

THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Twenty-Fifth Meeting, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 24 February - 3 March 1981

ALTERNATIVES IN IMPLEMENTING CGIAR OBJECTIVES

(Agenda Item 5)

Proposed objectives of the discussion

Noting the difficulties faced by TAC in formulating new initiatives acceptable to the Group, the Secretariat suggests that TAC re-examine possible alternatives in the light of the basic objectives of the CGIAR (Annex I), its present focus on food production technologies, and the actual constraints on agriculture and rural development in developing countries. A less sharp separation between international and national, food and non-food aspects of agricultural research, and between research and development activities, is advocated. Criteria for considering new institutional alternatives are suggested, taking into account available experience in research networks and other forms of cooperation between national programmes. After a discussion of the criteria, it is then proposed that TAC examine the advantages and disadvantages of several alternatives which are outlined in the last section of the document and possibly others which Committee members may wish to suggest.

TAC SECRETARIAT

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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ALTERNATIVES IN IMPLEMENTING CGIAR OBJECTIVES

NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT

Introduction

1. At its 23rd meeting TAC examined the report of its working group on alternatives in implementing CGIAR objectives and made several observations and recommendations regarding the changing role of the IARCs. It also discussed several institutional alternatives to the IARC model both within the CGIAR system (IBPGR, WARDA, ISNAR) and outside (the FAO cooperative research networks, several regional cooperative programmes, etc.). It felt, however, that further examination of these alternatives and/or longer experience of their operation would be required before TAC could make recommendations to the CGIAR in this respect. The Committee therefore decided to have further discussions on this subject. 1/

2. In the course of 1979 and 1980, TAC carried out several studies which gave new dimensions to this topic: the stripe analysis of off-campus activities 2/, the quinquennial review of IBPGR 3/, the discussions on factor-oriented research 4/, the formulation of a proposal on water management 5/, the examination of ICIPE's candidature as member of the CGIAR system 6/. Some of these studies brought additional knowledge and experience on possible alternatives. Others led to recommendations and proposals, some of which were not endorsed by the CGIAR, thus showing the need for TAC to re-examine the whole question of alternatives in implementing CGIAR objectives. The present document is therefore deliberately provocative and is meant to generate discussion and new ideas. The proposed approach is not to consider again the IARC model, its merits and disadvantages as compared to institutional alternatives, but to start with an examination of the CGIAR objectives, the constraints on their attainment and then consider alternatives which CGIAR members and others could use.

The objectives of the CGIAR

3. An examination of the objectives of the CGIAR (see Annex I) leads to the following observations:

- (i) The Group intends to be selective in the activities which it supports;

1/ Report of the 23rd TAC meeting (AGD/TAC:IAR/80/18), pp. 11-14, paras. 50-60.

2/ AGD/TAC:IAR/80/22, Rev.2.

3/ AGD/TAC:IAR/80/2, Rev.1.

4/ AGD/TAC:IAR/80/5 and AGD/TAC:IAR/80/18

5/ AGD/TAC:IAR/80/29

6/ AGD/TAC:IAR/80/30

- (ii) since the Group is consultative in nature, its mandate is not confined to collective funding of joint activities of general interest (i.e. the core programme of the Centres), but also includes funding by CG members, individually or collectively, of parallel but closely related activities of more limited interest (the special projects with the IARCs);
- (iii) funding by the donors of complementary activities may also be envisaged, i.e. not through the institutions of the CGIAR but by other ways and means in which the CGIAR as a consultative group can play an important role of promotion, catalysis, concertation and harmonization of activities of its individual members. ^{1/} (This role appears to have been overlooked as the attention of the Group was mostly focussed on collective funding of joint action).

5. The Group and TAC have always had difficulty in coming to grips with the question of coordination of special projects in spite of the recommendations of the first CGIAR Review on this subject. As to the research activities which CGIAR members support bilaterally or multilaterally outside the CGIAR institutions, TAC and the Group have merely contributed to some exchange of information. The Group does not seem to have played in this field a major role of promotion and consultation, a role which it had given itself in its objectives. The Group can perhaps claim to have played such a role in relation to the few institutions which enjoy an informal associate status with the CGIAR. These, however, were consultations for joint commitments vis-à-vis specific institutions taken individually and not consultations aimed at harmonizing in certain fields ongoing programmes of several institutions with a wider geographical dispersion of activities (bilateral or multilateral). The Group seems to have been mostly concerned with the interface between the IARCs and other institutions which it financed, on the one hand, and the related national programmes in the developing countries on the other hand. The CGIAR as a Group appears to have been much less concerned with the linkages between the activities of the CGIAR institutions and the parallel activities of development assistance agencies (FAO, UNDP, World Bank, bilateral assistance institutions) which are also working with national programmes in particular as regards the application of research results in development programmes and projects.

Specific goals of the CGIAR

6. In translating its objectives into more specific goals the CGIAR endorsed the recommendations of TAC that:

^{1/} See Annex I, sub-para. (ii).

"the first objectives of international support to agricultural research in developing countries should be to contribute to:

- (a) increasing the amount, quality, and stability of food supplies in the developing countries, and meeting the total world food needs;*
- (b) meeting the nutritional requirements of the less advantaged groups in developing countries.*

While concentrating at present on these objectives, TAC also recommends that due account be also taken of the need to achieve an improvement in the level of income and standard of living of the less advantaged sectors of society in the developing countries (especially rural), which determine their access to food, equity in distribution of benefits from research, and efficiency in use of agricultural resources."

6. Many factors play a role in improving the quantity and quality of food and promoting equal access to research results. TAC has therefore developed a set of criteria in advising the Group on priorities ^{1/}. These criteria are an attempt to identify the constraints which are due to a lack of knowledge and appropriate technologies as distinct from those which are due to other causes. The former call for more research efforts while the latter call for development actions, changes in policies and social structures, etc. In order to establish priorities among the research requirements, TAC then set other criteria aiming at identifying the gaps in knowledge and technology which could be filled by international actions as distinct from those which are location-specific and are better handled through national programmes.

7. In establishing criteria for priorities as described briefly above, TAC attempted to make two difficult and in fact arbitrary distinctions: between research needs and development needs and between international research and national research. In fact, most of the constraints to attaining the objectives of improved nutrition and equity call for research cum development programmes and for research activities both at national and international (or regional) levels. Hence the arbitrary and artificial nature of the priorities of a consultative group which deals with research only and not development, only with the international aspects of the research needs and this mostly as regards food and with relatively limited interest in other aspects of agriculture and rural development. Moreover the TAC criteria for priorities dealt mostly with the substantive aspects of international research rather than with the institutional aspects.

^{1/} Para. 39, page 13 of the TAC priority paper "AGD/TAC:IAR/79/1, Rev.1

The constraints in the implementation of CGIAR objectives and goals

8. When examining further the constraints faced by developing countries as related to the objectives and goals of CGIAR (i.e. food and equity) and its priority activities, it may appear in a preliminary analysis that the priorities of the Group - as recommended by TAC - are almost in the reverse order of importance as to the order of magnitude of the constraints to improved nutrition and accelerated rural development in developing countries.

9. For example, there is widespread agreement that the major obstacles are not related to the lack of appropriate technology, but first and foremost to the inadequacies of present food policies and of the present economic order. Similarly the "management gap" at different levels in many developing countries appears to be more important in its consequences than the technological gap. The effects of the energy shortage on the supply of production inputs, on the storage, processing and distribution of food may also prove to be more important than the effects of the inefficient use of these inputs. The Group, however, with the advice of TAC and on the basis of its established principles and criteria, is involved only to a limited extent in food policy research (IFPRI and some special projects of CIMMYT, CIAT, IRRI), in research on the development and management process (the monitoring programme of ILCA, and perhaps some future activities of ISNAR and the proposed initiative in water management), and in factor-oriented research. In the meantime, the Group continues to place most of its resources on research for improved technologies in the production of selected food commodities, whereas many other factors (policies, socio-economic structures, management, supplies of energy and other inputs) continue to be grossly deficient and tend to offset the potential impact of improved technologies.

10. The main reason for this apparent contradiction and for the pre-dominance given to technological progress in the priorities of the CGIAR is that important technological breakthroughs have induced and still can induce important changes in socio-economic policies and structures and trigger off a broader process involving other factors of development. Moreover, the comparative advantage of international research over national research and its potential impact are perhaps more limited when dealing with such research areas as policies, socio-economic structures, production factors and their management since these are more dependent on local conditions of the countries concerned. Research findings in these areas are probably less transferable and applicable to wide regions than improved technologies such as high-yielding varieties.

11. In a number of research fields (tropical vegetables, water buffalo, aquaculture, water management) TAC identified not only the priorities but also what could constitute the main elements of programmes of general

interest. It also collected information on the main institutions which are active in these fields. Major difficulties, however, were faced when TAC attempted either to conceive a new institution or to select an existing one which would play a central role in the implementation of the proposed programmes. Because of the nature of the research programmes considered, neither the IARC model, nor that of IBPGR gave satisfactory answers. Moreover, it seems that, in some cases, these institutional problems could not be resolved because some members of the CGIAR were not ready to join other members in supporting particular institutions, arguing that other existing institutions or programmes also deserve encouragement and support.

12. The "either in or out" principle ^{1/}, that of the comparative advantage and maximum efficiency are likely to be applied even more strictly and perhaps arbitrarily by the CGIAR now that it experiences some limitations in the growth of its resources. Nevertheless, it could be argued that these principles go against the very nature of a consultative group and the full use of its multiple possibilities. With the present financial stringency the institutions which are now part of the CG system risk to distort their core programmes to seize opportunities of financing parts of their core activities through special projects, whereas some institutions which are at present outside the system may continue to amend their programmes in the hope of coming closer to the CGIAR objectives and priorities and when ultimately adopted by the CGIAR, enjoying more security through core financing by the Group. It seems, therefore, imperative for the Group to develop some imaginative and innovative alternatives in order to avoid unnecessary distortions in the ongoing programmes of research institutions both within and outside the CG system.

13. Assuming that some innovative institutional approaches would enable the Group to undertake additional activities, it is clear however that the CGIAR will not and should not address all the constraints faced by the developing countries in food and agriculture. Furthermore financial and also managerial considerations lead to the concept of an optimum size both for the CGIAR system as a whole and for the individual institutions which it supports. These limits should not be perceived as constraints to the attainment of CGIAR objectives but rather as a means of optimizing different ways of attaining these objectives.

14. The central role of national research programmes, both within the CGIAR system and within the overall process of development of each country, has been increasingly recognized in recent discussions at the meetings of TAC and of the CGIAR. A main question before the Committee and the Group is therefore that of finding some alternatives and/or implementing some changes in the existing institutions of the CG system which would enable

^{1/} i.e. either full membership in the CG system, or not (no formal associate status), either core funding or not, etc.

these national research institutions of developing countries to play a more central role in international agricultural research, while at the same time making fuller use of the Centres and of the development assistance agencies which are part of the system, as a means of ensuring better linkages between research and development.

Criteria for alternatives to be considered.

15. From the above considerations, it is clear that one of the criteria in formulating alternatives in implementing CGIAR objectives should be the possibility of achieving a maximum involvement of national agricultural research systems and, therefore, as a pre-requisite, a strengthening of national research capacities, which would in turn enable a greater participation of national programmes in international agricultural research. At the same time, other criteria which are considered at the root of the strength and success of the CGIAR system should be retained. These include inter alia the priority given to activities which are capable of making a real impact on food production and productivity in a relatively near future; the concentration of important scientific and financial means on selected areas of relatively limited scope; the assurance of continuity of programmes and financial support; the possibility of attracting highly competent staff.

16. Finally financial considerations may have also to be introduced among the criteria, taking into account the recent trends among the CGIAR donors. Many donors have become hesitant to take important commitments in support to major capital expenditures at one location in one developing country and are looking for alternatives which would not require major capital commitments.

17. The potential conflicts between these different criteria and those of a greater involvement on national agricultural research institutions should not be under-estimated. TAC faced the difficulties of reconciling these different criteria on a number of occasions, for example when discussing the possibilities of sub-contracting some of the work of the IARCs and when considering different alternatives by which an international programme could be shared among several institutions (e.g. for tropical vegetable research, water buffalo research, and other proposals for research networks). It may be therefore useful to recall here the main observations which have been made by several institutions, such as FAO and some of the IARCs, involved in the operation of research networks and other cooperative activities with national agricultural research programmes in developing countries:

- (i) the success of a research network very much depends on the specificity of its objectives. The broader the objectives, the wider the number of possible participants, but also the more difficult the coordination and cooperation;
- (ii) networks with a wide geographical scope encompassing countries with different ecological, socio-economic and political conditions appear less efficient than those which are regional or sub-regional in scope and with a relative homogeneity in the conditions of participating countries;
- (iii) networks cannot be successful unless at least several of the participating research institutions have already sufficient strength and resources to contribute and sufficient political support for continued operation;
- (iv) it is essential that participating institutions in a research network may act on an equal partnership basis, not only in the implementation of a concerted programme, but also in its formulation;
- (v) very small grants to individual research workers or institutions can achieve a lot in implementing a cooperative programme. These are important not only for research activities, but also for joint travels, visits, meetings, and training courses among participants;
- (vi) any central pool of funds in a network may create problems unless its use is confined to liaison activities by the coordinators and to periodic meetings. It seems that if additional resources have to be injected into a network, these should be provided on a bilateral basis between individual donors and individual research institutions.

Exploring possibilities of concerted action

18. It would be worthwhile examining whether ad hoc consultations of the most interested research institutions could not achieve a lot more at regional or international level in promoting concerted action, distribution of labour and cooperation in specific fields of agricultural research. This type of consultation is by no means a new approach: it has been used by the IARCs, by FAO, the Bellagio Conferences, etc. These consultations aim at establishing both some form of framework and networks for cooperative activities. In order to obtain genuine cooperation on an equal partnership basis through these consultations the interested national research institutions should have a more active role in taking the initiative and the lead in conducting these consultations. These arrangements could, however, have both advantages and disadvantages which require further discussion.

19. These consultations could be organized as a one-time operation or repeated periodically depending on the degree of cooperation and integration achieved among participating programmes. Participants would not necessarily pledge additional resources, but "pledge" participation of some elements of their ongoing programmes (including if required the technical assistance or financial assistance cooperation provided to these national programmes) within a common priority and programme framework. Each participating institution would remain independent. No coordinator or international board would be appointed since the resource flow would continue to be handled through the national budgets of the participating institutions including the contributions which donors may provide bilaterally. Whereas there is a limited attendance and contribution of developing countries in the CGIAR meetings, these ad hoc consultations for international cooperation 1/, in specific research areas could permit a more active participation of developing countries.

20. Another alternative, by which more cooperation, coordination and efficiency could perhaps be achieved, would consist in following the same procedure as above, but having an institution appointed by the participants (for a fixed period to be renewed possibly with some rotation), as coordinator and/or executing agency for the international elements of the programme of the cooperative network. This institution could be one of the national centres of excellence in the network, or a regional or international agency or an IARC. There are definite advantages but also potential problems with each of these categories of institutions when acting as coordinator or executing agency in a network. These would deserve further discussion by TAC and possibly lead to further elaboration of the criteria set out in paras 15 to 17 above.

21. An important feature of the alternatives proposed above is their mode of funding. The research programmes would be shared and financed by the participating institutions which would provide their contribution in kind to the programmes. To this end some of the participating institutions may seek individually bilateral or multilateral donor support to their activities within the network. The review and evaluation of the programmes and of its achievements would also be ensured by the participating national institutions. The elements which would require some form of international funding would be confined to liaison, coordination, meetings, including travel of participants. In these conditions, a mechanism such as that of a Board of Trustees responsible to a group of donors would not be necessary since there should not be an allocation of funds from a central pool of resources.

1/ or regional, sub-regional cooperation.

22. Other alternatives could be considered in which the national programmes would play also an important role in planning and implementation of cooperative research activities, but where the mechanism of liaison and coordination would have more influence in the use of donor funds within the network. For example, the CGIAR or any other ad hoc group of donors may finance selected elements of the programme of an existing institution (regional or international) and this in so far as these elements deal with cooperative activities or networks with other institutions (as for WARDA). In this case, no international board would be instituted and the Group would use the existing mechanisms of governance and management of the institution selected.

23. Last but not least, a slightly different model from the IBPGR and ISNAR models could be examined. Whereas IBPGR does not operate special projects, but essentially a core programme, ISNAR's constitution includes provision for both core and non-core activities. It would be interesting to examine whether in other specific fields and for a fixed term duration, the CGIAR or some ad hoc group of donors would be ready to provide trust funds to one of its members or co-sponsors. These trust funds would finance a small secretariat which would play, on the basis of an agreed set of priorities and an agreed programme framework, the role of promoter and catalyst in the formulation and financing of special projects. These projects would be operated on a bilateral or multilateral basis, not by this small secretariat, but by the interested parties which the secretariat would have assisted in finding cooperative arrangements.

Objectives of the CGIAR^{*}

The main objectives of the Consultative Group (assisted as necessary by its Technical Advisory Committee ...) are:

- (i) On the basis of a review of existing national, regional and international research activities, to examine the needs of developing countries for special effort in agricultural research at the international and regional levels in critical subject sectors unlikely otherwise to be adequately covered by existing research facilities, and to consider how these needs could be met; 1/
- (ii) to attempt to ensure maximum complementarity of international and regional efforts with national efforts in financing and undertaking agricultural research in the future and to encourage full exchange of information among national, regional and international agricultural research centers;
- (iii) to review the financial and other requirements of those international and regional research activities which the Group considers of high priority, and to consider the provision of finance for those activities, 2/ taking into account the need to ensure continuity of research over a substantial period;
- (iv) to undertake a continuing review of priorities and research networks related to the needs of developing countries, to enable the Group to adjust its support policies to changing needs, and to achieve economy of effort; and
- (v) to suggest feasibility studies of specific proposals, to reach mutual agreement on how these studies should be undertaken and financed, and to exchange information on the results.

1/ Research is used in this document in a broad sense to include not only the development and testing of improved production technology, but also training and other activities designed to facilitate and speed effective and widespread use of improved technology.

2/ Final decisions of funding remain a responsibility of each member in connection with specific proposals.

* Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (AGR 71/3) Annex III.