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Agenda Item 8

Attached is a report from the CGIAR committee on the IBPGR, for discussion at centers week under agenda item 8. The TAC report which the committee had before it was circulated as an attachment to the Report of the 37th Meeting of TAC, document No. AGR/TAC:IAR/85/17 (agenda item 3).

The report is marked 'draft' because one member of the committee wished further discussion on one point related to the board of the proposed independent institute for plant genetic resources. This discussion will take place at a further meeting of the committee to be held shortly before centers week, the results of which will be communicated to members during the Group's consideration of this matter, if not before.

In all other respects the report has been agreed by the full membership of the committee.

Attachment

Distribution:

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Draft
October 4, 1985

Report of the CGIAR Committee on the IBPGR

At the close of the Group's discussion of the external review of the IBPGR in the Tokyo Meeting, the Chairman appointed a committee to receive a further report of the TAC and to make recommendations to the Group at international centers week 1985. The committee met on September 16 and 17 at the World Bank under the chairmanship of Mr. Husain. Messrs Brady, Caudron and Hardon were present. Messrs. Hills and Muhammed were unavoidably absent, but sent written comments prior to the meeting and reviewed and approved this report of the committee. The Chairman of TAC and the Executive Secretary of the CGIAR took part in the meeting.

The committee had before it, in addition to earlier documentation on the issue which the Group has seen, a report dated July 30, 1985 from the TAC, "TAC Recommendations on the Future of the IBPGR" with an attached report of a TAC sub-committee on the IBPGR dated May 30, 1985. There was also available a statement to the committee by the FAO.

At the opening of the meeting, Dr. Quentin Jones, a member of the IBPGR, made a brief presentation on behalf of the Chairman of the IBPGR who had requested to be represented. Dr. Jones spoke of the urgency of work on genetic resources and the nature of the research programs required. He answered a number of questions, and then withdrew with the thanks of the committee for providing valuable information.

Functions of the IBPGR

The committee first addressed the role of the IBPGR (and that of the CGIAR) in the area of genetic resources. With two changes, it approved the mandate suggested by the TAC, and the rationale for that mandate. One of the changes, the substitution of the word "utilization" for "exploitation" is merely a question of style. The other, adding the word "study" as the first of the listed functions of the IBPGR, is a substantive change, reflecting the change in the composition of the program which has been proposed by the IBPGR and endorsed successively by the review panel and the TAC. The mandate approved by the committee reads:

"The mandate of the IBPGR is to further the study, collection, preservation, documentation, evaluation and utilization of the genetic diversity of useful plants for the benefit of people throughout the world. The IBPGR shall act as a catalyst, both within and outside the CGIAR system, in stimulating the action needed to sustain a viable network of institutions for the conservation of genetic resources of these plants."

Given the close agreement between the committee and the TAC, it is not necessary to repeat the background to this statement of the mandate. The members stressed the need for balance in the program, combining collection with characterization, evaluation, technical support to gene banks, and research on preservation of germplasm. While in situ

conservation is an important subject of study some aspects of which are appropriate for the IBPGR, this is not an area where the IBPGR should become operationally involved.

In the light of the responsibilities of the FAO in the field of genetic conservation, the mandate of the IBPGR must be flexible enough to enable the IBPGR to provide any required technical support to the FAO, and particularly to the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources. The committee believes that the mandate it recommends to the CGIAR is adequate for this purpose. The Committee did not follow the logic of the paragraph at the bottom of page 4 of the TAC report beginning "should FAO decide....." and wished to record its inability to agree with that paragraph.

Responsibilities of the CGIAR for Plant Genetic Resources

The focus of attention on the IBPGR provides an opportunity to clarify the responsibilities of the CGIAR as a whole for plant genetic resources. This is required as there has been some ambiguity in the past regarding the responsibility of individual agricultural research centers and those of the IBPGR. Having noted that there is a wide variation among the centers in the degree to which they have invested resources in germplasm conservation for their mandate crops, the committee recommends that the Group make it unequivocally clear that a global crop mandate necessarily includes a mandate for collecting, characterizing, preserving, and making available germ plasm for that crop and its wild relatives. A regional mandate carries a reduced but nevertheless important responsibility to participate in the work on genetic resources. The review panel has rightly called upon the TAC to follow up on this matter with the centers through the budget and review processes. This policy implies finding more money for work on genetic resources, either by increased contributions or by reallocation.

At the same time, there is a need for the IBPGR to be more active in encouraging centers to take initiatives in this field, in setting standards, in defining research problems to be addressed by crop centers. Its relationships with centers should be more structured and explicitly defined than in the past. Future reviews of the IBPGR should take account of how well it is performing this role.

Research Program

It is clear that more research on various aspects of the preservation of genetic resources needs to be undertaken, and that the future role of the IBPGR should be larger in this field than in the past. In order to undertake such a program, the IBPGR requires a number of senior scientists with broad backgrounds in diverse fields to manage the program. The Committee agrees with the TAC recommendation that research requiring laboratories should be handled through grants and contracts, rather than through the creation of IBPGR laboratories. Dr. Jones made clear in his presentation that future approaches to collection and evaluation of germplasm would depend heavily on the outcome of research, particularly ecogeographic studies. There are many important crosswalks between the research activities proposed and the remainder of the program.

Structure

At present, the board combines the roles of overseeing policies and management, with being the top scientific review group in the structure. In future, these functions should be separated. The board should concern itself with establishing policies and budgets, program definition, and management of activities, appointing and guiding the chief management officer of the staff. A separate structure of scientific committees should shape and guide the research program, reporting at the top to the chief management officer, or director, not to the board. Similarly the hierarchy of crop advisory committees should tie to the staff not to the board. The need for appropriate interactions between the expert groups responsible for research and those responsible for crops should be recognized by providing for interconnections within the structure. There is also a need to make certain that the continuing work on collection and evaluation of germplasm, and provision of technical support to genebanks is closely integrated with the research program. The means for accomplishing this should be an early issue for the new board.

In order to perform the functions indicated, the board should include expertise on research management, science policy, and techniques of working effectively in the international environment, as well as high scientific skills in the area of plant genetics. In contrast, the committees responsible for the research program and determining crop priorities should continue to be selected primarily on grounds of scientific qualifications. Whereas the IBPGR membership is presently determined nominally by the CGIAR but in practice by self-perpetuation, the new board, after its creation, should have at least three members nominated by the CGIAR.

Relationship with the FAO

A close and effective working relationship with the FAO is essential for the performance of the mandate set forth above. It was therefore with some reluctance that the committee accepted the argument of the TAC that the role of the board, as defined above and as it has developed over the ten years of the IBPGR's existence, is not compatible with retention of the IBPGR staff as a division of the FAO. In order to carry out its responsibilities for the policy and management of its program, the board needs exclusive authority over its staff. Shared authority, as at present, is bound to cause problems.

The committee requested its chairman, the chairman of the CGIAR, to seek a meeting with the director general of the FAO to examine with him the whole range of issues raised by the TAC proposal. The chairman was asked to emphasize the importance the proposal places on a special relationship with the FAO, and also to explore FAO's position on the possible improvement of present arrangements. The chairman agreed to do so, and said that he had also convened a special meeting of the cosponsors to discuss this topic.

On the assumption that it is not possible for an institutional arrangement as described to be housed under the FAO umbrella, the committee

recommends that the CGIAR take steps to establish an institution concerned with plant genetic resources on an independent basis, but located and organized so as to encourage the closest possible working relationships with the FAO. It should be prepared to collaborate with FAO and to provide technical support to the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources. The actions of the Commission at its first meeting include a number of matters where the need for technical inputs from the IBPGR is manifest.

In order to cement the relationship, and to provide a reliable operational channel the committee recommends that the FAO be invited to name an individual to be a full fledged member of the board.

Location

The opportunity for working closely with the FAO should be the first consideration in determining location, outweighing the undoubted psychological value of being in a developing country, and the reinforcement that would occur from collocation with an active research program in plant genetics. Accordingly, the committee recommends Rome or its environs, with the alternative of Vienna to be considered should practical considerations make it impossible to locate in Rome.

International Status

Like all of the centers supported by the CGIAR, the IBPGR will require the privileges and immunities necessary for it to operate effectively in many countries.

Funding

While no reliable estimates have yet been made, it is clear that an independent institution dealing with plant genetic resources will cost more than the CGIAR presently contributes to the IBPGR. Besides the one time costs of establishing the new organization, it is proposed to upgrade the staff--but not to expand it--and to increase research. The services and personnel presently provided by the FAO will need to be paid for in future. It is important to get an early fix on costs, and also to plan for operations on the least expensive basis consistent with the goals of the IBPGR.

Implementation

It will be desirable, assuming that the Group approves a course of action as recommended in this report, to move expeditiously to carry it out. The committee therefore discussed the process of implementation with a view to expediting action following international centers week.

In some ways the process is analogous to the creation of new centers as the Group has done it in the past, requiring an implementing agency to negotiate with the host country, discuss with the FAO steps to ensure fruitful cooperation between the FAO and the new organization, select

an initial board, and carry out the many other preliminary steps which are necessary before an operating center can be brought into existence. The committee recommends that such an implementing agency be chosen and instructed. The committee, possibly with some additional members, would remain in existence for as long as necessary to provide guidance to the implementing agency between meetings of the Group.

While the new institution is being created, the existing IBPGR will remain in operation to carry on its programs up until the time when they can be transferred. The interim period will certainly extend for a year, and quite probably longer. The Group should be prepared to fund the IBPGR at the level recommended by the TAC during the interim period within present arrangements with FAO. It would also have to provide funds to the implementing agency.

As one step to make the transition smoother, the committee recommends that no vacancies on the Board be filled during the interim.

The committee agreed to meet again shortly before centers week, to hear the report of its chairman on the meeting of the cosponsors and his discussions with the director general of FAO.