

SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

Commentary on the Second External Program and Management Review (EPMR) of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)

April 18, 2007

The Report of the Second EPMR of ILRI was discussed at the Seventh Meeting of the Science Council (SC), held at ICRISAT, Patancheru, India, in the presence of Panel Chair, Dr. Lindsay Falvey, the Chair of ILRI's Board of Trustees, Dr. Uwe Werblow, and the Director General of ILRI, Dr. Carlos Seré. The SC thanked the Panel Chair and Members for a constructive and perceptive report. The SC agrees in general with the Panel's analysis of ILRI today and how it should evolve in the future. This analysis draws from the particular history of the institute recognizing the successful transformation from the ILCA-ILRAD merger and the changes that ILRI has undergone since the 1st EPMR.

The Panel's starting point was ILRI at the time of the 1st EPMR, which took place 5 years after the merger of two centers of disciplinary orientation, each with a distinctive culture. The SC is pleased to note the Panel's judgment that today ILRI is firmly established on a route to be a "regionally owned and globally driven livestock research institute" –to quote the DG—with a mission to serve the people that depend on livestock for their livelihoods.

The 2nd EPMR report presents 18 recommendations that the Panel considers important for further improving ILRI's performance as a globally relevant, well managed and financially sound Center, together with a significant number of suggestions particularly in section 3 on the research programs. Eleven recommendations are on strategic planning and research and 7 are on governance, management and finance. The SC is pleased to observe that ILRI has agreed with nearly all of the recommendations and has already made considerable progress towards their implementation. The SC endorses the findings of the review and the recommendations, while recognizing that the global livestock sector is particularly dynamic, given the rate of increase in the consumption of livestock products in the developing world and the current global interest in using land for biofuel production and its potential impact on livestock feed prices.

The SC finds the recommendations (and suggestions) comprehensive and constructive. While accepting ILRI's caveats to recommendations #4 (on pastoralists) and #6 (on People, Livestock and the Environment Theme), the SC expects ILRI to comply with the *intent* of the recommendations. With respect to recommendation #8 (on IPMS project), the SC understands that occasionally Centers are pressured (by e.g. donors) to take responsibility for managing development projects when it is perceived that there are no local institutions to do that. The SC, however, agrees with the Panel that alternative management options, such as private implementation agencies, need to be considered to relieve the Center from the risks (both financial and managerial time) of such involvement. The SC is not persuaded by the argument that ILRI needs to be involved in managing development projects in order to learn about and help evolve an emerging paradigm of "innovation systems". The ISNAR Division of IFPRI is arguably better positioned to undertake needed research on innovation systems.

Strategy and planning

The SC welcomes the Panel's recognition of ILRI's success in its strategy of influencing others to contribute to delivery of ILRI's mission: *'to reduce poverty and enhance sustainable development through livestock related research'*. ILRI is to be commended for its efforts to identify and manage different kinds of partnerships (including joint work with other Centers), which often need to be very complex, to serve research and development purposes. ILRI's high rate of joint publishing with both NARS (60%) and ARIs (53%) illustrates the success of its partnership strategy over a number of years. The SC notes that ILRI has had a CCER on Partnerships commissioned by its Board and encourages ILRI to evolve its partnership strategy towards the more general issue of sustainable agriculture, which is not much discussed in the report. As pressure on land increases due to the need to balance food security with energy security, ILRI's systems approach could have an increasing role to play in relation to sustainable agriculture.

The Panel views 10 years as a suitable general planning horizon for ILRI's research and recommends a five year plan that brings together the research, human resource and finance plans as a good management practice (#1). The SC is pleased to note that despite the difficulties of predicting the funding realities and the dynamics of the livestock sector in the developing countries, ILRI agrees with the recommendation finding it useful to develop a five-year business plan underpinning the MTP particularly for greater clarity in responsibilities for deliverable outputs and outcomes. The SC emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing the System Priorities through their incorporation into the day-to-day business in the annual operational plans as the SP framework plans mature.

The SC supports the Panel's recommendation of a 10 year planning horizon, particularly with respect to location of sites and staffing strategies. ILRI's response suggests that the 10-year horizon will not be reviewed until just prior to the next EPMP. A 5-year implementation plan will however be developed, relating to issues such as geographic scope (response to #2), staffing (response to #1) and a reassessment of the assets at its sites in Kenya and Ethiopia (response to #17). Changes in staffing, expanding geographical location of offices and asset disposal strategies are costly exercises (both in financial and human terms) and thus while welcoming the 5-year planning, the SC urges that the rationale for any changes to these strategies in the context of the 10 year planning horizon should be clearly recorded for the benefit of the next EPMP.

The SC noted that extensive quantitative strategic planning and priority setting exercises undertaken by ILRI in response to the 1st EPMP to provide more focus do not appear to have been referred to in the 2nd EPMP; this illustrates how changes in the individuals involved in management and EPMP teams can advocate different priorities within a Center's overall mandate. The SC would have liked to see how the quantitative analysis has and could continue to provide focus.

With respect to geographical focus, the SC agrees with Panel's recommendation #2 that ILRI *'requires a more geographically distributed allocation of a critical mass of resources'* in order to fulfill its broad global mandate. The SC supports ILRI's approach towards a broadening geographic spread of its research through an evolutionary process. This will necessarily include full consultation with key national partners in the regions as ILRI's global perspective unfolds. However, like the Panel, the SC does not view the Systemwide Livestock Program as the primary means of satisfying ILRI's global mandate. The SC notes the concern of recent EPMPs of the loss of focus on international public goods research in some Centers that have tried to implement

extensive regional programs by location in single countries. Therefore, the SC agrees with the Panel's recommendation that ILRI should share facilities with other CGIAR Centers to achieve the Panel's intent with respect to critical mass and it should collaborate with partners focused on a similar mission of delivering international public goods.

Research focus

The Panel makes a few recommendations for improving and adjusting the focus of the research program. Some of the recommendations (e.g. #4 and #6) are somewhat specific and are only partially accepted by ILRI. The Panel acknowledges that ILRI is best placed to decide on changes at the organizational level, but the recommendations imply that ILRI's ability to address the research topics highlighted could be improved. One such area emphasized by the Panel is research on pastoralists – an area where past involvement has been sporadic. ILCA was involved in such research that included consideration of how changing land tenure influenced the welfare of pastoralists. The SC agrees with the Panel that ILRI's orientation should be changed from considering pastoralists from an environmental point of view to addressing livelihoods issues. The report could have gone deeper in the analysis considering, for instance, decrease in available land and changes in land tenure as they affect the pastoralists. The SC agrees with the Panel's point of view that there are other pastoral communities outside SSA. Lessons learned in SSA might be of benefit in improving the welfare of such communities in parts of Asia.

ILRI has a mandate to conduct research on livestock diseases of importance to developing countries. Comments on the long time it has taken to develop a vaccine against *Theileria parva* need to be seen in the context of a similar effort by groups seeking to develop vaccines against other protozoan parasites, such as malaria. The first identification of a gene that encodes a surface protein of the human-infective stage of malaria was more than 30 years ago. In spite of large investments, predominately by ARIs, no vaccine has been developed so far. However, research has established that immunity to both malaria and theileriosis is mediated by both the antibody and cellular arms of the immune system. Vaccine development is complicated by the latter and a better understanding of the elements that elicit cell mediated immune (CMI) responses is required.

The SC is thus pleased to hear that ILRI considers vaccines still as a key intervention for many animal diseases. The SC agrees with the EPMR Panel that ILRI's approach to vaccine research needs to be carefully considered and it believes that ILRI's current intention to develop different tools for partners through a platform approach is appropriate. The Panel's suggestion to rank diseases through cost-benefit studies (p 27) needs to build on the extensive *ex ante* impact assessment and priority setting work previously undertaken by ILRI after the 1st EPMR.

The Panel acknowledged that the 1st ILRI EPMR recommended discontinuation of research on trypanosomiasis, but provided no further discussion. The disease remains an important livestock constraint in Africa, particularly affecting pastoralist societies. Conventional vaccines have been shown by earlier ILRAD/ILCA research to be an unlikely solution. However, there are continuing but dispersed efforts to work on alternative means to combat the disease (including drug and anti-vector strategies). This work lacks an international focus for application and ILRI may be advised to consider a role in relation to its target livestock systems.

The Panel's intention with regard to moving research on zoonotic diseases to the Theme related to markets (#6) was initially not quite clear to the SC, but clarification identified their perception of additional opportunities, which could arise from a stronger market focus.

The SC would have liked to see more clarity on how the Panel considered ILRI's role in developing its contribution to research on pigs and poultry since these were mentioned, but the SC agrees with ILRI, that relevant research objectives should be identified from an issues perspective rather than being species-driven. For these two domestic species, consideration also needs to be given to ILRI's comparative advantage in an area in which the private sector has heavily invested in developing measures for disease control.

BecA

The SC commends ILRI for establishing the BecA network with the involvement of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as a collaborator. BecA has been created as a regional "center of excellence" and ultimately to be a driver of economic growth. It has been difficult for countries in the region to pool their resources in support of such centers. BecA seeks long-term approaches, based on partnership for transformation of the economies of the countries in the region. Central to this economic development agenda will be the role of science, technology and innovation. As noted by the EPMR Panel, BecA will provide the opportunity for ILRI to be involved in the study of a range of diseases (#3) depending on the needs of its partners, which will be based on a problem-solving approach in building regional capacity in the biological sciences. The SC agrees with the Panel in suggesting that ILRI maintains a clear focus on its role in collaborations with like-minded partners.

Staff balance, achievements and impact

The SC notes that economists form a remarkably high proportion of ILRI research staff (32% of IRS) and that economists are involved in all themes, although (appropriately) to differing extents. This compares with only 28% in 'animal science/health/genetics and nutrition' disciplines. ILRI should be cognizant of the importance of maintaining an optimal balance of disciplines among its researchers. The SC will be interested to see the Center's vision for disciplinary balance in the long-term as ILRI develops its staffing plan.

The 'Market theme' has the smallest range of disciplines with only 5 out of 19 professional staff not having an economics/economic policy background. The Panel drew attention to this narrow skill base. The SC wishes to encourage ILRI to ensure that its scientists across disciplines are aware of the findings in this rapidly developing area and the implications for the context of their own research. The SC encourages ILRI to plan its activities in this area in the context of the System Priority 5B.

The SC was interested to learn that ILRI's decision to merge the 'Enabling innovation' and 'Targeting opportunities' themes, signaled in the current MTP 2007-2009, superseded the Panel's recommendation to do so. The SC is concerned by the lack of publications in major peer refereed journals in these two themes, given the significant investment in these areas and anticipates that the merger will bring more scientific rigor to the work in the new theme. The SC notes with satisfaction the relatively high level of publications—quantity and quality—in other themes.

The SC is pleased to see that ILRI will address the need to conduct *ex post* impact assessment across its research themes. This activity was intentionally kept dormant for the past six years due to the emphasis on *ex ante* work during the implementation of the strategic plan and systems approach, and the apparent lack of interest on the Center's part on evaluating the impact of discontinued projects for merely accountability purposes. The SC believes *ex post* impact assessment is a continuous need and ILRI's decision to de-emphasize it recently has contributed to its low ratings in the 3a and 3b components of the Performance Measurement System. The SC is pleased to learn that *Outcome Mapping*, a monitoring tool that ILRI has introduced to its teams, is seen as a complementary tool to *ex post* impact assessment, which the SC hopes will facilitate these appraisals.