

## Interview with Dr Dyno Keatinge, DG AVRDC and Chairman of AIRCA



**Dr Keatinge, AVRDC is well known as the global leader in promoting vegetables for development and a member of various networks already. What is the added advantage of being part of AIRCA for AVRDC?**

Anyone involved with agricultural development issues today knows there are no easy, simple solutions to the complex problems that confront us in the battle against poverty and malnutrition. AVRDC - The World Vegetable Center therefore needs strong allies with a range of

disciplinary expertise we lack and with global staff resources on the ground where we have none. Like-minded institutions have much experience from which we can benefit, which will help us better customize our outputs for our very varied stakeholders in the farming communities of the tropics. AIRCA centers such as CABI and *icipe* help us better protect vegetables through effective IPM and weed management strategies, and to reach a much broader range of farmers whose vegetable crops are challenged by biotic stressors through CABI's worldwide "Plantwise" program and links to hundreds of thousands of farmers through mobile-phone extension assistance programs in South Asia. We benefit from ICBA's knowledge and physical testing facilities in the search for vegetables with better salt and drought tolerance, and specifically for germplasm suitable for our target areas in Central Asia, where we are working closely together and where such stresses are paramount, such as in the Aral Sea region. AVRDC also partners with CATIE in Central America and with ICIMOD in the Hindu Kush region of Asia to bring appropriate vegetable germplasm to specific ecological niches where poverty and malnutrition remain intransigent problems.

**Agricultural research has been undertaken for decades, but we are still facing severe challenges in terms of agriculture production and poverty in rural areas. What will it require to feed 9 billion people in 2050?**

All the AIRCA centers recognize there is a big challenge ahead to feed the world in 2050 - but we also are convinced that it is not enough to provide only an adequate carbohydrate supply. We need to nourish the world population as well as feed it, or our mission will fail and the burden of human ill-health will be substantially increased. Much research is needed to ensure that healthy, nutrient-dense crops such as fruit and vegetables are available to even the poorest families. These crops need to be grown in healthy, nutrient-rich soils; this vital expertise is provided to AIRCA partners by IFDC. Crop and diet diversity should be exploited fully to ensure that farm enterprises and human health are made as resilient as possible by reducing environmental and associated risks. Crops For the Future, INBAR, CATIE and AVRDC all provide expertise in this specific area. Such risks include regular, heavy over-spraying of pesticides by farmers; all AIRCA allies combine their knowledge to help provide wholesome, economic solutions to this problem. Acting jointly, the AIRCA centers are able to promulgate the concept of healthy landscapes - which are urgently required if we are to sustainably feed and nourish the rapidly growing world population. Lack of coordinated research has been a major failure in the past, and even the AIRCA centers recognize they cannot tackle this huge problem alone. AIRCA thus seeks to ally itself with the CGIAR centers, a diversity of NGOs,

public agencies, and the private sector involved in agriculture throughout the world. Although the problems remain large and climate uncertainty makes the challenge more demanding, AIRCA is confident that the necessary solutions can be found through promoting healthy landscapes, if sufficient research investment is made now and made consistently over the following decades.

**AIRCA is developing a project for the Lake Victoria Basin - why do you think this project will make a difference to the region? What will be different with this project?**

The Lake Victoria Basin remains a hotspot of poverty and malnutrition even though much research effort and investment has been made historically in the region. AIRCA believes that most of the necessary answers to solve the region's agricultural development problems largely exist today, but exist like a jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces have not been properly put together. Seven of the nine AIRCA centers that have joined in this project proposal believe that with their combined substantive expertise, with sufficient long-term investment over the next decade, and with the appropriate political will at a regional level, it will be possible to make a positive difference to many millions of farmers. The basin can indeed become a series of healthy landscapes, but the effort neither must be piecemeal nor imposed from above as in the past. It should rather be built upwards from the village level, with well-tested scientific interventions suitable for and accepted by local farmers and covering the full and necessary dimensions of sustainable and resilient agriculture. CABI's strong managerial experience in Africa and *icipe*'s deep local knowledge and on-site physical infrastructure, combined with germplasm and productive interventions from AVRDC, IFDC, ICBA, CFF and INBAR, will form AIRCA's scientific nucleus for the region. Together with willing local partners, AIRCA aims to make the Lake Victoria Basin the food basket of the region, to deliver prosperity and good nourishment to the currently disadvantaged population.