

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

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From: The CGIAR Secretariat

May 23, 1994
MT/94/22

Mid-Term Meeting, May 23-27, 1994
New Delhi, India

Towards a CGIAR Financial Strategy - Issues and Options

Attached is a discussion paper entitled "CGIAR Financial Strategy - Issues and Options" which was reviewed by the CGIAR Finance Committee at its meeting on Saturday, May 21, 1994. The Committee believes that the paper will facilitate the discussion of CGIAR's Financial Strategies scheduled on May 26, 1994.

Attachment

Distribution

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Towards a CGIAR Financial Strategy
-- Issues and Options --

I. Introduction

1. Research is a long-term investment, and its funding should be consistent with its long-term nature. To allow an enabling environment for scientists, funding should be stable over the long-term. Funding for research *programs* should be committed over the medium term, and the precise amounts of available resources known with certainty in the short-term. Translated into the context of the CGIAR Centers, ideally donors should commit themselves to fund a certain research envelope for ten years, pledge specific amounts for three to five years ahead, and allocate moneys to Centers and/or programs at the beginning of each budget year.

2. The reality is different. The CGIAR Centers are funded within an unspecific understanding as to long-term donor support, and annual pledges which translate into payments often only in the course of a budget year rather than at the beginning, and sometimes are then reduced or do not materialize at all. This did not pose a problem in the early years of the CGIAR as funding was plentiful. However, as donor funds became more constrained, Centers have experienced increasing difficulty in mobilizing the moneys to fund their core operations adequately. At the same time, and paradoxically, special activities which fall outside their core activities, enjoyed a considerable degree of continuity of resource inflows.

3. Now, the Centers' mission is impeded by a growing financial crisis which threatens the integrity of their research programs. Funding for CGIAR programs has declined significantly since 1992 in both real and nominal terms. The decline continues in 1994 and is likely to continue in 1995 unless a major effort is undertaken to reverse it. The research agenda is now more driven by budget constraints than priority considerations, resulting in demoralization among the centers' cadre of outstanding scientists as staff is terminated and programs are eliminated. The crisis is afflicting the system at a time when it has geared up to implement numerous changes in its research agenda. Its emerging agenda requires greater partnership and interdependence in solving common problems among CGIAR researchers and research institutions, particularly with partner institutions in developing countries.

4. This paper diagnoses the causes of the current funding malaise, in particular the instability and unpredictability of funding inherent in CGIAR's current financing arrangements. (section III). The paper explores options, including multi-annual funding mechanisms (replenishment models), which could place the system on a more stable and predictable funding base (Section IV). It argues that the CGIAR now has to develop and adopt innovative financial strategies and mechanisms that can assure stable and predictable funding.

5. The Finance Committee is circulating the paper in order to initiate a discussion and to receive some guidance on the direction in which its further investigations should move. A detailed proposal will be prepared for ICW94. The Committee intends to reflect in its proposal the results of a fund raising feasibility study commissioned by the Center Directors' Public Awareness and Resources Committee (PARC) from the Downes Ryan Group to be completed by September 1994, and of the external study proposed by the Oversight Committee on the CGIAR's governance and system-wide decision-making and financing arrangements, also to be completed by September 1994.

II. How Others Fund Research

6. University-based research, once the dominant form of research, was typically funded from allocations of public funds, such as endowments or public budgets. Even where the main source of funding was annual budget allocations, the long-term commitment of the public sponsor was never in doubt. This publicly-funded research model, in agricultural research, was still the leading model at the time the CGIAR Centers were set up.

7. Many factors have changed the ways in which research is funded, most notable being the pressures on the public spending and increasing importance of private sector research. More and more research activity is taking place in the private sector, first, as industry has come to view research as a critical factor in gaining and consolidating competitive positions, and secondly, as protection of intellectual property, by granting a temporary monopoly over inventions, permitted to recoup research and development cost.

8. Declining public funding for agricultural research and the use of intellectual property instruments -now increasingly observed also in public sector agricultural research- have deeply affected its research modes and ethics, and have led to more result and product-oriented funding approaches. Contract research accounts for an important part of public sector research activity in some industrialized countries (e.g. U.K.). Private sector support and ownership of national research establishments has been on the increase; for instance, in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Australia, farmers' organizations are today an important source of funding for national agricultural research.

III. The Current CGIAR Funding Approach - Issues

9. The CGIAR has no legal personality and there is no written charter under which the CGIAR operates. The common goal of promoting productivity in developing country agriculture is translated into research funding through informal understandings which its members have broadly adhered to. The Group's informal set-up has allowed considerable flexibility in strategy formulation, but has increasingly revealed shortcomings when it comes to funding research operations.

10. The CGIAR operates under the following set of ground rules:

- as a group it decides on a common strategy and a set of research priorities based on independent technical advice provided by its Technical Advisory Committee;
- decision-making is by consensus;
- the international research centers, as legally independent entities, develop and present research proposals in accordance with the Group's overall strategy and priorities;
- donor contributions are voluntary, and there are no burden-sharing obligations; donors fund directly, and independently from each other, research activities of individual centers of their choice, according to their foreign aid policies and priorities;
- with the exception of a few donors who commit funds on a multi-annual basis, donors commit funds annually and disburse them during the financial year;
- Group membership is informal, and open to any government, agency or organization, public or private, that is willing to support its goals financially and on a sustained basis.

11. By limiting the scope of its decisions as a group to setting a common strategic agenda, while leaving funding and implementation to donor members and centers, the CGIAR has made an ingenious choice. This greatly enhances the Group's capacity to reach consensus which in more structured organizations would require intricate and long negotiations. It has permitted public and private, developing and developed country agencies to join in the same enterprise. It has allowed donors, individually or collectively, to draw advice from a wide range of sources within the scientific community, through the Technical Advisory Committee and the Centers. It also has enabled the Group to function with minimal bureaucracy.

12. The present financial environment, however, requires a closer look at some of these attributes which appear to defy sound research planning and management:

- In a contracting resource environment, the annual pledging mode produces increasingly unpredictable resource envelopes; and
- the donors' freedom to allocate their contributions to centers and programs of their choice and the centers' autonomy to raise funds for programs, both within and outside the agreed common research agenda, have led to relatively ample and stable funding for peripheral programs while the centers' core research agenda has been compromised.

The system's resource mobilization efforts have also been hurt by the absence of clear communication of its goals and accomplishments to a broader public, and the absence of a financial strategy.

A. Funding Stability

13. The CGIAR's process of annually funding research programs which often have lead times of eight to ten years between investments and outputs, is inadequate. As a brief historical review will show,

- the system worked smoothly until funding constraints became apparent;
- as funding constraints became binding, CGIAR introduced longer term planning for forecasting the future resource requirements;
- attempts to formally introduce more elaborate planning by adopting five year plans, first in 1986-88 and recently in 1992/93, failed because assumed funding levels did not materialize even though in the 1992/93 case the plans were prepared within financial limits agreed in advance, and because of lack of mechanisms to mobilize resources in a time perspective commensurate with the planning period.

14. The early years of the CGIAR were marked by a rapid, almost explosive growth in membership, in funds provided, and in the number of centers and activities carried out under its auspices. Fund raising in these early years was not difficult. The amounts involved were small relative to the aid budgets of most donor countries. As available core funding available met the centers' global requirements, Centers only prepared annual budgets, spelling out their funding requirements. The question of stability was moot. As the growth in funding declined in the late seventies, longer term projections of financial requirements were prepared by Centers to allow forward planning by donors.

15. These were further refined during the eighties by developing budgetary procedures and processes with a five year time frame more compatible with the long-term nature of research. During

1986-89, each center prepared five-year plans (MTP) which indicated how each center's activities would contribute to the achievement of the system's priorities and strategies. However, since little guidance was given regarding financial planning parameters, the sum of all Centers' requirements vastly exceeded the core funds that donors would provide as the planning process let the Centers build their projections on their own long-term plans.

16. The lack of an ex-ante financial planning envelope was identified as a key failing of the process, by a task force which reviewed, in 1990, the experience with the five-year resource allocation process. Consequently, at MTM92, the Group approved the initiation of the 1994-98 Medium Term Planning (MTP) process under a funding constraint, a global resource envelope of \$270 million (in constant 1992 dollars) for 1998 which would largely maintain, in real terms, the level of core funding available in 1992. However, as donor pledges during ICW'93 fell well below this funding assumption, even this MTP could not be agreed and implemented for 1994, its first year.

17. Essentially, what has defeated the various valiant attempts to provide funding stability to Centers, e.g. by introducing five year planning, was the fact that a funding target for future has remained elusive. Consequently, there may be limited scope for building a sounder funding base for the CGIAR Centers short of multi-year donor commitments.

B. Predictability

18. Predictable funding for a reasonable time frame is a pre-condition for sound research planning and management. The problem is that even after a pledging sessions Centers do not know how much funding they will have available for the coming budget year.

- The pledging session held at Centers' Week precedes the beginning of the budget year by barely two months;
- Amounts are pledged generally without indication as to the Centers or programs to be supported;
- pledges are only indicative and amounts actually contributed may differ substantially because they are subsequently adjusted by the donor or subject to exchange rate fluctuations or both.

19. Centers could more easily bear with this uncertainty as long as they could be assured that funds would eventually come through. In a situation of tight donor budgets, however, uncertainty without such assurances will frustrate good management practices.

C. Donor Independence and Center Autonomy

20. The challenge of funding a research organization from annual contributions is made more difficult by the high degree of discretion of donors and centers in negotiating the allocation of funds. As a group, the CGIAR has a dynamic, multi-year strategy and set of priorities, which it endorses upon recommendations from TAC. The centers formulate their research proposals in the context of and the CGIAR priorities and strategies, and estimate their funding requirements. The aggregation of all center programs as endorsed by TAC and approved by the Group becomes the System's Core program. However, to financially support these programs fully, the Group has never attempted to set goals for member contributions, or applied moral suasion on individual members to increase commitments.

21. Donor funds are not pooled: each donor supports centers of its choice, and in the amount it

wishes. This gives donors a measure of control over the use of funds: they can choose research activities consistent with their own developmental objectives and select the centers which in their perception contribute most effectively to their own policies and strategies. It is possible that, for some donors, this permits larger core contributions than available if funds were to be fed into a central pool through a formula. On the other hand, the freedom of choice allows donors to effectively disavow themselves from the participation in the consensus decisions taken in the Group.

22. Individual Centers can and do raise funds, with varying degrees of success, for activities and programs including those outside the approved core program. Often, such "complementary" activities and programs, 30 percent of total resources available to Centers, are not international or strategic in nature, e.g., targeted only at one country or have developmental rather than research goals. For a Center, complementary funding is attractive because it is seen as additional to core funding provided by the CGIAR. Funding of complementary programs creates a competitive environment for center resource mobilization and appeals to Centers' entrepreneurship. Not surprisingly, complementary funding has been increasingly sought by Centers as core funding stagnated or declined.

23. From a donor's perspective, funding complementary programs can be desirable because it allows a donor to tailor a program more closely to its aid objectives and more direct control the use of funds than core funding would. Furthermore, it permits tapping sources within the donor agency other than those that fund the CGIAR core programs. Potentially, it could also allow donors, especially private sector donors who do not intend to endorse the public goods goals of the CGIAR, to support Center activities.

24. However, some of these useful attributes of complementary program funding can lead to a problem from a System perspective. In principal, the core programs are of a higher priority than the complementary programs. However, the defining attributes of donor and center autonomy, permit both centers and donors to act in an undisciplined manner by funding complementary programs at the cost of core programs. To the extent that the independence attributes lead to a lack of "ownership" of the CGIAR's core program, either explicit or implicit, it often means that core funding gets shortened, as it gets redirected to complementary programs. In fact, in the past, when the World Bank contribution was exclusively applied to fill gaps in Center budgets left by insufficient funding from other donor sources, there was a "perverse" incentive for a Center to show core program activities as complementary.¹⁷ To conclude, although autonomy may help individual Centers and donors, it limits the system's ability to implement its agreed research agenda.

D. Communicating goals and achievements

25. The system's resource mobilization efforts have also been hampered by its inward-looking posture. For too many years, Centers have been considered, and have seen themselves, as centers of excellence that could expect sufficient funding as an entitlement. Centers often described and published their scientific advances without linking them to the actual developmental needs. The CGIAR itself was equally remiss in informing the world at large of the importance of its efforts in

¹ As it operated through 1993, the donor-of-last-resort facility provided by the World Bank automatically provided the balance, at least in part, if the sum of donor funding commitments to a center core program fell short of requirements. In that situation, if the center succeeded in mobilizing additional core resources, its "entitlement" against the facility was reduced correspondingly, resulting in a zero-sum game for the center. By contrast, if a donor offered to fund a program or activity which was mutually defined as complementary -though it may have been of a core nature- funding of such activity was additional to the center's total funding. The share used for gap-filling under the World Bank facility has since been reduced in favor of funding CGIAR approved core activities.

alleviating hunger and poverty. For instance, the last impact study was conducted in the early 1980s, and subsequent efforts to measure its impact have been fragmented. As a consequence, policy makers had little opportunity to realize the relevance of CGIAR sponsored research to their concerns. It is particularly astounding that in spite of the enormous impact of CGIAR generated technologies on their countries' agriculture, policy makers from the South as a group have not expressed stronger commitments to the goals of the Group, nor have they been strong advocates for its support in donor capitals.

E. Lack of a Financial Strategy

26. Finally, the system's funding has suffered from the lack of a financial strategy. In practical terms that has meant that although there is general agreement that CGIAR ought to have more, stable and predictable funding, there has been only been a limited attempt to modify or refine CGIAR's financing arrangements to better support long term research.

27. For a time, it has been believed that this was partly the result of confusing responsibilities. Within the system, there are, indeed, many active in public awareness work, developing funding strategies and resource mobilization. The CGIAR Chair is decisively campaigning for more funding support from the Group's traditional donors. The CGIAR Secretariat is strategizing and coordinating the funding effort and monitoring Center budgets and donor allocations. The Directors-General of the Centers have formed a Public Awareness and Resource Committee (PARC). A Public Awareness Association of information specialists from donor agencies, Centers and the CGIAR Secretariat promotes awareness campaigns. Organizations have been set up in several countries to encourage support of international agricultural research, including those Australia, India, the U.S. and others. In some countries such as Denmark and Japan, this is accomplished by informal groups of volunteers. And now, there are the Finance Committee, and to some extent the Oversight Committee, both concerned with funding aspects.

28. While this seems confusing at first, the maze of different players shows the makings of a sensible division of labor. The appointment of the two donor committees, at least for the domain of core funding, finally puts the responsibility for defining financial strategies where it would seem to belong i.e. with the "owners" of the system. Through these committees the CGIAR is now equipped to develop a financing strategy from an overall perspective on the system, and broach attendant policy issue that could lead to changes in the institutional set-up and the way the Group conducts its business.

29. As regards resource mobilization activities to implement these strategies, several of the other actors have a comparative advantage. Strategizing, and acting on, public awareness issues, for instance, is evidently a task best left to PARC and PAA in collaboration with individual donor agencies.

F. Broadening the funding base

30. The system will also have to address the need for broadening its resource base. Past fund-raising efforts of both the system and the Centers have focussed almost exclusively on the system's traditional donors. Little has been done to enlist the funding support from developing countries who stand to loose most from a demise or further contraction of the system. While the lack of ownership on the part of the developing world was given an explanation earlier, the lack of efforts to correct it cannot be explained. Financial ownership by the developing world could take a variety of forms. Some have viewed their financial participation mainly in the national or regional level on the grounds of more immediate relevance to national or regional concerns. On the other hand, there are equally valid arguments for developing countries to financial support the CGIAR's international public goods

for the same reason as the existing CGIAR donors, which include eight developing countries. While it is difficult, without canvassing their views, to assess the preferences or the funding potential of developing countries as a group, it would be reasonable to assume that at least some of them would be stronger financial supporter in the future.

IV. Options for New Funding Mechanisms

31. Several institutional and financial changes and alternatives should be examined that may produce a more reliable and predictable funding stream for CGIAR's core programs. Some of these are described below in four major categories: Modifying the current system, a market model, replenishment models and corporate models.

A. Market Model

(1) Without a Common Agenda

32. The most "liberal" system would be one where Centers bid for donor funds to finance research programs designed and packaged by the Centers, without recourse to a common agenda developed by a donor group. At an annual bidding session, research programs would be adjudicated to individual donors or donor groups, on a first-come-first-serve basis. Donors would agree to fund the program for one year on the basis of the cost estimate provided in the Center proposal. Since the "price" could not be bid up or down, some Centers are likely to receive more donor offers than they need, while other centers' programs would remain unfunded. In the medium-term, however, Centers are likely to build their programs to the needs and specifications of individual donors, and close Center-donor relations will lead to fuller use of donor funds.

33. This pure market model (equivalent to the "decentralized CGIAR model" in the Oversight Committee report) is likely to resemble a network of exclusive deals in the longer-term. The research agenda is likely to be defined by the big players on both sides. While this may be one of the acceptable outcome in the long-term, it may be inconsistent with the vision of the CGIAR as an international multilateral instrument serving the interests of the world. The function of the Consultative Group if there were to be one at all, would be reduced to facilitating exchange of contacts and information, and perhaps some monitoring.

(2) With a Common Agenda

34. An annual bidding system could be organized for center proposals referring to a common agenda agreed by donors, thereby preserving the system character of the CGIAR, and make it more than a facilitator by assuring its longer term and strategic cohesion. Depending on the degree of adherence of autonomously acting donors to the common agenda, this approach could foster donor funding of comprehensive programs with a medium to long term horizon (e.g., five to ten year), articulated within or across centers and around specific themes (e.g., commodities and ecoregions). Though the bidding would be annual, the donor support to such programs would imply a commitment to the program over time.

B. Modifications to the Current System

(1) Refocusing Complementary Funding

35. An obvious way to bring total funding more into line with the Group's agreed strategies and priorities may be to bar complementary programs. The major objection to such step would be the risk of a possible drop in overall funding of which complementary funding now represents 25 percent.

Two premises counter this objection: (i) A large part of current complementary funding is in essence of a core nature (the "perverse" incentives mentioned earlier in para 24), the financial implications of this step would be likely to be less serious; and (ii) funds currently supporting complementary programs can be redirected to support the core programs.

36. Barring complementary programs would certainly be resisted by donors who seek closer control over their contributions. It may also dampen some Center fund raising efforts and "entrepreneurship". But many will prefer a system that is more transparent and accountable, discourages "free-riders" (donors who primarily fund complementary programs and thus do not contribute their fair share to institutional cost) and generally offers a more level playing field.

(2) Premium on Complementary Funding

37. Another way to instill more discipline in the system might be to allow complementary funding, but subject it to a mandatory contribution. This mandatory contribution should not just reflect the actual overhead cost generally included in the funding for a complementary program which Centers currently determine to be around 25 percent -- while only 11-13% is presently levied -- but should deliberately go above this number to, say, 40 percent, in order to make complementary funding less attractive while not entirely discouraging it. The contribution should be payable to a central fund, which would add to the funding available for the core programs, and should be distributed to support the agreed system priorities.

C. Replenishment Models

38. Replenishment models are those funding arrangements that are multi-year commitments, negotiated in advance and often carry a treaty obligation. Due to their intergovernmental nature they are negotiated at senior levels in governments and often include representation from the Finance Ministries. Although many such arrangements exist, three representative models are described: a pooling option, a donor choice or menu option, and a pooled co-financing option.

(1) Pooling Option

39. The first option would drastically reduce donor autonomy in favor of a central pool which would allocate funds among center programs according to policy guidelines. This would resemble the IDA and GEF models. The central pool would be replenished periodically which -in order to do justice to the long-term nature of research- should be every five rather than three years. The central allocation function could probably be assured by, or built upon, the current TAC/CGIAR Secretariat collaboration without the cost of additional bureaucracies.

(2) Donor Choice Option

40. There could be a variant which may allow to retain a considerable measure of donor autonomy if one permitted donors to still select center programs of their choice to benefit from their contribution (akin to current restricted core-funding), but to agree to do so for the duration of the replenishment period. This "adopt-a-center" or "adopt-a-program" option would allow the building of a close, even proprietary, relationship between donor and center and would likely satisfy some of the needs for which donors currently favor complementary program funding over core-funding.

(3) Pooled Co-financing Option

41. A further option which would combine elements of pooling and donor choice could be derived from the model of the Special Program of Assistance for Sub-Saharan Africa (SPA). Established under World Bank leadership to support adjustment programs in the low-income, highly indebted

countries of the sub-Saharan Africa, the SPA combines resources from IDA and IMF and bilateral donors. The key integrating feature of a SPA operation is a structural adjustment program developed between the recipient country, IDA and the IMF which then is co-financed by bilateral donors. There is no formal pooling of funds as they are provided directly to the recipient. Contributors and recipients are independent in negotiating their bilateral fiscal arrangements. Hence although there is formal agreement to financially support a common agenda as in the case of the pooling option, donors maintain direct financial control. This model could be adapted to the CGIAR under the premise that a Center's approved five year program, could serve as the integrating element similar to an adjustment program for a country, around which resources could be mobilized.

D. Corporate Models

42. A genuinely long-term research funding base could be created if CGIAR were to be restructured as a corporation either as a foundation with an endowment fund which would generate sufficient income to fund center operations on a continuous basis or as an institution which would produce and sell research and related products commercially.

(1) A Foundation

43. This could primarily be done by setting up an international foundation (much along the lines of the more recently established centers) which would invest its endowment in the international capital markets. Its representative donor board would define research strategies and priorities on advice from its TAC. The major impediment to this option would be its financial implications. It seem unlikely that the system's current donors would be able and willing to set aside an endowment fund that would produce sufficient income to fund all center research.

44. A variant would be to consider an endowment to sustain some programs whose long-term-funding would be particularly critical, such as a system-wide genetic resources program. This could be accomplished by establishing a foundation, independent from but working closely with the CGIAR. Such a foundation would be able to receive donations, extraordinary contributions from CGIAR members, and other one time contributions from (private and public) organizations who do not wish to have an intricate involvement with the CGIAR. The foundation would have its own board, mainly consisting of individuals who could attract resources. The foundation could either function as a "pass through" mechanism -- i.e., redistributing the contributions upon receipt -- or build an endowment fund, the proceeds of which would distributed to CGIAR centers.

(2) International Agricultural Research Corporation

45. There could be a commercial variant of the corporate model: The CGIAR could be set up as a joint stock company, akin to the Bretton Woods institutions. This would make sense if at one point some Center research could be commercially exploited. While it is highly unlikely that the whole system could operate on a commercial basis, there may well be potential for organizing some advanced technology activities into a profit-making unit along the lines of technology offices of some U.S. universities or CABI that a CGIAR Corporation could sell research products to the commercial private sector in developed countries.

V. Conclusions and Next Steps

46. Donor independence and center autonomy are defining characteristics of the CGIAR. The freedom of donors to finance programs of their choice across the range of core and complementary programs has produced a paradox of relatively ample funding for complementary programs while core

programs are financed below required levels. Significant funds provided by donors go to activities peripheral to the agreed research agenda.

47. The increasing complexity of the research agenda and constrained finances raise the question whether the system can continue to function if these choices continue to be exercised by centers and donors without reference to the system's agenda and goals. Additional research activities arising out of center entrepreneurship or donor needs are justified only if the system ensures that the central programs of all centers are financed. Thus, to provide a stable financial environment for CGIAR research, while maintaining the unique attributes of the present CGIAR, innovative options need to be explored.

48. This paper has previewed several such options. They are listed in the table below in context of the criteria that have been identified earlier. All options imply changes in the culture and structure which will be more fundamental as one begins to consider replenishment and corporate models.

Table : Comparison of the Financing Options

Financing Model	Stability	Predictability	Donor Autonomy	Visibility to Policy Makers	Resource Mobil. Potential
A. Market Model					
(1) Without Common Agenda	- -	- -	+ +	o	+
(2) With Common Agenda	- -	- -	+ +	+	+
B. Modification to Current System					
(1) Refocussing Complementary Funding	+	+	- -	o	o
(2) Premium on Complem. Funding	+ +	+	-	o	o
C. Replenishment Models					
(1) Pooling	+ + +	+ + +	- -	+ +	-
(2) Donor Choice	+ +	+ +	+	+ +	o
(3) Pooled Co-Financing	+ + +	+ + +	+	+ +	+
D. Corporate Models					
(1) CGIAR as a Foundation	+ +	+ +	- -	+	o
(2) Parallel Foundation					
* without endowment	o	o	+	o	+
* with endowment	+ +	+ +	+	o	+
(3) Int'l Agric. Research Corp.	+ +	+ +	- -	+	+

50. The Finance Committee believes that improvements on the current funding mechanism must combine elements of various of these options. It intends to prepare a detailed proposal for ICW94.