

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

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

May 7, 1991

FROM: The CGIAR secretariat

SUBJECT: Letter from the Chairman

Please find enclosed a copy of the most recent letter from Mr. Thalwitz to heads of donor delegations. He would welcome your comments.

Attachment

cc: All CGIAR secretariat staff

May 2, 1991

Dear :

As we prepare for the CGIAR mid-term meeting in Paris, I know that we share a common desire for businesslike discussions and realistic decisions.

Aside from routine or formal business, items on the agenda fall into three broad clusters:

- The Review Process,
- Expansion of the System, and
- Future Directions.

The CGIAR has sometimes been criticized for over-reviewing its component parts, but compulsory external reviews are an attractive characteristic of the system, and a source of confidence in CGIAR centers. At the request of the Group, Alex McCalla will present the mid-term meeting with a progress report from TAC summarizing CGIAR experience with external reviews. This will give us an opportunity to scrutinize all aspects of the external review process closely, reiterating strengths, identifying weaknesses, and deciding whether the process needs to be changed. Our examination of the past record will no doubt add a special dimension to our examination of three contemporary program and management reviews (IBPGR, ICRISAT, and IFPRI) which will be presented in Paris.

In dealing with the second cluster of issues, we will take off from where we ended our discussions on expansion of the system at ICW90.

Shortly after ICW90, I conveyed the Group's decisions on expansion to the board chairs of the non-associated centers concerned, and asked for a formal response so that discussions could begin among the centers, the Secretariat, and TAC. Two formerly non-associated centers, IIMI and INIBAP, are now part of the CGIAR. A third, ICLARM, is expected to join fairly soon. The timing and modalities of ICRAF's entry will be based on the Group's reaction in Paris to the report of the working group on agroforestry/forestry research.

The committee's recommendations have already been widely discussed. Despite the fact that there remain differing perceptions on the ideal institutional framework for agroforestry/forestry, it is important that we try to reach a decision to move ahead at this meeting.

When we consider those agenda items which point the CGIAR system towards new directions, we will be following the suggestion of the Group's founders who said that the CGIAR should periodically "adjust its support policies to changing needs" and thereby "achieve economy of effort." We will hear a progress report on the formulation of a new set of priorities and strategies for the CGIAR. We will reexamine and perhaps redefine the relationship between CGIAR centers and national agricultural research systems in response to the "changing needs" of developing countries. We will hear more about the ecoregional concept which was endorsed at ICW90. In a connected development, we will learn of CIAT's plans for giving that decision practical application.

These developments raise important substantive issues for the system including, for example, how to maintain high standards of scientific research and an early impact on sustainable agriculture as we broaden the emphasis of CGIAR research activities to give greater attention to agroecological zone specific, natural resource management related research. The centers will continuously need our guidance as they revamp their programs to reflect the connections between productivity and environmental protection.

As usual, time will be set aside at the mid-term meeting for an executive session at which items already on the agenda can be explored in an intimate setting, or where we can take up any other issues that particularly interest or concern you. Suggestions for topics to be discussed are welcome, and should be sent to Alexander von der Osten.

"Impact" Reports

Tightening of aid budgets, due to several reasons including the slowdown in donor domestic economies, is juxtaposed with new demands for aid funds. For instance, environmental awareness is growing, and political pressure for action in this area has been increasing. The net result of these trends is that donors are reviewing existing commitments and, consequently, that historical CGIAR allocations are under scrutiny. USAID, the World Bank and IDB are three major donors currently evaluating their levels of grants to the CGIAR. Such reviews are bringing renewed calls for evidence on the effectiveness and impact of the system.

The first institutional effort to assess how research at our centers affected productivity in developing countries followed a decision by the Group at ICW82 to sponsor an "impact study." The results of that study are available in many forms including "Science and Food," the book published by the World Bank for CGIAR.

Our feeling is that another "one off" impact study is not the best way forward now, rather that a continuing effort which provides a stream of evidence of impact, is likely to be more effective in meeting donor needs. The centers are clearly best placed to provide this information for their own programs. Several centers are including more impact assessment in their work plans, partly for public awareness material, partly to allow evaluation and replanning of their own programs.

The Secretariat working in cooperation with the centers has launched a program to pull together some of the data already available in a number of scientific documents published by centers, and to produce "impact reports" in formats suited to easy reference.

As part of this impact-oriented approach, the Secretariat has been working with centers to update information on training for developing country scientists within the CGIAR system. The figures are now available and show that the numbers trained have almost trebled since the first impact study was undertaken. The information on training is currently being prepared for appropriate dissemination.

Leadership Changes

By the time ICW91 comes around, the leadership of CGIAR centers will be substantially different from what it was when ICW90 took place.

Lukas Brader has already moved over from FAO to take charge of IITA, succeeding Larry Stifel. Hubert Zandstra has left IRRI to be the new director general of CIP, taking over from the center's founding head, Dick Sawyer. Jim Ryan, who is well known as a member of TAC, will replace Les Swindale at ICRISAT later this year. Geoff Hawtin, the IDRC delegate at CGIAR meetings, will soon be the new director general of IBPGR. Two new directors general have entered the system as a result of expansion: Roberto Lenton of IIMI and Edmond De Langhe of INIBAP.

The "old guard" who are leaving the centers after several years will be missed. They have given unsparingly of themselves, and their contribution to the centers they headed will endure. The "new" directors general listed above, together with others who have assumed leadership at the centers in recent years, represent a strong component of "new blood" in the system.

The continued capacity of the CGIAR centers to attract scientists and managers of such high quality is both a compliment to the system and assurance of its continued excellence.

A CGIAR Milestone

Finally, let me remind you that when we commence our mid-term meeting, 20 years would have passed since the CGIAR first met as an established entity on May 19, 1971.

A formal commemoration of the event will not be held in Paris, partly because many of us will be travelling on the anniversary date itself, and also because attendance at mid-term meetings is somewhat restricted in keeping with the wishes of the Group. The Secretariat plans some commemorative activities later in the year. You will be kept informed about these and, of course, both invited and urged to participate in them.

Even without a formal commemoration, however, we can look back on two decades of the CGIAR, asking ourselves whether the exercise was worthwhile, to what extent the effort has been productive, and how we can remain relevant in the years ahead, building on what has been attempted in years past.

These questions touch on how we should function, on the nature and quality of the research we support, on linkages with our partners, and on the CGIAR system's ability to continue raising the resources required for research.

These are all important questions, and they were considered at the founding of the Group as well. They are brought into clearer focus today, because our answers and assessments can be based not only on hopes and ideals but on 20 years of experience.

Looking forward to seeing you in Paris.

Sincerely yours,

Wilfried P. Thalwitz
Chairman