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REPORT OF WORKSHOP 4

Subject: Research/Extension/Training

This Workshop examined the interrelated topics of research, training and extension. Lead off presentations were made by:

- (i) Professor L.A. Wilson - *Strategy and Instruments for Research Management in the CARICOM Region*
- (ii) Dr. P.I. Gomes - *Agricultural Extension*
- (iii) Dr. A. Jackson - *Food and Nutrition Training*
- (iv) Dr. L. Rankine - *Training in Agricultural Economics.*

The papers by Wilson and Gomes are part of this report.

Research

The Workshop shared the views expressed in the Wilson paper that there is an *impending crisis of confidence in indigenous agricultural research in the CARICOM Region*. This crisis is manifested in a number of ways, the more important of which are:

- (a) the decreasing supply of national and regional funds for research;
- (b) the low utility attached to indigenous research by potential users and policy-makers;
- (c) the tendency towards wholesale importation of technological packages from extra-regional sources; and
- (d) the commencement of production projects without recourse to the existing stock of research results at the commissioning of project-related research.

The Workshop analysed some possible causes of the crisis and suggested a few solutions. The following are the main issues and recommendations arising from those discussions.

The Appropriate Balance between Applied and Innovative Research

It is thought that, though too sharp a distinction should not be drawn between applied and innovative research, greater weight should be given to applied research in the overall budget for agricultural research. Because the gestation period of applied research tends to be shorter and the benefits more immediately apparent to potential users of the research results, the impatience of local and regional funding agencies should be sufficiently tempered to provide the necessary breathing space for the longer term but potentially higher payoff innovative research.

The Workshop thought that it is important that pure research be not treated as a poor relation of applied research and its value to be recognised by the explicit provision of funds for these activities.

Dysfunctional Institutional Structures

It was noted that under existing institutional arrangements, the

research decision and the production or implementation decision are usually separate and independent. This has resulted in a failure on the part of researchers to justify their projects by prior and clear identification of potential benefits as well as ignorance and/or scepticism about the usefulness of the research on the part of potential users.

A further problem identified with regard to existing institutional arrangements is that it results in piecemeal, fragmented research. The inter-relationships of the several components are frequently not perceived by researchers working independently in independent centres and sometimes even within the same institution. Furthermore, the transdisciplinary linkages are not structured into research projects either at problem identification stage or at the result implementation stage.

The Workshop felt that in designing an appropriate institutional framework it is necessary to take account of yet another source of conflict, namely, the uneven lobbying strength of various user groups, e.g. domestic foodcrop producers vs export crop producers, in determining national research priorities and agenda. Unevenness in lobbying strength has resulted in disproportionate budgetary allocations and consequently uneven distribution of the benefits of agricultural research.

Proposal for National and Regional Research Coordination

The solution to the problems discussed in the previous two sections requires the establishment of an institutional structure which ensures a holistic and overall sector oriented approach to project selection and funding, and which by careful evaluation of potential costs and benefits of research projects reconciles the sometimes divergent interests of researchers and users.

It is proposed that each country should establish a National Agricultural Research Committee comprised of senior research representatives, national funding agencies, and representatives from various producer groups. The NARCs would serve as overview and advisory bodies for determining research agenda, mobilising funds, monitoring research progress, assisting in the dissemination of research results, and monitoring and encouraging the adoption of those results where advisable.

It is further proposed that agricultural professionals should constitute a Regional Agricultural Research Committee, the prime functions of which would be to advance the professional standing of agricultural disciplines by evaluating and coordinating research and by establishing standards of professional excellence. The Caribbean Agro-Economic Society or some modification of that body could serve as the RARC.

The Workshop advances these proposals as a basis for further discussion and policy consideration.

Constraints on Research Implementation

The Workshop identified three broad categories of constraints on the farm level implementation of research findings:

- (1) Farm level constraints - These include capital scarcity on the part of the farm operator, uneconomic farm sizes, and high cost of improved inputs relative to expected returns.

- (2) National economic policy constraints - These include national factor and commodity price policies which directly affect farm level profitability, and the overall efficiency of national economic management.
- (3) National research implementation systems constraints - The research implementation process frequently involves an intermediate step between the generation of research results and its adoption by final users. That step is the communication of the results to the national funding agency or government and their dissemination of the results to farmers. The efficiency with which the national research implementation system functions is thus a critical constraint on farm level adoption.

The Workshop felt that farm level implementation could be improved by:

- (i) the monitoring and follow-up activities of the NARCs;
- (ii) the revitalization and restructuring of demonstration and experimental husbandry farms;
- (iii) the independent and widespread dissemination activities of NARCs; and
- (iv) greater attention to farm level constraints and national economic policy constraints.

Training

The Workshop heard brief outlines of the training programmes conducted by the University of the West Indies in the fields of nutrition and food planning, agricultural economics, and agricultural extension. The main point to emerge was the responsiveness of the UWI to the changing skill requirements of professionals in the agricultural sector. This responsiveness is evidenced by the several new developments described.

Food and Nutrition Planning: UWI, in conjunction with the United Nations University has mounted a programme of training in food and nutrition. The programme seeks to harmonize the different perspectives of agricultural economists and nutritionists on the problem area of food planning.

Agricultural Economics: The main innovation is the introduction of courses in agri-business and management in conjunction with the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Agricultural Extension: As part of Phase 2 of the Caribbean Agricultural Extension Project, UWI is introducing a one-year diploma in Extension. The target group is senior and middle level management in agricultural extension services. The basic objective is to upgrade and update the technical knowledge of this type of agricultural professional.

The Workshop noted with concern the absence of any properly structured arrangements for the training of agricultural researchers within the Ministries of Agriculture and even more seriously with the University of the West Indies.

Extension

The presentation by Gomes identified the type of research output as being one of the major obstacles to beneficial extension work. The Workshop's recommendations on research are therefore pertinent to this topic.

The Workshop also agreed with the substance of Dr. Gomes' other main point on agricultural extension namely, the importance of national extension planning.

It is proposed that there should be some institutional linkages between the Caribbean Agricultural Extension Project on the one hand and CARDI, CARDATS and UWI Faculty of Agriculture on the other hand in the form of a technical joint action committee. The main functions of such a committee would include:

- (i) review and coordination of activities in the field of agricultural extension;
- (ii) dissemination of information about major technological developments and developments;
- (iii) identification of technical problems for the attention of researchers, and
- (iv) the development of collaborative projects.