

5. Issues Raised by the EPMR Panel

The CCER Panel wholeheartedly agrees with the assessment of the EPMR Panel that ICARDA enjoys high standing among its partners and is well respected by national scientists and research managers. The Panel in the course of its field visits found also high regard by top policy makers, and noted that they were well aware of various details of activities carried out jointly by their country and ICARDA.

Through its collaborative networks, training programmes and various coordinating and planning mechanisms, extensive intra- and inter-country interaction and cooperation among NARS of CWANA has been promoted. The regional programmes are giving greater impetus to the work of ICARDA and have improved the Centre's ability to generate donor income.

However, as noted in the introduction to this report the EPMR Panel raised seven issues and these were examined in detail by the CCER Panel.

Regional Coverage: 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 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.

While this concern is a real one, the CCER Panel has seen no apparent evidence of a decline in the quality of science at headquarters. There are also no signs that the scientific credibility of the Centre has been diminished in the CWANA Region. On the contrary there is a continued high interest and strong demand to work with the Centre. The Panel was assured by Management and Programme Leaders that high quality research remains of utmost importance to the Centre. Within the restrained funding situation all possible avenues are pursued to maintain and preferably expand the research capacity of the Centre, for example, through the recruitment of post-docs.

In recent years, with the increased importance of restricted funding, scientists had to spend more time on the preparation of project proposals and reports, and to participate in a range of project activities and meetings of direct interest to them. Thus, there is more demand on scientist's time for the development and implementation of a much larger variety of activities. However, as a result of these special projects the interaction with NARS has increased and this is mutually beneficial.

Traditionally the CG system has used the number of publications in refereed journals as the criterion to measure the research outputs of the Centres. This remains probably the easiest one to use, notwithstanding the fact that it should certainly not be the only way to determine the quantity and quality of the work of research institutes that depend mainly on special project funding. The following table summarizes the annual number of ICARDA publications since 1990, using two year averages.

Year	Number of scientists	Publications in refereed journals		Conference/workshop papers and book chapters	
		no./year	no./scientist/yr	no./year	no./scientist/yr
1990/91	31	60	1.94	12	0.39
1992/93	32	75	2.34	65	2.03
1994/95	22	76	3.45	64	2.91
1996/97	23	59	2.57	83	3.61
1998/99	26	45	1.73	66	2.54
2000/01	25	44	1.76	61	2.44

Although the number varies from year to year the above figures show clearly a reduction in publications in refereed journals per scientist per year since the mid 1990s. Over the same period the number of conference/workshop papers and book chapters has only slightly decreased. Thus, while there may be no apparent reduction in the quality of research, there seems to be no doubt that there has been a gradual reduction in the quantity of quality research. And, as long as the Centre lacks the means to recruit additional staff, it will have to live with this reality, while in the meantime continuing to explore possible solutions.

Devolution/Outsourcing: in the history of ICARDA there is one example of devolution of a substantial part of its research responsibilities to a NARS. This concerned the transfer of faba bean research to Morocco in 1989. For a variety of reasons this became a failure and in 1997 ICARDA started the activities again at its headquarters. There have been no further attempts to devolve part of the research agenda, except for the devolution of responsibilities in the chain of activities in developing “finished” cultivars.

The EPMP Panel noted that some NARS wish to see more arrangements for outsourcing. While agreeing to ICARDA’s pragmatic and flexible approach, the Panel suggested that clearer policy guidelines be developed in consultation with the relevant NARS.

Outsourcing has been done on a couple of occasions, but the total effort has been rather limited. This matter is reviewed in more detail in chapter 7.4 where it is noted that: “outsourcing is a popular principle within the CGIAR system, but so far little effort has been made to carefully analyse the costs and benefits of it”. Consequently, a recommendation has been presented to address this.

No action has been taken by the Centre to follow up on the suggestion of the EPMP Panel to develop clearer guidelines. However, the CCER Panel believes that the current practice of preparing a contract indicating mutual responsibilities for each of the specific outsource arrangements, may well prove to be the easiest and most cost-effective approach.

Relations with policy makers: the EPMP Panel noted that while ICARDA’s work is well appreciated by scientists and research managers, it is less known by policy makers in some countries.

The CCER Panel has found no evidence in support of this concern. On the contrary discussions with Ministers or Deputy-Ministers of Agriculture showed that the Centre is well known at the highest levels. Also, ICARDA is attracting regularly many visitors including national policy makers. Ministers of Agriculture, Ambassadors, and other high level guests can be encountered frequently at the Centre. During visits by senior staff to countries meetings with high level officials are routinely organized. As a result ICARDA is well known at all levels as an effective partner for the further enhancement of national and regional agricultural research and development efforts in CWANA.

Nevertheless, this should not be a reason for complacency; continued efforts are needed to maintain this interest. During the country visits it became apparent that there is a need for a more systematic information/public relations approach at the regional level.

The Panel suggests that for ICARDA to maintain the excellent relations with its partners in CWANA two initiatives might be envisaged:

- *the holding of a presentation day in each of the major regions once every three years; and*
- *the regular publication of an information note especially addressing policy makers and their staff.*

The holding of regional presentation days would offer an opportunity to reach a wider range of policy makers beyond the Ministries of Agriculture, for example, Directors in the Ministries that play a key role in donor relations and project development at the national level. Regional presentation days could be combined with other meetings to reduce costs. The publication of information notes should attempt to create a sense of belonging by highlighting agricultural research and development issues and possible solutions, as well as examples of productive ICARDA/NARS collaboration. Such a publication should be produced in the main language of the region concerned.

Centre-Region Interactions: the EPMP Panel stressed that dialogue and interaction with NARS are fundamental to ICARDA's mission and are long-standing tradition; protecting such interactions is important.

The EPMP Panel notes that the main venue for interaction with NARS could be the annual and regional planning meetings. And it is concerned that fewer scientists are able to participate in these meetings. This concern could stem from the fact that not enough credit is given to the various other interactions between ICARDA scientists and NARS colleagues during the year. The most frequent and intensive form is the direct contact with scientists and research managers of the NARS. As noted earlier this is done through among others correspondence, e-mailing, workshops, training and in particular joint research projects.

Currently ICARDA is implementing 66 special projects and for 54 of them 21 scientists³ are the coordinator; the number varying from 1 – 9 projects per scientist.

³ There are currently 30 international scientists at Tel Hadya, who do not have the responsibility of being either a Programme Director or Unit Head.

The rest of the projects are managed by the Regional Coordinators. Coordination of projects requires close interaction with national colleagues and the above numbers are the best proof that these interactions are intensive. A concern raised in some countries is that collaboration is more and more directed to countries where it is easiest to develop and implement projects. This matter requires adequate attention from ICARDA's management.

The national and regional meetings continue to serve as an effective contact point, in particular with a broader group of NARS scientists and managers. And to meet their objectives adequate representation by ICARDA staff is essential. As noted earlier, it may be considered to hold the regional meetings less frequently, as also recommended by some of the countries visited, and to focus on major agricultural development topics relevant to the region concerned. Participation could then be decided based on the major agenda items. Also, the meetings could take place before or after the regional meetings proposed to keep regional policy makers and other relevant stakeholders well informed.

Interplay between the Headquarters and Regional Programmes: the EPMR Panel noted that 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.

This issue has already been addressed partly. There is no doubt that the countries would like to have more frequent interaction with ICARDA scientists and this is a good sign of respect for the Centre. Modern communication means have a very positive effect on the necessary information flows. The headquarters and outreach programmes are operated as one single programme, and this is well recognized by the management and most of the staff. As discussed in chapter 7.2, however, it is the Panel's impression that there may be opportunities to further enhance the interaction between headquarters and the regional programmes.

ICARDA's Role in the Context of the Regional Programmes: the EPMR Panel noted that it is important that expansion of outreach activities does not lead to recruitment of more generalist, technical assistance-type staff rather than scientists.

The Panel has seen no signs of this. As discussed earlier, in particular the increased responsibility for special projects has reduced in a number of cases the quantity of quality research, but there are apparently no clear signs of a reduction in quality. But given these developments in recent years the Centre could undoubtedly benefit from an expansion of its scientific capacity, especially through the recruitment of post docs, and carefully selected junior professional officers. Thus, the Panel welcomes the inclusion of such positions in some special projects, and encourages the Centre to continue to explore these and other avenues. This may have as a consequence that the senior staff members will increasingly become research managers and will carry out less and less research themselves. This must be considered as a normal evolution and may have the benefit of shielding the young scientists from too much administrative responsibilities.

Information Management: the EPMR Panel noted that 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.

This is a matter of concern for all the CGIAR Centres and can be resolved only through well planned efforts and extensive interaction with the scientists. The major issue is to decide/agree when and how data generated by scientists can be accessed by others. And this requires the development of guidelines that are followed in an effective manner by all concerned. ICARDA is moving in this direction, it is currently developing an ethics policy and a policy on data management. Drafts are under study by the Management Committee. In the meantime steps are also taken to establish the necessary communication facilities and data bases for this, for which the name extranet has been adopted.