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Memo

September 30, 1987

To : The Chairman of the Board and Chairman
of the Program Committee and all Trustees

From: The Director General

I enclose copies of the covering letter of the
Chairman of TAC to the Chairman of CGIAR and TAC's Interim
Commentary on the External Reviews of IRRI. These will
be helpful while considering Board's reaction to the
SPC report.

D. S. Swaminathan

M. S. Swaminathan
Director General

Sheds

Encl: a/s
MSS:d

I Balance: Importance of Ecologies
in terms of area, distribution
& production

II Genetic Enhancement Strategy

Yield Enhancement
Hybrid Rice

Upstream - AF National
IRTP Composition Agonomy

Strengthening NARS

III Collaboration with IITA, WARDA, CIAT

Global Reproducibility
Eastern & Southern Africa

Germplesum
Library
Network
Knowledge on Tropical Rice

IV Farming Systems Research
Multi He Key
Rice - Fish
Collaboration with other
centers
V IRRI's organizational
Departments - Programs
VI Training

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Chairman

Paris, 26 August 1987

Dear Dr. Hopper,

I am pleased to transmit to you the Report of the Third External Program Review of IRRI which, together with the External Management Review, was discussed by TAC at its 43rd meeting in Nairobi, Kenya.

This external review initiated a third round of such Center reviews, and its Terms of Reference reflected current thinking in the System that reviews should be more strategic in nature and less concerned with the minutiae of individual program elements. TAC considers that the Panel has fulfilled this objective admirably in undertaking a critical analysis of the Institute and preparing a forward-looking, constructive report.

During its discussions, the Committee noted that the Center did not have a Board-approved strategic plan, although a Strategic Planning Committee composed of Center staff, had been working for about a year, and their latest draft had been given to the Panel. However, without the endorsement by the Board, and without program leaders to discuss the implications of the recommendations, the Panel could comment only in very general terms. As far as TAC was concerned, in the absence of a Center strategy, it found it could not comment meaningfully on some of the Panel's recommendations.

The Committee decided therefore to prepare an interim commentary concentrating on those issues which were controversial or required clarification. This interim commentary is attached to the Panel's Report which is forwarded to you in advance of our final conclusions because it raises a number of issues which have implications for the whole System, especially for those Centers reaching maturity.

Dr. W. David Hopper
Chairman, CGIAR
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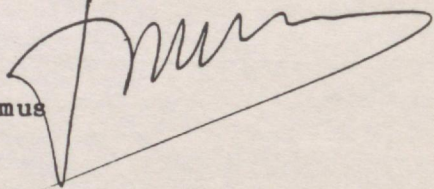
Some of these Centers have successfully attained their original objectives of strengthening the research and training capacities of those national systems that are the largest producers of their mandated crop or crops. Such issues as institute size and administrative capacity, narrow focus or broad diversity, and of whether one institute can be expected to meet the needs of the full range of all potential clients, especially if it is moving towards upstream research, are all touched upon.

IRRI is now at a crossroads. There is no question of the quality of IRRI's past achievements nor of its ability to continue to provide leadership and direction in the science of rice in the future. The question is rather in what manner and how should its mandate be implemented in the future. The evident strength of the national systems of the major rice producing countries requires IRRI to move into more upstream research with all deliberate speed if it is to bring new knowledge rapidly into the service of rice producers and consumers. In this view TAC is in complete accord with the Panel. TAC, and the Institute itself I am sure, would welcome a discussion of the Group's views on these topics before the strategic plan is in its final form.

The Institute has assured the Committee that its strategic plan will be completed prior to TAC's meeting in March 1988. The Committee therefore expects to present its final conclusions and recommendations on the external review of IRRI to the Group in May 1988.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Camus



TAC INTERIM COMMENTARY ON THE EXTERNAL REVIEWS OF IRRI

TAC is most grateful to the two Chairmen, Sir Ralph Riley and Professor Lowell Hardin, and their Panels for the penetrating reviews and excellent reports. TAC shares the views of the two Panels on IRRI's outstanding leadership in rice research and the contribution it has made to the well-being of millions of people in developing countries.

Both Panels have commented on the limitations imposed on their conclusions by the fact that IRRI had not completed its strategic planning exercise. The plan made available to the Panels was a draft document, prepared by staff, but for which the Board had not assumed responsibility.

TAC considers that one object of strategic planning is to inject rigour and transparency into the planning process. An approved strategic plan is consequently essential to an external review. TAC recognizes that the Centre will need time to develop its revised long-term plans but a review cannot be considered complete until the strategic plan has been presented for TAC's consideration and endorsement. Consequently, the reviews will remain on TAC's agenda until a final strategic plan has been cleared by the Board and presented to TAC for its endorsement.

Much of the material in both reports gives valuable insight into the changes that IRRI must make as it charts its future course. In general, TAC commends both reports to the IRRI Board and management for careful consideration as the Centre refines its strategic plan.

To assist in clarifying some of the issues that appeared to be controversial from the preliminary reactions of the Board, TAC offers the following interim commentary on the EPR and EMR reports. TAC considers that there is much in the report that the Board should consider carefully, but comments here are limited to those points that were drawn to its attention by the Panel, or that require additional clarification.

- The External Programme Review

In its analysis of IRRI's past successes and present character, the Panel has touched on some controversial issues to which the Board has responded vigorously. Nonetheless, TAC is pleased to note the Board's general acceptance of many of the suggestions the Panel has offered for its consideration.

Programme Balance

The Panel drew TAC's attention to the trade-offs IRRI is facing in adjusting its programme to meet the agreed CGIAR priorities and particularly to the choice between "productivity and livelihood". In discussing the need identified in the TAC Study on Priorities and Strategies to devote more effort to improving non-irrigated systems, the Panel commented:

① Program Balance
Relative importance of ecotypes

ZREI - NARS relationship

④ Genetic Enhancement
Genotype X Environment interaction

②
③

Composition of IRTP Nurseries

"If, within fixed budgets, this means that IRRI should substantially reduce maintenance research on the irrigated crop, considerable potential for further increase will be placed at risk unless the national systems can confidently be expected to take over the responsibilities."

TAC accepts that future strategies for the CGIAR Centres will depend heavily on the rate and extent to which national research systems can increase their own capabilities. The Committee agrees with the repeated emphasis given by the Panel, on the need for IRRI to keep its relationships with national research systems under critical review in order not to prejudice their ability to become self-reliant. In particular, TAC endorses the Panel's view that adaptation of varieties to local environments should increasingly be left to national programmes, enabling IRRI to accelerate its upstream approaches to research and thereby continue to contribute effectively to maintenance research.

Critical Review of relationships with NARS

TAC notes the somewhat divergent views of the Panel and the Board on the release of finished varieties, but sees the issue primarily as one of scale. While breeders will naturally wish to continue to release homozygous lines, both as potential varieties and as parents for crossing, the Committee agrees with the spirit of the Panel's recommendation that the scale of this activity should be selectively and progressively reduced. Clearly, weaker national programmes will continue to require homozygous lines on a scale adequate for the selection of finished varieties. Stronger programmes, however, will require only segregating populations or parents for crossing, for which prior fine-tuning is not necessary and thus the scale of supply can be very much less.

All-in-all, therefore, TAC sees in the Panel's report an endorsement of the feasibility of the strategy agreed by the Group. While accepting that there will be difficult trade-offs to be resolved, TAC considers that the move upstream should enable IRRI to continue to make major contributions to maintenance research for the irrigated crop. This would complement the work of the stronger national systems, leaving IRRI with the capacity to continue to assist the weaker programmes and tackle important problems in the rainfed environments.

Interpretation of Global Responsibilities

The Panel clearly recognized IRRI's status as the principal world research institute for rice, with similar status as a repository for knowledge. In considering how its global responsibilities should be interpreted, the Panel suggested the following:

- rice germplasm conservation and enhancement;
- library information services;
- network coordination;
- increasing knowledge on tropical rice.

In its response, the Board accepted this interpretation of global responsibilities and TAC agrees.

However, TAC recognizes that there are different interpretations of how these global responsibilities should be implemented. The Panel commented that TAC had not yet made recommendations on the overall sharing of responsibilities for rice research among the four Centres supported by the Group. It therefore took a rather conservative position with respect to IRRI undertaking research outside Asia.

TAC, in its current discussion on the sharing of responsibilities among Centres considers that as a basic principle a Centre with global responsibility for a given commodity should collaborate scientifically and in the most beneficial manner with other Centres that have regional or agro-ecological responsibilities for the same commodity. In these circumstances, however, the primary responsibility for coordination with the national programmes should be vested in the Centre best placed logistically to fulfill that function.

In areas, such as eastern and southern Africa, where no other Centre has responsibility for rice, IRRI should feel free to cooperate with national programmes. It should do so, however, in strict accordance with the Board's strengthened criteria taking due account of the strengths of the national programmes concerned.

With regard to IRRI's distribution of effort between Asia and other regions, TAC broadly accepts the Board's interpretation given in its response to the Review that its primary responsibilities lie in Asia, but that it also has obligations to other regions.

International Rice Testing Programme (IRTP)

TAC recognizes the important role the IRTP has played in the development of national capabilities in rice breeding and related research, but agrees with the Panel on the need for a critical and objective assessment of the programme's scope and future direction. Such an assessment should include consideration of the question of the posting of IRTP staff outside Asia and their integration with the host Centre's research activities. TAC sees obvious advantages in an arrangement whereby an IRRI scientist works at a host Centre as an equal member of an integrated research team. There is not only the need to assess the degree of integration but also ways of exploiting the advantages of a global Centre.

A Centre with a global commodity mandate has at its disposal a unique combination of the breadth of its germplasm collection and the array of environments to which that germplasm can be exposed. IRRI should ensure that its scientists continue to use this powerful research tool as effectively as possible to define new ideotypes and evaluate their potential.

Farming Systems Research

TAC endorses the Panel's comments that IRRI's research with a farming system's perspective could become too all-embracing and diffuse, that the focus should be on component research and that the location-

specific elements could best be done within national programmes. TAC considers that a Centre's involvement in the adaptive element of farming systems research should be limited to developing research methodologies, training, and stimulating awareness of the benefits of this approach. Centres should also maintain active linkages with national programmes as a means of channelling critical feed-back to their scientists.

In relation to considerations such as sustainability and the growing importance of diversification in Asian production systems, TAC acknowledges the need to design, analyze and evaluate improved cropping sequences, intercrops and relay-crops. It is also important that any new cropping patterns should take into account the various socio-economic and resource constraints of the range of rice environments, especially the unfavourable ones.

Although TAC therefore sees the need for IRRI to explore the use in rice-based systems of crops other than rice, it should strictly limit its own research on them. Because of the occurrence of genotype-environment interactions, evaluation of varieties of crops other than rice is essentially a task for national programmes. TAC considers that most of the required work on individual alternative crops could be undertaken through collaboration with other institutions, both national and international. IRRI should therefore actively search for such opportunities.

The consensus reached at the recent Workshop on Farming Systems Research (FSR) in the IARCs was that FSR is a multi-disciplinary approach rather than a distinct discipline. TAC shares this view and concurs with the EPR Panel that IRRI should reconsider the organization of its work on multiple cropping. If the future organization of IRRI is to be based on strong disciplinary departments, with research conducted and funded through projects, then it would seem logical that the staff working on multiple cropping should be absorbed into the most relevant disciplinary department.

Research on Soils and Water

From further elucidation of the Panel's views on IRRI's research on surface and floodwater hydrology, TAC understands that the Panel recommendation was based more on considerations of management than of science. Each department, or discipline, in IRRI's organizational structure must be strong enough to develop its own critical mass. The Panel's view, which is not clearly expressed in the report, is that a critical mass of scientists in a water management department would be tempted to stray into areas of research that lie outside IRRI's mandate. Consequently, it would be preferable, in the Panel's view, to maintain a critical mass on both water and soils within a single department. Accordingly, TAC draws this recommendation to IRRI's attention for consideration in the organizational adjustment required for its revised strategy.

The Committee recognizes that IRRI reorganized its water research programme in 1985 in consultation with IIMI and agrees that IRRI should limit itself to research on problems of on-farm water management, leaving the broader problems of irrigation management to IIMI.

and the impact of new rice technologies on the role of women in rice production and rice-farming families. However, TAC agrees with IRRI that it is essential to maintain some capacity for the analysis of aggregate sectoral and policy issues. Both will be needed for several purposes:

- to assess the global rice situation;
- to assess the potential impact of IRRI technologies, as an important input into the process of strategic planning; and
- to assist national programmes to analyze issues in rice research and policy.

Training

In its recommendations on IRRI's role outside Asia, the Panel apparently limited training to candidates from Asia. Given the differences between Asia and Africa, TAC considers that the Panel's comments on training African scientists are appropriate for western and central Africa but may leave a gap for downstream training of candidates from eastern and southern Africa.

In general, however, TAC suggests that IRRI should limit its training of candidates from outside Asia to those who are experienced scientists needing to extend their experience of rice environments, or who require training in new research techniques.

- The External Management Review

TAC is pleased to note the constructive spirit in which the IRRI Board has reacted to the report of the Management Review Panel. In general, the Committee strongly endorses the Panel's recommendations, but recognizes that the implementation of some of them will have to be considered very carefully by the Board. In particular, those relating to restructuring the organizational relationships of the scientific staff will require a balanced and somewhat cautious approach in order not to disrupt the research programs or seriously damage staff morale.

As the Panel observed, many of the problems it identified are not unique to IRRI, but are common to many research institutions that have reached maturity. IRRI was the first Centre to be created and there may well be lessons in the Review that should be heeded by other Centres as they approach a comparable age. The Panel's analysis of the problems created by the rapid and somewhat unrestricted expansion of a successful Centre is particularly relevant to the System as a whole.

TAC notes that the Board has already formed a Management Committee to monitor and advise on management issues. This Committee will relate to management matters in the same way that the Programme Committee relates to program matters. TAC agrees with the Panel that the formation of a Management Committee should, at least in the first instance, be regarded as temporary and experimental. Later on, the position could be reviewed, both in the context of IRRI and with respect to its usefulness for other Centre Boards.

The Panel emphasized the need for a more pronounced move towards programme and project management, a view that is reiterated in the report of the EPR and also alluded to in IRRI's draft strategic plan. TAC agrees that the suggested system of matrix management is appropriate to target the growing disciplinary research towards well-defined agricultural needs. TAC also agrees with the Panel that the present organizational structure should not be permitted to influence judgement on the direction of future strategies, nor should the present structure be altered until the strategy has been finalized.

The Panel recommended that IRRI should study the implications on future flexibility of its heavy dependence on restricted funding (restricted core plus special projects). TAC considers this recommendation to be timely, particularly in view of the additional restrictions very recently introduced by one of IRRI's major donors. These have the effect of increasing IRRI's restricted funding to 70 percent (compared with the figure of 53 percent referred to by the EMR for 1986).

While donors varied in the restrictions they imposed on the use of funds by Centres, each restriction added another constraint to a Centre's choice of strategy. TAC considers it essential for IRRI to explore its strategic options, at least in the first instance, without regard to restrictions on the use of funds.

- Next Steps

In conclusion, TAC welcomes the constructive discussion that the two reports have stimulated among the members of the IRRI staff, the Board and TAC. The recommendations and suggestions of the Panels need to be carefully considered by the Board and management. TAC looks forward to receiving the final version of IRRI's strategic plan which should accompany the Institute's mid-term budget proposal.