

## **iSC Commentary on the Fifth External Programme and Management Review of CIP**

The Report of the Fifth External Programme and Management Review (EPMR) of CIP was discussed at iSC/TAC 82 at CIP headquarters in Lima, Peru, in the presence of the Panel Chair Dr. G. Edward Schuh, Dr. Orlando Olcese who represented the CIP Board, and the CIP DG, Dr. Hubert Zandstra and other CIP staff members. The interim Science Council (iSC) expresses its appreciation to Dr. Edward Schuh and his Panel for an analytical and constructive Report which offers an insightful contextualisation of CIP's work within the CGIAR's overall framework. The iSC commends the Panel for the Report which undertakes a detailed assessment of all activities of the Centre.

The iSC notes with appreciation CIP's very positive response to this EPMR Report and the actions the Centre intends to take to implement the recommendations. A number of the recommendations build upon and further reinforce the previous 4<sup>th</sup> EPMR conclusions. CIP in general has made significant progress in most of the 1995 recommendations although some of the concerns still remain.

The Report contains eighteen key recommendations and other important suggestions in various chapters. The iSC broadly endorses the Panel's recommendations and provides the following commentary, which was prepared with inputs from the CGIAR Secretariat to complement the Report.

### **Introduction**

Although not necessarily the core of its Report, the Panel called attention to the recent restatement of the CGIAR goals of not only increasing the supply of food, but also raising the income of poor farmers, and to improving the management of natural resources. In the Panel's view the addition of these goals creates a situation in which the CGIAR Centres like CIP may be evaluated unfairly. Producing new technology for small farmers is an appropriate basis for evaluating performance of the international Centres. But expecting the new production technology to be a significant factor in raising the per capita or family income of the small farmers when so many other factors affect those incomes would not be appropriate. In raising this flag of caution the Panel invoked a cardinal rule in policy making which called for one policy instrument for one policy goal.

The iSC understands the apprehension of the Panel over the multiple goals of the CGIAR. This had been the subject of debate in the Group. However, the iSC maintains that increasing food production through improvement in productivity responds directly to the goal of food security but does not sufficiently account for the equally important objectives of alleviating poverty and maintaining the sustainability of the natural resources upon which food production depends. All three goals are intimately linked with each other and are best pursued together.

Agricultural research as a policy instrument is multidimensional and it is the challenge to CGIAR Centres and their NARS partners to find win-win solutions that will advance these goals in harmony. This review of CIP reveals good examples of how these goals can be reconciled through quality research, dedicated training and capability building and innovative partnerships/alliances with a host of research and development partners at the national and regional levels.

### **Research Achievements and Impact**

The Panel's first key recommendation is the need to coalesce all potato improvement activities into a single project to improve the identity, visibility and effectiveness of the CIP potato breeding effort and that the project leader be fully empowered with financial, budgeting and managerial authority to champion the development and delivery of a coherent breeding programme.

The Centre while appreciating the intent of the recommendation feels that the current configuration of the breeding efforts is working well so far and proposes instead to revisit the issue with a Centre-commissioned external review (CCER) in 2006 to provide the Centre sufficient time to test the present configuration.

The iSC believes that it is too soon to ask the Centre to change its structure anew without giving the Centre the opportunity to test the efficacy of its new project structure which was installed only in 2001 following the 4<sup>th</sup> EPMP recommendation. However, 2006 is too long to wait and the iSC urges the Centre instead to re-evaluate the situation within the next two years.

CIP has recently established a biodiversity and biosafety facility, which together with the fully integrated corporate database, workflow system for accession monitoring, integration of GIS, and establishment of a bioinformatics unit are likely to enhance the use of these resources for breeding and strategic research. The iSC supports the Panel's recommendation that CIP invest in a high-throughput genotyping facility for the benefit of the gene discovery and pre-breeding activities at CIP and elsewhere.

The Centre has made notable achievements in research on host-plant resistance and in integrated pest management both in pathogen identification, characterization and detection, and in developing resistant potato and sweetpotato materials. High levels of resistance to late blight have been attained in advanced breeding populations. The projects on late blight and integrated pest management are of high quality and they provide practical benefits to CIP's clientele. The Panel believes that the transfer of virus-free sweetpotato technology to China is likely to have a significant economic impact. Other important traits that are being introgressed into advanced materials include quality, particularly in sweetpotato for nutrition. The project for high vitamin A sweetpotato in Africa promises to have significant impact for women and children, in particular. CIP is also making good progress in developing markers and transgenic lines for potato and sweetpotato breeding.

The iSC notes that the Panel has doubts on whether the projects on true potato seed (TPS) and post-harvest quality will be sustainable and able to deliver, and encourages CIP to carefully assess the future of these projects.

The Panel assesses the recently initiated NRM research to be both relevant for the Andean region and the CIP-lead initiative on mountain ecosystems, and productive in developing tools and methods. It has already produced policy decision support tools, which are likely to have significance to the national partners for many different applications. A priority setting exercise for NRM within the overall strategic planning of the Centre as suggested by the Panel should help focus further the research agenda and develop a proper balance between process oriented and application oriented research, and between production systems based on CIP mandate crops on one hand and livestock-pasture-based production systems on the other hand. Greater synergies between CIP's commodity research and the NRM work are likely to strengthen the overall coherence of CIP's research agenda.

The iSC joins the Panel in commending CIP for the effective organizational location of its social scientists, who have dual belongingness and accountability to their own specialized units within CIP (benefiting from having critical mass and professional interaction) as well as to the interdisciplinary research programme teams, in which they are integrated as members. CIP's social research on poor farmers and households has yielded strategically useful knowledge to CIP's biophysical researchers. This needs to be sustained.

The iSC is alarmed by the discrepancy between the release of CIP-derived varieties and the much lower and variable adoption of those materials. Although adoption rates are influenced by issues such as vegetative propagation, consumer preference and prevalence of plant health problems, the iSC encourages CIP, in addition to looking at physical attributes associated with adoption, to do household studies and beyond that to examine cultural features at village and region levels for adoption and impact. The iSC strongly endorses the Panel's recommendation for CIP to conduct more studies on constraints to early acceptance and adoption looking at economic profitability and policy and to develop a consistent framework for data collection and analysis.

The Panel flagged the need for CIP to reallocate its social science resources to do more research on science and technology policy. While recognizing the impressive achievements of CIP in documenting rates of return to agricultural research as important basis for making decisions on research priorities, the Panel felt that in particular the topics of resource savings effects of new technology and the economics of *in situ* vs. *ex situ* genetic conservation are very important to CIP's work and must be addressed. The Centre's response to this recommendation was positive and the iSC looks forward to seeing these items in CIP's future social research agenda.

CIP's relationship with CONDESAN in particular is quite unique, and the iSC would have liked to see more analysis of the potential benefits that both CIP and CONDESAN are likely to achieve from this partnership. The iSC commends the Centre for its long

term commitment to this ecoregional consortium, which has features in line with the CGIAR's regional approach to research, stated in Plank 4 of the new Vision and Strategy. The iSC endorses the Panel's recommendations to increase the use of the CONDESAN benchmark watersheds in CIP research and the CONDESAN mechanism in the evaluation and dissemination of the research outputs. The iSC is confident that CIP as a member of CONDESAN will be able to enhance this kind of integration through the partnership. The iSC finds the Panel's recommendation on strategic framework in building partnerships important, but would have liked to see a more analytical assessment in the Report of the Centre's collaborative research partnerships as a basis for this recommendation.

The iSC appreciates the Panel's efforts to assess the quality of research based on the criteria of quality and impact of publications as well as quantity and quality of other outputs. The iSC joins the Panel in encouraging CIP to adopt a more determined and systematic strategy to publishing. In the Panel's view more of the quality work done at CIP could easily be advanced into refereed publications. Publishing in the relevant refereed scientific journals is vital for maintaining science quality and for the Centre's visibility, competitiveness and attractiveness as a science partner.

### **Governance, Finance and Management**

The iSC is pleased that the Centre agrees with the recommendations of the Panel and has put or is planning to put in place fiscal and management policies, systems or procedures to implement them. The completion of changes in CIPFIS should be followed by the full and transparent sharing of information with managers at all levels with budgetary and planning responsibilities, as recommended by the Panel. The iSC is concerned, however, that the Board's performance in the oversight of financial and budgetary matters has not been strong. This is particularly troublesome because the last EPMR made a similar recommendation: "that the Board continually monitor CIP's liquidity and operating fund levels and establish a timetable for achieving what CIP management proposes as prudent and reasonable targets".

The review highlights the leadership role expected of the Board in promoting prudence in financial management. As this review shows, the Board should focus not only on ways of increasing revenues, but also on ways of cutting expenditures. Otherwise there is danger that Centre programmes will be stretched to levels when they begin to lose their effectiveness, critical mass, and viability. Clearly, financial discipline can be achieved only if a Board is vigilant in setting and enforcing clear priorities.

The iSC calls CIP's due attention to the Panel's recommendation to employ an international development officer, given the variable performance in resource mobilization in the past by CIP. Whether through a programme and/or officer, fund raising is a vitally important strategic activity and CIP needs to secure high level of skill in this area by itself and/or in partnership with the other Centres and the CGIAR Secretariat.

The iSC joins the Panel in its wish that the Board be more challenging and forward looking in the exercise of its programmatic/scientific oversight.

### **CIP's Future**

The iSC commends the Panel for its insightful discussion of the future of CIP. The iSC agrees fully with the Panel that the Centre should urgently engage in the development of a vision and a strategic plan that will integrate crop improvement and protection, NRM and social sciences, particularly in the context of CIP's expected funding environment and changing external conditions. The need for strategic planning and priorities was also a concern of the 4<sup>th</sup> EPMR Panel. The iSC believes that priority setting should contribute both to seeking innovative solutions to developing country problems and to setting the basic priorities to guide resource allocation in CIP. The iSC agrees with the Panel's view that priority setting needs to involve partners and constituency groups and be methodologically suitable for the different areas of activities.

The iSC notes that, as observed by the Panel, recent budgetary cuts have been made across all areas. In the Panel's perception the Centre may currently be trying to do too much and has under funding pressure developed a short-term bias in its current programmes. The iSC strongly supports the concept of basing the cuts and resource allocation on a priority setting exercise of the Centre to ensure strength, capacity and critical mass in the high priority areas.

The iSC believes that continuous assessment is needed at CIP on the position of the Centre in the research-to-development continuum in order to develop a strong self-identity and guarantee long term impact. While accepting CIP's intention to engage in development activities as needed, the Panel cautions to do so only if this serves the weaker NARS. The iSC agrees with the Panel's view that CIP should sharpen its profile as a centre of excellence in its mandate research for the developing countries. CIP's focus on near-end-products is understandable for demonstrating impact where it is likely to be achieved effectively and in the short term. However, this should be balanced against the need for strategic research paving the way for long term relevance and impact, a point that was also strongly emphasized by the 4<sup>th</sup> EPMR. The iSC underlines the primary need for CIP is to produce international public goods.

The iSC trusts that the key recommendations and several important suggestions in this Report are helpful for the Centre. Like the Panel, the iSC strongly believes that CIP, despite the current financial difficulties, will remain an important and needed Centre.

Roots and tuber crops continue to be very valuable crops for the poor and in the marginal areas of the developing world. Because of their vegetatively propagated nature these crops require considerable research maintenance effort. Although these same crops are produced in the North, their research requirements for the developing world are quite different. CIP as the key supplier of international public good research for roots and tubers clearly deserves greater support.