

1. WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- Good morning and welcome to this three days' event. I am glad to see so many participants both in presence and online.
- It is a pleasure to open this conference on behalf of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission.
- Let me underline that conference does not come just from the efforts of DG INTPA, but it is a joined co-creation exercise, together with the Directorates-General for Research and Innovation and for Agriculture.
- We couldn't have done this work also without the support of the DeSIRA-Lift facility implemented by AGRINATURA, to which I extend my thanks.

2. WHERE DOES THE IDEA OF THIS CONFERENCE COME FROM?

- Let me start by giving some background information. The Conference you are participating to originates from the Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture Initiative, that you all surely know with the name of DeSIRA initiative.
- DeSIRA was launched at political level on the occasion on the One Planet Summit organised by France in December 2017 and started its first operations in 2019.
- Let me recall that DeSIRA aims to contribute to climate-relevant, productive and sustainable transformation of agriculture and food systems in low and middle-income countries. It supports research and innovation projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and strengthen research capacities and research governance, involving key actors at national, regional, continental and global levels.
- After 6 years, where are we?
 - We can count more than 80 projects (*82 precisely*) to support innovation for agriculture and food systems transformations and to develop capacities in 65 “Low and Middle-Income Countries” in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

- We managed to mobilise 340M€, from an initial pledge of 270M€, combined with more than 60M€ co-financing in joint operations with a number of EU Member States.

As many projects of this Initiative have ended or are ending, it is time take stock of their contribution to the sector and to reflect on possible approaches for the future.

- Results, and allow me to say, impressive results are there:
- Thanks to the setting-up of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system, we are proud to say that DeSIRA has, up to now, trained 30,000 technician and 4,000 researchers, supported 1,000 students in Master or PhD programmes, generated around 600 innovations taken up by farmers and strengthened more than 150 agri-food value chains in 45 countries and about 1,400 SMEs.
- In total, we managed to reach directly half a million farmers
- Beyond large but dry figures, we can count on several “Stories of Impact” that put “flesh on the bones” and illustrate concretely what it means to work with research with an ambition to impact for sustainable change.

Let me give you two examples.

The **Artemia4Bangladesh** project. Implemented under the coordination of a CGIAR centre (WorldFish), with the involvement of European partner (University of Ghent) and Asian research and operators. It used a comprehensive approach to introduce a new culture - *Artemia* – with salt farming and aquaculture in Cox’s Bazar. *Artemia* (brine shrimp) is one of the most widely used crustaceans to feed farmed fish and shrimp. Engaging in *Artemia* production allows salt producers to diversify their income stream during the rainy season, when they cannot produce salt. The project provided training and technical support in *Artemia* production to salt farmers, while training fish farmers how to use *Artemia* to increase their production. At the same time the connection with the market for *Artemia* cyst was made, by linking *Artemia* producers with shrimp hatcheries by involving marketing agents. Training in the use of *Artemia* as human food was also provided, to make the best out of the new technology. Significant gains in production of both *Artemia*, and of the fish and shrimp were achieved, leading to significant increases in income.

The **Cocoa4future** project (Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana) was able to promote cocoa agroforestry systems through a collective work with national and European R&I organisations, farmers’ organisations, extension services and cocoa companies. New models of agroforestry were tested and proposed to farmers. They are scaled

through NGO and advisory services involving thousands of farmers. Such solutions are supported by national policies and are integrated into the main axes of our response to support the sustainable cocoa initiative on the production side.

- This said, the DeSIRA initiative is NOT the only EU intervention to support R&I in agri-food sector in partner countries.

Our co-organisers, the Directorate Generals for Research and Innovation (RTD) and for Agriculture (DG AGRI) invest significantly in calls and partnerships with partner countries, and Africa in particular. They also coordinate policy dialogues on Science, Technology and Innovation R&I with external partner countries in which agri-food sectors have an historical dimension, like with Africa and the African Union.

3. SO WHY THIS CONFERENCE IF WE THINK THAT WE ARE DOING REASONABLY WELL?

Besides these positive and successful outcomes, it is also time to reflect on the lessons learnt and try to reply to the still remaining questions...

I will cite some of them:

- How to support productive, inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems transition?
- How to make “change at scale” based on scientific evidence by producing more, when needed, and better, anywhere, to address the current challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss or land degradation?
- How to do better research to support innovation at scale, with which adapted methodologies?
- How can research be part of our package to help “de-risk” investments in “complex” sectors of agriculture and of food sector at large?

This conference comes at a timely moment of not only political uncertainties but also new priorities in the European Commission and preparation of what could be future responses in the next Financial Framework starting in 2028.

Therefore, your reflections, proposals and recommendations during this conference will be more than welcome and we will take them in due consideration for future steps.

4. R&I IS POTENTIALLY A POWERFUL CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL GATEWAY

- One of our reaffirmed priority for EU external action is the Global Gateway strategy.
- It is the EU's strategy to boost sustainable infrastructure and development in partner countries through high-quality investments. It puts emphasis on mobilising private investments and, for the agrifood sector, along value chains; with a vision “from start-up to scale-up”.
- It will require an enabling environment, and what we call it “the 360° approach”, by promoting strong research and innovation ecosystems, access to finance, equal partnerships among others.
- The Global Gateway strategy includes a pillar on “Education and Research”. We need to work together during this conference to provide evidence of the contribution to research and skills to successful investments, highlighting how innovation drives economic growth and competitiveness.
- Global Gateway does not leave fragile countries behind. R&I support will help them reinforcing their integration into global markets and fostering sustainable development. Another major challenge will be to keep a positive influence on the global R&I agenda, by ensuring EU presence in multilateral fora.
- Any brilliant ideas that will emerge from this Conference to showcase and demonstrate what the EU and partners can better contribute through Research and Innovation to make this strategy a success will be without any doubts very useful.
- I thank you for your attention.