

June 30, 2004

Mr. Ian Johnson
Chairman, CGIAR
1818 H Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20043
USA

Dr. Francisco Reifshneider
Director, CGIAR
1776 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006,
USA

Re: The External Review Panel Report of Partnership Committees

Dear Mr. Johnson and Dr. Reifschneider,

The Private Sector Committee (PSC) discussed the external review panel report in June. The report prepared by the panel is comprehensive and as most of the current PSC members are new to the committee, it provided a good historical perspective on how the committees formed and evolved over the years. On behalf of the committee the following comments are made. The comments here are restricted to the areas dealing more specifically with the PSC in the report.

The objective behind establishment of the PSC was to get a private sector perspective regarding the current status and future needs of global agricultural research, serve as a link between the CGIAR and the private sector and raise awareness of the global agricultural research. All of these are still valid objectives. The increasing need for agriculture to provide for more people globally, is made a more challenging problem as a result of the limited and shrinking funds that the public sector has available for research. In these times of rapidly evolving technologies that are more and more costly, the need for effective partnerships between the public and private sector is of paramount importance. We feel that the PSC is an effective mechanism in place today to facilitate this exchange and technology transfer. While the pressures and dynamics of the relationship have shifted over time, PSC members believe that the current groups of scientists are ready to work in a cooperative manner for better public good.

In the early years of the committee's operations, more emphasis was placed at policy level initiatives. This also was the time when CGIAR was in the process of change and until the change process had reached a certain level of stabilization, PSC could best serve at the policy level. The PSC has since shifted some of its activities at center/program level such as the interactions with the Challenge Programs, the proposed exchange program between CGIAR centers and various participating private sector organizations.

The review indicates that the current framework of the PSC remains highly general and does not give details. The PSC has defined specific work plan within the framework established and is working closely with the CGIAR on these. The London meeting of the PSC set out with a new work plan that reflects both policy and operational level activities. Also the PSC meeting in Feb. 2004, had the participation of the CDC chair. Preceding this meeting was a workshop organized by IFPRI on Public private partnerships, again examples of activities that are engaging the CGIAR centers. Although time lines have been drawn up for some of the PSC programs, we need to take the next step in developing goals that both CGIAR and private parties can be measured against. It is also a fact that we have different reward systems and this at times leads to very different approaches to getting work done.

While the results of the survey by the panel on partnership committee perception are mixed, the creation of the committee has created greater awareness about CGIAR in the member's companies. Within our organizations there is greater understanding about the activities of the CGIAR and the PSC is also looking at working with Seed Industry Associations at national, regional and international level to bring greater exposure of the CGIAR and improved understanding. On appreciation, the cultural differences of the two groups require more effort to create greater appreciation of CGIAR at all levels within the private sector. It is valuable to the private sector to have a forum for engagement and for learning about the issues and strategies and programs of the CG. But this is also valuable to the mission of the CG in so much as it influences the actions of the private sector in ways that benefit small-holders and poor consumers directly or indirectly.

On the mission of the PSC, the review indicates that it is self-set and at CGIAR level, expectations from the committees are not well defined. PSC is comfortable with the mission as is and welcomes further clarifications from the CGIAR on what is expected from the committee if different than the stated mission. In addition, the PSC would welcome a formal means by which PSC's recommendations to the CGIAR are considered by the CGIAR. This would also help further define expectations from each other.

The panel has made one recommendation for the PSC and that the current committee/programs be market tested for next 2 to 4 years. The PSC is already engaged in these programs and supports the recommendation.

Although the panel has focused much on the historical evolution of the PSC, it has failed to place due emphasis on the current activities. Also a combined review of the partnership committees, especially since the two committees (PSC and NGO) have operated in such distinct manner has tended to generalize the committees and specific PSC related issues could have been lost in this. The ExCo discussions on the panel report highlighted the diversity of civil society and the fact that it is not just PS and NGO. PSC members are open to the idea of organizing some joint activities with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in areas of common concern. The PSC would take up this matter in its next meeting and update you as our thinking further develops on this subject matter.

The enthusiasm that existed at the establishment of the committee continues today and the PSC is looking forward to our continued interactions. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the report.

With best regards,

Usha Barwale Zehr
PSC Chair