

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Interim SCIENCE COUNCIL AND CGIAR SECRETARIAT

**REPORT OF THE
FOURTH EXTERNAL PROGRAMME AND MANAGEMENT REVIEW
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
(ISNAR)**

Interim SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

July 2002

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Dear Drs. Javier and Reifschneider,

I am pleased to transmit to you the report of the Panel that conducted the Fourth External Programme and Management review of the International Centre for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR).

The environment in which ISNAR works today is much different from that in which it was established 23 years ago. The nature and amount of funding available to the CGIAR and the Centre have changed; the range and competencies of alternative suppliers have increased; the capacity and nature of the NARS have in general increased although there are still countries, especially in Africa, where little progress has been made. These changes have accelerated in the past five years, and ISNAR has been required to make adjustments in its programme and activities.

In making its assessment of ISNAR, the Panel gave special attention to the changing environment, and the degree to which the Centre has succeeded in understanding its environment and making the necessary adjustments. While we recognize the achievements of the Centre over the last five years, we believe there are strong reasons for considering a restructuring for ISNAR. We believe that the Board and the CGIAR need to take far reaching steps to restructure and phase out the Centre over a five year period, transferring its responsibilities to IFPRI and to the regional and sub regional organizations.

I would like to thank the iSC and CGIAR Secretariat for assembling a team which has worked together so well, despite our varied backgrounds and experiences. Tim Kelley of the iSC secretariat provided invaluable support and counsel throughout the whole exercise for which the Panel is extremely grateful. Selcük Ozgediz of the CGIAR Secretariat also

provided wise counsel from a distance, and Tanya Alexander provided much appreciated secretarial assistance.

Stein W. Bie and his team, particularly Mina Senior-Faress were wonderful hosts. All documentation and information requested was provided promptly. The Panel is very grateful for the excellent collaboration from ISNAR Board, management and staff, which allowed it to perform its tasks within the restricted time period allocated. Our thanks also go to the numerous persons we contacted as part of the review process, including Jock Anderson and his team who conducted the impact study that provided the Panel with much useful insights into ISNAR's recent achievements.

Finally, all the Panel members join me in expressing our appreciation for the opportunity to perform a difficult, but very challenging task. We hope we have risen to the task, and that our report will be useful to the ISNAR and its partners, as well as the CGIAR.

Yours sincerely,

Dunstan S. C. Spencer
Chair, External Review Panel

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Interim SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	VIII
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	X
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 ISNAR's Changing Environment	2
1.2.1 Recent Developments Within the CGIAR.....	2
1.2.2 Changes in the External Environment Affecting ISNAR.....	3
1.3 The 3 rd ISNAR EPMP recommendations and ISNAR's response	5
2. ISNAR's Strategy	6
2.1 Strategic Plan for 1998-2002: "When NARS retool"	6
2.2 Strategic Plan for 2002-2006: "The Road Map"	6
2.2.1 Rationale for a new plan	6
2.2.2 Main focus of the new plan.....	7
2.2.3 ISNAR's new mission	7
2.3 Panel's Assessment of ISNAR's Current Vision, Priorities and Strategy.....	7
2.3.1 ISNAR's vision and mission	7
2.3.2 Congruence with CGIAR's Vision and Strategy.....	8
2.3.3 The analysis underlying the Plans	8
2.3.4 Institutional priorities	9
2.4 ISNAR's emerging conceptual framework.....	9
2.5 ISNAR's Niche	10
2.5.1 Defining its research and service products	10
2.5.2 Demand for ISNAR's Products	12
2.5.3 Alternative Suppliers of ISNAR Type Products and Services	13
2.5.4 Comparative advantage and niche	13
2.6 Overall Assessment	14
3. Programme Management.....	15
3.1 Organizational Structure	15
3.2 Review and Planning Processes	15
3.2.1 Internal Programme Review	15
3.2.2 Priority setting	15
3.2.3 Assessment	16
3.3 Monitoring the Quality of Research and Services	16
3.3.1 Internal review	17
3.3.2 External review	17
3.3.3 Product review	17
3.3.4 Impact evaluation.....	17
3.3.5 Assessment	18
3.4 Partnerships and Linkages	19
3.4.1 NAROs and NARS	19
3.4.2 Regional and sub regional organizations.....	19
3.4.3 CGIAR Centres.....	19
3.4.4 Universities and advanced research institutes	19
3.4.5 Assessment	20
3.5 Outposting of Staff	20
3.5.1 Assessment	21
4. Research and Service Programmes.....	22
4.1 MTP1: Policies for Institutional Innovations in Agricultural Research	24

4.1.1	Introduction.....	24
4.1.2	Objectives, scope of work, and activities	25
4.1.3	Assessment	26
4.2	MTP2: Linking Research and Stakeholders.....	28
4.2.1	Objectives and activities	28
4.2.2	Assessment	31
4.2.3	Conclusion	34
4.3	MTP3 Learning for Institutional Innovation	34
4.3.1	Objectives and Activities.....	34
4.4	MTP4: Management of New Technologies.....	38
4.4.1	Objectives, scope of work, and activities	39
4.4.2	Assessment	41
4.5	MTP5: Building Capacity to Respond to Cross-Sector Demands	43
4.5.1	Objectives and Activities.....	43
4.5.2	Assessment	44
4.6	MTP6 - Entrepreneurial Partnerships to Support Agricultural Research.....	45
4.6.1	Programme Overview And Objectives.....	45
4.6.2	Assessment	46
4.6.3	Conclusion	48
4.7	Assessment of the Quality of ISNAR’s Products	48
4.7.1	Research products.....	48
4.7.2	Services.....	50
4.8	Synthesis of Programme Issues	50
4.8.1	Strategy implementation and programme performance	50
4.8.2	Achievements and impacts	51
4.8.3	Balancing research and service.....	53
4.8.4	Enhancing staff breadth and depth	53
4.8.5	Overall Conclusion	54
5.	Governance and Management	55
5.1	The Changing Governance Function – a Background Discussion	55
5.2	Governance at ISNAR	56
5.2.1	Assessment	56
5.3	Formal Board Assessment Practices	57
5.4	ISNAR’s Financial Performance – an Overview.....	58
5.5	Organization and Management	59
5.5.1	Organization Structure.....	59
5.5.2	Leadership.....	59
5.5.3	Management Information	60
5.5.4	Administration & Finance	60
5.5.5	Human Resources Unit	62
5.5.6	Facilities Management.....	63
5.5.7	Computer Services	63
5.5.8	Research Support Services (Library and Publications)	63
6.	OPTIONS FOR ISNAR’S FUTURE.....	64
6.1	ISNAR’s challenges today.....	64
6.2	Options for the Future.....	65
6.2.1	Option 1: A Rejuvenated Research and Service-Oriented ISNAR	65
6.2.2	Option 2 - A Decentralized Service-Oriented ISNAR	66
6.2.3	Option 3: Phase out ISNAR.....	67
6.3	Which way ISNAR?.....	67

6.4 Conclusion	69
Acknowledgements.....	70
Annex I	
MTP Projects, objectives and geographical coverage, 1998-2001	71
Annex II	
Composition of the Panel and Biographical Information.....	74
Annex III	
Terms of Reference for External Programme and Management Reviews of CGIAR Centres	79
Annex IV	
Itinerary of the EPMR Panel.....	82
Annex V	
List of Documents Provided to the Panel.....	83
Annex VI	
Stakeholder Interviews	85
Annex VII	
Assessment of ISNAR's Response to the Recommendations of the 1997 External Programme and Management Review (EPMR).....	89
Annex VIII	
Glossary of Acronyms	100

PREFACE

This is the report of the Fourth External Programme and Management Review (EPMR) Panel appointed to evaluate the research and service programme and management of the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR). The members of the Review Panel are listed in Annex II along with their brief biodata. The Terms of Reference for this Review are found in Annex III. The Panel's itineraries during the Initial and Main Phases are provided in Annex IV.

In producing its report, the Panel was guided by the two broad objectives of EPMRs: (a) providing CGIAR members with an independent and rigorous assessment of the health and contribution of the Centre; and (b) providing the Centre and its collaborators with assessment information that complements or validates their own evaluation efforts. The Panel made every effort in this report to present an accurate account of the activities, outputs, and what is known about the achievements and impact of ISNAR during the review period.

With respect to the conduct of its review, the Panel relied on numerous sources of information in reaching its conclusions and making its recommendations. These were the following:

- Documentation provided by ISNAR and the iSC and CGIAR Secretariats (Annex V);
- ISNAR staff presentations and discussions with the Board, Management and staff during the Initial Phase of the review at Headquarters (HQ) (25 February to 1 March) which coincided with the Board's meeting;
- Panel visits to Mozambique (6 to 8 March), Sri Lanka (11 to 12 March), Vietnam (13 to 15 March), Costa Rica (18 to 19 March), Cuba (1 to 4 April) and Mexico (4 to 5 April) to meet with some of ISNAR's collaborators in the field - the choice of country visits was made in consultation with the Centre;
- Consultant report by Fernando Bernardo who attended the Initial Phase of the review and participated in the country visits in Asia;
- Impact Assessment Report by Anderson et al. (2002¹) completed just prior to the Main Phase of the review;
- Numerous in-person or telephone interviews and email correspondence with a broad range of ISNAR clients and stakeholders, including: National Research Organization/National Agriculture Research System (NARO/NARS) and SRO representatives (from Sudan, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Eritrea, Tanzania, Uganda, ASARECA, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cuba, Costa Rica, Mexico, Forum for the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO), and Peru); CGIAR members (from USAID, DGIS, BMZ, SDC, EIARD, GFAR, and the NGO committee); international and regional development banks/organizations (World Bank, IFAD IDB, and FAO), CGIAR centres (IFPRI, IPGRI, IWMI, and ICARDA); ARIs (Michigan State University; ZEF, Bonn); and some independent management consultants. [See Annex VI for a complete list of individuals];

¹ Anderson J. R., Anandajayasekera, P., Craswell E., and Rukuni, M. (2002). Impact Assessment of ISNAR 1997-2001. Report of an ISNAR Team, June 30, 2002.

- Follow-up meetings and discussions with ISNAR Management Committee, Medium Term Plan (MTP) leaders and project staff during both the Initial and Main (1 to 19 July) Phases;
- Review of Board agendas, minutes and other documentation, observations of the Board in action (Board Meeting, February, 2002) and direct interaction with Board members individually.

For this review, the Panel took as its departure point the major recommendations from the 1996 EPMP. These recommendations, the Centre's updated response to them, and a brief commentary by the current Panel on the adequacy of those responses, can be found in Annex VII.

The Panel made every attempt to conduct the review in an objective and transparent manner with a focus on the future as well as to the past. The Centre was kept informed of the Panel's activities and progress during the review. As they were completed, drafts of various sections and chapters of the report were shared with the Centre for comments and to check for factual accuracy prior to finalization.

The Panel benefited from a short visit by and interaction with the Chair of the iSC subcommittee on Evaluation and Reviews, Elias Fereres for two days during the middle of the Main Phase.

Because of time constraints, the Panel could not delve into every element of the Centre but chose to focus on what it believed were the most significant issues. For example, because the Panel had an opportunity to meet with virtually every member of the internationally recruited staff (IRS), and with many of the nationally recruited staff (NRS), including the Staff Council, it was not necessary to conduct a staff survey. However, during the Main Phase of the review, the Panel made themselves available and encouraged staff to contact them (confidentially) if they had any concerns or issues to discuss. A number of staff did so.

In the absence of any Centre Commissioned External Reviews (CCERs) conducted since the last EPMP, the panel needed to devote a considerable portion of its time to understanding and evaluating the relevance and quality of the various research and service activities undertaken by ISNAR in the past five years.

Although all CGIAR members and sister CGIAR Centres were asked to provide comments or raise issues concerning ISNAR for this EPMP, the Panel received written comments from only a few. However, many were quite willing to meet with Panel members upon request and indeed, were quite generous with their time.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 4th EPMP reviewed progress in implementing ISNAR's mandate over the period 1997-2002. This period has been characterized by considerable institutional and programmatic instability, as ISNAR sought to redefine itself through two strategic planning exercises and several iterations of Medium Term Project (MTP) formulations.

ISNAR's Strategy

The 3^d EPMP of ISNAR conducted in 1996-97 recommended that ISNAR define its niche in the context of a well developed (and shared) vision and strategy, move 'upstream' in the research-services continuum, and seek ways to enhance the multiplier effects of its capacity building efforts. Accordingly, the Centre developed a new Strategic Plan, "When NARS Retool" in 1998 that envisaged a more proactive research and service institution to assist research organizations in preparing for the changes ahead.

Facing rapid changes in its environment and increasing funding constraints that led to the dropping of six MTPs in the 2000-2002 Medium Term Plan, ISNAR revisited its strategy in late 2000 and 2001. Accordingly, in its new "Road Map" (the Strategic Plan for 2002 – 2006), ISNAR has broadened the target and scope of its programmes to focus on 'innovation systems' which recognizes multiple sources of innovation, both public and private, in the new stakeholder/client landscape. It has also developed its conceptual framework for generating knowledge in the context of application.

In reviewing the 1998 Strategic Plan, the Panel observed that ISNAR had not specified its priority clients sufficiently, its comparative advantage, or the types of products that it would produce in ways that would maximize the international public good (IPG) dimension of its research and services work, and contribute to the CGIAR goals. In addition, ISNAR did not, as recommended in the 3^d EPMP, revisit its staff competencies and skill mix, nor develop the required strategic partnerships in order to address the new agenda. As a result it did not move sufficiently upstream in the research-services continuum.

The Panel, in reviewing the difficulties in implementing the 1998 Strategy, agrees that ISNAR needed to revisit its Plan. The new conceptual framework of institutional innovations and action research, that underlies the new plan has much merit. However, the Panel sees this Plan very much as work in progress, and the issues of defining product types, and their IPG dimension, as a basis for selecting a few sharply defined priorities consistent with its resource base still hold. Forging strategic alliances with advanced research institutes and explaining its new Road Map to its major stakeholders will be critical to its successful implementation.

Achievement and impacts

The Centre has chalked up some notable accomplishments over the last 5 years. The Panel commends the Centre for its work on biotechnology decision tools and frameworks that are being applied in a growing number of countries. In addition, the Centre has developed research management tools and processes that enhance stakeholder linkages, and participatory network approach to solving problems and sharing knowledge on institutional innovations. The Centre continues to provide good quality training in a variety of themes, and has developed Web-based curricula and training modules that are frequently downloaded. Finally, ISNAR has provided quality advisory services to over 20 countries, and in two Latin

American countries, these have resulted in significant institutional change. The Panel also found evidence that ISNAR was successfully integrating action research and service provision in a number of situations, especially in Latin America.

However, the Panel considers that ISNAR's contributions to knowledge generation and policy guidance has been modest for an institution striving to be a global centre of excellence in agricultural research policy, organization and management. In the Panel's opinion, the Centre is performing below required standards. This is particularly true with respect to production of high quality peer-reviewed research outputs. As ISNAR was advised to move upstream in the research to service spectrum, the Panel is concerned about the Centre's ability to successfully implement its research programme. ISNAR must make every effort to ensure that its strategic and operational choices are grounded in its comparative advantage as a CGIAR Centre, producing IPGs in the area of institutional strengthening of research systems, and now innovation systems. Management tools and processes, and the associated training modules and guidelines have been the major IPG element of ISNAR's work, and also the one most appreciated by its partners.

The Panel also noted that, overall, the impacts of ISNAR's work has been modest, a conclusion shared by ISNAR's own impact assessment study. Although ISNAR can point to significant impacts at the level of individuals and on some organizations, impacts of its research, advisory services, and training have resulted in significant strengthening of national research system capacity in only a handful of countries. The Panel was also concerned that ISNAR has not developed an evaluative culture for upgrading the quality of both its research and service programmes, (except training), and for assessing its impacts.

In the Panel's opinion, one of the main challenges for ISNAR is to concentrate on a limited number of strategic thrusts and to develop effective programmes around these in the context of strong concepts, approaches and sufficient (appropriate) disciplinary expertise and critical linkages. Despite a number of competent and dedicated staff, the Panel believes that ISNAR lacks the mid-career professionals with high international standing that could provide the appropriate blend of disciplinary excellence and experience to implement its new Road Map. A wider range of disciplinary skills will also be needed, especially skills in the organizational and management sciences.

Management

During the course of this review, the Panel met with many of ISNAR's stakeholders, Board members, management, staff--both in headquarters and in a number of field offices, and with members of the ISNAR Staff Council to assess governance and management processes and competencies. The Panel has commented on the changing roles that all Boards are being asked to fulfil today and believes that, at the governance level, the ISNAR Board is not yet providing the degree of attention and leadership to the institution that 'best practices' demand today.

It has also commented on leadership, noting (a) the difficulty that management has had in reconciling donor views with management's views of where ISNAR is headed; (b) the difficulties of hiring the right mix of staff to implement the strategy, and (c) the fact that many staff feel that internal management practices and culture are not conducive to getting results, but are more designed to exercise close and legally-correct controls. The Panel has commented extensively on problems with the current management information systems.

The Panel noted that the External Auditors have given ISNAR a clean audit in each of the years under review. It also commented positively on the new staff performance appraisal system that has been implemented, and has noted the wide diversity of nationalities represented in the current staff.

The Panel was also concerned that the high fixed costs of ISNAR's headquarters operation (35% of total budget) is affecting its ability to provide sufficient resources to implement three of its six MIP Projects and to provide seed money to new activities in its Plan.

The future

As the Panel has pondered the challenges looming ahead for ISNAR, and as it has reflected on its analysis of ISNAR's recent performance, e.g., its modest contribution to new knowledge which is not in tune with its strategy of moving upstream on the research-service spectrum, the lack of measurable improvements in overall institutional capacity of NARS, the inadequate staff mix, and its financial and cost challenges, the Panel concludes that there is a need for a major restructuring of ISNAR. It is convinced that business as usual is not a viable option for the future of ISNAR. Options for re-structuring have to be considered in the context of the promising developments within the regional and sub-regional organizations and their potential role in policy, research management, advocacy, and training, and the reform processes in the CGIAR.

In this light, the Panel posed three options: (1) a rejuvenated research and service-oriented ISNAR, (2) a decentralized service oriented ISNAR, and (3) an immediate phasing out of ISNAR with the passing of the most relevant activities to other CGIAR Centres. In **Option 1**, ISNAR would continue to be based in The Hague. It would retool and re-staff to meet the challenges of providing analytical and action research integrated with some services, and devolve all pure service activities to alternative suppliers. The Panel considered this option, and while potentially filling a gap in the CGIAR agenda, noted the higher cost implications, and the existence of other institutional options in the System for providing the same products.

In Option 2, ISNAR would transfer its policy research to IFPRI, and decentralize its research and service activities, including a small headquarters to developing countries, with the objective of building capacity in the regional and sub-regional organizations to take over its functions within five years. **In Option 3**, ISNAR would cease to exist as a separate, stand-alone Centre transferring its research agenda to IFPRI, and a potential system-wide programme or challenge programme would be used to maintain ISNAR's IPG activities of strengthening institutional capacity within the CGIAR.

Each of the options spelled out above, can be adopted by the CGIAR as the way forward, but in the Panel's view, the most attractive and less risky option, given the commitment to improve partnerships with the regional and national systems, would be Option 2. Devolution of ISNAR's service functions to the regional and subregional organizations clearly has the potential to become a more effective mechanism for delivering ISNAR type products and services to its clients. The Panel recommends that the CGIAR carefully consider this option.

LIST OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 2 – ISNAR’s Strategy

1. The panel recommends that ISNAR implement its new strategy, through an emphasis on selecting a few sharply-focused priorities, consistent with its resource base and future structure, application of a judicious blend of research, training and services, and significantly adjusting staff breadth and depth, to fit its future agenda.

Chapter 3 – Programme Management

2. The Panel recommends that ISNAR institutionalize comprehensive planning and priority setting as well as internal and external quality control processes to ensure the relevance and quality of its research and service activities.

Chapter 4 – Research and Service Programmes

MTP1 – Policies for Institutional Innovations in Agricultural Research

3. The Panel recommends that ISNAR either comprehensively retool to effectively execute an appropriate agenda for policy issues in institutional innovations, in partnership with IFPRI and others (under a rejuvenated research and service oriented ISNAR – see Chapter 6), or MTP1 (policy research) should be discontinued with IFPRI assuming full responsibility for ASTI and research policy work (under a decentralized service-oriented ISNAR).

MTP3 – Learning for Institutional Innovation

4. The Panel recommends that ISNAR reinforce its capacity to revise and update its training materials and modules while developing an advocacy programme for influencing key policy makers for institutional change, that complements its current programme. Furthermore, ISNAR should not pursue its planned research agenda in learning for institutional innovations without first seeking qualified external experts to review its plans.

MTP5 – Building Capacity to Respond to Cross-Sector Demands

5. The Panel recommends that ISNAR discontinue MTP5 – Building Capacity to Respond to Cross-Sector Demands. The current project on HIV/AIDS should be screened against MTP2 (Linking Research and Stakeholders) strategic priorities and if appropriate, incorporated.

Chapter 5 – Governance and Management

6. The Panel recommends that the Nominating Committee of the Board develop a list of competencies required for the next 6 years (using external assistance as necessary) and then develop a Board of Trustee profile and an associated nominating strategy. The strategy should firstly determine the size of the board -

depending on the nature of the future ISNAR—and earmark a number of the upcoming vacancies for highly talented individuals representing the private and philanthropic sectors.

7. The Panel recommends that Management provide:
 - a quarterly management report to all Trustees with project management, personnel, and financial data and comments on results achieved and expected, including a rolling cash flow forecast for the ensuing twelve months; and
 - a monthly financial statement, and a rolling twelve month cash flow forecast to each member of the Audit Committee and to the Board Chairperson.

8. The Panel recommends that ISNAR:
 - Review (with external consultants) the adequacy and competency of the current Administration and Finance staff and make such changes as necessary to ensure an adequate level of service. Service levels should be defined by the external consultants and incorporated in revised Job Descriptions for the A&F staff;
 - Engage the services of an expert in cost accounting systems to design and help implement the necessary systems and processes that will enable ISNAR to understand, and monitor changes in its own product cost structure;
 - Expand the accounting system to include commitments and project implementation scheduling data so that the Administration and Finance department can supply complete, timely, and accurate management information; and
 - Develop an internal audit capability – possibly using part-time expertise.

Chapter 6 – Options for ISNAR’s Future

9. The Panel recommends that the CGIAR carefully consider the option of:
 - transferring the ISNAR mandate for analytical policy research on innovations systems to IFPRI; and,
 - transforming ISNAR into a decentralized service-oriented institution with devolution of its remaining functions to the regional and subregional organizations over a five-year period.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) was established in 1971 with the goal of raising the quantity and quality of agricultural production in developing countries, through strategic and applied research. Initially, the CGIAR focused on overcoming the main constraints to food-crop and livestock productivity. In the 1980s, the System broadened its scope by adding Centres dedicated to the conservation of plant genetic resources, food policy research and institutional strengthening. The latter was motivated by a recognition of the key role national agricultural research systems (NARS) could play in accelerating technological innovation. Recent CGIAR and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)/interim Science Council (iSC) reports attest to the increasing importance the CGIAR gives to strengthening national capacities in agricultural research.

The International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) was established in 1979 by the international community, and formally by the World Bank and by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It began functioning as an integral part of the CGIAR System *to help strengthen national agricultural research capabilities in developing countries* in 1986. Over time ISNAR's mission and mandate have evolved but its central focus has always been to assist developing countries in improving the performance of their NARS. "It has done this by promoting appropriate agricultural research policies, sustainable research institutions and improved research management" (ISNAR website). ISNAR has recently re-defined its mission and strategy focusing on innovation systems. It interprets its challenge today as identifying and advancing new institutional arrangements that promote more effective generation of knowledge within the context of the agricultural research systems in developing countries. It sees strong institutional arrangements in the developing countries themselves as the key to development.

Like other CGIAR Centres ISNAR seeks to produce international public goods (IPGs) over the range of its services and through its research. ISNAR and its partners support NARS by producing intermediate impacts on research and development institutions in pursuit of field-level impacts on poverty eradication, environmental protection and food security. In this way, ISNAR's programmes are designed to contribute to the overall goal of the CGIAR. ISNAR also produces non-IPGs, in support of national and local research efforts where appropriate.

Strengthening scientific capacity is one of the five principal undertakings of the CGIAR. Within the CGIAR, ISNAR is considered the lead Centre in strengthening NARS and one of the Centres engaged in policy research with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). To some extent, all Centres are involved in institution strengthening: ISNAR's share in the resources available for these activities is not large, representing about 10% of the total CGIAR investment (US \$75 million)—roughly the same amount the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) spends on training and institution strengthening, and actually less than the International Maize and Wheat Research Centre's (CIMMYT). However, the nature of NARS work is different between the Centres. ISNAR covers the broader field of organization and management, beyond the selected CGIAR commodities and increasingly beyond the traditional partners with which other CGIAR Centres associate.

1.2 ISNAR's Changing Environment

Over the years, there have been a number of developments in the external and internal environment that have had a profound effect on ISNAR's mandate and the development of its strategies in seeking to fulfil its mission.

1.2.1 Recent Developments Within the CGIAR

1.2.1.1 Strategic Study on Institution Strengthening Research Services

Just prior to the 3^d ISNAR EPMP in 1996, TAC commissioned a system-wide study on institutional strengthening (TAC, 1996). In addition to stressing the need for closer collaboration among Centres in all facets of institutional strengthening support to NARS, particularly between ISNAR and other Centres, the report indicated a need for increased research on institutional development, with ISNAR in the lead. The report recommended that additional resources be made available for ISNAR to enable a more comprehensive analysis on NARS' strengths and weaknesses to form the basis for a proposal for inter-institutional collaboration documenting successful and unsuccessful examples of institution-building activities. The report also recommended that ISNAR provide generic tools for NARS and pointed to the need to encourage regional organizations.

1.2.1.2 Third System Review

The 3^d System Review (CGIAR, 1998) conducted in 1997-98 was a major milestone for the CGIAR, strongly reaffirming the importance of the CGIAR in the global agricultural research system. The System Review recommended, among other things, that the CGIAR continue to emphasize capacity building and specifically to launch a special collaborative programme to strengthen capacity of NARS. While the Group supported the recommendation for enhancing NARS institutional capacity, and the Centres' Directors' Committee (CDC) agreed that the CGIAR's capacity building should hold a central place in Centres' agendas and serve as a cornerstone in CGIAR-NARS collaborations, they concluded that the CGIAR did not need a distinctly new mechanism for this work. This was consistent with what the external review on institutional strengthening had determined (TAC, 1996). The Review also recommended creating a single corporate entity for the System but this was not accepted.

1.2.1.3 New Vision and Strategy

Since the completion of the 3^d System Review, the CGIAR has been active in the reform process. One of the first steps in this process was a re-assessment of the mission, goals and objectives of the CGIAR in the light of a number of fundamental changes that were occurring in the external environment. This initiative, which was led by TAC, resulted in the System adopting a new vision and strategy for itself (TAC, 2000). In launching a new vision for a 'food secure world for all', the CGIAR re-defined its mission and outlined a strategy for identifying new ways to tackle the problem of poverty. The strategy is based on seven key planks, the most relevant of which from ISNAR's perspective are:

- Giving highest priority to the needs of people in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where poverty is concentrated and growing (Plank 3);
- Adopting a regional approach to research planning and implementation and integrate regional priorities with global priorities in international agricultural research (Plank 4);

- Giving increased emphasis to new types of partners in science and development and using new forms of partnerships (Plank 5);
- Strengthening the role of the CGIAR as a catalyst, integrator and disseminator of knowledge within the overall global agricultural research system (Plank 7).

With specific respect to institution strengthening activities, the CGIAR Vision and Strategy document (TAC, 2000) emphasized two areas with high potential payoffs. The first was research on institutional development, including identifying indicators for assessing institutional development requirements, evaluating which types of interventions have achieved the best results, and identifying political, cultural and institutional constraints. The second was research on the demands of the private sector and civil society, the public-private interface, the co-production of public goods by the public and private sectors, and the role and management issues in NGOs and other non-profit organizations. To meet these challenges, expansion of activities in capacity building of NARS (above current levels) and contributing to their sustainability were deemed necessary.

1.2.1.4 The CGIAR reform process

The major changes occurring in the external and internal environment in which the CGIAR was operating precipitated the need for institutional change and revitalization within the System. In particular, it prompted a serious re-look at the governance and organizational structure and mechanisms in place. Over the last three years, the System has been very active in setting up task forces and working groups to consider different operating and structural arrangements in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of CGIAR programmes and processes. Indeed, the Director General (DG) of ISNAR was a member of the Change Design and Management Team (CDMT) - charged with proposing recommendations to the Group on a range of institutional change requirements - as well as serving as a member of the task forces on Challenge Programmes (CP) and on the CGIAR system office.

At the CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting in Durban in 2001, the System agreed to initiate a reform programme proposed by the CDMT comprising programmatic, organizational and management dimensions. Of the four pillars of reform adopted, the CP initiative, which emphasized a programmatic approach to research planning and funding to complement existing approaches, has the largest potential impact on ISNAR. Gearing up for these new challenges means ISNAR and other Centres must seek donor support in an increasingly competitive environment.

With respect to structural organization, the CDMT recommended forming clusters or mergers among centres. While no specific criteria or plan was established, a bottom-up approach was suggested. A bottom-up proposal of this kind was put forward recently, considering an alliance between ISNAR, IFPRI, and the International Plant Genetics Resource Institute (IPGRI), which, after an assessment by two inter-centre working groups chaired by ISNAR, ultimately, did not materialize.

1.2.2 Changes in the External Environment Affecting ISNAR

The developments in the external environment, those which affect ISNAR directly as well as those affecting its clients, have been a major driving force behind the recent changes in ISNAR's strategic focus, positioning and agenda.

1.2.2.1 Funding Levels and Composition

While the level of funding to the CGIAR has remained relatively stable at about US \$340 million per annum since 1996 (slightly down in real terms), many of the centres have faced financial constraints in terms of either long or short term fluctuations. ISNAR has seen its funding decline during the past five years, from US \$10.9 million in 1996 to currently US \$8.9 million. Part of this is linked to currency fluctuations, and part to lower contributions, including the loss of one major donor. There could be a number of reasons, including a shift in donor priorities, a loss of donor confidence in ISNAR, or, as ISNAR itself says: “its inability to grow as a result of a growing tension between the expectations of developing country customers and the conditionality imposed by an increasing number of donors”².

1.2.2.2 Global Forum for Agricultural Research

The Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR) was founded in late 1996 by representatives of developing country NARS, advanced research institutions, regional and sub-regional organizations, universities, NGOs, farmer organizations, the private sector, the CGIAR, and the donor community. ISNAR played a role in its formation and was a supporter of its activities during its first four years of life. GFAR’s mission is to mobilize the world scientific community in their efforts to reduce poverty, increase food security, and conserve and manage biodiversity and natural resources. Many of the goals espoused by GFAR complement those of ISNAR:

- Facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge;
- Fostering cost-effective, collaborative partnerships amongst stakeholders;
- Promoting the integration of NARS;
- Facilitating the participation of all stakeholders in formulating a global framework for agricultural research;
- Increasing awareness among policymakers and donors of the need for long-term commitment to, and investment in, agricultural research.

Since its creation, GFAR has grown in strength, creating an effective forum for individual NARS and other stakeholders to articulate their needs. With the establishment of GFAR, ISNAR believes it no longer needs to fulfill an advocacy role, and must now focus on a programme of work that strengthens NARS capacities.

1.2.2.3 Other developments

Other key changes in the external environment that are directly or indirectly affecting the scope and nature of ISNAR’s activities include:

- the increasing regionalization of research, specifically, the development and maturation of the regional and subregional research organizations, changing the demand for and suppliers of ISNAR type products and services;
- the broadening of partnerships within the global agricultural research system, more actively embracing NGOs, the private sector, advanced research institutes, and universities, offering at the same time both possibilities for effective collaboration with ISNAR but also competition;

²Outline of Major Issues Facing ISNAR, 4th EPMR Paper #6.

- a move towards more demand-led, market-oriented research agendas, with competitive bidding, putting increasing strain (accountability) on budgets of the traditional National Agricultural Research Organizations (NAROs);
- changes and reforms within public sector agriculture research due to reduced funding or outside pressure to ‘de-centralize’ the system. In some regions, investments in agricultural research have been declining, e.g., in sub-Saharan Africa;
- a strengthened and enhanced capacity of some NARS (China, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Uganda, Kenya) and a weakening or stagnation of many others;
- rapid developments in the fields of biological science, information and communication technology and proprietary rights; and,
- globalization and greater trade liberalization.

The implications of the changing operating environment of ISNAR and its NARS partners are numerous. Those factors listed above certainly emphasize the need for increased flexibility and adaptability. In particular, the need for stronger linkages and networks must be emphasized.

1.3 The 3rd ISNAR EPMR recommendations and ISNAR's response

As many of the recommendations and ISNAR’s response to them are dealt with in the context of key issues that emerge in other sections of this report, they will not be dealt with here, except to mention two major recommendations that emerged from the 1996-97 EPMP, namely: (1) the need for ISNAR to define its niche in the context of a well developed (and shared) vision and strategy; and, (2) shifting the balance between its research and service functions. With respect to the latter, the Centre was advised to move ‘more upstream’, i.e., to do more research and depend more on intermediaries to reach its clients. While the Centre has made a serious attempt to address all 12 recommendations from the last EPMP, the major recommendations dealing with re-defining the niche of operation and moving upstream on the research-to-service spectrum, are issues that, in the Panel’s view, ISNAR is still struggling with today.

ISNAR feels it has implemented all 12 recommendations (4 main recommendations and 8 “other recommendations”) of the 3rd EPMP. Annex VII summarizes the 1996-97 EPMP recommendations and ISNAR’s description of the extent to which they have been effectively implemented by the Centre. The Panel has indicated its reaction to the implementation of these recommendations in the table in Annex VII.

2. ISNAR'S STRATEGY

The Strategic Plan that ISNAR developed early in the 1990s, "Service through Partnership", formed the basis for ISNAR's first five-year MTP (1994-98). In the 3^d EPMP Panel's view, this Plan was outdated, overly complex and confusing, and hence, a reassessment of its vision and strategy was called for.

2.1 Strategic Plan for 1998-2002: "When NARS retool"

In responding to the major recommendation of the 3rd EPMP with respect to clarifying its vision and niche, and the call to move 'upstream', ISNAR in consultation with stakeholders and its own staff, developed a new strategic plan in 1997. ISNAR adopted an internal iterative, Delphi-style approach in defining first, the vision, then the mission, niche, and guiding values. The resulting document, entitled "When NARS retool" envisaged a more proactive research and service institution to assist research institutions in preparing for the changes ahead. ISNAR defined its strategy in the context of four thrusts:

- globalization and its implication for agricultural research;
- governance and management of institutional change;
- new technologies for agricultural research; and,
- agriculture and the environment.

ISNAR felt its research-based services could be improved by learning from its involvement in the field, institutionalizing the lessons learned, and disseminating the results widely. Eighteen MTP projects were developed under the four broad thrusts embracing a wide range of topics. These were subsequently 'consolidated' into 12 MTP projects in 2000 (see Chapter 4).

2.2 Strategic Plan for 2002-2006: "The Road Map"

2.2.1 Rationale for a new plan

ISNAR revisited its strategy in late 2000 and early 2001. The rationale for this re-assessment and further revision of ISNAR's strategic outlook—implemented from 2002 as "The Road Map" - was:

- the changes in the institutional setting in many developing countries during the second half of the 1990s, e.g., greater competition for funds, together with the emergence of GFAR and the regional organizations of NARS;
- the changes in the context for the agricultural sector, related to globalization, privatisation, and new technologies.
- the new guidance given to the CGIAR system as part of the 3^d System Review in 1998 and the Change Design and Management Team (CDMT) recommendations in 2000/2001 (which have now fed into the CGIAR reform process); and,
- concerns about growing funding constraints for ISNAR, the CGIAR and NAROs.

2.2.2 Main focus of the new plan

ISNAR claims that its new plan confronts the realities of rapid change in the operating environment of NARS by broadening the target and scope of its programmes to focus on “innovation systems” and, further, that it addresses the need for new understanding of how various participants in these systems must interact to help the rural poor. ISNAR considers its challenge “to identify and advance new institutional arrangements that promote more effective generation of new knowledge.” Further, the focus will no longer be on the transfer of technology to NARS, but on learning together and sharing knowledge and information. ISNAR’s role will be to develop tools and processes to facilitate this learning.

Operationally, the Road Map constitutes the basis for ISNAR’s current Medium Term Plan. Six thematic areas of work are identified in the 2002-2004 MTP:

- Policies for institutional innovation for agricultural research;
- Linking research organizations and stakeholders in a changing context;
- Learning for institutional innovation;
- Management of new technologies for agricultural research;
- Building capacity to respond to cross sector demands; and
- Entrepreneurial partnerships to support agricultural research.

While none of these are new areas of work for ISNAR, all are now defined in the context of the new institutional innovation framework.

2.2.3 ISNAR's new mission

ISNAR’s vision effective since 1998 reads: *ISNAR will be a Centre of excellence in agricultural research policy, organization, and management and a key partner of NARS in pursuit of food security and equitable and sustainable development* The Road Map articulates a new mission for ISNAR: *to help bring about innovation in agricultural research institutions to increase the contribution of research to agricultural development for the poor.* In the new mission, its major challenge is perceived as identifying and advancing new institutional arrangements that promote more effective generation of new knowledge. The emphasis on institutional innovation envisages ISNAR playing a catalytic role in the change process.

2.3 Panel's Assessment of ISNAR's Current Vision, Priorities and Strategy

In the following sections, the Panel assesses ISNAR’s strategies by examining how it has established its priorities and interpreted its research and service roles. Its niche is then examined by defining its products and evaluating the nature of demand and alternative suppliers for those products.

2.3.1 ISNAR’s vision and mission

The need for ISNAR to redefine its vision and mission in 1998, and then again in 2002, was partly in response to a widely felt concern that ISNAR’s mission had, in the past, been intangible and that ISNAR’s clients found them unclear. In the Panel’s view ISNAR’s vision and mission are reasonable and appropriate, provided there is an accompanying

strategy for forging key alliances, and a plan for building up in-house expertise in disciplines consistent with its new mission. However, in the Panel's discussions with a range of stakeholders (Annex II) and collaborating organizations, few had a clear understanding of the new approach ISNAR was adopting and what the Road Map was specifically about. This indicates that ISNAR needs to do much more in explaining its new vision, mission, and strategy to its stakeholders.

2.3.2 Congruence with CGIAR's Vision and Strategy

ISNAR's new Road Map is consistent with the CGIAR strategy Plank 7 emphasizing the CGIAR's role as a catalyst, integrator and disseminator of knowledge. ISNAR is positioning itself to take on this challenge, but will need to further develop (or tap into) best practices with respect to facilitation, consensus building and conflict resolution, for which it may not have sufficient expertise currently. The Panel, however, did not see in ISNAR's new strategy enough congruence with some of the other planks of relevance to ISNAR. These relate to giving higher priority to sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Plank 3) and adopting a regional approach to research planning and implementation (Plank 4). The Centre's new focus on innovation systems does create a platform for working more extensively with new types of partners in science and development and new forms of partnerships (Plank 5), but the Panel feels that the Centre must be much more proactive in this area.

2.3.3 The analysis underlying the Plans

ISNAR's 1998-2002 Strategic Plan identified four programmatic thrust areas, defined three strategic objectives, and outlined five broad institutional strategies. Based on its analysis of socio-economic, political, technological and a host of other trends, and in dialogue with developing country partners and ISNAR stakeholders, the Centre endorsed the four problem-oriented thrusts on which to focus its work during 1998-2002. It was evident that ISNAR staff invested much intellectual energy in this effort.

For the most recent Strategic Plan, the Road Map 2002 – 2006, ISNAR relied less on background papers and analysis and more on dialogue within the institute (working groups) complemented by input from external shareholders. The ISNAR Board also provided close guidance throughout. Indeed, both Strategic Plans were developed in a consultative mode, although meetings for the Road Map involved relatively fewer ISNAR staff and very few external stakeholders (only 3 NARS and 3 donor/other type representatives). The Road Map would almost certainly have benefited from wider and deeper stakeholder involvement, in helping to map out a strategy for the Centre and defining its niche in the global agricultural research community.

A key issue in both plans is how ISNAR selected its major thrusts from among many potential themes. Given the mission and mandate of the Centre, why did globalization, for example, emerge as a priority thrust in the 1998-2002 strategy? Conversely, why has it now been dropped in the current Road Map? The basis for ISNAR, rather than alternative suppliers or collaborators, addressing the four thrusts is not adequately addressed. The Panel would have liked to have seen a more thorough assessment of ISNAR's comparative advantage in these thrust areas, and how ISNAR planned to address in any significant depth, the range and breadth of issues surrounding the selected topics. In short, it did not go far enough in spelling out the rationale for the choices made.

More critically, to what extent has the Centre invested in, and built up core capacity around these areas? The last EPMR concluded: “The professional expertise of the organization does not fully match the requirements of the emerging institutional needs. It is important for ISNAR not only to formulate a sound strategy, but also to adjust its structure and staff composition to meet the requirements of a changing environment”. In this Panel’s view, ISNAR failed to move ahead in the critical area of strengthening professional expertise—either in house, or through strategic partnerships—to implement its strategies.

2.3.4 Institutional priorities

The 1998 Strategic Plan was implemented through 18 MTPs. While the criteria for priority setting for the four broad thrusts – impact criteria, institutional criteria and scientific criteria - were laid out in the 1998-2002 Plan, the way in which these were actually ‘operationalized’ was not clear. In its commentary on the 3^d ISNAR EPMR, TAC strongly encouraged the Centre to develop a more systematic approach to priority setting and to link ISNAR’s outputs and activities more directly to CGIAR goals. Although the criteria were laid out, it was not apparent to the Panel that the strategic planning process made these sorts of linkages, and in particular, how the value of different sets of expected outputs from different strategies played a role in the selection of thrusts and projects.

ISNAR also experienced difficulties in hard priority setting, reflected in a work programme of 18 MTPs that was too large in relation to the capacity of the Centre, with several MTPs lacking a critical mass of resources for effective implementation. This problem was further aggravated with the funding shortfall in 1999, and is still evident in two of the six MTPs implemented in 2002 (see Chapter 4).

2.4 ISNAR’s emerging conceptual framework

A requirement for becoming a centre of excellence is a clear conceptual basis for its Strategic Plan. As part of its new Road Map, ISNAR is in the process of developing an overall conceptual approach to institutional development to guide its work. The draft document “The evolution of ISNAR’s approach to institutional development over the last five years” outlines four guiding principles:

- Generating knowledge in the context of application;
- Facilitating institutional arrangements to respond to change;
- Use of an innovation systems approach; and,
- The need for interaction at the different levels - individuals, organizations and policy.

ISNAR envisages that much of its work will revolve around ‘theory of action’ so that research will be combined with service-oriented action. Case studies become the dominant mode of operation. The Panel commends the Centre for taking the initiative to more systematically and explicitly define the conceptual approach underlying the new Strategic Plan.

As ISNAR recognizes, the effort to define more clearly how knowledge will be generated in the context of application still requires rigorous, well developed frameworks, and explicit hypotheses to guide the action research. In the Panel’s view, these initiatives increase the urgency of ensuring that the centre has the requisite social science skills in house, and through partnerships, to effectively move in these new directions. The results

should be subjected to rigorous scientific scrutiny by publications in recognized social science journals.

The innovation systems framework is also a significant departure from its earlier emphasis on NAROs and later, national research systems. This framework recognizes multiple sources of innovation - both public and private - including input suppliers, commodity chains, farmers, and foreign sources, and views the processes of innovation as an iterative, often non-linear, process of interaction and feedback between these various actors.

The Panel believes that the innovation systems framework is a logical move for ISNAR, since it more effectively captures the reality of agricultural technology generation and diffusion. However, ISNAR must still confront two major challenges if it is to mainstream the concept. First, although the innovations systems framework is a useful descriptive/analytical device, it does not identify the major intervention points for public policy and management services. Second, and especially important for its work on management of institutional innovations, the framework increases the number of potential clients and other stakeholders for its products and services, and broadens the scope of its potential activities. Together, these observations underscore the urgency for ISNAR to clearly defining its priority clients, products, and themes within this broader agenda.

The Panel encourages ISNAR to move forward in operationalizing the conceptual framework, by developing strong alliances with advanced research institutions with skills in these areas, adapt the framework to the specific situations of ISNAR's strategy, and identify the key International Public Good (IPG) dimensions.

2.5 ISNAR's Niche

2.5.1 Defining its research and service products

ISNAR operates on a continuum from research to services. In the early 1990s, research and services were mostly operationally and organizationally separated. Research tended to be relatively 'pure' analytical or conventional research, while services in the form of advice and to some extent, training, tended to be focused on individual countries and institutions on a demand basis. By the 1998-2002 Strategic Plan, ISNAR's strategy had evolved to promote much stronger integration of research and service activities and de-emphasize pure research or pure services.

2.5.1.1 Defining ISNAR's product range

In the 1998-2002 period, research and services were carried out through a number of different types of activities:


- Analytical or 'pure' research which aims to contribute new knowledge but with little service output;
- ISNAR-initiated action-research and services, often through case studies, that aim to generate knowledge through experience and learning (i.e., the research product), and at the same time solve specific problems through participatory processes with clients (i.e., the service). Typically such action research would be carried out in several countries, allowing some degree of freedom in experimental design and sampling to meet the research objective. However, the choice of country and research organizations in which to participate would also depend on demand.

- NARS-initiated advisory services, which are generally demand led and aimed primarily at providing services in a specific country. Although providing little flexibility in design and sampling to meet research objectives, these services do offer considerable opportunity to learn from experience across countries.
- Training events and workshops primarily designed to improve the human capacity of participating institutions. This is mainly a service function, offering little opportunity for research except in the area of understanding the processes of learning itself.
- Synthesis of what others are doing through literature reviews, interviews, and site visits.

The research output of these various activities depends on synthesis across experiences and countries within a well-articulated conceptual framework in order to provide tools, methods, and good practice. Generally, the importance of the synthesis activity increases as one moves down the list.

Against this background the various products of ISNAR can be summarized as in Table 2.1. It should be noted that conceptually there are strong linkages between the production of various products, in so far as knowledge products are packaged into core competencies and then fed into advisory services and training and vice versa.

Table 2.1 : ISNAR Products

	Product	Type of product
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">Research oriented</div> 	Knowledge products	New understanding of management or policy processes (usually publications)
		General policy and management prescriptions (good practice)
		Tools or methods
		Information
	Training	Training courses and modules, workshops
	Knowledge sharing	Networks, web sites, publications
	Advisory services	Consultancies and facilitation
	Services oriented	Advocacy

2.5.1.2 The International Public Good (IPG) element

The CGIAR focuses on the production of IPGs to complement investments by both the private sector and national governments. Indeed, production of IPGs is one of the four criteria used to assess opportunities for strategic choices in shaping the CGIAR's future research agenda (TAC, 2000). Accordingly, CGIAR research is organized around major problems that are of international relevance. This extends to all types of CGIAR activities, including training and advisory services, although it acknowledges that producing IPGs for services is more difficult to achieve.

In the most recent publication of *Priorities and Strategies for the CGIAR* (TAC, 1997), TAC recommended an increase in investment on research on institution building, and called for less emphasis on the provision of research-related services and strict observance of the CGIAR objective of providing IPGs. It is therefore incumbent on ISNAR to make every effort to ensure that its strategic and operational choices are grounded in its comparative advantage as a CGIAR Centre, producing IPGs in the area of institutional strengthening of research systems, and now innovation systems. An example would be designing a variety of models or a typology of institutional arrangements and interventions appropriate for respective countries and regions.

The Panel in its review of both Strategic Plans found little explicit recognition of the types of products its produces, for whom they are produced, and the relevant IPG element. The Panel urges ISNAR to more carefully define its products and especially to examine ways that it can maximize the IPG element of its work.

2.5.2 Demand for ISNAR's Products

Potential clients for ISNAR products can be classified into several categories: the NAROs, other actors in the national agricultural innovation system, actors outside the sector who influence the effectiveness of agricultural research, subregional and regional research organizations, donors, and international organizations including other CGIAR centres.

The NAROs are the traditional clients of ISNAR. They have always been a diverse group and are becoming even more diverse with the passage of time. Some NAROs, especially the large ones, are quite advanced in both institutional and scientific development, while a large number are in a very fragile stage of development, lacking critical mass, political support, human resources and leadership capacity. The demand for different research policy and management products varies enormously between these different types of NAROs.

In the 1998-2002 Strategy, following the urging of the 3rd EPMR, ISNAR has progressively expanded its potential clientele to recognize the pluralistic nature of the NARS that embraces universities, NGOs, and the private sector. Other actors in the agricultural innovation systems such as farmers organizations, policy makers in various ministries, and sometimes from other sectors, critically determine major issues affecting institutional development and are now also potential clients of ISNAR.

2.5.2.1 Expressed Demand for ISNAR Products

The Panel's stakeholder consultations revealed a continuing and even expanding demand for ISNAR-type research products and services. This demand is most strongly expressed in Africa, but also widespread in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Given the wide range of potential demands, it is essential that ISNAR should carefully prioritize its customers and beneficiaries, identifying the appropriate products for each group. While it may be necessary to include a broad spectrum of stakeholders in ISNAR's conceptual framework for production of its products and services, ISNAR's strategic planning must identify the target groups on which to focus its resources and activities for maximum impact and relevance at a *global level*. ISNAR should construct an institutional landscape (like other CGIAR Centres have their commodity or poverty maps) to guide their strategic planning and priority setting. A more precise knowledge of the diversity

of innovation institutions and their characteristics in different parts of the world would permit ISNAR to design a variety of models of institutional arrangements and interventions to suit the needs of the respective country or region.

2.5.3 Alternative Suppliers of ISNAR Type Products and Services

The Panel's assessment is that ISNAR faces most competition at each extreme of the research-service spectrum. On the pure research end, there are many alternative suppliers with considerable disciplinary expertise on research policy, including IFPRI and universities. There are also alternative suppliers for management tools and practices in universities and specialized management institutes, although many of these have not been adapted or tested in agricultural research situations.

On the pure service and training end there are an increasing range of suppliers, such as:

- Private consultants, both individuals and consulting firms;
- Multinational agencies (FAO, CTA, ICRA, IICA) and financial institutions (e.g., the World Bank) who provide knowledge sharing, advisory services and some training;
- Universities, management institutes and NGOs who offer advisory services and training, including specialized courses in agricultural research management (e.g., the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) in India, the Crawford Foundation, University of Maryland) or specific areas of management (e.g., various courses in Internal Programme Review).
- Other CGIAR Centres which usually offer more specialized advisory services and training related to their specific mandates, but often also offer ISNAR-type services (e.g., the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India and CIMMYT in Azerbaijan on priority setting); and,
- GFAR and sub regional organizations that provide advocacy, and increasingly, services.

In recent years, ISNAR has provided a small share of the market for services for research management and institutional change, and this is appropriate given the limited IPG nature of pure services.

2.5.4 Comparative advantage and niche

ISNAR's niche depends on its comparative advantage which in its case relates to its extensive institutional knowledge about the management of research in developing countries, proven tools and methods, an extensive database of NARS's activities, and a reputation as an 'honest broker'.

In the Panel's view, these factors give ISNAR a niche in the integration of research and services to produce decision tools and methods, that are then packaged into user-friendly guidelines, manuals and training modules where there are fewer alternative suppliers. In fact, many of the services provided by other suppliers depend on these manuals, processes, and tools, further enhancing their role as IPGs. This analysis would support ISNAR's current move towards an action research framework, providing sufficient attention is given to the IPG element.

2.6 Overall Assessment

The review period has been characterized by considerable institutional and programmatic instability. In 1997 ISNAR revised its Strategic Plan, and in less than three years, with a changing funding base, undertook a second planning exercise.

The first strategic planning exercise involved solid analysis, substantial internal discussion, and wide stakeholder consultations. However, listening to stakeholders is not a substitute for defining the key directions of a Centre. In the Panel's view ISNAR failed to identify the types of products and services it would produce, its priority clients, and to define its strategic priorities within the context of its comparative advantage given its mandate to focus on the IPG dimension. In addition, in operationalising the Plan, ISNAR did not revisit its staff competencies and skill mix, in order to address its new agenda requiring it to move upstream in the research-services continuum, as recommended in the 3rd EPMR, and as defined in the Plan. Nor did the Plan outline a policy on strategic partnerships at the institutional level, for accessing complementary skills.

The Panel in reviewing the difficulties in implementing the 1997 Strategy, agrees that ISNAR needed to revisit its Plan. The new conceptual framework of institutional innovations and action research, that underlies the new plan (The Road Map) has much merit. However, the Plan is silent on the issues of type of product, the IPG dimension, and priority clients, as a basis for defining its strategic priorities. As the new MTP projects move ahead in developing their own strategies and work programmes, the Panel urges ISNAR to define a clear Centre-level framework for priority setting, within the framework outlined above, to guide each MTP's internal planning process.

The Centre is developing a new conceptual framework to guide its activities. The Panel concurs on the whole with the general approach, but urges ISNAR to put this into operational terms that will stand professional scrutiny, and at the same time, be readily communicated to clients. Forging strategic alliances with advanced research institutes will be critical to its successful implementation. Finally, ISNAR needs to better explain its new Road Map to its major stakeholders, including its guiding conceptual framework.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that ISNAR implement its new strategy, through an emphasis on selecting a few sharply-focused priorities, consistent with its resource base and future structure, application of a judicious blend of research, training and services, and significantly adjusting staff breadth and depth, to fit its future agenda.

3. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

3.1 Organizational Structure

ISNAR has re-organized its programmes twice since its 1998-2002 Strategy. From two programmes in 1996 under one Deputy Director General (DDG) who covered both programmes and administration, programme management expanded to two DDGs, four programme directors (PDs) plus a Director for Finance and Administration in 1998. This was sharply reduced in 2001 in two steps (March and October). First, the DDG posts and one Programme Director (PD) were eliminated (but not the staff holding the posts). Later, ISNAR adopted its new 2002-2006 Strategy with six MTP Project Leaders reporting to one PD.

Throughout the period before introducing the new Strategy 2002-2006, ISNAR was reporting to the CGIAR based on 18 Medium Term Projects, later reduced to 12. The MTPs were reporting groups - there were no MTP project leaders or coordinators.

Two observations flow from the above. First, staff have been reshuffled at least twice during the review period, creating an unstable environment. Second, the MTP Projects up to 2001 were groupings on paper only, and there was no mechanism to strategically plan and integrate within MTPs, except at the level of PD. These two factors have severely constrained the ability to build MTP project coherence and team spirit. The new structure for projects implemented in 2001, is allowing for the first time, project leaders to build these essential elements.

3.2 Review and Planning Processes

3.2.1 Internal Programme Review

The Centre has relied on Internal Programme Reviews as the main mechanism for reviewing past work and planning future work. These have been held three times over the last six years, a one-day review in 1998, an Internal Programme Review in October 2000, focussing on globalization and governance, and a comprehensive Internal Programme Review in late 2001/early 2002. The most recent Internal Programme Review consisted of two three-day workshops, evaluating past achievements and preparing the new MTPs. All staff were involved, including internal peer reviewers. It brought in for the first time an external reviewer to observe the process and provide an independent critique.

At the end of each year, ISNAR staff members prepare a work plan, indicating the projects they will work on, the amount of time on each project, the expected outputs, and the personal development objectives. Under the 1998-2002 strategy there was no explicit mechanism for strategic planning and budget allocation. The new MTP structure with project leaders may provide such a mechanism, if it is coupled with regular Internal Programme Reviews, and effective management decisions.

3.2.2 Priority setting

The process of defining priorities and more specific areas of work within each of the thematic areas in the 2002-2006 Strategy has largely been one of internal working group arrangements. These feed into the development of ISNAR's annual Medium Term Plans. Within the MTP projects the main considerations in activity development have been:

- Does the proposed activity contribute to the objectives outlined and does it fit within the MTP-activities that have been identified?
- Are all the MTP activities that have been proposed sufficiently covered?
- Is the cost recovery sufficient, and does it undermine ISNAR's pricing strategy on other occasions?

The process of establishing institute-level priorities, developed in the context of the Centre Strategic Plans, has already been described in Chapter 2. Under the current funding situation, the growth of the MTPs depends largely on their ability to raise funds. Indeed, according to the Centre, the need to establish a more elaborate mechanism to decide on the priorities amongst the different MTP projects awaits a situation of increased project income or reduced fixed costs (Janssen, 2002).

3.2.3 Assessment

By its own admission, ISNAR's planning processes have been somewhat erratic in the past, resulting in an agenda that was too large and programmes that were not clearly focused. ISNAR's plans have been largely dependent on where the opportunities lay. The Panel believes careful priority setting and resource allocation to be a critical success factor for ISNAR's long-term viability. Increasingly, the shift to restricted core funding means that scarce unrestricted funds will possibly not even cover ISNAR's base costs in the near future. Further it costs money to raise money and these costs too will likely increase substantially in the future. Management will therefore be increasingly involved in making hard choices on how to prioritise spending of scarce unrestricted funds—including doing 'seed' research on potentially important new areas for which the demand can only be determined after initial funding and work has been done by ISNAR. Priority setting and thinking along these lines appears not to be incorporated in the management processes at ISNAR.

The Centre acknowledges—and the Panel recognises—the difficulty in establishing priorities for an organization with a mandate in institutional development. However, the Panel feels that the Centre failed to undertake in a consistent manner the standard planning and monitoring processes such as annual Internal Programme Reviews and regular CCERs. These would have provided the critical review and insight needed by ISNAR to determine and establish its priorities. ISNAR's own management practices must be consistent with those it recommends to its clients.

According to the external reviewer, the most recent Internal Programme Review was a well-organized and constructive exercise: it was well documented, efficiently managed, and the methods used were appropriate and productive. On the basis of documents reviewed and discussions with ISNAR staff, the Panel concurs with the external reviewer's positive assessment of this Internal Programme Review and encourages the Centre to retain the recent format and to conduct such Internal Programme Reviews on an annual basis.

3.3 Monitoring the Quality of Research and Services

ISNAR has a variety of quality control processes to enhance and ensure the quality of its products. These are internal and external reviews, a range of mechanisms to monitor the quality of ISNAR's outputs (publications, training, etc.) and impact evaluation. Overall responsibility for quality, relevance and coherence of the work programmes lies with the Programme Director and relevant programme leaders.

3.3.1 Internal review

ISNAR's Internal Programme Review has been discussed above. Projects submitted for special project funding are also subject to internal and sometimes external review - although the latter is not often followed due to time pressures. Finally, ISNAR holds regular seminars in which completed or planned work is presented and discussed with (primarily) ISNAR staff.

3.3.2 External review

During the period under review, ISNAR has not commissioned external reviews of its programs (i.e., CCERs), due to perceived lack of benefits in relation to the costs of such reviews for a small Centre.

3.3.3 Product review

Various quality control mechanisms are in place for individual ISNAR products:

Publications: ISNAR's internal publications are subject to peer reviewers, including two external reviewers for the larger research-type publications. Publications that are published outside ISNAR, which have accounted for the bulk of the publications in recent years, are apparently not subject to ISNAR-sponsored peer review processes, at least in any systematic manner.

Training: ISNAR's training activities are evaluated in a systematic manner. Every workshop or training course concludes with an evaluation following a standard format regarding logistics, organization, content, trainers, training materials, and usefulness. In addition, procedures are in place to follow trainees up to six months after the courses. This evaluation information is recorded in a database and summarized for programme management.

Advisory services: Surprisingly, given the importance of advisory services as an ISNAR product since its inception, no procedures are in place to systematically evaluate them. This is now being rectified and a team has drafted a Customer Satisfaction Survey in which 'customers' would be contacted after each advisory service is delivered in order to assess client satisfaction.

3.3.4 Impact evaluation

At the Centre level ISNAR has carried out comprehensive impact assessments only on an *ad hoc* basis, typically in preparation for the EPMP process. Following a comprehensive external impact evaluation in 1996, ISNAR commissioned a follow up evaluation in 2002, that was implemented using both internal and external evaluators. This review, while less comprehensive than in 1996, provided useful information on those areas in which ISNAR has had most impacts. At the project level, ISNAR is involved in methodology development and the evaluation of a series of case studies through a sub-project in MTP2.

3.3.5 Assessment

The Panel deems that the presence of one external reviewer for all projects during the recent Internal Programme Reviews is a poor substitute for a comprehensive review of a subset of programme activities by leading experts in the field. In the Panel's view, the lack of external reviews has led to insufficient exposure of programmes to rigorous review processes, resulting in some cases in low programme quality. Furthermore, it could not detect a Centre mechanism to follow-up the recommendations of the external observer, or the internal peer reviewers.

The Panel believes the Centre would benefit greatly from a series of Centre commissioned external reviews (CCERs) covering the full range of research and service activities of the Centre. The Centre disregarded TAC's encouragement from its commentary on the last EPMR report to subject all of the Centre's work to a rigorous external review prior to this EPMR.

The quality control of ISNAR's products is very uneven. The Panel acknowledges the high standard of evaluation processes in ISNAR's training programme. The internal peer review process for in-house publications appears to be working well, although the drastic drop in the number of in-house publications has reduced the relevance of this procedure. The Panel urges ISNAR to implement the intended monitoring mechanism for its service products as soon as possible (customer satisfaction).

With respect to the most recent impact assessment study, the review highlighted the lack of an institutionalised approach for systematic impact assessment on an ongoing basis, with appropriate performance indicators laid out not only for individual projects and programmes but also for the Centre as a whole. This lack of an impact assessment culture coupled with the lack of systematic baseline data collection has limited feedback to ISNAR and its donors on overall Centre performance. ISNAR needs to institutionalise responsibility within the Centre for impact evaluation, that includes routine sampling of completed projects and programs for impact assessment, using both internal and external assessors. Project formulation should also provide resources to allow such evaluations to be carried out.

The Panel concludes that overall, ISNAR has not had satisfactory mechanisms in place to assure quality in programme formulation and product delivery and evidence of impacts. The major exceptions are training which has developed a strong evaluative culture, and some of the work in Latin America. The Panel rejects the cost savings argument for foregoing external reviews, which are standard practice for ensuring the quality and relevance of research and services. For a Centre devoted to enhancing quality of research management, these gaps in its own processes are especially worrying if it is to 'lead by example'. The Board and senior management have a responsibility here to see that quality metrics are established and monitored.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that ISNAR institutionalize comprehensive planning and priority setting as well as internal and external quality control processes to ensure the relevance and quality of its research and service activities.

3.4 Partnerships and Linkages

3.4.1 NAROs and NARS

NAROs and NARS are ISNAR's traditional partners. ISNAR now extends its concept of national partners to a wider stakeholder constituency. The selection of NARS partners has mainly been guided by the demand for ISNAR interventions, or by funding opportunities. Strategic aspects for choosing certain countries or institutions were less dominant in the more service-oriented projects. However, in several action research projects pro-active selection of partners played a role in obtaining a range and balance of competencies, to foster learning among NARS.

3.4.2 Regional and sub regional organizations

ISNAR supported the creation of GFAR in the mid-nineties, and seconded one ISNAR staff to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) based GFAR Secretariat for NARS support. While appreciated by the GFAR Secretariat, this secondment was discontinued after ISNAR's financial crisis in 2000. ISNAR played a role in the creation of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA). Similarly, it is now involved in establishing the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). ISNAR has collaborative agreements with several sub regional fora in Latin America at the project level.

3.4.3 CGIAR Centres

ISNAR maintains three types of partnerships with its sister Centres within the CGIAR: (i) system-wide or multi-Centre activities, (ii) bilateral collaborations at project level, and (iii) out posted staff. The first type comprises the Central Advisory Service (CAS) (MTP4), the Inter-Centre Training Group (INTG) (MTP3), the Ecoregional Fund and the 'Global Knowledge Sharing Group' of librarians, as well as ISNAR's participation in the CGIAR initiatives on Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC), malaria, HIV/AIDS, and water. The second type relates to, *inter alia*, ASTI and biosafety policies with IFPRI (MTP1 and MTP4, respectively), links with the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in the Public Private Partnership Project in Latin America (PPP-LAC), MTP2, and several *ad hoc* collaborations, e.g. a workshop with IPGRI on plant genetic resources management. Lastly, there are two out posted staff members and one joint appointment at IFPRI, one at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and one at IITA.

3.4.4 Universities and advanced research institutes

Current university partnerships are exclusively at the project level, depending on the subject matter. Examples are PPP-LAC (MTP2) with the University of Hohenheim, Germany, where a Post-doctoral student has an 80% contract with ISNAR and 20% with the university; collaboration between ISNAR's Biotechnology Service (IBS) and Virginia Tech University on biosafety (MTP4), or with the University of Concordia, Canada, on evaluation methodology (MTP2). Forging such strategic alliances with leading universities or research institutes is entirely left to the initiative of the sub-project leaders.

3.4.5 Assessment

It is apparent from the above description that ISNAR has forged few important partnerships with other institutions though not to maximum benefit since there is no institutional policy or incentive to support staff or project leaders to establish strategic alliances. The Panel noted with concern that the impact assessment study (Anderson et al 2002³) had detected only minimal awareness of ISNARs products among those NARO managers who are not its immediate clients. Partnerships with the GFAR Secretariat or ASARECA have also not developed into sustainable arrangements.

While recognising ISNAR's continually improved approach to collaborating with clients and beneficiary institutions, the Panel is concerned with the conspicuously missing plan for forging strategic alliances with a range of partners with expertise in management and organizational science in developed and developing countries. It is clear from the limited number of such strategic alliances in which ISNAR has engaged in the last five years, particularly with management specialist organizations, that such a strategy was essential. In the context of a careful inventory and assessment of the major public and private sector providers of research and services in the field of agricultural research policy, organization and management, ISNAR must wisely chart its course, building strategic linkages and alliances wherever possible.

Finally, ISNAR as an 'honest broker' has an important role in advocacy especially in relation to top decision makers in client countries and donors. Such advocacy should promote the central role of agricultural research in meeting societal objectives, articulating the role of the public sector, especially in serving poor and marginal groups, as well as promoting appropriate institutional arrangements for efficient and equitable results.

3.5 Outposting of Staff

During the review period, ISNAR has actively started to decentralize its operation. At present, it has one regional office at San José, Costa Rica, and outposted staff at five locations. ISNAR intends to further decentralize, and to operate its future regional offices under MTP6. It is currently developing a strategy for regional offices.

Five IRS are based at the Costa Rica regional office, hosted by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). The leaders of MTP4 and 5 are located at the Washington office at IFPRI, and the leader of MTP1 is at IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria. Individual staff members of MTP1 are located at Los Baños (IRRI), and Entebbe, Uganda (ASARECA) respectively. One staff member at each of the offices in San José, Washington, Ibadan and Los Baños has the responsibility of representing ISNAR in the region, mainly for the generation of new project proposals and fund-raising. The associate staff member with the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) in Brasilia retired in 2001. A new office is being opened at ARC/NDA in Pretoria (South Africa) with a staff member from MTP3.

³ Anderson J. R., Anandajayasekeram, P., Craswell E., and Rukuni, M. (2002). Impact Assessment of ISNAR 1997-2001. Report of an ISNAR Team, June 30, 2002.

3.5.1 Assessment

The Panel commends ISNAR for initiating the process of decentralisation and welcomes ISNAR's preliminary thinking on a strategy for establishing regional offices to be closer to its clients. However, the Panel could not see the strategic considerations for out posting staff in response to ISNAR's programme. Some of the out postings appear to be based more on personal rather than on programmatic reasons. ISNAR needs to make strategic choices regarding how many and which regional offices it could and should maintain, and then staff these offices to respond to the region's needs with the necessary critical mass and adequate composition of skills.

ISNAR's attempt to cover all major developing regions has the effect of spreading its limited resources thinly. Since regional presence brings additional costs and difficulties, guiding principles and procedures need to be developed that allow ISNAR to decentralize its operations in the most effective and efficient manner for impact.

The degree of integration of the regional offices in their respective host institutions has been variable. With the exception of developing Inks at IFPRI for ASTI and biosafety, there is, up to now, little indication of joint research or service activities with ISNAR's host institutions.

Regional offices need clear principles for their operation. This relates to their degree of autonomy in programmatic decision-making and the management of funds. It further refers to communication across programmes and sites, mechanisms for joint strategic planning, and finally administrative support.

4. RESEARCH AND SERVICE PROGRAMMES

The Panel reviewed research and service programmes of ISNAR over the period, 1997-2002. During this period, ISNAR has restructured its Medium Term Projects (MTPs) twice. Up to 1998, ISNAR had organized its research and service activities around two programmes—one on policy themes and one on management themes (Figure 4.1). Following the 1998-2002 Strategy, When NARS retool, ISNAR grouped its research and service activities into 18 MTPs listed in Table 4.1. The objectives and geographical coverage of each of these projects are given in Annex 1. Six of the MTP projects were discontinued in the 2001 MTP, due to adjustment to reduced funding (ISNAR, 2001).

Figure 4.1: The evolution of ISNAR's medium term plan projects 1997 -2002

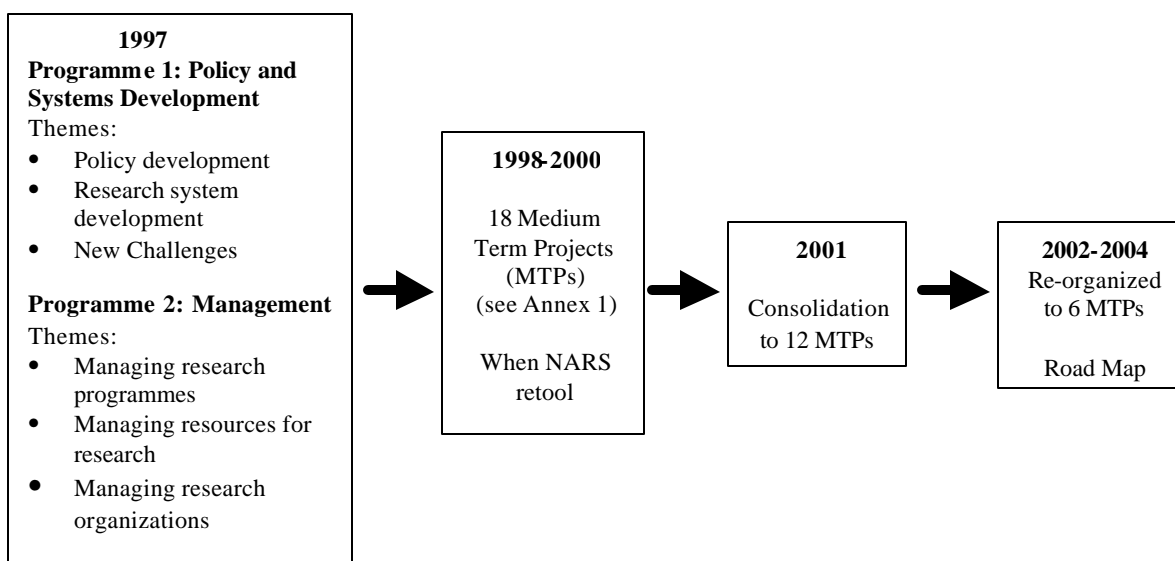


Table 4.1: MTP projects, 1997 to 2002

MTP project	Status in 2001	Status in 2002
Project 1: Globalization: Analyzing forces, processes, and options for NARS	Continued	Being phased out
Project 2: Informing agricultural research policymakers about trends in research: agricultural science and technology indicators (ASTI)	Discontinued	MTP1
Project 3: Integrating agroindustrial and environmental demands in agricultural research for the 21 st Century	Discontinued	MTP2
Project 4: Enhancing the governance and accountability of NAROs and NARS	Continued	MTP2
Project 5: Building capacity for the strategic management of institutional change in agricultural science and technology organizations in Latin America	Continued	MTP2
Project 6: Assessment of the impact of capacity building in agricultural research management	Continued	MTP2
Project 7: ISNAR's Intermediary Biotechnology Service (IBS)	Continued	MTP4
Project 8: Information and communications for agricultural research organizations	Continued	MTP4
Project 9: Agricultural research and the environment	Continued	MTP5
Project 10: Improving tools for research policy formulation, strategic planning, research linkages, and research system development	Discontinued	MTP1 and MTP2
Project 11: Towards integrated project-based agricultural research management systems	Discontinued	Discontinued
Project 12: Gender relations in agricultural research: Strengthening core competencies in policy, organization, and management	Continued	Being phased out
Project 13: Strengthening NARS through diagnostic reviews, planning, and facilitation of institutional development	Continued	MTP2
Project 14: The double transition: building NARS for the 21 st century in Central Asia and the Caucasus	Discontinued	Discontinued
Project 15: Strengthening institutions to participate in the emerging global research system	Discontinued	Discontinued
Project 16: Global information centre on agricultural research policy, organization, and management	Continued	Discontinued
Project 17: ISNAR Global Associates: Strengthening regional capacity to serve regional needs for institutional change in NARS	Continued	MTP6
Project 18: Building NARS capacity for training and facilitation of change processes	Continued	MTP3

Following approval of the Strategy, “The New Road Map”, in 2001, ISNAR regrouped its activities into 6 newly defined MTP projects. These projects included a set of 25 activities that related to previous MTPs (ISNAR, 2001).

The six new MTP Projects detailed in the 2002-2004 Medium Term Plan are:

1. Policies for institutional innovations for agricultural research;
2. Linking research organizations and stakeholders in a changing context;
3. Learning for institutional innovation;
4. Management of new technologies for agricultural research;
5. Building capacity to respond to cross-sector demands;
6. Entrepreneurial partnerships to support agricultural research;

The Panel has reviewed the work completed from 1997-2002 within the framework of the six newly structured MTPs. It has classified completed activities into each of the new MTP projects following the reports prepared by each new MTP Project. These reports reviewed activities over the period, 1997-2001. In a few cases where there are overlaps and the same activity was classified by ISNAR reports into two new MTP projects, the Panel has reviewed the activity in its most logical new home. For example, the subproject on university-NARS linkages in Africa was considered in the ISNAR documents as part of both MTP1 (Policies) and MTP2 (Linkages to Stakeholders), but the Panel has reviewed it under MTP2.

In the following sections, the Panel first reviews the activities and accomplishments of each MTP. It then assesses the quality of ISNAR's aggregate outputs in Section 4.7, and the overall implementation of the strategy, achievements and impacts, in Section 4.8.

4.1 MTP1: Policies for Institutional Innovations in Agricultural Research

4.1.1 Introduction

Agricultural research policy embraces a range of topics—the overall agenda for agricultural research, institutional options for innovation systems development, funding strategies, options for international acquisition and exchange of innovations, processes for interacting among domestic agricultural research institutions, the links to technology dissemination, and the legal framework governing agricultural research and design (R&D) (Omamo, Boyd, and Janssen, 2000). Research and service activities may explore influences of general agricultural, institutional, and economic policy on agricultural R&D, as well as ways that agricultural R&D systems can influence the setting of those policies.

Policies for institutional innovation and agricultural research are central to ISNAR's mandate. ISNAR has a long tradition of work on agricultural research policy, which has also been the focus of its analytical or 'pure' research activities. ISNAR in collaboration with university economists produced several books in the early-mid 1990s, that became standard references in the field. A major input for this research was the Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) that provided the first comprehensive country-based database on global investments in agricultural research.

Much of the research work in this field ceased in the mid-1990s with the departure of key staff. Staffing since then has been erratic, and with the exception of staff working on ASTI, there has been considerable turnover during the review period. Currently the project is staffed by 4.5 internationally-recruited staff, with two posted in two locations in Africa (including the MTP leader), one posted to Asia, and one person jointly hired with IFPRI and posted in Washington.

4.1.2 Objectives, scope of work, and activities

The major ISNAR activities that have been defined as research policy include, the work on ASTI and related analysis, the impacts of globalization on R&D, a variety of activities that were previously grouped under policy tools⁴, and some service-oriented activities to national systems.

4.1.2.1 ASTI

Information on levels and trends in agricultural R&D investments is essential to those involved in formulating agricultural research policies. The primary objective of the ASTI database is to document trends in national funding for agricultural R&D and personnel numbers by type of implementing agency (public, private, universities, etc).

Reducing the lag in data collection and timely updating has been the major challenge for ASTI. During the review period, updating of the ASTI database continued, but largely led by IFPRI. ISNAR had primary responsibility for updating and analysing data on the Caribbean. The final compilation of the updated database was recently published by IFPRI (*Slow Magic: Agricultural R&D a Century after Mendel*). ISNAR has led work to establish the Web-based ASTI that allows data to be downloaded by country and region. Recently ISNAR and IFPRI have collaborated in developing a longer-term strategy for ensuring that the database can be updated on a regular and timely basis and in a cost-effective manner.

The ASTI database provides a wide range of opportunities to analyse and interpret major trends in agricultural research investments. This work has been led by IFPRI although often with inputs from ISNAR. In addition, ISNAR has participated in an IFPRI led series of 13 individual country studies of policy perspectives and institutional change in agricultural research, taking the lead for the Netherlands and the Zambia. Finally, ISNAR is contributing to the methodological basis of ASTI by developing and applying an improved approach to estimating agricultural research intensity, by including the effects of R&D embodied in inputs

The degree of ISNAR's participation in ASTI has been conditioned by funding and staffing. Up to 2000, ISNAR had not been able to obtain special funding for this initiative and in 2000 dropped the subproject from its MTP. However, with a special appropriation from the CGIAR through a World Bank grant, ISNAR has again renewed participation with 1.2 professional staff devoted to the activity in the Hague, and one joint IFPRI-ISNAR staff member in Washington.

4.1.2.2 Globalization

In its 1997 strategic plan, ISNAR recognized that globalization is having major implications for agricultural research policy and management through changes in commodity mix, expansion of opportunities for international trade, trade standards, intellectual property rights, and privatization. ISNAR launched a substantial effort in 1999 with the objective to develop guidelines for re-orienting research strategies and institutions to accommodate the rapidly changing environment brought on by globalization. The major activities of this sub-

⁴ Some activities have been treated in the Internal Programme Review in both MTP1 and MTP2. For this review, work on linkages with universities, for example, is classified in MTP2.

project have been a series of country case studies on globalization, and surveys of NARS related to globalization and Internal Programme Reviews. These case studies have now been synthesized into a book that will be published by Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI) this year.

4.1.2.3 Policy tools

Several activities were included in a previous MTP project on policy tools, some of which relate more to research management than research policy. These activities include:

- Publication of the source books on *Financing Agricultural Research*, and *Planning Agricultural Research*;
- NARS instability: This work has focused institutional, staffing, governance, and funding instability in agricultural research systems, using Nigeria as a case study;
- Priority setting tools: ISNAR has traditionally been a leader in developing tools for priority setting and training in these tools. This tradition has been continued in the review period, with comprehensive efforts completed in Kenya, and testing and application of new tools, such as the Analytical Hierarchical Procedure for priority setting;
- Targeting R&D for poverty alleviation: Over the past two years, ISNAR has carried out work related to targeting of public expenditures and social programs;
- Comparative studies of innovation systems in Eastern Africa to understand the processes of institutional innovation: This work has just been initiated in collaboration with ASARECA, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

4.1.2.4 Service activities

ISNAR does not have a tradition in service activities related to agricultural research policy. However, it has recently initiated service activities in Africa, including the support to the establishment of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and policy seminars in Eastern and Southern Africa. Currently ISNAR has been commissioned by ASARECA to synthesize stakeholder perceptions on the key issues confronting institutional development of NARS in Eastern Africa.

4.1.3 Assessment

With programme reformulation, staff turnover and reduction in staff numbers in the policy area, the capacity of ISNAR to make contributions in research policy and institutional innovations has been steadily eroding. The major continuing activity has been ISNAR's sporadic participation in ASTI. This is an excellent example of an international public good that has been widely used by analysts and development practitioners to describe and analyse overall trends in public and private investment in R&D. ISNAR itself was a major user, with the publication, for example, of the *Financing Sourcebook* in 1998, but in recent years has had little active participation in data analysis. In the ISNAR impact study, ASTI was singled out as one of its most valuable products in informing policy on agricultural research (Anderson et al., 2002⁵). Finally, the expanding collaboration with subregional research organizations is an appropriate move to decentralize and eventually devolve ASTI to these organizations.

⁵ Anderson J. R., Anandajayasekeram, P., Craswell E., and Rukuni, M. (2002). Impact Assessment of ISNAR 1997-2001. Report of an ISNAR Team, June 30, 2002.

While the results of the subproject on globalization will undoubtedly make a contribution to professional knowledge, it is doubtful that it has and will make much contribution to improving agricultural R&D policies. The book does not provide a framework for policy makers and research managers (or even the authors of the case studies!) to analyse options for dealing with globalization. ISNAR should prepare a series of policy briefs to highlight the main findings and implications.

The contributions of ISNAR in development and use of policy tools, such as priority setting have been important. However, the Panel is concerned that ISNAR's leadership in this area has been eroded by departure or redeployment of key staff. This has not allowed its tools and manuals to be updated to reflect current trends toward blending analytical methods with more participatory processes.

Thus, while some of the activities in MTP1 are individually worthy, the Panel sees little coherence among the activities, no guiding framework, and no well-defined target audience for the products. Nearly all of the activities are very research oriented, in a field in which many others are undertaking similar research, and where ISNAR does not seem to be 'plugged into' recent literature and thinking through partnerships with universities and others. Work on globalization, for example, could have been more effectively carried out by a university.

One result of the strong research tradition in MTP1 is that much of the work has not been sharply targeted on key questions confronting agricultural research policy makers. One of the difficulties is that ISNAR's traditional client has been the NARO, while key policy decisions affecting agricultural research are usually made by policy makers outside of the NAROs, in ministries of agriculture, science and technology (S&T) and finance. ISNAR has generally not effectively targeted this wider range of policy makers in its research, or through its direct contacts in advisory services, or even through its publications.

Agricultural research policy is clearly central to ISNAR's original mandate, and MTP1 should therefore be one of its flagships. ISNAR has missed an important opportunity to make a wider contribution to the overarching research policy issues of the day. These include methods for enhancing the poverty impacts of agricultural R&D (now led by IFPRI and CIAT), the emerging areas of institutional innovation and policy, such as decentralization, competitive and contractual funding, policies to promote private sector R&D, and links to broader S&T policy. The Panel concludes that ISNAR no longer has a comparative advantage in economics-type research on research policy. In addition, none of the training courses have emphasized these bread and butter issues for policy makers (see Section 4.3), and readers of ISNAR's publications do not look to ISNAR for enhancing their knowledge of agricultural research policy (see Section 4.7).

ISNAR itself, has recognized the need to develop a coherent framework on agricultural research policy and institutional innovation, identify the key suppliers of research and service products for research policy, and then define its niche and needed partnerships. ISNAR is urging countries to adopt clear policy frameworks for national research systems, but has not led by example.

The over-riding issues for national agricultural research systems at this time is the erosion of capacity and the financial crisis in many systems. ISNAR's work while highlighting these trends, has thrown very little light on understanding them, and providing options for managing them. These issues clearly go beyond economics to broader issues of political economy of mustering public and private support for agricultural services. ISNAR in its own self-diagnosis, has recognized that it must focus on understanding policy processes.

ISNAR could stake out a programme of work more in line with its new Road Map, that emphasizes the key policy issues in institutional innovation at the system level, and which would complement work being done elsewhere in the CGIAR. Part of this work would involve constructing a global database of indicators of institutional development of NARS, perhaps as part of a continuing joint ISNAR-IFPRI ASTI effort. Such a database has long been recommended as a high priority activity for ISNAR (e.g., Nickel et al., 1996). However, the disciplinary mix to carry out these activities would be quite different to the current skill mix which is largely agricultural economics. Expertise in institutional economics, public administration, political science, and S&T policy would be required. While some of these skills can be accessed through partnerships, ISNAR will need to develop a core in-house capacity that requires investing substantial resources to re-staff or retrain staff. The Panel believes that it will be difficult in the current funding climate for ISNAR to comprehensively retool in the policy area. This is also a view that was widely expressed by ISNAR's key stakeholders in interviews with the Panel.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that ISNAR either comprehensively retool to effectively execute an appropriate agenda for policy issues in institutional innovations, in partnership with IFPRI and others (under a rejuvenated research and service oriented ISNAR – see Chapter 6), or MTP1 (policy research) should be discontinued with IFPRI assuming full responsibility for ASTI and research policy work (under a decentralized service-oriented ISNAR).

4.2 MTP2: Linking Research and Stakeholders

4.2.1 Objectives and activities

The objective of MTP2 is to develop capacity for institutional innovation that links research with stakeholder concerns. The creation of this project responds to two developments in ISNAR's working environment:

- Increasing recognition that agricultural innovation is not a unidirectional flow from technology development in agricultural research systems to its application, but a complex process with multiple stakeholders and feedback mechanisms;
- The growing importance of consumer demands and market forces, in addition to production of agricultural commodities.

For these reasons agricultural research has to respond to the demands of much broader range of interest groups. In addition, stakeholders need mechanisms to influence the research agenda and its implementation. Many of these demands concern issues or interest groups not defined within the mandate of the CGIAR. ISNAR serves NARS that must respond to these clients and their interests. As such MTP2 focuses on institutional innovations that facilitate interactions, influence, and responsiveness with a wide range of stakeholders. Much of the

work in this area originated from requests from NARS leaders who were concerned about the lack of impact of their research, especially with respect to resource-poor farmers.

MTP2 evolved from ten former sub-projects under the 1997-2001 strategy that have been grouped into four new areas of activities within MTP2:

- Governance mechanisms and bodies (former project 4);
- Partnerships, networks and complex programs (former projects 5, 6, 9, and 10);
- Management practices (former project 13);
- Strengthening the voice of vulnerable groups (former project 12).

Most of the current work is concentrated in Area 2 on Partnerships and Networks, which marries both research and services. Considerable past work was focused on Area 3 through the provision of services. There is currently little work in Area 4 and the Panel considers that the one subproject (PBMS) currently listed under Area 1 logically fits under Area 3.

Currently MTP2 consists of seven sub-projects with 14 international staff and a total budget of \$2.3m in 2002. The MTP has a strong Latin American focus with five staff based in Costa Rica managing two regional projects that have funding until 2004. These are the only projects that have assured funding beyond 2002. There is one special project for Asia and the remaining projects focus on Africa. Overall MTP2 has a strong service tradition, but most recent projects have combined action research and service.

4.2.1.1 Area 2: Work on partnerships, networks and complex programs

This Area combines three groups of activities: (i) evaluation of capacity development, (ii) networking and partnerships in Latin America, and (iii) NARS and university linkages in Africa.

Evaluating capacity development: From 1997-99 an in-depth evaluation was carried out of results of a capacity-development effort aimed at strengthening planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) in agricultural research organizations. Five studies assessed the project's contributions to strengthening the capacity of both individuals and their organizations. This was followed by a three-year action research project in which professionals from five international and six national organizations evaluated their own capacity-development efforts and drew general lessons from their experience.

Networking for institutional change: Building on the earlier work on strengthening PM&E in Latin America, the project team broadened its focus in 1998 to the management of institutional change, in what became known as the *New Paradigm Project*. In 2000, key stakeholders encouraged the project to transform itself into a network involving collaborators in 10 countries with the objective of building individual and organizational capacity in the strategic management of institutional change. A number of constructs—conceptualisation, food chain analysis, scenario development, training, and multi-stakeholder interaction—networking, and facilitation of 'thinking outside the box' underlie ISNAR's work in this project. The project emphasizes participatory action processes among a range of stakeholders with an aim to stimulate participants to seek innovation solutions to respond to a changing economic, institutional and social environment. The project has supported over 60

regional and national training workshops, the production of twenty training manuals/modules, and six reference publications.

Public-private partnerships: A project on public-private partnership for agro-industrial research in Latin America was initiated in late 2001 as a follow-up to an earlier project on “New Technological Demands”, operating in Latin America and the Caribbean from 1997-99. The new project is aimed at developing tools for the participating institutes to effectively forge partnerships with the agro-industrial sector. The project is undertaking three pilot case studies, networking through a web site, an electronic newsletter, and building a community of practice.

Linkages in Africa: From 1994-98 country teams analysed NARS linkages with producer organizations in four African countries to formulate strategies and plans to strengthen linkages. This project resulted in a number of ISNAR publications and training modules. A second project focuses on linking universities and agricultural research organizations in Africa. This project aims to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of NARS by strengthening the role of universities in research. The first two phases (1994-98) involved case studies and action plan development in six countries as well as networking activities. The current phase focuses on documenting past experiences and the development of guidelines.

4.2.1.2 Area 3: Work on the design and implementation of management practices

ISNAR has a long tradition of developing, introducing and applying management tools and methods for key planning and management processes in public research organizations. The major management areas covered include strategic planning, priority setting, programme planning, and organizational performance assessment. Increasing application of these tools requires involvement of external stakeholders. Advisory services of varying intensities have been provided to some 20 countries in the application of these tools.

An integrated example of this approach is the project to build Performance Based Management Systems (PBMS) in Asian Agricultural Research Organizations (specifically in Indonesia, Vietnam, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). The project works with each of these in organization performance assessment, strategic planning, priority setting, linkage planning and staff performance assessment, emphasizing facilitation of participatory action processes, team building, and self-assessment.

4.2.1.3 Area 4: Strengthening the voice of vulnerable groups

A fourth Area is being developed to address stakeholders within civil society whose voice and influence are often under-represented in agricultural research agenda settings. The involvement of social groups such as youth, women, refugees, the disabled, the media, and non-governmental organizations are recognized as vital to processes of institutional change in NARS. One dimension relates to gender and agricultural research-compliance with gender policy, involvement of rural women’s organizations, and analysis of women scientists in NARS. Gender analysis was mainstreamed in some areas of ISNAR’s training and project management tools, e.g. the ‘engendered log frame’ and the Planning Sourcebook. With very little financial resources, ten articles or book chapters were published by ISNAR in refereed journals/books, or on ISNAR’s website, and two training modules were developed.

4.2.2 Assessment

MTP2 is the heartland of ISNAR, the core of its core. With nearly half of ISNAR's programme resources, it has the potential to become the model project of ISNAR's concepts for the integration of service and quality research. Apart from the "theory of action", issues such as the new stakeholder orientation, gender aspects, the interface with the private sector, and cross-sector integration have the potential to become ISNAR's key research subjects.

4.2.2.1 *Scope of work*

The scope of MTP2 is very broad and ambitious, with a mix of service and research activities spread across all regions. The internal coherence of the project is currently limited by the fact that it is the amalgamation of a large number of predecessor subprojects. These subprojects cover diverse stakeholder groups at different levels of organizations (individual institutions, national systems, regional networks, etc). Future activities have to assess carefully whether they could or should build on key conceptual elements of these projects, or whether the time for these themes is over. One good example is the evaluation work where ISNAR has shown considerable leadership and developed interesting partnerships to tap university expertise. Other 'inherited' subprojects, such as the one on university linkages in Africa, has been very slow in producing final outputs and should be evaluated before continuation.

ISNAR recognizes the importance of forming a strong and cohesive team to carry MTP2 forward. To this end, the entire group conducted a planning exercise during a one-week retreat focussed on team building and developing its conceptual framework. The Panel commends the leader of MTP2 and his group for initiating this strategic discussion. The discussion should be continued with the addition of external input, drawing on the expertise of ISNAR's partners and clients. The results should be converted into a project strategy with clear demand-driven priorities.

Funding for the majority of the current activities will end in 2002. The MTP2 team is aware of this critical situation. Given the high number of staff in MTP2, new activities need to be prepared urgently according to the new strategic thinking within the project. If no new funding is obtained, MTP2 will be overstaffed and personnel will have to be adjusted to ensure continuation of the highest priority activities. In seeking new funding, ISNAR should attempt to maintain capacity in Asia, and sharply strengthen its work in Africa, where the need is greatest and MTP2 activities have been relatively weak. This will also provide an opportunity to incorporate lessons from the ongoing work in Latin America and Asia.

4.2.2.2 *Managing a wider set of stakeholders*

In responding to a changing environment for agricultural research, ISNAR has rightly broadened its scope to a much larger group of stakeholders, and is addressing these linkages explicitly in MTP2. MTP2 has to be commended for taking the initiative to develop a common understanding of ISNAR's new stakeholder map, and for identifying its entry points in this diverse environment. This work will be an essential input into ISNAR's overall strategic planning to identify the target groups on which to focus its resources and activities in order to achieve maximum impact on its overall goals. One issue is the extent that ISNAR itself will interact with this wider set of stakeholders, versus building capacity for NARS to undertake such interaction and provide feedback to ISNAR.

Part of ISNAR's research agenda should be to elaborate a 'stakeholder landscape' for its priority setting (equivalent to commodity or poverty maps in other CGIAR Centres). ISNAR should be the lead institution in detecting changes in the stakeholder environment of agricultural research. For this purpose it needs a broader range of disciplinary skills and must be in close contact with its constituency, preferably through a decentralized mode of operation in partnership with the regional fora.

4.2.2.3 Contribution through management tools and methods

Based on field visits by the Panel and results of the impact study, the provision of tools and services for improving institutional performance is clearly an area where ISNAR has made significant contributions in a number of countries. This work has provided support to individual organizations that have led to the formulation of new strategic plans for organizational development in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Vietnam through the PBMS subproject in Asia, and to new priorities and research programmes in Mexico. The breadth and experience of ISNAR staff and their facilitative style of operation has meant substantial local ownership of the results. A particular advantage of ISNAR staff has been their ability to bring experiences and lessons learned from similar situations in other countries and organizations. Although some of these activities were somewhat 'supply-driven', overall, ISNAR appears to have accomplished much in terms of opening up the process, strengthening team-building, and helping the institutes do their first self-assessments and strategic planning and priority setting exercises.

ISNAR regards its PBMS activities as interventions on governance. In the Panel's view this is a very narrow definition of governance, which involve broad political challenges. The Panel notes that addressing policy makers and developing a governance approach which interfaces management and policy is still an issue for ISNAR. In the Panel's view, ISNAR should not only broaden its concept of governance, but should develop a complementary advocacy programme.

Given the objectives of MTP2 and its strong focus on stakeholder interaction, the Panel is concerned that issues like evaluation, and much of the work on management tools and processes, may no longer get adequate attention. ISNAR should be careful to devote enough resources to the continued development and updating of its products and tools.

'Harvesting' experience from service activities through synthesis into manuals, guidelines, and lessons learned remains a challenge for ISNAR. The Organizational Performance Assessment System (OPAS) in Asia represents good practice in tool development and service provision in several organizations over a two-year period. This however, still needs to be synthesized into management guidelines and training modules.

The Impact Assessment survey reports favourable scores for the usefulness, relevance, and quality of generic tools and procedures. However, in their overall assessment they state that none of ISNAR's planning, management and diagnostic tools has been widely adopted yet, although they recognise a growing demand for the OPAS tool. In addition, the contribution to institutional performance was rated poorly, which led the Impact Assessment team to conclude that there is a need for a closer follow-up. The Panel observed that in countries (e.g., Mozambique) where there is less commitment within NAROS to institutional

reform at the system level, ISNAR was less successful in fostering institutional reform. This is partly because it did not actively seek to engage top policy makers or donors in dialogue.

The demand for these kinds of services seems to be strong, but a strategy for more efficient delivery, training of trainers and maintaining up-to-date best practices is needed. Clients also noted a need for long-term involvement by ISNAR to assure effectiveness of institutional change processes.

4.2.2.4 Contribution to ISNAR's conceptual thinking

Much of MTP2 work combines research and service. It generates knowledge in the context of application. This way of working is central to ISNAR's conceptual framework - its "theory of action" - and to ISNAR's efforts to move towards the research end of the service spectrum.

In situations, such as Mexico and Cuba, where national stakeholders are the owners and drivers of their change process, ISNAR has facilitated major inputs into the overall institutional change process. These cases also demonstrate the interactive feedback in the research-service continuum. For example, the work in Cuba was initiated as a service to support the institutional change process, which had already been initiated. Through active participation of the Cubans who developed their own approach to participatory self-assessment, the overall project has greatly benefited in its conceptual development, and has generated new research products. Networks such as the New Paradigm Project facilitate transfer and exchange of these lessons among participating organizations. Some universities have restructured courses following the Project's frameworks.

Finally as with management practice, ISNAR can only make a contribution to international public goods through concerted efforts to distil lessons, approaches and good practices from the processes of stakeholder engagement. These findings need to be subject to peer review of scientific journals prior to scaling up.

4.2.2.5 Human resource issues

MTP2 is one of the few projects that can allow ISNAR to evaluate an appropriate decentralization strategy. With nine international staff at headquarters and five in Costa Rica and associated national professional staff, both locations (The Hague and Costa Rica) have sufficient critical mass to permit interaction among staff members. Costa Rica also offers a potential model of setting up a decentralized team with a variety of skills. ISNAR should track this experiences as well as the effectiveness of communication within and between the two locations as a way of formulating its overall decentralization policy.

Approximately one third of MTP IRS are senior professionals, and the others are in the earlier stages of their professional career. In principle, this is a healthy mix of experience, if the professional profiles are adequate for the programme. The need to match skills to the strategy and programmatic needs of MTP2 is true for all of ISNAR. Future recruitments have therefore to consider the necessary mix of experienced advisors for service provision, and creative researchers for conceptual development. Especially for research, ISNAR must seek strong collaborative arrangements with advanced research institutes.

4.2.3 Conclusion

The Panel concludes that MTP2 should be maintained as the core project of ISNAR. It should continue strategic planning in consultation with its partners and clients, and judiciously use external expertise to prioritise sub-projects based on strategic criteria. New mechanisms for involving stakeholders that are now being tested should be subjected to peer review by submission to recognized social science and management journals. ISNAR also needs to reassess its concept of governance and face up to the broader challenges confronting key policy makers.

Furthermore, the balance between service and research functions within MTP2 should be carefully monitored. ISNAR must ensure that core competency in programme evaluation as well as development and updating of management tools must be sustained, and its accumulated experience should be capitalized into guidelines and training modules. Finally, ISNAR should maintain its capacity in Asia and be proactive in seeking to strengthen its MTP2 activities in Africa, where the need is greatest, drawing on its experiences from other regions.

4.3 MTP3 Learning for Institutional Innovation

Between 1997 and 2001 ISNAR's training activities were grouped under MTP18 (Building NARS capacity for training and facilitation of change processes). Beginning in 2002, as part of the "New Road Map" the activities have been grouped under MTP3.

4.3.1 Objectives and Activities

4.3.1.1 1997-2001 Programme

Under MTP18 the objectives of training were to develop and improve human capacity to manage research and training, support the development of specialized training, build NARS and regional capacity for training, support and follow up ISNAR's research and service delivery, improve collaboration in training within the CGIAR, improve NARS access and delivery of training tools, and test how in-service and distance training could be made an instrument to improve research management skills of scientists in remote locations.

Within the broader framework of innovation systems, ISNAR has consistently emphasized a comprehensive approach to training for capacity building in NARS. The Training Unit has developed a conceptual framework and a Training Cycle covering several phases ranging from diagnosis of training needs and organizational constraints assessment (TNA) and training of trainers to evaluation, and post-training evaluation.

The main activities of the Training Unit from 1997 and 2001 included development of educational methodology and tools including 41 training modules and CD-Rom, and 11 publications. Other outputs included 75 training workshops with 1300 trainees, of whom 834 attended courses organized by the Training Unit and 20 were also trained as trainers. ISNAR training targets senior agricultural research managers, who were drawn from Africa (46%), Asia (29%), Europe and USA (14%) and Latin America and Caribbean (11%). About 40% of participants were from the NAROs, 14% from universities, while the rest were from Ministries of Agriculture, NGOs, the private sector and international organizations.

The 75 training workshops are grouped into four courses that are conducted annually plus those conducted on an *ad hoc* basis. In the first annual course a total of seven workshops on Agricultural Research Management Training (ARMT) were conducted with the International/National Agricultural Research Centre (IARC/NARS) Inter-centre Training Group (INTG). These workshops covered leadership and management of research, research programme formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation of research projects and financial management. The second core course involved six workshops on “How to Write a Convincing Proposal”, and the third course was on “Facilitating the Agricultural Innovation Process” targeted at the NARS programme leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa. The fourth course on “Managing Bio-Technology in a Time of Transition” was designed by ISNAR for selected Asian countries with the support of the Government of Japan as part of MTP4.

4.3.1.2 Current Programme (since early 2002)

The new MTP3 represents an evolution in the concept of training at ISNAR, which emphasizes learning and the application of learning to inspire and facilitate innovation. The goal of the project is to strengthen the human capacity to contribute to institutional innovation in agricultural research. The main objectives are to (a) investigate how the behaviour and attitudes of researchers and stakeholders affect the success of their partnerships in order to design interventions to appropriately deal with the results, (b) identify and use learning and development approaches to bring the actors of innovation together to strengthen interpersonal relationships, increase collaboration and create a sense of community among them, (c) explore a range of learning and development mechanisms to maximize knowledge for capacity building, and innovation, (d) work in collaboration with agricultural research institutions (including networks) to contribute to their development and evolution by leveraging their human talents, and (e) strengthen human capacity to contribute to institutional research through sharing and developing knowledge.

Current activities are grouped under six sub projects with research components dealing with such subjects as “how managers and leaders facilitate learning and build learning organizations”, “the strategic management and development of human talents”, sharing institutional innovation, and “action research on distance learning” etc. Two sub projects are more directly related to supporting training workshops.

ISNAR is currently funding MTP3 activities mainly from its core budget. It is raising revenue from fees charged for its courses (\$2500 - \$3000) per participant, which covers around 60-80% of the operational cost, including charges for the time allocated by ISNAR Trainers, although not for the module development costs. None of the research activities are yet funded, although there are indications of funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the European Union (EU).

4.3.1.3 Assessment

The impacts of training activities in the 1997-2001 period are comprehensively documented in the Impact Assessment Report (Anderson et. al., 2002⁶). In brief, a meta-evaluation conducted by ISNAR summarizing the end-of-workshop evaluations for 18 different training workshops showed that overall, the training workshops in terms of

⁶ Anderson J. R., Anandajayasekeram, P., Craswell E., and Rukuni, M. (2002). Impact Assessment of ISNAR 1997-2001. Report of an ISNAR Team, June 30, 2002.

relevance of content, and presentation, were rated to be good (average of 4, with a range of 3.8-4.8, on a scale of 1-5 with 1=poor, and 5=excellent). The meta-evaluation identified three major strengths of ISNAR's training activities - the content and relevance of the workshops, the participatory methods used in training; and the quality of the training materials. Only once did participants suggest revisions to a training module. Additional materials were recommended for two other workshops. Hence, from the clients point of view, ISNAR training has been highly relevant and of good quality.

The meta-evaluation and ISNAR'S Participant Action Plan Approach, which is used to follow trainees up to 6 months after the end of the training event, also showed that in terms of outcome, the greatest impact occurred within the research teams that ex-trainees manage. Most often impact is related to improved team communications; better team organization; application of programme formulation, management and evaluation tools; improvements in management of programme finances, and better proposal writing. Some changes related to the organizations' adoption of new management tools, and to successful funding of new research programmes were reported. As far as leadership in management is concerned, significant results were noted at the individual level. All responding supervisors stated that the job performance of the trainees has improved as a result of ISNAR's training and the contribution of the trainees has resulted in the overall improvement in the performance of their unit. Sixty-two percent of the respondents specified that ISNAR's training has contributed to organizational changes.

Some of ISNAR's training modules were first posted on the Internet in January 1998. The number of users has increased from 158 in 1998 to 783 by 2001, and the number of modules downloaded has increased from 532 to 2738 during the same period. During 2001, the three most popular modules were PM&E, Strategic Planning, and Priority Setting.

The reports of the 3^d EPMR and ICERs observed that training is the best-known ISNAR product and service among NARS. As confirmed by the Impact Assessment Study and this EPMR Panel's stakeholder consultations, it is clear that it still is. The quantity and quality of training output by ISNAR during the last 5 years has continued to be very good.

The 3^d EPMR report recommended that "ISNAR move up in the capacity building ladder, concentrating more on building institutional capabilities both within and outside the NARS". Bearing in mind another recommendation by the 3rd EPMR that "ISNAR move towards the research-based end of the service spectrum", ISNAR appears to have developed the research projects in MTP3. This Panel has a number of concerns relating to the current agenda of MTP3.

4.3.1.4 Appropriateness of the research agenda

The basis for the current research agenda is the view that ISNAR's new mission (the Road Map) requires it to consider a broader range of stakeholders who participate in the process of innovation, than it did earlier. It is stated that the challenge for MTP3 will be to equip ISNAR trainees with new knowledge, attitudes, and skills to facilitate the implementation of the innovation process. New concepts need to be learnt and new skills need to be developed. It is anticipated that a continuing commitment to learning and the creation of new methods of getting to know people will be essential.

The Panel questions the appropriateness of the resulting research agenda. It sees little validity of ISNAR engaging in such research topics as the management and development of human talents, and strongly doubts that it has any comparative advantage in conducting research that could better fit into the research agenda of universities. As indicated elsewhere, the Panel is of the view that action research to complement the service function of ISNAR is better conducted under MTP2 and 4.

The Internal Programme Review rightly observed that a major issue is whether MTP3 has the research capacity and the in-house skills to implement the planned research agenda. The EPMR Panel shares the concern of the Internal Programme Review peer reviewers regarding the concentration of core competence in the leadership of MTP3.

In the view of the Panel the programme of research planned for MTP3 is not an area in which ISNAR should focus its scarce resources. Before proceeding further, the Centre should seek qualified external assistance to review its proposed agenda.

4.3.1.5 Need for traditional training services

There is no doubt that there is continued demand for the direct training services offered by ISNAR in the past, i.e. tools such as PM&E, strategic planning, etc. This was confirmed to the Panel during its field visits and consultations with stakeholders. This demand is particularly strong among the smaller, so-called “weak” NARS in Africa, but also exists in Asia and LAC. It is also true that over the last decade there has been increased capacity to conduct such courses in the developing countries, due partly to ISNAR’S efforts in the past.

As pointed out by the 3rd EPMR, this situation implies that ISNAR should devolve the conduct of its courses to local institutions in the regions in order to enhance multiplier effects. There is some evidence that some of this occurred during the last five years - for example, members of the ISNAR Global Associates (IGA) have taken over ISNAR’S responsibilities in carrying out the three annual INTG workshops in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and NAROs have hosted a number of the courses.

The Panel is concerned that in the drive to launch its new research agenda ISNAR seems to be neglecting its traditional clientele, as evidenced by the delays in responding to recent requests. In order to maintain its attractiveness, in this regard ISNAR needs to explore ways of offering its services at competitive prices. This implies that it should keep its cost down, e.g. by use of local trainers (the IGA initiative is going some way to meet this objective). It must also continue to show donors that it offers high quality service, so they continue to recommend use of its services in their projects.

4.3.1.6 Sustaining the Quality of ISNAR’S Training Output

As rightly observed by the peer reviewers during the Internal Programme Review conducted in 2001, an important challenge for ISNAR is how to strengthen the knowledge foundation of training without serious erosion of the gains, momentum and visibility of training for which ISNAR has come to be well known and respected in the NARS. ISNAR’S training activities need to keep pace with and adapt to technological evolution and changes in the operating environment of NARS. There is therefore a strong case to be made for a constant review and updating of training modules, methods, and approaches. The EPMR

Panel is concerned that in the move towards implementing the new research activities, this area is also being neglected, given the current level of staffing in the project.

4.3.1.7 Capacity building for appropriate Institutional Change Managers

The Impact Assessment Report shows that ISNAR training has had some effect on organizational change. However, while ISNAR training has contributed to human capacity development, there is little evidence of the translation of this into institutional capacity building. This is probably because most participants in ISNAR training activities have been at the lower or middle level of their organization's management structures. Even the NARO directors general may not be the key policy decision-makers when it comes to institutional reforms. Ministers of agriculture/science and technology, Minister of finance, national planning agencies, and key legislators or parliamentarians are often more critical. It is most unlikely that ISNAR's current training activities will directly impact this class of stakeholders. ISNAR needs to develop a new training/public awareness strategy to reach this class of stakeholders if it is to achieve its objective of bringing about institutional change. The objective of the strategy should be to help the CGIAR build the constituency for agricultural research within the national arenas. A strategy also needs to be devised to select more senior managers and stakeholders as participants in ISNAR's traditional courses. The Panel is aware of ISNAR'S expressed hesitation to adopt this strategy when proposed by the last EPMR and is convinced that there is an even greater need for such a strategy now.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that ISNAR reinforce its capacity to revise and update its training materials and modules while developing an advocacy programme for influencing key policy makers for institutional change, that complements its current programme. Furthermore, ISNAR should not pursue its planned research agenda in learning for institutional innovations without first seeking qualified external experts to review its plans.

4.4 MTP4: Management of New Technologies

MTP4 responds to the rapid changes in science, especially in biotechnology and information technology, which have important implications for the way that agricultural research is managed, organized, and regulated. There is strong demand from national systems for knowledge, decisions tools, training and advisory services on policy and management issues with respect to these new technologies.

ISNAR has recognized these demands since the early 1990s, and devoted considerable resources to research and service activities related to policy and management of new technologies. In the review period, these activities have been organized into three major subprojects: (i) ISNAR's Biotechnology Service (IBS), (ii) the Central Advisory Service (CAS) for intellectual property (IP) management in the CGIAR, and (iii) management and policy for information technology. A fourth major activity on management information systems (MIS) has now been terminated, and is discussed briefly under information technology.

4.4.1 Objectives, scope of work, and activities

4.4.1.1 IBS

ISNAR's Biotechnology Service (IBS) began in 1993 as a relatively self-contained unit within ISNAR with the objectives of developing policy and strategies for managing biotechnology, building leadership skills among policy makers and research managers, and harnessing international expertise in response to identified technical, policy and management needs. By 1997, IBS was well established and over the review period has carried out a wide range of activities related to strategy and priority setting for biotechnology, biosafety, intellectual property rights, and indicators of national capacity in biotechnology. It has done this through a combination of case studies, development and application of decision tools, networking, training courses for leadership skills on biotechnology, advisory services, workshops at the international, regional and country level, and syntheses from all of the above. IBS is currently staffed by a biotechnologist, an economist, and a political scientist and attracts funding from Japan, the Netherlands, the UK, Sweden, Switzerland, the Rockefeller Foundation, FAO, and others. A notable feature of the work has been the harnessing of additional skills through collaboration with advanced research institutes, such as Virginia Technological University, the University of Costa Rica, Michigan State University, IFPRI, OECD Development Centre, and Plant Research International.

The major activities of IBS during the review period include:

- **Strategy and priority setting:** Country case studies have been undertaken to formulate national priorities in a more systematic manner in Uganda, the Philippines, and Chile, using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) for priority setting;
- **Training and leadership skills:** An IBS course on "Managing Biotechnology in a Time of Transition" has been the flagship training programme for research managers, policy makers and scientists. In addition, IBS sponsored several regional policy seminars. Ten such training events with over 300 participants have been carried out in ten different countries during the review period;
- **Research indicators on agricultural biotechnology:** IBS has carried out and published surveys of research capacity related to agricultural biotechnology in six countries, Indonesia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mexico, Colombia and China;
- **Biosafety:** In the past year, IBS has focused more of its efforts on institutional issues in designing and implementing biosafety regulations, beginning with case studies of biosafety implementation in Egypt and Argentina, and provision of advisory services in five countries. This was followed by an international stakeholder workshop in 2001, that led to a decision support system on biosafety implementation;
- **Intellectual property rights:** ISNAR has conducted a number of case studies of management of IP in research organizations and provided support to national systems;
- **Synthesis and dissemination:** Much of the experience gained by IBS since 1993 was synthesized into a book, *Managing Agricultural Biotechnology; Addressing Research Programme Needs and Policy Implications*, CABI Publishing, 1999, with chapters covering all of the major areas of policy and management for agricultural biotechnology. IBS has also published five policy briefing papers in this period that have been widely distributed by ISNAR to policy makers, donors and research managers.

4.4.1.2 CAS

The Central Advisory Service for Intellectual Property was established in 2000 with special financing from the CGIAR to provide and facilitate expert advice and enhance the knowledge and experience of IP management in the CGIAR system. CAS has been staffed by one scientist/manager and a project assistant. It is guided by an Advisory Committee of 9 CGIAR stakeholders and experts that meets annually.

In the establishment phase, the CAS has focused on making initial contact with the Centres, signing of non-disclosure agreements, providing assistance on specific IP issues, and raising awareness of IP issues across the Centres. It has also received interns from two of the Centres and serviced over 200 requests from the Centres for assistance/advice on specific issues. CAS staff have also established contacts and growing collaboration with a range of other potential partners, such as the McKnight Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, FAO, and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). A second phase has been initiated on IP strategy development, synthesizing experience and lessons learned from within the system, and building capacity at individual Centres through training, knowledge sharing, and advisory services.

4.4.1.3 Information policy and management

ISNAR has had a considerable history of mostly service-related activities on policy and management issues related to the use of information technology in agricultural research organizations. Much of the earlier work related to helping NARS formulate strategies for managing information technology in a period of rapid change in the underlying technologies. ISNAR's recent work has been supported by Japan, FAO, CTA, and others.

During the review period, the major trends activities have been:

- Strategy development work in Iran, Egypt, and China, in collaboration with partners such as FAO, CABI and Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). Additional work is in the advanced stages of planning for India, which also emphasizes development of in-country capacity through Centres of excellence in selected areas of information technology management;
- A series of training workshops for senior research managers in Asia. This training experience has led to the development in collaboration with FAO of a resource kit for distance learning related to information and institutional development;
- Developing, maintaining and training in MIS, especially using the revised Information for Research Management (INFORM-R) and its associated 'lite' version. Given the high costs (including maintenance) of this venture in relation to benefits, ISNAR has now taken the decision to no longer support INFORM and this subproject has been discontinued;
- Work in collaboration with CTA on a field-level manual on evaluation of information programmes. This manual will be published in 2002, but has already been applied in a number of situations, including applications well outside of agricultural research;
- Developing a project on Agricultural Research Information Systems (ARIS) that would use case studies of ARIS to formulate a general framework for management of ARIS in light of second generation issues that arise after computers have been widely adopted.

4.4.2 Assessment

IBS is a flagship programme of ISNAR that demonstrates a judicious blend of action research, advisory services and training. It has a well regarded reputation that is reflected in the support that it receives from donors. The recent impact study identified the IBS as one of the outstanding examples of contribution by ISNAR to knowledge and awareness building and the policy debate. With a small but stable staff with good team spirit, it has developed valuable partnerships to capture expertise that it does not have in-house, and to multiply the impacts of its work. Most recently these partnerships have emphasized international donors and agencies such as UNDP, the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), African Development Bank (ADB), and FAO, where IBS products have been extensively utilized. IBS also has a stable personnel base, and a good record of documentation and synthesis of experiences. The synthesis book is a high quality product that serves as a valuable reference for policy makers and managers. Finally, the leadership training course received the highest evaluation rating among all of ISNAR's courses.

A biosafety decision framework, now available on the web, has just been accepted as the starting point for further collaboration with FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and is being developed into modules that will facilitate decision making in the large number of countries in which these agencies are engaged in biosafety capacity development. Given the large amount of resources now being devoted to biosafety capacity building, ISNAR's products are demonstrating considerable strategic leverage as international public goods.

On the other hand, IBS needs to define a clear strategy for its economics work on biotechnology. Much of the indicators work has tended to be descriptive with missed opportunities to do additional analysis to provide policy insights. Given the number of other actors that are undertaking studies of the benefits and costs of transgenics, the Panel suggests that the comparative advantage of ISNAR will be to develop appropriate frameworks and case studies of the cost effectiveness and opportunity costs of various options for regulating biotechnology products, especially biosafety.

Within IBS, there is a danger that the rapid escalation of demands for biosafety capacity building and the availability of funds in this area will lead to an imbalance in the mix of activities. ISNAR should ensure that it maintains capacity in areas of proven reputation such as biotechnology strategy and priority setting, as well as areas in which IBS has had less influence, such as Internal Programme Reviews, but where there is an increasing demand from national systems, and which logically links to CAS activities.

The establishment of the CAS, based on the IBS approach, was a logical addition to ISNAR's MTP6, although it focuses on a different clientele (the CGIAR Centres). It is too early to assess its major achievements and impacts. The most recent annual review by the CAS Expert Advisory Committee expressed a high level of satisfaction with the progress to date. Growing demands from the Centres and an expanding scope of work are promising indicators that the CAS has taken root. After the CAS was established, four of the Centres have hired their own IP experts but even these Centres see a need in CAS for knowledge sharing among the Centres and development of common IP management tool kits.

ISNAR's contribution in the area of policy and management issues on information technology has been modest. Part of the problem has been a small number of staff in the area,

with one of the staff members fixed on INFORM where there is little evidence of long-term and sustainable adoption and impacts. This work has now been synthesized in a book. Service activities carried out by ISNAR have been generally well received, but have not been formulated as part of an overall strategic framework for information policy and management.

Nonetheless, ISNAR has accumulated considerable experience, which should be synthesized, and more widely shared through Briefing Notes and other relevant publications as well as web outlets. The demand for these types of products is evident from the initial feedback on the evaluation manual for information programmes, which has been very favourable (one project manager describes it as his/her 'walking stick'). Recent efforts to reformulate the programme, by dropping work on INFORM and other *ad hoc* efforts (e.g., livestock information systems for small enterprises), and developing a general framework for its work on agricultural research information systems is a promising step. However, in the Panel's opinion the work on information technologies still has a long way to go to formulate a well focused and strategic work programme.

A further challenge for ISNAR is to keep its products up to date in a rapidly changing field. For example, the biotechnology synthesis book, which is very valuable, is already quickly depreciating. The Panel suggests that this book should be placed on the Web as a series of stand-alone modules that are updated on a rolling basis.

While the Panel urges caution in expanding CAS activities to NARS, until its role within the CGIAR is firmly established and until additional staff are deployed, some steps could be made in this direction by exploring IP issues in CGIAR-NARS interactions. Because CGIAR Centres do not release technologies for commercial use, the CAS should clearly articulate the varying options that they have in sharing IP with NARS for research and for eventual commercial use, especially IP that the CGIAR has obtained through licensing agreements. It could also facilitate system-wide dialogue with NARS partners on these options, and ways that they could be most effectively implemented.

Demand for CAS products and services will increase as the CGIAR moves to a partnership-mode of operation through the challenge programmes. As the number of Centres and NARS organizations with in-house IP specialists increases, the role of the CAS in knowledge sharing and facilitating system-wide approaches, toolkits, and joint initiatives will become more central, and the current emphasis on serving CGIAR Centres should logically evolve to include NARS.

Demand for support on broader information policy and management will undoubtedly increase, especially as NARS and their clients now have better electronic connectivity, and management of content of web sites and networks relating to agricultural research information is challenging many systems, especially the balance between centralized approaches versus more decentralized demand-driven approaches. ISNAR should position itself to respond to these demands, by providing a strong conceptual foundation to management of these systems.

As a recently created project, linkages among the three subprojects of MTP4 are still evolving. There are important points of convergence with respect to Internal Programme Reviews, strategies, decision support, and institutional models. In the future, the rapidly expanding demand for advice and capacity development for country-level biosafety clearing houses and bio-informatics, will require much stronger linkages in NARS between managers

of information systems and biotechnology. This should provide added opportunities for integration among the subprojects. In the Panel's view, ISNAR could further enhance its niche advantage and exploit synergies among biotechnology and information technology, by shifting staff time in information technology to work on biotechnology, such as management of biosafety clearing houses.

Despite an impressive list of publications, MTP4 has very few peer reviewed, journal articles. The Panel urges staff to subject new decision tools, policy findings and conceptual frameworks to peer review in recognized scientific journals.

In summary, the major challenge now for ISNAR is to carefully define its strategy, niche, and needed partnerships in management of new technologies, at a time when the number of other suppliers of these products is rapidly increasing. ISNAR is already moving in this direction and identifying institutional structures and cultures as the focal area of its activities. It will also need to identify the appropriate mix among action research, decision support systems, institutional models, and advisory services and training to best exploit its comparative advantage.

The Panel view's is that ISNAR should continue the main thrusts of MTP4 with stronger efforts to enhance synergies between the three subprojects and with:

- A careful delineation of IBS's niche in institutional innovations and arrangements in a rapidly expanding field of suppliers for capacity development;
- Consolidation of CAS with special emphasis on incorporating NARS perspectives and options into CGIAR IP management options; and
- Defining a conceptual framework to guide action research and advisory services in management of information technologies;
- A much increased effort to subject its work to peer review in scientific journals.

4.5 MTP5: Building Capacity to Respond to Cross-Sector Demands

4.5.1 Objectives and Activities

The goal of MTP5 is "to strengthen capacity of research to respond effectively to new demands for knowledge from social, economic and environmental changes beyond those traditionally associated with agricultural production."

MTP5 is a newly designed area for ISNAR intervention in the new strategy 2002-2006. However, indirectly it builds on two predecessor projects under the ISNAR 1998-2002 strategy, namely, (i) Agricultural Research and the Environment (Project 9), and (ii) NARS for the 21st century in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Project 14, and a follow-up project on malaria). Project 9 addressed natural resource management (NRM) issues, which was one of the four thrusts in the "When NARS retool" strategy, which also included issues on methodology development for ecoregional approaches. Creating this thrust was a reaction to the expansion of the CGIAR agenda into the field of NRM, and the TAC concept of ecoregional approaches. Later ISNAR moved into addressing issues at the agriculture-health interface, first by addressing pesticide poisoning, and later the impact of HIV/AIDS on agriculture.

ISNAR's initial work in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) (Project 14) was an attempt to enter this part of the world at the time the entire agricultural research system was

being reorganised in the newly independent states. With funds from the World Bank and IFAD, ISNAR organized an expert consultation and conducted surveys of the agricultural research systems in five countries. These were documented in a series of country reports. However, due to personnel changes within ISNAR and lack of funding, this initiative was not sustained. Nevertheless, a World Health Organization (WHO) funded project on the effects of the transition in agriculture (breakdown of the irrigation systems) and on the incidence of malaria in Azerbaijan materialised. This has now also been incorporated in the new MTP5.

ISNAR's current work on HIV/AIDS consists of coordinating the Regional Network on HIV/AIDS, Rural Livelihoods and Food Security (RENEWAL) in which IFPRI and FAO are partners. The purpose of the network is to show that fresh thinking in agricultural research and development policy and concerted action can help prevent HIV/AIDS infection and lessen the impact of AIDS. The challenge objective of the network is to enhance understanding of the links between rural livelihoods and food security on one side and HIV infection and AIDS-linked illness on the other so that actions can be more conscious and targeted and their effects can be felt in years not decades. ISNAR also cooperates closely with WARDA on AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, within a system-wide initiative, and played a major role in developing the proposal for a Challenge Programme by the CGIAR, on HIV/AIDS, which was not accepted.

The current profile of MTP5 therefore covers work on the agriculture-health interface (HIV/AIDS and malaria), the development of a conceptual framework, and the preparation of a project proposal on disaster recovery. MTP5 is the smallest of ISNAR's new MTPs with only 2.5 IRS positions. Only two of the activities have secured funding into 2003.

4.5.2 Assessment

In this area of work ISNAR explores new thematic fields and modes of operation to prepare agricultural research and innovation systems in more broadly defined societal challenges. In principle, this is a commendable strategy. The IBS in MTP4 is an example of successfully taking such an initiative. The DG of ISNAR was among the first members of the CGIAR to recognize the vital link between agriculture and the HIV/AIDS epidemic and bringing the issue into the CGIAR agenda. However, within ISNAR this initiative resulted in a shift from an NRM focus to HIV/AIDS.

The subjects on the MTP5 agenda are highly relevant global problems. However, it is the Panel's view that independent of the contributions of individual staff members, there is a mismatch between the scope of the subject matters and the human resources assigned to them in ISNAR. While ISNAR, as a small Centre can identify issues of system-wide relevance, it does not appear to have sufficient capacity to follow through when the subject develops into a larger programme.

Furthermore, it is doubtful that these system-wide subjects are within ISNAR's mandate and comparative advantage. For example, the strategic relevance to ISNAR of the malaria project in Azerbaijan must be questioned. ISNAR lacks the human capacity in the CAC region to induce institutional change processes effectively. Furthermore, studying the effect of malaria on agricultural research institutions would be more appropriate in Africa, where the incidence of malaria is more widespread, research institutions are more vulnerable, and ISNAR has a much greater experience.

In the Panel's view, the issue of cross-sector interfaces is not substantially different from other stakeholder interactions, which are covered by MTP2. It would therefore be logical to incorporate the viable elements of MTP5 into MTP2, particularly into Area 4 on strengthening of vulnerable groups.

In stepping back to make an overall assessment of past and current initiatives undertaken by ISNAR in this broad area, the Panel is deeply concerned about what appears to be a pattern of short-term enthusiasm and corresponding investments (and subsequent disinvestments) in a range of topics for which ISNAR does not have an obvious leading edge. This gives the appearance of jumping from one relatively unsuccessful 'bandwagon' to another. In tracing the development of ISNAR exploring the linkages between agriculture and the environment or agriculture and health, the panel counts at least six different initiatives: NRM; eco-regional methodologies; NARS in CAC; malaria in Azerbaijan; HIV/AIDS in Africa; and now disaster recovery. For the most part, the Panel saw little evidence of proven achievements and lasting impacts by ISNAR as of yet in these areas, although raising awareness has been an important ISNAR contribution in the case of HIV/AIDS. For example, ISNAR's Impact Assessment Study (Anderson et. al., 2002⁷) found no evidence of impact in this area. The impression left with the Panel is one of pursuing one perceived "opportunity" after another, without real sustained and lasting input and impacts. While acknowledging that both human and financial resource constraints have often limited more effective implementation of these programmes, the Panel questions ISNAR's choices in moving into and out of so many areas in such a short time.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that ISNAR discontinue MTP5 – Building Capacity to Respond to Cross-Sector Demands. The current project on HIV/AIDS should be screened against MTP2 (Linking Research and Stakeholders) strategic priorities and if appropriate, incorporated.

4.6 MTP6 - Entrepreneurial Partnerships to Support Agricultural Research

4.6.1 Programme Overview And Objectives

ISNAR was established to *help strengthen national agricultural research capabilities in developing countries*. Its central focus has always been to assist developing countries in improving the performance of their NARS by providing timely and cost-effective services to strengthen agricultural research.

Over the last few years the CGIAR has put considerable emphasis on *international* public goods as one key output. ISNAR complies with this emphasis through the knowledge generation activities of MTP1 to 5. At the same time ISNAR has been looking into the possibility of supplying *national* public goods, while respecting the CGIAR orientation.

Increasingly, projects for institutional development are being awarded on the basis of open tender and, in order to successfully compete in this market, ISNAR has established MTP6 that seeks to:

⁷ Anderson J. R., Anandajayasekeram, P., Craswell E., and Rukuni, M. (2002). Impact Assessment of ISNAR 1997-2001. Report of an ISNAR Team, June 30, 2002.

1. strengthen capacity for South-South collaboration by developing a “**competency provision centre**” (basically a consulting arm) comprising a cadre of experienced affiliated professionals in institutional development and innovation. The aim would be to match the demands for expertise with supply. ISNAR would charge a daily fee for providing access to the roster, but would not be necessarily involved in the tasks where these experts are required. The ongoing IGA concept would be expanded through this initiative. Created in 1998 to capture and expand the pool of skilled developing country experts, ISNAR now uses approximately 200 days of IGA services per year. These Associates are mostly involved in training related activities to a large extent initiated by ISNAR. Since inception IGA services were used in the following countries: Dominican Republic, India, The Netherlands (activities at ISNAR HQ), Zambia, Kenya, Swaziland, Mauritius, Ghana, South Africa, Nicaragua, Costa-Rica, Brazil, USA, Trinidad and Tobago, Burkina Faso, China and Niger. The ongoing IGA activities are coordinated from the Costa Rica regional office by one IRS and two locally recruited staff members each of them dedicated halftime to IGA;
2. develop a capability to successfully bid for, and then implement relatively **large national institutional development projects** that may involve strategic planning, priority setting linking research and extension, information management, biosafety systems, learning plans, monitoring and evaluation, and other topics as defined by and with the client. The projects in preparation for Iran and Mozambique are examples, and MTP6 will largely draw on staff from other MTPs to carry out these activities; and
3. establish **subregional units** to facilitate and accelerate institutional innovation in a sustainable manner within NARS (public, private, non-governmental, and civil) and subregional organizations engaged in agricultural R&D. These units will become the base for training activities, for smaller advisory services activities in the countries of the subregion, and for support to the subregional organization. The concept is presently being developed in collaboration with ASARECA (a subregional organization in Africa).

These activities would not only be focused on ISNAR’s traditional clientele and donors, but, over time, would explore opportunities to employ ISNAR capacity to support non-traditional donors and clients, such as the NGO community, multi-national companies, and the philanthropic foundations.

In the above activities, ISNAR expects to collaborate with a large range of partners, both from non-profit and commercial communities, but, in every case ISNAR’s involvement would be predicated on (a) whether the task is essential to ISNAR’s mandate; (b) does it strengthen client capacity irrespective of what knowledge it might create; and (c) does the task call on existing competencies from several other MTP’s in ISNAR?

4.6.2 Assessment

During the course of the current review, the Panel received two quite different descriptions of the MTP6 programme. The structure and business plan for MTP6 is obviously still evolving rapidly. The latest description for MTP6 envisages both an expansion of the IGA programme and a number of new activities as outlined above. Each initiative is taken in turn.

4.6.2.1 Creating a ‘Competency Provision Centre’

The existing IGA programme

In principle, ISNAR’s idea of creating IGAs who are local staff who live and work close to the NARS as a means to extend its reach and to simultaneously expand its human resource base and to ‘build brain-gain in NARS’ is a worthwhile endeavour.

The Impact Assessment Report states that most IGAs are ISNAR alumni. This limits opportunity to bring in new ideas and experiences from other sources. However, the IGA initiative provides a unique opportunity to expand the scope and could have significant, and cost-effective multiplier effects.

Apart from the training programme, other programmes have made very little use of IGA to date. This is attributed to two factors: first, the mix of profiles among IGA members is limited, and second, ISNAR staff do not see the advantage of employing IGA members, when they can recruit local staff they know better at lower costs.

The Panel concludes that in order to make this current programme more effective and efficient, ISNAR should aim for broader participation in stakeholders and geographical dispersion and professional profile. The Associate selection process needs to be clear and more transparent. ISNAR should introduce an explicit and systematic strategy to review and evaluate performance, and actively involve IGAs in action research and service-related activities in addition to training.

Above all, ISNAR has to introduce a market-oriented tariff system for all ISNAR services (independent of full-time or IGA staff) based on the complexity of the task to be performed, the level of expertise and qualification required, the client (country) economy, and the degree of contribution to the generation of international public goods.

The Expanded Programme

In the case of the proposed expanded IGA ‘Competency Provision Centre’ or consultancy function, the Panel has a number of concerns. First, ISNAR needs to explain why this expanded activity should be undertaken by a CGIAR Centre funded by scarce public monies when it would appear that there may well be alternative, private sources of funding available for much of the proposed activities. Second, although currently envisaged in a ‘brokerage’ role only, ISNAR’s name and reputation will nevertheless be linked to outcomes. It is unclear how ISNAR will ensure the quality of advice given. Third, there is, as yet, no clear evaluation of who ISNAR’s competitors will be in each geographic area, and what the competitors’ pricing strategies are, and will be, when faced with ‘competition’ from ISNAR. The Panel cannot support this proposal activity.

4.6.2.2 Participating in Large National Development projects

ISNAR is also contemplating the expansion of its activities so that it can compete for, and implement relatively large national institutional development projects at no cost to its own core budget. At the broader level, the Panel believes that ISNAR should not pursue programmes that result mainly in national public goods and therefore it cannot support this activity.

4.6.2.3 Subregional units

In Chapter 3, the Panel comments extensively on the outposting of staff as ISNAR seeks to decentralize and move its locus of activities closer to the client. The Panel commends the initiative and notes that MTP6 would be the organizational ‘home’ of these subregional units. Such units would consist of a small core group of staff with multiple skills, possibly assisted by IGA’s and others recruited as appropriate. The need for an overall outposting strategy has been noted in Chapter 3 and is repeated here, since, *inter alia*, it is unclear just how staff from other MTPs would report to more than one MTP leader when working across MTP boundaries.

Many details of this matrix management exercise are still to be worked out, and “the devil is in the details” in these decisions. For example, the Panel notes that one staff member is about to open an office in South Africa. This staff member currently reports to the leader of MTP3 yet, given the definition of MTP6 and the multiple functions envisaged for that office, the Panel would have thought that the new MTP6 would have been the natural home for this office. Given the early, and evolving nature of this MTP, it is not possible to confirm that MTP6 is the optimal approach to implementing ISNAR’s strategies at this time.

4.6.3 Conclusion

The Panel does not agree with ISNAR’s intention to supplement its IPG-focussed mandate by pursuing a national public goods agenda. In this field there are many suppliers, some of whom are in the private sector. The Panel believes that such initiatives lie outside ISNAR’s mandate and does not represent a good use of scarce public resources.

Additionally the management of the ongoing IGA programme and the subregional units does not, in and of itself, require the elevation to MTP status. Rather the management function belongs rightly within Operations. The Panel believes that ISNAR management should consider eliminating MTP6 *per se* and locate the management functions directly in the office of the Director of Research.

4.7 Assessment of the Quality of ISNAR’s Products

4.7.1 Research products

On the research end of the spectrum, an important measure of quality is the number and type of publications produced. Over the review period, ISNAR lists 263 publications in a wide variety of outlets (Table 4.2), not including training modules which have frequently been downloaded from the Web. ISNAR’s in-house publications are subject to a formal peer review process (Section 3.3.2) to assure quality standards. However, the number of ISNAR-released externally reviewed publications has dropped sharply, with only 5 such publications in the pipeline.

Table 4.2 ISNAR Publications 1997-2001

Type of Publication	Total Number
Books	11
Research Reports	10
Research Management Guidelines	2
Conference reports	7
Peer-reviewed scientific journals	35
Other journal and magazine articles	13
Other book chapters, conference proceedings	83
Briefing papers	19
Country reports	10
Discussion Papers	62
Annual reports/public awareness	11
TOTALS	263

Source: ISNAR list of publications

ISNAR has just completed its own 'client satisfaction' survey of the value of its publications (ISNAR, 2002). This survey shows that publications related to tools and methods are well regarded by readers, relative to general institutional publications (e.g., annual reports), and country-specific reports. Survey respondents especially valued publications relating to decision-tools for biotechnology and research management, especially planning and priority setting. ISNAR books on financing research, planning research, and two manuals/management guidelines were included among the most popular publications. In terms of future demands for research, respondents again noted their interests in research management, biotechnology, and financing research. Only 6% of respondents noted their interest in future publications on agricultural research policy, which reinforces comments elsewhere on ISNAR's weaknesses in this area (Section 4.1).

An important measure of research quality is the number of peer-reviewed articles in internationally recognized journals. ISNAR lists 48 journal and magazine articles in the period, 1997-2001 (sharply down from 95 reported by the 3rd EPMR in the previous five-year period), and about 35 if only peer-reviewed articles related to ISNAR's work programme are included.⁸ With less than one peer-reviewed journal articles in five years per professional staff member, ISNAR's output is very low.

A final measure of research quality is the extent that ISNAR work is cited in scientific journals. Publications in the form of manuals and guidelines are often the most cited publications of staff of Centres such as CIMMYT and the International Potato Centre (CIP) (T. Walker: pers. com.), even for citations in scientific journals. ISNAR's citation search in the Science Citation Index and Social Science Citation Index shows 42 citations for publications over the period, 1997-2002. While this is too short a time period to comprehensively assess citation, it is still a low number for the size of the Centre.

⁸ The number of peer reviewed articles related to ISNAR's work, was estimated by removing magazine articles, book reviews, and articles that did not relate to ISNAR's work programme, such as work on poverty targeting of social programmes, and effects of transport costs on smallholder agriculture. Articles in special issues of a journal edited by an ISNAR staff, were included.

Overall, the Panel concludes that ISNAR's contribution to knowledge generation has been modest, although in selected areas of research management it is well recognized for its tools and methods. ISNAR is not subjecting its knowledge products to sufficient rigorous peer review in scientific journals. While ISNAR has filled a niche in tools and methods for research management, it has not provided significant new knowledge relating to the big issues facing agricultural research systems today. In addition, the Panel had difficulty in identifying new and innovative knowledge products delivered by the Centre over the past five years. These conclusions are certainly not in tune with ISNAR's stated strategy of moving up stream on the research-service spectrum. In part, this relates to a continuing service culture in the Centre, as well as a tendency to move into new activities before wrapping up ongoing activities.

4.7.2 Services

Quality of training services has been documented through the institutionalized feed back system for all training courses and through the results of the impact study. As discussed in Section 4.3, participants have generally rated the quality of these services as good.

There is no equivalent institutionalized system for quality rating of advisory services. However, through the impact study and the field visits by Panel members, the Panel generally feels that ISNAR provides good quality advice. In some cases, especially in two Latin American countries visited, quality of these services could be rated as outstanding. In these countries, ISNAR staff demonstrated considerable skills as facilitators employing participatory approaches to problem solving in a workshop format, and providing collaborators with a strong sense of ownership of tools, methods, ideas and solutions. However, in at least one other country project reviewed by the Panel in Africa, the quality of advisory services was not up to standard.

The Panel concludes that ISNAR has a generally good reputation for the quality of its service products, especially in training and facilitation of participatory processes.

4.8 Synthesis of Programme Issues

The scope of ISNAR's projects evaluated in this chapter is a mix of research and service activities reflecting the Centre's interpretation of its mandate. Following the launching of its new strategy early in 2002, all MTPs, except MTP6, are required to have research and service components. In Chapter 2, the Panel presented its assessment of the demand for the Centre's services and of the processes it has put in place to define the services it produces in response to the demands. This section provides a synthesis of the Panel's assessments of the Centre's responses in terms of strategy implementation, programme performance, achievements and impacts, and how it has managed to balance the research and service functions.

4.8.1 Strategy implementation and programme performance

The Panel's overall assessment is that out of six newly regrouped MTP Projects (and their antecedents), one (New Technologies) has achieved sufficient international recognition to have gained a sustainable funding base (although its output of scientific publications is low). Two projects, MTP2 (Linkages with Stakeholders) and MTP3 (Learning for Innovation) are now being implemented satisfactorily.

Two other MTP projects (MTP1 and MTP5 and their antecedents) are not performing satisfactorily. In the case of MTP1 on research policies, ISNAR has lost leadership and credibility over the period, in part due to erosion of staff. For MTP5 on cross-sectoral issues, ISNAR has not been able to establish a viable programme, and some activities that have been initiated are taking the Centre well outside its mandate and comparative advantage. The final, MTP project (MTP6) relates to building a new *modus operandi* for pure service activities and is not supported by the Panel.

Most of the newly reconstructed projects are searching for internal coherence that exploits synergies among project activities. This is understandable given the recent restructuring. The Panel notes that the new MTP-based organizational structure provides the potential to develop for the first time, internally coherent and strategic activities within MTP projects.

Throughout the period covered by this review, ISNAR's programmes consisted of a relatively large number of fragmented and often quite small activities. This has raised the Panel's concerns about ISNAR's strategic directions. First, ISNAR failed to effectively operationalize its 1997 strategy by setting clear priorities, and translating them into a coherent work programme. Second, ISNAR was characterized by an individualistic culture, with little team coherence and commitment to a shared set of priorities (noted by the 3rd EPMP and affirmed by its own Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis). Third, with a decline in funding, especially core funding, programme content appears to have been driven largely by the best opportunities for special project funds rather than by strategic priorities. Finally, ISNAR's work has suffered unduly from a "stop and go" syndrome. Work on globalization, ASTI (later reinstated), natural resources, NARS fundamentals, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the global research system, and the Global Information Centre, are all cases of MTP projects that were initiated and stopped in the review period. It is critically important that ISNAR establish a few sharply defined priorities and stick with them until progress can be adequately evaluated.

4.8.2 Achievements and impacts

Over the review period, ISNAR can point to a number of significant achievements. The Panel highlights the following six as significant achievements during the review period:

- The work on biotechnology and associated issues in biosafety and Internal Programme Reviews, leading to new decision tools and frameworks, and a valuable reference book on policy and management issues;
- Continued efforts to explore and build on its tool kits, especially with respect to linking to stakeholders, priority setting, and evaluation processes;
- Strengthening its training programmes and moving up the capacity building ladder through more effort on training the trainer, curriculum development, and training modules which are available and frequently downloaded from the web;
- Initiation of work on incorporating commodity chain perspectives into priority setting and strategic planning, through stakeholder consultative processes in Latin America; and
- Developing network mechanisms for involving diverse organizations to identify and solve problems, and develop methods and training materials.
- Providing a range of quality services with a concentration in about 20 countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and in a few cases over a period of years.

The recently-completed impact study provides information on the achievements noted above. The Study's overall conclusions were that impacts have been modest, with greatest impacts on individual capacity development, somewhat less at the organizational level, and little at the system and policy level. The study identifies only a handful of countries, where ISNAR's collective research, advisory services and training, have resulted in significantly strengthening of national research system capacity.⁹ Although not explicit in the impact study, the Panel gained the distinct impression that ISNAR has had less impact in Africa in recent years. In relation to the CGIAR's goals of poverty reduction and food security, and the critical importance of these problems in Africa, this is an issue that the Centre needs to pay special attention to.

One limitation of the impact study is that it focused on impacts of products released from 1997. Institutional change is a long-term process, and the study undoubtedly underestimated long-term impacts. However, ISNAR has no institutional mechanism in place to assess such impacts, nor has it established baseline information on institutional capacity. In one subproject where ISNAR has done self-evaluation of its activities after several years, the findings generally confirm the impact patterns observed above (McKay et al., 2002).

Of course, long-term institutional change and reform have to be driven by national institutions, policy makers, and their stakeholders. ISNAR's modest impacts reflect the fact that it has worked in many countries where conditions for reform have not been present, reducing its impacts to improvement of specific management processes within research organizations. In countries, such as Mexico, Cuba, and Uganda, where there has been a home-grown commitment to reform and institutional development, and ISNAR has provided critical inputs to this process, long-term impacts should be substantial.

Despite these achievements, the Panel noted many missed opportunities. ISNAR is not seen as the leader in big issues of research policy (meeting the funding crisis, new institutional arrangements at the system level, promoting private investment R&D, competitive funding). In addition, given its intention to move upstream following the recommendations of the 3rd EPMR, its contribution to knowledge has been modest at best, and the number and quality of its research products have been well below the standards expected of an international centre (Section 4.7).

On the services side, including training, the Panel notes that ISNAR has, with few exceptions, generally targeted middle and sometimes senior managers of research organizations, but has not identified or targeted those key policy makers and other potential reform champions who provide more strategic leverage for enhanced overall impacts. It has also not mounted an advocacy campaign to promote the role of public investment in agricultural research and institutional mechanisms to ensure that investment is used more efficiently and effectively.

⁹ Out of the 23 NARO managers who responded to the Impact Study survey, 13 indicated that their organization did not have any collaboration with ISNAR in the review period (1997-2001). Those who responded, had in their majority been involved in training activities (10); three had biotechnology related collaboration, and two NARO strengthening and consultancy. Although these very partial results have to be interpreted with caution, they support the Panel's own stakeholder consultations, that ISNAR is only reaching a small share of countries with its research and service products.

Finally, it appears to the Panel that ISNAR's strategies have given almost no attention to the international public good dimension of its work. These need to be clearly identified in terms of different types of products and services. A recurring theme throughout the review is that management tools and processes, and the associated training modules and courses, have been the major IPG element of ISNAR's work, and the one that NARS have also most appreciated. However, ISNAR is only reaching a fraction of the market through its services work, including training, so that the IPG component of these collective services in terms of strengthening NARS would be very small.

4.8.3 Balancing research and service

Almost since its creation, ISNAR has struggled with its niche along the continuum from pure research to services, and the linkages between the two. This was a central theme of the 3^d EPMR that urged a move upstream in the continuum. From a tradition of separating research and services in the early 1990s, ISNAR may finally be finding ways to more harmoniously blend the two by combining research, services, and syntheses. Through its "theory of action", case studies, and participatory networks, services are being provided at the same time that both national partners and ISNAR develop, adapt, and test new knowledge and methods. The New Paradigm Project, the PBMS, the Public-Private Partnership project, the project on Evaluating Capacity Development, and the IBS are all examples of where a blend of participatory action in a number of organizations/countries, provides opportunities to develop new ISNAR products, usually in the form of decision tools and participatory methods. However, these are still early days and it remains to be seen whether ISNAR will be able to do the needed synthesis into publications for rigorous peer review, and into manuals and guidelines that can be widely available for capacity building. The work on evaluation of capacity development in Latin America is indicative of what might be accomplished in these dimensions. In addition, the Panel notes that there is still much scope for making these approaches more rigorous from a research perspective, by developing them within well-conceived conceptual frameworks based on typologies of innovation organizations and the environments in which they operate.

These positive developments represent only a part of the work carried out over the review period, most of which has not been 'processed' into final knowledge products or tool kits. This is especially true of the service activities, where there is still little effort to synthesize the rich experiences—both from ISNAR and from other suppliers—and it also applies to many action research activities as well. However, not all service activities have to produce knowledge products and the Panel is concerned about the possible dilution of proven training capacity, by adding a research dimension to training—an area where ISNAR does not appear to have a comparative advantage.

4.8.4 Enhancing staff breadth and depth

Despite a number of highly competent and dedicated staff, the Panel believes that ISNAR does not have the types of skills and quality of human resources to implement its new Strategy. This finding echoes a conclusion of the 3^d EPMR. Current skills are centred on either experienced research managers with a strong tradition of service to NAROs, or economists, largely agricultural economists. These skills will also be important in the new ISNAR, but more expertise in other social science and management disciplines are required. These include organizational theory and behaviour, institutional development and change management, public management policy, innovation theory and institutional economics.

Some of these may be obtained through alliances with ARIs, and the Panel saw evidence of promising moves in this direction. However, some minimum in-house capacity is needed to effectively seek out and participate in such alliances.

The Panel also concludes that ISNAR has insufficient staff depth to provide intellectual leadership to the major issues of today's research systems. Repacking programmes into an innovation framework will not solve this more fundamental problem and in fact, will require even more intellectual rigor and disciplinary depth. In particular, ISNAR lacks the mid-career professionals with high international standing that could provide the appropriate blend of disciplinary excellence and experience to implement its new Road Map. Improvements in the depth and breadth of staff expertise in a climate of constrained funding will require tough decisions on redundancy, retooling, and re-staffing.

4.8.5 Overall Conclusion

Given its modest contribution to new knowledge, the lack of measurable improvements in overall institutional capacity of NARS, the difficulties of capturing the IPG dimension of its work, and its inadequate staff breadth and depth, there is need for a major restructuring of ISNAR.

5. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The Changing Governance Function – a Background Discussion

Throughout the ‘not-for-profit’ community of organizations (including the CGIAR Centres), the roles and responsibilities of Trustees is in a period of rapid change. The so-called “Sixties” model of a governing board was traditionally that of a collection of eminent, and nearly always quite senior, individuals—with specialist knowledge in the field covered by the institution—who were ‘honoured/recognized’ by the community for past services rendered, and who were able to give technical guidance in specialist areas based on many years of experience. Under this model, and in descending order of priorities, management looked to the board first for ‘figure-head’ representation in public or scientific fora, for technical guidance, and lastly, to comply with various regulatory provisions in respect of external audits, government reporting requirements, etc.

But like all ‘not-for-profits’ the CGIAR Centres are now facing a very different operating environment than heretofore. Overall funding is tightening and, more importantly, there are increasing restrictions being placed on the funding as donors focus more on specific and often short-term outputs, than on general scientific research with a longer term perspective. Indeed CGIAR Centres are now typically seeing about half of their total funding devoted exclusively to contracted projects with specifically -agreed time horizons and outputs, and, for the most part, these restricted core donors are unwilling to pay the proportionate cost of the Centre’s overheads.

The demands on Management and the Board in this changing environment are very different and a new governance model is emerging whereby the board is now expected to have a much broader range of expertise and experience, and the time and energy to provide clear and innovative leadership, *inter alia*, by:

- (i) assuring itself that the Centre’s programme and project portfolio and the core competencies of its senior management and staff remains aligned with the mission, with its ‘marketing’ activities and with its fundraising strategy;
- (ii) fostering existing donor relations and taking leadership in identifying and accessing new funding sources—particularly the private for-profit, and private-philanthropic sectors;
- (iii) providing strategy-driven direction in an increasingly fluid, funding-driven environment;
- (iv) ensuring that the Centre is being managed efficiently and effectively in a new project-dominated environment;
- (v) insisting on a level of client responsiveness that has not been necessary until now;
- (vi) lending credence for those new, and non-traditional donors as to the excellence of the governance function;
- (vii) providing ‘brand management’ leadership and competency¹⁰ in an increasingly competitive environment; and
- (viii) holding senior management responsible for results—acting quickly, decisively, and assertively when agreed performance metrics are not met.

¹⁰ That is, expertise in knowing how best to position ISNAR within the competitive marketplace for funding and for expanding ISNAR’s client base.

The functions of the Chief Executive (the Director-General) are also changing dramatically under this new governance model. Heretofore, the DG was selected based primarily on his/her competencies in the scientific field; in ‘people’ skills; by reputation and demonstrated ability to manage comparable institutions, and on his/her knowledge of, and access to the CGIAR system and its stakeholders.

Today, this is not enough. More than ever before, senior management has to demonstrate competencies in strategic planning under conditions of scarcity, in marketing, in project management, and in a wide range of legal and information technology matters, and in the broader field of optimizing human resources management. Boards and CEOs are changing in response to these new demands and ISNAR is no exception.

5.2 Governance at ISNAR

ISNAR operates from its headquarters in The Hague under the authority of its Constitution, a Headquarters Agreement between it and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the Rules of Procedure of its Board of Trustees. ISNAR’s Constitution establishes the size, composition and committee structure of the Board of Trustees (BOT) as not more than 14 voting members: of which one is drawn from, and appointed by the Host country; four are nominated by the CGIAR; 8 members-at-large are elected by the Board; and the Director-General, who is an ex-officio member. The FAO is permanently represented at the Board by an Official Observer who does not have voting rights. The Board carries out its governance activities under the leadership of a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, and with assistance of 4 Committees, the Executive, Audit, Programme and Nominating committees.

5.2.1 Assessment

Elsewhere in this report, the Panel comments in detail on ISNAR’s performance. The Board has ultimate authority and responsibility for all activities in ISNAR and, as such, is ultimately responsible for where ISNAR is positioned today within the CGIAR system and also within the broader set of organizations serving the poor.

All is not well. From the Panel’s interactions with stakeholders, it emerged that many Donors are saying that they do not understand where ISNAR is headed, nor where its comparative advantages lie vis-à-vis other providers of both research and services to the NARS. A number of clients are questioning ISNAR’s ability and commitment to implementing change, and the Board has not commissioned and evaluated Centre-Commissioned External Reviews (CCERs) of ISNAR’s activities as recommended by the CGIAR system, thus depriving itself of key external inputs to inform its own evaluative processes. Furthermore, many staff are unhappy with the quality and responsiveness of ISNAR’s own internal management practices and are reticent to raise these issues with either senior management or the Board.

In its own self-evaluation conducted over each of the past two years, the Board concluded that it has been doing a “good to very good” job for ISNAR¹¹. The Panel is concerned at the apparent disconnect between how the Board rates its governance activities, and what the outside world is inferring about its effectiveness.

¹¹ Self Evaluation of ISNAR Board Member Performance, covering two-year periods to October 2001, section entitled “How the Board Rates”.

ISNAR's overall performance in governance will need to be substantially upgraded if ISNAR is to successfully meet the ongoing needs and upcoming opportunities for serving NARS. The Panel notes that the Third EPMP also found deficiencies in the critical area of determining vision and developing an appropriate strategy. Concluding that ISNAR was a Centre in search of a compelling vision, the Third EPMP recommended action to "define and interpret its niche both to guide ISNAR's own future planning and to improve the understanding of its role by clients and the donor community". While Management responds that it has completed this task, many stakeholders disagree and the DG and the Board have not yet succeeded in reconciling these views.

ISNAR's Board is now in a unique position to strengthen itself for this new environment. By end-2004, eight of the current 12 board members, including the Chair, the Vice Chair, and the chairs of each of the 4 board committees will have reached their term limits, and a new DG will have been appointed. Additionally, there are currently two vacant Board positions to be filled.

The Panel notes that if normal Trustee appointment term limits are followed, there will be another substantial Trustee turnover in 6 years. Consideration should now be given to extending shorter initial terms to some appointees (indeed that may be a preferred alternative for private sector candidates) to bring the trustee replacement schedules more in line with ISNAR's requirement that one third of the Trustees be replaced and/or be eligible for reappointment each year.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that the Nominating Committee of the Board develop a list of competencies required for the next 6 years (using external assistance as necessary) and then develop a Board Trustee profile and an associated nominating strategy. The strategy should firstly determine the size of the board—depending on the nature of the future ISNAR—and earmark a number of the upcoming vacancies for highly talented individuals representing the private and philanthropic sectors.

5.3 Formal Board Assessment Practices

The Panel noted that the ISNAR Board reviews its own performance using the standard CG-developed Assessment Tool. This action is to be commended.

That said, a review of the results of the most recent self-evaluations show that, while the Trustees feel very satisfied with their overall governance role, almost all Trustees commented that they had little or no individual involvement in ISNAR activities between board meetings. Apparently ISNAR is not using its Trustees as advocates for, or participating in ISNAR's ongoing activities or fund-raising. Involvement by Trustees on a much more regular basis is one of the key shifts in the emerging governance model, as noted above. All Trustees felt that their contributions at the meeting were both helpful and personally rewarding and that board processes were efficient and effective. A number of Trustees made very insightful comments about governance practices in these evaluations and the Panel notes that there is sufficient material now available for the Board Chair to formally schedule a discussion to consider the results and review the many excellent suggestions for reforms

being made. This is clearly a Board leadership initiative that should have been taken some time ago and must now be taken—with the assistance of an outside Facilitator.

5.4 ISNAR's Financial Performance— an Overview

Donor funding uncertainties within the CGIAR system has made the management task of the CGIAR Centres more complex in recent years. ISNAR is no exception. A number of traditional donors are decreasing their contributions—or stopped contributing altogether, and new donors are tending to be interested in project-specific activities rather than institutional support *per se*.

ISNAR's overall funding has decreased, in current terms, by approx US\$1.5 million over the past 5 years to \$8.3 for 2001. Management expects to see income rise to \$8.9 million in 2002 and the Medium Term Plan calls for annual increases of about \$0.5 million thereafter.

ISNAR's operating funds, at \$1.3 million at the beginning of 2002, are budgeted to fall to about \$0.8 million by end-2002 although management believes that additional funds will be forthcoming during the remainder of this year and there may, in fact, be no funding deficit for the year. At the end 2001 level of \$1.3 million, ISNAR's operating funds amounted to about 53 days' operating expenditures, a satisfactory level. The current Medium Term Plan: 2002-2004 projects a funding deficit for 2003 of about \$0.5 million but the Panel notes that any further decline in the level of reserves would begin to jeopardize ISNAR's ability to accommodate unanticipated delays in receipt of funds.

As currently configured, ISNAR's fixed costs - the costs of its physical facilities, its administration, management, governance and support infrastructure are around \$3.5 million. As ISNAR's unrestricted funding declines (it was budgeted at \$4.4 million for 2002, management believes this figure may increase to \$4.7 million), ISNAR's capacity to fund innovative, or 'seed' research or service activities that are not also the recipient of project funding is diminished.

Elsewhere in this report the Panel states its belief that a number of programmes are at or below a critical mass point and should either be dropped or moved elsewhere in the CGIAR system, or be rejuvenated. If ISNAR is to continue at about its current funding levels, management and the Board will need to make a number of decisions aimed at: reducing ISNAR's fixed cost 'base'; and redefining its mission to include only those activities where it can have both a critical mass of resources and a comparative advantage over its 'competitors'.

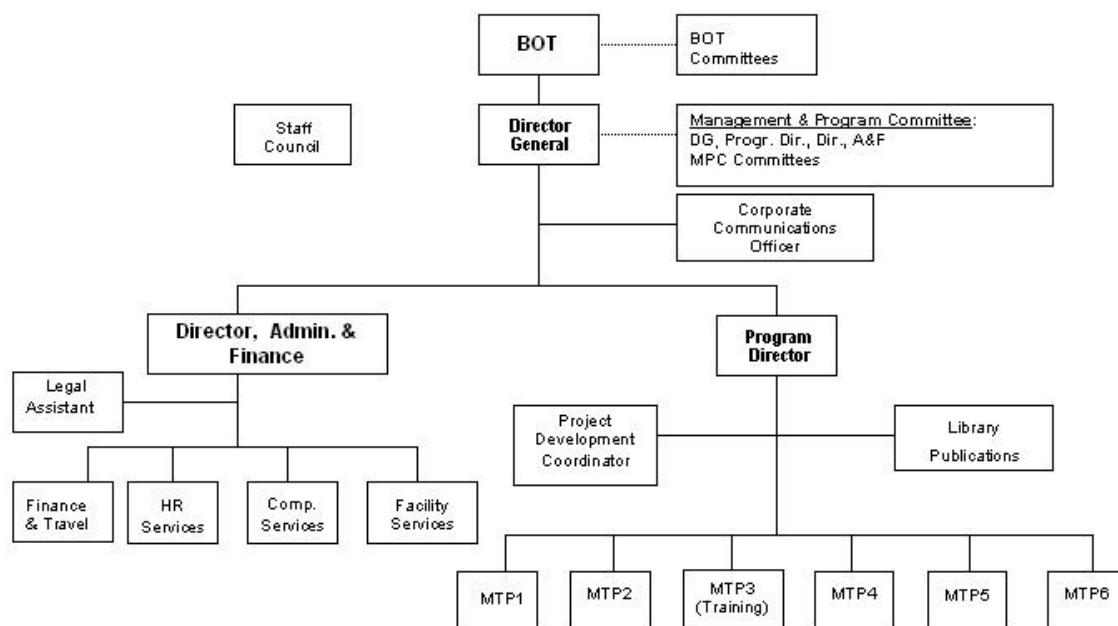
Chapter 6 discusses these issues and options in depth.

5.5 Organization and Management

5.5.1 Organization Structure

The current organization structure is as shown below.

Organizational Chart per 19 October 2001



5.5.2 Leadership

ISNAR has a strong record of annual DG evaluation exercises that seek formal inputs from both the Board and from staff through the Staff Council. Results of the more recent evaluations clearly show that the current DG has an enviable record of loyalty to, and care of, his staff.

Elsewhere in this report the Panel has commented on the Board's difficulties in leading ISNAR into the future. Some of the criticisms of the board must also fall on the DG, in that it is he who provides the leadership within the Centre for determining how best to meet stakeholder's expectations within a constrained budget envelope and develop the plans and programmes aimed at achieving the board-approved results.

The frustrations that staff have indicated with respect to the deficiencies of ISNAR's internal management processes also have clear leadership implications. Throughout the Panel's interaction with ISNAR staff, there has been a continuing complaint that A&F is unable to 'connect' or empathize with staff and to provide a level of service that would be expected. Many complain of a pervading culture that always finds a legal reason for why something cannot be done, but rarely seeks to find supportive ways to solve the problem at hand. The decision not to commission an external review of ISNAR's own administrative and

management practices has meant that the DG has not benefited from an independent evaluation of the management function. Further, with more astute leadership and direction from the DG, a more comprehensive, and convincing, corporate vision and action plan could have been prepared. In addition the inability of the Centre to take difficult personnel decisions, discussed later, reflects adversely on the DG's leadership.

5.5.3 Management Information

The Panel observed that Trustees receive financial reports, and an associated management commentary on ISNAR's activities at 6-monthly intervals. Trustees are not given information that summarizes project performance metrics nor are they given sufficient data about the Centre's own human resource activities. A board cannot exercise its fiduciary responsibilities adequately with this dearth of information and the infrequent reporting cycle. Trustees must, at all times, be cognizant of the financial and operational state of the organization for which they have final responsibility.

There is a legal presumption—and a moral responsibility—for board members to demand accurate, relevant, and timely information regarding the activities of the institution. A brief financial report of the type currently provided to the ISNAR Trustees at half-yearly intervals is inadequate on all three of these measures.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that Management provide:

- (a) a quarterly management report to all Trustees with project management, personnel, and financial data and comments on results achieved and expected, including a rolling cash flow forecast for the ensuing twelve months; and**
- (b) a monthly financial statement, and a rolling twelve month cash flow forecast to each member of the Audit Committee and to the Board Chairperson.**

Interestingly, a number of Trustees, in discussions with the Panel on this matter responded that they would not want the added workload of reading more frequent reports from ISNAR. Such a response in the new governance model today would not only give rise to legal liability in any court of law and/or of public opinion, but would also result in the immediate termination of any relationship with that Trustee.

5.5.4 Administration & Finance

Administration and Finance consists of four units: Finance and Travel; Human Resources Services; Computing Services; and Facility Services. Its budget in 2002 is \$2.0 million, representing 21%% of ISNAR's total costs each year. It is headed by a Director and has a total of 3 IRS and 15 NRS staff.

Finance & Travel is responsible for all aspects of ISNAR's financial matters and for arranging and controlling all ISNAR's travel activities. ISNAR uses the SUN system accounting package and through it, provides the Board, senior management and the programme/project managers with financial information. It also maintains the accounting records with their associated controls. Finance works with the External Auditors, as appropriate, to ensure the integrity of ISNAR's finances. It also handles the Centre's travel arrangements and account reconciliation. There is no Internal Auditor.

5.5.4.1 Assessment

The travel function appears to work satisfactorily and cost effectively and has been reviewed by the External Auditor recently. No irregularities were noted.

ISNAR's financial management processes, however, leave a lot to be desired. First, Project management staff complain of the slow response in getting useable project income/expense data. What is supplied is difficult to interpret, often inaccurate on the first attempt, and always late. The SUN accounting system is capable of a high degree of customisation to suit user's needs and the Panel urges management to determine user requirements and then meet those requirements. This is a substantive leadership failure in that too little management attention is being given to adequately meeting staff needs.

Second, in times of funding scarcities, the fact that ISNAR's accounting system does not include a commitment system (though the Sun system module has been purchased by ISNAR and has been available for some time) means that programme and project managers have to maintain their own, informal listing of actual and committed expenditures in order to exercise control—particularly towards the end of the year or the end of a project. This deficiency should be rectified.

Third, as a Centre that provides services to its clients—some of which are in competition with other suppliers of similar products—the absence of an accurate and timely cost accounting system that enables ISNAR to set prices, monitor the 'profitability' of its products, and undertake comparative analyses of its competitors products is a major shortcoming.

Fourth, there is no internal audit function. Management argues that ISNAR cannot afford an Internal Auditor in an expensive city like The Hague—and that ISNAR has always received clean external audits, and is, in any case, too small to require, or afford, this capability. The Panel believes that an internal audit function is an integral part of the set of checks and balances in any organization and that it may well be possible—in a major city like The Hague—to hire, on a part-time basis, a retired External/Internal Auditor for a few months each year in order to carry out this important function, as other CGIAR Centres are doing. The Panel met with the ISNAR External Auditors and is pleased to note the satisfactory Audit reports in all years under review.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that ISNAR:

- (a) **Review (with external consultants) the adequacy and competency of the current Administration and Finance staff and make such changes as necessary to ensure an adequate level of service. Service levels should be defined by the external consultants and incorporated in revised Job Descriptions for the A&F staff;**
- (b) **Engage the services of an expert in cost accounting systems to design and help implement the necessary systems and processes that will enable ISNAR to understand, and monitor changes in its own product cost structure;**
- (c) **Expand the accounting system to include commitments and project implementation scheduling data so that the Administration and Finance**

- department can supply complete, timely, and accurate management information; and**
- (d) Develop an internal audit capability –possibly using part-time expertise.**

5.5.5 Human Resources Unit

This unit handles all the administrative aspects of the Human Resources (HR) function: recruitment, employment, training, promotions, relocations, dismissals and disciplinary actions.

Following extensive interactions with staff, HR recently completed an extensive overhaul of the ISNAR HR management process and has introduced an excellent performance-related Personnel Appraisal and Awards (PAA) process and concomitant salary structure.

ISNAR has also made significant efforts to improve the gender balance of its IRS staff, in part by promoting 6 NRS staff (of which 5 are female) to IRS status as of Jan 1, 2001, and has been very successful in achieving a wide country representation in its staffing complement.

5.5.5.1 Assessment

The recent downsizing of ISNAR's staff complement by non-renewal of contracts has caused an inevitable element of dissatisfaction with the HR function. Nevertheless the Panel is impressed with the thoroughness of the design and implementation of the new Personnel Appraisal (PAA) system in ISNAR. Relating individual performance to salary increases is becoming the norm and ISNAR's approach appears fair to staff, well designed, and professionally implemented. The Panel commends ISNAR's management and BOT for this initiative.

The Panel notes that management appears unwilling to take the difficult personnel decisions that would more closely align its staff competencies with its needs as these needs change. The Panel recognizes the difficulties ISNAR has recently faced with respect to some staff taking legal action against it. Nevertheless the Panel believes that organizations cannot be managed on a 'threat-avoidance' basis and hard decisions to terminate staff – even those who are mid-contract, must be made if the organization is to be successful. The adverse impact resulting from this indecision is two-fold: first, ISNAR's already tight budget is further burdened with less-than-fully productive personnel; and second, it sends a signal to other staff that less-than-stellar performance will be acceptable. On recruitment, the Panel notes that 6 of the January 2001 NRS promotions to IRS status did not follow an international recruitment process and thus is not convinced that the best available talent has been recruited for the work at ISNAR. This is a critical issue, as ISNAR needs to rebuild a reputation for excellence and leading edge competencies in all its professional staff.

With the recommendations being made elsewhere in this Report to eliminate a number of activities, management will be faced with a significant number of additional difficult staffing decisions. Failure to act on them would, negate ISNAR's capacity to realign staff competencies with needs, and this would be unacceptable to ISNAR's stakeholders.

5.5.6 Facilities Management

ISNAR's headquarters, located close to the central business district of The Hague, occupy some 3566 sq. m. of office space under a 10 year lease at a current cost of around \$700,000 per year.

5.5.6.1 Assessment

With the recent downsizing, ISNAR is investigating a sub-leasing arrangement whereby a portion of the currently excess office space would be used by others at cost savings to ISNAR. This would bring the Centre's very generous space standards more in line with typical professional office space standards

This 'rightsizing' of its office space requirements is an important initiative by ISNAR and is to be commended. However the Panel would have wished to see this process expediated.

5.5.7 Computer Services

CS provides both ISNAR's internal computing and networking requirements and also manages the external database of knowledge for which the Centre is well known.

5.5.7.1 Assessment

Technically, the computer centre's assets and level of service to clients is adequate and provides easy access to all staff users of the various systems. The Panel has had no complaints from staff and it appears that the information technology (IT) staff are knowledgeable in current systems and can apply appropriate technical solutions where upgrades are needed. The Centre's investments in IT appear to be sound, and cost-effective.

5.5.8 Research Support Services (Library and Publications)

Research Support services that include the costs of the Director-Research, total \$580,000. The Library appears adequate to ISNAR's internal needs and the CGIAR system and the work done by the Library staff in support of the MTPs is commendable. Likewise the Publications unit is satisfactory: the number of publications is discussed in Chapter 4 above.

6. OPTIONS FOR ISNAR'S FUTURE

6.1 ISNAR's challenges today

The Panel has spoken with the NARS, donors, other stakeholders, members of the Board and ISNAR staff, and has reviewed progress in ISNAR's activities since the Third EPMP in 1997. A number of general themes have emerged that highlight the major challenges facing ISNAR today.

These include:

- **Changes in the external environment:** ISNAR has a wider mandate and a greater number and complexity of clients in terms of the actors who make up agricultural innovation systems, compared to a previous emphasis on NAROs. There is a growing number of alternative suppliers of ISNAR-type products, especially at each extreme of the research-service continuum where ISNAR has only a small share of the market. These include the regional organizations and subregional organizations which are gradually increasing their service delivery capabilities;
- **Implementation of the ISNAR Strategy:** While ISNAR has developed a new Strategy that lays out interesting and relevant themes, the biggest challenge lies ahead of it - how to translate that plan into realities that define its niche and focus sharply on a few priorities within that niche. This must be carried out within a framework that clearly defines its comparative advantage, its priorities, its clients, and its products. It must also clearly communicate that strategy to its key stakeholders;
- **Definition of international public goods:** To assure continued CGIAR support, ISNAR must clearly define and focus on producing its major IPGs;
- **Reformulation of its programmes for the new strategy:** Presently only half of the current MTPs are operating in a satisfactory manner. Key areas such as policy research must be revitalized if it is to implement its strategy. To do so, will require adding significantly to staff resources in all but two MTPs, and all but one regional office;
- **Upgrading staff:** by adding disciplines required to implement the strategy, such as institutional economics, public policy, the management sciences, including change management, and organization behaviour. At the same time, ISNAR will have to recruit internationally qualified cutting edge staff to lead its new strategy, especially on the research side;
- **Demonstration of impacts:** ISNAR has not been able to demonstrate sufficient impacts, in part, due to the difficulty of assessing its impacts and in part to the lack of an institutionalized impact assessment culture. This is happening at a time when donors are demanding more accountability and results orientation;
- **Reduction of costs:** in order to allay client perceptions that it is a high cost supplier. This in turn implies reducing the high fixed cost base (administration, management, governance, physical facilities and programme support) of \$3.5m -amounting to some 36% of the total budget in 2002; and,
- **Restoration of financial flexibility:** With high fixed costs, and the failure to release staff, there is very little flexible funding to initiate new ventures or support core research activities.

6.2 Options for the Future

The Panel concludes from its review of ISNAR that ‘business as usual’ is not an option for ISNAR and that it must explore fundamental changes. In this section the Panel poses a number of alternative future scenarios for ISNAR that seek to address the challenges noted above and yet achieve the mandate that ISNAR’s stakeholders ask, including maintaining the mandate to produce international public goods. These options are; (1) A rejuvenated research and service oriented ISNAR, (2) a decentralized service oriented ISNAR, and (3) phasing out of ISNAR and passing the most relevant activities to other CGIAR Centres. Each option could have several variants, which need to be explored in depth, but which are beyond the mandate and available time of this Panel. We conclude with an analysis of the implications of choosing among the options.

6.2.1 Option 1: A Rejuvenated Research and Service-Oriented ISNAR

ISNAR would continue to implement its 2001 Strategy, within a framework of innovation systems and institutional innovations, and operationalizing its ‘theory of action’ to integrate research and service activities. This would also be in line with the recommendation of the 3^d EPMR. In this option ISNAR would:

- Implement the suggested changes and recommendations in governance, management and programme content in this review report;
- Retool and re-staff to meet the analytical and action research as well as the service provision challenges. Compared to its current staffing structure, this would require recruitment of a blend of specialists in relevant disciplines maintaining a balance of disciplinary excellence and real world experience, who would have the credibility to work with managers of research organizations and policy makers in facilitating institutional change, and the ability to conceptualize and synthesize across these experiences;
- Change the disciplinary mix toward institutional economics, public administration, political science, organization theory and change, and build strong linkages with other research institutions (e.g. IFPRI, universities in developed countries, the private sector, strong NARS including universities in developing countries) for the conduct of cutting-edge action research on innovation systems, including policy and management processes, and institutional change;
- Sharply focus on a few core and high priority activities that are critical to improving institutional capacity for agricultural innovations;
- Devolve remaining pure service activities to alternative suppliers, and develop strong linkages and outreach programmes with them to ensure that ISNAR’s products are utilized;
- Retain the headquarters in The Hague with a core research and service team. This may continue to guarantee the current level of funding from the host government, and make it easier to recruit high calibre research scientists who might have a preference for a European base;
- Change its resource allocation to devote a significant proportion of its budget to advocacy/public awareness for mustering the necessary political support for agricultural research in national budgets/agendas, and ISNAR’s role in promoting the needed changes; and

- Expand its funding base and budget. The EPMPR team estimates that this option would require more than 30% increase in the current annual budget of about \$9m.

6.2.2 Option 2 - A Decentralized Service -Oriented ISNAR

In this option ISNAR would focus on strengthening the ROs and SROs to provide service to the NARS and improve research management in the current change environment, with the objective of devolving its service functions to them. This option would require that:

- The CGIAR would transfer any ISNAR mandate for analytical policy research on innovation systems to IFPRI (i.e. the current MTP1 and parts of 4 would be disbanded);
- ISNAR would build an action research-service programme around core elements of its projects on linkages, institutional change and learning for institutional innovation (MTP2 and 3), drawing upon the framework of the new Strategy, and focusing on change management and the relevant tools and processes;
- ISNAR would base a core team of seasoned experts (3-5) in each region, within the Regional Organizations (ARIENENA, APAARI, FARA, FORAGRO). Each team of experienced practitioners and experts in the region would work together, promoting synergism, organizing projects, recruiting regional (not global) associates, and contracting the services of other suppliers to undertake case studies or training activities. In addition to providing advisory and training services to NARS, they would have a mandate of strengthening the capacity of the SROs to take over their functions within five years;
- Maintain a small headquarters staff of a DG and a small team of experienced thematic experts in management and institutional change with good skills in synthesis, linking to knowledge bases outside of ISNAR, knowledge sharing within ISNAR, and ability to coordinate among regional programmes and monitor quality in their area of expertise. The team may also include staff for fund raising, and information and public awareness activities. Its responsibilities would be transferred to an appropriate body in the global agricultural research system within 5 years;
- Focus sharply on a few key areas of change management, and give high priority to Africa, where the demand is greatest;
- Move the headquarters to a developing country. Such a re-location should result in reduced headquarters costs and would bring the organization closer to its clients;
- Implement the suggested changes and relevant recommendations on governance and management in this review report. However, the statutory size of the Board would be reduced;
- Completely devolve all action research and service activities to the ROs and SROs over a five year period; and
- Maintain current levels of funding. The EPMPR Team estimates that the current level of funding of ISNAR (\$9m annually) should be sufficient to operate this model.

6.2.3 Option 3: Phase out ISNAR

Under this option, ISNAR would cease to exist as a separate, stand-alone Centre. The CGIAR would:

- Transfer the mandate for analytical and action research on innovation systems to IFPRI (MTP1, 4 and 5);
- Create a System-wide or Challenge type programme as appropriate to pull together IPG activities of all CGIAR Centres and their partners in the general area of strengthening of NARS, e.g. the development of tools and methods; and
- Fund the operations, which in the Panel's view would cost less than the current budget of ISNAR.

6.3 Which way ISNAR?

In arriving at any decision on which of the above options may be most appropriate at this time, a number of factors need to be taken into consideration, including but not limited to the following:

- the projected future demand for ISNAR-type services in the near to medium-term future;
- the relevant international public goods element of ISNAR-type services;
- the speed of development of ROs and SROs;
- the most appropriate structure to ensure that the CGIAR provide these services in the most cost-effective manner to its major clients and other stakeholders, most of whom are located in the developing world;
- how ISNAR or its derivatives should contribute to the CGIAR goal of assisting NARS and other members of the wider "agricultural knowledge systems" in developing countries;
- the viability of a stand-alone Centre at its present level of funding; and
- the degree to which each option would allow ISNAR to exploit its comparative advantage in service delivery which is based on its past achievements.

In light of the above, the Panel's analysis of the options is as follows. The major requirement for **Option 1** is to re-staff ISNAR with internationally recognized scientists in ways that would strengthen its research base and broaden its disciplinary mix. In the Panel's assessment, less than one third of current international staff would qualify for this new ISNAR. In bringing ISNAR to a world-class international Centre in institutional change related to agricultural innovation and knowledge systems, it could fill an important gap in the CGIAR system, and with a strong base in agricultural research policy, institutional change, and organization management, could provide leadership to the system in the big issues of the day in public-private partnerships, promoting public investment in agricultural research, new institutional mechanisms for demand driven research agenda, increasing the voice of the poor in innovation systems, and organization change.

While tempting, the Panel's overall assessment is that in today's funding climate, donors are not willing to risk investing in such a new venture. If funds were available, donors would likely explore other institutional options than a rejuvenated ISNAR, including other CGIAR Centres, and Challenge programmes. The Panel has therefore ruled out Option 1 as having some worthy features, but being infeasible.

Option 2 would draw significantly more than Option 1 on current staff competencies, although they would be relocated. Re-staffing would be especially important for the small hub at its headquarters. It would allow the CGIAR system to build on the progress made by IFPRI in policy research by expanding its mandate slightly to give more attention to institutional issues.

With a decentralized and in many ways ‘virtual’ Centre, and close contact with clients, ISNAR would be better placed to satisfy its clients. With effective linkages among nodes, ISNAR could play an important role in knowledge sharing within and across regions. With a sharp focus on a few key issues in management and institutional change, and with mechanisms to reach a larger number of countries, it might be able to enhance its overall impacts.

Co-location of the Headquarters with FARA would have the advantage of putting the Headquarters in Africa which the CGIAR has identified as a priority region (Plank 3), as well as locating it in the FAO Regional Office for Africa, thus providing an opportunity for closer collaboration with one of the largest alternative providers of ISNAR type services in the region.

Earlier in this report, the Panel observed that there is a wide range of alternative suppliers of ISNAR products and services, but that these tend to be more available to stronger systems that have the capacity and access to information to shop around both locally and internationally for these services. Weaker national systems find advantages in one-stop shopping for these services and ISNAR has been seen in that role. The Panel notes that there is still a considerable number of such systems, many of them in Africa, but also in other regions as well. This option would allow the CGIAR to continue to provide the service over the next five years, thereafter devolving the responsibility to ROs and SROs.

Furthermore, the option would provide the system with a mechanism to gradually build up the capacity of the ROs and SROs to take over the service function of ISNAR. The major challenge would be to ensure that during the period of transition ISNAR does not become a specialized service Centre, thereby jeopardizing the production of international public goods, such as tools, and risking to quickly become intellectually obsolete.

Option 2 focuses on Africa, and an important variant would be to make this an exclusive focus, phasing out activities in the other regions. The Panel considered this, but rejected it for two reasons. First, institutional change in agricultural research is proceeding at different speeds in different regions. This means that there are other regions, especially South Asia and Central Asia and the Caucasus, where agricultural research systems have hardly initiated the reform process, and ISNAR-type services should be in demand in the future, potentially playing an important role in shaping the evolution of NARS in these regions. Second, there is much to be gained by knowledge sharing among regions, and especially capturing the lessons from Latin America, which has been undergoing considerable institutional evolution of its innovation systems over the past two decades.

Option 3 has the advantage that institutional strengthening within the CGIAR would immediately move towards the research end of the research-service spectrum. The CGIAR would preserve the IPG elements of its action research function by requiring IFPRI to develop an appropriate programme. Potentially the CGIAR could also preserve the core competencies and knowledge sharing for strengthening research organizations and systems,

provided that a system-wide programme or challenge programme is established and effectively managed and governed. Therein lies one of the risks - Challenge programmes are still untried, and system-wide programmes have a variable performance record.

An important variant of both Options 2 and 3 is to turn over ISNAR to the subregional organizations, with the GFAR Secretariat providing the hub for linking institutional strengthening activities located in each of the SROs. This option is attractive for the longer term, but the Panel, and indeed the SROs interviewed, feel that more time is needed for these organizations to mature.

6.4 Conclusion

Each of the Options spelled out above can be adopted by the CGIAR as the way forward in further implementing its mandate to strengthen the NARS, depending on the level of commitment from the system's current and future donors. However, in the Panel's view, the most attractive and less risky option, given the current trends in donor funding, and the commitment to improve partnerships with the NARS would be Option 2.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that the CGIAR carefully consider the option of:

- **transferring the ISNAR mandate for analytical policy research on innovations systems to IFPRI; and,**
- **transforming ISNAR into a decentralized service-oriented institution with devolution of its remaining functions to the regional and subregional organizations over a five-year period.**

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