

Supporting global efforts to make data on agriculture and nutrition available and accessible

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I recently had the opportunity to be part of the Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN) 2017 summit in Nairobi, Kenya, from 14-16 June. The monumental potential that data has to build resilience for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture was evident at this event hosted jointly by the Government of Kenya and the GODAN Secretariat.

Hon. Willy Bett, the Kenya Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, rightly said during a press conference at the summit: “In the climate change era where drought has become a new and constant reality, we cannot build resilience without the right type of data being available to inform the decisions we make. Only an evidence-based approach using credible data will help us transform our economies through agriculture.”

I concur with his view and firmly believe that a data-driven transformation of agriculture is very much in the realm of the doable and can transform the lives of smallholder farmers, especially in the dryland tropics that are facing frequent droughts.

Titled “Catalyzing Agricultural Transformation for Inclusive Growth” the GODAN summit sought to provide a platform for peer-learning, co-creation and sharing of expertise and practices on proven successes on the use of quality data and standards for agriculture and nutrition; create opportunities for the adoption of youth-driven agricultural innovations within the public sector; and facilitate networking and to showcase proven initiatives on open data for agricultural transformation.

The summit brought together world leaders, researchers, farmers, processors, students and others to deliberate on ways in which to improve food and nutrition security through open data.

GODAN was born out of the 2012 G8 summit, and seeks to support and encourage the proactive sharing of open data to make information about agriculture and nutrition available, accessible and usable.

At the forum, I made a presentation on “Strengthening resilience and food security for agricultural communities: Open data to modernize food systems.”

We at ICRISAT recognize that data is an integral component of any research activity. Together with our partners we have generated voluminous data and datasets for the past 45 years through institutional research. This valuable and open data can be found on <http://dataverse.icrisat.org/>, which anyone can access, use and share. We view them as long-term assets that can shape solutions and facilitate effective decision making. They can be treated as International Public Goods (IPGs). I would say that their use has the power to foster innovation and transform agriculture.

At the end of the summit it was decided to establish an intergovernmental coordination mechanism to support African networks.

Taking place concurrently with the GODAN conference was the 4th Agritech international exhibition on agriculture and nutrition organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Radeecal Communications. It was a veritable showcase of diverse efforts being made to improve agricultural productivity and nutrition.

ICRISAT partnered with Signature Foods, a sorghum and millets processing company, to set up a booth to display their combined efforts to promote the production and utilization of sorghum and millets in Kenya.

The theme of the ICRISAT/Signature Foods booth was “Diversifying our farms and diets with Smart Food”, in sync with the institute’s vision to reduce poverty, hunger, malnutrition and environmental degradation in the dryland topics. I was pleased to see visitors, nearly 10,000 of them, milling around the Smart Food products from India and Kenya that were on display. The visitors ranged from government ministers from Kenya and other countries to researchers, processors, seed companies, farmers and the general public. They also tasted some snacks made from Smart Food grains. Some of the snacks prepared for tasting were gluten-free millet and sorghum cookies, cakes and muffins, chickpea samosas, sorghum chapati, among others.

For more insights into the scenes at the Summit and exhibition, watch this video: