

**Planning in Muddy Waters – Orientation for Strategic Planning in CGIAR Centers**

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# **Planning in Muddy Waters – Orientation for Strategic Planning in CGIAR Centers**

**The report has been written and compiled by  
Peter Gardiner, Jürgen Hagmann and Gunther Hahne**

The content of this report is grounded in the outcomes of a Research Priority Setting Workshop held from the 28 to 30 May 2002 amongst research planners from Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers, on behalf of the Center Deputy Director Generals' Committee (CDDC). The original Workshop documentation and outcomes have been distributed, unprocessed, to participants. Whilst the Executive Summary reflects the agreed outcomes and recommendations of the Workshop, this report has been synthesized and developed by the authors who take responsibility for the subsequent changes.

Participants in the Workshop were:

Doug Pachico, CIAT  
Ken MacDicken, CIFOR and Workshop co-convener  
Mike Spilsbury, CIFOR  
Prabhu Pingali, CIMMYT  
Hugo Li Pun, CIP  
William Erskine, ICARDA  
Peter Gardiner, WorldFish Center (previously ICLARM – The World Fish Center)  
and Workshop convener  
Anne-Marie Izac, ICRAF  
Cynthia Bantilan, ICRISAT  
Lyndsey Withers, IPGRI  
Ren Wang, IRRI  
Gunther Hahne, WARDA

Jürgen Hagmann, Workshop Facilitator

With the support of Lim Li Sze, WorldFish Center

# Foreword

At the annual meeting of the Center Deputy-Directors' Committee (CDDC) in Washington in October 2001, a conscious effort was made to allow scope for the research managers of the system to discuss issues relating to the science program, and not just the administrative and logistical functions of the Centers. Chief amongst the concerns of the research managers is the setting of priorities – both at the strategic and operational levels – within the Centers they represent. The discussion session led by Ken MacDicken of Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), helped identify the range of approaches being attempted, and the difficulties encountered in tackling this common issue. The level of interest immediately identified this topic as one worthy of further deliberation and debate, best undertaken away from the constraints of the Annual General Meeting. The suggestion that the CDDC should hold a meeting for research managers and planners from the Centers to discuss priority setting was endorsed by Center Directors' Committee, and WorldFish Center offered to host such a meeting in Penang, Malaysia.

The group engaged Jürgen Haggmann to help guide the conceptual process and to facilitate the Workshop as he has close knowledge of the CGIAR system, and CIFOR and WorldFish worked with the facilitator during early 2002 to develop the meeting format. Eleven Centers participated directly in the Workshop in May at their own cost; fourteen Centers provided background information on priority setting processes at their Centers. We suggest that the outcomes of the Workshop, which was conducted informally and in a most cooperative atmosphere, provide important building blocks to guide the process of strategic priority setting at the Centers in the future. The report includes an additional “check list” approach to assist Centers and others implement strategic planning processes. We believe there are important messages in this synthesis report for the Centers themselves, but also particularly for the CGIAR system (and its component parts) as it grapples with the establishment of a common identity and unified approaches to its portfolio of research. All need to consider how strategic priorities have and are being set, and to put in place processes that respond to the system's overall goals, and which can guide the component parts through the inevitable changes and shocks that a large body encounters.

A major, if perhaps less tangible, outcome of the Workshop is the beginnings of a collegial community of practice amongst the research managers and planners of the Centers. This is key to developing broadly applicable, flexible processes and methods of use to the system as a whole. We believe that the understandings and processes started in Penang, can be used for the benefit of many issues currently confronting the CGIAR. These include placing the system in its rightful place in the “research for development” community, planning for sectors, regions and collaborative research developments, including Challenge Programs, and assisting day to day operational management in a different and broader partner environment.

Peter Gardiner  
*Workshop Convener,*  
*WorldFish Center, Penang, Malaysia, May 2002*