

Report of the Science Partnership Committee

ICW 2000, Washington DC

The Science Partnership Committee (SPC) met on October 21, 2000, in Washington DC in conjunction with the International Centers Week. This was only the second meeting of this new committee, which held its inaugural meeting as part of MTM 2000 in Dresden, Germany. Participants in this second meeting were R. James Cook, Mouin Hamze, Sudha Nair, and Satohiko Sasaki. Werner Arber (Chair), Lydia Makhubu, and Jose Israel Vargas were not able to participate in the meeting because of previous commitments. R. James Cook served as Chair for the meeting and also represented the Committee at the meeting of the Consultative Council on October 21, 2000. CGIAR Chairman Ian Johnson and Center Director Committee Chair Per Pinstrup-Andersen joined the SPC meeting during the morning. Manuel Lantin of the CGIAR Secretariat served as resource person and provided information on developments in the CGIAR since MTM 2000 and matters arising from the Committee's report at MTM 2000.

The Committee reviewed the SPC Terms of Reference which are: *To strengthen communication and collaboration between the CGIAR system and the broader international science community; and to help provide the CGIAR with advice and guidance on major scientific issues in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable agricultural development.*

Interaction with the CGIAR Chairman and the CDC Chair

Mr. Johnson stated as part of his discussion with the SPC that quality, relevant science is the only real pillar to survival and growth of the CGIAR system. This means that science at the Centers must be the best science based on objective and independent merit-review by peers. The Chairman suggested that members of the SPC could serve as "science ambassadors" for the system. They could think strategically about science, especially about the quality of science within the CGIAR system. He asked that the SPC consider its role to help place the CGIAR in touch with the broader international scientific community while also serving as a consultative scientific group.

The CDC Chairman indicated that the Center directors welcome any opportunity to be more in touch with the broader scientific community and explore potentials for research collaboration. He pointed out that the need to generate new and fundamental information (which usually means "upstream" research) and also have impact on international development (which usually means "downstream" research), creates a conflict for the Center programs. Donors may fund programs based on scientific standards set for generating new knowledge and understanding but generally evaluate accomplishments based on impact on international development.

Some of the questions raised in this discussion were: How can the contributions of scientists at the Centers be made known more widely within the broader international scientific community, recognizing that the work of the Centers must also be

developmental? How can the importance of science quality be further elevated with the donors? How can the Centers establish connections with reviewers in the academic community that can be both impartial yet understand the CGIAR system of international agricultural research and development.

In addition to background information and discussions with the CGIAR Chairman and CDC Chair, the committee made certain assumptions and took note of certain premises as a guide to developing an agenda for its work. These were:

- Access to the benefits of quality science is a fundamental right of the people of all countries;
- Donors will look favorably on and be attracted to research and development programs recognized as both relevant and scientifically “world class” on the basis that such programs will provide added value for their investments;
- The Centers and Center scientists would benefit from validation and wider recognition of their research and development programs by the international scientific community;
- The evaluation process for research and development depends on independent, merit-review by peers; and
- The current discussions on organizational structure and governance of the CGIAR system and alternatives proposed for change also provide an opportunity and an institutional environment for change in how the quality of science at the Centers is evaluated.

Further Steps toward Development of an Agenda for the SPC

Working within this framework of assumptions and premises, and taking into account the substance of interactions with the CGIAR, TAC (at Dresden) and CDC Chair, the SPC has identified three topics for further consideration within its terms of reference. These are:

1. As a global *emerging issue*, consider how the CGIAR through TAC can facilitate a deeper understanding of the public policy debate on the direction of the agricultural sciences and its implications for research and development at the Centers;
2. Consider ways by which merit review of the science by peers (where *merit* includes an assessment of both relevance and quality), can be achieved or improved for the research and development programs at the Centers; and
3. Address the specific issue of balance between core funding and competitive grants in the context of the need at the Centers for continuity of programs, increased funding, and greater access to or use of merit review.

These three items will make up the work of the SPC for the foreseeable future.

Much of the public policy debate on the direction of agricultural science is currently directed at the application of modern biotechnology to understanding and improving agriculturally important organisms, including plants, microorganisms, fish, and livestock. The SPC endorses the recommendations presented in the report on "Systemwide Review of Plant Breeding Methodologies in the CGIAR" in regard to the use of the tools of modern biotechnology and the institutional arrangements suggested. In addition, the SPC recommends to TAC, other CGIAR committees, and the Center Directors the recent white paper issued by seven academies of science (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Third World, U.S., and U.K) entitled "Transgenic Plants and World Agriculture" (available at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/9889.html>). However, the appropriateness of transgenic technologies for food and agriculture is only a current target in a much larger issue regarding the direction of agricultural science that must be addressed.

The SPC recognizes its unique roles and opportunities within the larger CGIAR system. Every effort will be made to complement but not duplicate the work of TAC, CDC, and other partnership committees. The work may take the form of producing a white paper.

The next steps will include discussions and decisions on how to complete this work. The full committee has not been present at either the first or second meetings held in conjunction with the MTM and ICW, respectively, owing to other commitments of some of the members. The committee will ensure that the next opportunity to meet will involve all members. It will also make full use of electronic means of communication for exchanging of ideas.

CGIAR Science Partnership Committee

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