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THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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TROPICAL VEGETABLE RESEARCH

TAC Secretariat Note

(Agenda Item 3.3.)

TAC SECRETARIAT

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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## TROPICAL VEGETABLE RESEARCH

### TAC Secretariat Note <sup>1/</sup>

#### Introduction

1. In March this year TAC formally submitted to the CGIAR a proposal for establishing a new international centre for research on tropical vegetables. This was discussed by the CGIAR at its special meeting on May 3-4 in Paris.
2. The proposal represented the culmination of TAC's deliberation and the work of its ad hoc Subcommittee on Tropical Vegetable Research over the past two years. TAC had also employed two consultant missions; one to examine the real need for an additional international effort in vegetable research and the other to formulate a pilot project proposal to create a new IARC. TAC's discussion of the proposal is recorded in the Report of the 21st meeting (AGD/TAC:IAR/79/12).

#### Response of the CGIAR to the proposal

3. Eleven representatives of donor members of the CGIAR spoke on the proposal. Of these, five supported the proposal; the two principal donors indicating strong support. The other six donors, while recognizing the need for additional research on tropical vegetables, had reservations on the proposal for a number of reasons which are elaborated below. From the discussion it was concluded that whereas the majority of CG donors agreed on the high priority for vegetable research, a significant number had important questions or reservations of such fundamental nature about the merit of the proposal as to preclude the CGIAR from reaching a decision to act on the TAC proposal.
4. TAC was asked, therefore, to bring a more refined proposal before the Group at a subsequent date, if possible at the meeting in November of this year. The main concerns expressed related to: (i) the problem of determining priorities among the very wide range of tropical vegetables; (ii) the need to consider farming systems (cropping systems) in the research programme; (iii) the need for a clearer definition of the proposed programme of work of the centre, and (iv) an indication of the ultimate size of the centre.
5. Although the CG had attempted to consider the proposal only in the context of TAC's current review of priorities, and more specifically the priorities for filling the most important gaps in international agricultural research, an overriding consideration was the financial outlook of the CG system. The number of reservations expressed however indicated that the proposal did not have yet the kind of clear majority which a new activity should have before it would be taken on by the Group as a collective responsibility.

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<sup>1/</sup> This note should be read in conjunction with the original "Proposal for the Creation of an International Centre for Vegetable Research within the CGIAR System" (AGD/TAC:IAR/79/17).

### Follow-up action by TAC

6. In order to submit the proposal with the necessary refinements to the CG meeting in November, TAC will need to have the proposal paper redrafted and cleared during its present meeting. To undertake this task TAC may wish to reconvene its vegetable research subcommittee.<sup>1</sup>
7. The main revision and/or addition needed in the proposal paper are in Chapters III and IV and in the latter, sections D and possibly E. Any changes in the suggested staffing pattern in terms of total numbers of senior scientists (international staff) would need to be reflected in Section G of Chapter IV and Annex II which relate to budgetary requirements.
8. Although one CG member was not wholly convinced that a case had been made in Chapter II for the need of a new centre, particularly with regard to the nature of international support required, the potential for progress in this research area, and the real importance of vegetables to the poorer peoples, most other members appeared well satisfied. TAC, or its Subcommittee, however, may wish to consider the need for reinforcing or restating the case as presented.
9. Paragraph 32 of the proposal paper could be augmented to give an account of the current state of action by the IBPGR on tropical vegetables. An information note from the IBPGR Secretariat can be made available upon request.

### Selection of priority vegetables species for research

10. Concern has been expressed by both CG and TAC members of the difficulty in selecting a sufficiently small number of species from the very wide range of vegetables to be representative of a number of developing countries and meet the needs of the poorer people. In Section III (paras 36-38) of the proposal paper, the rationale for the Subcommittee's selection of priority vegetable species for research is stated. The Subcommittee concluded that there were some 15 vegetables (some admittedly being composed of a number of species, e.g. Amaranthus spp) which deserved attention judged on the ranking of seven parameters. The list of vegetables is given in the table on page 9a of the proposal paper. However, the Subcommittee recognized that this list was too large for consideration in the research programme of IVRIT. For this reason nine vegetables were selected from the list and of these six were regarded as having higher priority. This recommendation of priorities within priorities among vegetable species is given in para 48 of the paper.
11. It is possible that some confusion may have arisen with respect to the number of vegetable species recommended for consideration in the crop improvement programme of IVRIT. There should be a reference to para 48 in Chapter II and perhaps it should be more clearly stated that TAC has recommended only six vegetables (of which four are named species) in the proposal.

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<sup>1</sup>The Chairman of TAC may wish to nominate a member to replace Prof.G. Camus on the Subcommittee.

12. Alternatively, TAC may consider it not necessary to be so definitive at this early stage but merely to recommend that not more than six vegetables be in the core breeding programme of IVRIT at any one time. TAC may wish to suggest that in the formative stages of the centre an international workshop be convened to assist the Board and management of IVRIT in making a final decision on priority species and its research programme.

13. Paragraph 38 of the paper refers to the work at IITA and ICRISAT on the cowpea which can also be considered as a vegetable. It might be appropriate also for reference to be made to the work of IARCs on other grain legumes and roots and tubers which are sometimes considered as vegetables, or at least, parts of the plants are used as vegetables, such as:

Potatoes	-----	CIP
Sweet potatoes	)	
Yams	)	IITA
Soybeans	)	
Pigeonpeas	)	ICRISAT
Chickpeas	)	
Cassava	-----	IITA and CIAT
Broadbeans	-----	ICARDA

14. Related to the selection of priority vegetables is the statement in para 41 on target beneficiaries. The reference to the "improved varieties of solanaceous and leguminous vegetables, will have application in ... commercial enterprises which are oriented to exportable vegetables" may be an overstatement and could be misleading. This should be made more specific or perhaps omitted.

#### Role of farming systems (cropping systems) in IVRIT's programme

15. The proposal refers to the evaluation of vegetables in cropping systems of staple cereal and root crops as an important activity in the crop environment and management programme (para 50). It also calls for strong collaboration with existing IARCs to further evaluate the role of vegetables in cropping/farming systems (para 60).

16. If the present format of the description of recommended programme activities is to be retained (see below, para 20), then Section iii on p 12 subtitled Crops environment and management could be redrafted to refer more specifically to work on small farm systems and kitchen gardens in which vegetables are the dominant crops. It should be noted however that farming systems per se would not have heavy emphasis in the IVRIT programme.

17. It is anticipated that training programme would put strong emphasis on kitchen gardens and that part of training programmes would involve trainees in planning and growing vegetable gardens containing a range of vegetables in a mixed culture. Production technology would require practices providing reasonably good conditions for the range of vegetable selected for each garden. These points could be elaborated in para 53 of the proposal paper.

Need for clearer definition of the proposed IVRIT programme

18. Section D, paragraphs 44-62, of the proposal paper sets out the specific programme activities recommended as appropriate to IVRIT. It has been suggested that the recommendation in para 48 should be restated to reflect more clearly TAC's opinion that not more than six vegetables should be included in the centre's core programme. The need for further elaboration of the scope of work on farming/cropping systems (paras 50, 53 and 60) has already been mentioned.

19. Apart from the references to selection of priority species and role of farming/cropping systems in IVRIT's programme, the comments of CG members were not specific. One member remarked that it was "not yet clear what sort of work that the institute ought to be doing" while a second called for "a much sharper definition of what it (IVRIT) is going to cover." A third member pointed out that "some questions would seem rather serious and probably must be answered, referring to the scope, the forecasting and the work of the intended institute and perhaps some of the operational strategies it will have to follow."

20. TAC may wish to consider recasting the whole of Section D to include a "sharper definition" of IVRIT's programme. The sort of detail given in Chapter III - The Project Organization and Work Plan of the Report of the TAC Vegetable Research Project Formulation Mission<sup>1</sup> may provide a suitable basis for this purpose. Copies of the report can be made available by the Secretariat upon request.

21. However, it has not been customary practice during the early phase of establishing new centres in the CGIAR system to provide such detail prior to the Group reaching a decision to support a new venture. Normally the executing agency appointed by an ad hoc subcommittee of the Group organizes an expert consultant mission to work out these details. Final definition of a centre's programme is the prerogative of the Board of Trustees on the basis of recommendations of its Programme Committee. In the case of tropical vegetable research, however, the general dearth of information may require a greater degree of refinement at an earlier stage in order that the CGIAR can reach a decision.

22. TAC may consider that only further elaboration of certain parts of Section D of the proposal paper is required to attain a satisfactory level of refinement.

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<sup>1</sup>DDD/TAC:IAR/77/2

Ultimate Size of IVRIT

23. Concern has been expressed by both CG and TAC members that like most other IARCs the new vegetable centre will rapidly grow from its initial recommended size (16 senior administrative and scientific officers) as its programme expands and demands for cooperative work increase.

4. As noted in para 63 of the proposal paper, the recommended size of IVRIT in terms of staffing was based on the experience of AVRDC in having an effective programme covering 6 vegetables, and the anticipated close collaboration between IVRIT and AVRDC and other IARCs as well as active support from stronger national programmes.

25. TAC may wish to indicate more clearly how it visualizes the projected size would be sufficient for real progress and how rapid expansion could be avoided through an initial directive to this effect by CGIAR. TAC may feel that further elaboration of IVRIT's collaborative programme is needed to reflect more the idea of IVRIT's dependency on national programmes to undertake (under subcontract) specific research projects.

Location of IVRIT

26. The question of location of IVRIT is not, at present, an issue with CG members. It is generally accepted that in keeping with TAC's recommendation, if the centre is created it will be located in S/SE Asia. TAC may wish to narrow down considerably the possible choices of location and indicate a strong preference for one or two countries. The country reports given in the Report of the TAC Vegetable Research Project Formulation Mission are relevant to this task. Copies can be made available upon request.