

# CGIAR NGO Committee

## Report to CGIAR International Centers Week - 1996

October 31, 1996

Mr. Chairman,

The CGIAR NGO Committee has just concluded its annual meeting. This is our third meeting since the Committee's establishment last year. I am happy to report to you -- and to all the participants in 1996 International Centers Week -- that we have made a promising start in helping build new bridges between NGOs and their farmer partners on one hand and the CGIAR's international agricultural research centers on the other. Today we will report to you on our activities during this busy year. We will review the goals our Committee has set for itself. We will then relate these goals to our activities during the past twelve months and make some general comments on what we learned during our visits to international agricultural research centers and from the NGOs with whom we met. In addition, we will summarize proposals that we recommend for adoption by the CGIAR and the international agricultural research centers.

But first, Mr. Chairman, we wish to commend you for convening the global forum on agricultural research, a forum in which NGOs and farmers' organizations have been recognized as key partners in the process of technical innovation. We, of course, share your view that the success of the global agricultural research system the CGIAR envisages will depend very fundamentally on NGOs having a strong voice in the conceptualization, planning, and execution of centers' research. For in a very short time in many, if not most, developing countries, NGOs and farmers organizations may well become the CGIAR centers most effective partners in reaching the poor.

Mr. Chairman, when you appointed the members of the NGO Committee, you referred us to the mandate given to the CGIAR by the 1995 Lucerne Ministerial level meeting, namely "to develop participatory systems with full north-south partnerships." It was in that light, you noted, that the CGIAR established the NGO Committee. Our Committee was left full liberty to operate within this general mandate. This was wise, for if NGOs and farmers' organizations are to be full partners in building a global agricultural research system, we will need this kind of independence -- independence that allows us to meet our obligations to farmers, fisher folk, forest peoples, and their NGO partners.

We cannot presume to speak for these millions of dedicated women and men. But we do strive to faithfully reflect their aspirations and interests. Doing this has not been easy, for there are nearly two billion farmers, fisher folk, and forest peoples as well as thousands of NGOs. Nevertheless, we have made a serious effort to consult with as many as we could (I should note

that from here on when we use the word "farmers" we also mean to include fisher folk, forest people and all rural people). We have obviously not done enough consulting -- and probably never can. We are in the process of opening our Committee to NGOs worldwide to serve as a channel for their concerns about the CGIAR. We recognize that doing a better job of consulting -- finding out more about what NGOs and farmers' organizations can contribute to the CGIAR and what they want and can realistically get from the system -- must be a primary focus for our Committee. We plan to do much more consulting in the year ahead.

### **The NGO Committee's Goals**

We believe this process of consultation will help us to refine our goals further. What are they? Our central goal is an ambitious one. It is nothing less than the promotion of major changes in global agricultural research and in how CGIAR centers work with farmers and NGOs. We see two categories of urgently needed change: first, changes in thought and action that will make farmers and their representatives full and effective partners with the international research centers and, yes, with the national research centers, in conceiving and carrying out research; and, second, changes that will deepen and strengthen the centers' commitment to a strong ecological approach to rural development, so that technologies that are developed and deployed will truly serve the poor. We believe such changes are overdue if the global research system is to help defeat poverty, help provide equitable and sustainable livelihoods for rural people, help farmers produce enough nutritious food for their families and for the world's consumers, and help ensure the protection of natural resources that will make agriculture sustainable over the long run.

To date, our Committee has focused most of its attention on the CGIAR and its centers. But increasingly, we also seek to work constructively with the national research centers. For we believe that national research centers, just as much as the international centers, should accept NGOs and farmers' organizations as full partners. We are glad to have had indications during the last few days that the national centers feel the same way. In fact, Mr. Chairman, in just the last hours we have met with some of the national center's leadership and agreed on the first elements towards common activities. To facilitate closer collaborations, we believe CGIAR centers should help bring about an evolution in national centers' research agendas as well as promote broader cooperation between national research centers, farmers, and NGOs. During the past year, at various fora and at CGIAR meetings we have strongly expressed ourselves in this regard. We will continue to do so. And of course our Committee is ready to do whatever it can to help national centers in ways that serve our mutual interests and those of the farmers. Identifying these mutual interests should not prove that difficult.

## Committee Proposals for Strengthening the NGO Role in Research

The organizers of today's program asked us not only to report on our Committee's activities, but also to bring to you our proposals for strengthening partnerships within the global agricultural research system. What follows is an outline of these proposals as well as suggestions about how such changes can be facilitated.

As suggested earlier, we see two principal areas where changes must come. In the first area, our Committee has five proposals. Our primary proposal is an obvious one: the reinforcement of NGO-centers collaboration. We believe centers must expend substantially more time and money in seeking out NGO research partners. We recognize that centers' capacities to conduct research with and through NGOs is not unlimited. While we believe that the product of centers' research must be fully available to all NGOs, we recognize that centers will want to choose as partners those NGOs and farmers' organizations most capable of producing practical results for farmers. Above all, we believe these NGOs must be partners from the beginning of the research process to the end.

Our second proposal is for the CGIAR creation of a fund to finance substantially more collaborative research programs involving both NGOs and the international centers. Many of the NGOs who would be the most experienced productive partners for the centers, experienced NGOs who have a deep knowledge of farmers' needs and limitations and who have broad technological know-how, have very limited financial resources. To be really valuable research partners, most NGOs must have some kind of grant financing. Our Committee believes that what is need is a moderate flow from donors through the CGIAR of unearmarked grant funds that can be awarded to cooperating NGOs and centers on a competitive basis. This will, we believe, require additional funding for the CGIAR from donors. We urge all CGIAR financial supporters to give this proposal serious consideration. And, further, we believe that the subject of how to nourish this kind of collaborative research between NGOs and centers should be addressed by the systemwide review panel.

Our third proposal is that the international centers be mandated to accept responsibility for working much more closely with NGOs in ensuring the dissemination of farmer-inspired research results back to the farmers that inspired them and need them. This is especially important in countries that have weak, under-funded, and politically neglected extension services and where national services concentrate their research on serving large farms and export crops. We're not asking centers to become extension services. Nor do we suggest that NGOs in a way be regarded just as a conduit for centers' developed research, as they often have their own technologies to offer. But we do believe the centers have a moral, practical and political responsibility -- to the farmers, to the donors who fund their work, and to the public at large -- to ensure that in a timely way the products of their research actually reach farmers that want and need them.

Fourth, we propose the CGIAR and its centers put a much higher priority on including NGO representatives -- or people with substantial experience working with farmers and farmers' organizations -- on governing bodies -- and in the first instance centers' boards of trustees. These should be people who can help integrate the NGO viewpoint into centers' work. Several centers have already done this. We urge others to follow suit. Certainly it will be essential to include such persons on centers' boards as the strength and influence of the NGO movement in civil society increases. Next, we propose that centers include NGOs or people with NGO experience in the design of their mid-term plans. Several centers report that they have invited farmers and NGOs to join in their planning. Next, we urge the inclusion of NGOs as members of external review panels. At this point we are aware of only one case where an NGO representative has been appointed to such a panel. This appointment, we are told, proved to be very productive.

In the case of external reviews of two other centers, panel members have gone to some pains to discuss centers' performance with Committee members. We appreciate that. Finally, we ask the CGIAR's cosponsors to appoint people with long agroecological experience to the CGIAR's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

Fifth, we propose that the CGIAR systemwide review, about to get underway, be mandated to review the relevance of CGIAR science to the poor. The systemwide review should also analyze the roles of the international research centers, the national research centers, the national extension services, NGOs and the private sector. Some very basic changes and not just incremental adjustments are needed in how these responsibilities are defined. To ensure this kind of approach, we believe the panel conducting this review must include people, ideally from the south, who are well-informed about the contribution of farmers' organizations and NGOs to agricultural development. They must be people who will be seen by NGOs -- in fact everyone -- as authentic representatives of farmers' and NGO views and interests. Including such people should bring a fresh and critical focus to the whole CGIAR system. This panel must not engage in just a bigger and better external review of CGIAR centers. It must go right to the heart of the complex problems of poverty, food security, equity, and sustainability. The panel must not be tempted to look at parts of the system in such detail that the big picture is missed.

### **Committee Proposals for the Reorientation of the International Centers' Research Agenda**

Our Committee has two proposals in this area. The most basic proposal is one for a broad reorientation of the international centers' research on the basis of widely accepted agroecological principles. We have been more than a little stimulated in this regard, Mr. Chairman, by your own statements. What do we mean when we talk about an agroecological approach? Quite simply, we see it as one that is science-based, culturally sensitive, socially acceptable, ecologically friendly, and economically viable. Any such approach must learn from the farmers, fully utilize traditional knowledge, protect and better utilize biodiversity and natural resources, and maximize the utilization of "on-farm" inputs.

In our view, too many centers' scientists still see their role to be predominately, or even exclusively, the conduct of high-tech "upstream" research focusing on biotechnology. Given the urgent need for systems and plants that farmers need right now in order to raise themselves out of poverty as well as to feed more and more people, an agroecological approach must be the main thrust of centers' research. The central focus of the international centers' work must be to meet immediate needs of small holder systems requiring low-input approaches that do not pose unacceptable risks nor dependency to farmers. This bottom-up focus is important for very practical reasons, given the inability of too many national research centers to fulfill their role of adaptation of international centers' research to local conditions.

We recognize that parts of this approach have already been adopted by most centers, particularly -- but not only -- through research on integrated pest management and integrated nutrient management. But in our view, none of the centers -- international or national -- have moved fast enough towards attacking the broader problems of how to manage complex farming systems. We favor such a broad reorientation of centers' research not just because we strongly believe in it personally and as a Committee. We also do so because the development and promotion of sound agroecological systems is a priority objective of the global NGO movement. All of the NGOs with whom we have met this last year have emphasized this point. This point is also emphasized in the regional NGO reports to the upcoming World Food Summit.

To that purpose, we hope to hold workshops and regional fora where the agroecological approach can be addressed in practical ways by international centers, by national centers, by farmers and by their NGO partners. As a first step, together with the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) our Committee co-organized a workshop on *The Conditions for Farmer Management of Irrigation Schemes in West Africa*. Sixty-eight people from seven African countries took part, all of them people who deal with the problems of turnover and transfer of irrigation schemes from state governments to farmer-controlled institutions. Among those who participated were farmers' representatives, NGOs, and researchers from the national and international centers. The questions raised and materials produced provided IIMI, and others, with new perspectives on water management issues. This meeting turned out to be valuable both for the discussion of important water issues and for the mutually useful contacts that were established.

Turning to the broader question of centers' adoption of a more pointedly agroecological research agenda, what does our Committee propose on this regard? First, at the centers' level, we propose that each center review its research agenda for the coming year, with particular attention to how NGO partners might contribute to identifying and implementing agroecologically-oriented research. NGOs, we believe, can be especially useful in research on complex systems that protect natural resources.

Second, at the level of the CGIAR system, we propose that TAC, as a general principle, mandate the reorientation of every applicable aspect of centers' research in this same direction. To that end, we propose that in the coming months TAC allocate enough time to discuss with

our Committee specific changes in this direction. I should mention here that several members of our Committee met with TAC at Los Baños, Philippines last March. While some of TAC's members noted they had little experience working with NGOs and remained silent, others reacted enthusiastically to the proposals we outlined. The Committee will seek opportunities to continue its dialogue with TAC, with the additional aim of encouraging this important group to allocate to the centers more of the resources necessary for the promotion of NGO-centers cooperation. I should also note that we also place special importance on TAC's promoting many more practical programs to improve and expand centers' work with women farmers.

### **The CGIAR and Global Agricultural & Trade Policies**

Our Committee urges that the CGIAR find an early occasion to make a strong statement recognizing that too many of today's development and trade policies are inconsistent with the system's goals of poverty alleviation, sustainability, agricultural research and food security. While on the one hand the international financial institutions support the strengthening of national centers to achieve these ends, on the other hand they mandate country-by-country budgetary cuts that make it more and more difficult to serve the poor and to sustain national agricultural research. Likewise, agricultural trade policies of developed countries tend to penalize exactly those weaker developing countries that must rely, in no small part, on agricultural exports for the generation of urgently needed foreign exchange. This makes it more difficult for these countries to become competitive in world markets. At a minimum, the CGIAR systemwide review should focus on these contradictory elements and articulate a strong CGIAR stand on policies and programs that would remedy their destructive effect.

### **NGO Committee Activities During the Last Year**

Turning to our Committee's activities during the past year, we put much of our effort into visits to the international centers. We did this in order to come to grips with the problems of the CGIAR system and to get to know the players concerned. We succeeded in visiting eight centers (CIAT, CIFOR, CIMMYT, ICARDA, ICLARM, IFPRI, IIMI, and IRRI). In addition, we corresponded with those centers that we didn't have time to visit. Our other objectives in visiting centers were to inform ourselves in much greater detail about the centers' work, to look at the state of their cooperation with farmers and NGOs, to get to know the leading NGOs that are or should be working with them, and to encourage these NGOs to articulate, either to us or to the centers directly, what they believe they can do, for and with the centers -- and what they want to get from them. I am happy to report to you that at the eight centers our Committee's members visited this last year, we found growing recognition of the need to seek out NGO partners. And we observed some progress towards that goal. We recently asked all of the centers -- those we visited and those we didn't -- to describe for us what they had done to expand and improve their work with farmers and NGOs. All the centers say they are giving serious consideration to how they can work better with NGOs and some centers report small advances in that regard. These results are too detailed to lay out here. However, we would be happy to share them with anyone interested, as well as make available reports of our visit to individual centers.

We recognize that establishing the kind of close relationships that we have suggested here between research centers -- international and national -- and farmers and farmers' organizations will not be easy. It will take time and effort on both sides. Scientists, NGOs, and farmers tend to see themselves as living in different worlds. They don't -- and they can't. There are problems on both sides in bridging this gap. Many NGOs have a profound disagreement with the centers about the kind of science and technology now being promoted by them. Few NGOs know much about the international centers. And even fewer fully appreciate the value and potential of working with them. On the centers' side, there is still some resistance to working more closely with NGOs in equal and transparent partnerships. This resistance must be overcome.

In our view, work with NGOs and farmers is still limited to too few people in the centers we visited. Our members made clear our view that the maximum number of professionals in every center must, in one way or another, be involved with farmers and NGOs, that work with NGOs must not be confined to a few persons or to any internal committee. True, improving and expanding a center's work with NGOs will require each center to have a few people with special contacts and experience with NGOs and farmers' organizations. Even so, the objective should be to change the way all center's professionals think and act about collaboration with NGOs, just as much as it must be to change the way farmers and NGOs work with and think about the centers.

We -- and the centers -- can only claim to have made a good start. But there are still problems that we believe the centers must address much more clearly and forcefully. Rhetoric in favor of NGO-centers partnerships still tends to outrun the reality. Only time will tell whether progress in integrating NGOs as full partners is genuine and sustainable. Real change never comes quickly or easily.

Despite the difficulties we've described, we believe that our Committee can serve as a catalyst to speed these changes. But let's face it, our help will only be marginal. The centers themselves -- national and international -- must bear the major responsibility of forging links with capable farmer-oriented NGO partners. And they must do so more energetically -- and for their own good. The centers need the farmers input to make their research truly relevant. In addition, the centers need the political backing of progressively empowered rural people, many of whom organize themselves through non-governmental organizations. For without their vigorous and informed support, the CGIAR and its centers could eventually wither on the vine.

We would like to emphasize another role that we believe the centers should undertake in those countries where centers are actually located or where they work extensively. That is the more general promotion of the CGIAR and its work -- and of course the research of the center itself. This must involve the NGO community beyond organizations with which a center normally works. Any such meeting should include not only the country's farmer-oriented NGOs, but also policy-oriented organizations. They must not be neglected. For they are potentially

among the centers most useful friends, although at this point many NGOs are the centers' strongest critics. They must not be neglected. We do not believe that the centers need to spend a lot of time in such generalized promotion of the CGIAR. But we think they should spend no less time than they do in building the support of other important stakeholders.

### Committee Plans for the Coming Year

As the Committee enters its second year, well informed by its experiences in 1995-1996, it is being reinforced by new leadership and new members. At your invitation, Mr. Chairman, Dr. Miguel Altieri will replace me as Chair when I retire from the Committee following this meeting. Further, the process of inviting five new members to join our Committee is now underway. These appointments fit in with our Committee's expressed view that its numbers should be expanded from nine to twelve and that the Committee should include more women and more people from developing countries. These new members will add strength and diversity to our efforts.

At the two-day meeting held this last week here in Washington, the Committee spent much of its time reviewing its program for the coming year and discussing how better to organize our work for greater effect and efficiency. The principal elements of our 1996-1997 plan include:

- Visits to more international agricultural research centers: dates and procedures will be agreed upon by the Committee and the director general of the center concerned. In each case, very special efforts will be made well ahead to meet with NGOs from the country and region where the center to be visited is located. The Committee also plans to communicate even more closely with the centers it cannot visit in the coming year.
- Attendance by members at the Mid-Term Meeting in Cairo, Egypt in March, 1997, and at International Centers Week 1997 in Washington, D.C.
- Organization of three thematic workshops involving international centers, national centers and NGOs: the proposed subject of these workshops are, first, two workshops in Africa -- one on soil fertility and the other on intensification of production of inland valleys. The third workshop will be held in Southeast Asia on the relationship of forest biodiversity and agriculture. The Committee will plan well in advance to include as many centers and experienced farmer-oriented NGOs as practicable in these workshops.