

## SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

### Commentary on the Sixth External Program and Management Review of the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT)

*20 September 2007*

The Science Council considered the Report of the Sixth External Program and Management Review (EPMR) of CIAT, and the Center's response, at the SC's eighth meeting at FAO in Rome on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, 2007. The main findings and recommendations of the EPMR Panel were presented by the Panel Chair, Dr. Eduardo Venezian. Responses on behalf of the Center were made by Board Chair, Dr. Yves Savidan, and by CIAT Director General, Dr. Joachim Voss.

The SC thanks the Panel for their detailed and constructive work stressing the need for CIAT to emerge from its current crisis and acknowledging that the Panel had a difficult task. The SC notes CIAT's mostly positive response to the EPMR Report and its 19 recommendations, of which the Center fully agrees to implement 13 and partially agrees with 6.

#### **Overview**

Two key findings from the review were the need to overcome governance and management shortcomings and to clarify CIAT's future strategic research agenda. The Panel recommended improvements in seven categories: organization and planning of research, research management, specific research topics, regional organization of research, intellectual property, center management, and governance. The Council agrees with the Panel that the Center needs to quickly emerge from the most recent turmoil and instability by rethinking its research strategy and by revitalizing its leadership. The SC concurs that this is a crucial time for CGIAR donors to invest collectively in CIAT's turnaround, subject to program, governance and management changes detailed in the EPMR report.

#### **Program**

The Council welcomed the Panel's positive assessment of the quantity and quality of CIAT's research for development, their productive and relevant work and world class scientific programs. The SC believes that the quality and the relevance of CIAT's science should be the basis and starting point in reshaping CIAT as a solid, high performing global research institute. The Council notes that, in general, the Center had responded only half-heartedly to the 5<sup>th</sup> EPMR (2000) and suggests that this might have contributed to the current problems the institute is facing. The Council suggests strengthening the recently started practice of monitoring the implementation of EPMR recommendations through the annual MTP review.

The SC concurs with the Panel that an overarching vision and a comprehensive strategic plan needs to be prepared. The lack of such road map in the recent past has resulted in seemingly constant organizational and management changes. The SC suggests that this strategic planning exercise should not be started until the next administration of the Center is in place. The proposed "outcome line" concept, seeking to integrate natural resource management research with CIAT mandated commodities in regional programs, should be seriously considered by the Center in the forthcoming strategic planning exercise. Due consideration should be given to ensure that the production of IPGs will result. Thus the Council, in addition to monitoring the implementation of EPMR recommendations through the annual MTP review, recommends that a) the SC review a draft of the new strategic plan before it is approved by the Board, and, b) a focussed follow up review be undertaken by the SC

eighteen months after the review of the draft strategic plan to report on the progress.

The SC concurs with the Panel recommendations to maintain key research themes and functions (crop protection, forage and rice research, IP capacity, spatial analysis and social science work). The Council also agrees with the Panel's recommendation to strengthen CIAT's agrobiodiversity research program, mainstreaming the current agroecosystem program activities. CIAT's Genetic Resource Unit staffing has been an apparent casualty of the crisis; with additional losses of essential critical mass in entomology, pathology, virology and physiology which the Panel believes should be remedied as a priority (Rec.3). This is strongly supported by the SC and deserves added funding support from investors. The SC feels that the Panel's Recommendation 4, on closer collaboration with ILRI in SSA on forage genetic resources, is highly appropriate, as is Recommendation 6 on IPR in rice and *Brachiaria*.

The SC stresses the need for CIAT and IITA to agree, without delay, on how to coordinate cassava research in SSA. There is a good model for this in the recently negotiated alignment arrangements for rice research in Africa among CIAT, IRRI and the Africa Rice Center. As cassava is arguably a higher current priority food staple than rice for SSA, it deserves to be on top of the alignment agenda for the continent. The SC looks to the Alliance to have resolved any ongoing issues such that a new agreement is in place in 2008.

The Panel considers that CIAT's program and its credibility in LAC is eroding. The SC supports the Panel recommendation for CIAT to re-engage with research partners in Latin America as soon as possible, not missing the opportunities inherent in the forthcoming strategic planning exercise and paying particular attention to the deterioration of relations between CIAT and Colombia, its host country.

Based on the Panel's assessment, the SC believes that CIAT's Asian program appears to include a series of technical assistance projects of an adaptive nature; although well integrated within the region, it lacks visibility at the CIAT HQ.

The TSBF is considered by the Panel as an exemplary program, with many outputs and a high reputation. CIAT is to be congratulated for this accomplishment. The TSBF program is perhaps a possible multidisciplinary systems-based model for the "outcome line" approach proposed by the Panel.

The Panel commends CIAT's regional programs that have matured to be the principal strategic platform for R for D for CIAT. It sees "outcome lines" in the regions as the model for CIAT in future, with regional leaders to be given more autonomy in a decentralization strategy as indicated in Recommendation 9. However, the Panel feels CIAT management is ill-equipped to support this. This is not a problem peculiar to CIAT alone and thus deserves more discussion at both the Center and system levels as it seems to be essentially a matrix management mode (Fig 7.10), with the attendant challenges this implies.

### **Management and Governance**

The SC agrees with the Panel, and is pleased to note the Center also acknowledges, CIAT's need to improve HR management and devise a new IRS staff policy. The SC would like to emphasize that as recommended by the Panel, and by 5<sup>th</sup> EPMR (2000), that CIAT needs to add operational capacity and devise a plan to manage IP.

The SC concurs with the Panel that the current management intervention of the Center by the Board, although justified given the financial and management crisis, should end as soon as

possible and that an action plan to improve management should be put in place as a matter of urgency. The SC also agrees with the Panel that the Board should have done better on due diligence seeing that, as the report indicates, management lacked the required finance and management skills and "...CIAT was living beyond its means since 2002." (p.114). The SC is pleased to see that given the magnitude and the length of the financial crisis the current CIAT Board of Trustees has made efforts to strengthen its financial management expertise.

The SC remains perplexed by the lack of effective and anticipatory CGIAR oversight of Center finance management. The SC believes that the CGIAR cannot afford recurrent crises such as this one without the necessary sound preventive measures. Such measures should go beyond the current annual financial flagging that a Center is not in a "healthy" financial position. If CIAT was spending in excess of its revenues since 2002, as stated by the Panel and agreed by the Center, the CGIAR System cannot wait 5 years for an external review to address the situation. The SC suggests that the CGIAR Scoping Team assess the need to create a stable mechanism to better anticipate and deal with finance, management and governance crises such as the one CIAT has gone through.

The SC notes that CIAT, just as with some other Centers, is losing focus in its research through a much higher reliance on restricted / project funds than in the past. The SC sees one way to assist the Centers deal with the decline is to urge members to support the resourcing of the SPs. The SC recognises that most research institutes today are largely funded through restricted project funding; it is not unique to the CGIAR. However, funding a long-term strategic international agricultural research agenda with a focus on IPGs is not conducive to short-term projects with attendant short-term impact expectations, and does place a special responsibility on investors in the CGIAR. The SC believes that this also requires the system and the Centers to have more discipline in their undertakings; Centers need clear strategic plans, focused MTPs, aligned business plans to resource them and a strong management team to stay focused on implementing them.

#### **In summary**

The SC endorses the recommendations of the Report, notes that the Center is in a process of renewal of leadership and looks forward to CGIAR membership support to the Center's transition into a revitalized global research institute. The SC will review a draft strategic plan that will outline a research approach to implement the EPMR recommendations soon after a new management team is in place. The SC also recommends that a small team re-visit the Center within 18 months to report on the progress in implementing the EPMR recommendations.