

SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

Commentary on Panel Report: Ethics and the CGIAR Mission

SC Secretariat, 24 October 2008

Overview

The Science Council (SC) discussed the report “*Ethics and the CGIAR Mission*” at SC-10 (September 2008) following a presentation by Professor Sandøe (the Chair of a four member panel) of a synopsis of the Panel’s findings.¹ The report, the third of a series of SC commissioned studies of Ethics, considers the ethical implications for the organization of possessing and trying to implement its mission statement. The Report has been written to induce thought about the system’s goals and the dilemmas in designing research to reach those goals, rather than attempting to solve these for every possible situation. The Report provides important guidance that should be considered in the design and implementation of research programs to tackle the long term goals of the system. Following the consideration of this study by ExCo the SC will consolidate and publish the three studies of Ethics for the CGIAR.

Synopsis of the Panel's summary and recommendations

The panel describes the ethical problem of poverty as a lack of welfare. However, it is useful operationally for the CGIAR to state its goal in terms of food insecurity, poverty, hunger and malnutrition, as these can all be thought of as indicators of poor welfare. The Panel therefore endorses the CGIAR’s mission as being principally focused on the two main stated goals, poverty alleviation and sustainability.

- While acknowledging the complex relationship between hunger and poverty, the Panel suggests CGIAR to focus on *poverty that translates into food insecurity*.
- The Panel recommends *micronutrient deficiency* be given more emphasis, so that under-nutrition and micronutrient deficiency are considered with equal priority.
- The Panel argues that the ethical goal of the CGIAR should place a stronger emphasis on fighting the serious inequality (and the resultant hunger and malnutrition) facing the very poor.
- In considering the ethical values underlying the CGIAR goals and mission, the Panel recommends explicit reference be made to *empowerment* as an important value, and as a goal in itself, in addition to poverty alleviation and sustainability.
- Regarding the issue of sustainability, the Panel observes that the CGIAR is not primarily concerned with intergenerational equality, but rather with the inequality within the present generation and the equitable sharing of costs and benefits. The Panel recommends that nature

¹ The current Report is the third SC-commissioned study of Ethics following “*How Should the CGIAR Handle Ethical Challenges? - Issues and Proposals for a Strategic Study*” (August 2004) and “*Ethics and CGIAR Research*” (November 2006). The first study reflected generally on ethical approaches and discussed in which areas of the System’s undertaking a more detailed evaluation of ethical considerations would be most important. The second study (of 2006) considered the practical aspects of how to ensure that ethical guidelines and principles were being followed in the conduct of CGIAR research. The overarching recommendation from that study, endorsed by the SC, is the need for the Alliance of CGIAR Centers to develop and adopt system-level ethical guidelines against which matching Center-level policies should be developed.

protection, while not a direct goal of CGIAR research, must be an important element to consider in the context of the possible effects of agriculture on “wild nature” (a term used by the Panel to encompass ecological values including ecosystem services and natural biodiversity).

- The Panel stresses that resource allocation must be considered to bring optimal result in accordance with the goal and mission of the CGIAR, viewed in light of its underlying principles as well as its comparative advantage over other agencies.
- The Panel underlines the need for CGIAR to maintain its world-wide focus, even if some Centers specialize in the concerns of particular regions. It recognizes, however, that there might be cases of serious regional problems that would be ethically compelling for CGIAR to give more weight. The Panel therefore places more stress on the maintenance of access to the products of CGIAR research rather than a strict interpretation of international public goods.
- Recognizing the importance of listening to the end-users of CGIAR’s research, the Panel recommends partnerships to be thought out with proper division of labor allowing engagement of all relevant stakeholders in the chain from discovery to delivery.
- The Panel recommends that the ethical need for the CGIAR and its donors is to maintain its focus on the long-term mission, rather than moving away in order for the Centers simply to survive.

SC Comments on the report and the recommendations

The Panel focused on and endorses the *vision, mission and goals for the CGIAR* encompassed in the 2002 statements of its strategic framework.² The SC notes that, as of May 2008, ExCo has endorsed a draft statement for a new vision and mission of the CGIAR.³ However, the SC believes that the Panel findings and suggestions on the 2002 CGIAR vision are still relevant, particularly as the CGIAR finalizes the proposed reforms in the forthcoming months.

The Panel provides a critical ethical assessment of the goal statements and identifies issues and dilemmas in matching intent to the implementation of research. The Report notes that the CGIAR’s research mission hinges on improving the welfare of the poor and that, as welfare has a number of dimensions, it is expedient for the CGIAR to continue to state its goal in terms of food insecurity, poverty, hunger and malnutrition. The Panel assesses that the CGIAR’s principle contribution will be to provide advances to improve “nutrition security”, a term intended to recognize the dual targets of energy nutrition and “hidden hunger” (or micronutrient deficiency). The Panel believes that the former has always been at the forefront of CGIAR considerations but suggests that ethical considerations demand that both targets be tackled equally. The SC confirms the Panel’s suggestion that redressing energy under-nutrition and micronutrient insufficiency of

² CGIAR (2002). *Vision: A food secure world for all. Goal: To reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition by sustainably increasing the productivity of resources in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Mission: To achieve sustainable food security and reduce poverty in developing countries through scientific research and research-related activities in the fields of agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, policy and natural resources management.*

³ CGIAR (2008) Report of Working Group 1, Change Management Process. *Vision: to reduce poverty and hunger, improve human health and nutrition, and enhance ecosystem resilience through high-quality international agricultural research, partnership and leadership. Mission: to be proactive and forward-looking global leader, catalyst and partner of choice in the conduct of international agricultural research for development, harnessing human ingenuity and innovation, leading to the empowerment of the poor, especially women, to overcome poverty, hunger and ill-health and to sustainably manage and enhance natural resources in the face of climatic and socio-economic change.*

the poor are, ethically, equal in importance. However, because of the differences in research strategies and methods required for these complementary approaches ethical importance will not necessarily translate into direct equivalence in research dollars spent on the two approaches.

The Panel's Report discusses the poor as target and beneficiaries of the work of the CGIAR noting that CGIAR planning should make transparent which classes of poor are being targeted by CGIAR programs and how. The Report draws attention to the classes of the poor and considers that research should be designed so that it does not exacerbate inequalities amongst the classes of the poor. The Panel interprets the 2002 CGIAR vision document as strengthening the tendency to give additional weight to the very poor and recognizes the challenge this poses for the CGIAR when some (many) aspects of poverty are caused by local circumstances, vis-à-vis the global orientation of the CGIAR's agricultural research. The Panel therefore urges that programs to be developed are clear about their aims and tradeoffs and the involvement of partner agencies and their tasks in carrying the design through to provide the likely impacts from the intent of the research. The SC welcomes the Report's discussion of poverty and degrees of poverty and the need for clarity in setting long term research goals and impact pathways. The discussion also has relevance to the discussion of the CGIAR's role as supplier of IPGs and in development outcomes at a local level.

The Panel notes that whilst empowerment is not explicitly stated as a CGIAR goal, it is implicit in much of the CGIAR's *modus operandi*, through capacity building of national programs (which may in turn provide assistance to poor farmers, for instance). As the Panel notes, hunger and poverty are very disempowering and so improving human capacity would seem to be an ethical imperative and to provide opportunities for self help in overcoming disadvantageous circumstances. The Report argues that empowerment should be made a more explicit goal of the CGIAR as an ethical consideration in its own right and not just as an efficiency argument. The SC notes that the suggestions of Working Group 1 (WG1) of the Change Management Process in their review of the CGIAR mission have similarly placed emphasis on empowerment. The SC notes that empowerment of collaborating scientists and other members of national programs is inherent in much of the CGIAR capacity building allied to the system's research function, but that it becomes more difficult to empower smaller groups and individuals directly through research approaches. Thus, whilst welcoming the statement of empowerment as an additional goal, the SC recognizes that to reach down (beyond NARS towards small groups and individuals) is best done through partnership with the appropriate agents and cannot be interpreted as the CGIAR working with all the poor. However, the overall aim should be to empower individuals and the CGIAR may need to give more evident emphasis to this goal in its capacity building strategies, particularly through the tailoring of knowledge and through engaging with relevant partner organizations.

In contrast, the SC finds that the Sandøe Report places less emphasis (than did the WG1 paper) on gender, discussing instead the several dimensions of generational equity, of which gender is one. The gender dimension of agriculture research is important, particularly in many developing countries, by way of the predominance of women as farmers and therefore the main users of technology. The SC also confirms the broader perspective of the Ethics Panel's Report which urges that balanced approaches to research would seek to ensure that they not promote particular groups of the poor to the disadvantage of any other groups of poor.

The Panel firmly recommends that in tackling nutrition security, the CGIAR's primary interest in undertaking environmental research is to protect and enhance the sustainability of food systems

of the poor. According to the Panel, the main role of the CGIAR is not to do work directly on the protection of nature. Rather, the role should be to consider the implications of innovation in agriculture on nature and environmental provisions. Where there are cases to be made, the CGIAR should enter into appropriate partnerships and ensuring that the very poor are not inequitably burdened with the costs of resource management. When considering intergenerational equity, the Panel considers that, ethically, the specific concern of the CGIAR should be for future food insecure people, rather than the general welfare of all “future” people. The SC notes that recent CGIAR literature focuses more on “resilience” rather than sustainability of natural resource systems. The SC confirms that a poverty focus should underpin the natural resources management research and that research on (what the Panel refers to as) “wild nature” should only be undertaken with this distinct rationale in mind and preferably in partnership with appropriate environmental research agencies.

Turning to criteria relating to implementation of research, the SC welcomes the Report’s good description of when and under what circumstances the CGIAR would enter into research programs. The Panel notes that issues may vary regionally and that the context of poverty may require local solutions. Thus, the Report recognizes that there is a tension between helping the very poor and the ability to conduct internationally oriented research. The Panel further questions whether the strict application of the term “international public goods” is useful (even allowing for a broader understanding of the term in the CGIAR). Ethically, the Panel suggests, the commitment of the CGIAR should be instead to the non-exclusive access to CGIAR results and knowledge. In promoting the concept of IPG, the SC has placed emphasis on the intent of research to provide wide spillovers, so that this in turn helps to identify the character of the research and the CGIAR entry point (differentiated from the competitive advantage of others). The SC will continue to analyze the practical implication for describing the scope of CGIAR research as IPGs (e.g. at a workshop on this topic jointly organized with the Alliance Deputies at AGM08).

The Panel’s views on the need to map out partnerships and (size of) impacts are directly akin to impact pathway analysis which the SC has urged should be more precisely carried out (e.g. through current MTPs). For the poor to benefit from new technologies, the risk assessment calculations of the poor will have to be accommodated. Whilst in general agreement, the SC notes that the Report has adopted a somewhat mechanical view of activities and impacts (more akin to development projects) rather than accommodating the serendipitous nature of some impacts which can result from hypothesis testing and research. This in turn demands transparency and understanding of the nature of the results the CGIAR expects to deliver.

Finally, the Report notes that there is a need in the developing world in general, including the poor, to continue to increase agricultural productivity. This challenge, plus the underlying natural resource management issues, requires long term research. Because of the multifaceted nature of poverty, poverty traps etc, poverty alleviation is often dependent upon many other simultaneous advances as well as agricultural change. The CGIAR and donors should be more transparent and more realistic about what can be accomplished in the time frames given for research to avoid unethical “gaming” and unfulfilled promises to either the sector or the intended human beneficiaries. The Panel confirms that the CGIAR Centers should adhere to the long term goal of the CGIAR and not deviate from this goal simply in order to survive and that it cautions on the practice of over stating the likely benefits of the research outputs.

The SC notes that the discussion of empowerment, poverty and degrees of poverty should encourage the CGIAR to consider how to frame research to make its aims transparent. This is linked to the reduced use of rhetoric and more effective planning of partnerships and impact pathways i.e. the need to match realistic claims to the likely deliverables of the CGIAR now and in the future. The SC suggests that the CGIAR enter these ethical considerations into the design and development of new collaborative and impact-oriented research programs.