

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Nineteenth Meeting, Nairobi, Kenya 6 - 13 June, 1978

REPORT OF SECOND MEETING OF THE TAC SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON TROPICAL VEGETABLE RESEARCH

(Agenda Item 14)

TAC SECRETARIAT  
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
ROME 1978

### 1. Opening of the Meeting

The second meeting of the TAC Subcommittee on Tropical Vegetable Research (TACVRSC) was held on 5th June, 1978, at ILRAD, Nairobi.

Dr. T. Ajibola Taylor was in the Chair.

The meeting was attended by the three other members; Prof. G. Camus, Drs. A. Blumenschein and A.B. Joshi; Dr.J. Moomaw, Director, Asian Vegetable Research and Development Centre; Dr R.W. Cummings, Chairman of TAC, also attended at the invitation of the Subcommittee.

### 2. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting agenda, as earlier circulated to Subcommittee members, was adopted with minor modification. The main items on the agenda were

- (i) Review of the report of the 1st meeting of the TAC VRSC;
- (ii) Priorities for vegetable research; and
- (iii) The concept of a single, new international centre for vegetable research.

### 3. Future programme of work

The Subcommittee endorsed the decision taken at an informal meeting during the 18th TAC meeting in February, 1978, that it should determine its future programme of work on the basis of timing a recommendation to the CGIAR, relative to the present climate on funding of the CG system overall. As pointed out by the Chairman of TAC, although some CG members were keen to see TAC come up soon with a recommendation on vegetable research, at the same time there was a feeling in the CGIAR that the so-called consolidation period should be extended at least through 1979. The projected total requirement for funds from the CGIAR in 1979 and 1980 would be around \$105m and \$120m respectively, as against \$85 for 1978. Although much of this increase was due to inflation, a number of the IARCs were still requiring additional funds to complete capital programmes and fill gaps in research programmes and staffing in line with TAC quinquennial review recommendations.

Thus the CG would need to look hard and close at any new proposals

for its financial support at least until the question of priorities had been sorted out. There was a need to examine priorities within priorities which required improved quantification of data. This should be taken into account when preparing any new proposal on vegetable research.

The Subcommittee agreed therefore, that it should plan its activities in order to present a firm proposal to the TAC meeting in February 1979 with the objective of having TAC, at its following meeting consider a recommendation for submission to the CGIAR meeting in November 1979.

The Subcommittee also agreed with the suggestion of the TAC Chairman that in considering any new proposal it should closely examine the criteria for assessing the suitability of proposals for CGIAR support, which were endorsed by TAC in its 18th session<sup>1/</sup> as well as the criteria suggested as being essential for "associate status" in the CGIAR<sup>2/</sup>.

In addition the Subcommittee agreed that it should attempt to obtain as much quantitative data as possible in terms of the more specific assessment criteria which the Chairman was developing as part of his formulation of a policy for the allocation of resources in the CGIAR system and which he intended to present to TAC at this 19th meeting.

The Subcommittee decided that it should not await the outcome of TAC's current review of priorities but should continue to examine the alternatives proposals for support to vegetable research on the basis of TAC's decision at its 17th meeting to accord vegetable research first priority status.

#### 4. Earlier decision of the Subcommittee

At its first meeting the TAC VRSC considered the following specific alternatives:

- (i) The establishment of an International Centre for Tropical Research, as earlier recommended in report of TAC Vegetable Research Appraisal Mission (DDR:IAR/76/1; January, 1976);

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<sup>1/</sup> Annex VI Report of the 18th meeting of TAC, February, 1978; AGD/TAC:IAR/78/13

<sup>2/</sup> Refer para.14 of the CG Secretariat paper "Concept of Associate Status" October 20th, 1977, annexed to TAC document AGD/TAC/IAR/78/19.

- (ii) The setting up of a vegetable research pilot project, which would be limited initially to two sites, one in Asia, another in Africa, operating under a designated executing agency responsible to a number of bilateral donors. It was envisaged that the programme might be assigned "associate status" within the CGIAR;
- (iii) The establishment of an International Council for Tropical Vegetable Research (ICTVR) which would formulate programmes and develop activities for international support to vegetable research. It was proposed that the Council would, in the first phase of programme development, set up two bases, one each in Asia and Africa, as recommended in the report of the TAC Vegetable Research. Project Formulation Mission. Another base in Latin America was also contemplated.

After considering the above three alternatives, the Subcommittee came to the conclusion that an International Council for Tropical Vegetable Research would provide the best solution for an additional international effort in vegetable research, and accordingly recommended that it be established under the auspices of the CGIAR for an initial period of five years.

Details of the proposed objectives, terms of reference membership, etc. as well as a broad outline of the project activities based on the recommendations of the TAC Vegetable Research Project Formulation mission are given in Report of the Subcommittee's 1st meeting (pp 7-13, DDD/TAC:IAR/77/27).

TAC at its 17th meeting, after considering this recommendation of the VRSC, concluded that the proposal for the establishment of ICTVR had not yet been sufficiently advanced with respect to the necessary details which would be required in a proposal for submission to the CGIAR. One particular question which had been raised by the TAC Chairman was how the three bases (in Asia, Africa and Latin America) to be established and administered under ICTVR, would relate to the future possible concentration of an international vegetable research effort at one location, which was implicit in the Subcommittee's submission. It was difficult not to view the three bases of the pilot project as being the nuclei of regional research centres.

#### 5. Recent developments affecting this decision

At its informal meeting during the 18th TAC meeting the VRSC

was informed of two matters which had a direct bearing on the Subcommittee's decision to further develop the ICTVR proposal following the conclusion reached at the 17th TAC meeting.

The first concerned the location of the African base at IITA which had been recommended. In the light of the TAC Quinquennial Review mission's strong recommendation that IITA should not involve itself further in any research on vegetables and because of the very high cost of adding research staff to the Institute (in 1980 estimated \$2.8 million for 5 new members), it was now obvious that IITA could not be considered as the African base. It had been envisaged that the proposed pilot project would rely to a large extent on its base at IITA to make a quick and auspicious start since establishment of the necessary facilities at the Asian base would be a slower development.

The second matter relates to the viability of establishing bases in the vegetable research pilot project with the level of senior international research staff (2-3 members/base) which had been recommended in paras 41 and 102 in the Report of the TAC Vegetable Research Project Formulation Mission. In consultations between the TAC and CG Secretariats it was pointed out that the CGIAR was unlikely to consider such small nuclei of research staff without a larger parent research institution as a viable proposition for CGIAR funding.

A more recent development concerns the future of the Asian Vegetable Research and Development Centre in relation to its programme of work and budget.

Dr J. Moomaw, in a memorandum to the VRSC, provided a very comprehensive account of the present situation at AVRDC, particularly with respect to recent Board action and decisions, and programme changes and problems in implementation, at AVRDC.

The Board of Directors of AVRDC, at its meeting in April of this year, resolved that the Centre should "continue to function as an international agricultural research and development centre for a third five-year period, January 1981 through December 1985. The Board and its administration pledged

to seek expanded financing and agreed to continue to pursue the objectives of the Centre as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding. The Board members acknowledged other international initiatives in vegetable research and stated that it was AVRDC policy to cooperate fully with the other international and national project programs or institutes which are devoted to objectives that are the same or similar to those of AVRDC."

But, as pointed in Dr. Moomaw's memorandum, this action by the AVRDC Board does not necessarily guarantee an increase in funding or even continuation of the present inadequate level although it does affirm the intention of the Centre to continue its research programme and training activities at the present level in its present location.

While AVRDC is recognized by TAC as being a valuable resource base for vegetable research it should be equally recognised, as brought out in the memorandum, that AVRDC does only a small part in the total task of furnishing tropical agriculture with improved vegetable crop technology, as it is concentrating its efforts on only six of more than 100 crops identified as vegetables. Notwithstanding this 'small part' it plays, AVRDC has made a valuable contribution to vegetable research, notably in developing a tropical tomato. However, it has a number of problems identified as being substantial. These are summarized below:

- (i) Training - facility of AVRDC currently underutilized owing to constraints many countries place on travel to Taiwan;
- (ii) Staff recruitment - limitation on recruitment of staff from some countries and financial constraints limiting AVRDC's ability to compete on the international market;
- (iii) Outreach Programmes - political reaction has severely curtailed AVRDC's attempts to develop cooperative programmes other than Korea and the Philippines in the Asian region;

- (iv) Target orientation - because of its location AVRDC is influenced to a large degree to place emphasis and orient its programme on larger farms. It would require another centre to focus on the very small producers (including kitchen gardeners);
- (v) Priorities among vegetable crops - While AVRDC's current programme covering six crops stemmed from initial consultation with CGIAR and TAC on selection of crops, it includes only one crop (tomatoes) in the priority list of the TAC VRSC. However, AVRDC is planning to review its crop research priorities. It has already carried out work on leafy green vegetables, such as Amaranthus, and sweet potato tips, and this group of crops deserves more attention.
- (vi) Economics and social science surveys - AVRDC has carried out a series of surveys in Taiwan leading to a number of successful systems for vegetable crops production and development of increased rural incomes. AVRDC is limited in its ability to test the models in other countries and expand the work.

In the light of these developments the Subcommittee believes that there is little value in further pursuing the ICTVR proposal at this time. It has therefore decided to re-examine the first alternative, that is, the establishment of new single international centre for tropical vegetable research.

6. The Single international centre concept.

The Subcommittee recognizes the fact that TAC, on two previous occasions, has had before it proposals to establish an international centre for vegetable research. TAC had earlier (February 1975) examined the IVRIT proposal presented by Dr A. C. McClung Rockefeller Foundation. Later at its 12th meeting, February, 1976, TAC considered the report of the Vegetable Research Appraisal Mission which recommended the establishment of an international centre in combination with a network approach

The main reasons for TAC not endorsing this recommendation and which the VRSC reiterated in the report of its 1st meeting are:-

(i) The diversity of vegetables and local preferences make it difficult to concentrate all the international research efforts at a single centre;

(ii) In fact, research on several vegetables was already internationally supported at different international centres and through a large number of technical assistance projects to national institution; and

(iii) The information available on research needs and global priorities, and on the potential impact of a large scale international research effort was not sufficient at this stage to justify the long-term commitments and the level of capital investment usually required for the establishment of an IARC.

Notwithstanding the validity of these reasons, the Subcommittee feels that they bear critical examination in the context of the evolving situation in international vegetable research both in terms of the higher priority accorded by TAC and the political and financial constraints limiting the work of AVRDC.

After considerable discussion on the most suitable method of approach to the formulation of a firm proposal, the Subcommittee agreed to request the TAC Secretariat to prepare a paper providing the rationale and formulation of the proposal, and details as to size, subject area coverage, mechanism for implementation and governance, possible locations and criteria for selection and development of a cooperative network.

Particular aspects which needed to be carefully considered are:-

(i) development of a clear definition of the functions which a new centre would perform;



(ii) concentration on those priority activities recommended by the consultant mission, not covered by AVRDC;

(iii) making full use of AVRDC as a secondary testing station and of its training and cooperative programmes;

(iv) considering the governance of the new centre with a possible overlap with the AVRDC Board in view;

(v) determining the critical mass of scientists and support staff required;

(vi) determining procedures for the location of a new centre.

The Secretariat intended to have the paper ready for distribution to members of the Subcommittee by November 30. On the basis of comments received a final draft would be prepared for consideration by the Subcommittee at its 3rd meeting which is scheduled for February, 1979, just prior to the 20th TAC meeting in Rome.