFanm: Synthesis of a credit delivery methodology for women in the Haitian rural milieu”, published by IICA.

This document describes how other organizations, such as the Canadian Embassy, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the Kellogg Foundation, have supported and financed the implementation of this initiative at different times.

According to Alfredo Mena, the IICA Representative in Haiti, the results of KrediFanm are being documented with the intention of promoting dialogue with other institutions interested in contributing to address the credit needs of women in Haiti’s rural milieu and in other countries.

The digital version of this publication may be found at: [www.iica.int](http://www.iica.int)

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## **IICA and the prestigious University of the West Indies sign agreement**

*The purpose is to step up academic, professional and technical exchanges between the two organizations.*

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has strengthened its ties with academia in the Caribbean by signing a cooperation agreement with the renowned University of the West Indies (UWI), whose main campus is situated in Jamaica.

The agreement will promote academic, professional and technical exchanges between the scientific and administrative staff of the two institutions, as well as the sharing of academic, technical and research information.

The document was signed recently by IICA Director General Chelston Brathwaite and UWI Vice Chancellor Nigel Harris.

Created 60 years ago, the UWI has campuses in several English-speaking Caribbean countries. With 800 accredited programs and 38,000 students, it offers courses in the humanities, education, the pure and applied sciences, agriculture, law, medicine and the social sciences, with a marked emphasis on subjects that are of interest to the Caribbean.

The university's alumni include seven prime ministers and two Nobel Prize winners - Derek Walcott and Sir Arthur Lewis.

The agreement with IICA is for four years and could be extended. It also makes provision for the execution of selected projects under specific agreements.

The document includes an annex that specifies the scope of the activities to be implemented and an operating guide. Four objectives are set out in the annex:

- To contribute together to the sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas in general, and to the economic viability of selected Caribbean industries and enterprises.
- To coordinate the work programs of the two organizations so as to create synergies, with a view to constructing a cohesive, logical framework for agricultural development in the Caribbean.
- To promote links and transfer important information, technology and expertise between IICA and the UWI.
- To establish a basic legal framework for specific agreements, operating contracts or letters of understandings, for work on shared interests or topics proposed by either of the parties.

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## **The IICA Office in Trinidad and Tobago has a new Representative**

*Agronomist and agricultural economist Gregg Rawlins took up his post on 7 January.*

On 7 January, Gregg Rawlins took up his new position as the Representative of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Trinidad and Tobago. The official has broad experience in the fields of economic analysis, policy development, foreign trade and trade negotiations.

The new head of the IICA Office in Trinidad and Tobago studied agronomy at the University of the West Indies and then obtained a master's degree in agricultural economics from the University of London, England. In the 20 years since then, he has worked for a number of Caribbean institutions.

Before being appointed to his new post with IICA, Rawlins, a citizen of Barbados, worked in Port of Spain as a project management consultant for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (Cariforum), on a food security project.

His other previous posts include that of Senior Project Officer of the CARICOM Secretariat in Guyana, Chief Economist of the Agricultural Planning Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture of Barbados and as a post-graduate professor of the Lodge School, also in his native Barbados.

Rawlins is the author of numerous publications, books and technical reports on subjects such as agricultural economics, raw materials, food and nutrition and foreign trade.

On 11 January, IICA's Director of Operations and Integration for the Caribbean Region, Trevor Murray, accompanied Gregg Rawlins on a courtesy visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the two officials met with Minister Paula Gopee Scoon.

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## **Border women become micro-entrepreneurs**

*Binational Project in Honduras and Nicaragua executed by IICA produces rapid results*

In less than one year, the women of six Honduran rural communities located in the Upper Basin of the Rio Negro have become micro-entrepreneurs and local farmers have begun to organize a cooperative of organic vegetable producers.

These developments are largely due to the training and technical assistance provided to the inhabitants of these rural communities through the Nicaragua/Honduras Binational Project for the Sustainable Development of the Rio Negro Upper Basin.

The deputy mayor of the Honduran municipality of San Marcos de Colon, Marcos Aurelio Rojas, said he was pleasantly surprised by the pickles, juices, wines and handicrafts produced by women from the communities of Cacamuya, Santa Rita and El Arenal and offered at a recent farmers' fair.

This project is being financed by Austrian Development Cooperation and is being executed in 14 communities in Nicaragua and Honduras by the offices of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in both countries.

The non-governmental organizations APRODESE of Nicaragua, ODESA of Honduras and Initiative for the Third World, represented by the *Fundación Chica*, are also involved in the project, and have been implementing agribusiness natural resource management programs in the Upper Basin of the Rio Negro since last May.

IICA's rural development specialist, Rolando Téllez, said that the next step for the Bi-national Project will be to focus on improving the quality of the products made by small-scale businesswomen on the Honduran border, and also on improving their canning and packaging processes.

He also confirmed that he had received a request for technical support from local farmers in that same area who are interested in establishing a cooperative of organic vegetable producers.

Participants in the Binational Project invited beneficiaries from both countries to learn about a successful experience in production, cleaning, selection, vacuum packing and marketing of a Salvadorian cooperative of organic vegetable producers.

Téllez said that the vegetable growers from this Honduran region are making an average of 27 scheduled pesticide applications per cycle for the different vegetable crops they grow, "which greatly drives up the costs, but worst of all, it is affecting their health and contaminating the soil and the water sources".

He also explained that the construction of potable water collection and distribution systems had been completed for the six Honduran communities that form part of the Project, and said that similar works are about to conclude in eight Nicaraguan rural communities located in the area of the Upper Basin of the Rio Negro.

The Rio Negro Basin covers an area of 2,228 square kilometers, bathes extensive regions of both countries, and is regarded as Nicaragua's third most important watershed.

Taken from the *Agronoticias* newsletter, IICA Nicaragua

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## **Dominican agricultural exporters receive training**

*First training modules of the Second Agro-Export Platform imparted on the Caribbean island.*

As part of a joint effort, the Secretary of State for Agriculture (SEA), the Center for Exports and Investments of the Dominican Republic (CEI-RD) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) imparted the first training modules of the Second Agro-Export Platform in the Dominican Republic.

This activity, which is being implemented in the context of the Secretariat of Agriculture's policy of promoting agricultural exports, constitutes the first part of a comprehensive training program that will be executed during the first four months of this year, alongside the implementation of a validation and marketing study on local products and the organization of a trade mission in April.

The purpose of the program is to prepare 16 Dominican agricultural and agroindustrial companies so that they can export their products to New York's ethnic market.

The first training module, entitled "Preparing to Export", trained the participants to identify the benefits of exporting agrifood products; described, in general terms, the policy and regulatory aspects governing food exports; analyzed the factors that make a company or an agrifood product ready for export; and, evaluated the degree of export-preparedness of their own companies.

The second module, entitled "Your Export Business Plan", identified the benefits of business planning and the possible risks of failure in the export market; described the components of an export business plan; explained the different stages of developing an export business plan, and; explained how to prepare a realistic timetable to achieve success in exports.

The person responsible for imparting the course was IICA's Regional Specialist in Agribusiness, Iciar Pavez. The participants included the managers of producers' organizations, clusters and agroindustries as well as individual farmers. All expressed great satisfaction with the knowledge acquired and were encouraged to continue participating in the rest of the activities, as well as to take concrete steps to begin exporting their products to the United States markets.

The training modules were imparted in the Training room of the Banco Agricola and were attended by officials of local and international institutions, among them Pedro Pablo Peña, Undersecretary of Agriculture, Acelis Angeles, Deputy Technical Director of CEI-RD, Jesús de los Santos, an expert from

the National Competitiveness Council (CNC) and Oscar Hernández Peguero, Coordinator of the Agro-Export Platform, among others.

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## **Strategic partnership between the FAO and IICA Offices in El Salvador**

The Offices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in El Salvador signed a letter of understanding on January 21.

This instrument falls within the context of the Letter of Understanding signed between the Director of the Regional Office of FAO, Jose Graciano Da Silva, and the Director General of IICA, Chelston Brathwaite. The aim is to consolidate an effective partnership that will strengthen the technical cooperation provided by both international organizations and will establish a general policy for joint actions and programs in response to the Mandate issued by the Ministries of Agriculture.

The document was signed by the FAO Representative in El Salvador, Francisco Muñoz, and the IICA Representative in El Salvador, Keith Andrews. The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Mario Salaverría, and the Presidential Commissioner for Agriculture, Carmen Elena Díaz Bazán de Sol, were the witnesses of honor at the signing ceremony.

The event was also attended by officials of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), representatives of the country's agricultural production sectors and special guests.

The purpose of the agreement is to strengthen the technical cooperation provided by FAO and IICA in order to effectively support the efforts of the country's agricultural sector. Both institutions have worked together in the past and now wish to promote a closer and more systematic approach to cooperation.

The parties will focus their activities on issues such as:

1. Promoting Food and Nutritional Security
2. Animal and Plant Health and Food Safety
3. Information Management, Agricultural Technology and Innovation
4. Rural Development and Environment to promote rural prosperity
5. International Trade
6. Execution of the AGRO 2003-2015 Plan
7. Promoting Agribusiness
8. Institutional Strengthening and Modernization

Cooperation efforts will focus on the above-mentioned priorities, but will not be limited to these topics.

The IICA Representative explained that the United Nations and IICA have worked together for many years and that the letter of understanding serves to formalize these relations, ensuring a joint planning process every six months and a follow-up process to measure achievements and synergies and discover other areas where their interaction could be improved by including other partners, especially the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

“The agreement that FAO and IICA have signed today is an expression of the need to focus not on *ad hoc* or improvised activities, but rather on formalizing relations and strategies in order to address challenges of greater complexity that are more promising for the country's future”, Andrews explained.

He emphasized that agriculture in El Salvador is undergoing a profound change and that it is now time to strengthen the idea of a truly modern, multi-functional agriculture, dedicated to products and services, and integrated with other sectors of society, including the urban sectors.

According to the FAO Representative, Francisco Muñoz, “this is a time to unite efforts; with a greater harmonization of international cooperation on agriculture in this country, it would be much easier to obtain achievements.”

Muñoz said that one of the first steps would be to organize a small workshop on the subject of food safety, taking advantage of all the international and hemispheric experience accumulated by FAO and IICA in this area. He said this issue has now become an essential requisite for agriculture as a result of the free trade agreements and the rules of the World Trade Organization.

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Mario Salaverría, acknowledged that FAO and IICA are two leading international organizations that play an important role in El Salvador’s agriculture.

Salaverría noted that last year agriculture grew by 8.6%, which not only denotes an increase in productivity in the last four years, but also underscores the fact that agriculture has gradually taken on a more strategic role. He added that this role would be further strengthened by working together and uniting the efforts of FAO and IICA as contemplated in the letter of understanding.

Both institutions will appoint a liaison officer in their local Offices to provide follow-up during the two-year term of the agreement, a period that may be extended, if the parties so wish. The results of the joint actions and the achievements derived from these will be made public.

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