

THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Forty-Fourth Meeting, Washington, D.C., 19-24 October 1987

NEW CGIAR VENTURES: VEGETABLES RESEARCH

(Agenda Item 6(a))

Secretariat Note

This note should be reviewed along with the Consultant's Report on Vegetable Research (AGR/TAC:IAR/87/29). TAC may wish to consider the issues highlighted by the Secretariat.

TAC SECRETARIAT
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

October 1987

CGIAR SUPPORTED RESEARCH ON VEGETABLES

(Secretariat Note)

General Remarks

The consultant has produced an excellent report. It contains many useful and challenging recommendations and a sound proposal for a new CGIAR initiative on vegetables. During the study the consultant had many extensive contacts with a wide range of research scientists and administrators from selected national, regional and international research programmes and institutions in both developed and developing countries.

Main Issues

(a) Priority species and activities

Five commodities namely, tomato, pepper, onion, okra and egg-plant have been identified for priority attention. In addition green leafy vegetables are said to be of high priority particularly in Africa (paras. 59-67). Heat tolerance, social sciences research, seed production research, post-harvest technology, nutrition research, training, and information services have also been suggested as areas deserving serious consideration by the new CGIAR entity (paras. 77-91).

TAC may wish to consider the following questions:

- (i) What would be the optimal number of commodities for the proposed network?
- (ii) How can the coordinating body ensure proper research focus and adequacy of financial resources to support both a critical mass of research scientists and funds for contract research for each commodity if the number of commodities remains as proposed?

(b) Institutional structure and organization

The proposed entity calls for a single global vegetable research network based on commodity programmes (paras. 107-109), a coordinating body with an in-house research capacity (paras. 117-139), a sub-base in Africa, and possibly another sub-base in Latin America. There would also be a board of trustees, a management entity, regional coordinator(s), commodity programmes coordinators, a core headquarters research staff and cooperating scientists in national and international institutions (paras. 140-147).

The following questions merit attention by TAC in light of the proposed institutional structure and organization:

- (i) What would be the chain of command?
- (ii) What would be the relationship between the Asian, African and Latin American regional coordinators with the commodity programme coordinators?

- (iii) What is the rationale for a single global research network? Could a restricted number of specific networks involving carefully selected collaborating institutions be more cost-effective if supplemented with a global information exchange network in which the weak national programmes could also participate? (see para. 110).
- (iv) TAC has consistently urged that any new initiative on vegetables should have close collaboration with AVRDC. Are the proposed collaborative arrangements with AVRDC feasible and adequate? (paras. 92-100).
- (v) It has been suggested that the entity should have an initial life span of 6-8 years. Is the proposed phasing of activities realistic? Why not establish concurrently a sub-base in Latin America involving collaboration between Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico whose activities could have beneficial spill-over effects for countries in the Andean chain, Central America and the Caribbean, or possibly Africa or Asia?

(c) Strategic planning and priority setting

The proposed network is supposed to use a bottom up approach in its strategic planning and priority setting:

- (i) What would be the respective roles of the Board, the coordinating body, the advisory committee and the collaborating institutions?
- (ii) Would the diversity of needs and capacities among cooperating national programmes cause problems on priority setting?
- (iii) How would the coordinating entity ensure scientific quality and relevance of network activities?

(d) Funding needs and resource allocation

The bulk of the research is expected to be done by scientists based in national programmes. And yet only \$500,000 out of an annual recurrent expenditure of about \$5 million would be earmarked for contract research.

- (i) Is the notion of decentralized research adequately reflected in the proportion of resources suggested for headquarters research? How different would this approach be from the traditional CGIAR Centre concept?
- (ii) What is the justification for investing over \$2 million for capital development at the headquarters? Could not such facilities be leased from a national institution? Thailand is said to have excellent facilities already.

(e) Name of the new organization

A number of suggestions were given as possible names for the coordinating body (paras. 117 and 118). Why does the word "Service" not appear in any of the proposed names? Given the experience with ISNAR, ICRAF and IBPGR, there is no reason to assume that calling the organization a "Board", "Council" or "Service" would diminish its role in research. A "Service" would probably indicate better the supporting role of the proposed entity (cf. ISNAR).