



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Report of the 2014 Regular Meeting of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI)

San Jose, Costa Rica
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Special Advisory Commission on
Management Issues (SACMI)

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I. Introduction

Pursuant to its Statute and Rules of Procedure, and in compliance with the recommendation made at the Thirty-third Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee (Resolution IICA/CE/Res. 580), the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI) met on March 27, 2014 at 8:30 am Costa Rica time, via videoconference. The members of the SACMI comprised representatives designated by Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Dominican Republic, Mexico, United States of America and Venezuela. A list of participants may be found in Annex 1.

II. Points of Consensus

2.1 Message of the Director General

The Director General welcomed all the participants and expressed his condolences for the recent death of Mrs. Cheryl Claus, to whose memory he dedicated the success of the meeting. He recalled that during the last meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), he had reiterated his commitment to turn the Institute into a technically powerful institution that is efficient in delivering results, responsible in its administration of financial resources and transparent in its accountability. He stressed that the support of the Member States would be required to meet this challenge.

He went on to emphasize that the Institute's financial situation required an urgent solution and therefore the IABA had issued two mandates to the Commission. The first of these mandates, contained in Resolution No. 481, called on the Director General to prepare the 2014-2018 Medium Term Plan with the participation of the Member States. He stated that in order to facilitate its implementation, it would be necessary to ensure consistency with the Institute's budget. The second mandate, contained in Resolution No. 491, considered that the Institute's capacity to provide technical cooperation had been reduced due to the freezing of the quotas paid by its Member States and that there was no possibility of making further savings without compromising IICA's technical cooperation. Consequently, it had called on the Director General, with the guidance of this Commission, to present proposals that reflected the current financial situation, as well as recommendations to strengthen it.

The Director General explained that during his first administration, the emphasis had been placed on thematic concentration. He added that the proposed 2014-2018 MTP, which was being prepared in the context of the 2010-2020 Strategic Plan, was based on a cooperation model with greater impact, thanks to the way in which technical resources were organized and financial resources allocated. He added that the topics covered in the previous MTP would be maintained, but that new knowledge would be incorporated in order to keep the Institute's technical cooperation in the vanguard. He also recalled the mandates received at the last two IABA meetings, instructing IICA to address the issues of innovation and integrated management of water for agriculture. He emphasized the importance of risk management in order to tackle price instability and the effects of climate change, though he recognized that the Institute's financial situation would limit its ability to address these issues.

2.2 Progress in the formulation of the 2014-2018 Medium Term Plan (MTP)

The Head of the Inter-American Information and Editorial Production Center for Agriculture (CIPE) at IICA explained that the starting point for the new 2014-2018 Medium Term Plan was the 2010-2020 Strategic Plan.

He then referred to IICA's vision and mission, and stated that the aim of the proposed MTP was to support the Member States in addressing the main challenges facing the agricultural sector. It therefore included the following strategic objectives: 1) to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural sector; 2) to strengthen agriculture's contribution to the development of territories and to rural well-being; 3) to improve agriculture's capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change and make better use of natural resources; and 4) to improve agriculture's contribution to food security.

He explained that the proposed technical cooperation model was based on the following elements: a) results-based management, b) a better definition of the Institute's key functions, c) a commitment to achieve "IICA's contributions" through the "flagship projects", d) strengthening the Technical Cooperation Fund, e) operating through networks, f) integrating technical services and institutional management within the model and g) strengthening a culture of monitoring and evaluation for continuous improvement.

He added that the Institute's work would be based on a chain of results, comprising three levels of results: 15 transformations, 11 contributions and 37 products and services. He enumerated the four "flagship projects" that would constitute the linchpin of IICA's technical cooperation: 1) Competitiveness and sustainability of agricultural production chains for food security; 2) Productivity and sustainability of family agriculture for food security and the rural economy; 3) Resilience and integrated risk management in agriculture; and 4) Inclusion in agriculture and rural territories. He also pointed out that results-based management demanded a solid culture of monitoring and evaluation.

2.2.1 Analysis and comments

Argentina expressed satisfaction with the MTP proposal, and particularly with the inclusion of the issues of integrated management of water resources and risk management. With regard to climate change, she reported that her country had given priority to adaptation. Argentina agreed with the idea of a results-based approach to projects but stressed the importance of establishing clear parameters and objectives for gauging and monitoring progress.

Barbados felt that the MTP was consistent with his Government's plans regarding sustainable agriculture, innovation in agriculture, support for small-scale farmers and climate change. He acknowledged IICA's efforts to improve its efficiency in the use of available resources, but considered that the Institute should reinforce the area of human resources.

Brazil commended the Institute for its excellent work in structuring the MTP and expressed agreement with the proposals contained therein. With respect to the increase in quotas, he

considered it pertinent to mention that his country was facing constraints with respect to public spending.

Canada highlighted the consistency between the objectives proposed and the transformations expected in the Member States, but considered that some aspects should be better defined, such as the relationship between the 11 contributions, the guiding principles and the four strategic objectives. In relation to the budget, there was need to clarify whether this corresponded to the Institute's Regular budget.

Chile expressed agreement with the general guidelines of the MTP and said it had no comments to make regarding the content of the plan.

The United States of America expressed support for the new MTP and thanked the Director General for ensuring that the Institute was moving toward a change. It recommended that the issues of collection of quotas and the INR be included as part of the discussions of the meeting. The delegation also felt that the strategic objectives were clear and focused on addressing the needs of agriculture in the hemisphere. However, it was of the opinion that these should be linked to the contributions. The delegation also underscored the importance of linking the resources for external projects with the Institute's other resources. Finally, it left open the possibility of submitting specific observations regarding the document to the Director General.

Mexico acknowledged IICA's efforts to provide a preview of the MTP, based on the guidelines of the 2010-2020 Strategic Plan. They recalled that the Plan's objectives sought to improve the competitiveness and productivity of agriculture, strengthen its capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change and improve agriculture's contribution to food security. They welcomed IICA's proposed new approach to cooperation, referred to the challenge of supplying countries' food needs with limited soil and water resources and approved the inclusion of risk management. Mexico also noted the emphasis on the results-based approach, and on offering timely and flexible solutions.

The Dominican Republic lauded IICA's efforts to improve its technical cooperation services to the Member States, promote efficient use of the countries' contributions, and address priority issues for hemispheric agriculture, such as risk management, climate change and family agriculture. She mentioned that her country's Ministry of Agriculture had set up a specialized unit on Climate Change and a general directorate for Agricultural Risk.

Venezuela expressed agreement with most of the initiatives proposed, particularly with the plan to make better use of native species, promising crops and genetic resources, which he considered very important for the development and competitiveness of the agricultural sector. He expressed confidence that positive results could be achieved in this area through multilateral cooperation.

The Director General summed up the comments by noting that the SACMI had stated its agreement with continuing with the preparation of the MTP and adapting it for ease of reading by different groups. He explained that IICA was still in the process of conceptualizing the "flagship projects", to which most of the regular technical cooperation resources would be allocated.

He then referred to the “rapid response actions” (RRA), emphasizing that the Member States had recognized IICA’s capacity to respond promptly to emergency situations, such as the earthquake in Haiti and the outbreak of coffee leaf rust in Central America, Mexico and Colombia, among other events. He added that this capacity was one of the Institute’s strengths, which was applied in the MTP through the RRA and was complemented with efforts to strengthen risk management in agriculture.

He added that the current Competitive Fund for technical cooperation would be transformed into a seed fund in order to attract additional resources. Finally, he mentioned that the projects financed with external resources would enable the Institute to address the needs of member countries in partnership with other organizations. He concluded by inviting delegates to submit any additional comments.

The Deputy Director General emphasized that the MTP focused on achieving results. He reported that work was currently under way to implement the Plan, and invited members of the Advisory Commission to submit their contributions.

2.3 Strengthening institutional management: progress and results of the strategy to strengthen IICA’s institutional management in 2013, the 2015 Program Budget, report on the collection of quota contributions and proposal for the recovery of the Institute’s financial capacity

Mr. Carlos O’Farrill, Secretary of Corporate Services at IICA, described the main advances and results achieved in strengthening IICA’s institutional management, particularly the following: a) institutional sustainability, b) continued application of the policy for continuous improvement and reduction of operating costs, c) 100% implementation of the financial-accounting system (SAP) in all IICA Offices and at Headquarters, d) strengthening the administrative-financial processes, e) improving annual programming using a new model of planning, monitoring and evaluation, f) automated budget monitoring and online programming using the Unified Institutional Management System (SUGI), g) progress in “reengineering” the management of human talent and implementing the SAPIENS electronic platform, which will automate various processes.

2.3.1 2015 Program Budget

The Secretary of Corporate Services presented the proposed 2015 Program Budget and mentioned that the Seventeenth Regular Meeting of the IABA, held in Argentina in September 2013, had decided to approve the Regular Fund budget for the 2014-2015 period for USD 33.9 million annually; to approve the 2014 Program Budget; and to delegate to the Executive Committee the approval of the 2015 Program Budget, so that it would respond to the new MTP.

He explained that the 2015 Program Budget would need to minimize the impact of inflation, the effect of which was estimated at USD 1.0 million in the Regular Fund. For this reason, he added, it would be necessary to apply various measures such as cutting five professional personnel positions and rationalizing operating costs, while at the same time reinforcing the items of training, technical events and consultancies, allocating 0.1% more to technical cooperation. He

added that the budget for 2015 was USD 33.9 million, which meant that it remained unchanged with respect to the previous year.

2.3.2 Report on the collection of quota contributions

The Secretary of Corporate Services expressed his appreciation for the timely payment of quota contributions by the Member Countries and outlined the progress made in quota collections during the period 2010-2013, with respect to 2003. He stated that the number of countries in arrears had fallen from 12 in 2003, to one in 2013. The number of countries in regular or up-to-date status with quota payments had remained at between 31 and 33 in recent years, whereas in 2003 it had been 22. He noted that the number of Member States that had been up-to-date in 2013 had also increased when compared with 2012.

The Director General of IICA expressed concern over the Institute's financial situation. He pointing to the contrast between the countries' recognition of IICA's technical strength and the difficulties encountered in increasing its resources for technical cooperation. He also thanked the countries for their punctuality in paying their quotas. He called on the SACMI to offer some suggestions to improve the situation of the Regular Fund, recalling that the quotas had remained frozen for 19 years. He also invited the members of the Commission to offer some guidelines, recommendations and support in the search for more resources for the Regular Fund to enable IICA to fulfill the commitments established in the new MTP and address the priority issues with its characteristic effectiveness and efficiency.

2.3.3 Proposal for the recovery of the Institute's financial capacity

The Secretary of Corporate Services explained that demand for technical cooperation from IICA was increasing and becoming ever more complex; therefore greater speed and capacity for response was required. He added that the new 2014-2018 MTP would mandate the implementation of a type of management aimed at achieving results and accountability, without disregarding the need to ensure greater rationality, austerity and transparency in the execution of resources, maintain high standards of quality in cooperation services and address the new topics incorporated by the governing bodies into IICA's agenda.

He outlined the situation of the Regular Fund, comprised of quota resources and miscellaneous income, whose real value had fallen by more than USD 13 million. He pointed out that this loss of value would have been even greater without the use of extraordinary budgets and miscellaneous income and that the extraordinary revenues obtained from the recovery of quotas had been exhausted.

The Secretary of Corporate Services added that the generation of annual miscellaneous income had also declined, a fact explained by four external changes and therefore not within the control of the Institute: government decisions to eliminate the recovery of taxes, restrictions on retaining interest from the administration of external resources, cuts in interest rates and the negative effects of fluctuations in the exchange rate.

Faced with this situation, he noted that the Institute's main challenges would be to prevent the risk of a deterioration in the standard of institutional management and the quality of technical cooperation, restore the competitiveness of salaries, respond to growing demand for cooperation services, strengthen IICA's capacity for rapid response actions and ensure the inclusion of the issues of innovation and integrated management of water resources.

He stated that all these aspects should be taken into consideration for the successful implementation of the new 2014-2018 MTP, which would require the strengthening of the Regular Fund. He added that the contributions promised in the new MTP would be delivered through the flagship projects, the pre-investment resources (FonCT) and the rapid response actions. He explained that with the current budget it would be possible to finance the four flagship MTP projects without taking into account the effect of inflation in the coming years, and that the implementation of the new projects in areas such as innovation, water resources and risk management for agriculture would imply an estimated increase of USD 3 million in order to boost their potential contribution in the member countries. He ended by emphasizing that an increase in quotas would be necessary to strengthen technical cooperation services and address the issues with improved technical capacity, coverage and better contributions to the member countries.

2.3.4 Analysis and comments

Argentina mentioned that her Government was up-to-date with its quota payments and was currently negotiating the amount corresponding to 2014, as well as an additional voluntary contribution. She added that her country was unable to commit to a greater change than that implied in the voluntary contribution. The country also underlined the importance of redirecting resources towards technical cooperation by reducing unnecessary operating expenses. Argentina pointed out that, even when the nominal value of quotas was maintained, in many cases the budgetary contributions of the countries (measured in their respective local currency) increased because of variations in the exchange rate.

The Director General reported that last year, eight countries including Argentina, had unilaterally decided to make an extraordinary contribution, an effort which he acknowledged and for which he was grateful.

Barbados supports the effort and focus of corporate management and the tightening of the financial management for efficiency in the use of resources to benefit the technical programmes and to achieve some rationality, equity and transparency. It also lauds the focus on decreasing operating costs to allow an increase in the channeling resources to technical cooperation, and the rationalization of costs, to benefit the institute and member states.

Brazil commended the Institute's Administration for the way in which it had executed the available resources. He said that in order to make a projection of the Institute's financial situation, information was needed on future spending, such as investments in equipment and hiring of personnel. He added that his country's Ministry of Agriculture was willing to contribute to strengthening IICA's financial capacity, but that this decision also involved other official

institutions, including the Ministry of Finance and Planning, and therefore the matter would need to be discussed.

The Director General mentioned that he was planning to visit Brazil in May in order to negotiate an increase in the country's quota contribution to IICA with the relevant government institutions.

Canada urged the Institute to continue its efforts to ensure that the institutional net rate (INR) covered indirect costs. He pointed out that his country had reduced financial resources for government institutions and that they had taken steps to adjust to the existing budget. He mentioned the importance of the decisions to be taken on budgetary matters and the need for further discussion on this point. He suggested that, in the absence of an increase in quotas, the changes that this would imply for the Institute would need to be determined.

The Director General acknowledged the difficulties that tend to arise in countries with respect to budgetary issues and thanked the delegates for raising the matter of the INR. He stated that IICA hoped to reach the target value of 8.1% in 2018 established in an external consultancy on the INR. He reiterated that the income from INR was used to cover indirect costs generated by the execution of projects and activities financed with external resources, and therefore it could not be used to compensate for the financial erosion of the Regular Fund.

Chile lauded the austerity shown by IICA and indicated that his country's Ministry of Agriculture would be willing to adjust its quota contributions to the Institute. However, he pointed out that other institutions such as the Ministry of Finance and the Foreign Ministry were also involved in decision-making, and negotiations would therefore need to be carried out with the relevant bodies.

The United States of America reiterated the importance for IICA to increase its income from the INR. It suggested that the Institute conduct a detailed review of the current structure of Regular Fund costs in order to identify those that could be financed proportionally with INR resources. The delegate mentioned that salaries below market levels would prompt IICA employees to seek other employment options and proposed that the Executive Committee give priority to discussions on issues of this nature. Finally, the delegation expressed its interest in incorporating the INR into the tables that were presented and in knowing how this was distributed.

The Director General explained that 80% of the resources administered by the Institute came from external funds and that this was another important mechanism for providing technical cooperation to the Member States and attracting international financial organizations. He stated that part of the income from the INR was used to cover the costs of personnel involved in the execution of agreements financed with external resources and to maintain equipment, among other costs. He stressed that the income from INR was uncertain, and therefore could only be used when it was received.

The Secretary of Corporate Services added that the income obtained from the INR was allocated to cover the proportion of indirect costs resulting from the execution of external resources, and therefore did not represent profits for the Institute, which was the net neutral approach. He explained that IICA's overall budget stood at around USD 200 million and that managed funds

accounted for 80% of the resources, which were executed in accordance with the agreements signed. He added that INR revenues were received gradually, as the projects were executed, which meant that they were not immediately available. Furthermore, since this income was uncertain, it could not be used to cover fixed commitments, such as financing salaries, except those directly related to the agreements under execution and for some exceptions. Finally, he pointed out that reaching the expected minimum percentage of INR (8.1%) would require time, as there were still some projects that had been negotiated with a lower INR. Also, regulations in certain countries and institutions had to be complied with.

The United States of America called for a broader discussion on the administration of the indirect costs of projects financed with external resources, since, according to accepted international practice, the INR must cover IICA's indirect costs generated by those projects. They suggested that a fund be established to compensate for fluctuations in the recovery of the INR, following international practice.

As a possible solution to the fall in the real value of the Institute's budget, Mexico proposed that IICA offer consultation and project management services to the private sector. The resources obtained through this mechanism could go into the fund proposed by the United States of America. The delegates recommended that IICA develop its proposal for increasing quotas and add further details, with a view to submitting it to the Executive Committee. One of the specific aspects requiring explanation was how the 10.8% increase in the quotas for 2015 had been determined.

The Dominican Republic agreed with Chile on the importance of IICA's efforts to administer its resources in an austere manner, and on its achievements, despite its limited funds. She suggested that IICA insist to the authorities of the countries on the need to update their quotas and that the Member States keep up to date with their quota payments. She considered that the Institute's contributions were very valuable, and therefore felt it was essential to provide it with an adequate budget, made up of Regular Fund resources and income generated by the INR.

Venezuela stated that his country's highest authorities were aware of the need to pay their quota arrears. He felt that closer links with IICA would enable Venezuela to strengthen its relations with the rest of the countries in the hemisphere and take advantage of the experiences and synergies of all member countries.

The Secretary of Corporate Services agreed with the idea of gradually increasing the INR, stating that this had been an ongoing effort at IICA and had yielded good results. He then referred to figures showing the positive trend in the recovery of indirect costs and expected this to grow even further in the coming years. He reported that the INR averaged 6.71% for agreements signed in 2013, and announced that resources corresponding to these agreements would be available in the coming years, given that these projects have a time frame of more than one year. He showed the evolution and upward trend of the INR over a longer period of time, reaching 7.1% in 2013, and specified that in this case the average INR resulted from projects already executed. Finally, he stressed that it had not been easy to increase the real rate and mentioned that IICA was negotiating with those member countries where the rate for administration of projects was

established by law. He explained that the increase in the INR was not a unilateral decision by IICA, but rather depended on the countries and on the financial agencies.

The Director of IICA's Programming, Budgeting and Control Division commented that the concept of indirect costs used by the consulting firm which had analyzed the INR coincided with the proposal of the United States of America.

He explained further that the indirect costs associated with the IICA Offices and Headquarters were reflected in the Institute's budget. Part of these costs had to be financed by the Regular Fund, based on the percentage of projects managed with resources from that Fund. He added that 80% of the projects were managed with external resources and the remaining 20% with resources from the Regular Fund.

He mentioned that a portion of the costs of the Institute's management, corporate services and other costs were financed in part with Regular Fund resources and in part with INR resources. He explained that the Regular Fund was currently financing certain indirect costs, given that the INR target of 8.1% had not yet been reached, and pointed out that the gradual raising of the average rate had made it possible to release Regular Fund resources.

The Deputy Director General stated that IICA was close to reaching the recommended percentage of INR and called for further discussions in order to bring the administration of indirect costs fully in line with accepted international practices.

Argentina pointed out that, broadly speaking, an INR of between 6% and 8% had been established for the projects signed. For future projects (not those already under way), a figure somewhere between the two (7%) could be considered. However, the matter would have to be studied internally and submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MAGyP) for its consideration. The country reiterated that any study of the issue would be for future projects, not those already signed. It also drew attention to the fact that: (i) a rate of 6% was not low compared to the rate charged by other internal organizations; (ii) part of Argentina's voluntary contribution was intended to cover the different rates; and, (iii) Argentina contributed technical officers specializing in different areas to support IICA's work.

Brazil recommended that the Director General discuss the matter of the INR with the relevant authorities during his forthcoming visit to that country.

Canada requested the tables presented by the Secretariat of Corporate Services with information on the INR, broken down by country and by projects.

The Director General promised to send the information requested at the meeting to all the participants.

United States of America pointed out that the standard percentage charged by the United Nations was around 13% and noted that some of its agencies charged a higher rate. It added that the projects must be consistent with the organization's work and that information concerning the INR should be part of the budget.

Mexico pointed out that the income from the INR could not be determined with certainty, since it depended on the signing and execution of funding agreements. It reiterated its satisfaction with IICA's administration of projects, reaffirmed Mexico's backing to the Director General and ratified its support to IICA with an extra quota. In addition, it expressed willingness to support the Institute in its search for solutions to the budget situation.

Venezuela agreed to submit comments and recognized the effort made by the Institute's Administration to reduce costs and channel resources toward substantive issues.

III. Other business

Canada thanked all the participants for their efforts to hold this meeting online and in such a successful manner. It requested information on the situation in Colombia, in order to follow up on this matter before the next regular meeting of the Executive Committee. It announced that Canada would be chairing the next meeting of the Codex Commission, to be held in Geneva, and that it would like to share a document, in English and Spanish, with IICA's Member States, containing information on the issues to be discussed at this meeting.

With respect to the situation in Colombia, the Director General explained that relations had improved and that technical cooperation actions had begun in that country. He mentioned that it was important for Member States to analyze the document that Canada wanted to share prior to the next meeting of the Codex Committee.

United States of America acknowledged IICA's efforts to take full advantage of its limited budget, and made a commitment to assist in the search for solutions to improve its financial situation.

The Director General pointed out that the purpose of the meeting was to have frank discussions with the representatives of the Member States, hear their recommendations for improving the Institute's actions and ensure the success of the next meetings of the Executive Committee and the IABA, all of which he considered had been accomplished.

IV. Close of the Meeting

At 12:06 pm on March 27, 2014, the agenda items having been analyzed and discussed at length, the Director General thanked the members of the SACMI for their valuable recommendations and input and adjourned the meeting.

ANNEX 1

**List of participants
(Video conference March 27, 2014)**

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