Consultative Group Meeting
Washington, D.C., November 5-9, 1984

Agenda Item 18

Attached is a copy of a paper on "Improving Communication About the CGIAR". The subject is to be discussed by the Group under Agenda Item 18. Also enclosed as background material are the summary proceedings of a CGIAR information officers meeting held last year in Eschborn, Federal Republic of Germany.

Attachments

Distribution:

CGIAR Members
TAC Chairman
TAC Secretariat
TAC Members
Center Board Chairmen
Center Directors
Improving Communication About the CGIAR

Three years ago the members of the Consultative Group instructed the CGIAR secretariat to "increase its activities in the general area of public relations" as recommended by the Second Review Report (Recommendation 14). The secretariat has since tried to translate this general instruction into a program of work and to figure out how the secretariat together with the centers and donors can more effectively reach and influence those individuals and groups whose cooperation is critical to the CGIAR.

The members of the Group represent the most important constituencies of the CGIAR, the donor community and national research programs. Many members are becoming more active in promoting awareness of the CG centers within their countries or agencies. With a rising level of activity, it would seem the time has come when the system would benefit from a discussion within the Group of issues and priorities related to improving communication about the CGIAR.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a sense of what is currently being done as a point of departure for such a discussion. The topic is a broad one for an organization of the CGIAR's size and decentralized structure. The term "public relations" has different meanings for many people, and generates both positive and negative vibrations. To ensure that its own initiatives in this area reflect actual needs, the secretariat made several attempts to get centers and donors to identify communication priorities and preferred directions for the secretariat and centers. The most recent of these were a meeting in Eschborn last October of center information officers as well as representative donors and center directors (a summary of that meeting is attached) and a questionnaire circulated to CG members this spring.

While no clear consensus emerged, some guiding principles did. The Group might wish to ask itself whether these principles are valid, whether there are certain audiences or themes the system as a whole should be stressing, and what the most effective form of communication would be.

Guiding Principles

Use of Resources: It is understood as a basic premise that the centers' priority information activity remains the transfer of centers' research knowledge and technology to recipient countries. Any expanded effort to promote understanding of the CGIAR must not detract from this essential function. Moreover, while there is a recognized need for better communication about the CGIAR, activities undertaken at this time should be relatively modest; they should not divert scarce resources from more important activities. Given the informal, personalized nature of the CGIAR system, activities based on personal contact as opposed to mass diffusion will be more effective in the long term.
Audiences: Activities should reach policymakers in both developed and developing countries, not exclusively one group or the other. Depending on the political structure this might include ministers, parliamentarians, policy advisers, boards of intergovernmental and financial institutions, and leaders of agricultural research. Ranked second in importance are the development and university communities. These professionals play an important intermediary role between centers and national governments, and centers and donor officials. According to information gathered from the centers and CC members, the centers are seen as having primary responsibility within the system for communication with research organizations and governments in developing countries. They also have responsibility for keeping development professionals apprised of centers' progress. CC donor members on the other hand have primary responsibility for securing CGIAR support among decisionmakers in their country or organization and for seeing that the technical and field staff in their agencies are fully informed about the work of the centers. The secretariat, finally, in support of both centers and donors, should give priority attention to reaching policymakers in both developing and developed countries and then to the development and university establishments.

Themes: In all countries the main theme should be that agricultural research is a good investment, that developing country research institutions must be supported, and that the CGIAR system exists to support and strengthen developing country programs. In donor countries, in addition, the work of the centers needs to be put in the context of the need for greater food production in the Third World and the role of research in achieving such increased production. In addition, donors need to have evidence of centers' responsiveness to national program needs and their impact on developing countries. They also may be reminded that the industrialized world benefits from the economic growth of the developing countries and research done there. An important aspect of the system which needs constant reinforcement because it is unique and not well understood by outsiders is the independent nature of the centers, their freedom from political and bureaucratic control, and their truly international character. Other themes which are valuable in many circumstances are the benefits of CGIAR research to the poor in developing countries, contributions to nutrition, focus on the role of women, concern for the environment, and by no means least, the conservation of germplasm and its utilization for human benefit. Interaction with private enterprise, and the mechanisms of the system for maintaining quality and setting priorities are the last items on this list, which could, of course, be extended to considerable length.

Current Strategy

These principles are more a reflection of the CGIAR's current approach than a series of recommendations for the future.

Centers: Information activities at the international centers are in direct support of their research mandate. Relations between center management and senior research and donor officials are characterized by personal contact. Only 7% of center senior staff have a "communication"
function per se. This does not include the library, specialized reference or training operations. The objective of the communication departments is primarily production of publications directed at the world research community. The main concern of centers is to improve the quality, in substance and presentation, and dissemination of their publications. This is being pursued through better control of mailing lists, participation in international and regional bookfairs, more inter-center cooperation, and joint publishing ventures, especially in local languages. In response to donor pressure, centers are also introducing into their research highlights and newsletters evidence of their impact in developing countries. Some centers are also seeking increased contact with international and local media as an indirect way of reaching policymakers and of drawing attention to the need for agricultural research. At ILCA's invitation and BBC's expense, English radio journalist Mary Cherry spent 10 days at ILCA during the recent center directors/TAC meeting in Addis. This has resulted in widespread coverage of the CGIAR over the international BBC network and represents an excellent example of how well targeted media contacts can work to the benefit of the system at little cost.

CG Members: CGIAR members are involved in a wide range of information activities on behalf of the CG system. The level of activity of individual members seems to be related to the amount of criticism of the CGIAR contribution, the pressure groups involved and the extent to which information activities are perceived as having some influence. In addition to providing financial support for projects undertaken by the secretariat or centers, such as the CGIAR brochure and participation at the Frankfurt Bookfair, members have produced publications themselves, like The Fragile Web and the CGIAR Publications Catalog, hosted press dinners and briefings, sponsored films or video documentaries, sent journalists to visit centers, and provided support in kind. Members also play a critical part in arranging senior level meetings for center and secretariat staff with government officials to talk about the CGIAR.

CGIAR Secretariat: While there is some gray area between fundraising and public relations activities, the secretariat estimates it is directing 20% of its resources to improving understanding of the CGIAR among important target groups. This occupies one secretariat staff member full-time, several others part-time, and two consultants part-time. The secretariat divides its efforts in equal thirds to: (1) reaching decisionmakers; (2) reaching the academic/development communities; and (3) providing information support. The secretariat sees its fundraising and public relations functions as complementary and closely linked, with the public relations activities creating or maintaining the positive supportive climate necessary to secure the actual resources.

Reaching Decisionmakers: Consistent with its fundraising priorities, the CG secretariat, in its public relations efforts, has focused primarily on influencing selected advisers and decisionmakers in donor countries, especially in Europe and the U.S. Its approach has been characterized by direct personal contacts by the CGIAR Chairman, members of the secretariat and/or center directors with small groups of officials from key donor agencies. Most often these visits are initiated by the secretariat; once informed, donor representatives are usually quick to organize schedules to gain maximum mileage for the CGIAR.
This approach is reinforced with a low-key media campaign. The use of both print and electronic media has been explored, but until now most contact has been with radio and the press. The secretariat's efforts have concentrated on using the occasions of International Centers Week and the CGIAR mid-term meetings to draw media attention. These have been successful in identifying interested journalists and fostering a systemwide momentum to use the media to reach decisionmakers. The question arises, though, whether these events are actually the best for attracting media attention, as opposed to directors' meetings, special inter-center seminars, or other center meetings.

Finally, both the personal donor contacts and press contacts are backed up with written materials: specially prepared briefing papers, pamphlets, brochures, etc.

Reaching the Development/Academic Communities: Again, largely due to its fundraising focus, the secretariat's efforts at improving awareness of the CGIAR among these audiences have concentrated on developed countries. Because of the secretariat location and the international reach of U.S. media, they have focused on the U.S. in particular. Once more, also, a three-pronged approach has been taken. Personal contact is in the form of presentations, speeches, and attendance at professional meetings by the secretariat's scientific advisers. Consultants have been retained to work with secretariat staff on special articles for scholarly and popular journals, and good relations have been nurtured with the senior editors of these journals.

The bulk of information material produced by the secretariat goes to individuals and organizations in the academic/development communities. The brochure is used as a text by some professors in the U.S. and U.K. and the largest number of requests for the newsletter comes from university faculty, particularly in developed countries, and project staff in the field. This raises the issue whether the present material available in the system is adequate or whether there is other information about the system these particular groups should be receiving. It was essentially this audience whom the secretariat had in mind for a series of issues papers or Occasional Papers about systemwide concerns.

Information Support: Information support describes two types of functions. One is the actual production or coordination of production of publications, exhibits, briefing materials, press digests, etc. The second refers to the secretariat's catalytic role in working with centers and donors to enhance the CGIAR's external communication. The Eschborn meeting of center information officers and a proposal to microfiche center publications are illustrations of this kind of activity.

The secretariat expects to continue with this basic approach unless the Group directs otherwise. New activities will include production of several new publications about the CGIAR and a second information officers meeting in 1985.
Issues

In developing the secretariat's program and in discussions with center directors, a number of issues have been raised.

CG Secretariat Focus: The first relates to the secretariat's present focus on developed countries. While it makes sense in terms of fundraising, the donor survey revealed clearly that decisionmakers can often be swayed by evidence of centers' responsiveness to national research needs and their impact in developing countries. This suggests more work needs to be done in the developing countries getting policymakers supportive of the CGIAR to share their opinions directly with donors or express them through some medium that can be widely publicized. This needs to be done in a way that is non-threatening to the national research programs and perhaps helps to enhance their prestige. Conversely, developing country officials negative to or unfamiliar with the system need to be reached more systematically.

Sharing Information: A second issue concerns the sharing of information among centers, donors, and the secretariat. This is critical. The extra time spent in keeping each other informed is marginal in comparison to the potential benefits. Center directors, in particular, need to give the secretariat or individual donors advance notice of their schedules so that donor visits are used to the fullest advantage. For example, IDRC has said it would be delighted to organize speaking engagements for directors if notified in time. Donors on the other hand need to advise the centers or at least the secretariat of potential 'political' topics such as women in agriculture, small farmers, low-input technologies, the environment, etc., so centers can provide donors with relevant data.

Breakthroughs: Continuous pressure by donors on centers to show results every year leads to premature reporting and wasteful expenditure of resources. This is counterproductive in terms of center-donor relations and the centers' public image. The decision for centers to make presentations only every other year at International Centers Week is a step in the right direction, but perhaps there are other activities, such as the annual research highlights, that need to be examined in this light.

CGIAR Highlights: The system suffers to an extent from its lack of a corporate image. Donors have to glean information about the recent work of centers from at least 13 different publications. Several CG members have suggested an annual or biannual CGIAR Highlights. This would be a major undertaking and the secretariat could not do it without cutting back substantially its current program unless other funding sources were identified.

Impact Study: The Impact Study should provide an opportunity to initiate dialogue with all of the CGIAR's important constituencies. The system needs to think ahead how it will use the Impact Study to its full advantage.
Donor Field Staff and Embassy Personnel: Several directors have raised the issue of more systematic communication with donor embassies overseas and field staff. Dr. Nour mentioned ICARDA participation in a meeting of USAID country officers for the Near East. Would such an activity be of interest to staff from GTZ, ODA, CIDA, EEC and others? Communication with field missions is presently handled largely through individual donor organizations. Should the centers and secretariat take more initiative in this area?

Centralization vs. Decentralization: There has been some pressure from centers and CG members for more centralization of information activities in the secretariat. The secretariat has undertaken only those tasks for which it thinks it has a comparative advantage and encouraged centers and CG members themselves to take the lead for most projects, especially ones in their regions. This has proven to be an effective approach thus far.

Conclusions

Initially when the secretariat began to play a more active role in information dissemination on behalf of the CGIAR, it thought it would be possible to develop a coordinated systemwide strategy. It has since come to learn that the requirements and philosophies of the centers and CG members are too different for such an ambitious plan. Reactions to some of the principles and issues articulated here may show support for the existing framework or suggest new directions.