

CHANGE IS IN THE AIR

AGM 08 Brief

December 2008

A Revitalized CGIAR — A New Way Forward

Throughout 2008, the Change Management Initiative strived to design a more effective and efficient Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The initiative engaged stakeholders as participants in working groups on key topics and in broader consultations to create a new vision for the CGIAR. The 2008 Independent Review Panel contributed to the process through its findings and recommendations. On the basis of this work, the Change Steering Team prepared a proposal for reform. Endorsed by the Executive Council in October, the proposal is now before CGIAR members for their consideration at the 2008 Annual General Meeting (AGM08).

The Need for Change

Recent global crises caused by turmoil in food, energy and financial markets make clear that the CGIAR will be challenged as never before in fulfilling its mission to reduce poverty and hunger, improve human health and nutrition, and enhance ecosystem resilience through high-quality international agricultural research, partnership and leadership.

The CGIAR can rise to the challenge but needs to transform and revitalize. Its loose structure — emphasizing donor sovereignty, Center autonomy, decision by consensus and independent scientific advice — served well in its formative years by facilitating inclusive growth. But growth has brought to the CGIAR mission creep, as its focus expanded beyond crop productivity to include natural resource management and policy advocacy; organizational complexity, as its membership grew from 18 to 64; and overlapping mandates, as its number of research Centers rose from four to 15.

A recent analysis of what to expect from significantly larger CGIAR investments and scaled-up “best bets” programs found that billions of people would benefit if annual public spending on agricultural research, including investment in the CGIAR, substantially increased. To meet this potential and ensure that best bets become results, the CGIAR needs a tighter structure. It must replace donor sovereignty with donor harmonization, Center autonomy with System coherence, and decision by consensus with results-oriented rules for prioritizing and managing research guided by independent advice that integrates science with partnerships and development outcomes.

Disentangling Doers and Funders

Fundamental to the reform proposal is replacing the consultative system and its complex overlay of reporting and funding relationships with a new contractual structure that clearly defines the distinct roles of those who do research on the one hand and those who fund research on the other, while improving transparency and mutual accountability. The new Consortium of Centers will unite research Centers under a chief executive officer

(CEO) — the public voice of the System — supported by the Consortium Office and reporting to the Consortium Board. Research funders will form the Fund, whose 15-member Fund Council will arrange and approve contracts with the Consortium, supported by the Fund Office. The Fund Council will report to the biennial Funders Summit of all donors.

The Consortium of Centers will guide the research done by CGIAR Centers. Unlike current CGIAR management, it will be legally constituted and therefore able to enter into binding program performance contracts with the Fund. The Consortium will similarly have binding performance agreements with the Centers and partners contracted to deliver the research.

The contractual accountability of the Centers to the Consortium, and of the Consortium to the Fund, is expected to reverse the trend toward restricted funding and sometimes onerous donor oversight. Restricted funding did not exist in the earliest years of the CGIAR, but by 2007 two thirds of all funding had become restricted, typically failing to provide full cost recovery. A robust Consortium will also harmonize reporting systems and provide opportunities for jointly handling human resources, information technology, finance and procurement, which will reduce System costs and enhance managerial effectiveness.

A Strategy for Results

The Consortium Board will be responsible for strategy formulation, management oversight, and risk assessment and compliance. The boards of individual Centers will continue to exercise fiduciary responsibilities for their Centers, not least regarding the binding performance agreements that Centers sign with the Consortium, and they will set the general strategy for their Centers in line with the CGIAR’s Strategy and Results Framework.

The Consortium will take the lead in developing, with partners and stakeholders, the Strategy and Results Framework, the basis for System coherence. One mechanism for developing the strategy will be the biennial Conference on Agricultural Research for Development, which will replace the AGM and provide the occasion for the Funders Summit.

Endorsed by the Fund and implemented by the Consortium, the Strategy and Results Framework will define how the CGIAR achieves its three strategic objectives: (1) improved agricultural productivity, (2) sustainable natural resource use, and (3) policies that stimulate equitable rural development. In line with this overarching strategy, the Consortium will, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, refine a portfolio of 10-15 “mega programs,” which the Fund will support through program performance contracts with the Consortium. A mega program could address, for example, nutritional enhancement, efficient water use or genetic resource management.

The Fund will provide an efficient, multiyear funding mechanism for mega programs through four windows, one each for the three strategic objectives and another for institutional support to Centers. It will harmonize funding decisions, ensure accountability through program performance contracts and provide full cost recovery. Donors will be encouraged to make completely unrestricted contributions to the Fund, but will have the option to earmark to specific windows and mega programs. Bilateral funding for Centers may continue outside the Fund, subject to review by the Consortium to confirm alignment with the broad strategy and provision for full cost recovery.

Evaluation and monitoring will take place at the Center, program and System level. The Consortium will establish a common and strengthened performance management system that will replace other systems, reducing overlap and costs. Performance contracts for mega programs will include a results management framework, and the Consortium CEO will provide an annual report of performance results to the Fund Council. The Fund Council will arrange independent program evaluations every 4-5 years. The Strategy and Results Framework will be reviewed every 6 years, following input from an enlarged Conference for Agricultural Research for Development.

A New Culture of Partnerships

Reporting to the Funders Summit, the Independent Science and Partnership Council will help funders assess the Strategy and Results Framework and advise the Consortium Board. Integrating partnerships and development results with the work of the current Science Council, the Independent Science and Partnership Council will work with the revitalized Global Forum for Agricultural Research

(GFAR) to build partnership networks with national research and development programs, advanced research institutes, United Nations agencies and the private sector. In this new culture of partnerships, a considerable portion of resources flowing through the Fund will support research conducted by partners contracted under performance agreements with the Consortium.

The Fund’s key decision-making body will be the Fund Council, chaired by the World Bank. The rotating voting membership of 15 will have three representatives from Europe and one member each representing seven other regions, international financial institutions and foundations. GFAR will occupy one of the three remaining seats reserved for stakeholders. In practice, the Fund Council will likely have seven members from the South (four funders and three stakeholders), seven members from the North, and one member from an international financial institution. Sessions of the Fund Council will be open to donor observers.

The Way Forward

While building on the successes and competencies achieved since the CGIAR’s founding in 1971, the new structure will allow it to do more and do it better. A more cost-effective System will free up money for plowing into research. Fragmented funding of restricted projects and individual Centers will give way to sustained funding of results-oriented research agendas strategically directed toward significant and compelling challenges. Stable funding will allow Centers to invest in facilities to support great science. Simplified funding and reporting procedures will release scientists to focus on research and provide incentives for working toward results. A secure financial outlook and exciting research environment will help CGIAR Centers attract, hold and develop the best scientific talent. And a more open and supportive CGIAR System will build more dynamic partnerships up and down the research-to-development continuum.

At AGM08, on 2 December, the Alliance of the CGIAR Centers and GFAR will organize roundtable and world café discussions on CGIAR renewal. Once the CGIAR has confirmed in the business meeting its decisions on this proposal, a transition management team will be appointed under the CGIAR chair. The Consortium is scheduled to become a reality in October 2009, with the Fund, Fund Office and Fund Council established and fully functional 2 months later.

FIGURE 1: THE PROPOSED NEW STRUCTURE FOR A REVITALIZED CGIAR

