

Chairman's Closing Statement, ICW97

AN OVERVIEW

We have had an interesting, significant, and productive International Centers Week (ICW) and, before I get into the substance of our decisions, let me thank all those who helped us. I thank the management of the Preston Auditorium, the technical staff who have given us audiovisual and photographic services, the staff assistants who have worked ceaselessly before and during the meeting, colleagues in the CGIAR Secretariat who designed this meeting to satisfy our interests and convenience, and the interpreters who made us understand each other. Please acknowledge their contributions, and particularly the outstanding efforts of the Secretariat.

[Applause.]

At this year's ICW we looked deep within ourselves, but did not do so in a navel-gazing mood. Rather, we engaged in some inward-looking exercises somewhat like a cat that gathers itself into a compact body before it springs. The purpose of our creative introspection was to prepare ourselves to confront the enormous challenges that motivate us all, the challenges that were so eloquently and effectively described by Per Pinstrup-Andersen in his magisterial opening presentation on the state of the world's food outlook.

If I reflect a bit on our discussions in that context, I see a number of unique features about the meeting now drawing to a close.

First, the evolution of the CGIAR from a relatively small and clubby group of dedicated donors to a broad coalition of equal, like-minded partners, is going well, perhaps even beyond expectations. It is a coalition of the caring. Like all coalitions, this too has tensions, variability, some differences, and a range of accommodations that are required to make it work. Nevertheless, the membership of the Group is certainly broadening and the call for inclusion made at Lucerne has clearly resonated across the international community.

Second, while taking pride in our sense of inclusion, we realized that we need also to ask ourselves: in terms of *structure*, do we have too much of a good thing? Do we have too many committees? Is it time to revisit the question of an executive committee which has been put on the table several times? These questions surfaced directly and indirectly at our deliberations. Grappling with them is part of ensuring that as the membership of the Group grows, we will continue to do business in ways that both challenge and engage us all.

Third, in terms of approach, recall the concern I expressed about what I a possible drift towards an either/or instead of a both/and perspective, or towards balancing various considerations in a politically-correct fashion at the expense of excellence. I hasten to emphasize that the potential drift is not a foregone conclusion. We can go for the both/and perspective, and certainly there is no reason to doubt that while doing so, we can, as well,

match diversity with excellence. The question then arises: with size and quantitative change, do we also need change in *process* and *practice*? Looking at all these questions, sometimes in only a preliminary way, with further discussion anticipated in Brazil (May 1998) and even later, is part of what we have been doing this week.

Fourth, we put the “c” back in ICW, Centers Week, by spreading the sixteen presentations throughout the business meeting, not having them all lumped together into a single day, and then taken off the program, as it were. Listening to the center presentations was an enriching experience. We are indebted to the Center Directors and their colleagues for having enhanced our deliberations in this fashion, and for giving us a glimpse of the work that is so inspiring and motivating, especially to those of us who have had the pleasure and the privilege of visiting the scientists in the fields and observing how they work side by side with the farmers, with the NARS, and with others.

Fifth, we recommitted ourselves to our purpose and our mission of harnessing science to serve the world’s poor. Everybody here is motivated. If there is any self-questioning within the System it is not on what we seek to do, but on how best to do it. It is in this sense that an inward-looking orientation at ICW97 has been like the gathering of the muscles of the cat. Now, the questions are: where do we go next? and, how do we get there? Well, we should expect that Maurice Strong and his colleagues on the System Review panel, now broadened to include more members in the sub-panels, and resource persons as well, will guide us.

With those preliminary reflections, ladies and gentlemen, let me try to revisit the four themes that I outlined to you in my opening statement, and see how far we have progressed on each of them.

MAJOR THEMES

Evaluation: This was the first theme I examined, and we have certainly had movement in this very important area. Nobody can say that nothing is happening. A lot is happening. There is a significant debate taking place and our preceding speaker, Jock Anderson, gave us an excellent and succinct addition to that debate, in his summary of impact evaluation. I will not repeat his comments which are still very fresh in our memory, but I would like to recall some of the observations that I made earlier, because I think they will help us to sort out conflicting statements and contradictory views.

The over-riding principle that characterizes our approach to impact evaluation is the existence of multiple strands: multiple needs, multiple products, multiple methodologies. Unless we are clear on what it is that we are trying to look at, and recognize that we need more than one type of product, we will not be able to make significant progress.

The first type of product we need consists of short, pithy pieces that can be used to reach decisionmakers and, by implication, the public. That was the plea of Ernest Loevinsohn (Canada). The plea is appropriate and was endorsed by many others, all of whom need to ensure that that non-scientist interlocutors in their home agencies are not

turned off by what is presented to them. And there, we frequently run into problems of impatience with subtleties and nuances. . We have to struggle against that tide, finding ways of communicating accurately, convincingly, **and** succinctly, when we make the case of why it makes sense to invest in the activities we espouse.

In this connection, let me share with you a fact from a fascinating study by Kiku Adatto of Harvard University who found that the average time allowed for a sound bite on television by a Presidential candidate in the US dropped from 42.3 seconds in 1968, to 9.8 seconds in 1980, and to 8.4 seconds in 1992. Anton Chekov argued in the 19th century that “brevity is the sister of talent.” In today’s sound bite world, brevity **is** talent.

Another set of issues concerns the harmonization of approaches across the CGIAR System in areas such as cost/benefit analysis. What is included in the cost stream, what is included in the benefit stream, and how these are defined should be more or less agreed on among the Centers. We must, however, accept differences. And, yes, IFPRI and ISNAR have very different sets of considerations in doing cost/benefit analysis. Whether one goes for footprints or head counts, there are still going to be very difficult questions ahead. Perhaps what we can do, is to encourage the use of best practices so that what is today the best practice of the few becomes tomorrow the standard practice of the many.

We move on, then, to the compelling need for promoting and nurturing an evaluation culture throughout the System, an internal function of quality enhancement. This would link *ex ante* and *ex post*, promote critical peer reviews, and influence project as well as continuous monitoring, evaluation, and feedback.

There are many other complexities to contend with, such as the linkages between what we do, and seek to evaluate, and the work of many, many others that is required before the impact of our efforts is actually felt in farmers’ fields and the homes of poor consumers. We noted the need for case studies as well as for broad assessments of the whole effort; the need to enrich evaluation both by quantitative and qualitative data. And let us always remember the wise words of Wally Falcon (Chair, CIMMYT) that while we should never be complacent, we are indeed among the very best in the world on this topic.

Now, on top of that I think we were very appropriately reminded by Michel Petit (World Bank) and others this morning of the risks of pushing evaluation impact assessments to the point of creating perverse incentives that would lead to the appropriation of credit at the expense of partners; that would move us towards the short term and the visible; that would stifle the creative contrarian view that is so necessary for the advance of science. These are all apt cautions, and I leave them with you, as I move to the next theme I addressed.

Center Concerns: The second broad theme of my opening statement was the set of concerns I have encountered at CGIAR centers. I tried to articulate the feelings of center staff and of the Center Directors. I won’t repeat them here. They are spelled out in my opening address and are now available in writing for you to take back and mull over. But I want to say that we cannot find a more committed, motivated and dedicated group of outstanding scientists than those we have, and I hope that we will show them our

confidence, reiterate our support, reaffirm our commitment, avoid micromanagement, and create the space in which their imaginations can soar. I know that we can and that we will.

Finance: The third theme was finance, and after much debate and some misgivings, we adopted the Finance Committee's recommendations to distribute 11 percent of the World Bank funds on a matching grant basis and to attend to particular needs with the rest. I have been assured that there is a \$4.2 million reserve still held for the System.

We also welcomed the promises of some members -- for instance, the United States, Sweden, Finland, and others -- to increase their support. I thank them all, and others who have agreed to accelerate their disbursements. I thank particularly Japan for that. I thank, as well, all members -- such as the European Commission and Nigeria -- who have undertaken to clear arrears that have accumulated for institutional reasons. And I think in all of that, we have seen a reiteration of the commitment of members to the System.

Research Paradigm: My fourth and final theme was the need to make a double shift in the science paradigm, and new partnerships.

The first of these shifts was the one that dealt with integration of crop-specific research, which has been so successful, into a broader, more holistic vision which encompasses the concepts of sustainability and ecoregionality, and looks to achieving results through increasing the productivity and profitability of complex farming systems at the small-holder level. I think we have made progress in accepting the paradigm, but not so much in discovering how to cope with it. Is it a lens through which we view problems and are able to define them in a way that makes researchable? Are these problems researchable products in their own right? Or are we talking about a combination of both? We are struggling with that.

The second shift was to bring to bear the most cutting-edge work associated with genetic mapping, molecular markers, and biotechnology to accelerate the breeding process and achieve the promise of all that science can do for the poor and the environment. On that one, there were limited concerns about genetic mapping and markers. On the issue of biotechnology, we have had a whole range of reports and a major debate in two parallel sessions and in plenary, and we reached conclusion around three topics.

We agreed that efforts should be made to broaden the membership of the panels set up under the auspices of TAC after our discussions in Cairo (May 1994). Toward this end, we suggested that efforts should be made to seek additional sources of expertise from many areas including Sub-Saharan Africa.

We agreed, as well, that the justifiable concerns for biosafety issues should guide the committess. We asked for a broader interpretation of risk, which would involving an assessment of the potential downstream downstream effects of biotechnology, and more support for the NARS on biosafety procedures and regimes. All this should be done while

the centers are held to the highest international standards and full compliance to all national regulations, but not by a moratorium on research.

While acknowledging that the issues of intellectual property rights are urgent and that their resolution requires a very specialized expertise, we suggested that the System as a whole may want to help the centers to identify reliable legal expertise from several countries; that there is a risk of delays in this area leading to the appropriation of some technologies by the private sector and thereby blocking them from access to the poor and to others; and that some preemptive moves to patent for keeping "open access" may be needed. The case of the Orstom/CIMMYT apomictic gene research was highlighted in this area.

But, finally, in everything that we'll do in this complex area, we will continue to be guided by the principles that the CGIAR has long stood for--open access, free flow of germplasm and information, and no commercial profit to the centers from these activities.

Now, we will look forward to the reports of the two panels, and we will certainly look forward to an exciting debate in Brazil in MTM '98. So much more remains to be done but, yet, we have advanced a lot in this last week. We have pulled together partnerships as never before. I think our colleagues from the NGO Committee and from the Private Sector Committee are certainly fully integrated in our discussions. And I want to report to you that I have already had two specific proposals in response to the challenge (in my opening statement) to AROs to participate with us more fully in creative forms of partnership.

TOWARDS HOPE....AND BEYOND

So, where do we go from here? Well, Graham Greene once said that in every life "there comes a moment when the door opens and we let the future in." What lies beyond that door--complexities, challenges, advantages, problems--who can tell? But the future certainly has to be met and that is part of life's reality.

For us, perhaps that special moment came in New Delhi when we opened the door for renewal and let the future in, and we encountered challenges and change and opportunities and, indeed, problems. But we grasped opportunities, and now so much more lies ahead and we open a new door and we go through it. And there's a System review that will help us reposition ourselves in the future, and who knows between now and then what else we will encounter? But as I have said before: Without challenges, sciences dies.

At every stage, this Group has faced challenges and opportunities boldly, as well as with compassion and a profound sense of caring. You have come together in periods of difficulty, and it was a sense of family that was reflected in Jakarta when we enabled some of our centers that were in deep crisis to overcome them. And I have seen this happen time and time again.

As we look through that door to the future, we see there are vistas out there. Will these vistas remain dotted with despair or will we work together to help transform them into landscapes of hope? For millions now deprived of the right to the most very basic needs of life, to lose hope is to lose will, and that must not happen.

The Indian writer Satish Kumar, in his moving plea on behalf of all the world's deprived people, said:

"Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to hope, and from fear to trust."

In our special area of focus, we must recommit ourselves to do our best to offer hope, trust, and indeed life to the neglected and the unconnected. In the future, as in the past, let us do so with undiminished commitment.

Thank you, each and every one, and I look forward to seeing you in Brazil next year.

[Applause.]