

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

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A Proposal for Revitalizing the CGIAR System

Attached is a paper entitled "A Proposal for Revitalizing the CGIAR System" dated October 23, 1993 prepared by the CGIAR Oversight Committee. The document is transmitted as background material to the Oversight Committee's Report, Agenda Item 5.

Attachment

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Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research Oversight Committee

23 October 1993

A Proposal for Revitalizing the CGIAR System

Summary

The system of agricultural research centres supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is in a critical phase. While the system to date has achieved major progress in addressing food shortages in developing countries, the challenges that lie ahead are significant. At the same time donor support seems to be wavering and the system is underfunded. Unless this situation changes soon difficult decisions will have to be taken regarding the coverage, scope and structure of activities supported by the CGIAR. It is therefore proposed to formulate a new vision for the CGIAR through a small external panel of experts and a strategy for operationalizing the new vision through a second panel of internal experts. To launch the new vision and strategy and to mobilize additional support for the system, it is also proposed that a ministerial level donor conference be organized in early 1995 under the leadership of the heads of the World Bank, FAO and UNDP. The proposals in this note are based on deliberations by the Oversight Committee at its first meeting in Berne in July 1993 and second meeting in Washington, D.C. in October 1993.

The Challenges Facing Global Agriculture¹

It is as difficult to disentangle the ties between poverty, environmental decline, and rapid population growth as to disentangle the ties between affluence, overconsumption and environmental problems. Poverty has a toxic effect on the environment, such as when poor people press on forest margins and fragile lands in pursuit of foodstuffs, and poor countries do not have the means to deal with such effects. Poverty also hightens the pace of population growth by limiting opportunities for women, assurances for old age, and the availability of education, family planning, and public health services. Population growth puts greater and greater pressure on the environment. Finally, environmental degradation limits income growth--the way out of poverty--by reducing the capacity of the resource base.

These series of cause-effect relationships can be given a positive thrust through improved productivity in agriculture. Gains there stimulate broad-based economic growth, reduce poverty, lessen pressure on natural resources, and slow population growth. Historically, new agricultural technologies have been the major force driving improved productivity. Today, such technologies must also protect the natural resources upon which agriculture rests. These technological solutions will have to come from agricultural research--the main business of the CGIAR.

Over the next 20-30 years farmers and policy-makers in developing countries will have to face several difficult and interrelated challenges. First, food will have to be provided at affordable prices for almost 100 million more people every year - the largest annual population increase in history. This growth, coupled with increased demand engendered by rising incomes, will lead to large increases in food

¹ This section is based largely on materials from IFPRI and CIMMYT.

demand in developing countries for many years to come. Second, growth in incomes and urbanization is expected to shift consumer demand toward more consumption of livestock and high-value agricultural products. This will cause an increase in demand for cereals and coarse grains for feed. Third, the increasing food and feed demands must be met primarily from land currently under cultivation and without further degradation of the natural resources. And fourth, employment opportunities for the rapidly expanding labor force in low income developing countries will have to be found primarily in the food and agriculture sector and those nonfarm sectoral activities that accompany agricultural growth. The rural poor will be particularly dependent on this growth.

During the 1980s, as much as one-third of the increase in food production in developing countries was achieved through cultivation of new land. But opportunities for continued expansion into new lands are being rapidly exhausted, and the major share of future food production will have to come from higher yields on presently cultivated land. What is more, the rate of growth in yields of major cereals appear to be declining. In Asia, the pioneer region of the Green Revolution, rice yields increased at an annual rate of about 3 per cent between the mid-1970s and early 1980s. These increases dropped to less than 2 per cent in the late 1980s. During the 1980s, Africa's population grew at about 3 per cent annually, while food production grew at only 2 per cent.

It is against the background on issues like these that the challenges facing the CGIAR should be seen.

The CGIAR Under Pressure

The CGIAR's unique model is under multiple pressures. First, funding for the centres' core programmes has been declining in real terms over the last few years. The system is now severely underfunded: the approved work programme for 1993 has been costed at US\$ 270 million but available core funds may be no more than US\$ 225 million. Second, the research agenda facing the system is becoming increasingly complex with the recent addition of not only research on forestry and fisheries but also cross-cutting issues, such as natural resource management, gender concerns, institution building, priority on Sub-Saharan Africa. Third, there was in the early 1990s an increase in the number of centres from 13 to 18, adding to the complexity of the informal coordination that is characteristic of the CGIAR. While the system is now being realigned to 16 centres the pressure for additional cross-cutting programs has meant added efforts for inter-center coordination and collaboration. Fourth, the number of donors to the CGIAR has increased from 11 in 1971 to 41 in 1993, placing the decision-making processes within the CGIAR under increasing strain.

Most serious is the emerging financial crisis facing the system. This is the aggregate result of a number of mutually reinforcing factors: the overall stagnation in aid flows to developing countries caused by the end of the Cold War, the ongoing recession and the needs of the new states in East Europe; an increasing hesitation by aid donors to fund projects in agriculture due to perceived difficulties in the sector, particularly in Africa; the tendency of donors in a political climate less conducive than in the past to generous development aid to tie their contributions to specific objectives and modes of implementation; and a general feeling in donor circles of fatigue with support to the CGIAR which has now been in existence for 22 years.

The Need to Reinvigorate the CGIAR System

To remain viable, the CGIAR needs to undertake a probing examination of the rationale for its existence, identify the areas where changes are needed, and convince its internal and external stakeholders that, with these changes, the system will remain relevant and responsive in the global agricultural research scene in the long-term. This will require efforts in two fronts. First, there is need for a new vision and strategy to guide the system. Second, there is need to "sell" the new vision to the relevant audiences.

The need for restating the CGIAR's vision and strategy stems, in part, from the urgency of making a convincing case for continued support to the CGIAR. The world around it has changed markedly since the CGIAR last looked at questions concerning the long-term vision of its future at the time of the expansion of the system. Its supporters expect from the CGIAR frequent assessment of the continuing viability of its long-term vision and exploration of alternatives at times of major change.

A New Vision

What is needed is a vision that is imaginative, forward-looking and reflective, covering the next 20-30 years. This vision should analyze the likely demographic, political, economic and technological changes over this time horizon and interpret their impact on **food, agriculture and environment** globally. It should use as its point of departure the recent political transformations and raise possible future implications of the emerging new world order, particularly as regards international co-operation and development aid. It should discuss the globalization of economic exchanges that results from the gradual removal of trade barriers coupled with technological advances. It should draw the appropriate conclusions from the current paradigm of political economy with resultant new relationships between the state and the private sector, in particular as regards agricultural research. It should discuss present trends in science and their implications for agriculture in areas such as biotechnology, plant/animal genetic resources, management of natural resources, information processing, modelling, etc.

The vision should clearly and convincingly show the main challenges facing agricultural research globally, describe the financial and other constraints within which international and national agricultural research will need to operate, and place the future role of the CGIAR in that context. The focus would be on why the CGIAR should continue to exist, what would differentiate it from other efforts, and what impact would be expected from investments in the CGIAR. It would also address the question of what would happen if the needed investments were not made. The vision statement should clarify the CGIAR's niche and identity as a system, its main businesses and clients, and the key philosophy and values guiding its operations. It would seek to identify the contributions of CGIAR to global food supply and suggest alternative scenarios for different levels of activity of the system. Although it would not spell out an operational strategy for the system, the vision statement would be crafted in full recognition of operational considerations.

For a system taking pride in its pragmatism and flexibility, the CGIAR seems to have ignored the need for a crisp and short (10 pages or so) vision statement addressed to scientists and non-scientists alike. True, there are numerous planning documents which are currently being used to guide the system's operations—but, they do not provide a perspective of the future role of the CGIAR within the context of global agriculture, nor are they fully up to date. These focus more on internal priorities and are intended

for an audience well versed not only in the issues of agricultural research but also in the jargon that is peculiar to the system.

A Strategy Based on a New Vision

The CGIAR is currently in the midst of a transformation, some induced by the donors (such as the integration of IBPGR and INIBAP and the creation of a unified livestock entity) and some by the centres (such as the programmatic and budgetary downsizing of the operations of several centres). With regard to the structure of the centre system, several alternative scenarios are implied in the recommendations of TAC concerning the medium-term programmes of the centres, but more work needs to be done to evaluate the key options. In addition, the Oversight Committee is examining options concerning the future governance of the system and the Finance Committee is taking a careful look at future financing modalities.

A new vision for the CGIAR would clearly need to take into account these developments and the thinking that led to the formulation of the proposals that are currently on the table. However, the new vision—by itself—would not provide the system with a map of actions that is necessary to redirect the system towards the new vision. For this reason, the formulation of the new vision should be accompanied with a parallel exercise that translates the vision to an operational strategy for the short-to-medium term.

The operational strategy would raise issues central to the operations of the system, including its research themes, organizational structure, financing modes, governance, linkages, and priorities. Unlike the recently completed medium-term planning exercise of centers and TAC, it would not contain center-by-center budget projections, but would describe the broad strategy by which the CGIAR can contribute to the agricultural research needs described in the vision statement. Like the vision statement, the strategy document should also be short and accessible to a lay audience.

Putting the CGIAR's Case to the Donors

There is a need for the case for international agricultural research and that for the CGIAR to be forcefully put anew to the donors. It has been suggested that a high level donors' conference convened in early 1995 might be the most effective way to do this. This would not be just another conference, but one with truly high-level representation and clear, forceful preparation. Such a conference would show to top decision-makers that the CGIAR has a carefully elaborated long-term future vision of its mission and an accompanying strategy well attuned to the challenges facing agricultural research.

The proposed conference, like the 1971 Bellagio Conference which led to the creation of the CGIAR, would bring together the heads of major present and potential donors to the CGIAR, i.e., aid ministers, enable them discuss the global concerns surrounding agricultural research, and renew their commitment to the goals and ideals of the (new) CGIAR system. It is doubtful that anything short of a major gathering by minister-level officials would generate the public visibility and impact necessary for rejuvenating the CGIAR. The Oversight Committee believes that it would be most appropriate to have the heads of the three Co-sponsoring agencies take the lead in co-sponsoring such a conference.

The Process

Working toward a high-level donor conference in early 1995 means that the first drafts of the vision and strategy documents would have to be ready for discussion at the MTM in May 1994, and final versions at ICW 1994.

The Oversight Committee proposes that the vision document should be prepared by a panel of five prominent experts, supported by a secretary and resource persons the panel would like to draw on for assistance in specific areas. To the extent possible the three main developing regions (Asia, Africa, Latin America) should be represented on the panel. In principle, the experts should be outsiders to the CGIAR in order to avoid built-in biases linked to existing institutional arrangements. The secretary should be provided by the CGIAR Secretariat and should assist the panel in drafting the final document which, depending on the deliberations within the panel, may well be based on a longer paper.

IFPRI is embarking on a two-year exercise to develop information on how to meet future world food needs, tentatively titled "A 2020 Vision for Agriculture, Food and the Environment". Since that project is quite similar to the process discussed here, the panel may wish to invite IFPRI's Director General or a senior staff to serve as resource to the panel.

One of the panel members would be nominated to serve as chair. The panel would decide for itself how it wished to approach the task. The work would likely entail at least one workshop with the panel members in early 1994.

As soon as selection of the first panel is complete, the Oversight Committee, in consultation with the CGIAR Secretariat, TAC Chairman, and representatives of the centers would set in train the selection of the second panel, recruited from within the system, to draft the CGIAR strategy. Once the second panel is established, for the most part, the two panels would work in parallel, with some interaction between the panels.

If the CGIAR agrees with this proposal at ICW 1993, the Oversight Committee would oversee the process on behalf of the CGIAR.

The proposed timetable looks as follows:

Nov 1993	Appointment of external panel
Jan 1994	Appointment of internal panel
Apr 1994	Joint meeting of the two panels
May 1994	Review of drafts by the CGIAR
Aug 1994	Final drafts sent to CGIAR
Oct 1994	ICW
Jan 1995	Meeting of aid ministers