

# REVOLUTIONIZING THE EVOLUTION OF THE CGIAR 2001 – 2007

A contribution to the institutional memoir  
and some thoughts for the future

## SUMMARY

The CGIAR has changed over time<sup>1</sup> although change has not always come easily, and not always at the pace required. The many external challenges that agriculture and development face require the CGIAR to address its internal challenges, giving continuity to the reform program initiated in 2001, if the CGIAR System is to continue to play an important role in development. The 2001-2007 reform program focused on **efficiency, efficacy, transparency, accountability, and participation**. The four initial pillars of reform were:

1) The creation of major research for development programs that addressed key global issues and that necessarily required the mobilization of science and scientists from South and North alike, known as CGIAR **Challenge Programs**; 2) Streamlining governance and putting in place adequate mechanisms for nimble decision making, through the creation of an **Executive Council**, the elimination of several committees, and the abolishment of the Mid-Term meetings (MTM); 3) The creation of a science-focused **Science Council** to advise the Consultative Group, replacing the Technical Advisory Committee; and 4) The establishment of a **System Office** that would bring together, virtually, all units that provide service to the System, with a clear expectation that a single, integrated communication strategy, for coherent communication and fund-raising, would be developed.<sup>2</sup> These first pillars paved the way to many additional components, such as a System-wide Performance Measurement System; a Compensation study that analyzed compensation and benefits at all levels of the System and many more.

Although impact that sustainably changes institutions can only be assessed in the mid- to long-term, initial evidence suggests that the impact of the reform program was, in many ways, immediate. Several of the initial initiatives are leading to more innovations. We believe the actions taken have led the CGIAR System in the direction of efficiency, efficacy, transparency, accountability, and participation. A fundamental change has been the acceptance of the Consultative Group as a

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**decision-making body**, and not merely a platform for discussion. Based on these first elements, we believe that key internal issues that need to be tackled include:

- 1) **Simplification of governance at Center level:** Increased demands on accountability and several failures in the recent past (CIAT, CIMMYT, and ISNAR) indicate beyond doubt that “business as usual” in governance at Center level is not tenable;
- 2) **Increased alignment among Centers and CGIAR Members:** Alignment in terms of programs, provision of services and governance has finally begun to occupy a prominent space in the agenda of CGIAR meetings. For the benefit of developing countries, much more is needed, and a focus on alignment to support the development of Sub-Saharan Africa is a good start. Increased stability in funding is expected to be a key outcome of serious alignment efforts by Members, which is important for Center management and long-term strategy;
- 3) **Reviewing and Adjusting Priorities:** The “System Priorities for CGIAR Research 2005-2015” are expected to help the System maintain its focus. The CGIAR needs to review and adjust the set of approved priorities and, equally important, Members need to discipline themselves in the kinds of projects or programs they would fund. These are major and complex challenges considering the Centers’ financial needs and the fact that Members need to demonstrate the short term impact of ODA resources;
- 4) **Mobilization of Science and Technology:** The single new and perhaps most important element in the establishment of the Science Council was the creation of a standing panel to mobilize science. A preliminary assessment suggests that the objective of mobilizing science from Southern and Northern institutions to support the CGIAR mission simply did not take place, notwithstanding other important achievements by the Science Council.

All these issues demand immediate strategic attention. If, in order to meet these challenges, we need to plan new modes of operation, of governance and of management, we should be prepared to do so. The CGIAR needs to tackle the **unfinished business** responding to these key challenges which will allow the System to get ready to respond to the new ones which will undoubtedly come.

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1 For a brief history of the CGIAR, please see <http://www.cgiar.org/who/history/index.html>.  
2 Future Harvest, a public relations activity sponsored by CGIAR Centers, has been dissolved.