

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

Mailing Address: 1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433, U.S.A.

Office Location: 801 19th Street, N.W.

Telephone (Area Code 202) 334-8021

Cable Address—INTBAFRAD

TO: FAO regional representatives
 Center board chairs
 Center directors
 TAC chair TAC members
 TAC executive secretary

April 17, 1989

FROM: The Secretariat

SUBJECT: Letter from the chairman

Please find enclosed a copy of the most recent letter from Mr. Hopper to heads of donor delegations. He would welcome your comments on the contents of this letter, as well as your suggestions about topics that might be taken up at the executive session of donors to be held at Canberra.

Attachment

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

Mailing Address: 1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433, U.S.A.

Office Location: 801 19th Street, N.W.

Telephone (Area Code 202) 334-8021

Cable Address—INTBAFRAD

April 10, 1989

Letter from the Chairman of the CGIAR to the heads of CGIAR Delegations

The ad hoc committee which I mentioned in my previous letter (February 13, 1989) held a fruitful two day meeting in Paris in mid-March. Everyone invited came except for Steve McGaughey of IDB who was ill, Chris Bonte-Friedheim who was tied up in Rome but was ably represented by Mohamed Zehni, and Alex McCalla who could not be present because the meeting was scheduled opposite the opening of TAC 48 at CIMMYT. Alexander von der Osten, with my agreement, went to TAC for the full week. The conflict in timing was unavoidable on this occasion, but that does not make it less unfortunate. When such ad hoc meetings are held in the future, we will try to make sure that conflicts of timing will be avoided.

The original purpose of the meeting was to get advice on how the Group could best deal with the uncertainty about the ability of the donors to maintain present funding levels, and with the continuing controversies over how CGIAR centers and donors should view their relationships to national systems. The agenda was lengthened when it became clear that consultation on forestry research and on the plans for our Canberra meeting would also be timely.

In this letter I shall try to summarize the main points that came out of the discussions.

CGIAR Funding

There was agreement that financial difficulties lie ahead, given the constraints on donor resources and the consensus on giving priority to other fields, such as the environment. Agricultural research may have lost none of its long term importance, but its appeal to decision-makers attuned to current political concerns has certainly weakened. Donors face the need to share available funding with scientific institutions in their own countries, and core funding does not presently attract aid managers.

Against this background, participants dwelt at some length on the sources and uses of funds within the system; as well as on the medium-term resource allocation process. It was acknowledged that the system had made

important steps forward in providing information, and in building mechanisms to allocate funds effectively since it faced the financial problems of the early 1980s. Nevertheless, greater transparency continues to be required, so that a range of questions could be answered readily. Information on the use of funds was needed under consistent programmatic headings to permit cross-center comparisons and analysis.

There were calls for stronger and better system management. Even some of those who recognized that central management in the usual sense was not compatible with the structure of the CGIAR, called for more rules of behavior, and standards of conduct. Without stronger central administration there was a threat to the confidence in the system which is absolutely necessary for funding to continue at appropriate levels.

Several participants said that they also needed greater assurance that the use of funds was carefully reviewed outside of the centers. They expressed doubts that centers were acknowledging all support received. These doubts persisted, even after Curtis Farrar said he thought the share of center resources which was not covered by the resource allocation process was very small, and Larry Stifel representing the center directors said there was now full disclosure.

Several donors hoped that the goals of centers would be more sharply defined, and urged that there be realistic statements of how much could be accomplished with the resources available. The new resource allocation process should provide a mechanism to meet this requirement.

It was particularly important to deal with the problem of how collaboration with national systems fits into the CGIAR program structure. Major increases in funding in the next few years, if any, would likely come from bilateral sources within donor budgets, i.e. from sources focussing on national systems.

The terminology of essential and desirable was found to be confusing, however, and the word "desirable" itself should be changed as soon as possible. Centers trying to juggle programs between the two categories so as to maximize their own funding put donors in a difficult position. Centers might also find themselves caught between a donor who rejected a program because it was only desirable, and the TAC which insists that is the correct classification.

The outcome of the new resource allocation exercise will give us a projection of demand oriented needs; we should also try to look at the likely flow of funds to the system by modelling donor performance. Apropos of the new process, several donors expressed disappointment that TAC and the centers had not found it possible to identify more activities which could be reduced or transferred to national systems, so as to mitigate the tendency of center budgets to expand.

After talking a lot about discipline among the centers, the donors turned, and discussed the possible value of increasing self or collective

discipline among donors. They spoke particularly about the degree to which the donors accepted Group decisions on priorities rather than pursuing their own interests through project type funding. This discussion seemed to reinforce interest in having more information about what donors are doing.

A closer look by the Group at the sources of funding was suggested. The CG secretariat should publish data by center and by donor showing unrestricted and restricted contributions, as well as support for essential and desirable activities.

Some fairly concrete ideas for action came out during this discussion. The CGIAR secretariat, TAC and the centers, already have work underway to provide better answers to many of these questions that turn on improved information. The secretariat will want to learn from each donor the sort of information that is required to maintain confidence in the system, and then work with the centers to make sure that such information is provided. A further discussion of the other aspects of this whole issue in the closed donor session at Canberra should help to clear the air further, and improve the consensus on an approach to funding. When the next round of results are analyzed for us at ICW89 with all of the centers present, we might appraise the further steps that need to be taken. Perhaps we can thus reduce somewhat the uncertainty with which we face the major decisions that lie ahead in the next couple of years.

Overall, it was clear that the ad hoc committee thought that the Group should adjust its rationale to emphasize environmental issues, and move forward in explaining its accomplishments and its potential much more effectively than hitherto.

National Agricultural Research Systems

The discussion on national systems ranged, inevitably, over an even broader field. All agreed that we were much more certain of the appropriate range of center programs in Alex McCalla's group A activities, those where an international organization has a clear comparative advantage, than with his group B, where the centers need to act because of the present weakness of national systems. The correct style and scale of center involvement with national systems has been a question almost since the start of the Group (see page 82 of the report of the first system review).

While a number of the issues can be framed pretty much as they were in the past, the context has changed significantly. Perhaps the most important change has been the major strides made by some national systems, but this must be set off against the impact of the debt/financial crisis which has led to declines in many national systems, particularly in Latin America and Africa. The impact of the financial crisis has been made worse by some donor practices which have tended to leave completed and equipped facilities and trained scientists without operating funds. Another fact that cannot be ignored is the great strengthening of pride and independence

on the part of national system leaders who insist on a stronger voice in the world system, and on being treated as professional colleagues, even if their own institutions have serious deficiencies.

Those present agreed that action was needed, but could not agree on how much responsibility for taking that action should rest with the CGIAR. Some believed that the scarce grant resources of the Group should be used exclusively for research, leaving national systems development to ISNAR and to others, SPAAR for example. (The possibility of a like initiative for Latin America was raised.) Others doubted that the centers could be effective research bodies unless they were close collaborators of national systems in adapting technology to use in farmers' fields. Most of those present seemed to fall in between these two positions, suggesting that some close involvement with national systems in applied research and institution building was necessary but that it should be limited to a few selected cases lest the centers become primarily technical assistance agencies.

There was sharp disagreement over whether the centers should ever accept responsibility for managing donor funds intended for national systems. Some found it dangerous for centers to assume the role of donors. Others pointed to successful examples to suggest that it was a highly efficient method of achieving CGIAR purposes.

In the light of the range of opinion among donors, it should be no surprise that centers are getting confusing signals on whether they have a mandate for helping national systems beyond training, information and networking. TAC has on its agenda a major review of this question, but has had to put it aside pending completion of the present work on non-associated centers. Meanwhile TAC is making quite a lot of case law on this topic in considering medium term programs. Its paper on relations between centers and national systems scheduled for discussion at Canberra deals only with the issue of transferring center functions to more advanced national systems.

In the meantime, the system has a fairly clear stance, reflected for example in the Second Review, which suggests a balance in direct involvement with national systems depending on the needs of the research program and the ability of the centers to manage such relationships. The consensus on which this is based is tenuous, however, and there is no clear agreement on how to implement the decision taken at Ottawa to include strengthening national systems among the stated goals of the CGIAR.

Few new ideas for making progress on this topic came out of our meeting. One suggestion was giving national systems budgets which could be used to pay for center services. Rethinking some of the self-imposed limitations of ISNAR was also proposed, i.e. that ISNAR should take stronger leadership on behalf of national systems with donors and centers. Another possibility would be for ISNAR and one or more other centers to collaborate in dealing with a national system. ISNAR might provide training in research management generally, and the other centers expertise on the management of commodity research programs. Perhaps ISNAR might be

charged with making a regular report to the CGIAR on the state of national systems and the role of CGIAR centers in collaborating with those systems, much as IFPRI does on the overall food production and markets.

There was general agreement that centers needed to develop relationships with their national clients which were collaborative in fact, and which had the feel and appearance of equality to the participants. It appeared that centers vary considerably in how they actually work with national systems, although their rhetoric is often quite similar. At the same time, the relationship between centers and national systems has to take account of the fact that the culture of an exotic institution and that of an indigenous institution are necessarily different. Programs in these different cultures can be harnessed together only with great sensitivity and care.

There was also agreement that there needed to be a lot more discussion and sharing of experience on this question both within the CGIAR and outside of it. Pending the start of the major TAC review mentioned above, there is much that can be done outside of the CGIAR and at different levels within the CGIAR. Centers might be asked to prepare or make available existing case studies on relationships with national systems, reflecting both successful and other experience, to lay a basis for TAC's subsequent work.

Much of the concern for national systems needs to find responses outside of the CGIAR. The need for collaboration among donors collectively and the host government in providing reliable support to national systems is self-evident, although the experience of SPAAR shows that the obstacles to achieving such coherent support are considerable. Centers supported by the CGIAR should be expected to take a strong positive role in bringing such country level mechanisms into existence, and making them work. Many at the Paris meeting asked the question of who was responsible for ensuring a coherent approach among CGIAR centers to individual national systems; no good answer was forthcoming.

There is a tendency to identify the roles of national systems with more routine and applied science, and that of the centers with advanced science. It should not be forgotten that some of the problems faced at the country level require very sophisticated scientific work, i.e. require collaboration between centers and national systems in advanced science. The roles of national systems in collaboration should not automatically be identified with the old fashioned and routine, and that of the centers with the modern and challenging. Needs at the national level should be assessed specifically, without a preconception about the kind of science required.

We must try to understand whether it is more efficient to achieve the goal of greater, more sustainable, and less costly production in farmers fields through direct research programs of international centers, or through a probably slower collaborative mode. It seems likely that the answer is different in individual cases: we should learn how to decide

which cases are which. In any event, much more open dialogue with national systems and their host governments on such matters is needed.

While sorting out the degree to which the CGIAR itself will deal with issues related to national systems, we might pick up a suggestion made by several at the ad hoc meeting that the CGIAR should at least discuss the issues, and make a formal statement about the need for both donors and developing country governments to support national agricultural research systems more strongly, and more coherently. This possibility might be discussed among us at the donor executive session in Canberra.

Forestry Research

Extensive background documentation on the thinking about forestry research was provided in advance to members of the ad hoc committee, some of whom had also attended the Bellagio II session on forestry research, on which I reported fully in my previous letter. I reminded the participants that the World Bank had made it clear on that occasion that it did not have the resources to support a separate consultative group for forestry. The outcome of the Wiston House discussions was to request the CGIAR to consider taking responsibility for forestry research, and to establish a separate TAC for forestry. Those participating felt a great sense of urgency to move forward without delay.

At Wiston House, five areas had been identified for research. These have been mentioned before, but it is probably worth including them here:

Forestry's role in agroforestry, watershed and arid zone land use management.

Natural forestry conservation and management (species identification and management, ethnobotanical research, ecosystem conservation and maintenance of biological diversity).

Tree breeding and tree improvement to conserve germplasm of key forest species and to provide high yielding planting material for multipurpose uses.

Utilization and market research aimed at making more effective use of lesser known species and non-wood products, adaptation of already existing technologies, market structures and their functioning.

Policy/socioeconomic research with special emphasis on improved understanding of policy reforms that could help to contain tropical deforestation and provide incentives for reforestation and common property forest resource management.

Some of these relate to actual or potential capacity of existing CGIAR centers: for example, IFPRI could conceivably expand its policy research to include forestry issues; IBPGR could encourage the conservation

of tree germplasm. Several centers were involved in agro-forestry and ICRAF was being considered among the non-associated centers under study. Although not specifically among the research objectives, strengthening of national forestry research systems could be undertaken by ISNAR with an expanded mandate. The majority of the work foreseen would require the addition of new institutions and possibly also major institutional change in existing CGIAR centers. It is foreseen that much of this work would be done on a networking basis, rather than through a program concentrated at a new institution.

The members of the ad hoc committee found themselves in substantial agreement on the priority of forestry research and the appropriateness of considering expansion of the CGIAR in this direction. They suggested that it should be possible at Canberra for the donors to reach a conclusion as to whether or not they wished to extend the mandate of the CGIAR. There was a discussion as to whether the issue at Canberra should be a broad one, that is of taking within CGIAR's mandate concerns related to problems of natural resource management, or whether the proposal should be confined to forestry research alone. The balance of opinion was toward a broad approach; and that it should be presented for a decision at Canberra.

The issue of the shape of a future TAC and how it should deal with forestry research was an issue which seemed likely to take longer to resolve. The suggestion was that if the Group acted at Canberra along the lines of the proposal above, it might also ask the TAC chairman to come back at ICW89 with a proposal, or perhaps alternative proposals, for bringing forestry and/or natural resource management expertise into the mechanism through which the Group gets technical oversight and advice. Opinions on the forestry side in favor of some sort of independence for technical advisors on forestry seem strongly held, mainly I think because of concern that agricultural priorities would otherwise obscure forestry priorities. However, most speakers indicated that the CGIAR system would have to create some overall mechanism for turning priority judgments and technical advice into an integrated whole. One speaker put it that he could not agree to forestry being in fact separate and only appearing to be under the CGIAR umbrella.

I told the committee that the TAC chairman would, on my behalf, shortly be appointing a small panel on forestry research which would look at the priorities set forth at Bellagio II and at existing forestry research organizations. The names would be chosen in consultation with the cosponsors of the Bellagio series of meetings on forestry research. This action was being taken without prejudice to the ultimate decision on the technical advisory structure the Group might adapt for forestry, but to prepare the groundwork for future decisions in this field comparable to those being considered more generally for non-associated centers.

Informed that the funding for the work of the Special Development Cooperation Program of IUFRO would expire at mid-1989, the donors present in Paris supported the idea of creating a donor support organization for the SPDC to meet its needs for the transitional period until the Group has

decided what programs and institutions it will support in forestry research. The CGIAR secretariat will take the necessary steps to inform SPDC and arrange for an initial meeting of the support group at Canberra. The committee also recommended that a small group of foresters should be invited to Canberra to observe the discussions.

In concluding this part of the discussion, I said that following the advice of the ad hoc committee, a proposed extension of the mandate of the CGIAR into the field of natural resource management, to include forestry, would be drafted for consideration at Canberra. Action on the form of the technical advisory function on resource management would, however, be proposed for ICW89, although it might be covered in the discussion in Canberra in a preliminary way. Representatives of forestry research organizations would be invited to Canberra.

Action would also be taken to convene a donor support group for the SPDC which could function until the CGIAR completes its action on the issue.

Other Matters

As always happens when more than two CGIAR activists get together, a lot of things were talked about at Paris. Two which are worth mentioning specifically are the Canberra agenda and the proposed move of the IBPGR from Rome to Copenhagen.

Canberra Agenda: The only point raised concerning the agenda was the number of center specific topics. Donors had understood that an effort would be made to keep the mid-term meeting agenda as much as possible focussed on general policy questions and confine center specific discussions to centers week. The executive secretary explained that it would be difficult for the CIMMYT external reviews, which had been completed and considered by TAC just before ICW88, to be kept pending any longer. Such delay would also jeopardize completion of the resource allocation process first round. Delay in action on the ICRISAT and WARDA medium term programs would seriously inconvenience both centers, and overload the ICW agenda with five such programs to be considered simultaneously. These explanations were accepted, but there continued to be comments about the amount of time CGIAR meetings took, and the value of holding short (if any) mid-term sessions.

IBPGR: Mr. Farrar reported on the action of the IBPGR board at its recent meeting in Rome to recommend acceptance of an invitation from DANIDA to move the headquarters to Denmark. He said that the IBPGR felt it had consulted fully with its donors, and had invited all of them to send representatives to the board meeting. Five or six had done so. Several of those in Paris expressed concern about the timing of the decision, which had not been expected until after an interim report at Canberra. They also stressed the need to maintain full collaboration between the IBPGR and the FAO. A report from the IBPGR is on the agenda for Canberra.

Finally, we all spent a few minutes appraising the meeting itself. Everyone seemed satisfied that the time was well spent, and the discussion worthwhile. I certainly benefited from useful advice. Nothing was decided, but then nothing was supposed to be decided. We shall only know after some time whether a satisfying discussion will actually lead to more efficient conduct of the Group's business. For the present, I am inclined to keep open the possibility of calling further ad hoc meetings whenever issues appear that could benefit from in depth and informal discussion in a small group of key donors.

We shall be returning to the role of ad hoc committees, as well as to some of the specific items discussed, when the donors meet in camera at Canberra. I look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely yours,

W. David Hopper
Chairman

copies to: FAO Regional representatives
Board chairs
Center directors,
TAC chair
TAC members
TAC Executive Secretary
CG Executive Secretary