

Message from the SC Chair

e-CGIAR News

The CGIAR's hallmark is combining the best in science to contribute to development. Throughout its history, working in partnership with national agricultural research systems, and increasingly with other partners the CGIAR has helped to contribute to sustainable and poverty-reducing development through the research and research-related activities of its Centres. This has resulted in major productivity gains and improved policies and institutions for the benefit of the poor. Like other institutions, the CGIAR has evolved over time, changing its focus and structure to adapt itself to the needs of the present while, at the same time, nurturing the competence and imagination to wrestle with the demands of the future. Indeed, the CGIAR has evolved from a small group of research centres focused on raising agricultural production largely through crop breeding activities to one today that encompasses a much larger number of research centres and expanded partnerships addressing broader and more diverse set of research-for-development activities. At least seven distinct phases of development can be identified over its brief history:

1. Plant breeding activities oriented to high yielding varieties of rice, wheat and maize, the major food staple crops. IRRI, CIMMYT (1960 – 1965).
2. Plant breeding activities underpinned by agronomic activities tailored to the needs of the high yielding varieties, crop protection, irrigation, soil fertility, plant nutrition. IITA, CIAT, ICRISAT, ICARDA (1965 – 1975).
3. Farming systems research to fine tune the agronomic and technological activities to the specific needs of various socio-economic characterized farming systems. More socio-economic research and policy research to address distorted policies and weak institutions recognizing the critical role that good agricultural policies and strong NARS play in accelerating technological change and fostering agricultural development and to enable impact. IFPRI, ISNAR (1975 – 1980).
4. Broadening the objectives of the research by including biodiversity, natural resource management, natural ecosystems and agro-forestry. IPGRI, ICRAF, CIFOR, IWMI, ICLARM (now WorldFish) (1980 – 1990).
5. Problems can't be solved at farm level unless the conditions are created that enable them to do the right things. Eco-regional progress aiming at higher integration levels were identified (Ecoregional Programs). (1990 – 1998)
6. Global programs have to be addressed by combined and collaborative efforts of the centers (Challenge Programs). (1998 – 2007)
7. Mobilization of science and stimulating agricultural research by public and private investment. Greater and more extensive use of partnerships with private sector and civil society. (current)

Clearly, the CGIAR saw its agenda broaden considerably as it moved from a strongly supply-side orientation to a considerably more demand (often donor) led one. At the same time it started moving away from delivering concrete research products (e.g., improved crop varieties) to one of developing approaches, articulating problems and deriving common agendas and solutions with its partners. Its role as a moderator, initiator, facilitator, stimulator and a bridge to the broader stakeholder groups has become increasingly

important. That evolution is also making clear what is needed from the SC to ensure that CGIAR research and its partnerships remain of the highest relevance and quality.

The mission of the SC, the science-advisory organ of the CGIAR is to (a) enhance and promote the quality, relevance and impact of science in the CGIAR, (b) advice the Group on strategic scientific issues of importance to its goals, and (c) mobilize and harness the best of international science for addressing the goals of the international agricultural research community. With respect to the latter, and considering the current seventh phase of CGIAR development, the SC is committed to ensuring that the System is as well positioned as possible to meet the challenges inherent in effectively mobilizing global science towards CGIAR goals. A particular focus will be placed on bridging the gap in the current research-to-development continuum and in creating a collective node in the “open science” system. This will be achieved through four channels:

- 1) Promote excellence in research: two standing panels, SPME and SPIA, focus their efforts on strengthening processes related to research planning, monitoring and evaluation, including documenting the poverty-related impacts of Systems research.
- 2) Ensure implementation of system priorities: continued interaction and discussion with the Alliance Office in helping develop, improve, and implement the Framework Plans following a CGIAR System strategy.
- 3) Encourage partnerships: seek ways to best stimulate partnerships, including with private sector and civil society, so as to open up the avenues for development. The centres have to develop these relations and that requires a different mode of operation and attitude. The mission and dynamism in the environment urge for such change and the Science Council is available to stimulate and support such changes.
- 4) Conduct strategic analyses: follow through on the provision of necessary contextual issues to support the research agenda of the CGIAR, including support to develop System-wide guidelines on IPR (in particular with product stewardship and liability), ethics, streamlining of MTP and other monitoring and evaluation processes, in particular, the performance measurement system.

These activities will lead to more relevance of the CGIAR for the development and will contribute to the MDGs, especially MDG1 and MDG8. The role of the SC as a catalyst and a facilitator is modest but when done in the right way very productive and effective. That is our goal.