

ICW98 Parallel Session I
External Reviews: CIFOR, ICRAF and SGRP

Chair: Roberto Lenton
Rapporteur: Iain MacGillvray
Date: 29 and 30 October, 1998

Purpose

The External Review reports (EPMRs) of CIFOR, ICRAF, and SGRP were considered in Parallel Session I on 29 and 30 October 1998 by an *ad-hoc* Committee of interested CGIAR Members and other participants of ICW98. The *ad-hoc* Committee's report is **submitted for information to the CGIAR**, as per the streamlined procedure for considering External Review reports.

Process

Participants had received the following documents in advance of the meeting: the Firs', External Review of CIFOR; the Second External Review of ICRAF; the First External Review of SGRP; and addendum to each of these reports, incorporating the response of the Center to the Review report, the TAC commentary, and the transmittal letter forwarding the report to the CGIAR Chair.

The meeting on October 29 was attended by over 110 participants, and the session was lively. About 30 participants attended the meeting on October 30, to continue discussion of the SGRP report. The discussion of each review report was based on a brief presentation by a TAC member giving an overview of the respective Review report, the Center's response to it, the TAC commentary, and suggested actions by the CGIAR. The Review Panel Chair, Center representatives, and TAC members responded to questions. At the conclusion of the discussion, the Session Chair summarized the conclusions and recommendations of the Parallel Session.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. CIFOR External Review

TAC member (presenter):	Elias Fereres
Review Panel Chair:	Jeffery Burley
Center representatives:	F. Reifschneider, Board Vice-Chair Jeffrey Sayer, Director General

Comments and Issues:

1. The *ad hoc* Committee concurred with the overall conclusion of the Panel and of TAC that CIFOR had received a very positive review, and that the Center had made remarkable progress in all aspects of its work since its establishment in 1992.

2. Questions were raised and clarified concerning the magnitude, composition and quality of CIFOR's social science research. There was consensus that the Center was allocating sufficient resources to work in the areas of sociology, anthropology, and economics as it complements its forestry research. The quality of its social science research was regarded as high; an expansion of it was not warranted.

3 The desirability of CIFOR expanding the agroecological scope of its research beyond tropical rainforests to dry areas (e.g., WANA) was acknowledged by the Center's Board and management. However, there was consensus that such work would require additional resources and should not be undertaken at the expense of work in the humid areas.

4. The Panel's recommendation that the managerial and financial competencies of CIFOR's Board of Trustees be broadened, implying a possible increase in the number of members from the current 14 to 16 or 17, was weighed against factors of cost and 'of appropriate representation of the Center's stakeholders. CIFOR's plan to add up to three members to achieve the right mix of expertise and representation was endorsed.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The *ad-hoc* Committee:

- Strongly endorsed the Panel's recommendations and positive assessment of CIFOR, and thanked the Panel for an excellent report.
- Agreed with most of TAC's comments on the report.
- Expressed satisfaction with the response from the Center Board and Management to the Review report.
- Encouraged donors to continue to strongly support CIFOR's excellent work in forestry research.

2. ICRAF External Review

TAC member (presenter):	Elias Fereres
Review Panel Chair:	Jochen Heuveldop
Center representatives:	Yemi Katarere, Board Chair -Pedro -Sanchez, Director General

Comments and Issues'

1. The *ad hoc* Committee concurred with the conclusions of the Panel and TAC that ICRAF had successfully transformed itself into a major research institution in the field of agroforestry.

2. Strong concern was expressed that the ratio of restricted to unrestricted funding (65:35%) seriously limited ICRAF's flexibility to carry out its mandate; and was an issue that needed to be urgently addressed by CGIAR Members.

3. Various views were expressed on the Panel's recommendation that ICRAF undertake research in the area of vegetative propagation. NARS were said to be better placed to undertake this activity, and concern was raised about ICRAF's comparative advantage in this area. However, consensus was not reached on this issue.

4. Similarly, the advantage of ICRAF pursuing research in the areas of market development and strategic planning for value-added activities (including the process of identifying, selecting and developing appropriate post-harvest technologies) was questioned, but the issue was not resolved.

5. ICRAF's Board confirmed that it had already taken steps to implement the Panel's recommendation on strategic oversight of its program.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The *ad-hoc* Committee:

- Recognized the Panel's positive assessment of ICRAF, endorsed its recommendations, and thanked the Panel for its excellent report. It largely supported TAC's comments on the Review report.
- Expressed serious concern regarding the low level of unrestricted funding provided to the Center, as well as the lack of full recovery of overhead costs chargeable to projects, both of which are threatening the viability of research at ICRAF.
- Recommended that the Finance Committee and the donor community collectively address the important System-wide problem of low unrestricted funding and overhead recovery on an urgent basis.
- Commended ICRAF for its outstanding achievements during the review period, and urged donors to provide continued strong support to the Center.

3. SGRP External Review

The parallel session's report on the SGRP External Review will be distributed separately.

Additional Comments and Recommendation Regarding Reviews

Two additional comments, of a general nature, were made during the Session:

Several participants attending the Parallel Session expressed strong reservations regarding the "streamlined" procedure used at ICW98 for discussing External Review reports. They noted that the Panel Chairs had not been given the opportunity to present their Report's main conclusions, and there was insufficient time for discussion. As a result -- despite the availability of comprehensive assessment reports, and the considerable money and effort invested by donors and Centers in supporting the review process - many Session participants felt there had not been sufficient time to obtain full returns on this investment.

Concern was also expressed regarding the guidance available to Review Panels regarding the assessment of science quality. It was noted that while the terms of reference of EP MRs directed the Panels to undertake a broad strategic review, recent TAC commentary appeared to suggest that the Panels also undertake in-depth assessment of science quality, (even though this is also expected to be covered by Center Commissioned External Reviews (CCERs)).

The *ad-hoc* Committee **recommended** that these concerns be addressed on a priority basis by TAC and the CGIAR Secretariat, in consultation with the Oversight Committee.