

THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Twenty-Eighth Meeting, CIMMYT Hq. (Mexico), 22-29 June 1982

FUTURE REVIEWS - GENERAL
(Agenda Item 6)

Proposed objectives of the discussion

In the light of the recommendations of the last Review of the CGIAR, it is suggested that the Committee, in consultation with the Centre Directors, should:

- (i) re-examine the terms of reference of external (quinquennial) reviews, the format and scope of the list of questions and the review procedures, in particular those aspects which related to management reviews, the finalization of the quinquennial review reports, their consideration by TAC and the format of TAC submissions to the CGIAR;*
- (ii) determine the schedule of future quinquennial reviews for 1983 and 1984;*
- (iii) discuss the possible scope and topics for activity/commodity reviews and their timing, beside that of training already requested by the CGIAR (see AGD/TAC:IAR/82/18 Addendum "Future Reviews: Training").*

FUTURE REVIEWS - GENERAL

Introduction

1. The following recommendation of the CGIAR Review Committee was adopted by the Group in November 1981 as regards future reviews in the CGIAR system:

"Recommendation 9. We recommend that, in addition to external financial audits, review procedures in the System should comprise the following elements:

- (a) Internal Reviews of the Institutions, commissioned by the Boards of Trustees.*
- (b) Management Reviews of the Institutions, commissioned by the CGIAR Secretariat.*
- (c) Commodity and Activity Reviews of the System, commissioned by TAC*
- (d) External Reviews of the Institutions, commissioned by TAC, and*
- (e) Reviews of the System, commissioned by the CGIAR.*

These mechanisms for review are largely consistent with those currently in use, but involve strengthening the procedures for reviewing the management of Institutions, for assessing the relevance of programmes and for coordinating common activities. The guiding principles of reviews should be to avoid duplication of effort, to use staff time as efficiently as possible, to produce recommendations for maintaining or improving the efficiency of the System, and thereby to give continued confidence to donors in the effectiveness of the System in fulfilling the purpose of the CGIAR."

2. The present document first deals with the future external (quinquennial) reviews in general and then specifically with the schedule of future reviews. The activity or commodity reviews are discussed in the last section of the document.

General Considerations on External Reviews

3. TAC formulated in 1978 detailed terms of reference and guidelines for the quinquennial reviews. Recent discussions at TAC and CG meetings do not seem to call for drastic revisions of these terms of reference nor of the guidelines but mainly for changes in the format of the presentation and perhaps of the nature of the conclusions to TAC and to the CGIAR.

4. The terms of reference are practically the same for all the quinquennial reviews. They are very comprehensive (see for example those of the Quinquennial Review of IRRI 1/, pages 2 & 3). The main problems

1/ AGD/TAC:IAR/82/9 Rev. 1

experienced so far with these terms of reference are twofold: the practical feasibility of fulfilling the task and the emphasis to be placed on the different facets of the review. Both the Review Panels and some members of the CGIAR remarked that the task as set out in the terms of reference is a very tall order. As it is practically impossible to assemble a high level expert group for more than three consecutive weeks, the Panels have to work extremely hard. The pressure of work makes it difficult for the Panels to address strategic considerations in the last days of the reviews when formulating their conclusions. It is also difficult to reassemble the whole full Panel a second time when the reactions of the Board and those of TAC to the draft report have to be considered and the draft report finalized. The review report is usually finalized by an "editing" committee of the Panel which cannot depart very much from the main conclusions of the full Panel, and therefore cannot go very much further in addressing strategic issues.

5. The terms of reference of the quinquennial reviews are usually supplemented with a list of questions which comprises many questions raised by TAC, by the Board of Trustees, the management of the Centre, the Chairman of the Panel and the members of the CGIAR. This procedure was launched with the purpose of compensating for the general nature and comprehensiveness of the terms of reference, thus trying to give more focus, sharpness and relevance to the review process. As contributions are received from multiple sources, however, the list of questions tends to be rather long. These may be grouped under different headings (mandate, policies, specific programme issues, management, etc.) but the list inevitably increases as more people are consulted, especially when some donors request the consideration of specific aspects which are of particular interest to them. The format and scope of these lists of questions may therefore have to be reviewed. It may be necessary also to separate more clearly those questions which a Review Panel may address from those which should be dealt with by the Board of Trustees or by TAC.

6. Although the introduction of the lists of questions in the quinquennial reviews procedures was aimed at giving more sharpness and focus to the reviews, TAC and the CGIAR often noted that the reports were "bland" and lacked "teeth". It should first be remarked that the standards of the IARCs are high and therefore in general an external review panel can be expected to be very favourably impressed by their work and their results. A review panel may be hesitant to engage in making criticisms on some minor points when it is generally satisfied with its findings and does not wish to undermine the support of the CGIAR to the Centre concerned. In other cases, it was felt that some issues should be resolved by the management of the Centre or by TAC. Nevertheless, the question of making the quinquennial reviews more incisive deserves further discussion, in particular whether the lists of questions, or some other procedures could assist in this respect.

7. The balance to be achieved between the scientific assessment of the programmes and the review of the mandate, objectives and priorities of the Centres was already reviewed by TAC in the past when the terms of reference were changed and the present formulation was adopted. It is difficult, however, to assemble a review panel which can address both

aspects with equal effectiveness and competence as part of the same process and in a relatively short time. Moreover, some questions related to the mandate, and priorities of a Centre cannot be discussed without considering those of other Centres. It may not be possible, therefore, for an external review panel (i.e. a group of people who are not part of the system) to sort out the priorities for a given Centre adequately and, in some cases, TAC itself may have to do more than referring its comments and suggestions to the panel with the hope that some issues which go beyond the consideration of an individual Centre will be addressed and resolved satisfactorily.

8. The question of the respective roles of the review panels, of TAC, of the CGIAR and the Board in the external review process comes up even more acutely when discussing the future resource requirements of the Centre. The first pre-requisite is of course the availability, before the quinquennial review actually starts, of a long-term plan in which the Centre indicates its future requirements and priorities. There are still cases where these requirements are not indicated in the long-term plans or are not given in a comprehensive manner or were based on assumptions of the availability of future financial resources which do not seem realistic anymore in the present situation. It is obviously difficult under these conditions for the Panel to make specific recommendations in this regard. A Centre may also prefer to wait for the outcome of an external review before determining its future requirements and reformulating its long-term plans. Many questions related to the future resource requirements of a Centre, however, cannot be dealt with adequately by a review panel as some issues transcend the consideration of an individual Centre and, therefore, should be addressed by TAC, whereas others are of managerial nature and should be dealt with by the Board and the directorate of the Centre. A quinquennial review panel may outline broad priorities which may have to be indicated more sharply by TAC and reviewed by the Board and the CGIAR as to their practical implications.

9. The above considerations lead to suggest that TAC should examine in consultation with the Centre Directors, the sequence of action which should follow the main phase of a review, i.e. what happens after the completion of the first draft of the quinquennial review report until the submission of conclusions and recommendations to the CGIAR. Some questions may be referred back to the Panel or to the Centre but broader issues may have to be identified and addressed by TAC itself and some recommendations may have to be elaborated at this stage and made more specific. The Board of Trustees of the Centre concerned should also be involved in this process and this not only by providing its comments to the review panel or to the CGIAR but by interacting with TAC itself before the submission of the conclusions and recommendations to the CGIAR, in particular as regards the formulation of the next programme and budget and a possible revision of the long-term plan.

10. The discussions at the last CGIAR meeting clearly indicated that the format of the presentation of the Quinquennial Review Report of ILCA is a welcome improvement. It may be necessary, however, to take other steps so as to ensure that important recommendations of the quinquennial review and/or of TAC are clearly endorsed by the CGIAR. In addition, a procedure should be found by which the differences between the views of the Board of Trustees and those of TAC can be addressed and resolved in the CGIAR and the position of the Group on these points can be recorded

more explicitly. It seems, therefore, that it is the format of the presentation of the conclusions and recommendations of TAC itself to the CGIAR which calls for further improvement rather than that of the quinquennial review panel. The quinquennial review reports were submitted so far to the CGIAR by means of a transmittal letter of the Chairman of TAC to the Chairman of the CGIAR attaching the comments and recommendations of TAC in the form of an extract of its records of proceedings. A different mode of transmittal may identify more clearly the points which require the CGIAR attention (in particular those related to the mandate, the policies and the future resource requirements) and the important recommendations which call for an endorsement of the Group.

11. Two other points require clarification: the periodicity of the external reviews and their linkage with management reviews. The wording of the CGIAR recommendations ("external" review instead of quinquennial review) seems to indicate that these reviews should be made as and when required although the CGIAR Review Report indicated however that the present quinquennial basis should be regarded as the norm. It is not clear, however, whether the decision on their timing should be left to TAC in consultation with the Centre concerned or should be taken by the CGIAR. As to the management reviews, their organization and scope require further discussion. It is, therefore, suggested that, for the time being, the external reviews conducted by TAC continue to cover those aspects of the management which are indicated in their terms of reference. The CGIAR Secretariat in consultation with the Centre Directors should develop proposals for the management reviews and their linkage with external reviews.

Schedule of Future External Reviews

12. Several reviews are already scheduled as follows:

CIMMYT	-	6 - 24 September 1982
CIP	-	7 - 19 February 1983
ICARDA	-	9 - 29 March 1983

13. The preparations for these reviews are already well underway and the Secretariat will report on progress made as part of the discussions to be held individually with the Centre Director concerned when considering their P&B proposal (Item 5).

14. The second round of quinquennial reviews should proceed further in the following order: CIAT, IITA, ICRISAT, WARDA whereas the first review of IFPRI and ISNAR should also be undertaken.

15. The timing should be discussed with the Centre Directors and take into account also the number of quinquennial reviews which TAC and the CGIAR can be expected to handle effectively each year (probably two or three), beside other reviews which are discussed below.

Commodity or Activity Reviews

16. The report of the CGIAR Review Committee noted that reviews which focus on a single commodity or activity could provide opportunities for reviewing more completely programmes of different Centres, that have common elements, examine their relevance, their coordination and their resource requirements. The commodity or activity reviews would, therefore, go beyond the "stripe analysis" which aimed at describing ongoing activities in a subject area explaining their rationale and facilitating the development of common concepts and approaches, while recognizing that they were termed "analyses" rather than "reviews" because at that time the CGIAR did "not like to see them become mechanisms that encourage uniformity".

17. Beside the stripe analyses of farming systems research and of off-campus activities, TAC had actually carried out what may be called commodity or activity reviews in several fields such as plant nutrition, crop protection and upland rice. The studies on plant nutrition and crop protection, however, aimed mostly at a review of priorities, the identification of gaps and the formulation of general principles as to the role and objectives of the CGIAR system in these fields, whereas the review of upland rice activities is more directly focussed on coordination and cooperation.

18. The scope of commodity or activity reviews will deserve further discussion. Recommendation 2 of the CGIAR Review Committee actually amounts at requesting an activity review in the broad field of training. The feasibility of such review is discussed in a separate document 1/. It raises, however, more general issues as to the breadth of the subject to be tackled. The review of a single commodity may be too narrow and lead to biased conclusions. The review of a group of commodities (food legumes or roots and tubers) may be more useful in setting priorities across Centres, but is a major undertaking which would require time and means.

19. The topics for across-centre reviews may go beyond the consideration of an activity or a commodity but perhaps examine the specific needs and ongoing programmes in a given geographical region or ecological zone. As regards the activities, and beside training, communication and publications, international testing programmes, on-farm research, seed multiplication, collection and interpretation of ecological information and data may be considered as possible topics for reviews. Food legumes, roots and tubers, and pastures and animal research may be among the priority subjects for commodity reviews. Among the regions which may deserve attention are those identified in the TAC priority paper, namely the irrigated areas in arid and semi-arid zones, the high rainfall areas of humid tropics, and the tropical highlands. As to geographical regions, the arid/semi-arid areas of Africa and the Andes may deserve particular attention in assessing the scale and nature of contributions of different centres in relation with local problems and needs.

20. Finally, TAC should consider whether it wishes to develop some common terms of reference, guidelines and procedures for these reviews or handle them on an ad hoc basis. It may be preferable to gain further experience with some reviews before addressing these questions. The most urgent question, therefore, is whether TAC would wish to engage in other across-centre reviews next year beside that of training, taking into account the schedule of quinquennial reviews.