

SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

Commentary on the Follow-Up External Review of Recommendations #1 and #2 of the Third ICRAF EPMR (2005)

August 26th, 2007

Background

CGIAR Members agreed at AGMO5 to organize a follow up review of two recommendations from the 3rd ICRAF EPMR. The SC commissioned Hans Gregersen to conduct in early 2007, 18 months after the EPMR concluded, a mini review to assess ICRAF's progress in following up on the EPMR's first two recommendations, both of which the ICRAF board and management agreed with fully.

The SC TORs for the review were as follows: *The review will assess progress made by ICRAF on the following two recommendations: 1. ICRAF consolidate its strategic research priorities into a long-term workable strategic plan that directs more effort towards a small number of relevant emerging research topics; and 2. An analysis be undertaken of the likely impacts of involvement in large development projects including the Millennium Villages Project, on ICRAF 's overall balance between research and development, staff commitments and administrative costs; it is also important to ensure that projects with restricted funds be aligned with ICRAF's strategic research goals.*

Gregersen concludes that ICRAF is making good progress toward implementation of the first recommendation of the 3rd EPMR. Gregersen also points out that since the real spirit of the Recommendation is not only to produce a more focused Strategic Plan, but also that a more focused program of research will be implemented. Thus, the reviewer suggests a set of proposed milestones for ICRAF to take corrective action when these are not reached. Gregersen suggests that progress as measured by the milestones be monitored by the BOT of ICRAF and the lessons shared, with full disclosure of issues arising, as part of the annual EPMR reporting process in the Center's MTP submissions.

The reviewer also concludes that ICRAF has implemented Recommendation #2, in the sense that it has undertaken the assessment recommended and has developed a process for project selection that will help ensure that all restricted funding projects contribute to its strategic goals. Gregersen also indicates that ICRAF is making good progress towards implementation of the spirit of this recommendation, i.e., implementation of a process of screening all future projects for their relevance to ICRAF's strategic research for development goals.

Finally, Gregersen notes that maintaining focus on and implementation of the new Strategic Plan, in light of ICRAF's current funding situation could end up being a continuing, serious constraint for ICRAF. So long as ICRAF continues to face a 30:70 unrestricted to restricted funding split, and so long as it only has an average 12% overhead cost recovery on restricted funding projects, it will face pressures to take on projects that are marginal to implementation of the Strategic Plan but that provide full overhead cost recovery. Gregersen suggests that, in the context of fully implementing EPMR recommendations #1 and 2, ICRAF continue to explore alternative means to improve the ratio of unrestricted to restricted funding; and that the Center move quickly to put in place policies and guidelines for fiscal soundness and for ensuring that incoming grants/restricted resources fit directly with the Center's research for development priorities.

SC Commentary on the Follow-Up Review

The SC agrees with the Follow-Up assessment and believes that ICRAF has responded effectively to both recommendations. However, given that ICRAF went through a full fledged strategic exercise in the development of a new Strategic Plan to implement the first recommendation of the EPMP, the Council finds surprisingly few changes in the current MTP (2008-2010). The Center has reconstituted its portfolio into 9 Global Projects that are based on the new strategic plan. The MTP does not explicitly state that it terminated any activity or added anything new as a result of the EPMP or the Strategic Plan development. Thus, the devolution or termination of some of the projects and the take up of new activities is a work in progress, and may be it is too early to see this already in the 2008-2010 MTP. The Follow Up review conducted by Gregersen has seen progress and suggests waiting for the remaining milestones to be reached.

The SC believes that the center will need to learn how to manage restricted funds to implement its Strategic Plan, which means limiting project development and marketing to those projects that both meet donor interest and contribute to outputs, not responding to all investor requests, and ensuring full cost recovery of the projects. In addition, the program committee of the Board may need to review carefully the projects in the pipeline to ensure that they are in line with approved plans.

ICRAF proposes to embed science into the Millennium Villages Project (Recommendation 2). The Follow Up review conducted by Gregersen shows that ICRAF has seriously considered the issue and is satisfied that the devolution policy of ICRAF will ensure that ICRAF remain on the IPG research side of the spectrum and partners are found to cover the implementation of the development agenda. The SC believes that the next MTP should explicitly address this process of devolution.

In sum, the SC:

- 1. accepts the recommendations of the Follow-Up Review conducted by Hans Gregersen,*
- 2. believes that based on the reviewer's assessment, ICRAF has responded effectively to the two EPMP recommendations,*
- 3. suggests that ICRAF implements the milestones for further M&E suggested by the Follow-Up Review,*
- 4. will continue to monitor progress on the implementation of both the EPMP and the Follow-Up recommendations and suggestions in the annual MTP assessment of ICRAF.*