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## **GENERATION CHALLENGE PROGRAMME LAUNCHES RESEARCH PROGRAMME TO BRING GENOMICS REVOLUTION TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

*First public initiative of its kind, the Generation Challenge Programme kicks off its second year of bringing international partners together to propel plant genetic diversity and genomics research forward for the resource poor*

Brisbane, Australia – The Generation Challenge Programme is a new initiative of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) to explore plant genetic diversity and create crops that better meet the needs of the resource poor by partnering with a wide range of research organizations and implementing institutions around the world.

Launching its second year of research, the Generation Challenge Programme (GCP) uses genetic and genomic tools to harness the rich global heritage of plant genetic resources to bring improved stress tolerance to the staple foods of developing countries. For GCP Director Robert Zeigler, the time is ripe to bring biotechnology to bear on the agricultural constraints that plague the poorest farmers, such as drought, pests and diseases, and low soil nutrition.

“In recent years, three simultaneous revolutions have completely changed the way we think about problems and their solutions: revolutions in biology, information management, and communications,” says Zeigler. “Modern biology has enjoyed an explosive growth in knowledge, especially in our understanding of genetics and the creation of the field of genomics—the understanding of how genetic information is stored and processed. This revolution created enormous amounts of data and would not have been possible without the second revolution in data storage and analytical capacity. A very large, sophisticated, and global “distributed” data set has been created, and is accessible around the world thanks to the third revolution in communications technology.

“Add these capabilities to a fourth, but more established resource,” says Zeigler, “the large set of genetic resources collected by CGIAR centers during the past decades, and we now have the capability to produce improved varieties for farmers working in very harsh environments that we only dreamed of a few years ago.

In addition to the window of opportunity these technological revolutions provide, experts around the world are calling for a new generation of global, public research to address the needs of the poorest people in developing countries. In its report *The State of Food and Agriculture 2003-*

2004, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations said, “Public-sector research is necessary to address the public goods that the private sector would naturally overlook and to provide competition in technology markets.” And in their August 2004 editorial, the editors of *Scientific American* rallied for “an armistice in the war of words over ag-biotech”: “Serious public investment by industrial countries—both at home and in the developing world, to help scientists there build their own research initiatives—could serve both commercial and humanitarian ends.”

The Generation Challenge Programme answers that call and is poised to make real impact by uniting three sets of partners—the CGIAR centers, advanced research institutes (ARIs), and national agricultural research systems (NARS) in developing countries—to deliver on its mission.

The GCP’s research is organized under five subprogrammes that span the spectrum of research in germplasm, genomics, bioinformatics, and molecular breeding for agricultural development. A central principle of the GCP is that our products make it from the lab to resource-poor farmers, so we build strong partnerships with NARS to ensure that their scientists help drive the GCP’s research agenda and that delivery mechanisms are in place. In addition, all of the GCP’s products are released as public goods.

The Generation Challenge Programme aims to drive the revolutions in biology, information management, and communications toward a fourth revolution: a new research paradigm that targets the needs of the world’s poorest people. Through applications of genomics and plant genetic diversity, this Generation strives to make a real difference in the lives of future generations.

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