

**RESEARCH-ORIENTATED AGENDA: A PATH THAT BRINGS RESEARCH CLOSER TO THE COMMUNITY**

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1. **Background**

Producing knowledge from an integrated and deep perspective, which allows a better and more complete understanding of human processes in their internal dynamics and in their inter-relationships with the environment, is a challenge that we face at the end of this century full of paradoxes: the enormous scientific and technological development achieved in the face of the progressive deterioration of the quality of life of the populations, the growing inequalities in access to basic services, the scarce capacity of national companies to solve problems, the lack of incentives and stimuli to knowledge, research and technological processes, the difficulties in the managerial and administrative field to face the changes.

As a country that carries many intelligences in its baggage, facing an emerging difficulty in the management and distribution of resources, the task of approaching society with the idea of turning Science and Technology into a platform for quality of life becomes relevant for CONICIT. It is essential to propose that the energy used to generate knowledge, invent or discover, flows to society in the form of health, social security, agriculture and environment.

We are aware that from multiple scenarios, efforts are made to create solutions, well, we think that it is of strategic importance that different actors converge and combine ideas and efforts to generate useful knowledge, generating change and new alternatives. In other words, the fundamental purpose would be to promote and strengthen these meetings, this complex task of agreeing on interests in the face of a situation and producing a scientific task that is interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, intersectoral and highly linked to the needs of society. This proposal, based on the idea of new ways, new actors for new times and new challenges, seeks to open up spaces for meetings, for bringing together the scientific community, interest groups, business people, communities, non-governmental organisations, producers, servants and users, in work processes characterised by consensus on problems considered to be priorities, team effort and commitment to society, aimed at producing transformations that involve the government, committed groups and organised civil society.

In Venezuela, the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICIT in Spanish), attached to the Ministry of the Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, does not escape from this environment and is therefore carrying out a task that cannot be postponed. This task consists of directing and guiding new processes where research is useful to society and where society demands knowledge, research and new technologies.

Furthermore, this research must generate new knowledge and responses to the processes of globalisation, information, tele-information media, and the processes of transformation and change in society.

In this sense, the CONICIT has among its purposes

1. To promote quality, efficient and relevant research in the social and economic fields.

2. To support technological development in the national productive apparatus.

3. To promote cooperation among the actors in the innovation processes, facilitating the conjunction and coordination of scientific and technological efforts and capacities.

4. Strengthen scientific and technological capabilities at the state level in order to overcome the needs and problems of the regions and to promote their development.

5. Deepen international co-operation in support of national foreign trade strategies and national research and development needs.

1. **Innovation Programs**

This factor is key to CONICIT's mission as an advisory body to the State on Science and Technology. Part of the aspects derived from this interactive system or network is that of inserting inventions in the economic system and in the production of goods and services.

The possibility of aligning scientific production with the interests of the actors involved and the needs of society, suggests strategies for convening, coordinating and orienting research with clearly established criteria, such as excellence, relevance, opportunity, feasibility and social impact. Adding up intelligence from various spheres of society and promoting social transformation, energised by research, around specific problems, is what we understand by innovation.

Innovation, as we have proposed it, requires: approaching local situations with an extended call, recognizing that everyone knows something and brings a perspective of interest on the local reality; promoting the recognition of existing skills and ensuring access to knowledge for all; identifying potentially successful actors who lead innovation processes at the local level and as an element of great importance the possibility of radiating solutions from the local to the general, non-hierarchical and the development of cooperative relationships and strategic links. In this way, the research projects are aimed at promoting innovative alternatives to face the complexity of human problems, both individual and collective, as well as the interlocking of actors, articulating them towards more efficient, self-sustaining and competitive forms of organization.

The innovation system must promote a network of leaderships over a process that is characterized by:

* The orientation of the discussions, exchanges and coincidences towards the application of scientific and technological knowledge to situations whose solution has a positive impact on the quality of life.
* Agreements on relevant, timely and feasible connections between lines of research and problems identified in common.
* The links, motivation and commitment between different institutions or individuals that coincide in research and management issues.
* The dissemination, collection, systematization and relationship of information that facilitates both the management of science and technology, and the association between actors for the formulation of targeted research projects.

As a consequence of this process we expect the establishment of inter-relationships between CONICIT and the actors, in different contexts and forms:

**Agenda Projects:** interdisciplinary and inter-institutional proposals through which it is established with CONICIT:

* Clearly defined objectives and implementation times.
* Orientation established through the lines of research detected in the process of the research agendas.
* Clearly established identification and commitment of the research applicant as a user of the research.
* Compliance with project evaluation criteria: relevance, opportunity, feasibility and excellence.
* Shared efforts in terms of budget, human resources, infrastructure, equipment and information.

**Strategic Associations:** alliances between CONICIT and institutions related to scientific research, public policy managers and the private sector for the financing of research projects where usefulness and applicability is based on:

* Cooperation and exchange.
* The variety of options for working together in the generation of scientific and technological knowledge applicable to the solution of specific problems.
* The medium-term commitment.
* The opportunity that resides in the success, trajectory and capacities of the institutions involved.

**II.1 Orientated Investigation**

Orient research towards the solution of priority problems for the country in the areas of environment, agriculture, education, health and social, through mechanisms such as shared agendas and strategic partnerships, which encourage the flow of knowledge between various actors, achieving creativity, cooperation and the use of information networks, the identification of common needs, to transform them into research and innovative projects, which involve multiple disciplines and institutions with criteria of excellence, relevance, opportunity and feasibility, help improve the quality of life of Venezuelan society.

This is the fundamental mission of the Oriented Research Management, where it is responsible for executing and implementing this mechanism and inserting it into Venezuelan society as an innovative and public policy process.

The functions are as follows:

1. To identify regional potentialities and successful actors to promote links and agreements that allow them to generate processes of social and environmental innovation.
2. To identify opportunities for inter-institutional cooperation that will encourage and facilitate the processes of social and environmental innovation and the implementation of programmes and projects.
3. Generate research agendas that guide investment in science and technology towards the resolution of social and environmental problems.
4. To promote the execution of programmes and projects that are established within the framework of the agendas and related actors, through the search for co-financing, multi-institutional support and national and international dissemination of the projects to be developed.
5. To systematize the information resulting from the processes of social and environmental innovation in order to use, transfer and establish networks.
6. Maintain relations with the Foundations, the State Commissioners of Science and Technology, and other regional, national and international institutions for their linkage and incorporation into social and environmental research programs and establish the exchange of information related to them.

**II.1.1 Agendas**

The Agendas are mechanisms aimed at guiding the construction of a space for public discussion within the framework of Science and Technology, where the guidelines on what and for what research respond to concerns formulated by society.

Universities, research and technology centres have the responsibility to build, together with society, the necessary, relevant and timely knowledge to improve the quality of life and well-being of the population.

Therefore, orienting research through the generation of this knowledge aims to formulate better public policy, and also to the innovative process and transformation of organizational modes, research processes and products generated by research.

The actors involved in this process are:

* Universities, Research Centres.
* Governmental organizations.
* Non-governmental organizations.
* Consulting companies.
* All those related to the lines of research and interested in participating in the agenda.

**II.1.2 Processes and Stages of the Agendas**

The processes that are triggered in an agenda are (1)Conceptual, strategic and operational design of the agenda; (2)Strategies for negotiating with actors at different stages; (3)Strategies and courses to contribute to the process of dissemination and communication of both the agenda and the projects; (4)Implementation of the agenda, from the process of calling for proposals, public offer (notice in the press) and receipt of preliminary projects; (5)Evaluation of preliminary projects and projects; (6)Monitoring and control of the agenda and its projects.

The transmission and dissemination of the results of both the research projects and the agenda process itself means that both clients and the community in general must be kept informed.

The transmission and dissemination of the results to the clients or users of the research suggests proposing new strategies and infrastructures for communication and dissemination of the results.

The process of implementing the agenda is based on establishing non-traditional administrative and technical procedures, where workshops, forums, interviews, among others, are instruments for gathering and systematizing information related to priority problems and knowledge gaps translated into lines of research.

The evaluation process of both the agenda and the preliminary projects and research projects is translated into evaluation criteria oriented towards the search for social impact, relevance, viability and feasibility.

The monitoring process is linked to new forms, strategies and interaction between the one who generates the knowledge (project proponent) with the research applicant or user. For this reason, it suggests considering management and monitoring indicators both at a strategic and operational level with the Agenda programme.

The different stages associated with the agenda development process are explained in more detail below:

**1st STAGE: CONCEPTUAL, STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL DESIGN:**

It is closely related to the design or construction of the agenda's model, associated with the identification of actors with high organizational, financial and research capacity who could be eligible to participate as potential partners in the agenda. Likewise, with the definition and selection of the topic to be addressed as a research problem.

This includes an analysis of the environment where the theme to be addressed is identified and the actors associated with it, the political, social, economic and environmental viability. The strategy to be implemented on the topic identified as a priority demand is designed, as well as the methodology to be used.

At this stage, the potential actors or partners with a high level of negotiating, organizational and financial capacity are identified to provide material, human or financial resources.

The methodological strategy of the agenda is related to the form and the ways to detect the problems, the priority lines of research in which they are translated into concrete projects where they comply with criteria of relevance, opportunity, feasibility and excellence.

Once the subject matter and strategies to be followed have been identified, as well as the possible actors or applicants interested in resolving the problem from a research point of view, a round of inter-institutional negotiations is initiated to detect areas of cooperation and association.

**2nd STAGE: WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS:**

The process of negotiation involves proposing and implementing negotiation strategies and rules of the game, which are clearly defined by this institution with traditional (researchers) and non-traditional actors (public bodies, private institutions, non-governmental organisations, in short, different forms of civil society organisation).

In order to effectively and successfully carry out the agenda, a broad call must be made with the different actors belonging to governmental and non-governmental organizations, where their influence on the issue is direct; the second necessary aspect to be addressed is the methodology of the workshops or events to be held. In general, these workshops include presentations, guidance and round tables.

The working groups are organised with the balanced and equitable participation of both traditional and non-traditional actors, and are then subject to validation and the completion of a questionnaire which outlines the problems and associated lines of research. The identification, selection and prioritisation of the problem must be based on criteria defined and agreed by these actors in the workshop working groups. Once the workshop has been completed, a stage of analysis, synthesis and final validation of the results of the workshop is carried out, where the results related to the hierarchical problems and priority lines of research are concluded. Finally, the lines of research are offered to the public so that they can compete for preliminary projects within the framework of these lines and which meet the criteria explained below.

**3rd STAGE: RECEPTION AND EVALUATION OF PRE-PROJECTS:**

This stage makes it possible to distinguish and obtain specific and detailed information about the research environment and the real demand in terms of areas and lines of research. After about six (6) weeks, the preliminary projects are received within the framework of the publicly offered lines of research.

The pre-projects are then evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

**Inter-institutionally**: preferably they should be raised by inter-institutional networks.

**Transdisciplinary**: designed to address lines of research that seek answers from a comprehensive perspective.

**Co-financing**: proposals preferably co-financed by the participating institutions.

**Beneficiaries and/or users of research results:** proposals which preferably define or characterise the beneficiaries of the research.

The evaluation is carried out by the technical commissions of the area belonging to this Council, where they are made up of members with a high academic and research career, as well as people with great expertise in the public and private world who can make judgements about the beneficiaries and the formation of inter-institutional networks (relevance and social impact) from the public, private and civil society administration and management (opportunity scenario).

Subsequently, the research proponent is informed if its preliminary project:

* Qualifies: proceeds to the next stage of formulating its research project with any comments, suggestions and recommendations.
* Does not qualify: does not proceed to the project formulation stage
* Subject to negotiation: in this phase workshops for the formulation of projects arise, negotiations to be carried out with the different institutions that formulated different pre-projects on the same line of research, in order to combine them in a single effort and with greater inter-institutional and interdisciplinary participation.

**4th STAGE: RECEPTION AND EVALUATION OF PROJECTS**

In this fourth stage, after approximately eight (8) weeks, the research projects are received.

In order to be approved within the framework of an Agenda, a project must be positively evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

* **Excellence** judged on the thoroughness of their presentation and the credentials of the officials and institutions behind them.
* **Feasibility** measured as the possibility of achievement as a result of the adequacy between what is aspired to and the resources available and/or will be available to meet that aspiration.
* **Relevance** understood as the correspondence with the objectives set for the Agenda and the coherence with national, regional and local policies.
* Estimated **opportunity** in terms of the appropriateness of the proposal for the moment in which it is to be implemented, in terms of the economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental scenario or situation.

The fulfilment of the above-mentioned characteristics by a project must be verified by commissions appointed for this purpose, which will include the members of the CONICIT Technical Commissions directly related to the subject matter of the Agenda, as well as technical representatives of the Guided Research Management. These committees shall base their recommendations, when necessary, on the opinions of external evaluators.

**5th STAGE: APPROVAL OF PROJECTS FUNDING**

If the evaluation is favourable or unfavourable by the Technical Commissions of the area and this management, the recommendation of these bodies is submitted to the Board of Directors of CONICIT so that they can proceed to make the decision to support (approve) or deny the financing of the project.

In the event that the CONICIT Board decides to approve the project, the terms of reference to be signed in the contract will then be drawn up. In this phase, the partial and final products to be delivered to CONICIT are negotiated with the proposer, as well as the strategy for the transmission and dissemination of the results with the users or beneficiaries of the research.

**6th STAGE: CREATION OF THE FUND**

Having identified and negotiated in the early stages of the agenda, the potential partners who commit to and take responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the agenda. This aims to ensure the sustainability of the agenda.

In conclusion, it is the signing of a cooperation agreement between the parties that gives the agenda its legal and contractually binding character. This agreement makes explicit the creation of a fund for the financing of research activities, programmes and projects in the area addressed by the different traditional and non-traditional actors in the agenda.

All those programmes and projects that are highly relevant, timely, feasible and excellent will be eligible for funding via the fund, provided that the agenda's mechanism in its respective stages has been satisfactorily fulfilled.

The fund is created via trust with the bank selected among the agenda's partners. The contribution of each of the institutions is established either in the form of "species" and/or "financial". Then the payment schedule is established between the partners, the selected project and the fund.

**7th STAGE: MONITORING OF PROJECTS**

Established in the previous stage, the creation of the fund, the signature of the contract and the negotiation with the project proponents of the monitoring and control strategy, the need arises for the proponent to have a plan of inspections or mini-technical audits of its project on site, in the cases that merit it.

**II.1.4 AGRICULTURAL AGENDAS**

Today, agricultural research cannot be conceived as an activity isolated from reality, but with a fundamental service objective, which is to solve production problems in order to direct them towards improvement and productivity. To this end, research must be based on the search for specific solutions to each problem - without losing its universal nature - and at the same time ensure that its results can have a multiplier effect on the whole, thus helping to improve the efficiency of the activity. The final objective must be to influence the improvement of Venezuelan society by making it more solid from an economic point of view, more equitable in social terms and more harmonious from an environmental perspective.

Within this framework, and understanding innovation as the knowledge put to social use, in August 1995 the Management of Oriented Research considered it necessary to include the agricultural area as one of its areas of work, in order to promote networks which aim to solve problems in some of its production circuits. To do this, it was necessary to consider meeting new requirements, which translated into a better relationship between the sectors, new research and development requirements, technical assistance, coordination of activities within the circuit, etc., which requires a much greater and more efficient articulation within the agricultural and agro-industrial chains. For all these reasons, the preparation of the AGRO AGENDA constituted and still constitutes that element that interlinks the activities, coordinates the requirements and innovates in its implementation.

To advance the implementation of the programs that had been emerging as important and relevant to the agricultural sector, adding the product of previous experiences in the agricultural area that this institution has been developing in recent years, the General Management of Innovation Programs considered it appropriate to partner with FUNDACITE ARAGUA. With this, the strengths of the state of Aragua were recognised, firstly, as the geographical place where most of the qualified human resources in the agricultural area are located, given that it has the oldest Faculty of Agronomy in the country; furthermore, it has a series of agricultural research institutions with extensive experience, such as FONAIAP and CENIAP. On the other hand, this recognizes the style of work that FUNDACITE has been developing in terms of the orientation of the projects it supports and the range of activities it has developed so far, specifically in the cocoa sector.

This is how this teamwork began, with the aim of facilitating the process of building the Cocoa, Rice, Sesame, Animal Feed, Seeds and Cereals Agendas, as well as the National Agricultural Information System. The most visible results have been crystallised with the success of the Cocoa Agenda, launched in August 1996 through a public tender and whose technical and administrative implementation has been coordinated by Fundacite Aragua since April 1998, the two stages of the Rice Agenda.

**CASE: COCOA AGENDA:**

Cocoa is a crop linked to Venezuelan history and not only to the agricultural part of it; it gave us an important contribution to national finances from the colonial period to the non-oil era of our economy, thanks to a significant place in international markets, in which we still maintain a name, thanks to the quality that our native materials give to the products that include them in their elaboration.

Its production has deteriorated considerably, resulting in export levels that are less than half of those we had two centuries ago. This is the result of a series of concomitant factors, including the lack of importance given to agriculture in our country in recent decades, the lack of incentives for "quality" production and, as a result, the replacement of "native" materials by other, more productive ones, the abandonment of plantations, their replacement by the planting or exploitation of other crops, changes in land use, land tenure conditions, the average age of producers, distorted marketing, lack of appropriate research and technical assistance, and competition with other activities as a source of occupation, particularly tourism, in most traditional areas. The above has led us over the last 25 years to a very low productivity, achieved on an area of around 70,000 hectares, generating around 13,000 MT per year, with average yields of less than 250 kgs of almonds per hectare, and to the loss of the international qualification of "producer of fine cocoa only", with the consequences of this qualification on the price of our exports.

Despite the above, cocoa is one of the few agricultural items that would allow us, in addition to satisfying domestic demand, a secure presence in foreign markets, if we concentrate on exploiting the niche represented by the need for "fine" cocoa and add the certain possibility of adding domestic processing value to that international presence.

What has been exposed up to now tries to reflect the situation of the cocoa production in our country at the time when CONICIT, in 1995, assumed the agricultural area as susceptible to manage agendas. In accordance with the criteria for the search of lines with proven potential competition, whose recovery would influence the improvement of its production system and in which successful actors were involved with the possibility of generating the multiplier effect to the rest of the actors in the circuit, as well as the quantity and quality of inputs that we had, the cocoa production system was selected as a pilot experience. The initial diagnosis took into account information from recent studies on the competition of the cocoa sector within the national economy, and the potential of this system at that time. The main problems identified in the agenda-setting process were, according to the indicators, the availability of genetic materials, and the transfer of technologies to improve production. This is why at the same time as establishing a programme to increase current production, the strategy had to aim at improving and rescuing the quality, extra-fine and aromatic cocoa that characterised us in the past.

As a result of a series of activities in which representatives of the above-mentioned bodies were involved, CONICIT decided, supported by a joint effort that we do not hesitate to describe as inter-institutional, multidisciplinary and intersectoral, to publicly launch the Cocoa Agenda, which has so far resulted in the following activities:

1.- Request to PALMAVEN to carry out a detailed inventory of soils suitable for cocoa cultivation, which will make it possible both to guide the selection of new areas for cocoa planting and to undertake actions for the recovery of cultivation in traditional areas.

2.- Conclusion of a strategic partnership with PALMACAO (a joint venture between PALMAVEN and Chocolates El Rey) to co-finance research useful for the establishment and development of new cocoa plantations in appropriate areas of the “Llanos Occidentales” (western plains), as well as to combine efforts to rescue the high quality cocoa beans of the plains.

3.- Public offer of the lines of research and technology transfer that were considered necessary to, complementing what is known, advance the plans for recovery and expansion of the crop in the country.

The lines chosen and for which the formulation of projects was publicly requested were the following:

* **Agronomic management** with specific signalling for aspects of irrigation, shade, fertilisation, association alternatives and mathematical models for production prediction.
* **Biotic management** including phytophagous insects, diseases, weeds, pollinators and beneficial agents
* **Selection and propagation of genetic material** with a focus on quality, maintenance of diversity, clonal propagation and creation of hybrids.
* Marketing and commercialisation with emphasis on profitability and market studies, particularly international.
* **Agro-sociology of cocoa production** dedicated to the study of the communities linked to the crop, the types of economic and social organisations that are prevalent and the possibilities of these organisations to become involved in other productive activities.
* **Transfer of technology** aimed at making available to producers, regardless of size, the recommendations arising from the generation and adaptation of knowledge, through various communication techniques.

As a result of this offer, 46 projects were received for a global amount of almost 1,382 million bolivars ($ 2,764,000.00), guaranteed by the following types of institutions or organizations

* 22 by Universities and other Institutes of Higher Education (mainly the Faculty of Agronomy of the Central University of Venezuela)
* 12 by Research Organisations attached to Ministries (mainly FONAIAP).
* 6 by Regional Development Support Organizations (particularly Science and Technology Foundation of the State of Sucre)
* 6 by private research or consulting companies.

When we reviewed the numbers of projects according to the different lines tendered we found that Agro-sociology of Cocoa Production did not attract any proposals, while the rest were demanded as follows:

* 9 in Agronomic Management
* 8 in Biotic Management
* 15 in selection and propagation of genetic material
* 5 in Marketing and commercialization
* 9 in Technology transfer

Eight of the projects received were approved for funding, and with the rest of the proposals, national programmes were developed in the areas of "Rescue and conservation of cocoa genetic resources" and "Management of the biotic component of the crop"; both programmes have inter-institutional participation, coordinated by CONICIT. The proposals for technology transfer for cocoa were again sent to the regions, so that each corresponding Foundation or Commission would coordinate a programme for its region. At present, to cover those aspects of the Agenda that were not offered projects, proposals will be requested to initiate the negotiation process for the second stage of this cocoa agenda.

Specifically in this case, the topic of Cocoa is selected and developed as an agenda process. However, the Foundation of Science and Technology of the State of Aragua, is responsible, together with the CONICIT, in executing, supervising and ensuring that the projects financed by the cocoa agenda and the national programmes mentioned above are fully complied with.

**CASE: RICE AGENDA**

At the end of 1995, the primary production sectors and the national rice agro-industry created the "NATIONAL RICE FOUNDATION" (FUNDARROZ), a non-profit institution with its own patrimony, with headquarters in the states of Portuguesa, Cojedes and Guárico, whose fundamental mission is to contribute to the research of rice cultivation in all its areas, to promote scientific and technological development in terms of production, consumption, industrialization and exportation, having as a fundamental premise the preservation and rational use of the environment.

"Organizations such as this one have been operating for three years in the United States, Brazil and Colombia, as a real alternative to constantly generate and validate the most appropriate technology for efficient rice cultivation and hence the success these countries have had in maintaining advanced agricultural production.

On December 22, 1995, the members of the National Rice Circuit officially established FUNDARROZ, in the conference room of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. The capital for its operation comes from contributions from the industrial and production sectors, equivalent in each case to 0.3% of the price of conditioned Paddy rice. The industry is in charge of collecting the funds.

The official act was signed by the Minister of Agriculture and Breeding, Dr. M. K. K. Raúl Allegret, representing the National Government, and by the representatives of the different organizations that make up the Foundation: Venezuelan Association of Rice Mills (ASOVEMA), Federation of Agricultural Producers' Associations of Venezuela (FEDEAGRO), Association of Certified Seed Producers of the Western Plains (APROSCELLO), Association of Producers of the Guárico River Irrigation System (APROSIGUA) Association of Producers of the State of Cojedes (APACOJEDES), Association of Rural Producers of the State of Portugal (ASOPORTUGUESA), Association of Rural Producers of Turin (ASOPRUAT) and the organized financing programs: PALMAVEN, MIDA Calabozo, MIDA El Playón, FUSAGRI, REUNELLEZ and REUNERG. The Board of Directors was made up of four representatives of the production sector and four representatives of the industrial sector, with their respective alternates.

For the supervision of the technical training and research activities, the Board of Directors of FUNDARROZ decided to constitute the Technical Committee, in July 1996, composed of representatives of the institutions of research and development of the crop: FONAIAP, CONICIT, IUTEG (Portuguese), Instituto Tecnológico de Los Llanos (Calabozo, Guárico), Fundación DANAC, Fundación POLAR, UCV, UNELLEZ, FUSAGRI, ASOVEMA and APROSCELLO. This Committee's function is to advise the Board of Directors on the selection of projects to be financed, with the aim of giving priority to the best, highest priority, among others. It also serves as a coordinator of the activities carried out in the country in this area.

Finally, in September 1996, an agreement was signed between FUNDARROZ and CONICIT, whose main objective is to combine efforts and resources for the promotion of research and technology transfer projects applicable to rice cultivation, with a view to establishing a system of innovation in the primary production and industrial processing of this product.

From that date to the present, the Convention has served to integrate capacities with a view to improving knowledge of the technological operation of rice production systems and their agro-ecological and socio-economic environment. In the first year of its existence, CONICIT contributed the sum of 10 million to a "pot" of more than 50 million, contributing mainly to co-financing training and transfer activities, as well as to updating the Diagnosis of the Situation of the Sector in the Country, a work that served as a source of information for the generation of the Rice Agenda.

In the second year of its existence, CONICIT contributed the sum of 100 million to co-finance the projects approved in the framework of the agenda that was put out to public tender in August 1997. Out of 20 lines of research tendered, 11 pre-projects were received, located in 6 of them, formulated by 10 institutions related to the sector.

It is important to highlight the constitution of FUNDARROZ as a meeting point between primary producers and the agro-industrial sector. CONICIT participates in the steering and technical committee, providing contributions for the operation and promotion of the rice sector in the country. They basically adopted the methodology of the agendas among the different institutions that make up the board of FUNDARROZ. The projects have been oriented around the following axes:

* Soil preparation
* Sowing
* Fertilization
* Weeds
* Arthropod plague
* Vertebrates Plague
* Diseases
* Irrigation
* Harvesting and marketing
* Genetic improvement
* Seeds
* Environmental impact

1. **SOME EXPERIENCES DERIVED FROM ONGOING AGENDAS:**

1.- Drawing up a concerted research agenda aimed at innovation requires a major effort in terms of time and work, the success of which depends mainly on the selection of the universe to be consulted. The presence of qualified individuals is an important condition, but the official representation of institutions and organisations, especially public ones, is vital if a more formal operational commitment is to be made.

2.- The preparation of an adequate agenda requires detailed knowledge of the situation to be addressed; therefore, having the background of each case, properly prepared, not only facilitates the approach to the discussion, but also accelerates the agreement on what is demanded.

3.- The definition of the lines of investigation to be attacked must be made with great precision, writing them in a way that makes the objective clear, reducing the possibilities of interested interpretation as much as possible.

4.- The public offer of projects is a healthy practice; however, it must be accompanied by a specific request addressed to those institutions and personalities who are known to be interested and capable of dealing with the corresponding subject.

5.- The Agendas have proved to be an interesting experience, which has allowed institutional and personal learning about a different way of dealing with support for scientific or technological research. Its benefits and consequences are far from being able to be evaluated as a whole; for the moment, it is enough to point out that its implementation is representing a challenge for the CONICIT, from the point of view of the promoter and for the researchers and their institutions, because in the end they are the only ones who can make everything work out well; the rest of the actors are waiting, impatient and hoping that this time we do not make a mistake and find the way that facilitates innovation as part of an absolutely normal process.

6.- The deconcentration and decentralisation of agendas through the creation of inter-institutional coordination bodies between the different partners and the creation of funds to finance projects that are timely, relevant, excellent and feasible and, of course, aimed at solving specific problems that require or demand new knowledge by the users or demanders of this knowledge guarantee success and the bridge between knowledge and society.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The Agendas are an organisational response in terms of State policy and action to link our intellectual capital to the main challenges facing society, through networks of various social actors who come together in agreements, alliances and commitments. To achieve this purpose, the Agendas convene and bring together those interested in facing concrete problems to solve them using knowledge and technology, and joining their capacities and resources to those of CONICIT.

In this sense, each agenda opens up a world of possibilities guided by shared norms and values:

1) Cooperating to compete: a country, a company or a person is competitive because they develop their competencies, knowledge, skills and advantages to be among the best; and the best competitive strategy is the cooperation, networks and alliances that are built.

2) Learning and Innovation: innovation is knowledge, research and technologies incorporated into society, the market and the quality of life of the population, and it is produced if a network of knowledge, institutions, resources and attitudes, are articulated.

3) Participation and sustainability: the complex problems of our society need the talent and will of many. Solutions can no longer come from above but must be built with the help of the capacities and resources of all sectors.

4) Negotiation and Transparency: participation means above all accepting the existence of diverse interests that are legitimate and that have a great common goal. Participation is trust and cooperation to share risks and benefits in a win-win undertaking.