

**ICARDA's Board and Management Joint Response to the Report of the
4th External Programme and Management Review
August 1999**

Recommendation 1

*In view of a diminished expertise in fungal pathology at ICARDA, the Panel **recommends** that the Centre should strengthen its scientific capacity for strategic and applied research in crop pathology, and its pathology support to the Cereal and Legume Enhancement Programmes.*

We agree with the Panel's recommendation to increase the Center's scientific capacity in crop pathology. However, given the scientific profile of current staff, we will address this specifically through legume pathology.

Diseases caused by fungal pathogens are a major factor limiting the productivity of mandate crops in the region. In the case of the kabuli chickpea, lentil and faba bean our ability to produce widespread adoption to diversify the cereal-based farming system will in large part be contingent upon reducing the risk of crop losses from diseases.

Integrated management for key diseases provides the framework for our approach to reducing risk from diseases and raising economic returns. Host-plant resistance will continue to underpin the Center's overall disease management strategy. The Center will further strengthen its ongoing collaboration and outsourcing with NARS, many of which have significant strength in this area. We concur with the Panel that this requires a continued and vigorous pathology input on food legumes, and will seek to strengthen this area of our activities.

Recommendation 2

*The Panel **recommends** that ICARDA should review the opportunities that may be available if it should expand its research role in malting barley in developing countries. In undertaking this review, the Panel would expect ICARDA to complete a social and economic assessment of the potential of work in this area to meet CGIAR priorities.*

In line with the Panel's recommendation the Center will review the opportunities for research on malting barley, for which we will undertake the suggested social and economic assessment.

The Center has a global mandate with respect to Barley. We recognize the importance of malting to some NARS. Within this global context, the Center will undertake the review of the need for assistance with this aspect of barley improvement.

The Center will assess the potential social, nutritional and economic returns of research into malting barley directed toward CGIAR priorities.

Recommendation 3

*The Panel **recommends** that as a matter of priority ICARDA seek discussion with CIMMYT to develop mutually acceptable plans for the incorporation of doubled haploids and marker-assisted selection technologies in their joint durum wheat, spring bread wheat and facultative/winter bread wheat breeding programmes.*

ICARDA will continue to integrate modern biotechnologies into its breeding programmes, including the CIMMYT/ICARDA projects. Further growth in this area, as it relates to wheat, will be through ongoing discussions with CIMMYT.

ICARDA holds annual planning meeting with CIMMYT; we will ensure that the next meeting addresses the technical issues appropriately raised in this recommendation.

ICARDA is already scaling-up existing efforts on marker-assisted selection and doubled haploid breeding for its mandate crops, including for the joint CIMMYT/ICARDA activities. The scaling-up of these biotechnologies is done on a cost-effectiveness basis.

As part of this expanding activity, ICARDA will insure that there is a dialogue with CIMMYT, and that agreement is reached on a relevant plan of action and then seek the necessary financial resources.

Recommendation 4

*Given the reductions in the Genetic Resources Unit staff that have occurred, the demands placed on the Unit for collection and conservation activities, and so as not to threaten its existing activities, the Panel **recommends** the GRU Unit make a concerted effort to seek additional P and RA level staff from either internal or external sources, if it is to undertake an expanded programme of research in in situ conservation, pre-breeding and the evaluation of collections using molecular markers.*

We agree with the Panel's recommendation and we will seek appropriate funding to address staffing levels

We concur with the Panel that collection and *ex situ* conservation, particularly of FAO-designated germplasm maintained in the Genetic Resources Unit, **must** be continued. We are pleased that the Panel endorses the new research directions on pre-breeding, *in situ* conservation and molecular characterization, which were highlighted

in the Center's Medium Term Plan 1998-2000 (Table 1 p 11). In West Asia we have already begun the implementation of a GEF project to specifically address the *in situ* conservation of dry area agrobiodiversity. A new P- level appointment is part of that project. The Center has strong alliances with NARS in the area of genetic resources, which are highly valued given the critical importance to the Center of this area of research.

Recommendation 5

*In view of the critical nature of water scarcity in the CWANA region, the Panel **recommends** that ICARDA place more emphasis on strategic issues of water use/ allocation and management at rural community level, and that it join in strategic partnerships to carry out this work.*

We agree with the Panel's recommendation that ICARDA place more emphasis on water management at the rural community level.

ICARDA's primary emphasis will remain on on-farm water management. We also recognize the strategic importance of community-level management mechanisms, particularly in water harvesting and water run-off systems and have already made contributions in that area. Integrated watershed management figures prominently in the current MTP 1999-2001. We are actively seeking, through expanded strategic partnerships, to increase resources devoted to this work.

Recommendation 6

*Regarding social science research, the Panel **recommends** that ICARDA should: (i) reduce its scope and concentrate on fewer issues, selected in close collaboration with the Center's physical and biological scientists and the national programmes - that are central to the operational mandate of the Centre; and (ii) seek to improve the quality of output by among others, (a) judicious recruitment or designation of a lead social scientist, (b) recruitment of high quality support staff, and (c) entering into more cooperative arrangements like those existing with IFPRI.*

We generally agree with the Panel's recommendation, in line with current resource levels, to focus our social science research, and enhance quality by recruitment/designation of a lead scientist and high quality support staff.

The existing three MTP socioeconomics and policy projects have included planned reductions in baseline studies, technology evaluation, and adoption studies by ICARDA scientists. We will continue to collaborate closely with NARS to jointly undertake these important tasks. Reduction of ICARDA's direct input in these areas will result in relatively more emphasis being placed on other strategic subjects such as Center impact, poverty alleviation and gender analysis, which the center is already addressing. Through cooperative agreements with sister Centers and system-wide

programs, we will seek to continue our research in policy, property rights, and community management of natural resources.

Recommendation 7

*Recognizing ICARDA's efforts to consolidate its natural resources management research by merging its former projects into a more integrated programme, the Panel **recommends** that ICARDA, together with appropriate partners, articulate a vision, strategy, and an implementation plan for natural research management research, drawing on CGIAR and other experiences and centered on Unified Research Sites most appropriate for its emerging poverty alleviation focus.*

The Center generally accepts this recommendation and will continue its ongoing program of strengthening research in NRM. The Center will use its Unified Research Sites to further integrate its program activities, especially in relation to poverty alleviation.

Over the last five years ICARDA has greatly strengthened its work in NRM, particularly in the area of on-farm water resource management. Refocusing of its work on crop-livestock interactions and the inclusion of the work on livestock value added products will greatly strengthen its impact on poverty alleviation, particularly on rural women. The Center will continue to be an active partner within the CGIAR in terms of showing its past experiences, such as long-term agronomic and farming systems research, and engaging in the broad debate as to how the CGIAR has impact in NRM.

In the Dry Areas, water and poverty are inextricably inked. The Center will strive to achieve substantial improvement in the sustainable use of water resources in the region, while carefully considering the human needs of the people who survive and work on these lands.

Recommendation 8

*In view of the importance of the Regional Programmes to ICARDA's interactions with its stakeholders and the Programmes' increasing share of the total financial resources of the Center, the Panel **recommends** that ICARDA undertake a strategic review of its outreach activities to examine issues of strategic importance including: regional coverage, devolution/outsourcing, interaction with NARS, interplay between research and outreach, information management and its role in the diverse regions.*

We agree with the thrust of the recommendation to review issues of strategic

importance of the Regional Programmes.

We noted that the Panel recognized the substantial positive changes in ICARDA's Regional Programmes with respect to their contribution to the research continuum and staffing. In particular, we are pleased the Panel recognizes the additional financial resources accruing to the Center, as well as the justified geographical expansion. The expansion of regional programmes has been possible because of special project funding, which permits us to fulfill the approved research agenda and allows to further strengthen collaboration with NARS.

ICARDA's research in the region reflects the concept of a "Center without walls" whereby the research venue is based on comparative advantages in terms of human and physical resources available.

Strategic review of interaction with NARS is a continuous process at ICARDA, based on the feedback obtained from NARS through annual national and regional coordination meetings. However, considering the dynamics in the NARS and many developments in the Regional Programmes, ICARDA will further review its regional activities within the framework of the Centers 1997 Strategy.

Recommendation 9

*To improve research quality and relevance, and to help develop a more prominent place for the conduct of multidisciplinary research at ICARDA, the Panel **recommends** that the Management promote quality and multidisciplinary research through recognition, rewards, and other incentives, and by assuring that appropriate criteria are covered in its Performance Evaluation process.*

We agree with the Panel's recommendation for further promotion of multidisciplinary research through a variety of reward and recognition systems.

Multidisciplinary research is a keystone of ICARDA's research strategy. ICARDA will further promote this objective through expansion of its existing reward and recognition systems.

We believe it will be possible to further expand our existing staff recognition procedures. Our current system of awards to Junior and Senior Scientists of the Year will be maintained. Additional recognition mechanisms will be developed and implemented as appropriate.

Staff incentives for quality science production and multidisciplinary activities will be carefully reviewed, and the present system will be amended as required.

Recommendation 10

*Recognizing that ICARDA has conducted a wide-range of studies offering partial insight into poverty, the Panel **recommends** that ICARDA determine,*

with its partners, the rural livelihood strategies of the poor in its region to clarify what research options, investments, policies, and technologies are most likely to benefit them. Special emphasis should be given to highly vulnerable segments of the population.

The Center welcomes the recommendation. The well-being of the poor in the dry areas is central to the mandate of the Center. In marginal lands, where water is a scarce resource and climatic conditions are unpredictable the livelihood of the rural poor poses significant human and social challenges. The refinement of strategies to address this central theme is fundamental to the work of the Center.

The Center has already been active in conducting livelihood studies. New projects already approved at the Center in the areas of WANA and Central Asia will allow greater focus and depth on household and community surveys. This data, when linked to other data sources available to the Center should allow for the development and implementation of more comprehensive and integrated livelihood strategies, in partnership with the NARS in the region.

The approach lends itself to the continued integration of activities within ICARDA's diverse research portfolio, ensuring inputs of a broad nature on biological, social, economic and policy research. The Center looks forward to achieving meaningful success in this fundamental area of the CGIAR's and Center's research mandate.

Recommendation 11

*The Panel **recommends** that TAC undertake a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the continuing decline in unrestricted core funds on the Centers' research activities and their outputs and impact, as well as on their interactions with national agricultural research systems and advanced research institutions.*

The Center appreciates the recommendation the Panel makes to TAC. The dramatic shift at ICARDA in unrestricted core from 80% to 30 has had consequential impacts in terms of proposal preparation and reporting requirements. For **ALL** Centers these changes clearly impact the scientist time and the Center's flexibility.

Over the time these changes can have substantial implications on both medium and long-term research. Sustainable programs at the Centers, such as crop improvement, long-term agronomy and monitoring data collection at benchmark sites are vulnerable under these circumstances.

We endorse the recommendation the panel makes to TAC and we hope that TAC will undertake the analysis and make recommendations for the benefit of all CGIAR Centers.

Recommendation 12

*Realizing that the complexities of managing research at ICARDA require many interactions between project managers and other units, and that staff productivity will be greatly enhanced if a computerized management information system (MIS) is available, the Panel **recommends** that ICARDA implement a purpose-built MIS system for project management, if necessary acquiring the services of a consultant with experience on the recently-commissioned Oracle financial package, so that a user-oriented system is put in place.*

We agree with the Panel's recommendation regarding the implementation of an MIS system for project management.

The Center has already developed the initial phase of a computerized WINDOWS based project management system. It was installed in early 1999, and project managers are beginning to input data.

We will plan to enhance the existing system based on the past experience and taking into consideration the future requirements of the user community. The current MIS system uses ORACLE RDBMS and application object library (AOL) for all of its six modules. The enhanced project management system will be made as another module of the existing MIS suite. The new project management system will also use the AOL to have a user interface similar to that of the existing six modules. It will also be seamlessly integrated with the six modules to share the relevant information like project finance data from the general ledger.

Further, user orientation and training will be an important component to the implementation of a fully functioning system.