

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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Science Council Strategy

At the last ExCo in October 2004, I reported to you on a number of exciting programmatic and personnel developments within the SC and its Secretariat. As you may recall, I also presented the five elements of the SC strategy that would lead us towards a more cohesive and more sharply focused research program of the CGIAR. Let me re-state these five key elements:

1. Identify a small number of key CGIAR System Priorities that focus on problems for which the CGIAR is likely to have the greatest impact;
2. Implement new monitoring and evaluation processes that give more emphasis to self-evaluation and Board accountability;
3. Measure performance in terms of progress towards achieving the goals of the CGIAR, on the basis of Medium-Term Plans (MTPs) and logframes;
4. Improve the quality of Center, Systemwide Program and Challenge Program MTPs and logframes as a basis for better planning and performance appraisal (linked to System Priorities); and
5. Contribute to CGIAR programmatic alignment (linked to the current activities of the two task forces for Sub-Saharan Africa).

I am pleased to report that we have just concluded our Third Meeting of the Council and that we have made significant progress in virtually every one of these five areas. Some notable achievements and milestones are highlighted below.

CGIAR System Priorities: A research portfolio to help achieving the MDGs

Through an exhaustive Science Council-led process of participatory information gathering, analysis, synthesis, and debate, a set of 20 research priorities for the CGIAR, organized within five priority areas, have been identified by the Council and submitted for your approval. This finalizes a three-year process of hard work in consultation with researchers, CDC, CBC, NARS, CG Members and many others in a highly participatory and transparent process of listening to stakeholders.

Three key criteria were employed to help identify the priorities: (i) the expected impact on poverty alleviation, food security and nutrition, and sustainable management of natural resources; (ii) the international public goods nature of the research; and (iii) the CGIAR's comparative advantage in undertaking research, given alternative sources of supply of the research.

Recent activities to finalize this strategic pillar for the CGIAR have included:

- a final expert consultation on priority areas via stakeholder meetings held at FAO in Jan-Feb (SC members, CG Center scientists and international experts -- approximately 30 participants per meeting) with resulting consolidation into five broad areas and 20 specific research priorities;
- refinements via interactions with the CDDC at ICRISAT in March and following comments received on earlier drafts from CGIAR Centers and a range of other stakeholders;
- SC member visits, briefings and discussions with a range of CG Members and in various forums;
- finalizing the process of identifying system priorities, through consolidation and narrowing of focus, at the SC3 meeting at IWMI during the first week of April.

The following five priority areas for CGIAR research resulted from the priority setting efforts:

1. Sustaining biodiversity for current and future generations;
2. Producing more and better food at lower costs through genetic improvements;
3. Reducing rural poverty through agricultural diversification and emerging opportunities for high-value commodities and products;
4. Poverty alleviation and sustainable management of water, land, and forest resources;
5. Improving policies and facilitating institutional innovation to support sustainable reduction of poverty and hunger.

The SC proposes that 80% of the total CGIAR funding be allocated to research activities within the 20 identified system priority areas; the remaining 20% could be utilized for other activities. The Council encourages Centers to use this to pursue exploratory work on promising strategic areas of research currently outside the system priorities, but it could also be used to support more applied research for development initiatives or for training activities independent of specific system priority research.

As soon as the new priorities are approved by the CGIAR, the SC will advise the centers to begin a 3-year process of adjusting their research portfolio to reflect the system priorities and reflect these adjustments in their MTPs beginning with the MTP to be prepared next year.

Monitoring and evaluation processes: A more streamlined, cost-effective approach to Center-level monitoring and evaluation

A new approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of CGIAR Centers has been proposed in the policy document “*New Monitoring and Evaluation System for the CGIAR Centers*”. Guidelines to implement forthcoming EPMRs have been made available to ExCo. This process establishes a continuum of evaluations starting from center self-assessment and ending in an external review of center programs and management. Although the standard terms of reference for EPMRs have not changed, the new M&E process relies on high quality center-commissioned external reviews (CCERs). Subsequently, EPMRs will be streamlined so that they build on the CCERs’ assessments. With input from the CBC and others, a set of principles for conducting CCERs are being finalized. We believe that in the future, EPMR panels should be identified on the basis of

their capacity to review priorities and strategies and management and governance issues, relying on the CCERs for more in-depth analysis.

With respect to the planning, organization and implementation of Center EPMRs and System-wide Program reviews:

- Panel reports from the 5th CIMMYT and 4th IFPRI EPMRs were considered at the SC3 meeting and are part of this meeting agenda;
- Panel report from the external review of the SWP on Alternatives to Slash and Burn will be presented to the Council at SC4 next September;
- Planning of the ICRAF, CIFOR and WorldFish Center EPMRs are underway and expected to be completed by early 2006;
- Planning for three more Center EPMRs (ILRI, IWMI, and ICARDA) to be implemented in 2006 is now beginning.

The SC is looking carefully at each Center EPMR, and with the help of the SC Secretariat will be compiling a comprehensive set of strategic issues from various sources, including the previous EPMR, MTP commentaries, and CCERs of the Center, and from SC members, CGIAR Secretariat, Center Board and Management and CGIAR members.

Medium Term Plans: Improved guidelines for preparation

New MTP guidelines have been prepared in collaboration with the CG Secretariat. The deadline for submitting Center and CP MTPs is 15th June 2005. SC members will read all MTPs, and Standing Panel members and consultants will assist in the review of specific MTPs as needed. A standard criteria framework, currently under development, will be applied. Three SC members have been assigned to oversee compilation of the Center MTP commentaries to ensure uniformity of the final report. The SC's report on Center and CP MTPs will be presented to ExCo in October. This schedule has only been made possible due to the change in dates of the Annual General Meeting, from late October to early December, thereby allowing the Science Council sufficient time to carry out a high-quality review of the MTPs. We appreciate the support ExCo gave us in this request.

Planning and performance appraisal: Work on improving performance appraisal by the SC is underway and is now linked to the MTPs and, in the future, to System Priorities.

During the pilot phase of the performance monitoring (PM) system, the Council, through a task force involving members of SPME and SPIA and SC Secretariat staff, is contributing to improving five PM system elements: output, outcome, impact, quality of research staff, and quality and relevance of programs. The output and outcome indicators will be based on the forthcoming Centers' Medium Term Plans 2006-08 to be reviewed by the Council. Thus, in this pilot year, the SC will examine the reported achievements on outputs and outcomes across the Centers and assess the quality, usefulness and effectiveness of these indicators as a measure of the performance at these levels. The SC, through SPIA, is currently reviewing the inputs from Centers on the two impact indicators and developing a mechanism for rating these. The

proposed indicator on program quality based on EPMR and CCER assessment needs to be further developed among a set of indicators for program quality and relevance. The SC will draw lessons from the pilot year and further develop indicators on research performance for use in 2006, but will not rate Center performance in this pilot year.

CGIAR programmatic alignment: Finalization of the SSA joint Task Force report

The CGIAR created two Task Forces (TFs) to propose rationalization of CGIAR operations across the System, starting with Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). TF1 was asked to examine the CGIAR's work in terms of its programmatic coherence, and TF2 to review the strengths and weaknesses of the existing organizational structure of the System. The two TFs decided to work together and prepared a joint report. Although the joint TF on SSA report is not a SC document, the SC chair and a SC member were actively involved, and other SC members have reviewed the final draft document and provided comments and suggestions for improvement. A final report from the TF has been submitted to ExCo. The report contains recommendations that identify opportunities for greater programmatic integration and synergies and organizational adjustments towards increasing effectiveness and efficiency of CGIAR research.

Science Council Standing Panel Activities

While the above five elements have been reported separately, I would like to emphasize the interdependent nature of many of these and other SC activities and the fact that all of these important actions should come together to help increase the impact of the CGIAR. The SC's Standing Panel on Monitoring and Evaluation coordinates the work on policy and implementation of external reviews, MTPs and performance measurement.

In addition to the elements discussed before, there are other major activities within the SC related to the work of the other three standing panels, and I would like to report briefly on their progress.

Standing Panel on Impact Assessment

The CGIAR *Impact Website* is now fully functional (<http://impact.cgiar.org/>). Work continues on updating and expansion, e.g. producing briefs and translations. Second drafts of the seven completed case studies of the *Impact from CGIAR Research on NRM* have been submitted and are now undergoing external peer-review. A book of the case studies, synthesis and other related chapters will be published at the end of 2005, and highlights of specific case study results will be presented at AGM '05. The *Training Evaluation and Impact Assessment* study is gearing up for extended field visits during May – June in Vietnam, Thailand, Kenya, Malawi, Cameroon, Bolivia and Ecuador. Ex-trainee and partner surveys are on-going. Work has just initiated on the *Impact of CGIAR and NARS Research in Africa* study (first phase) to collect, synthesize and assess the available evidence on the impacts of new technologies and improved policies as a

result of CGIAR and partner agricultural research in SSA. The *Donor Needs and Uses of Evidence of Research Impact* study has just been completed, and a report is expected soon. A major finding of this study is that although *ex-post* IA is not a direct driver of specific funding decisions, the confidence in CGIAR capacity that *ex-post* IA findings impart appears to be of substantial importance for continued support to the System as a whole.

Standing Panel on Mobilizing Science

A survey of CGIAR Centers on-going scientific collaboration was conducted in late 2004 to analyze how the Council could enhance Center collaboration, what are the most effective mechanisms and how to build new scientific partnerships. Preliminary results (from 12 responding Centers) show extensive collaboration in the south and the north across a wide range of types of partners (NARIs, universities, ARIs, NGOs, private sector, etc.) and across different types of research. However, gap filling and more consistent information are required before a summary overview of Center collaboration can be assembled.

Roster of experts. To improve the status of the current roster, SPMS is developing a set of criteria (8 broad scientific areas, peer review committee, 6 weighted criteria, 2 stage rosters, specific CV format) to use for vetting candidates.

Science for Agricultural Development 2005. The Panel has organized a task force to support the preparation of this new Council-led publication, which we expect to launch at AGM05. A detailed annotated outline for this forthcoming publication has been produced, including the intended audience, the main messages from each chapter and a detailed timeline for the completion of the document. The Panel is finalizing the proposal to commission the main chapters of the study.

Science Forum at AGM '05. The Panel is organizing a one-day forum within the CGIAR Annual Meeting (December) to discuss recent trends in world science relevant for agricultural development.

Standing Panel on Priorities and Strategies

Study on Animal and Fish Genetic Resources. A joint report on the state of Animal and Fish genetic resources has been produced, including recommendations regarding opportunities for future CGIAR engagement with the fields of farm animal and fish genetic resources research in the areas of conservation, characterization, information and links to programs of genetic enhancement. Final document including SC commentary is under preparation.

Biosafety. The ExCo commentary on the Biosafety study was received in January 2005. A Centers' focal point (from IRRI) will lead a workshop to harmonize a proactive CGIAR approach to biosafety.

Poverty mapping. An evaluation of the current prospects of using poverty mapping in support of priority setting has been carried out.

Other on-going and planned activities relate to: *International Public Goods in an era of IPR, Food Safety Consideration in CGIAR Research, and Ethics and Science in the CGIAR.*

Science Council and SC Secretariat Staffing and Budget 2004-05 Update

The SC Workplan and Budget 2004-05 was approved at ExCo-6 in May 2004. The Council and its Panels have been hard at work implementing an ambitious plan. The Secretariat of the SC is being strengthened by filling vacant positions and changing the composition of the support staff during the last quarter of 2004 and in the first semester of 2005. This will help implement a very comprehensive work plan ahead of us. In spite of two new major activities undertaken since the work plan was approved, the Secretariat estimates to end calendar year 2005 with a balanced budget.

Conclusion

We believe we have made significant progress in implementing the five key elements of the Science Council Strategy and we are moving ahead with major activities being carried out by each of the four Standing Panels of the Council.

The Secretariat of the Council is being strengthened but will remain a small and efficient unit in support of the Council's activities. We estimate to finish 2005 with a total balanced budget for the biennium 2004-05.

Let me finish by thanking you again for your continued support to the Science Council. It is an honor for me to be associated with a group that I believe will make a difference in the lives of poor people.

