

CGIAR

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<p>The Third System Review: From Proposals to Practice</p>
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**NGOC Comments on the CGIAR Consultative Council's
Deliberations on the System Review**

This document is issued as background to Agenda Item 8 – Committee Recommendations and Reports: Report of the NGO Committee.

Comments of the CGIAR-NGO Committee on the deliberations of the Consultative Council on the System Review

1. The NGOC agrees with the Consultative Council (CC) in that TAC should conduct a systemwide review of plant breeding to assess the existing balance within the CGIAR between conventional breeding and biotechnology. Recognizing the potential of biotechnology as a tool, the NGOC insists that the CGIAR only embark in research that can demonstrably benefit the rural poor, and that biotechnology be considered as one more component of an overall NRM strategy. The NGOC also strongly recommends that the CGIAR only use biotechnology to address those problems which have no “other solutions” and to give priority to innovations that the private sector is not addressing. The NGOC is critical of current research conducted by some centers on transgenic crops as this is clearly not a comparative advantage of the system and in view that some transgenic crops pose considerable environmental risks (i.e. BT crops promotion of insect resistance, effects on soil biology and on natural enemies) as evidenced from the recent scientific literature.
2. The NGOC supports the recommendation of strengthening existing NRM networks by linking with other initiatives led by FAO, universities, NGOs, etc. As the system identified NRM as one of its key research pillars, the NGOC sees the need to retool IARC scientists with NRM approaches based on agroecology, traditional knowledge and participatory methods. The NGOC is collaborating in this regard through workshops and concrete field projects involving IARCs, NGOs, and farmers. The NGOC agrees on the recommendation that the CGIAR should play a more active role in global knowledge and information networks for agricultural research. The exchange of information between IARCs and NGOs and local universities should also be an important activity, and the CGIAR could play an important role in providing an interface between agricultural research information and development activities. The proceedings of the NRM consultation held during ICW 98 entitled “Toward defining a pro-poor natural resource management strategy in the CGIAR” is an important starting point in the dialogue between NGOs and IARCs on this critical topic.
3. The NGOC has serious reservations about the planned high-level meeting with private sector CEOs, especially if it only involves biotechnology corporations that so far focus on the needs of capital intensive farming and that, therefore, see no markets in the CGIAR’s farmer clientele. Such meeting should include companies involved in the conventional “seed” business and in fair trade of agricultural products coming from peasant communities. A similar meeting with executives and leaders of farmers’ organizations, NGOs and southern universities would prove useful in planning further collaboration to advance cooperation in training, research and outreach. More representation of NGOs is needed in the TAC, Center Boards and Review teams, in order to balance the increasing visibility and influence of corporate representatives in CGIAR committees, including DG search committees. The inclusion of members from the NGO community and from the South in key CGIAR positions must be crystallized if the renewal is to truly flourish.
4. The NGOC agrees with the recommendation to strengthen policy research at the IARCs level. Assuming that IFPRI (economics and food issues), IPGRI (genetic resources) and ISNAR (institutional issues) are responsible for providing policy leadership among IARCs, a question arises: Is capacity in policy research at the IARCs level enhanced by maintaining the centralized structures of such policy guiding centers, or would it be better to decentralize them into teams positioned in each IARC thus providing local and regional level support in policy research?

5. It is possible that a single legal entity for holding patents and a central IPR service unit, would be in the best interest of the CGIAR as issues of cross-licensing and liability may be more efficiently handled. Whatever the route followed, a central unit or several single or multi-center units, these should handle patenting and IPR issues based on the philosophical premise that the CGIAR holds in trust germplasm of developing countries, and that this germplasm is for the benefit of the poor farmers of the developing world. Every effort should be made to ensure its free flow in order for the CGIAR to carry out its mission. Free access, compensation and farmer rights should form the philosophical basis of whatever entity the CGIAR will decide upon. The cost of such legal operations will be enormous, diverting funds from the field work so urgently needed.

6. We have held several discussions regarding the CGIAR's role in global policy dialogues. We had agreed that although the CGIAR should not advocate a particular political position, it was its responsibility to bring the voice of the poor to the global fora dealing with relevant issues such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International undertaking in Plant Genetic Resources and others. Along these lines, the NGOC endorses IPGRI's paper discussing the role of the CGIAR in implementing the undertaking, highlighting the CGIAR as an effective multilateral system through which goals of free access and equitable sharing can be achieved.

7. On the issue of partnerships, we agree that both the PSC and NGOC should remain as separate committees as each holds different perspectives and plays different roles. Some members of the CGIAR feel that the membership of the NGOC should be reduced, include representatives of farmer organizations and include members of NGOs actively involved in agricultural research and development who are willing to actively take on the task of promoting concrete collaborative activities between NGOs and centers. It may be necessary for the NGOC to emphasize two central activities. On the one side policy dialogues and strategic workshops and on the other, concrete field activities that will add value to what centers and NGOs are already doing. The NGOC will further discuss these ideas and present a proposal to the CGIAR at MTM 99.

8. The NGOC still believes that the System Review did not come out with recommendations that call for a radical departure from the current structure of the CGIAR. There were, however, some useful recommendations and we urge the CGIAR to adopt some of the most challenging recommendations of the System Review. If this is not done, it will raise questions about what was the real goal and impact of the review. To many, not making substantial changes will signify 'window dressing' and will diminish credibility of the CGIAR renewal process. At some point the CGIAR will need to address the issue of centers reorganization and/or consolidation. The CC's position is that such a process will start much later. The CGIAR should not miss the opportunity to conduct at least one reorganization experiment (as suggested in the NGOC report to MTM 98) in order to allow one or a few centers to reorganize differently and thus tackle the challenges of the 21st Century in a more creative and effective manner.

The NGOC looks forward to continuing discussions on the above and other issues with CGIAR partners at MTM 99 in Beijing.