

CGIAR Secretariat's Comments on the Governance, Management and Finance Aspects of the Report of the Fifth EPMR of the International Center for Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)

The CGIAR Secretariat thanks the ICARDA EPMR Panel for its report. The Review Panel makes 9 out of 22 recommendations on governance and management, i.e. 7 concerning the Center Board's functioning and 2 in relation to finance and management. The Secretariat notes from ICARDA's response that the Center agrees to most of the Panel's recommendations.

Governance

- We are pleased that ICARDA accepts the Panel's recommendation to increase frequency of Board meetings and has decided to have two regular meetings per year. We especially encourage the Center to use virtual meetings through audio or videoconferences.
- Regarding Board composition we fully agree with the Panel's suggestion to focus on competence, diversity of experience and contribution of Board members. In our view there is further scope of reducing the size of the Board (now at 13), while continuing to retain benefits of diversity and representation. We strongly encourage ICARDA to strengthen formal financial expertise on its Board, and also to renew second term of members based on their performance.

Management

- We are pleased that ICARDA accepts the Panel's recommendation for a CCER on management and finance, and has decided to have the CCER even before the Board meeting in 2007.
- The area of human resource management needs special focus by the Center. A conscious effort is required to have an HR policy that can attract and retain high quality staff, bring in younger scientists, revisit salary structure, increase transparency in performance measurement and address some concerns raised by the staff survey.

Finance

- The Panel has expressed concern about the processes adopted by the Center for expenditure approvals, and lack of clarity on authority for such approvals, including expenses incurred by the DG and the Board Chair. We recommend that the upcoming CCER on management and finance would help put in place appropriate processes.
- The report specifies that financial management is carried out by ICARDA's finance department. In our view, this function is primarily the responsibility of ICARDA management with Board oversight. The finance department assists both the Board and management in this task with professional advice and timely information, and in implementing best practice fiduciary standards. We recommend the upcoming CCER on management and finance have this item explicitly stated in its TORs so that CCER experts can help ICARDA put in place appropriate processes for financial oversight.