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Renewal of the CGIAR: The Final Milestone

CGIAR Priorities and Strategies: The Process

Attached is a paper on the process TAC intends to follow in preparing recommendations on CGIAR priorities and strategies for which a report is due to be presented to the Group at MTM'96. Attached also is the transmittal letter from the Chair of TAC to the Chairman of the CGIAR. The transmittal letter covers the paper on process as well as five background notes on themes important to CGIAR priority setting and which are distributed as separate papers: Criteria and Framework for CGIAR Priority Setting; Poverty as a Factor in Priority Setting; Natural Resources Management Research as a Factor in Priority Setting; NARS as a Factor in Priority Setting; and the Role of Advanced Institutions in the Work of the CGIAR. The Chair of TAC will introduce the paper.

SDR/TAC:IAR/95/15

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

CGIAR PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES: THE PROCESS

TAC SECRETARIAT

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

September 1995

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Donald L. Winkelmann
Chair

19 September 1995

Dear Mr. Serageldin,

As discussed at MTM'95 in Nairobi during the consideration of the 1996 CGIAR research agenda, TAC is currently preparing for a major review of CGIAR priorities and strategies on which a report is due to be presented to the Group at MTM'96. As I also announced at that time, at TAC 67 in July the Committee allocated several days to discussions with well informed professionals on a number of specific themes of major importance to CGIAR priorities. Following those discussions, TAC prepared a number of short notes each dealing with one of these themes: Process; Criteria and Framework for CGIAR Priority Setting; Poverty; Natural Resources Management, Collaboration with Advanced Research Institutions; and National Research Systems. I take pleasure in attaching a copy of each of those notes for discussion with the members of the CGIAR at ICW'95. Directly attached to this transmittal letter is the note on Process that lays out a timetable for delivering recommendations on CGIAR Priorities and Strategies to the Group. The other notes are attached as separate papers.

The objective of these notes is to share with the Group some stances TAC has taken and to seek the Group's counsel on the directions in which we should move forward in setting CGIAR priorities and strategies. In preparing them, TAC has assumed that the reader is familiar with earlier material on CGIAR priority setting and the Lucerne paper on the CGIAR research agenda. No attempt was made to review the evolution of CGIAR thinking on these topics nor to pursue various caveats and subtleties. Rather, the intent was to keep the papers as short as possible, consistent with the aim of stimulating discussion and eliciting the Group's counsel. A draft of each of these notes was shared with Centre Directors at the end of August and despite the short notice and time available for comments, many very useful responses were received for which we are very grateful.

Mr. Ismail Serageldin
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World Bank
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The notes reflect, I believe, the collective views of the members of TAC and I would like to express my appreciation to them for their inputs in the work. While I took personal responsibility for preparing the papers, I benefitted substantially from the support received from the TAC Secretariat which I would like to gratefully acknowledge.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald Winkelmann". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Donald L. Winkelmann

CGIAR PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES: THE PROCESS

This paper describes the process through which TAC will move from the discussions at ICW'95 to recommendations about CGIAR priorities to be presented at MTM'96. The pathway is reasonably well established; at this time (September 1995) the detailed steps are still being defined.

Earlier Steps

While priority setting is never far from TAC's mind, the specific considerations of this round of analysis were developed at TAC 66 in Lima, Peru. Discussion there showed that TAC wanted guidance from the Group on several themes, in particular on the major elements of decision-making and on the weights to be applied to several strategic considerations. In many cases it was felt that guidance may simply be a reaffirmation of past judgements; in other cases it could be, or would potentially be, a clearer expression of the Group's concerns. Beyond that, TAC felt the need for outside counsel about, e.g., the adequacy of the information available, such as that pertaining to the distribution of poverty and/or of degraded soils.

These considerations, described to the Group at MTM'95, occupied TAC in July 1995 over roughly four days of meetings which featured the participation of a number of well informed professionals. The discussions led to the five notes that were delivered to members of the Group for discussion at ICW'95. Further discussion of those papers by the Group, especially of the major questions raised in each paper, will guide much of TAC's subsequent analysis and recommendations.

Framework and Aspirations

TAC plans to recommend a four dimensional framework for priority setting to the Group at MTM'96. This emerges from assumptions about the Group's major concerns (taken to be a people-centred and efficiency driven research agenda for food security through alleviation of poverty and protection of natural resources) and about the assumptions or perceptions that shape the System's sense of the probable. The four dimensions pertain to choices among: (i) the principal undertakings of the System (increasing productivity; protecting the environment; saving biodiversity; improving policies; and strengthening NARS); (ii) the four production sectors (livestock, crops, forests and fish); (iii) the emphasis on one crop versus another (e.g., the relative importance of rice versus cassava); and (iv) the Systemwide Programmes, (e.g., the relative importance of CGIAR work on slash-and-burn systems versus the rice/wheat based production systems).

In some cases, work in assessing priorities may rest largely on quantitative considerations. As examples, much of the comparison among commodities can be quantified, along with some comparisons among sectors. For the rest, TAC will rely on a mix of quantitative and qualitative judgement, but always within a systematic framework. In doing so, TAC's informed judgement will be also guided by the counsel of advanced institutions, CGIAR Centres, and NARS. TAC has and will seek expert

counsel in all of these arenas. Finally, TAC expects to have tangible arguments offering transparency where intuition and judgement have played a role.

As noted in the accompanying papers, TAC does not intend to start with a 'clean slate' approach. Instead - given the long horizons in research, the uncertainties surrounding the process and the costs of rapid shifts in emphasis - TAC will take current allocations as its point of departure and then pursue vigorously the implications of the Group's criteria in rebalancing priorities.

Future Steps

After ICW'95, TAC will synthesize the guidance received from the Group and lay out the various implications for further work. These findings will be discussed and digested by TAC at its December 1995 meeting, where a framework for the analysis of priorities will be laid out (including criteria and weights) and the further analytical work required will be identified. In the meantime, the TAC Secretariat supported by consultants will initiate the collection from Centres, from FAO and from other data sources, of necessary data for each of the major considerations. It is also important to note that regional representatives of NARS will meet with TAC, at TAC 68 in December 1995, and TAC 69 in March 1996, for discussions on their sense of CGIAR priorities.

Decisions about the major criteria and their weights in hand - along with information about such considerations as alternative potential sources of supply and about probabilities of success - recommendations on CGIAR priorities will be formulated at TAC 69 in March 1996. TAC 69 will draw conclusions about the priorities for the System's undertakings and frame initial recommendations for resource allocations to each of the Centres. These recommendations will be discussed by the Group at MTM'96. Based on the tentative allocations, Centres will then develop their new medium-term plans for consideration by TAC at TAC 72 in March 1997, and by the Group at MTM'97.

The task at hand is both notably large and critically important. Its effective completion will require open communication, a free flow of ideas, a considerable energy, and a strong sense of common purpose. TAC is confident that the job can be done.