



From: The Secretariat

August 21, 1997

**Report of the NGO Committee to the CGIAR  
Mid-Term Meeting, 1997  
Cairo, Egypt**

The CGIAR NGO Committee (NGOC) held its fourth meeting in Cairo on May 25-26, 1997. Attached is the report presented by the committee to the CGIAR at MTM97.

Attachment

Distribution:

CGIAR Members  
TAC Chair, Members, Secretariat  
Impact Assessment Evaluation Group  
Genetic Resources Policy Committee  
NGO Committee  
Private Sector Committee  
Committee of Board Chairs  
Center Directors Committee

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**I. Activities during the period November 1, 1996 - May 15, 1997**

**1. Center visits**

Various members of the NGOC visited CIP, CIAT, CIMMYT, IITA and IFPRI during the period. In most visits, NGOC members were joined by members of NGOs from the host country. The purpose of the visits was for NGOs to better understand the nature of the research conducted by the IARCs, and for NGOs to analyze the relevance of the research conducted by Centers to the needs of the rural poor and suggest ways in which centers' research agendas can be modified to better fit farmers needs. In many cases, NGOs presented to the scientists of the various Centers a description of their rural development strategies and work, thus allowing for a fruitful exchange of opinions between NGO members and center staff.

The exchange resulted in a better mutual understanding of perspectives and approaches and led to the identification of areas for potential collaboration. It also stimulated discussions on the types of desirable partnerships that could be created so that IARCs and NGOs can jointly target the poor with programs that enhance food security, environmental preservation and income generation. One concrete example is the emergence of a partnership between CIMMYT and three Mexican NGOs on the conservation of biodiversity and improvement of soil quality in maize agroecosystems in the Purepecha region of Michoacan, Mexico. A group of NGOs in Colombia has also had some discussions with CIAT to define a collaborative program where NGOs and CIAT scientists can engage in joint field work. A specific project for IPM research in the Cauca Valley involving a NGO has been initiated.

**2. Participation in the Genetic Resources Policy Committee workshop on ethics and equity in conservation and use of genetic resources for sustainable food security, Brazil, April 22-25, 1997**

Committee members Jeff McNeeley and Ranil Senanayake participated in this workshop and produced a report distributed at MTM97 detailing the position of the NGOC on the issues discussed. The following recommendations of the NGOC are highlighted:

- support by the NGOC for the creation and functioning of a code of ethics to guide the work of the CGIAR in the areas of biodiversity and biotechnology as well as in the area of farmer's knowledge and farmer's rights.

- create an independent committee (which includes NGO representatives as members) that reviews and recommends approval of biodiversity-biotechnology related research to be conducted by the CGIAR. Given that such areas transcend the boundaries of science and impinge on the welfare of society it is crucial that the CGIAR has a mechanism that ensures that biotechnology and biodiversity related research meets a series of ethical, safety, economic and open access standards.

## II. Meetings with other CGIAR committees:

During MTM 97 the NGOC met with members of the private sector committee on two occasions: during a field trip organized by the private sector committee and more formally at a dinner meeting. Although some members from both committees do not agree on a number of topics, both Committees have found that discussions on issues related to biotechnology, strategies for poverty alleviation, the role of private sector initiatives within the CGIAR, etc. can be very productive and can be carried out within a climate of mutual respect. It will be challenging, however, for the CGIAR to balance the views of both committees when making decisions about research directions.

Discussions with TAC revolved around many important topics:

- The importance of NGO inputs into the TAC's mission of overseeing resource allocations and ensuring the quality of the science conducted by the CGIAR centers was conveyed. For the NGO committee, what is important is not only to make sure that the science is of high quality but that it is also of relevance to the need of the rural poor.
- On budget matters, there is concern about the high transaction costs of ecoregional research projects. CGIAR scientists spend so much money and time in planning research to be implemented at the local level, when instead they should focus on strategic research and take better advantage of NGO capabilities who are best suited to carry out technological innovation and adaptation work at the local level. It must be made clear, however, that NGOs are not willing to serve only as extensionists of CGIAR technology, but that NGOs insist in establishing a collaborative process through which NGOs can have participation in technology development from the beginning.
- Many NGOs have established successful local projects that have led to yield stability in marginal environments and in less favored areas, and it is in these areas that partnerships should be established to derive lessons from such local successes, to use such local information to inform macrolevel policies and research agendas, and also to encourage partnerships to scale up NGO successful experiences.
- On biotechnology, the NGOC expressed its concerns about the issues of risk, safety, ethical aspects and open access. It raised questions about increasing funds for fundamental biotechnology research at the expense

of natural resource management research projects which in the NGOC's opinion are relevant for the rural poor. Further dialogue with the TAC was deemed crucial.

Although NGOC members did not meet with members of the IAEG, the NGOC raised the following:

- Involve NGO members in the analysis of CGIAR impact on poverty alleviation. A major question that remains is whether the rural poor have really benefited from the agricultural innovations of the CGIAR.
- Include case studies of NGO projects for comparative purposes, as comparisons of the economic costs and benefits of high and low-input technologies can be of great use to guide future research. The NGOC believes that indigenous and NGO production choices generally outperform CGIAR introduced options under conditions of increasing insecurity and ecological marginality.
- Include natural resource accounting techniques to evaluate environmental impacts of CGIAR field projects, as estimating the environmental damage or externalities associated with various technologies can also be an important tool to guide future research.

### **III. Global Forum on Agricultural Research**

NGOC Chair participated in the meetings of the Global Forum Steering Committee (GFSC) and recommended that the committee should include at least one representative from southern NGOs, as well as members of farmers' organizations and southern Universities. It was made clear that NGOs would not look favorably at the creation of another bureaucratic global research structure that triggers another set of meetings, but that rather the GF should focus its activities on the establishment of key partnerships that crystallize their actions into concrete field projects. The NGOC Chair offered a series of locations where NGOs are already conducting successful projects and that such areas could serve as pilot areas to establish collaborative projects that involve NGOs, farmers organizations, NARs and IARCs to scale up impact in various rural communities.

### **IV. Biotechnology**

The NGOC endorsed a paper written by Chair Miguel A. Altieri entitled "The CGIAR and Biotechnology: can the renewal keep the promise of a research agenda for the rural poor?" The paper was distributed during the CGIAR stakeholders' consultations on biotechnology held on April 18, 1997 at Washington, D.C. It was also distributed and served as one of the background papers for discussions of the agenda item "Biotechnology in the CGIAR" during MTM 97.

## V. CGIAR External Review

The NGOC feels that the CGIAR external review is of pivotal importance for the future of world agriculture and members expressed their interest in having major input into the review process, including:

- proposing names of NGO members to be included in review committees
- making available to all review committees all NGOC reports and other relevant materials
- writing a position paper outlining the NGOC's perspectives on the future governance structure, research agenda and funding of the CGIAR.

Members of the NGOC feel that the CGIAR has a) to increase the involvement of farmers and NGOs in defining the centers' research agenda, b) to expand its commodity-based research to address wider parameters of sustainability, food security and livelihood systems, c) to diversify the constituency of its governance by including more members of the South that speak for the needs of the poor and advocate for more holistic approaches to agriculture, and d) to decentralize its research by creating effective and transparent partnerships with NGOs and farmers organizations.