

Dr Bergvinson takes over as DG of ICRISAT

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“Inclusive and demand-driven innovation is the key to fighting poverty, eradicating hunger and malnutrition, and providing environmentally sustainable solutions to the most pressing challenges faced by smallholder farmers in the drylands.”

This was stated by Dr David Bergvinson, as he assumed office as director general of the ICRISAT for a five-year term effective January 01, 2015.

While emphasizing on the need to promote innovation, the newly joined DG mentioned, “In tackling the poverty challenge persisting in the drylands of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, innovation has to be driven by the demands of farmers and markets, and must recognize the important role of women and youth to enable inclusive market-oriented development.”

Dr Bergvinson articulated his passion and commitment for smallholder agriculture, and a strong desire to improve the lives of the hundreds of millions of impoverished smallholder farmers and their families living in the drylands, as he addressed senior management, scientists and staff at the ICRISAT global headquarters in Hyderabad, India, and virtually, at various ICRISAT locations in Africa.

“We must focus on what smallholder farmers need – improved varieties, agronomic practices and market opportunities – and work and think collectively to integrate and deliver our science-based solutions to the national level through partnerships.”

Dr Bergvinson identified his two strategic priorities as the new ICRISAT Director General to be: Defining organizational values that build the kind of culture required of a knowledge and innovation institute; and mapping out country strategies as a vehicle for implementing market-oriented development.

“I will work to make an enabling environment to empower all ICRISAT staff to do their very best to serve. Building on the foundation of success of ICRISAT, we should play a mentoring role to the next generation of scientists. We also have to face the challenge of rejuvenating agriculture to bring back the youth into the sector by making it more productive and profitable, and to ensure food security for all.”

Prior to his appointment at ICRISAT, Dr Bergvinson was with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle, USA, as Senior

Program Officer, Crop Value Chains and Digital Design for Agriculture Development. He had been with the Foundation since 2007.

Before joining the Foundation, Dr Bergvinson was a Senior Scientist with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) at its Mexico headquarters for over 12 years.

His research background is in crop improvement, plant biochemistry, integrated pest management, and entomology. He is no stranger to ICRISAT, having interacted with the institute's scientists on projects dealing with grain legumes, village level studies, seed systems, and digital technologies in smallholder agriculture.

Dr Bergvinson, who succeeded Dr William Dar as Director General for 15 years, is expected to move ICRISAT further in generating and sharing cutting-edge global scientific innovations, and in bringing about genuine pro-poor growth and inclusive market-oriented development in the dryland tropics of the world.