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Shaping the CGIAR's Future

CDC Commentary on the Report of the CGIAR System
Review

Attached is a CDC note on the CGIAR System Review. These comments follow the CDC meeting held on October 22-23, 1998.

CDC Commentary on the Report of the CGIAR System Review

The Center Directors would like to express their appreciation to Maurice Strong and the members of the Review Panel for their stimulating report. We note that it still represents "work in progress", and we look forward to participating fully, together with other CGIAR stakeholders, in the various mechanisms and activities set up to follow-up and complement the report's recommendations. We propose to establish a sub-committee of the CDC specifically to ensure that we are able to make a substantial, effective and coordinated input to process.

We are aware of the enormous amount of consultation and analysis behind the report. We look forward to having access to relevant background documents to help us in our own further analysis of the issues and recommendations.

We note with pleasure the recognition by the Panel of our past work and its act. We would urge that in implementing the recommendations care be taken that we not lose the proven benefits of the current system. We hope that the deliberations on this crucial review will lead to a closely system of independent Centers, supported by an efficiently functioning group of donors who fully subscribe and act according to agreed-upon budgetary and accountability procedures that ensure efficient management and quality science of relevance to the world's poor.

We note the attempt by the Panel to assign system-wide responsibility to specific Centers. We recognize that these proposals will require further discussion and review by TAC and other bodies within the CGIAR, including the CDC.

With regards to the reports specific recommendations, the following are our comments. In this context the term "agriculture" is used in its broadest sense, i.e. encompassing agriculture, fisheries and forestry.

Recommendation 1: The CDC recognizes the need to revisit the CGIAR mission statement and, in general, welcomes the new formulation. It points out, however, the need for the statement to refer explicitly to the developing countries.

Recommendation 2: The CDC supports the recommendation concerning the role of the IARCs and is encouraged by it because it reinforces directions being taken by the Centers in frontier science and technology, new partnerships and low-potential areas.

Recommendation 3: The CDC welcomes the recommendation dealing with the dual strategy of roving food security and enhanced rural income. The Centers reinforce the need to play the role of neutral convenor in harmony with existing initiatives and in ways that minimize transaction costs.

Recommendation 4: The CDC endorses, with qualifications, the recommendation dealing with integrated gene management. The Centers are fully supportive of the integrated gene management approach and the need for new operational modalities. They recognize it entails further strength g and new approaches to intellectual property rights protection and they support the establishment of an advisory service on these issues. The Centers, however, feel there is no need for a separate legal entity to hold CGIAR patents as this can be done by the individual Centers.

In view of the availability of new tools in plant molecular biology, the CDC supports the idea of continuously reviewing the priority germplasm needs and the most efficient methods of improvement. To draw on the benefit of the new tools, adequate breeding capacity needs to be maintained.

Recommendation 5: The CDC does not endorse the recommendation related to the establishment of an additional network for integrated natural resource management, but it strongly recognizes the need for continued, even increased, support of ongoing activities of the CGIAR in the area of natural resource management. The CDC wishes to clarify that development of sustainable systems of management encompasses all natural resources. The establishment of national agricultural research strategies is the responsibility of the NARS, and the IARCs consider supporting this process a priority. See also the comment on recommendation 25.

Recommendation 6: The Centers share the Panel's perspective on the importance of enhancing information systems but do not endorse the establish of a new entity.

Recommendation 7: The Centers support the recommendation that places more emphasis on social and management science and policy research. In addition to policy, the Centers are convinced that more efforts are needed in the management of complex organizations, both internally and in relation with their partners. As indicated earlier, Centers do not endorse the establishment of a new . initiative and hold themselves accountable for complementing the thrust of this recommendation .

Recommendation 8: The CDC welcomes the recommendation on capacity building and feels that, in general, the Centers have excellent experience in this domain and are well. equipped to advance the process. However, the CDC would like to the need to exploit the benefits of capacity building through appropriate institutional support at the national level that addresses the retention of middle- and top-level scientific and management staff

Recommendation 9: The CDC recognizes the importance of dealing with empowerment of women in agriculture, but without necessarily creating an additional network as other opportunities should be considered involving a wider audience, beyond the Centers.

Recommendation 10: The CDC concurs with the recommendation for the CGIAR to focus on Sub- Saharan Africa, and acknowledges the Panel's general endorsement of the programs being implemented by the Centers. However, the CDC is not convinced of the need to set up a new coordination structure. More specifically: The CDC agrees with the specific recommendation to build \ capacity but notes that this needs to be done with a wider system-based approach, and should be developed with and be supportive of the sub-regional organizations ASARECA, CORAF and SACCAR;

- The CDC considers that the greatest need is to foster circumstances in which NARS scientists could conduct meaningful and creditable research. This is necessary to encourage the best scientists to stay in the NARS and thereby sustain research capacity. The CDC considers that the eco-regional programs could have a more important role in capacity building;
- The CDC welcomes the Panel's view that Centers should participate in consortia of NARS, NGOs, and other public and private sector organizations to encourage and support transfer of research-based knowledge and technology;
- The CDC recognizes that, in view of the non-agricultural constraints on technology and policy building activities more closely with the development agencies that are addressing such issues;
- The CDC acknowledges a need for greater coordination and joint action by the Centers based in and active in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it believes that the Centers are themselves best placed to determine the leadership of the different collaborative activities; and,
- The CDC recognizes that the Centers should improve the coordination of activities in Sub-Saharan Africa. It recommends that a retreat be held, in Africa, of the Directors General and senior managers to develop ways to improve their collaboration in the region.

Recommendation 11: While the CDC in general supports the recommendation on partnerships, it would like to emphasize its concern on the effective utilization of limited resources. It also recognizes the opportunities for new partner relationships with the private sector.

Recommendation 12: See the comments on the recommendations 15 through 21.

Recommendation 13: In addressing this recommendation, the CDC would hope that the informal status, consensus and information based decision-making process are not lost and should involve broad consultation.

Recommendation 14: The CDC welcomes the recommendation on evaluation and supports innovative approaches to review and impact assessment, such as review workshops. However, any additional review and assessment activity should be countered by reductions in ongoing activities in order to avoid additional time demands.

Recommendations 15 through 21: The CDC is supportive of proposals for streamlining governance whilst retaining center autonomy. However, it believes it is critical that direct communication channels be maintained between the Centers and the CGIAR Members. The CDC does not wish to comment at present on the specific recommendations on governance structures other than to welcome the intention of having center representation on decision-making bodies.

The CDC recognizes the value of having some service functions closely associated with system governance but it believes that these should remain generally center driven. For instance, the proposed Media and Communication Unit - of which PAA, PARC and Future Harvest form the core - should be owned and managed by the Centers. The CDC would suggest caution in having "agenda support funds" centrally administered, as this may become a disincentive for donor payment of full overheads.

The CDC welcomes the increased recognition of in-kind contributions, particularly those from host countries. It stresses, however, that this must be done in a consistent and transparent way, and should not be in lieu of existing membership requirements with regard to funding of CGIAR activities.

Recommendation 22: The CDC does not support that the CGIAR Secretariat should undertake services centrally that are best done by the Centers. It welcomes a dialogue with the Secretariat on human resource services and strongly supports the need to identify young professionals.

Recommendation 23: The CDC is of the opinion that any task force on the implementation of governance changes must have strong representation from the Centers.

Recommendation 24: Should a task force be established to foster relationships among center boards and the central board, the CDC urges that board chairs and center directors be well represented on it.

Recommendation 25: The CDC is convinced that system-wide programs require continuity of funding and guaranteed support for their lifetime. Both CDC and TAC have been or will be involved in analyses of eco-regional activities, and any further analysis should benefit from this; a similar analysis should be undertaken for system-wide initiatives. The CDC considers that the management of eco-regional activities should be decided on the basis of comparative advantage of participants in the shorter and longer term. The CDC urges that Center representatives be part of any task force on improving the governance and financing of system-wide programs.

Recommendation 26: The CDC agrees wholeheartedly with the Panel's call on the international development community for a greater financial commitment to agriculture, agricultural research and the CGIAR through mobilizing a variety of sources of funding. The outcomes of The World Food Summit and Vision 2020 argue strongly in support of this, but are not yet reflected in political agendas of donor countries.

Recommendation 27: The CDC regards it as important that current initiatives to secure non-traditional funding take due account of existing mechanisms such as Future Harvest. Any new mechanism must be international and broad-based and managed by fund professionals.

Recommendation 28: The CDC considers that continuity of funding is essential, that good science requires considerable unrestricted funding, and that unrestricted and attributed funds should not fall below 70% for any one Center. It is equally important that special projects have full cost recovery. The CDC agrees with the recommendation pert 9 to the quality of financial information both at the planning and accountability stages. The CDC notes the Panel's comments, on the inherent risk of the matrix approach with regard to market forces becoming a dominant factor in the allocation process. The

CDC would much appreciate an improvement in the Members' disbursement practices. The functions and responsibilities of a central body, if constituted, should be carefully defined, and its comparative advantages vis-a-vis center management of activities should be considered. The valuable experience obtained through the established World Bank Fund allocation mechanism of matching funding should be kept in mind.

Recommendation 29: The CDC considers that throughout the history of the CGIAR the development perspective has been strongly upheld by the World Bank. This has reinforced the role of knowledge -- generated by research -- for development agencies. Their commitment to the CGIAR is essential.

Washington, D.C.

October 24, 1998