

1. Introduction

In the course of 2002 the Board of Trustees of ICARDA decided to undertake a Centre Commissioned External Review (CCER) of ICARDA's Outreach Activities. This review is undertaken in partial response to one of the recommendations of the 1999 EPMR Panel, and in reaction to the interest expressed on a number of occasions by the Programme Committee for an in depth analysis of the Centre's outreach activities. The EPMR Panel had recommended 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. The Board of Trustees, while addressing this matter, noted that ICARDA's outreach programme has never been the subject of a Centre Commissioned External Review or strategic review. It agreed that the current review should be forward-looking. The terms of reference of the CCER are presented in Annex I.

In reviewing ICARDA's outreach programme the EPMR Panel summarized its concerns as follows:

- **Regional Coverage:** The Regional Programme has over the years developed into an extensive collaborative research network involving all CWANA countries and numerous collaborating partners from within and outside the region. However, there is a concern that growth of the outreach programme might outpace the Centre's ability to provide adequate scientific and logistic support. It is a question of balance and focus, and it is crucial for ICARDA to maintain a credible and viable research programme and a sustainable outreach programme, as well as maintaining good balance and synergy between the two.
- **Devolution/Outsourcing:** The twin policy of devolving some activities to NARS partners and outsourcing others has been widely implemented. Advanced NARS are able and willing to undertake specific activities at sub-regional or regional level (e.g. Tunisia, disease screening; Morocco, screening for Hessian fly resistance; Egypt, developing protocols for genetic transformation). Some NARS wish to see more arrangements for outsourcing. While agreeing to ICARDA's pragmatic and flexible approach, the Panel suggests that clearer policy guidelines be developed in consultation with the relevant NARS.
- **Relations with Policy Makers:** While ICARDA's work is well appreciated by scientists and research managers, it is less known by policy makers in some countries. To ensure greater understanding of the work of the Centre by policy makers and to solicit their support ICARDA might consider convening meetings involving policy makers and top research managers to discuss relevant strategic and policy issues. This will be more important for ICARDA in future, as it becomes more involved in policy and socio-economic research and in challenging issues such as *in-situ* on-farm conservation of germplasm and the development and release of GMOs.
- **Centre-Region Interactions:** ICARDA has developed unique opportunities for interaction and cooperation with and among NARS, as both are highly valued by NARS. The main venue for such interaction could be national and regional planning meetings. As these meetings are increasingly dependent on

non-core funding, fewer scientists are able to participate. NARS have expressed concern about the long-term sustainability of these activities and expressed the wish that ways and means of ensuring their continuity could be sought, particularly as they are basic to ICARDA's core functions. The Panel believes that dialogue and interaction with NARS are fundamental to ICARDA's mission and a long-standing tradition, and protecting such interactions is important.

- **Interplay between the Headquarters and Regional Programmes:** The national and regional meetings, important in themselves, are equally important to effective interplay between ICARDA headquarters research and the regional programmes. The decline in attendance by scientists in these meetings, due to financial reasons, is leading to less interaction between headquarters and outreach research. The Panel was informed that normally advantage is taken when Regional Coordinators are called to headquarters during the annual Board meeting, offering opportunity for consultations among themselves, and with leaders of Research Programmes. This arrangement, together with excellent relations between the Assistant Director General for Research and the Director of International Cooperation mitigated the situation to a great extent, but ICARDA is advised to keep this under review.
- **ICARDA's Role in the Context of the Regional Programme:** Within the Regional Programme context, ICARDA is seen by the NARS as a partner, facilitator, service provider, and technical back-stopper. The role of ICARDA as a partner differs with NARS capacity, needs and the ability to make impact. There is general agreement that technical back-stopping and related activities have positive effects on the quality of national research, especially in research planning, management and reporting. It is important that expansion of outreach activities does not lead to recruitment of more generalist, technical assistance-type staff rather than scientists.
- **Information Management:** The information generated by the regional programmes through the numerous special research and development projects is gathered and analysed at the Centre level as part of the 19 MTP research projects. However, other information and experience have been accumulated, which should be retrieved and used effectively inside and outside the region. The Panel suggests that ICARDA review its approach to total data management from its regional collaborative activities.

The CCER Panel was composed as follows: Dr. Lukas Brader, former Director General of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (chair); Dr. Abderrazak Daaloul, Director General for Agricultural Production, Ministry of Agriculture, Tunisia; and Dr. Mohammad H. Roozitalab, Deputy Head International Scientific and Research Cooperation, Agricultural Research and Education Organization, Iran. Dr. Mohamed S. Zehni served, in his capacity as Member of the ICARDA Board of Trustees, as resource person/observer to the team. The curricula vitae of the Panel Members are presented in Annex II.

The review activities have been undertaken in the following step-wise manner:

- Meeting with ICARDA Regional Coordinators on 30-31 January 2003 at ICARDA headquarters at Tel Hadya to review and discuss matters related to the terms of reference;
- submission of reports by the Regional Coordinators with specific comments and detailed information on each of the terms of reference;
- circulation of a questionnaire to ICARDA staff to solicit their feedback on a number of matters related to outreach activities;
- interviews with scientists at headquarters to obtain further information on the development of their research activities in recent years;
- sending of a questionnaire to a wide range of national ICARDA partners in the CWANA region to collect their views on the effectiveness of the collaboration with the Centre;
- visits by team members to Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia and Uzbekistan¹, to seek the reaction of different partners to the ICARDA outreach activities;
- interaction with ICARDA management on matters related to outreach activities; and
- meeting of CCER team from 29 April to 3 May 2003 at ICARDA headquarters at Tel Hadya to review the information collected, discuss major findings and prepare the report.

¹ The number of countries visited was reduced because of the special situation in the region at the time when the visits were planned.