



Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

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Mid-Term Meeting 2001
May 21 - 25
Durban, South Africa

Charting the CGIAR's Future – Change Design and Management

Report of the Science Partnership Committee

The attached report from the Science Partnership Committee is being circulated for information.

This item is for: Information Discussion Decision

Proposed Action: None



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May 10, 2001

Mr. Ian Johnson
Chairman
Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
The World Bank
1818 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am writing on behalf of the CGIAR Science Partnership Committee (SPC), which I have had the privilege to chair. The Committee recently held its third meeting in the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), Paris, France. The two previous meetings of the SPC were held in conjunction with the CGIAR meetings, i.e. one or two days before the meetings and at the same venues. In order to ensure members' participation, the Committee decided to hold its meeting for MTM2001 earlier and in a more central venue. We are grateful to a member, Dr. Mouin Hamze, for his help in making arrangements with CIHEAM to host the meeting.

The meeting sought to exchange views on the recommendations of the CDMT and formulate a position on aspects relevant to the Committee's role in the CGIAR. I am pleased to inform you that the Committee accomplished its objectives. As you know, SPC is one of the CGIAR committees that would be affected by the proposed changes in the structure and governance of the CGIAR System. The Committee welcomes the recommendations in the context of the Group's desire to "enhance the science output" of the CGIAR, a key component of its terms of reference. We agree that the role of the SPC could be subsumed and merged with the scientific mandates of TAC under the proposed Science Council. The Committee also endorses the proposed shift to a "programmatic approach to defining, funding, and managing" the CGIAR research agenda. It notes that a focus on challenge programs is consistent with the work it envisioned in its report at ICW2000 on how the CGIAR "can facilitate a deeper understanding of the public policy debate on the direction of agricultural sciences and its implications for research and development at the Centers."

I am transmitting herewith a brief summary report of the main points discussed in the meeting, including suggestions pertinent to the work of the Science Council and issues that the Committee feels important in considering the shift to a programmatic approach based on merit review and competitive funding.

Noting that the meeting in Paris would be its last, the Committee would like to convey to you and colleagues in the CGIAR their thanks for having been given the opportunity to interact with various components of the System, albeit for just a period of one year. We very much appreciate this experience, and rest assured that we would remain interested in following the developments in the CGIAR.

We regret our inability to join you and other colleagues at MTM in Durban, South Africa because of pressing individual commitments. We trust, however, that our report will be shared with the participants at MTM.

With best wishes for the continued success of the CGIAR.

Sincerely,



Werner Arber
Professor, Dept. of Microbiology Biozentrum (Basel) and
Chair, CGIAR Science Partnership Committee

Cc: Francisco Reifschneider, CGIAR Director
Manuel Lantin, Science Adviser, CGIAR Secretariat

Report of the Science Partnership Committee MTM 2001, Durban, South Africa

The Science Partnership Committee (SPC) held its third meeting for two half-days on May 4-5, 2001, in the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, (CIHEAM), Paris, France. This venue was chosen to facilitate maximum attendance and participation by the members of the SPC. Participants in the meeting were Werner Arber (Chair), R. James Cook, Mouin Hamze, Lydia Makhubu, Sudha Nair, and Satohiko Sasaki. Jose Israel Vargas was not able to participate. He has informed the CGIAR Chairman earlier that duties in a new position preclude his continued participation as a members of the SPC. Manuel Lantin of the CGIAR Secretariat served as resource person, provided information on the developments in the CGIAR since ICW 2000, and helped clarify issues pertinent to the Change Design and Management Team (CDMT) report.

Established as a committee of the CGIAR in early 2000, the SPC held its inaugural meeting in conjunction with MTM 2000 in Dresden, Germany.

The SPC reviewed the report from the Change Design and Management Team (CDMT) on changes in the CGIAR proposed for decision at MTM2001. Specifically, the SPC examined those recommendations in the CDMT report on: 1) enhancing the output of science at the CGIAR Centers, and 2) the programmatic approach to defining, financing and managing research .

Enhancing the output of science

In considering the changes recommended by the CDMT, the SPC referred to its 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.*

The SPC had sought to identify its unique roles and opportunities within the larger CGIAR system that would complement but not duplicate the work of TAC. The SPC endorses the CDMT recommendation to merge the scientific mandates of TAC and the SPC into a Science Council. Consistent with the Terms of Reference, the SPC endorses the changes in the CGIAR designed to enhance scientific standards as a central part of the research definition and priority setting process within the CGIAR System.

The SPC also reviewed the three topics intended to “make up the work of the SPC for the foreseeable future” within the Terms of Reference. These were presented in the SPC report to ICW2000 as follows:

- 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.**

Consistent with the work envisioned in item 1, the SPC had noted from the CDMT proposal that the Science Council would be composed of members “with strong backgrounds on science policy and strategy questions, and with broad vision on the major issues.” Science organizations (at global/regional and national levels) can contribute much to help identify individuals with appropriate expertise and qualifications.

The SPC suggests that the Science Council follow closely the rapid advances in science, including social sciences, and critically evaluate these advances with regard to their relevance to the CGIAR and its partners for the evolution of research activities at the CGIAR Centers. The SPC proposes that the Science Council periodically call top experts in selected fields of science to brainstorming workshops. As a result of such workshops, new topics for GCPs and for the evolution of the Centers could be identified. This strategy could help CGIAR respond in a timely and appropriate way to the expansion of knowledge relevant to agricultural development in developing countries.

Programmatic approach to CGIAR research

The SPC noted that a focus by the CGIAR on *Global Challenge Programs* (GCP) proposed by the CDMT is consistent with the work envisioned by the SPC on how the CGIAR “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.” The Committee would like to emphasize that ecoregional diversity, participatory approach involving the NARS and other stakeholders, and science output should be given high priority in designing GCPs.

The SPC discussed at length the proposed shift within the CGIAR to “a programmatic approach in defining, financing and managing research activities,” noting the intent that “the CGIAR should move to have a substantial proportion (e.g., around half) of its research agenda delivered through the GCPs by 2006.” Specifically, the SPC considered this shift in the context of items 2 and 3 of its proposed work.

The following assumptions were made in an effort to fully understand and comment on the implications of this proposed shift.

- The shift to programmatic approach would be a shift to funding research (up to a certain percentage) at the CGIAR Centers and their partners through the equivalent of

competitive research funding subjected to rigorous merit review by peers, where “merit” includes both scientific quality and relevance of the proposed research.

- The remainder of the research at the CGIAR Centers, i.e., not shifted to a programmatic approach, would continue to be supported through core funding.
- The two categories of funding, i.e., competitive grants in support of the programmatic approach and core funding would become the equivalent of “soft” and “hard” funds, respectively, as known today in advanced research institutions, universities, and large programs involving many institutions.

Funding some portion of a total research program with competitive grants, even if only a small portion, e.g., 10-20%, can have the effect of increasing the scientific quality of the entire research program of that scientist or team of scientists (e.g., see Kelman, A. and Cook, R. J., The role of a competitive research grants program for agriculture, food, and natural resources, *BioScience* 46:533-540, 1996). On the other hand, much if not most research carried out at the CGIAR Centers may not fit or compete well in the typical competitive grants program, hence the need for continued core funding. Finding the right balance is critical but might not be easy.

In further preparation for making a shift to a programmatic approach based on merit review, the SPC recommends consideration of the following issues:

- Most scientists, and especially the younger scientists, are accustomed and willing to compete for research grants. However, scientists must be assured that the process is fair, including, that the peer reviewers are not biased because of a conflict of interest, that the awards are based solely on the merits of their proposal, and that information in the proposal will be held in strict confidence;
- The “programmatic approach” where awards are made competitively based on rigorous review by peers, includes two fundamental elements: definition of broad programmatic areas, and generation of specific proposals.
- Mechanisms might be needed to enhance the competitiveness of historically less competitive Centers;
- Merit review of research supported by core funding will be just as important as merit review of competitive research funding, although the procedures for such merit review may differ for the two funding mechanisms.

The Science Partnership Committee acknowledges the intention of the CGIAR to strengthen the scientific basis of its activities. The Committee fully believes that putting the highest quality science to the service of CGIAR programs must increasingly account for environmental and sustainability issues in a sociologically complex context and remain essential to achieve its primary and basic goal in contributing to the reduction of poverty.