

**Report of the NGO Committee to the CGIAR
Mid-Term Meeting, 1998
Brasilia, Brazil**

The CGIAR NGO Committee (NGOC) held its sixth meeting at Naoum Plaza Hotel in Brasilia, Brazil in conjunction with the Mid-Term Meeting. Participants in the meeting were Miguel Altieri (Chair), Kamla Chowdhry, Bernd Dreesmann, Yuexin Du, Julian Gonsalves, Ranil Senanayake, and Carmen Felipe Morales. Pat Roy Mooney (Executive Director, Rural Advancement Foundation International) also attended part of the meeting as a resource person. The following representatives of the Brazilian NGO community also attended the meeting as observers: Jean Marc von der Weid and Pablo Sidersky who are both from Assessoria e Serviços a Projetos em Agricultura Alternativa (ASPTA).

The NGOC reviewed and discussed its past activities since ICW97. However, a more substantial part of the meeting was spent in discussing and formulating the Committee's position on key issues and items in the agenda of the 1998 CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting. Future activities including a new NGOC initiative on natural resource management are also outlined in this report.

REVIEW OF PAST ACTIVITIES

NGOs-ICRAF Plan of Action on Soil Fertility Replenishment

The proceedings of the NGOC-ICRAF workshop on soil fertility replenishment approaches held on June 3-9, 1997 in Nairobi has been published. The NGOC is now coordinating with ICRAF the involvement of various NGOs in Mali, Cameroon and Uganda to implement in the field some of the workshop recommendations, such as testing Tithonia-rock phosphate combinations to reverse depleted soil fertility in a range of small holder conditions.

Farmers Meetings

The NGOC sponsored three meetings with farmers groups in Kenya, Sri Lanka and Ecuador to elicit farmers inputs in terms of their research needs and on how the CGIAR should respond to such needs. Three conclusions from the farmers' meetings merit consideration. These are:

- Farmers perceive themselves as innovators and hope that researchers through a participatory approach can help them develop their capacity and communication skills to disseminate their findings.
- Farmers would like that the CGIAR consider their farms and communities as important repositories of germplasm and hope that the CGIAR will assist them in establishing community in-situ conservation programs of their genetic resources.
- Farmers request that the CGIAR develop seeds that are adapted to their local environmental conditions and that can perform well under low levels of external inputs.

Interaction with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The NGOC has met with TAC members for the past two years at MTM and ICW meetings. The question of how to scale-up successful local experiences stands out among the many research topics of common interest. It is well accepted that throughout the developing world there are many research and development projects that have resulted in tangible benefits to local communities in terms of food security, poverty alleviation and productivity increases. However, most of these constitute "islands of success" and have not

reached wider impact. Thus how to "expand" or "scale-up" such projects is a key research methodological question.

The NGOC and TAC have visited CIAT and will soon visit CIMMYT in order to observe field projects where NGOs are partners, and thus identify in the field the requirements needed for projects that are candidate for scaling-up.

Interactions with the Private Sector Committee (PSC)

At MTM 98, members of NGOC met with PSC Chair and Vice-Chair in order to explore areas of common interest. Despite differences of views or opinions on such issues as IPR and biotechnology, both committees concluded that there are some key questions that could be jointly addressed:

- In order for rural development projects to be successful, dimensions other than technological such as rural enterprises, markets, etc., are key to enhance income generation among the poor. NGOs and private companies have comparative advantages in such areas.
- Co-sponsorship of collaborative research projects that test the performance of transgenic crops under smallholder management (i.e. low inputs, marginal environments, complex systems, etc.) and to assess the potential environmental risks of such engineered crops.

Involvement in the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)

Although the NGOC provided inputs in the elaboration of GFAR's plan of action, it is of vital importance that mechanisms are created for effective participation and involvement of NGOs in the steering committee and the regional fora. This is in keeping with the need to promote broader dialogue with civil society envisaged by the the CGIAR in the Lucerne Declaration. The GFAR seeks to promote the participation not only of the government-supported national agricultural research institutions but also those of the NGOs and farmers' organizations.

In keeping with the same spirit of a true participatory renewal, the NGOC has also asked the CGIAR to more clearly define mechanisms to include NGO members in TAC, Center Boards, External Review Panels, and other bodies.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Proprietary Science and Technology

Through its Chair, the NGOC emphasized to the TAC Panel on Proprietary Science and Technology that patents and other IPR claims --actual or anticipated-- hinder the work of the CGIAR. Industrial type intellectual property rights (IPR) are generally not appropriate for indigenous farmers as such regimes define poorly farmers rights to biological or cultural resources. A specific recognition of indigenous alternatives to the industrial system of values, rights and laws must be made by the CGIAR as away to challenge the dominance of industrial world values regarding crop genetic resources.

The NGOC believes that the CGIAR and its co-sponsors should advocate vigorously in multilateral fora (Convention on Biological Diversity, FAO undertaking, World Trade Organization) on behalf of poor farmers and agricultural biodiversity. An important tool to reach such goal, is for the CGIAR to endorse the concept of farmers rights, as the right of poor farmers of the Third World to freely grow, exchange and store seeds. In the opinion of the NGOC, this is the only viable position that a pro-poor organization such as the CGIAR should take.

The CGIAR should ally with other public sector institutions and civil society organizations in order to keep vital scientific knowledge and genetic resources in the public domain. By becoming an active political voice, the CGIAR could negotiate at WTO-TRIPS that a special status is created for germplasm relevant for food security and poor farmers.

The moratorium called by Chairman Serageldin is a call on the moral standing of governments and corporations to respect the terms of the CGIAR-FAO agreements. Many NGOs are prepared to help the CGIAR expose to the international media violators of such agreement. Many NGOs have also proposed that the CGIAR and its cosponsors explore the possibility of seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the impact of IPRs on world food security.

General Issues on Biotechnology

The NGOC Chair reiterated and emphasized that biotechnology should be considered as a tool within the range of options available to the CGIAR to accomplish its mission. Despite much enthusiasm, the promises of transgenic crops still remain to be fulfilled. In previous discussions, the NGOC has emphasized the need to conduct ecological assessment studies beyond gene flow, to include effects of Bt crops on insect communities and soil fauna, and the potential development of weed resistance and creation of superweeds associated with herbicide resistant crops. Such studies must be done before IARCs initiate large field scale deployment of transgenic crops.

Although transgenesis and gene markers are important tools, other biotechnologies should likewise be considered. The advances in Cuba on the artisanal production of biopesticides and biofertilizers through fermentation technology should be explored by the CGIAR as it holds immediate potential application to solve limitations that smallholders throughout the developing world are facing.

System Review

The NGOC applauds the System Review Panel's (SRP) consultative approach to obtain the widest possible range of viewpoints as it moves towards its conclusions and final recommendations.

The NGOC appreciates the efforts of the SRP in redefining a new mission statement. The NGOC assumes that the focus on poverty alleviation clarifies that the main targets of the CGIAR are the poorest of the poor. The NGOC also recommends that an operational definition of food security be provided so that emphasis on access to means to produce food as well as access to food and income are well balanced. Household, local and regional dimensions of food security should also be clearly defined. The NGOC also assumes that the mission statement will serve as a yardstick on which to measure the impacts of the CGIAR on behalf of the poor. The SRP should also make it clear that such pro-poor orientation reflected in the revised mission statement implies a shift in research paradigm and processes, with an emphasis in natural resource management and agroecology.

In defining the two pillars- integrated gene management (IGM) and natural resource management (NRM)- the SRP should clearly identify those technologies and processes that will help the CGIAR to carry out its mission and avoid promoting technologies that are not consistent with its goals. NRM should be given equal treatment and support as IGM so that a balance of approaches is reached.

In light of the increased role of the private sector in research and dwindling public funds, both research pillars should be subjected to focused targeting, that is, an emphasis on marginal, degraded, rainfed and other ecosystems where the poor concentrate.

In addition to a set of specific recommendations derived from the System's Review at ICW 98, the NGOC would like to see one or more fully developed alternative scenarios for the future of the System to be discussed by all members and partners. The NGOC encourages the SRP to provide both consensus and non-consensus recommendations and scenarios in order to allow it the greatest freedom of expression and also to enrich the options to be considered by members and partners. By keeping in mind that the CGIAR is at a historical turning point, the System should be prepared to consider and debate very substantial changes or radical alternatives, provided that the SRP offers a convincing rationale for such departures from the present approach.

IAEG

In assessing the impacts of CGIAR research on poverty, the IAEG should realize that overcoming poverty does not entail only improving the "physical" conditions of the poor, but also the "empowerment" of the rural poor. Poverty is not only a "physical condition" but also a "psychological condition" and the effect of research and technological innovations on poverty should also be assessed in terms of their capacity to "unlock" the poor from low-esteem status so that they become major actors for their own development.

IAEG should also focus on the institutional effects of new technologies to assess their impact on social inequities.

Climate Change

Evidence from the presentation at MTM clearly show that not only is the mean temperature likely to rise, but also the incidence of extreme events such as heat spells, droughts and floods. Most likely, resource-poor farmers in marginal environments will be hit the hardest.

Given the fact that such climatic changes and variations are mostly due to emissions originating in industrialized countries, provides the CGIAR an additional argument to solicit donors from such countries for increased funds for pro-poor research, as extreme climatic events will make the situation of poor farmers more dramatic and consequently the task of the CGIAR more difficult.

Given the contribution of agriculture to climatic change, limiting emissions of greenhouse gases in developing countries agriculture (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides) will be an important research activity for the CGIAR. Arresting deforestation through alternatives to slash-and-burn limiting crop residue burning, decreasing use of N fertilizers, reducing methane emissions in rice and livestock systems are all key topics.

However, given the relative contribution of smallholder farmers to the overall gas emissions, the emphasis of CGIAR research should be on improving the resiliency and adaptability of smallholder farming systems to variations in climate. In this regard, the study of traditional farming systems that evolved risk averting mechanisms can provide key principles on how to design improved systems capable of confronting environmental variability.

Increases in carbon dioxide and warmer temperatures will most likely affect the dynamics and incidence of weeds (C4 species), insects and pathogens. It will be imperative for IARCs to develop varieties with a broad genetic base so that resistance under changing environmental conditions to pests is more likely to be durable. Narrow resistance will be quickly overcome by evolving pest organisms favored by increased temperatures and humidity regimes. Biotechnological approaches will, therefore, have to take this into account.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

NGOC Membership

The NGOC will soon renew some of its membership as some of its members will have completed their terms by ICW98. New members will be sought based on expertise, geographical and gender considerations, and relevance of work to target rural communities. Nominations of representatives from farmers' organizations will also be welcomed.

Workshop on Research Partnerships

The NGOC will be co-sponsoring a workshop at the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), a non-governmental institution in Cavite, Philippines to document efforts that have involved NGOs in agricultural research initiatives undertaken by universities, NARS and /or IARCs. The focal point of the analysis will be the NGO-scientist "partnership" and the basis to derive lessons on how to best devise research partnerships in which NGOs can be key actors.

Workshop on Andean Agrobiodiversity

This workshop will also include NGO, University, NARS and IARC representatives and will analyze the relationship between agrobiodiversity, food security and sustainable agriculture in the Andean region.

The main goal of the workshop will be to analyze the many functional and dynamic forms of in-situ management and preservation of agrobiodiversity used by Andean peasant farmers. A specific objective will be to document successful cases where maintenance of agrobiodiversity has led to improved food security and sustainable production. Lessons from such cases will be systematized to guide future efforts in sustainable agriculture using biodiversity as a basis.

Activities in Africa

The NGOC will organize, in collaboration with the systemwide IPM program and ICIPE, a workshop on integrated pest management for NGO technicians. The workshop will provide NGO participants with key tools to diagnose and solve pest problems affecting smallholder farmers, emphasizing cost-effective and environmentally sound approaches.

As a follow-up to the Plan of Action devised last year at NGOC-ICRAF workshops on "Approaches to replenishing soil fertility in Africa", the NGOC, ICRAF and TSBF will coordinate on-the-ground activities, led by key NGOs in Mali, Uganda and Cameroon to test a series of alternative techniques to reverse soil fertility depletion in specific farmer fields. Such farms will thus serve not only as testing grounds but also as demonstration sites of how to enhance soil fertility using agroecological methods.

Visits to Centers

Some NGOC members will visit IPGRI and ICARDA to further understand the work of such centers and to explore potential areas of collaboration with NGOs.

NGOC Consultation Initiative on Natural Resource Management (NRM)

Major challenges confront the CGIAR in the area of natural resource management. In the high potential areas, intensely cropped lands are experiencing yield declines. Many scientists believe declining productivity to be associated with an erosion of the natural resource base due to unsustainable practices. But the real challenge lies in developing appropriate agricultural systems that respond to the needs of the poor, especially of those located in arid or semi-arid areas or on steep hillsides that are ecologically fragile. To assist such farmers, emphasis will lie on improving farming systems using agroecological approaches.

Given the focus of the CGIAR on NRM to address poverty reduction and food security issues, the NGOC is proposing to assist the CGIAR in strengthening its capacity in NRM. Although many IARCs have pursued NRM initiatives, it is considered that NRM has not reached the level of excellence achieved in other areas such as plant breeding.

In an effort to assist IARCs in formulating a NRM strategy that will effectively benefit the rural poor, the CGIAR NGO committee will sponsor before ICW98 a consultation on NRM. The objective of the consultation is to bring a selected group of experts who, from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, can establish the scientific basis and methodological approaches needed to define a NRM strategy aimed at poverty alleviation, food security and sustainable agriculture in the developing world.

The consultation will build on what IARCs have already done on NRM, bring other approaches not emphasized so far by the CGIAR, including agroecology and indigenous technical knowledge. Recommendations and guidelines of the consultation will be presented at ICW 98 and serve as a basis for the NGOC, TAC and IARCs to jointly define the best operational NRM strategy to fulfill the CGIAR mission.