Jacqueline Hughes takes charge as Director General of ICRISAT

Jacqueline d'Arros Hughes, a well-known plant health expert and leader in international agricultural research, on Thursday took charge as Director General of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

Due to travel restrictions, Hughes assumed office from the Philippines during a virtual event, where she outlined the priorities for the institute during and post the Covid-19 pandemic.

The virtual event was attended by ICRISAT staff and the governing board of the institute. Hughes took charge from Peter Carberry, who has returned to Australia.

"We need to help where we can in the short-term with the Covid-19 response. ICRISAT's help will be in assuring productivity in the Semi-Arid Tropics. Risk to people, staff, communities, stakeholders, and the research on which many of our stakeholders depend, has to be minimised as the lockdown lifts," a statement from ICRISAT quoted her as saying.

At the moment, Hughes is focused on mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on agriculture by supporting smallholder farmers in the Semi-Arid Tropics of Africa and Asia in finding ways to safely return to their farms and ward off food crisis.

She also said the year 2020 must be observed with greater resolve as the International Year of Plant Health, as declared by the United Nations.

After earning a doctoral degree in microbiology/virology and spending her early research years in the UK, Hughes, a British national, moved to Ghana in the early 1990s to work with the Cocoa Research Institute and then to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Nigeria, where she took on increasingly challenging roles in virology, germplasm and plant health management.

She was then appointed Councilor for IITA's highest research management body. She then joined the World Vegetable Centre in Taiwan as its Deputy Director General-Research.

Before joining ICRISAT, Hughes was the Deputy Director General-Research at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. IRRI and ICRISAT are sister institutes in CGIAR -- the world's largest agricultural research for development body.