Annex 3.  ExComs Meeting with the Senior Vice President and Chief Economist for the World Bank

Members of the Alliance Board (AB) and Alliance Executive (AE) Executive Committee, along with Per Pinstrup-Andersen and Ruben Echeverria, met with Mr. Francois Bourguignon of the World Bank on Wednesday, December 7.

Mr. Bourguignon emphasized the past year had been a tremendous learning opportunity for him, since his first meeting with the CGIAR in Mexico City. Overall, his impressions were extremely positive of the CG. Initially, and as a newcomer to the System, it took some time to understand the mechanisms of the organization. He mentioned being impressed with the cooperation among the Centers to reach some well defined goals. He also observed the donors had a very big role to play. In reading the documents prepared by the SC on the new priorities, and from a World Bank viewpoint, he shared these priorities and said it is exactly where the CG needs to go.

He asked to hear from the Science Council and the Alliance as to what they envisioned as the next steps forward.

Discussion.

- Mr. Bourguignon applauded the System for moving towards a more cohesive program, which in the end would have a greater impact on poverty alleviation. The designated priorities fit very well with the Bank’s views, which is important for maintaining unrestricted core.
- Speakers emphasized the need to have other donors, in addition to the World Bank, understand the need to put resources into the matrix (composed of 20 CG Priorities and a number of Center and Challenge Program projects). A key factor in aligning the CG research portfolio to new priorities during the next three years would be the vision and leadership to be taken by donors in funding activities within the System agreed priorities.
- The idea was raised of having a dialogue on funding the new priorities with donors and experts in 2006. The success of the system’s reforms would be seen in the buy-in of donors and increased funding with less restrictions.
- It was pointed out that the proposed funding system had certain similarities with the old system when the World Bank served as “donor of last resort” – with the result that the Bank was covering activities considered less “exciting”. It is important that this not happen again and that the whole matrix be funded.
- In September, 2005, a new Multi-Donor Trust Fund Administrative Agreement (MDTFAA) was completed within the Bank to harmonize the administration of over $120 million in CGIAR Member contributions channeled through the World Bank. The Bank’s Internal Audit Department, in its report on the Bank’s oversight of Bank-administered CGIAR trust funds and DGF grants, commended the successful conclusion of the MDTFAA, the most comprehensive administrative instrument for handling CGIAR Member funds through the Bank since the inception of the CGIAR.
• There was agreement that the new $120 million multi-donor trust fund at the Bank is a good initiative. There will be a need to develop mechanisms for allocating funds that have not been earmarked, for which it will be important to establish a hierarchy within the priorities.

• Mr. Bourguignon asked if the System would be able to handle a substantial increase in funding, if the opportunity would arise – e.g. if there were a doubling of resources for Africa. The Centers responded that the biggest handicap would be lack of human resources to actually get the job done. However, much could be achieved through working with partners and sharing resources with them.

• There is a need to explain to donors that most agricultural research takes time, and it is not easy to produce substantive results in two or three years. The push by donors for quick results has created problems for the System. The more this trend continues the more difficult it will be to undertake fundamental long-term research of the kind that is unlikely to have an impact in less than, say, 10 years.

Next steps for the CGIAR.

Francois Bourguignon said that from the Bank’s point of view the past arrangement of having a Senior Vice President in charge of the CGIAR worked well. His current role was to make sure there was no conflict of interest, and that the mission of the Bank was well reflected in the way the money is being used. At the time of the meeting there was no further information as to who would follow Ian Johnson. He said that he would suggest to the President that the same arrangement continue, but it was likely that there would be some reorganization within the Bank. Agriculture could go to one VP and Environment and Social Issues to another, but this was difficult to predict.

He said he would brief the World Bank President, Paul Wolfowitz, on the issues, emphasizing there was a unique opportunity to keep the CGIAR group strong. He was convinced that agriculture would remain a priority for the Bank, and from this point of view the future was bright. The CGIAR need not fear change.

He thanked the Alliance and Science Council leadership for meeting with him, and looked forward to continuing the dialogue. In return, the Alliance leadership extended the invitation to him to join them in their spring meetings, at CIAT, April 26-27, 2006.