

Summary of ExCo 9 Discussion and Recommendations to the CGIAR on Engagement with CSOs¹

Fionna Douglas (Leader of the Communication Team, CGIAR Secretariat) introduced the item, recounting the historical context as background to the issue. She noted that the CGIAR NGO Committee (NGOC) was established in 1995 and functioned until 2002 when the NGOC froze its relationship with the CGIAR at AGM02, and has not functioned as a committee since. One of the recommendations emanating from the discussion of the review of partnership committees at AGM04 asked the CGIAR Secretariat to consider ways to increase and improve engagement activities with civil society organizations. A draft strategy paper has been prepared addressing this, which outlines options for the CGIAR to consider.

I. Johnson noted his own regret and disappointment that the relationship with NGOC was unilaterally severed because of the efforts of one individual who was attending a CGIAR meeting for the first time.

Maria Iskandarani (CGIAR Secretariat) presented the draft strategy paper, which contains the following key recommendations:

1. Adoption of a more holistic approach to engagement with CSOs;
2. Establishing a network of CGIAR CSO focal points;
3. Establishing an information/knowledge sharing system on CSO engagement in the CGIAR;
4. Enhancing current mechanisms for engagement with CSOs;
5. Developing new mechanisms for engagement with CSOs; and
6. Dissolving the dormant CGIAR NGO Committee.

Discussion:

- ExCo thanked the CGIAR Secretariat for developing a strategy and agreed that engagement with a broad cross-section of civil society organizations (not just NGOs) is desirable.
- AGM06 should include a CSO forum.
- GFAR should play an active role in helping to facilitate engagement with CSOs.
- The civil society seat on ExCo should remain and preferably be filled by appointing a representative of farmers' organizations reflecting developing country perspectives.
- The paper should not be seen as one-sided (i.e., what benefits the CGIAR would derive from such partnerships) and should include more on benefits that engagement can offer civil society as well.
- A member indicated the usefulness of holding consultations with CSOs on the proposed approach/framework.
- There was strong support for the recommendation to abolish the NGOC, and for maintaining the CSO seat on ExCo.

¹ Excerpt from Ninth Meeting of the CGIAR Executive Council (October 19-20, 2005) Summary Record of Proceedings, October 31, 2005.

- In response to questions, Francisco Reifschneider stressed that a central coordinating mechanism was neither needed nor planned. Instead, there would be multiple entry points to CSO relationships. The focal points that exist at the Center level would be expanded by having a dedicated focal point in the CGIAR Secretariat (part-time). In addition, more effort will be devoted to communication in order to highlight the already strong relations with CSOs at the Center level.

Conclusions and ExCo Recommendations to the CGIAR:

- *The CGIAR should be fully engaged with CSOs.*
- *The paper should be updated based on comments received from ExCo and discussed fully at AGM05. The engagement framework should clearly reflect what the CGIAR is already doing.*
- *There is a desire to fill the civil society seat on ExCo, but it is important to remember that ExCo is only one element of the overall approach. ExCo suggests:*
 - a) The civil society seat on ExCo be filled with a representative of farmers' organizations bringing developing country perspectives;*
 - b) In consultation with the GFAR Chair, the CGIAR Chair should identify an individual who could play the expected role in ExCo and report back to ExCo with a recommendation.*
- *The CGIAR should abolish the now-dormant NGO Committee.*