

Report of the Center Directors Committee  
International Centers Week 1997

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Last week, center directors spent two days in retreat recommitting themselves to the vision of the CGIAR and to the spirit of Lucerne, that is to the concept of a truly global agricultural research system.

As a practical step in that direction, our retreat was designed to help us find way in which the sixteen centers can work together more effectively as a system, and thus further increase the effectiveness of our work with our partners and stakeholders.

We observed that the current vision of the CGIAR does not adequately reflect the environment and biodiversity objectives of the group and we have rededicated ourselves to working more actively, more collaboratively, and more effectively in these areas.

As part of our retreat, Center Directors also reviewed the decision making processes in the CGIAR and I am pleased to note that we have identified a number of opportunities to make a greater contribution to the work of TAC and to other specialized committees and stakeholder groups within the CGIAR. To that end, we decided to identify individual center directors as specific contact persons for such committees and for major issues that require center responses, such as biotechnology and climate change. The centers are also reviewing the manner in which we interact with TAC. When we met with Don Winkelmann on Saturday, we left convinced that we share a common objective with our TAC colleagues to find effective ways to strengthen our interactions.

Allow me to point out as well that during our Saturday discussions, we spent considerable time with the Center Board Chairs discussing the Systemwide Review. As a result of our meetings with the CBC, we prepared a submission on most of the aspects

contained in the Review's terms of reference. Although our meetings with the review panel and Wednesday's session on this subject has dealt with many of our concerns, we urge that steps be taken to place center participation in the mainstream of the review process. We believe that this is extremely important to ensure that the panel produces the type product that will lead to practical recommendations in keeping with the basic goals and objectives of the CGIAR. We look forward to frequent and regular interactions with the Panel throughout the process of the review.

We also conducted, Mr. Chairman, that if centers are to collaborate more effectively as part of a global research system, that we must develop our own capacity to support collaborative ventures. One way that we might achieve this is through the establishment of an executive secretariat. The objective of such a secretariat, which would be modest in terms of size, would be to provide appropriate leadership within the system and increase the centers' collective capacity to support system-wide programs, public awareness needs, and stakeholders' contacts. A proposal for the establishment of such an executive secretariat, working specifically on behalf of centers, will be discussed by Center Directors at their next meeting just prior to MTM98, and it is our intention to report back to the Group at the time.

I have also been asked, Mr. Chairman, to point out that center directors greatly appreciate the continuing financial support we receive from our donors. We know that donor representatives are working hard against severe competition to assure us of the support that we need. For this we are truly grateful and will do all that we can to make best use of the funds that we receive.

Allow me to point out that in reviewing recent trends, we found a divergence between the appearance of financial well-being at the CGIAR level and the hard realities

at the center level. Inflation and the shift to restrict funding have led to a substantial reduction in unrestricted funding for many of the most basic parts of the CGIAR agenda.

In addition, Mr. Chairman center directors found that our concerns for poverty, environment and natural resource management will require more rapid progress in methodological and managerial aspects of ecoregional research for the methodological work we are engaged in.

We have likewise followed with interest the activities of the biotechnology panels and are pleased to see the interest in and support for this work in the CGIAR. CGIAR centers have responded in a diverse ways to different opportunities. They are developing an appropriate capacity with a wide range of linkages to a range of specialized advanced research organization and national systems. They have been particularly attentive to the training and research needs of the NARS and to sensitivities about the sharing and husbanding of genetic materials and knowledge. Center directors also expressed the conviction that more support should be given to the development and adoption of bio-safety regulations in developing countries.

The CDC also noted the progress made by the CGIAR gender staffing and gender analysis program and considered briefly the form of future gender related activities after the present phase of the program ends in 1998. We noted and support the idea that the gender analysis element of the program become integrated into the Systemwide Program on Participatory Research and Gender Analysis. As to the gender analysis part of the program, we welcome the proposed workshop next may. This event will provide an excellent opportunity to plan next steps, building on the successful first phase. We suggest that workshop participants may want to use a broader definition of diversity in staffing during the course of their discussions.

I should also note, Mr. Chairman that the CDC has decided to expand its support to systemwide public awareness and has collectively committed to the major Public Awareness Campaign that you mentioned in your opening address. The public awareness campaign for agriculture seeks to link some of the world's most influential people and its most respected academic institutions in an enhanced effort to promote the importance of the global agricultural research system.

Referring back to your opening address, Center directors have also asked me to acknowledge your commitment to their work as expressed during our one day meeting prior to the CDC retreat. We were very pleased Mr. Chairman that you brought forward to the Group, as our ambassador, our concerns about the burdens of increased reporting, decreases in unrestricted funding, and the possibility that trends toward greatly increased managerial complexities will subvert the principal goals of the systems.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I would like to note that this will be my last intervention as CDC chair. Leadership of the committee now passes to Geoff Hawtin of IPGRI who I know will bring forward the many initiatives for which the CDC carries a responsibility. I am likewise confident that Geoff will make every effort to help the centers renew their commitment to the vision of a truly global and highly effective agricultural research system.

Thank you very much.