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CGIAR Chairman's Opening Statement, AGM05

WHERE AGRICULTURE BEGAN: GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

1. Introduction

Your Excellency Lhafi Abdeladim, Your Excellency Mouhattane Mohamed, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Welcome, again. Events connected with this meeting (AGM05) are already in full swing. Now, it is time for the Annual General Meeting, with a focus on issues that will dominate the Stakeholder Meeting and the Business Meeting. I look forward to dynamic discussions as well as clear decisions.

This is our first meeting in the Central, West Asia, and [North](#) Africa region, or CWANA, and we are honored that it is being held under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohamed VI. Our appreciation of his gracious encouragement will be formally recorded in the AGM Summary of Proceedings.

I welcome the collaboration of many partners that has made this meeting possible, and I particularly want to thank:

- His Excellency Harouchi Abderahim, Minister of Social Development who joined us yesterday at the formal opening of AGM05, and at the opening of the exhibition that showcases the work of the CGIAR and its partners. He did so on behalf of His Excellency Driss Jettou, Prime Minister of Morocco;
- Hamid Narjisse, Director General of INRA, and INRA staff, our direct partners at AGM who have worked tirelessly;
- Ministers participating in the "Conversation with Ministers" as part of the Science Forum, and other distinguished visitors;
- Zohra Ben Lakhdar, who will deliver the Crawford Memorial Lecture later today;
- Ferid Belhaj, the World Bank's Country Manager in Morocco and his dedicated staff for their invaluable co-operation and assistance which has been vital to the organization of AGM;
- ICARDA's Director General Adel El-Beltagy and Center staff for facilitating so much of the technical arrangements required; and of course
- CGIAR Director Francisco Reifschneider as well as the staff of the CGIAR Secretariat and their associates for their hard work on our behalf.

Please join me in a round of applause in recognition of their contribution.

There is a natural fit between the CGIAR and the CWANA region where agriculture had its beginnings. Important crops that originated in this area include barley, bitter vetch, chickpea, einkorn, flax, lentil, pea and wheat. Today, these crops are of global and/or regional importance, and they must be recognized as part of the CWANA heritage. This is a region that is a major contributor to the bread basket of the world.

Over 40 percent of the CWANA population live in rural areas, and depend on agriculture for their livelihood. High population growth rates, limited water resources, and scarcity of arable land are the main causes of poverty among sections of the farm population. Agriculture and agricultural research have major roles to play in improving their livelihoods and enabling them to break the bonds of poverty.

In Morocco itself, some 17 percent of GDP is derived from agriculture. Drought, problems of crop management, and degradation of its natural resources, as well as lack of access to fair markets, constrain agricultural growth. Morocco supports innovation and scientific research, as we saw in the impressive INRA presentations yesterday, in order to cope with many challenges including those associated with globalization. Morocco has created effective research partnerships including several with CGIAR-supported Centers. More recently, Morocco, as a CGIAR Member, is helping us to strengthen what we do and how we do it. The fact that the Government of Morocco is co-hosting this meeting so soon after it joined the Group demonstrates, in my mind, the extent of Morocco's involvement in the CGIAR, and the high regard in which the CGIAR holds Moroccan scientists and policymakers.

2. In Memoriam

Sadly, several colleagues have died this past year. I have not attempted to compile a full list, because there is always the risk of omissions. Let me, however, mention four of our late colleagues, who were all well known to all of you:

Robert Carsky, an agronomist working at the African Rice Center (WARDA), and before that at IITA, died under tragic circumstances. In his death, Africa lost a pioneering scientist whose work will have a lasting impact on the lives of thousands of African farmers. The CGIAR Secretariat has dedicated its latest publication, "Scientists in the CGIAR," edited by Rebecca Carsky, to his memory. The book is available outside.

Robert Havener's association with international agricultural research spanned some 50 years. He was a wise and helpful colleague, and certainly a mentor to me. His influence was spread wide. One of his collaborators described him as a scientist who could look back at what he had done in his career and truly know that he had a profound and positive impact on humankind.

Ravi Tadvalkar left an indelible stamp on financial management in the CGIAR. He will be remembered for the innovations he introduced, for his constant emphasis on transparency and accountability at all levels, and for his commitment to nurture the talents of others.

John Vercoe was respected as a distinguished scientist. He chaired the ILRI Board, was Chair of the Committee of Board Chairs, and served on ExCo. As a colleague and leader, he was known for his deep sense of caring, as well as his commitment to agriculture, and he was admired for his sparkling sense of humor.

We honor them and, in doing so, we honor the memory of all our colleagues whom we have lost.

May we have a moment of silence as a mark of our respect for them all.

Thank you.

I will now move on.

3. Agriculture Matters

The agendas for both segments of this meeting are heavy on substance. They cover such crucial issues as science priorities for the CGIAR System, funding for science priorities, the essential link between research for development and development itself, Africa's special needs, internal and external partnerships, and the future of the CGIAR.

We approach our discussion of these issues, strengthened by support from the international development community, developing countries, civil society organizations, and the private sector. It was not always so. I began my CGIAR chairmanship at a time when support for agriculture had truly declined. Other issues, such as HIV/AIDS, governance, education, the environment, and trade, all of them very important, were at the forefront of the global discourse on development. Reduced interest in agriculture was reflected in ODA trends. Almost every donor reduced its support for agriculture.

Today, by contrast, there is a broad international consensus that agricultural growth is a precondition for rural development and a pre-condition for income growth and poverty alleviation. There is agreement, as well, that appropriate technologies and therefore strong agricultural research programs are required if the objectives of agricultural development, and hence of economic and social development, are to be met in all countries.

Many forces combined in a successful effort to restore agriculture to its rightful place on the development agenda. In this city, the world's developing countries, acting through the Group of 77, now consisting of 132 countries, adopted the Marrakech Declaration of 2003 in which they recognized agriculture as a key component of development, and called for South-South co-operation to enhance agricultural productivity and to ensure food security. The G-77 reaffirmed and endorsed this approach in subsequent Declarations in Sao Paulo and Doha. The Group of 20, a combination of developing and industrialized countries, stressed the importance of fair trade practices as a means of ensuring agricultural growth and supporting development.

Individual developing countries and regional organizations including the African Union added their voice. Countries such as Brazil, China, India, and Kenya showed by example how diversified and thriving agriculture could improve the well-being of their peoples, and could contribute to economic and social prosperity.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) explicitly recognized the link between agriculture and development, as did the third World Water Forum which emphasized the need for improved use of water in agriculture. Two consecutive G-8 Summits, in 2004 and 2005, acknowledged the importance of agriculture, especially as a means to reduce poverty and hunger in Africa. Support for agriculture has been revived at the World Bank, and will continue to grow. Indeed, In his first major policy statement, World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz spoke with approval of increased support for agriculture. The UN has endorsed a special focus on agriculture and agricultural research. At all these events, the role of international agricultural research in promoting growth and, thereby, reducing poverty and hunger, was highlighted. The CGIAR was specifically mentioned in these documents.

The message from the international development community is clear. So I am pleased to confirm that agriculture is truly back on the map of development.

The CGIAR has contributed to the new trend primarily by demonstrating that investment in agricultural research brings substantial returns and impact. The CGIAR has also worked with many partners in advocacy for agriculture and agricultural research, at national, regional, and international levels. At the UN, for instance, a partnership of the CGIAR, G-77 and the Government of Japan co-hosted a lunch-time dialogue with government ministers, diplomats and the media, during the World Summit of September 2005. The topic was "Agriculture Matters." Participants enjoyed a meal of cassava, NERICA rice, and tilapia – all products of CGIAR-supported research.

Our role of advocacy is vital, and will continue as a major element of our work, in close association with many partners. At all times, however, it must be evidence-based advocacy; the result of first class thinking and pioneering research and its impact. Thus, for advocacy to be effective, the CGIAR System must at the same time be actively engaged in providing research-based knowledge, information, and analyses that can contribute to enlightening the debate on how best to resolve the unresolved issues of the development agenda. In doing so, the CGIAR must not shy away from science.

4. Tasks for Research

We have all witnessed phenomenal progress in the world, in so many different aspects of life. On the whole, human conditions improved more in the past century than in the rest of history. On this continent, where negative developments tend to capture public attention, growth, a precondition for development, was over 4 percent in 16 countries during the past decade, higher than in many major industrialized countries. And yet, in Africa as elsewhere in the developing world, deprivation is widespread. Close to 300 million people

have average incomes of below US\$1 per day. A majority of them depend on agriculture for their livelihood, income, and sustenance.

The existence of such levels of destitution anywhere in the world is outrageous. Attacking poverty in all its dimensions is therefore a moral imperative. This is not a task that can be accomplished by quick fixes. We need to think strategically with a long-term perspective because agricultural research, which is central to changing this sad scenario, is a long-term enterprise.

The world's population which was some 3.6 billion in 1971, the founding year of the CGIAR, has grown to the current 6 billion, and is expected to be around 9 billion by 2050. The demand for food could double, and the demand will diversify, as incomes rise, and consumers spend more on better and higher value foods. The need to produce more food, safer food, and food that meets stricter standards, will intensify pressure on natural resources which are already under stress. The CGIAR must invest now, to prepare for that future.

Water is a very scarce commodity. This is now better understood than before, but problems associated with water remain acute. Nearly two-thirds of the world's population are expected to live in water-scarce or water-stressed areas by 2025 unless current trends are changed. In some countries, the economic cost of producing clean water is greater than the economic cost of producing oil.

We are losing biodiversity at unprecedented rates. Some 10 percent of the world's tree species are threatened. The world's marine fisheries are overexploited. Livestock populations are unstable. Soils are constantly degraded and destroyed, with profound economic costs. Annual agricultural production in some developing countries is 10 percent lower than it otherwise could be, as a result of soil degradation and land degradation. The people of Morocco will especially understand the threats to progress caused by desertification.

The world is increasingly inter-connected, and we are in many respects a smaller world although population is growing. The management of global issues is especially important, because we know that some of them are potentially capable of creating havoc in both developing and industrialized countries.

- The international community is gravely concerned about Avian influenza. If mutations of the H5N1 strain now identified in parts of Asia were to develop human-to-human transmission, spread of the disease would be incredibly fast and, by some estimates, there would only be a grace period of a "few weeks" before a pandemic gets beyond control. Remember, also, that well over 150 million chickens and ducks have died or been culled in South-east Asia, to prevent the disease from spreading. FAO estimates that the economic cost to the countries concerned is some US\$10 billion. For small farmers, the impact has been overwhelming. Controlling the virus in animals needs concerted action. In addition to surveillance and quarantine, good farm practices, and effective policies, we

need a pro-poor approach to the problem, overall, because we know and see over and over again that in countries of both the North and the South, the poor are the hardest hit. This example also highlights the kind of agricultural health/human health linkages at the global level that we need to address today and tomorrow. It is my view that agriculture can protect public health.

- The world also faces a potential threat to wheat from the emergence of a new virulent race of stem rust, UG99. Data from CIMMYT confirms that most currently grown varieties of wheat are either completely susceptible to UG99 or have unknown susceptibility. Yield losses of up to 70 percent from UG99 were recorded under careful monitoring in Kenya. CIMMYT and ICARDA recently hosted a wheat rust summit, where participants agreed that the “best case” scenario is for UG99 to cause a 10 percent loss of wheat production, and the “worst case” scenario is a 70 percent loss. Continued vigilance, constant testing, and intensified research to create UG99-resistant strains are urgently needed.

There are, of course, serious issues in addition to Avian influenza and wheat rust that require resolute international action. These include natural resource degradation with particular attention to deforestation, the complex process of trade negotiations and the quest for a fairer deal for developing countries that need access to markets, and the debilitating effect of livestock diseases.

We might ask ourselves; Should the CGIAR develop the capacity to provide a rapid response to such issues when they arise so that they might be prevented from developing into major crises, while respecting our mandate to produce global public goods?

- The recent upsurge of petroleum prices on the world market, provided a sharp reminder to profligate users of fossil fuels that these are a non-renewable resource. High prices and low supplies have been debated in industrialized countries very much in terms of their impact on industrial production, personal transport preferences, and comfort. Developing countries, too, are profoundly affected. They are less able to absorb hefty price increases. The search for renewable sources of energy needs to be re-energized and intensified. Such a search must surely consider the production of biofuels, whether these are based on agricultural waste, energy crops, or food crops that can be put to multiple use. This is a sensitive area, but it cannot be avoided, and needs to be approached with strict, scientific discipline as well as respect for social acceptability.
- Global climate change represents a major threat to agriculture. Some estimates predict yield declines as early as in 2020. We need to act now – to mobilize first class science – both to ensure that agriculture can adapt to the new and emerging vagaries of climate change, including drought and desertification, and that farmers can take advantage of the new opportunities for carbon-sequestration and carbon-farming.

The issues I have just mentioned – global communicable diseases; global environmental threats; global trade barriers; all highlight the need for us to see agriculture in its widest

context; a local, global, and regional context; a public health context; a food policy context; an economic and wealth creating context; and an ecological context.

Agriculture is the center-pin of much of our common future. Agricultural research can drive us along pathways to help current and future generations, but only if we choose the correct pathways and undertake our productive journeys with care.

5. The CGIAR Must Act

Many challenges lie ahead. The CGIAR has a solid record of achievement. We have the experience, the commitment, and the resources. We need to ensure, however, that our strengths remain intact and are enhanced, so that they can serve as the basis for even greater effort and impact in the future. We must act. And a clear focus in our actions is as critical today as it was when the green revolution helped to reduce poverty and hunger in Asia.

Let me, therefore, suggest that at this AGM you begin consideration of a number of actions that will further enhance the effectiveness of the CGIAR as a catalyst of research-based development.

First, is the need to define and implement whatever further changes are necessary to modernize governance in the CGIAR and its Centers. Much has been achieved. We must now ask ourselves: What more do we need to do, how, and how soon?

Second, is to decide what actions are necessary to continually sharpen our focus on the core task of the CGIAR System: research for development. If our focus on science erodes, or if our capacity to produce the very best in science-based solutions to development problems is diminished, we will lose our relevance. At this meeting we expect to reach closure on the first set of science priorities proposed by the new Science Council which has labored to produce a document that responds to the needs of developing countries and the views of CGIAR Members. ExCo has already had a preliminary discussion of the proposed priorities, and offered Membership its recommendations. I hope that we can quickly agree with the Science Council report, and then immediately move to consider what arrangements the Membership should establish so that implementation can begin without delay.

Third, in order to increase the efficiency and impact of our work, is the need for programmatic and structural alignment throughout the CGIAR, beginning with Sub-Saharan Africa. When we began our reform program there was broad agreement that the CGIAR should follow the path of evolutionary change. Positive changes have already taken place. As a result of a decision by the Group, an ISNAR program was integrated with IFPRI, and ISNAR as an autonomous Center ceased to exist. I appreciate, as well, the discussions that have taken place among many Boards to explore avenues for closer collaboration and integration. The study of Board governance initiated by the CGIAR Secretariat and the Committee of Board Chairs may produce new ideas. I commend the initiative of the Centers to improve collective action through an alliance. I congratulate the

Centers and everyone involved. However, several conditions are necessary if these measures are to be effective. The direction of change must be clearly geared toward problem-solving based on high quality science. This will require consultation within the CGIAR System as well as with partners. And the pace of change has to quicken, so that an evolutionary approach is not misinterpreted as a license to delay.

Fourth, is the need to build on the progress made in fostering partnerships. The private sector is today involved in agricultural research, very much more than it was when the CGIAR was established. Much of what is produced by the private sector comes under IPR regimes. The continuum between global public goods and private rights requires us to think more creatively about intellectual property rights issues, so that the potential of all those involved, from subsistence farmers to large corporations, can be combined to the benefit of the poor and disadvantaged, yet does not deter the private sector. Perhaps we need a hybrid IPR regime that is more fair to the developing countries, and conducive to development. Should the CGIAR be providing true and strong leadership in this complex area? Meanwhile, the CGIAR Private Sector Committee has begun a very constructive process of creating closer, action-oriented co-operation between the CGIAR and the corporate sector. We need to develop such co-operation, to benefit those who need science to work for them. We need, as well, to continue revitalizing our relationships with civil society at the CGIAR level, so that these relationships will be genuine, have clear goals, and will be pursued on the basis of mutual respect. This is a major item for discussion at our Business Meeting. With strong agricultural science in the South, there are new and exciting opportunities for facilitating South-South co-operation as foreseen in the Marrakech Declaration to which I have referred. I believe the CGIAR could facilitate South-South co-operation, with INRA playing a key role.

Fifth, is the need to continue to strengthen and, I hope, increase our funding, so that Center scientists will never face the prospect of having to curtail or end their efforts because they are not supported with the necessary resources. In 1993 the prospect of continued strong funding for agricultural research was considered so poor that the CGIAR actually considered the desirability of dramatically reducing the total number of Centers. Two years later, at the Lucerne High-Level meeting of the CGIAR, a reference to a target of US\$500 million in the draft Lucerne Declaration was deleted because the amount was considered so high as to be naïve and completely, utterly unrealistic. The tide has turned. Support and funding have never been higher. I want to say a special word of thanks to our Members who have contributed to make our current funding robust. I want to thank those in the Centers and the CGIAR Secretariat who have worked so hard to make this happen. We cannot, however, be complacent. I can say with confidence that donors will support only those institutions that they consider dynamic, effective, and adaptable to changing conditions. In short, performance will pay off.

Sixth, is communications. In the short space of four years, the level of improvement in internal and external communication is almost beyond belief. Communications are transparent, agile, and widespread. Internally, the entire System is kept informed of major developments through the use of the CGIAR web site and a variety of communication tools including the quarterly Letter to CGIAR Members. Minutes of meetings are ready in

a matter of days. The CGIAR web site and Information Center have contributed to knowledge sharing. The CGIAR Marketing Group, combining the expertise of the Centers and the Secretariat, has made a big difference. Publications have been issued in many languages and distributed globally. Many special events – such as the recent “CGIAR and Sweden Day” and periodic interactions with scientists and policy-makers in several countries – have ended the old claim that “the CGIAR is a well kept secret.” The appointment of a Chief Information Officer and the establishment of an Information Communications Technology/Knowledge Management program have given an impetus to knowledge sharing within the CGIAR System and beyond. This now allows us to move communications into higher and higher levels, using new information technology to the fullest extent possible, so that our knowledge and the results of our research are widely shared, our mission is fully understood, and our effectiveness is known. Communications technologies can also be used to build low-cost effective training and knowledge systems with great benefits for large numbers with limited access to the knowledge they need.

6. Conclusion: A Personal Note

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me end my statement on a personal note.

Most of you know that I have informed the World Bank President of my decision to leave the Bank. I plan to share my thoughts with Membership at the Business Meeting on how to arrange a smooth transition. For the first time in the history of the CGIAR, The Charter provides for inclusive consultation, involving the entire Membership. We must not lose this opportunity to agree on a collective view that will then serve as the basis of consultations with the World Bank. Full consultation in accordance with The Charter will help to guarantee a seamless and effective succession for the CGIAR.

When I began my chairmanship I told you how my predecessors said to me that of their experiences at the World Bank what they enjoyed most was chairmanship of the CGIAR. I did not know whether to believe them, but I know now why they felt that way and, needless to say, I feel just as they did.

I have enjoyed working with you, and benefited so much from the collegiality that is a characteristic of the CGIAR. We have done much together. We have the people, the agenda, the partnerships, and the funding to continue fulfilling the promise of the reform program. You must not falter in that endeavor..

As I reflect on my first meeting as CGIAR Chairman, I recall sharing with you an event from a field visit to Kenya that I had undertaken a few weeks earlier with colleagues from ICRAF and ILRI. We went to a village and met the members of a farmers’ organization led by an extraordinarily articulate woman. The farmers gave us a poem composed by her, and she recited it to us. Its concluding lines said: “Our farms are sleeping, and they

need awakening, and we need research. We need help from the CGIAR to awaken our farms.”

I can think of no better message to leave with you, as you look to the present and future of the CGIAR. I wish you well. Thank you.
