

4. How to Put the Framework into Practice

4.1 General Procedure

When envisaging a strategic planning exercise, a helpful starting point is the development of a matrix relating the requirements imposed by the four planning cornerstones with the principles and approaches necessary to obtain the required information (an illustrative example from the Workshop is shown in Annex Item 6). Once the availability, completeness and quality of all required data and other necessary elements have been checked against the matrix, the sequence in which the building blocks of the planning process will be assembled can be organized. The exact sequence depends on the specific needs and conditions in which the planning exercise will take place. Some elements of the actual planning process may be started while the information pertaining to other cornerstones is still being gathered.

The schedule and checklist proposed in the Annex (checklists 1-5) provide a synthesis of the steps to be followed and help in management and oversight of the planning exercise.

Participants in the Workshop applied the recommended cornerstone framework to earlier Centro International de la Papa (CIP) and anticipated West African Rice Development Association (WARDA) planning processes. In particular, the cornerstone framework was helpful in designing the following aspects of the process:

Examples where the cornerstone concept was found helpful

- Definition of why the planning process was to be undertaken (whole Center strategy, new area, revision of regional focus etc.)
- Detailing all necessary components
- Definition of the actors (architect, champion, stakeholders and the assembly of a design team)
- Ensuring commitment by DG, BoT, and the need to generate commitment by scientists
- Assembly of skills (and to ensure appropriate coverage in such areas as social science, writing skills etc.)
- Definition of a realistic schedule.

Participants suggested that the analysis of the external environment could be undertaken with stakeholders (such as the Mega-trend workshop – see Box 2) and could serve to invigorate staff and partners alike fatigued by earlier strategic revisions, as well as to help explain wider implementation issues with partners. The focus on inventories of current activities, lessons learned and scans of the realistic implications of new science, was also a useful reality check. It became clear in planning such processes that those charged with implementation should be involved from the outset. The assembly of skills, and the definition of the process and sequence to be undertaken, depends on the needs and capacities of the different Centers (or partner consortia) and there will thus be some variability in implementation of different planning events. The process development steps would necessarily form part of a feedback loop with budget projections (or applications to donors) to support a process of sufficient rigor to meet the objectives.

The strategic planning exercise is a negotiation process, between the Center and its diverse partners, about how the future – uncertain by nature – is to be interpreted. The appreciation of the future is usually built up to the greatest advantage of all concerned parties, and the negotiations include how best the path to the preferred future is to be translated into concrete actions. As in all negotiations, the different steps are not “one-off” events. Most of them are meant to be evolutionary – they will change their importance and contents in accordance with information gathered and advances made in other fields (see Boxes 5 and 6). It is therefore important to conceive the different steps as an iterative process. For example, the information about the external environment or the appreciation of the key stakeholders may change considerably after holding a stakeholder workshop, necessitating a thorough revision of the interpretation of the information made after the first round. Feedback loops should be included between the different cornerstones.

Box 6: A process plan for strategic planning (provided by CIAT)

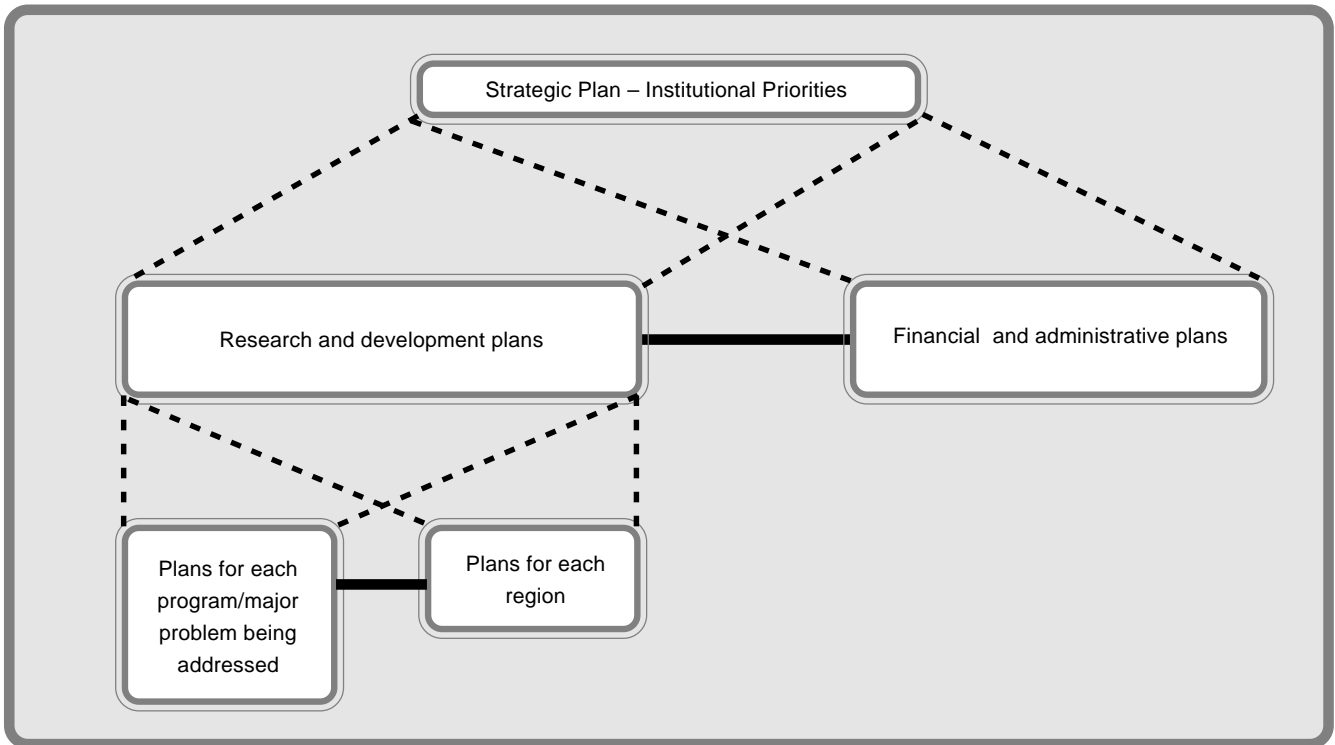
The development of the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) Strategic Plan 2001-2010 followed a process that involved three parallel lines of activities: an appraisal of the external environment; consultation with stakeholders and partners; and internal reflection by CIAT staff. The appraisal of the external environment entailed two main activities at the outset of the process. In September 1999, CIAT organized an international conference to examine the relationships between agricultural research and poverty. Then, in November 1999, the CIAT Annual Review looked first at alternative scenarios for the future of CIAT; secondly, at the past and expected impacts of alternative lines of CIAT research; and thirdly, analyzed the recent advances and future directions in different areas of science (including for example, biotechnology, pest management, soils, and geographical information systems). This appraisal of the external environment in terms of socio-economic trends and scientific opportunities provided an overall context within which to frame the plan. This material is presented in the introduction in the final plan document.

Because CIAT cannot alone achieve its research objectives, consultations with partners and stakeholders were crucial. Partners work along with CIAT to do research together around a common research agenda, while stakeholders finance CIAT's research. To be effective, CIAT's new strategic plan must be aligned with both partners and stakeholders. Partners were consulted through three mechanisms. First, there were specific planning meetings with key research partners in Colombia and Brazil. Second, there was an ongoing discussion with key national and regional systems through the regular meetings of the Director of International Cooperation both bilaterally and through regional bodies such as Foro Regional de Investigacion y Desarrollo Tecnológico (FORAGRO), Program Cooperativo de Investigacion y Transferencia de Tecnologia Agropecuario para los Tropicos-Suramericanos (PROCITROPICOS), Program Cooperativo de Investigacion y Transferencia de Tecnologia Agropecuario para la subregion Andina (PROCIANDINO), and Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA). Third, groups of senior national research system leaders were invited to CIAT for consultation. These included a group each from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Consultations with stakeholders occurred through two main mechanisms. First, in 1999, there was a CGIAR External Program and Management Review which provided a basis for assessing with stakeholders CIAT's performance and future directions. Second, the DG personally visited over a dozen of the major investors in CIAT to discuss with them future directions for CIAT. These consultations provided key elements to CIAT's strategic plan, not only in its regional strategies as laid out in the plan but also in some of the major foci of the plan.

The knowledge of the CIAT scientific community provided key input to the design of the plan, while the commitment of CIAT scientists to the plan is vital to its implementation. Staff consultation was initiated through a working group that developed four scenarios for the future of CIAT. These scenarios were discussed with the BoT at the 1999 Annual Review. Subsequently, four working groups were formed to consider the future vision of CIAT. Two working groups were comprised of experienced internationally recruited staff; one group of more recently recruited international staff; and one group of nationally recruited staff. Out of the work of these groups came a brief three-page document laying out the guiding principles for the development of the strategic plan. These were considered and endorsed at a BoT meeting in May 2000 as "CIAT's Strategic Vision." To translate this into a full plan, a second set of internal working groups were formed around five scientific areas: agro-biodiversity and genetics; integrated pest management; soils; geographical information systems; and socio-economics. Based on these reports, and the other elements developed to date, the CIAT Management Team drafted the definitive Strategic Plan that was considered and approved by the BoT in November 2000.

The Strategic Plan presents the future vision of CIAT and the major elements of its research agenda. It does not, however, lay out the specific research objectives, projects, organization, or assignment of resources. These instead are included in rolling three year Medium Term Plans, the first of which, under the new Strategic Plan, was presented to the Board for 2002-2004 in November 2001. Most of the work to develop this Medium Term Plan was carried out by the project teams that were formed earlier around the different elements of the research agenda of the Strategic Plan.

Box 7. The interaction between planning levels (an example provided by ICRAF)



4.2 Guiding Principles and Core Values

A successful completion of the planning (negotiation with partners) process, and a satisfactory product, can only be expected when the negotiating partners share a number of core values, and when they agree on a few principles that guide them through the ups and downs of the negotiation process.

Some important core values have been identified by the participants of the Workshop. A common denominator is that all contribute to the building of a climate of trust between the negotiating partners, the creation of conditions that produce the degree of confidence necessary for a Center and its partners to commit themselves to undertake a long-term collaborative endeavor.

These principles appear to be generally applicable. However, the list could be amended by “enlightened self interest” i.e. the consciousness of all partners that they are indeed engaged in a process and development of a product which will be useful to their respective communities in the future, but where all concerned

partners will have to cede in some areas in order to gain in others.

Some important core values

- Commitment to quality
- Solidity of background knowledge
- Transparency of the process
- Accountability of the process to stakeholders
- Subsidiarity
- Inclusiveness of stakeholders
- Democratic Leadership
- Credibility

In order to produce a document that will be useful in the long term, it is necessary that the process be characterized by clarity of purpose, a clear vision, rigor in the process and logic in its design, by a sense of ‘adaptiveness’ to changes occurring during the negotiation process, and foreseeing adaptation in response to future changes and challenges. The whole process can only be completed successfully if all stakeholders participate with conviction about the

importance of the exercise, the integrity of the process, and the quality of the contributions. Finally, important as the strategic planning might be, the partners should keep a keen eye on the cost-effectiveness of the mobilized resources and envisaged approaches. These attributes of a sound process can be summarized:

Some attributes of a sound strategic planning process

- Strategic planning as a negotiation process
- Clarity of purpose
- Clear vision
- Rigor and logic in process design
- Adaptativeness
- Participation (stakeholder Buy-in)
- Broad acceptance
- Cost effectiveness

4.3 Pre-conditions

A number of pre-conditions represent absolute requirements in order for the strategic planning process to have a chance of success. As we have seen (paragraph 3.1), top management, in particular the DG, must be firmly committed to the exercise and demonstrate this commitment through the allocation of adequate financial resources and through personal involvement in the process. Support by the BoT is an indispensable moral support without which it will be difficult to mobilize the enthusiasm and engagement necessary for successful completion of the process and the production of a quality product.

The identification, nomination and support of an active and capable champion that coaches the process dynamically and diplomatically through all its phases are a further set of requirements of absolute importance.

The champion is a person that drives the planning process in a competent and dynamic way. Her/his main attributes are conviction, clear vision and understanding of the process, and a diplomatic approach to convincing all planning partners. It is helpful if the champion has a strong hierarchical weight, ideally the DG or another member of top management. However, the task of the champion is very demanding on her/his time; if the task of champion is delegated to a person who is not from top management, Center management should take every measure possible to invest the champion with similar institutional weight and credibility. All other pre-conditions fulfilled, it is the character of the champion that can make the difference between the success and the failure of the strategic planning process.

The strategic planning process must be adapted to the needs and requirements of each institution as well as to the objectives that are to be achieved through the strategic plan and planning process. The process itself will take very different shapes depending upon these needs, and funding requirements can be expected to vary within a wide scope. An institution that is fully aware of all factors relating to its external environment has a clear advantage over another that does not. The latter institution will be obliged to carry out such studies before the planning process can even be started. However, it must be stressed that there is no one absolute quality for a strategic plan, except that it must match the expectations and requirements, and it must fulfill the task for which it was designed.

Some indispensable pre-conditions

- Commitment by DG
- Commitment by BoT
- Active and capable champion to drive the process (preferably enjoying an 'integrative' reputation within the organization and among stakeholders)