

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

ICARDA has the most extensive and intensive set of collaborative research and related activities with partners in its mandate region. In the early days these activities were largely undertaken through unrestricted core funding with well balanced medium term plans developed for this purpose. With the shift to restricted core funding this changed significantly and a multitude of special projects are now largely determining which areas will get major attention. Although these areas fall within the overall strategic plan, the Centre has less control over the balance between the main priority areas. This has also consequences for the management of the relationship between ICARDA and its partners.

The establishment of the regional programmes has allowed the Centre to adjust efficiently to new realities and to carry out research together with partners on areas of direct relevance to countries and donors. The Centre merits to be commended for the successful establishment and expansion of the six regional programmes which cover all the countries in CWANA in a comprehensive manner. The development and implementation of this well adapted and unique research management mechanism, as well as the mobilization of the necessary resources for it, is a good demonstration of the excellent foresight and communication and planning capabilities of ICARDA management and staff.

The special position of the Highlands Regional Programme has already been discussed, and *the Panel suggests that ICARDA reconsiders the usefulness of maintaining the current Highlands Regional Programme and that it should look for possibilities to combine it for example with the West Asia Regional Programme.*

Given the poor state of agriculture in most highland regions and the high degree of poverty, considering the special interest of certain donors in supporting research activities for mountain areas, and noting also the research activities carried out by ICARDA over time in highland areas, **the Panel recommends that ICARDA establishes a highlands research network for the CWANA region to develop and implement a pragmatic agricultural research programme for the highland agro-ecologies.**

Certain advanced NARS have expressed a strong interest to become more actively involved in joint research activities with ICARDA through outsourcing. However, in recent years the number of newly outsourced activities have been very limited, consequently, **the Panel recommends that Management reviews the available information related to outsourcing to decide if ICARDA should spend more efforts on it. It is important to first analyse the current experiences in order to determine under which conditions outsourcing will be beneficial to the Centre. Such an analysis should also address the positive effects on the relationships with NARS.**

The CCER Panel concludes contrary to the EPMR that ICARDA has established good relations with policymakers. But, to further maintain and enforce these links it is *suggested that two new initiatives might be envisaged:*

- *the holding of a presentation day in each of the major regions once every three years; and*
- *the regular publication of an information note especially addressing policy makers and their staff.*

To ensure the effective involvement of all professional staff in the field and at headquarters in the evolution of the Centre's research agenda, and in the development and updating of the project portfolio, there is a need to use the annual planning meeting in a more effective manner.

**The Panel recommends that the annual planning meeting is organized in such a manner that it becomes the main joint research planning exercise during the year. All scientists need to be fully involved; projects should be discussed in project working groups and the outcome of the discussions presented to plenary. It should become a planning week where all professional staff members interact with each other and contribute to the updating of the projects and the development of the research agenda.**

The panel reviewed extensively the balance between headquarters and the outreach programme, that are all part of one integral research agenda. It hesitated between the maintenance of the status quo and the development of proposals for change. It concluded that the latter would be best for the Centre, and on that basis developed a number of recommendations.

All the current 66 special projects are linked to the 19 MTP projects which are coordinated by Research Project Managers, while the special projects fall under the responsibility of Project Coordinators. Research Project Managers can be at the same time Project Coordinators. But not all Project Coordinators are Research Project Managers. Some special projects are for 100% linked to one MTP project. But that is not the case for almost all of the larger projects for which the Regional Coordinators are the Project Coordinator.

With respect to these latter special projects in particular, but also for the others, the Panel was not convinced that there is always adequate feedback from the results obtained under these projects into the MTP projects, and that the objectives, outputs and work plans of the latter are updated accordingly. With such a large number of special projects, and so many people involved this is a major exercise that needs to be planned systematically.

**The Panel recommends that ICARDA prepares a status report on the flow of information from field to headquarters, and vice versa, of results obtained under special projects, as well as on the current practices of updating the MTP projects, and to use the information collected for the preparation of a set of best practices.**

The extra burden of the expanded field activities on the scientists is mentioned regularly. This burden may be decomposed in the following elements: (i) country visits to obtain a good understanding of the research carried out; such visits are an essential part of international agricultural research; (ii) visits related to project operations; scientists have less to say on the planning of these, and consequently they

constitute an extra demand on their time, and may reduce research outputs; (iii) an increased number of project/programme planning meetings that are an additional burden. Thus, undoubtedly changes have occurred, and under the current circumstances scientists have to address a broader range of matters than their colleagues of 20 years ago. The best approach is to be well aware of these new realities and adjust to them accordingly, because these are normal developments also outside the CGIAR system. As discussed in chapter 7.2, a very positive point is the fact that all scientists consider that the extensive interactions with field projects benefit their overall research activities.

The research continuum from basic to applied research, from headquarters to the field, is considered to be managed and implemented as one unified research programme. Many issues may and have been raised in relation to this, but the Panel sees two major concerns: the overall management responsibility for the outreach and research programme, and the linkages between the MTP projects and the large range of field projects.

The outreach and research programmes are handled as two different structures, each with their own Assistant Director General reporting to the Director General. This may not be the best management structure to ensure optimal interaction between staff in the field and at headquarters. In chapter 3.4 the reporting relationships have been discussed and in general they seem to have been working well under this double management structure.

The EPMR Panel was also indirectly referring to this matter when it discussed the interplay between headquarters and regional programmes. It noted that advantage is taken of the annual Board Meeting to bring the Regional Coordinators to headquarters, which offers an opportunity for consultations among themselves and with Leaders of the Research Programmes. It concluded that this arrangement, together with excellent working relations between the Assistant Director General for Research and the Director of International Cooperation mitigates the situation to a great extent.

The Panel considers that there should be no double messages to ICARDA partners and staff, and that all research activities and related matters in the field should fall under research and be reported as such. The Panel notes the EPMR Panel's reference to excellent working relations between the two managers concerned, but this offers no guarantee that these will stay the same over time, especially so with a newly recruited international cooperation manager.

**The Panel recommends that the Board of Trustees examines the current management structure with the purpose to develop new arrangements where there is one clear line of reporting for all research matters.**

*In addition, it is suggested that in light of this recommendation the Board might want to reconsider the terms of reference for and the filling of the position of the Assistant Director General for International Cooperation.*

The larger field projects implemented by ICARDA under the regional programmes are all multi-disciplinary projects. This is a logical development given the complex

production and resource management problems that have to be addressed. Inter-disciplinary research has become common practice in international agricultural research undertakings and increasingly also at national levels. However, a scrutiny of the 19 MTP projects shows that they mainly represent research activities with a very limited involvement of various research disciplines. That is also clear from the fact that the above mentioned multi-disciplinary field projects are linked to a range of MTP projects.

Given the overall developments in agricultural research planning and implementation and considering the increasing importance of inter-disciplinary special projects in ICARDA's research agenda **the Panel recommends that ICARDA undertakes a detailed review of the current breakdown of its research agenda, with the purpose to re-formulate the 19 MTP projects into a smaller number of inter-disciplinary projects that can effectively address the research needs of the major production systems in the dry areas.**

ICARDA has always obtained most of its funding from the traditional CGIAR donors. In addition, it is unique in the way it has succeeded in attracting financial support from bi-laterally managed funds as in the case of the Nile Valley Project. During the country visits the Panel was made aware that funds for research are also available in a number of countries under rural development projects. However, in many cases these funds do not seem to be used for the strengthening of research activities in the countries concerned.

**The Panel recommends that ICARDA explores with the national partners the opportunities for strengthening linkages with rural development and related projects as a means to increase the financial contributions to agricultural research.**

Countries have raised on various occasions the need to undertake more research on crops outside the current ICARDA mandate. This includes crops that can help to increase farmer income, in particular in dry areas, and fruit and nut trees are frequently mentioned. At the request of certain countries the Centre assists already in some research activities beyond its traditional mandate. For example it has recruited consultants to help with the production of oil seed crops in Iran and the development of protected cultivation in the Arabian Peninsula. Countries desire the involvement of ICARDA because of its extensive experience and reputation as an International Centre, and its capacity to appraise and ensure the quality of the research undertaken. Such efforts can be undertaken at limited costs and are essential to address problems of major concern.

**The Panel recommends that ICARDA reviews the possibilities of expanding its role as an honest broker in triangular arrangements involving the Centre, specialized research institutes and countries in CWANA, for the promotion of research activities on problems outside its traditional mandate.**

ICARDA has already an excellent record on training, and continues to manage an active programme. Nevertheless a number of countries consider that new efforts are needed in this respect, including the provision of better information on the training programme and the conditions under which individuals can participate in training

courses. In addition, further expansion of opportunities for individual training, and a more aggressive visiting scientist programme were mentioned. The Panel also observed a need for training of international cooperation staff in the Ministries of Agriculture on matters related to project formulation and fund raising. At the same time in the CAC region there is a continued need for the more traditional type of training courses. Generally, in all countries a strong desire was expressed to take advantage of ICARDA for the increase of the research capabilities of the national scientists, and the Centre is encouraged to seek additional funding for training.

*The Panel suggests that ICARDA reviews its current training programme to ensure that it effectively addresses the needs of the countries in CWANA, and that it explores opportunities for strengthening links with universities in CWANA, and the possibilities of outsourcing training through cooperation with institutions in the region.*

Given the interest expressed by the scientists to make better use of students to strengthen their research activities **the Panel recommends that in the light of the new funding realities leading to more limited permanent staff resources, the Centre revises its current training policy to facilitate the employment of students.**

The Panel did not obtain much evidence of collaboration of ICARDA with NGOs, farmer organizations, private sector etc., although it is aware of some examples of farmer participatory research carried out by the Centre. Given the importance of working with these important stakeholders in agricultural development activities *the Panel suggests that ICARDA explore the possibilities of giving greater visibility to its work with NGOs, farmer organizations, private sector, and others.*

In Latin America there is considerable potential for the effective use of ICARDA inputs and technologies. Faba bean and barley are important crops; natural resource management is a major concern in virtually the whole continent. There is some exchange of improved plant materials through the international nurseries. However, ICARDA is not very well known in the region and there is competition from other Centres for getting support from countries. This makes it rather difficult to develop a comprehensive research programme. An understandable problem is also the difficulty of headquarter staff to provide effective backstopping to a region that is located far away from headquarters. However, there are extensive opportunities and needs for ICARDA inputs in this region.

**The Panel recommends that the Board of Trustees reviews the costs and benefits of maintaining an active ICARDA Regional Programme in Latin America, as a basis for a decision to be taken on the development of further plans for the involvement of the Centre in this region.**