

CENTER DIRECTORS COMMITTEE - ECOREGIONAL STUDY

WORKSHOP ON ECOREGIONAL RESEARCH

ISNAR, The Hague

20-23 August 1996

A SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS - WITH SOME COMMENT

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Following an email conference on issues in ecoregional research, this workshop was the second stage of a study of ecoregional initiatives for the Committee of Center Directors. The aim of the workshop was to highlight progress, identify and discuss issues in implementing two dimensions of the ecoregional initiatives; the research approach being followed, and the institutional arrangements for its implementation.

ISNAR, overseeing the study on behalf of the CDC, hosted the three and a half day meeting which was opened on Tuesday 20th August by the Director General, Dr. Christian Bonte-Friedheim. The twenty two participants included managers and scientists from IARCs, NARS and NGOs, the Executive Secretary of TAC, and two donor representatives. Their names and addresses are listed in the annex to this report.

The Workshop was organized into three cycles of working groups with a progression of outputs. Cycle 1 had four groups representing a variety of perspectives; NGOs, NARS managers and scientists, IARC scientists, and IARC managers. The task in this first cycle was to identify issues in the ecoregional approach and in the institutional arrangements for its implementation. The aim was to have different types of stakeholder articulate issues from their own perspectives. Cycle 2 mixed the four sets of stakeholders in four groups to bring the different perspectives to bear on each issue discussed. For cycle 3 the mixed groups were retained to identify improvements in the way in which initiatives were being implemented.

This report seeks to cover the material which arose at the Workshop. I have highlighted those things which made an impact on me. Where I have material from other sources the report includes illustrations and comment, in particular gleaned from my subsequent visits to IRRI and ICRISAT and some national institutions. (August 24 - September 12). Comments, including issues or contributions that participants feel were important but are omitted, would be most welcome sent to m.collinson@cgnet.com via email.

To preface the first cycle of working groups I described the historical background to the launching of the ecoregional initiatives in the CGIAR, and individual participants introduced themselves and their institutions.

WORKING GROUPS - CYCLE 1

Working Groups met and then, in a plenary session, the rapporteurs presented the issues identified by the four groups. There was a good deal of overlap in the issues identified and lists were consolidated under the two heads; Research Approach (9 issues) and Institutional Arrangements (9 issues). Two asterisks mark those issues which were directly addressed in the subsequent discussions, one asterisk marks issues addressed as part of others.

Issues on Research Approach

- An ecoregional approach demands new skills in both NARS and IARCs. There is a particular need for capacity building in multidisciplinary research and systems methods in NARS, which may also require changes in their structure and organization. **
- How can the need for forging effective partnerships and building capacity in new skills be reconciled with the demand for rapid results ? **
- What mechanisms have been successful in reconciling regional and local priority setting among consortium partners ? **
- What methods have been followed in site selection and extrapolation from site results, and for aggregation of results from plots and farms to the levels of the watershed, the agroecology and beyond ? **
- What have been experiences with the measurement of degradation and the positive enhancement of resources and productivity ?
- Is the collection of baseline data presently out of balance with other research activities ? *
- What unique roles can IARCs play in the evolution of ecoregional research ? *
- What mechanisms exist for sharing information on the databases available both within a consortium and beyond to outside agencies. *

Issues on Institutional Arrangements.

- What is the relationship between existing networks and new ecoregional initiatives ? *
- What funding mechanisms are necessary for the sustainability of the ecoregional initiatives ? *
- What factors inhibit regional (i.e. beyond country) ownership and sharing? What characteristics are essential for IARCs, NARS and NGOs to feel ownership of an initiative ? **
- Which 'in country' institutions (beyond NARS) have been involved in ecoregional initiatives and what experience is there in sensitizing all relevant levels of all in country institutions to the importance and implications of ecoregional research ? **
- Example good experiences of research partnerships between institutions. *
- For many NARS fragmented funding, following existing (commodity or factor-dictated) budget lines, results in ad hoc uncoordinated activities, usually by scientists who are only part-time on ecoregional research with other, more traditional projects, dominating their workplans. **
- Poorly identified and often unspecified complementarities leads to ad hoc, uncoordinated implementation. *
- What experience is there of mechanisms for timely, efficient, participatory decision making in consortia ? *

On the morning of 21st August, preceding the second cycle of working groups, two guest speakers; Professor Rudi Rabbinge, member of the Netherlands Scientific Council and Chair of the IRRI Board, and Professor Louise Fresco of Wageningen Agricultural University and a member of the WARDA Board, provided participants with insights into the wider importance of the sustainability issue, and outlined the implications for research and for research methods. Professor Rabbinge also described the functioning of the Dutch fund for methodological innovation in the ecoregional approach to research.

WORKING GROUPS - CYCLE 2

This cycle was the heart of the workshop. Again four working groups met, this time of mixed composition, to address selected issues from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. Participants were asked to bring their own experiences, good and bad, to bear on the issues the group considered the most important of the 18 listed from the output of cycle 1. Two and often three groups identified the same issues as priorities, and each group only had time to address four or five issues. Only seven issues were addressed, others were touched on and discussion of these has been incorporated in the notes on the priority seven. Before the groups reported out, Dr. Michael Loevinsohn of ISNAR looked at some of the institutional challenges, drawing attention to the institutional complexity of implementing the ecoregional approach.

Need for new skills and capacity building in NARS

Participants expressed the belief that institutional issues ought to be a priority in the ecoregional initiatives, and indeed most of the priority seven are institutional issues. Members felt that identifying and exploiting institutional complementarities were a key step in an effective initiative. They also felt that detailed guidance was needed on the implications of an ecoregional approach for institutional organization and operation (offering a significant role for ISNAR).

The need to bring multidisciplinary teams to bear on problem oriented research issues requires a joint decision making process and a common vision across disciplines in the team. This common vision needs to be built. Where NARS are organized on commodity or factor lines, the need for multidisciplinary teams and a multiscale focus has major implications for institutional structure, for operation, and for budget planning and disbursement. Historically it is clear that the reorganization of public institutions requires strong political support. In the case of ecoregional research it would need a common vision among policy makers that sustainability, and the environmental dimensions of agricultural development, are a critical issue.

(This may be illustrated by a contrast between the clear success of the IRRI rainfed lowlands rice consortium and the modest progress with the upland rice consortium. Certainly in the Philippines, senior research managers see the uplands as relatively unimportant as a major source of rice. In Indonesia on the other hand, recognition of the uplands as the water catchment for the rainfed lowlands and the irrigated rice areas has reinforced their importance to senior managers, bringing the environmental dimension and the watershed level of research strongly into play).

In the context of a consortium, it will be an asset to include other in-country institutions that can bring complementary skills to bear on the problem. GIS and remote sensing skills for example, maybe elsewhere than in the NARI. Including other in-country institutions will help reinforce policy and political will to see it as a priority initiative. Universities are particularly valuable as members, offering the opportunity to move innovative concepts and methods into the training curricula at the undergraduate and graduate levels. To incorporate other in-country institutions will often require a conscious effort to break the parochial view of many NARS managers who see the IARCs as 'their territory', and who resent the possible dilution of the IARC-NARS relationship, and the professional benefits it can offer.

Some NARS participants expressed the view that the IARCs, as external institutions with strong recognition, were a prerequisite to changing mindsets in country institutions. Others noted that these kind of changes were very difficult under circumstances of static or declining budgets: new funds help ease the way and should be accepted as part of the transaction costs.

Systems analysis, crop modeling, remote sensing, GIS, participatory methods with associated disciplines of anthropology and rural sociology, ecology and development economics were listed as some of the new skills required to implement an ecoregional approach. It was felt that the consortia was a vehicle which allowed importation of these skills from specialist institutions. Wageningen Agricultural University, with regional analysis, modeling and GIS specialization's, was offered as an example, as well as ICASA, the new international agricultural modeling consortium.

The feeling was expressed that data base collection and the mobilization of GIS and remote sensing as tools were perhaps getting disproportionate attention compared to the other skill needs. It was noted that Inter-Center Training for Africa is the sort of initiative which can bring balance into the planning and implementation of capacity-building activities. The SARP experience in Asian national programs was highlighted as an example of visionary capacity building. The forthcoming systemwide initiative in Participatory Research and Gender Analysis was identified as a resource for the multiplication of skills in participatory methods at farm and community levels.

Reconciling Local, National and Transnational Priorities

The joint setting of priorities gains loyalty and commitment across institutions at the local level but when aggregated to the nation or region for higher level priority setting the original local priorities can get submerged. The process should start at the higher levels, with broader generalizations at regional and national levels as an umbrella for a focus on local priorities at the local level.

The early establishment of a regionally agreed pool of themes was thought to be important and formal economic analysis might be useful at this level. But time is also important. No formal exercise should be protracted. For example, insisting on the need to create regional data bases of a standard type in order to do a more accurate economic analysis draws out the time required for regional priority setting and takes on a research life of its own. As with the development of integrated databases for use in GIS, such an activity, apart from being prolonged, can be 'institutionally isolated' from other dimensions of the action, thereby losing its identity, particularly in the perceptions of other partners, as an important means towards

the wider end. These are research projects in their own right and, when better tools are seen as a priority, should parallel the cycle of ecoregional research. It seems important that field implementation move ahead with the priority setting tools and the extrapolation tools that are readily available, and not be postponed pending the identification of a more refined approach.

From a set of broad regional themes, countries can subsequently decide which they are best equipped to pursue, both on behalf of the region, and because of its particular importance to them. Within this fairly wide umbrella, it seems vital, in gaining commitment and ownership from local institutions, to be responsive to local expressions of priority at chosen sites.

Two Examples: Mechanisms Used for Regional Priority Setting.

1. At regional workshops of NARIs country priorities are put forward. Common themes are then seen as regional priorities and are confirmed with NARS Directors.

(NARIs are not policy making institutions, on the whole they are policy takers, either from their own ministries or often beyond, from central planning ministries. Like the IARCs, their view of priorities may be distorted by their own current scope of work and their current organizational structure. Multidisciplinary teams, the environmental dimension, research at the watershed level, or research with an anthropological or rural sociology focus may be completely missing and out of the question.

IARCs often expect these things to happen. There needs to be a joint effort to analyze the limitations of all partner institutions, as part of the discussion of complementarity, to see what additional skills are needed. This contributes to the need for a much 'cleaner' and more widely disseminated view of what ecoregional research involves.)

2. Consultants visited NARIs and emerged with a regional shopping list. A regional task force then sorts out the list, choosing priorities from the basket brought back by the consultants.

Some such Task Forces have often been heavily IARC-dominated. One example showed no NGOs, no other sector institutions, no universities represented. The result is a narrow, top down process with little chance of inter-institutional ownership of the programs built on what is perceived as a unilateral choice from a regional list. It needs a broader, intersectoral consensus, with a wider involvement of institutions from sectors capable of reflecting national priorities, and national agencies with something to offer the consortia and program implementation.

IARCs themselves need to consider how ecoregional research affects their own priority setting, a particularly important question as new MTPs are developed. In that discussion, the issue will be faced of how far ecoregional research is new research, and how far it is a new, holistic approach to research, the substance of which has always been researched, but along disciplinary lines. It is vital that stakeholder perceptions are congruent on this question otherwise there will (continue to) be a good deal of talking past each other, importantly on the question of new funding.

We need an analysis of the new dimensions which realistically should be done directly by the

IARCs, rather than institutions with special skills being drawn into the consortia to do the job, or the work being taken up by NARS because of their long term need for this capacity. Also needed is an analysis of the amount of ecoregionally relevant research that has traditionally gone on in the IARCs, in a factor or disciplinary mode, which now requires integrating into an ecoregional approach, using the same resources.

There was further discussion contrasting the value of formal economic approaches to priority setting, and informal priority setting which really sets out to establish ownership and commitment among institutions which will be needed to address the problem at hand. Participants felt that a broadly defined problem of key importance to the region can be readily identified without a formal priority setting process. An example was offered of CONDESAN where, in the rush of projects, decisions fell, by default, to CIP. At CIP, spreading the action among partner institutions to keep the consortium cohesive and inclusive, was felt more important than following a formal priority setting exercise.

In pointing out that delays in getting action in the field may have other causes, attention was drawn to the DMI which followed a cascade of priority setting workshops, from global, through subregional and national levels, over a period of two and a half years. This represents a tremendous overhead investment and raises a question of whether interest will be maintained among stakeholders. DMI credibility now hangs on obtaining the US \$ 25 m budget for the first five years of the program. Will money be found ? How will a reduced budget be allocated? This long overhead process contrasts with the need to do something to show progress in the near term and gain credibility. Plans in themselves are not an attractive medium term output.

Building Partnerships and Capacity and Getting Early Results

In parallel with a broader planning process, experimentation in the research approach* might build on existing sites to provide short term results, to build capacity and to add new research dimensions to what is ongoing. Specifically, this may entail adding an adaptive research capacity to get technologies, evaluated by criteria reflecting the new sustainable dimension in the improvement of productivity, off the shelf and into farmers' fields. Such a strategy will build a momentum in the field as well as round the negotiating table. Existing sites may be with any of consortium partners, but in-country institutions are perhaps a priority as sustainability problems have local causes requiring local solutions. In general, it was felt that more emphasis should be placed on deepening the understanding of an ecoregional research process, to balance exhaustive priority setting, and also as an alternative to widening the numbers of sites and geographic scope of studies.

(IRRI, given its existing program organization based on Upland, Rainfed Lowland, and Irrigated Rice ecosystems, would seem to have a tremendous opportunity - not so far exploited - to look at the interactions between these ecosystems in a watershed or landscape context. When examined more closely it would require important decisions to reorganize and coordinate efforts since currently no two programs apparently have research sites on the same watershed.)

An addition to short term products by early field implementation was the idea, introduced by Michael Loevinsohn in his talk, of 'proximate indicators' of progress, milestones for a project.

These need to be identified early in the planning process, and given weight as achievements. In the absence of proximate indicators in proposals donors will always have optimistic expectations of the end products. Such indicators also offer a basis for comparison across ecoregional projects.

Examples of some 'Proximate Indicators' of Achievement

Planning & Priority Setting

- New approaches adopted
- New sets of information brought to bear
- Participant satisfaction with the process
- Tangible commitments as a result of the process

Implementation of Research

- More, and more relevant information available to partners
- New ways of working identified, adopted and evaluated.
- Policy formulation better informed of field realities and technology options.

Workshop participants were convinced that there had to be strong CEO level commitment and good communication between levels within institutions, as well as across institutions to ensure successful initiatives. It is important for credibility with partners, and within each institution, to have a common vision of the ecoregional initiative, and a simple way to present the ecoregional approach and highlight the value added over the use of conventional research approaches.

Methods Used in Site Selection, Use of Site Results and Standardization

(Perhaps this section needs prefacing with the fact that historically research station sites, and off station sites, have been chosen in an informal way, usually based on climate, soils and access. In the farm economics literature, there has long been debate over methods to identify or to construct the 'representative farm'. Whether research sites can be expected to be representative in any formal statistical sense, of the wider climate, and soils is, to my mind, doubtful. Suffice it to say that climate and soil types have dominated choices historically and probably remain the most fundamental selection criteria of sites for both strategic and applied research. It seems to me that the new found importance of the 'human decision' dimension in the sustainable improvement of productivity doesn't deny this. What it does is insist that the technical solutions can only be designed and evaluated properly when the cultural and economic circumstances of a particular target group of farmers are well understood.)

Examples offered of Site Selection processes

- Administrative Boundaries were used and, within these, political considerations weighted site selection. Within general site areas, cropping patterns decided the particular sites, driven by the presence of particular crops.
- Constraint blocks were used to identify sites; low phosphates, flooding, aluminum toxicity. Areas suffering from these constraints were delineated and then sites identified

within them.

- Reconnaissance surveys were used to identify 'subzones' within a biophysical framework, emphasis was placed on representation (typicality ?) and no duplication.
- Criteria were defined by a regional level task force. NARS used these to identify two benchmark locations. These locations were discussed by the task force, and again at in-country planning workshops. Sites selected went through a process of detailed characterization. There was no concern for either duplication or representation, though 'understanding' the site was felt to be important. NARS tended to pick places with easy access from an existing research station. Because of the lack of participation in the choice by other partners, complaints resulted.

The humid forest initiative (IITA - West Africa) picked pilot sites along a gradient from virgin to intensively used forest. Studies extend well beyond these pilot sites, looking at influences on the sites and their off-site impacts. For the African Highlands Initiative, the NARS in Uganda chose high elevation potato based systems, but regional priorities also pushed the NARS into banana based system at a lower altitude. CONDESAN chose sites on an altitude-based gradient of agro-ecological zones. IRRI, in its wet humid ecoregional initiative, is focusing on existing sites with no special criteria for selection. RWC has focused on the intensive Rice-Wheat cropping system where yield erosion is thought to be occurring: sixteen areas are being monitored, and research on 4 main themes has started at 10 sites which are already in service.

In general, convenience of access has dominated choice. Commonly, existing sites have been chosen, and the projects have sought to add value to existing sites by widening the dimensions of the research efforts there. This fits well with the ideas put forward under earlier headings, though it is clear when enumerating the sites in some initiatives (RWC 14, AHI 9, DMI 9) that numbers has taken priority over deepening understanding. On the whole participants reported that sites were chosen without consideration of extrapolation and aggregation opportunities. Methods for doing this were seen as 'hazy'. Participants conceded that a good deal of research and standardization of data bases, development of analytical techniques, including software, would be required before GIS, remote sensing, watershed modeling, and multiple goal programming could be viewed as 'routine tools'. A question raised is whether making these routine is a high priority for resources, or even a prerequisite to field implementation through less sophisticated tools ?

(Some cross center learning is going on. For example the ICRISAT GIS specialist left during my visit there for three months to work with the experienced GIS unit at CIAT to short cut the learning process on how to bring GIS into ecoregional research.)

It was clear to all participants that discrete sets of indicators were required for the different levels of aggregation: plot losses did not aggregate into watershed losses, and some initiatives (African Highlands and Inland Valleys) reported they had established minimum data sets for different levels of aggregation for selected parameters. ASB reported standardization of characterization across its sites. No routine mechanisms for standardizing across ecoregional initiatives, or even for contact, were reported. ILRI exemplified its partnership with KARI (Kenya) in the development of a common conceptual framework for livestock research, reaching from field to market. The framework permits the accumulation of data from discrete studies over a period of time. It is clear that standardization will be all-

important for the systemwide initiatives where global themes will be researched at diverse locations. While less important for ecoregional initiatives, the lack of routine cross-initiative contacts suggests a good deal of 'wheel rediscovery' must be taking place.

Ownership and Decisionmaking

It was felt by participants (and has cropped up several times) that IARCs have a much clearer idea of the goal and role of an ecoregional approach to research than NARS and therefore tend, first to dominate the decision making, and second to get less than full commitment from NARS managers. All partners need to understand clearly why an ecoregional approach is important, and what the organizational and operational implications are for their own institutes. Particularly where there is poor sensitization in the NARS, and weak information flows and programming processes, national scientists feel used. The program is, to them, an add-on to their existing work. They have no clear view of the whole and the importance of the part they will play to making it a success. Some of this is brought about by the overall program strategy. Two cases were noted (African Highlands and Rice-Wheat) in which different IARCs have the responsibility for different priority themes. In the case of Rice-Wheat in implementation there seem to be different points of entry into NARS through the various themes and individual researchers are pulled into experimentation on a particular theme. This probably fragments the effort, and inhibits an overview of the novelty of the ecoregional approach. (It perhaps inhibits use of the approach at all). It is noteworthy that the interactions between three major themes allocated to different IARCs in the Rice Wheat Consortia are potentially so strong, that this thematic division of responsibilities is apparently being reconsidered.

There were many positive angles recorded. NARS participants volunteered that decision making in the IRRI rainfed lowland consortia (not a TAC approved ecoregional initiative) had worked very well; for example, while certain treatments were common across the region the designs offered scope for individual countries to add treatments to look at issues particular to their own situations. Similarly the Rice-Wheat consortium was held up to example a good decision making structure. A Steering Committee of the NARS Directors and one IARC DG gives the NARS the authority to drive the consortium. A Technical Committee advises them, made up of the rice and wheat coordinators for each country and a scientist from each involved IARC. A new development is a National Steering Committee, targeted to bring better coherence within the NARIs for program implementation.

A NARS participant expressed the view that in Indonesia the multisectoral National Steering Committee for ASB was proving very effective. It provides a neutral goal of sustainable land management, ministries do not appear to protect proposals in their own field, and, when addressing a local government about project implementation, the multisectoral committee speaks with one voice. At an extreme, an example was reported of a NARS with a dominant role in implementation, supporting IARC staff which bring in new skills, even from its domestic budgets. In Latin America, local proposals were successfully being funded locally through the municipalities. Similarly, in the IRRI program consortia, budgets were drawn up at the local level, assessed by the Steering Committee and pointed towards a friendly donor.

These examples argue for high level sensitization in the NARS and the conclusion of partnerships only where there is strong commitment and proactive management by the NARS

to attack the sustainability issue. It was felt important to identify pockets of knowledge and expertise in NARS and use these pockets to strengthen both ownership as well as the resource base of the consortium. This means it is important for IARCs to understand which of their own roles (conceptualizing/implementation in the field) should be widened and which limited, or even abandoned, in order to create space and thus ownership for others.

Some felt the convening role should not move much beyond facilitation: beyond it the IARC is best seen as an equal in the partnership. Such a limitation is easier said than done, especially when the concept is being actively promoted, and when a pace has to be set for planning and implementation. This may be too slow for one partner and yet, in practical terms of budget procurement, organizational redeployment etc., may be way too fast for others. The IARCs, as part of their convening and facilitation role, should understand and perhaps guide, either as a part of project implementation, or as an added transaction cost, their partners in reforming their operational processes, at least at a pilot level. (A role for ISNAR ?)

Participants agreed that the IARCs had great advantages in operating at the transnational level, reaching higher levels of government, linking with advanced research institutes, identifying new needs for methodology development and training in new skills. They also recognized that many of these advantages only came through involvement in research in close collaboration with NARS.

In-Country Institutions - Involvement in Ecoregional Initiatives

Examples were offered by participants:

1. Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn in which the National Steering Committees are intersectoral, including policy makers from the relevant ministries, universities, NGOs and the private sector. Technical Working Groups consist of researchers and field workers from organizations directly involved.
2. Involvement in decision making strongly skewed to agricultural research and forestry institutions. NGOs are involved at the field level in implementation, but not in formulation and planning.

IITA process in the Humid Forest initiative was related: It has taken about two years and has involved 19 country workshops to sensitize research leaders, and four Task Force meetings. After the second meeting, the Coordinator visited policy makers and then, after a lag of six months, went to visit the scientists who had been designated for work within the context of the initiative. After meeting in IITA to sign a memorandum of understanding, NARI Directors played a role in sensitizing other policy makers in their countries.

Several participants admitted that efforts to diffuse information on the initiative, particularly to policy makers beyond the NARI, had been weak. In several cases existing networks were used to pass on the information and some were seen as vehicles to sensitize NARS. Where the networks were made up of NARI Directors, as in the Latin American networks, they served to authorize ecoregional initiatives. It was pointed out that much depended on the focus of the network, but that commodity driven networks, while they might form a good point of contact for identifying commodity-oriented skills in the region, would be inherently

unsuitable for managing a systems oriented research process focused towards natural resource management.

Ideas put forward for sensitizing relevant institutions about ecoregional research suggested their inclusion in the Steering committee, involvement in Task Forces and technical committees, and that they be part of the information flows set up for the initiative. A memorandum of understanding is considered important when funding flows are involved.

NARS Organization and Budget Process as an Impediment

As noted earlier, where NARS are organized on commodity or factor lines, the need for multidisciplinary teams has major implications for institutional structure, for operation, and for budget planning and disbursement.

(As noted earlier the Rice-Wheat consortia had identified a number of themes for which different IARCs had been given coordinating roles. While traveling in India, it was brought home to me that several DDG departments may be pursuing research, through universities as executing agencies, on one of these themes. Tillage and crop establishment was highlighted as one theme in which research was probably being funded independently by three DDGs; Crops, Soils and Engineering, sometimes in different departments of the same university).

Different financial needs, or priorities of the different departments may lead to different timing in the release of funds, and, as an extreme, may lead to the individuals on the receiving end not even being aware that they are part of a wider, supposedly cohesive effort. Similarly, when the ecoregional slice of the scientist's work program has been pressed onto him or her, his commitment and ownership may be weak, particularly when it constitutes a very small part of his total program and the rest is largely self-defined. This isolation is enhanced when the commitments to the consortia are made by managers who must then find funds from their regular budget, with repercussions on the self-defined parts of scientists' programs. It tends to show up as ad hoc bits of work appearing at the end of long lines of delegation without cohesion or commitment. The implied changes in operating and budgeting procedures are difficult to introduce unless the program makes funding available to grease the organizational change required. This sort of factor argues for program funding and scientists committed for much of their time to the initiative.

WORKING GROUPS - CYCLE 3

For the final, third cycle of working groups, two questions were posed:

- Following our discussions what are the most important recommendations you would like to see in a report to the Committee of Center Directors ?
- What are the best mechanisms for promoting synergy within and across consortia?

The mixed groups identified for the second cycle were retained for this final session. Again, because of considerable overlap among the conclusions of groups, the lists of recommendations and mechanisms have been consolidated.

Suggested Recommendations to the Committee of Center Directors

- There needs to be a clearer exposition and wider dissemination of the goal and importance of the ecoregional approach to research, and the Center Directors should confirm their commitment to the initiatives. (They might be the appropriate source of a clear exposition on ecoregional research)
- Ecoregional initiatives, coming as they have in parallel with funding shortfalls, and followed by the System Wide Initiatives in response to Rio in 1992, have created tremendous pressures on Centers' management. There is the threat of a crisis of confidence among scientists in some IARCs, and perhaps among their partners. The full implications of an ecoregional approach to research, including those of institutional change, should be related more realistically to the time available for implementation.
- There needs to be explicit guidance, particularly for partners, of the organizational and programming implications of this systems based, multidisciplinary, multiscale research approach.
- The ecoregional approach is, in part, a new way of doing old things - old wine in new bottles. Much, but not all, can be achieved by using existing resources in new ways. For NARS partners adopting new ways is eased by incremental finance.
- Capacity building in the skills, and particularly the new skills, required to implement the approach effectively is imperative. Training should be coordinated across the CGIAR and have the best resource persons involved for each specialist course.
- Funding mechanisms should reflect an organizational structure which will ensure effective implementation of the approach and funding should create pressures to achieve that structure.
- Mechanisms to capture the learning experiences across ecoregional initiatives are essential.
- Ecoregional consortia should be merged, or at least rationalized, with existing networks.
- Despite the need for promotion of the concept and leadership in implementation the IARCs should not dominate the decision making process in planning and operation.
- Strategies should be developed to ensure countries which are brought into partnerships are committed at the highest policy levels to attack the sustainability issue, and perceive their NARS as front line actors in the fight.

Suggestions on Gaining Synergy from Consortia Experiences

- Use a page on the World Wide Web, or a dedicated list server, to record, discuss and query experiences.
- Report on experiences to the newly established Regional and Global NARS Fora.
- Each initiative should have a full time coordinator, coordinators should meet at least annually.
- Invest in documenting site level experiences, particularly those pre-planned as agenda for next year's (NARS or coordinator) meetings.
- Use appropriate existing networks more deliberately and systematically to widen the information flows about experiences in the ecoregional initiatives.
- Make provision for managers/scientists who are embarking on a particular phase to visit initiatives which have successfully implemented that phase.
- Establish a (temporary) unit in the TAC secretariat to promote activities which will learn across the ongoing experiences.

- Formalize a periodic review across ecoregional initiatives.
- Restructure funding to favor ecoregional initiatives. Encourage donors to fund dimensions which will enhance partnership, such as USAID funding email communications between partners, and methods development through the Dutch Fund.
- Link the incremental funding of NARS to organizational change to encourage effective implementation of an ecoregional approach, and to capacity building in the skills required.

It was felt important to recall that the degradation problem is one which articulates locally. The IARCs, with only 3-4% of the total agricultural research budget spent in developing countries, can never be more than a catalytic role model in terms of the coverage required to manage an increasingly stressed natural resource base. NARS must take the lead, and be encouraged to do so.

The Workshop closed at 12.15 p.m. on Friday 23rd September with thanks from participants to the DG of ISNAR Dr. Christian Bonte-Friedheim, to Dr. Michael Loevinsohn for his help in organizing the workshop, and to Ms Melina Tensen for being the perfect workshop administrator. The discussions during the workshop have provided a invaluable foundation for my visits to convening Centers and their partners.

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