

Statement by Per Pinstrup-Andersen, Chair, CGIAR Science Council at the Stakeholder Meeting, AGM, Nairobi, Kenya

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends:

It is wonderful to be back in the CGIAR. And I want to thank you. For those of you who are laughing, I actually did leave for a full year, but the fact that I am back confirms the old saying that very few, if any, ever leave the CGIAR.

I am really grateful to all of you for inviting me back to this wonderful organization, and I look forward to working with the very outstanding new Science Council, the outstanding members that have been selected. I will do my best to meet your expectations but please don't set the expectations so high that the Science Council cannot achieve them.

I am, of course, not speaking on behalf of the Science Council. The Science Council has not yet met; not all the members are here at this meeting. I do not have a written version of what I am going to say but the meeting Secretariat has agreed to transcribe my comments so that for those of you who want to verify if I really said what I am going to say, there should be a written version before the end of the meeting on Friday or earlier.

I believe the CGIAR is a great institution. We continue to have great impact. The financial support for the system has been roughly constant in nominal terms, which I believe is very good during a period of time when development assistance generally is decreasing.

Now I don't want to downplay for a moment the tremendous budget difficulties, the painful budget problems that some of the centers have experienced and some are experiencing now. Neither do I want to say that we have enough funds to do the work that the CGIAR needs to do. Clearly, we need to grow in real terms. That is clear.

However, it is a matter I think of whether the glass is half full or half empty. The fact that we have maintained a more or less constant nominal level of budget I think means that the glass is half full.

As I said earlier, I have been on the outside for about a year. During that time, I have heard a number of people claim that the CGIAR is not the great institution it once was. In fact, some people use slightly stronger words about the CGIAR. When I tried to find out where they get their information, many of them get it from within. It seems to me that we within the CGIAR are doing damage to our own institutions if we try to convince the rest of the world that this organization is not very good.

I am not for a minute suggesting we shouldn't identify the problems that we have. We must identify the specific problems and then we must solve them. But that is very different from making general statements like the CGIAR is going down the drain. It could turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy because nobody wants to bet on a loser, and the CGIAR, in my opinion, is a winner and we must communicate that not only among ourselves but to the outside.

In my opinion, the system is spending too much energy on reorganization and structural change and too little on establishing programmatic priorities for the system. It seems to me that the latter should guide the former. The form should follow the substance. And there has been a tendency in the CGIAR to spend a lot more time on how many centers and where they should be located and what committees than on talking about what exactly is it that we need to do in order to help people out of poverty and hunger.

I am mentioning this not because I want to be critical but because I think that is a place where the Science Council can help. I think we can help set programmatic priorities for the system, leaving space for individual centers to also pursue other activities that are part of the individual center priorities. I am not for a minute suggesting central planning and central implementation; I am suggesting system priorities and decentralized implementation.

We need to find a way that will integrate effectively system priorities with center priorities. And the key question, it seems to me, is where can international public goods type agricultural research have the greatest impact on the reduction of poverty and hunger? And answering that question is much more important in my opinion than arguing about minor structural changes. Should there be 16, 14 or some other number of centers? It seems to me that the desirable structure will follow once we get the priorities right. And it seems to me that that is how we should proceed.

One model that I think we can learn from is the Gates Foundation-funded so-called Grant Challenges in Global Health Program. That program has just identified 14 what they call grand challenges. And if you are interested in seeing what they are, a recent issue of the Science Magazine has an article about this where they list the 14 grand challenges. This program is now proceeding to try to identify what action is needed to deal with those challenges. That is what I thought the CGIAR challenge program, in fact, would be all about.

But we are moving very slowly. We now have three challenge programs that are just beginning to get implemented. The CGIAR members have provided very little funding for these challenge programs. I agree that one of the reasons for doing the challenge programs was to attract additional funding from non-traditional donors, but I do not agree that that should be the sole objective, because no donor can be fooled for very long, that we say what we are proposing as a challenge program is a very high priority for the CGIAR but we are not going to put any of our own money into it. That won't work for very long. I don't think we can go back to the Bill Gates Foundation three years from now and say we need another \$25 million for a challenge program but we are sorry that we were not able to put very much of our own money to supplement the first \$25 million. The world doesn't work that way. We have got to put our money where our mouth. If we are really serious about the using the challenge program concept to identify and work on key priorities that will make a difference in the lives of poor people, we have got to be willing to co-fund those global programs along with other funding from the outside.

One other point on the challenge programs is that I don't believe it makes sense to spend two years from the time an idea is put on the table until a proposal has been approved. That to me is way too bureaucratic. We ought to be much more flexible than that.

And that brings me to my next point, and that is I believe we are seeing a dramatic increase in the transaction costs within the CGIAR. And I am not talking about legitimate overhead activities at the center level or at the system level. Those overhead activities have to be performed in order to get the research done.

I am talking about what I consider to be a mushrooming of system level activities covered under things like evaluation, participation, coordination. We are talking about committee after committee meeting, after meeting, spending a large amount of the money that should go for research on those kinds of activities. Now if that sounds a bit extreme, it is to get the point across.

But I want to modify it by saying that, yes, of course, some of those activities are essential in order to get the research done, but let's not lose sight of the fact that what is going to make a difference for poor people is the money that is spent on research, not the money that is spent on many of these other things.

In other words, we need a balance between what we spend on research and what we spend on, let's call, it transaction costs. There is such a thing as too much participation. It may be hard to believe in an era where participation is such a wonderful word. But participation costs money and it takes time. And we have to find a balance between participation and our willingness to take risks, because obviously the more preparation we do and the more money we spend on that, we can then reduce the risk of making a mistake. But I think we should be ready to assume some risks and, yes, we will make mistakes. That is part of doing business.

Let me come back to the programmatic priorities because I believe that is an area where the Science Council can help make a difference. It seems to me that overriding priority or certainly the most important continues to be research for sustainable productivity increases and reduced production in post-harvest risks and losses, combined with research on the kinds of policies, the kinds of institutions that are needed to support such productivity increases.

That I think is obvious to everybody, that that is the bread and butter of the CGIAR, to generate the international public goods to make that happen. As the Vice President said this morning, agriculture is key to poverty eradication, and agricultural research is key to getting agriculture moving. So I think we are doing the right thing.

But pursuing productivity increases and reducing risks have to be in the context of the future, not the context of the past. And that means, one, that we take into account the new science and technology opportunities; second, that we take into account that we are in a phase of globalization with increasing trade liberalization and all of the risks and opportunities that come with it; third, food safety is much more important now than it was just a few years ago, partly as a trade barrier, as a non-tariff barrier in international trade and partly and, of course, most importantly as a health problem, as a health problem particularly but not exclusively in developing countries.

We need to pursue productivity increases within the context of sharing bio safety. And you will be pleased, I believe, to receive a report some time in the not too distant future by an Interim

Science Council Panel on that issue. I read an early draft coming over here. In my opinion, it is an excellent forward-looking report that gives us guidance as to how to proceed.

We need to take another look at the agro-ecological approaches and what is it we can learn from the agro-ecological approaches that will help us achieve the goals of the CGIAR, what kind of research is needed. I agree with some of the critics of the CGIAR who argue that we have done too little research in that particular area.

And last but by no means least, we need to have another discussion of how the CGIAR can help remedy the tremendous hardships caused by HIV/AIDS. I believe it was a mistake when the system a few years ago suggested that the relationship between agricultural research and HIV/AIDS did not belong in our research portfolio. I think it does. And I would like to bring it back for a discussion in the Science Council. I think it is an extremely important issue that the CGIAR can help deal with.

I want to refer you to a paper by the Interim Science Council, by the Standing Committee on Priorities and Strategies (SCOPAS) of the Council on ongoing activities, because I think that paper points out a number of these forward-looking activities. Obviously, I cannot cover all of the things the Science Council should work on. The Chairman is going to call my twenty minutes, but I want to mention one other thing, and that is we need to seek and strengthen partnership with the most relevant and promising institutions, and I want to mention in particular NEPAD. I think NEPAD provides a tremendous opportunity for collaboration for the benefit of African agriculture.

I have already mentioned that we need to strengthen the reputation of the CGIAR by talking nicely about us instead of otherwise. But we also need to assure a good reputation of the Science Council. We need to have a good reputation of the Science Council both within and outside because, as I see it, the Science Council is primarily responsible for delivering advice to the group but it is also responsible for dealing with clients outside the CGIAR.

And the only way that the Science Council can get a good reputation is by earning it. And I am really encouraged by the membership that has been identified. I believe together we can, in fact, earn the kind of reputation that we should have.

And in order to get us started on this, much has been done, including the ongoing work by the Interim Science Council, the continuity that is provided by three others members of the Interim Science Council, staying with the Science Council for a year, by selecting the six outstanding new members and by the CGIAR decisions at last year's annual meeting on how to proceed.

Now this is what Francisco referred to as the third pillar, the reform of the third pillar. It has not been completed. There is one more element that has to be done, and that includes the assessment of the support needed by the Science Council Secretariat to undertake the new mandate and the new activities, because, in fact, the Science Council does have a new mandate and a new set of activities that have to be supported by the strongest Science Council Secretariat that we can find, that we can put together. We need to specify the human resource needs and what staff changes, if any, need to be made within the Secretariat. We need to develop a budget that is justified on

the basis of the activities, and we need to hire the Executive Director and make whatever staff changes seem warranted.

This I believe should be initiated by the Science Council as soon as possible. Now the guidelines for doing this you have given us in the approval of the report from the Science Council Panel a year ago at the annual meeting in Manila. And there are a number of recommendations in this report and all of them were approved.

But I want to make special reference to recommendation number 10, which states that: one, the precision of the chief operating officer of the new Science Council should be at the level of Director with the title of Executive Director; and two, the Science Council should have full and unconditional authority in selecting the staff of its Secretariat. It also says that this should be implemented by the co-sponsors as soon as possible.

This same report also states, and I quote, "The support of a strong and flexible Secretariat headed by an Executive Director is essential for the Council's success". There are some unresolved issues related to the Science Council Secretariat, and I understand that they will be dealt with in the business meeting on Thursday or Friday. But I want to stress that resolving these outstanding issues is in my opinion essential to the success of the Science Council.

Mr. Chairman, I think I have spent my twenty minutes. So let me end with a reference to the task in front of us. Based on an analysis that I have done as Chairman of the World Economic Forum's Expert Group on Hunger, I believe that with business as usual -- and I am here referring to what we did during the 1990s as a world community -- only 16 out of 74 countries for which we have data will achieve the Millennium Development Goals for hunger, which is to reduce by half the percent of the population that is malnourished, and only 12 of the 74 countries will achieve the World Food Summit goal which is to reduce by half the number of hungry people. That is really disgraceful if that is the best that we can do as the world community.

And I would argue that if the CGIAR gets it right, we can help change those statistics for the better. We can help bring down the number of poor and hungry below what it would otherwise be without doing damage to natural resources. That it seems to me is an exciting opportunity and one of the most important challenges facing human kind.

I thank you for your attention.