

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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Building a Strong Science Council

I am pleased to report to you that we are building a very strong Science Council along the lines outlined in the working group report that you approved at AGM 2002 and reaffirmed at AGM 2003. While the power of the Science Council is, appropriately, limited to the power of persuasion, I believe we can be very helpful to centers, donors, and other stakeholders of the CGIAR in setting research priorities, assuring good science, enhancing impact, and mobilizing agricultural science for the benefit of poor people and the environment.

In addition to the Science Council itself, which consists of six outstanding scientists and the Chair, we have now established the three new panels we were instructed to create. Each panel has two Science Council members and two additional members. Together with the existing panel on impact assessment, these three panels focus on priorities and strategies, monitoring and evaluation, and the mobilization of science. The new panel members have already been introduced. Suffice it to say that each and every one of them strengthens the overall Science Council effort. As Chairman of the Science Council, I can assure you that it is a great honor and pleasure to work with such outstanding Science Council and panel members.

We have made a giant step towards strengthening the Science Council Secretariat at FAO by hiring an extremely well-qualified new Executive Director. Ruben Echeverria is an outstanding professional who brings both very high qualifications and a wealth of experience to this position. Together, we are reorganizing the staffing patterns at the Secretariat in order to better meet our new challenges.

The new Science Council began its work in January of this year and we have since then held two formal meetings in addition to a couple of informal get-togethers—one of which was held earlier this week here in Mexico. Our formal meetings are open and transparent. We make decisions in open sessions and the short, closed sessions that we have are primarily on housekeeping matters and discussion of individuals for the various panels and committees that we establish. While discussion and decision-making in open session entails a certain amount of risk and goodwill on behalf of all, we believe transparency is of utmost importance. This approach means—among other things—that draft documents will be publicly available before they are revised and finalized. We want all interested parties to be a part of the process arriving at the decisions rather than keeping everything to ourselves until we have the final paper and the final decision.

We will make every effort to safeguard the objectivity, independence, and lack of bias in the Science Council. In this regard, we have put in place a conflict of interest policy which requires each Council member to declare any aspect of his or her work that may be perceived as a conflict of interest. While all of us are entitled to our personal and professional opinions, we must make every effort to assure that the Science Council operates in a professionally objective manner.

As I mentioned in Nairobi last year, I believe firmly that form must follow function. Therefore, during its ten months of existence, the Science Council has spent much of its energy on trying to develop a set of system priorities. Once we have agreement on such priorities, we are prepared to discuss any needs for structural change. This, of course, does not prohibit individual centers from pursuing structural changes if they so desire. Since I already presented our work on system priorities in the Stakeholder Meeting and since we have a separate session in the Business Meeting to discuss the system priorities, I shall not dwell further on this matter. Suffice it to say that this is work in progress that hopefully will involve all stakeholder groups of the CGIAR before it is completed.

We are close to completion of a new approach to monitoring and evaluation of CGIAR research, we have made significant progress on a number of impact assessments, and we are beginning to build a platform to help mobilize agricultural science outside the CGIAR system.

We are enjoying outstanding collaboration with FAO at all levels and specifically, we are strengthening our working relationship with FAO's technical resources in fields of common interest. To advance this matter, we are organizing an FAO/Science Council day early next year.

Science Council Strategy

In order to respond to the desire by donors and centers for a more cohesive and more sharply focused research program of the CGIAR, the Science Council has developed a strategy that consists of five key elements:

1. Identify a small number of key CGIAR System Priorities that focus on problems for which the CGIAR is likely to have the greatest impact;
2. Implement new monitoring and evaluation processes that give more emphasis to self-evaluation and Board accountability;
3. Measure programmatic performance in terms of progress towards achieving the goals of the CGIAR, on the basis of Medium-Term Plans (MTPs) and logframes;
4. Improve the quality of Center, Systemwide Programs and Challenge Programmes MTPs and logframes as a basis for better planning and performance appraisal (linked to System Priorities); and
5. Contribute to CGIAR programmatic alignment (linked to the current activities of the two task forces for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)).

Since I already discussed these five elements in my presentation at the Stakeholder Meeting, suffice it to say here that we will be placing much more emphasis on the centers' Medium Term Plans and logframes. The centers have responded positively to our request for enhanced plans and logframes. However, the Science Council will need an appropriate amount of time to do justice to the plans and that is why we strongly support the ExCo's recommendation to move the Annual General Meetings from late October to a later date. This will give us the necessary time to do a high-quality job on the Medium-Term Plans without asking centers to submit the plans unreasonably early in the year.

Action Taken

On reviewing the CGIAR Research Agenda. We have recently reviewed the centers' Medium-Term Plans 2005 – 2007. They reflect improvement with respect to logframe clarity and annual targets. This year a logframe had also been requested for each Systemwide and Ecoregional program. You can see our specific comments and each center's response in the document made available for this meeting.

On Challenge Programmes. We recommend continuation of the Generation Challenge Programme and the initial phase of the SSA Challenge Programme to identify researchable topics and research hypotheses. An analysis of lessons learned from the CPs was done jointly with the CGIAR Secretariat. Specifically, important issues for a successful CP include a need to have a clear definition of the problem to be solved, a “comparative paradigm” across partners, and purpose-oriented partnerships. We also intend to evaluate progress made by Systemwide programs.

On Identifying CGIAR System Priorities. We reconfirm the need to rationalize the current system priorities and after two years of work, including wide consultation, we suggest the following preliminary list of 10 priority areas: conservation and characterization of genetic resources; genetic improvement of specific traits; improved water management in agriculture; better management of forests and forest landscapes; better soil and land management; improved production and processing systems for high-value commodities; enhancing resource-efficient and equitable forms of livestock sector work; improved management of aquatic resources; policy and institutional innovations to reduce poverty and hunger and to enhance competitiveness of smallholders; and strengthened national and regional capacities for agricultural research and rural institutions.

These are still broad areas that perhaps encompass almost everything that we currently do. The next step is to develop specific priorities within each area. We will do this in collaboration with centers, donors, NARS and other stakeholders. A series of workshops to further define system priorities (one per priority area) will be held in Rome in January-February 2005. The Council will make a final decision on priorities at the Spring 2005 meeting.

On Changing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in the CGIAR System. In collaboration with the CGIAR Secretariat, the Council is preparing a document, *Changing Monitoring and Evaluation in the CGIAR System*, which represents completion of a lengthy process to streamline the center review process. This process establishes a continuum of evaluations starting from center self-assessment and ending in an external review of center programs and management. The Performance Measurement System would be an input to the new M&E process. The different parts of the system will be complementary to each other. It is proposed that the Center Boards would assume the main responsibility for oversight, and the external program and management reviews would focus on auditing the internal

evaluation processes, the Board's governance function, and the centers' strategic directions.

On Regional Programmatic Alignment. The Science Council is collaborating with the CGIAR Secretariat, the two task forces, and the resource persons to help realign CGIAR research for Sub-Saharan Africa. Progress on this matter is presented elsewhere.

On CGIAR Performance Measurement. This will be a key element of linking the evaluation of MTPs and the evaluation of centers. As we conclude the process of identifying system priorities, the indicators of programmatic performance will become much clearer. Together with the CDC, we have collaborated with the task force in the preparation of indicators for quality and relevance of staff, quality and relevance of programs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

On Mobilizing Science. We are proceeding with a summary overview of the present collaboration going on at the centers in order to have relevant information before continuing development of a Standing Panel on Mobilizing Science (SPMS) strategic plan. We will prepare a State of the Global Agriculture Research paper to be presented at AGM 2005 and annually thereafter.

Because the CGIAR, in my opinion, is a winner and because we must communicate that, not only among ourselves but also to the outside, we are collaborating with the CGIAR Secretariat to design and implement a SC Communication Strategy, through which the Council could make better use of existing CGIAR communications mechanisms (CG News, CGIAR Annual Report, CGIAR AGM and Science Briefs) and possibly develop new ones.

Regarding External Reviews of Centers. Progress is being made in implementing the 4th EPMR of IFPRI, the 5th EPMR of CIMMYT, and the review of the Systemwide Programme on Alternatives for Slash and Burn. Forthcoming EPMRs of CIFOR, ICRAF and the World Fish Centre are on the agenda to start in 2005; and of IWMI and ICARDA in 2006.

Other Activities. In addition to the above, the SC is undertaking a number of other activities as outlined in the SC meeting reports available on the web. These include work on food safety, ethics, and the endorsement of the CGIAR Open University. Hans Gregersen will report on our impact assessment work.

Let me finish by thanking you for inviting me to Chair the Science Council. It is exciting and challenging and it is an honor to be associated with such a strong Science Council—a Council that I believe will make a difference in the lives of poor people.