



RAFI



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The CGIAR's last Mid-term Meeting has ended:

“Can Donorsaurus Mollify Treasury-Rexs?”

Nice try but no Cigar

The last-ever Mid-term Meeting of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has shuffled into extinction in Durban, South Africa. The fate of the outmoded Green Revolution centers - the South's most important scientific research system, remains in limbo. The “donorsaurus” (as its 58 funding governments and foundations have been dubbed) are faced with a number of unresolved challenges ...

Historically challenged: The Green Revolution harks back to the 1940's and Norman Borlaug's pioneering work in the hills outside Mexico City breeding semi-dwarf wheat. Short-strawed wheat, maize and rice push a plant's energy into its grains. Cereal production, with pumped up fertilizers, irrigation and herbicides, boomed. By 1970 Borlaug was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and shortly thereafter, the thin green band of research stations that sparked the Revolution were organized into the CGIAR's International Agricultural Research Centres, the IARChy fed by the CG's “donorsaurus”. Thirty years have passed since the halcyon days of the CG's founding. There are now 16 Centres, 58 donors (mostly governments, foundations and the World Bank), about 8000 researchers and support personnel, and an annual budget of almost \$340 million.

At thirty, however, “Cigar” (as German advocacy groups sometimes call it), isn't quite the poor's “Che Guevara” it once hoped to be. The 16 “big box” science campuses scattered around the South are looking a little ragged around their radical fringes. The funding, in real dollars, is stagnating. Good scientists are being let go – or running off to better provisioned laboratories in the private sector. The old revolutionaries have been caught in dalliances with the Biotech industry, flirting with life patents ...

But even as the threat of extinction looms over them, some of the centers are proving themselves progressive and agile. As a result, some civil society organizations monitoring the CGIAR System would like to see the IARCs shed their cumbersome campuses and evolve into regionally-focused “science-animateurs” or collaborative catalyts.

The System's donors have been propelled to take action. CGIAR's semi-annual meeting held in Durban, May 21-25 was to decide on a new programme and institutional strategy that would revitalize public sector agricultural research and restore the confidence of its financial backers in Europe, Japan and North America.

At best, it was a biocrats partial success. Probably not sufficiently so as to return stability to the System and confidence to those critical of CGIAR science and policies. A nice try but no Cigar ...

“IARChy” challenged: Uniquely informal in style (there is no constitution or by-laws) the CGIAR has three centers of power: the national governments who donate to the System (led by Japan, the European Union, and the USA in that order); the World Bank (which hosts the CG secretariat, provides it with its Chair – always a Bank V-P – and antes up about \$50 million a year for the infrastructure of the 16 Centres, and the 16 Centres themselves. Each Centre has an independent legal identity and board (though they obviously need donors) and operate with a long history of complex bilateral (and host country) arrangements that continues to give them leverage.

Since 1994, when the CGIAR embarked at its efforts at “renewal”, the Bank and donors have been aware that mergers and liquidations would be needed. Indeed, some mergers did take place in the early 90’s but since then, the IARChy has stood resolutely against major changes. In preparation for Durban, a Change Design and Management Team (CDMT) crafted proposals that acknowledged the need to merge and eliminate centers but avoided specific recommendations or even processes. Some observers thought the team may have misunderstood their mandate to be change, design, *or* management” and that the report has come out in favour of “design”.

Intellectually challenged: The CDMT proposed that over a five year period, the CGIAR shift half of its funding to support a set of “Global Challenge Programmes” such as climate change, water, a farming systems strategy to take into account the devastating effect of AIDS on African food security, and strategies to utilize new crop genomics technologies (i.e. “GM food”). Initially, the new challenges were to be funded with new money. Theoretically, if enough new money was attracted to these socially “sexy” topics, the IARCs might carry on with their mundane mandate to increase crop yields and conserve genetic resources while launching new collaborative initiatives with non-CG partners in the new challenge areas.

A nice idea nobody bought. Privately, World Bank officials let it be known that they were prepared to shift between \$ 15-20 million of their regular \$50 million contribution into the new Global Challenge Programmes more or less immediately. Some other donors hinted that they were prepared to do the same. The net effect would be that the majority of the core unrestricted funds now used by the 16 Centres to ensure their institutional survival would suddenly move to the “GCP” (dubbed “Give Cash Please”) pocket. By this slight of hand, donors hoped to force the Centres to restructure and to collaborate more closely with national and regional agricultural research systems in the South.

But in proposing to move half of the CG budget (about \$170 million) into the GCP over five years, the donors were faced with a political embarrassment – or impossibility. Clearly, they were revealing that they were unhappy with half of the current spending activities of the System. Since the Challenge Programmes were far from detailed or adopted, the move says much more about what they didn’t want than what they did want. How could the “donorsaurus” return home to their capitals to convince their treasury ministries (“T-Rexs”) to continue funding such a dubious proposition?

Regionalisation challenged: The governments who donate the CGIAR have long been aware that there is very little political cache in dumping millions into international science facilities in the absence of a newsworthy Green Revolution. Foreign and trade ministries can get far more “bang for their buck” supporting national and regional

agricultural science initiatives that strengthen local laboratories and resource local scientists. In response, the 16 Centres claim that about one-fifth of their total funding actually goes to capacity building at the national level. Nobody – but nobody – is enthusing about the results.

For this reason, the drive to reduce the number of Centers and to design challenge programmes that emphasize national and regional collaboration, lay behind many of the proposals in Durban. In the end, however, IARChy opposition to core funding cuts combined with the donors' inability to carry through regionalisation. While everybody talked about "bottom-up" regional priority setting, no one in Durban knew how to do it. In order to paper over their confusion, donors agreed to establish a process for adopting new challenge programmes between now and their next meeting during International Centers' Week in Washington October 29th to November 2nd. So much for real grass roots participation.

Governance challenged: The donors did adopt a series of modest institutional changes – the kind that can be vital to bureaucrats and boring to almost everybody else. Some of the changes do, however, indicate political tendencies. Chief among them is the decision to create an Executive Council and do away with one of the System's two semi-annual meetings. Historically, the twice-yearly events have been open to virtually anybody who drops by. With exceptions, CGIAR's decision-making processes may have been cumbersome but they have always been transparent. Removing one of the global gatherings is a reasonable move toward greater efficiency but the formation of the Executive Council cuts the transparency and the participation of about half the donors who might not win seats at the table. In the end, it was agreed that all members could be observers to Council sessions even if they could not speak. In reality, this means that the OECD governments – who can afford to send observers – will be present while South donors will not. Further, in a somewhat unseemly scramble for influence, the NGO Committee and the Private Sector Committee won seats on the Council, as did the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Development. When the music stopped, only farmers were left standing without a chair. Although the world's two most important federations of farmer organizations were in the room, Via Campesina (for the world's smallest and poorest farmers) and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (not so small nor so poor), no one stood to offer them a seat. All that talk about grassroots participation but the South and farmers lost out.

Balance challenged: Durban exposed – if not a power struggle – then certainly uncertainties about power distribution between the CGIAR's co-sponsoring agencies (the Bank, FAO and UNDP). The MTM failed to clarify the CG's support for the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Development and its vital regional fora. The role of the GFAR Secretariat hosted by FAO in Rome is not clear in relation to the System Office that the donors did agree to establish in Washington. This will consolidate the present CGIAR secretariat with the Future Harvest public awareness and fundraising campaign and possibly unite some other services so far offered by the Centers. At the same time, the move to turn TAC (the prestigious Technical Advisory Committee) into a Science Council, and the future role of the corresponding secretariat at FAO is also unclear. While some restructuring could prove beneficial, the full involvement of FAO as a co-sponsor needs to be assured and a proper balance of strategic and operational planning, monitoring and evaluation functions between the Science and Executive Councils elaborated. The new Science Council also needs the full participation of CGIAR's constituencies – especially small farmers' organizations actively concerned with research.

Future challenges: For all half-resolved decisions in Durban, the "donors" continue to score high marks for dedication and goodwill. CGIAR continues to be a remarkably transparent and collegial system refreshingly open to new ideas and partnerships. The CGIAR's Chair, Ian Johnson, scores especially high marks for his commitment to

consultation and dialogue. It is important that this approach continue in the months ahead as donors try to sort out the fall out from Durban and to explain to their T-Rexs why financial flows should continue in this era of great extinctions.

Taxonomy of the IARC Kingdom		
CG Speak	CSO Translation	Definition
“Shareholders”	<i>Donorsaurus</i>	Government and foundation delegates to CG meetings and those who directly monitor IARC activities
“IARCs”	<i>Dinersaurus</i>	The 16 Centers that receive funding, directly, and indirectly, from the donorsaurus
“Stakeholders”, also “clients”	<i>Dinnersaurus</i>	NARS (including farmers), the bread and butter of IARC research and justification
“Investors”	T-Rexs	Treasury-Rex (or finance officials) who approve the CGIAR budget contributions
“NGOs”	<i>Prontosaurus</i>	Civil Society Organizations (mistakenly called Nongovernmental Organizations in the CGIAR) that are always pushing for overnight (“Pronto”) revolutions
“Private Sector”	<i>Predataurs</i>	The CGIAR’s Private Sector Committee and the companies that have dealings with the IARCs

This is a joint news release of the German Forum Environment and Development and the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI). The two organizations have been cooperating closely for more than one year on issues of common concern related to CGIAR, GFAR and FAO. Susanne Gura of the German Forum and Silvia Ribeiro of RAFI attended the Durban MTM. They can be contacted as follows:

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