

Evaluation–Report from Parallel Session IV
Follow-up to the External Review of ICRISAT
(CGIAR Mid–Term Meeting–May 28, 1998)

Chair: P Egger; Secretary: S Ozgediz

Mr Egger introduced the item by noting that the purpose of the session is to receive a briefing from ICRISAT about its progress in implementing the recommendations of the 1996 External Review. This briefing was suggested by TAC, in place of a mid-term review that had been recommended by the 1996 review panel.

ICRISAT's Director General, S. Barghouti, briefed the participants on ICRISAT's new vision and strategy. D Winkelmann summarized TAC's comments on ICRISAT's actions in response to the review. The participants raised questions and offered suggestions and P Egger concluded the session by summarizing the major points.

ICRISAT's New Vision and Strategy

ICRISAT's vision is to be a premier center of excellence in agricultural research for development for the semi-arid tropics (SAT). The center plans to act through partnerships and aims to build bridges of knowledge and technology exchange between Asia and Africa. It sees its mission as increasing crop productivity and food security, reducing poverty, and protecting the environment in the SAT through partnership-based international agricultural research.

ICRISAT intends to focus on three key resources of the SAT: *genetic, natural, and socio-economic*. It will use an approach stressing: (a) research on *understanding the potential of SAT resources*; (b) research to *generate knowledge and technology that promotes better use of SAT resources*; and (c) *sharing of technologies with partners*, including studies of technology adoption and use.

On Asia-Africa balance, Mr Barghouti informed the session that ICRISAT plans to base the directors of its NRM and socio-economics. and policy programs in Africa. Overall, ICRISAT will devote 46 percent of its resources exclusively to Africa.

Mr Barghouti announced that ICRISAT is in the process of consolidating its operations in Niger and that a major institutional renewal program has been initiated covering administration, personnel, management, and finance at all ICRISAT locations.

TAC Views

Mr Winkelmann briefed the session that at its last meeting TAC reviewed the steps ICRISAT took in response to the 1996 External Review and that it commends ICRISAT for taking decisive steps to transform the institution. While the renewal process was not complete TAC, is satisfied that ICRISAT is on the right track.

Discussion

The participants welcomed the new ICRISAT vision, applauded the consolidation of programs, asked for clarification in a few areas, and made some suggestions,

- Niamey. Several speakers questioned why ICRISAT had chosen Mali over Niamey for coordination of its NRM work. The DG noted that the principal reason was Mali's wider natural resource endowment which is better suited to ICRISAT's research programs.
- Biotechnology. A speaker questioned whether placing the coordination of genetic resource management at the Patancheru would deprive African partners from biotechnology work. The DG pointed out that 70 percent of ICRISAT's genetic utilization activities would be geared towards Africa. Also, ICRISAT would increase its trait identification activities in Africa.
- Nigeria.. B Shaib mentioned new partnership possibilities with ICRISAT in Nigeria. S Barghouti welcomed these and agreed to follow up as appropriate.
- Low rates of agricultural growth in the SAT. The participants queried the reasons for low agricultural growth rates (around one percent per annum) in the SAT. The DG stressed that although crop improvement work has had strong impact on yields, this alone is not sufficient for agricultural growth. Other assets would need to be built, including efficient water delivery systems. ICRISAT's watershed program could have a large impact in Africa.
- ICRISAT work in Latin America. One participant queried why, in a tight budget environment, ICRISAT planned to spend seven percent of its resources in Latin America. The DG pointed out that ICRISAT has global crop mandates and that the planned work would depend on the availability of restricted funding. The Board Chair, R Sohlberg, mentioned that the work in Brazil might allow ICRISAT to transfer LAC technologies to Asia and Africa.

Conclusions

- The participants welcomed ICRISAT's new vision and strategy, the decisive steps it has taken in response to the External Review, its integrated approach to programs, *and shift of* research leadership to Africa. They also welcomed further studies on the impact of ICRISAT's NRM work and supported the emphasis on genetic resources utilization work in Africa.
- ICRISAT should explore fully the potential for new partnerships with countries like Nigeria.
- The unsuitability of the, Niamey site for wide-scale NRM work creates a concern for the CGLAR as a whole. A lesson for the CGIAR is that heavy investments, in infrastructure could severely constrain the flexibility and adaptability of the centers later on. The Board of ICRISAT should monitor this situation carefully.