

SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

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Revisiting SC Business: A Proposal

16-17 May 2007, Madrid, Spain

April 30, 2007

A perspective on the mandate of the SC

According to the mission and bylaws of the CGIAR, the SC has three roles to play:

1. Quality control, reviewing, monitoring and continuous upgrading of the work of the CGIAR centers and to strengthen and extend their impact.
2. Formulation of CGIAR System strategy and the prioritization of research activities.
3. Mobilization of science from outside the system and the strengthening of collaboration with knowledge centers and universities in the North and the South.

For each of these roles, SC panels and portfolio holders have been identified. The first role is a question of good housekeeping and it is of vital importance to maintain high standards and to promote excellence. That role is fulfilled by two standing panels: monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment. They are continuously promoting the upgrading, efficiency and efficacy of their work. The second role is addressed by the panel on priorities and strategies. The MTPs and the framework plans are their instrument. To limit transaction costs, to strengthen their activities and to increase the cohesion within the CGIAR centers the frameworks should function as an instrument of common interest. They should help to increase mutual interaction and to promote synergism. That is at this moment not yet so. It is according to the SC of crucial importance that the Alliance of the CGIAR Centers owns this instrument and tries to improve and use it. The third role of the SC has been not adequately fulfilled during the past few years. The SC thinks that in the seventh step of the evolution of the CGIAR centers and their research agenda this role is of pivotal importance. These steps can be summarized as follows:

1. Plant breeding activities oriented to high yielding varieties of rice, wheat and maize, the major food staple crops. IRRI, CIMMYT (1960 – 1965).
2. Agronomic activities tailored to the needs of the high yielding varieties, crop protection, irrigation, soil fertility, plant nutrition. IITA, CIAT (1965 – 1970).
3. Farming systems research that may help to fine tuning the agronomic and technological activities to the specific needs of various socio-economic characterized farming systems. More socio-economic research and policy research to develop enabling circumstances that may promote impact. IFPRI, ISNAR (1970 – 1980).
4. Broadening the objectives of the research by including natural resource management, natural ecosystems and agro-forestry. ICRAF, CIFOR (1975 – 1985).
5. Problems can't be solved at farm level unless the conditions are created that enable them to do the right things. Eco-regional progress aiming at higher integration levels were identified. (1985 – 1995)
6. Global programs have to be addressed by combined and collaborative efforts of the centers (Challenge Programs). (1995 – 2005)
7. Mobilization of science and stimulating of agricultural research by public and private investment. Greater and more extensive use of partnerships with private sector and civil society.

The mobilization of science aims at the full development of this seventh step. During the evolution of the CGIAR centers the character changed from technology push to technology pull, from end products (varieties) to methodologies, approaches, insights, from mono-disciplinary to multidisciplinary activities, from field level to regional level, from leader and center of activity to partner, facilitator and stimulator. That evolution is also making clear what is needed from the SC to maintain effective and productive.

On the operation of the SC

The SC has now being in operations for 4 years (5 years if the interim SC is included) and it is wise to consider the possibilities of increasing its efficiency and effectiveness. The mode of operation of the council with active working members has been productive. It is also clear that the SC Secretariat has assembled a solid technical team which has been very effective in implementing Council decisions. Those elements should be maintained in the coming years.

The panels as working groups are functioning well for the core tasks of the SC (monitoring and evaluation, impact assessment), but have problems in fields that require full input of all members (priorities and strategies and the mobilization of science). It is for that reason that the Chair of the SC will test some ideas on the future operation of the SC that will help to strengthen its performance. Those ideas will be presented orally.