**ICARDA’s Draft Response to the Recommendations of the**

**Center Commissioned External Review (CCER)**

**of ICARDA’s Outreach Programs and Partnerships**

**10 June – 10 July 2013**

ICARDA’s research portfolio and its geographic coverage have evolved over time. Global and regional developments; evolving areas of emphasis of the CGIAR System; changing priorities, needs, and opportunities and have driven the Center’s priorities. ICARDA has always placed high priority on effective partnerships with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS). These partnerships will continue to be central to ensuring ICARDA’s research relevance and impact and its decentralization strategy. In addition to national agricultural research and extension programs, other key partners include national agricultural and other government ministries; universities and other research institutes; farmer associations, community-based organizations, civil societies and NGOs; the private sector; and donors.

The success of ICARDA is dependent upon effective partnerships. It is only through partnerships that ICARDA and the CGIAR System will be able to carry out an articulated global research agenda, leverage a variety of resources toward the achievement of strategic goals, and accomplish sustainable development. This very much in line with the CGIAR reforms.

The main objective of this CCER is, therefore: to address the effectiveness of ICARDA’s current partnerships and the necessity for new partnerships in order to achieve the goals set forth in ICARDA’s Strategic Plan, within the context of its operational decentralization and CGIAR reforms.

New developments call for a broad re-examination of ICARDA’s outreach programs and building new partnerships. These developments include: the current context of ICARDA’s relocation and decentralization; broadening of ICARDA’s coverage to non-tropical dry areas globally; new challenges facing agriculture in dry areas, particularly climate change; implications of the CGIAR reforms and the implementation of the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) including the Dryland Systems CRP that ICARDA leads; the emergence of significant new donors and their evolving priorities; the growing importance of public/private cooperation; the need to choose effective research-for-development partners; the focus on impact and evaluation; the increased focus on gender and the key role of women in food security and poverty alleviation; and new information technologies that can enhance partnership building and information sharing.

Given these developments, there is a need to develop strategies that will enhance and extend existing partnerships including development partnerships along key impact pathways. The last Center Commissioned External Review (CCER) of outreach and partnership activities was conducted in 2004, about nine years ago. ICARDA is, therefore, keen to re-assess its partnership and outreach programs in line with the ICARDA Strategic Plan, 2007-2016 and ICARDA Decentralization Strategy, and the requirements of the CGIAR reforms for expanding partnerships, enhancing program effectiveness, and maximizing impact and relevance to achieve the CGIAR System Level Outcomes (SLOs).

The review covered strategic, operational, and coordination and integration issues related to ICARDA’s Outreach Programs and Partnerships.

The CCER Panel, approved by ICARDA Board of Trustees, is comprised of Mr. Abdel Majid Slama (Chair), Dr. Lamia El-Fattal, and Dr. Robert Edis. The review was conducted during 10 June to 10 July 2013, when the Panel visited the Center’s Regional and Country Programs between 16-28 June 2013 and made on-site visits to the national research programs as follows:

* West Asia Regional Program in Amman, Jordan
* Central Asia and Caucasus Regional Program in Tashkent, Uzbekistan
* Nile Valley and Sub-Saharan Regional Program in Cairo, Egypt
* South Asia and China regional Program in New Delhi, India
* North Africa Regional Program in Rabat, Morocco
* Country Program for Turkey in Ankara
* Country Program for Ethiopia in Addis Ababa
* Country Program for Pakistan in Islamabad

The Panel submitted their first draft report on 8 July 2013, and presented the findings of their review at a meeting on the 9 July 2013, which was attended by ICARDA’s Management Committee and BOT Focal Points, Drs. Susan Schram and Masum Burak (through Skype). The first draft report was revised by the CCER Panel based on the comments made at the meeting and then submitted to ICARDA on 20 July for factual corrections. ICARDA sent its consolidated “factual errors” comments on 28 September, 2013. The Panel submitted their final report on 30 October, with a total of 32 key recommendations. Other suggestions and ideas were made by the Panel, but not as formal recommendations. The Center will consider these, but they are not formally addressed in this response. The Center’s management response to these recommendations, which is recommended for approval by ICARDA’s Board of Trustees is provided below.

**ICARDA’s Response to the Recommendations**

**Preamble**

ICARDA’s Board and management would like to express their appreciation to the Panel for a highly professional and through review of the Center’s Outreach Programs and partnerships. ICARDA’s management has considered the Panel’s recommendations very seriously in drafting this response.

ICARDA generally accepts most of the recommendations of the Panel, and where we have some reservations, the rationale for these reservations is indicated. Implementation of some recommendations will require additional resources. It must be recognized, therefore, that these recommendations are accepted on the principle that their implementation will depend on resource availability. In this regard, the Center will set priorities based on its needs, priorities and available resources.

**Response to Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** While recognizing that ICARDA risks diluting the quality of research if significant time of scientists is spent backstopping projects that contain little innovation, the CCER Panel recommends: (i) that outsourcing or contracting of backstopping projects be pursued; (ii) ICARDA to “package” research outputs for development readiness to minimize the need for backstopping; and (iii) that ICARDA maintain a regional vigilance and visibility for opportunities for development-ready outputs to be exploited and explicitly pursued in the Communication Plan.

**Response:**  **Partially accepted**. Such projects that “contain little innovation” should be minimized to start with. Even Research in Development projects can have a significant research component that studies innovative approaches on how to best scale-out and up. Only few projects tend to focus much more on the “development” side, such as a number of projects in Afghanistan, but in principle only a small percentage of projects are acceptable under the specific country circumstances.

**Recommendation 2:** The CCER Panel recommends to ICARDA putting its full weight behind its *Strategic Communication and Knowledge Sharing Plan (2012-2016)* to link the research platforms into a sophisticated communication web through a state-of-the-art knowledge management system using ILRI’s experience as “best practice,” with a strong focus on opening research results as International Public Goods to be accessed by everyone. This implies the following actions:

**Response 2:** **Accepted.** ICARDA’s current information management activities are inspired by ILRI’s approach.

**The ILRI Approach is as follows:**

ILRI (and many other CG centers) have put in place processes and rules for the capture and organizing of all ILRI institutional information and placing it in databases that feed the website and the center’s intranet. This facilitates direct sharing and easy access to the entire center’s information by research staff and external users. The final goal is to progressively reduce, and eliminate the need for center staff to request the library or admin staff to locate information - favoring rapid keyword search. To achieve this, an experienced team of “electronic documentalists” or “information managers” is needed.

The library team has been re-skilled into the information management team to deliver this strategy by building a team of “e-documentalists” that have the skills required to collect, organize and manage information in the corporate databases, create web pages and related delivery mechanisms. They facilitate collection of all information created by the center, organize it in databases, and add keywords (metadata) to make it searchable internally on and on the web. They also attend key meetings and collect presentations, videos, documents and place them in the databases and on-line rapidly, also using blogs and wiki spaces to facilitate the sharing of information between. The IT department provides the infrastructure. The added value of information management is done by the ‘new library’ team.

The ILRI Information management team is composed of 23 people, led by 2 IRS staff, supported by the information management team and a web team. The team calls on interns to provide support for collecting and tagging information. CIMMYT has a similar structure and skilling arrangement.

NOTE: It is important to note that this approach to information management concerns the management of “information objects” – documents (reports or all kinds), powerpoints, publications in pdf, photos, videos, Excel sheets, maps, etc. This is governed by the information management team (under communications) and guided by the open access policy, strategy and processes of the center.

A separate (but complementary) policy, strategy and processes governs data management, which covers research data and databases in all its forms, that is collected, cleaned/validated and organized under the governance of the research group

In preparing the ICARDA Communication Strategy, detailed interactions were held between the Head of CODIS and the Head of Information Management at ILRI.

ICARDA has a state-of-the-art document repository, created in 2011, as part of the new website project; it feeds the ICARDA website, automatically, pushing document links to specific thematic pages, by key word (metadata). As the ICARDA information management plan develops, the repository will be expanded to be more comprehensive - of the kind that ILRI and other centers have in place today.

The key element of such a strategy is not only the document repository that is highlighted by the Panel, but the framework and skills that support it. These include the creation of a highly-skilled web documentalist team to manage the repository and all ICARDA’s information, and a robust policy and processes for the systematic capture of all research information and data generated. In addition to being a CCER recommendation, this approach is required for the CRP on Dryland Systems and required by the CGIAR Open Access Policy. ICARDA has already hired IRS-level staff on Web-Management and Knowledge Sharing, and is currently recruiting support staff.

**Action 1**. Multiple regional and thematic learning be captured, synthesized and disseminated consistent with the 2012-2016 Strategic Communication Plan.

**Response: Accepted.** This area needs further development and is being pursued as part of the ICARDA strategic communication plan.

*Current activities*: Research to Action reports synthesize evidence; working papers and technical reports that capture the work in progress in ICARDA research.

Capturing and organizing information from ICARDA research project cycles: In 2012-2013 CODIS completed a pilot project with the Iraq Salinity project; a large amount of project information was written up and organized in a special information platform.

*Targeted web information* - In the past 10 months, the communications team has created targeted, thematic web information that synthesizes ICARDA’s expertise on: Conservation Agriculture, FIGS, Olive Irrigation, Rangeland Management, Information management platforms with six WANA countries; Salinity in Iraq; Barley/Livestock systems; Sustainable Agriculture in Central Asia; specific websites to promote weekly information on CRP Dryland Systems (five regional sub-pages); the ICARDA International Water Policy meeting and HSAD-Iraq.

**Action 2**. Given regional specificities, complexity and dynamism of the NGO sector, a more nuanced and proactive engagement with the NGO community needs to be developed.

**Response: Accepted.** The Center will be building on ICARDA’s experience in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and West Asia.

**Action 3**. Establishment of continuing network of partners - called “Friends of ICARDA” as an advocacy mechanism to be initially constructed through the current outreach offices in collaboration with CODIS, to expand impact.

**Response: Accepted in principle.** The Center management is already establishing a list of high profile figures to form the “*Friends of ICARDA*” to support the Center at this difficult time in its history because of the unfortunate developments in its host country Syria. We accept the recommendation, although we will have to reconsider a new name for the network proposed by the Panel, such as “*ICARDA’s Partners*”. By December 2014, each Outreach Office will identify a diverse list of “ICARDA Partner Supporters” in each region/country, and CODIS to provide them continuously with updated information on ICARDA’s development and research outputs. This group can serve as a think-tank for enhancing ICARDA’s partnerships along the impact pathway. Solid foundations for growing such an activity are in place today. The ICARDA global contacts list comprises some 5000 contacts. The communication team engages on a daily/weekly basis with more than 2000 followers on Twitter <https://twitter.com/ICARDA_CGIAR> and 1000 on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/icarda>. ICARDA Linked-In has more than 200 followers. The website receives an average of 9000 visitors per month. These followers include former staff, donor agencies (FAO, IFAD, USAID, DFID, GIZ…) who forward ICARDA’s information to their networks, creating a potential readership for ICARDA’s weekly information of many thousands of readers worldwide.

**Recommendation 3:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA increase its investment in capacity development through the creation of training capabilities at the platform/regional levels. This implies:

**Response:** **Accepted in principle.** Planning and executing capacity development in Outreach is a joint responsibility by Research Programs and Outreach. Some fine-tuning may be needed, but the commitment on all sides to further improve on this is already there.

(i) That the functions of the Outreach Office be reviewed to ensure that capacity development is a central accountable responsibility

**Response: Partially accepted.** Capacity development has been and will continue to be a central accountable responsibility for Outreach Programs. In fact, many of ICARDA’s capacity development activities are effectively coordinated and facilitated by outreach in close coordination with concerned Research Programs and CDU.

(ii) The establishment of capacity development focal points at regional/platform levels with appropriate training and duty recognition.

**Response: Accepted in principle.** ICARDA has already designated platforms and thematic sites for specific training courses (e.g. AGERI-Egypt for biotechnology, Jordan for conservation agriculture). As the platforms/thematic sites are well established and become fully operational, a capacity development focal point can be named by Programs at the platform level.

(iii) The training of outreach personnel on the preparation of training modules, resources and delivery.

**Response: Not accepted.** As this is the core responsibility of CDU.

(iv) The Head of the Capacity Development Unit undertake a scoping study of resources, facilities and partnerships that could be used by Regional/Country Offices to deliver training activities and serve participants.

**Response: Partially accepted.** Platforms/thematic sites will be in charge of capacity development activities. CDU Head will visit the platforms/thematic sites and ensure the availability of needed facilities.

(v) Harmonize and manualize the logistics associated with the conduct of capacity development activities.

**Response: Accepted.** Yes, this is the core responsibility of CDU which is requested to harmonize logistics and capacity development activities (June 2014).

**Recommendation 4:** ICARDA outreach offices, in general, have weak capacity to undertake socio-economic studies. The Panel recommends enhancing the capacity of outreach programs to conduct more baseline, adoption and impact studies, analyses of financial, social and economic returns of technological packages and associated policies for technology uptake by farmers. This implies that socio-economists be made more available at platform and regional levels.

**Response: Accepted.** Socio-economic and policy research is an integral part of ICARDA’s research portfolio including its collaborative research activities in outreach programs. This is the function of SEPRP which has been providing technical support to all other research programs and projects implemented in the outreach. ICARDA has hired several socio-economists to support the implementation of large projects (e.g., SARD-SC, HSAD, and Watershed Management Projects). We support fully strengthening the capacity of socio-economic studies in outreach programs, which can be done either by SEPR Program or through partnership with national programs.

This increased involvement by SEPR staff in outreach programs is certainly possible and important, but needs to be fully funded from such projects in Outreach. In addition such funding can contribute to SEPRP’s growth.

**Recommendation 5:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA conduct stakeholder analyses, including adopting a political economy approach for more nuanced understanding of power relations in the design of every project and program to maximize uptake of research outputs. Such an approach will help define the key partners to be involved with in a change process from the very beginning of project/program cycle to help increase the chances for successful collaboration, impact and out-scaling. This is especially true in the outreach programs in the context of decentralization where ICARDA is expected to operate further down the research to development continuum.

**Response: Partially Accepted.** This should be based on the size and objective of projects and based on impact pathways for collaborative research in outreach programs without involvement in political sensitive aspects.

Involvement of “power relations” is a very relevant suggestion, but needs to be considered with the utmost sensitivity, fully respecting any country’ sovereignty in deciding to what extent this is appropriate to local stakeholders and tradition. This is very much needed during the implementation of CRPs and the Center’s Decentralization Strategy and Investment Plan (Dec. 2014).

**Recommendation 6:** As the SEPR is in the process of employing another gender expert, the CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA use modalities to mainstream gender in all its R4D activities. The purpose of *mainstreaming* gender concerns is to improve on the efficiency and effectiveness of research for development projects (especially along the value chain) as well as to support gender equality in a region where women’s roles in agricultural production (especially in livestock) appears to be on the rise.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA is developing within the framework of CRP Dryland Systems a strategy for gender mainstreaming along the value-chain (March 2015). This also includes gender aspects within the research programs. ICARDA will be hiring a senior sociologist who will focus on gender research.

**Recommendation 7:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA clarifies its collaborative work with the host countries where decentralized research platforms and specific thematic sites are located to ensure that its national and global research priorities are safeguarded and for ICARDA to conserve its identity by providing its scientists with access to independent research facilities.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA realizes the need for conserving its identity and ensuring that it fulfills its global and regional mandates. This has been already been discussed and agreed upon with those countries hosting Platforms and thematic research locations and it will be clearly stated in the new collaborative agreements with those countries.. This needs to be re-assessed in early 2015 to monitor the situation.

**Recommendation 8:** The Panel recommends to ICARDA that appropriate devolution of much decision-making and implementation procedures from Headquarters to regional offices and platforms to improve on the efficiency of delivery and reduce stressful workload on Headquarters. This implies effective modalities for delegation of authority to the Regional Coordinators in signing contracts and committing project expenditures within the boundaries of approved work programs and budgets to ensure smooth and timely project implementation with the understanding that a yearly internal audit is conducted as part of risk management.

**Response: Accepted in principle.** Legally, all binding agreements with ICARDA should be signed by the Director General or delegated persons upon his authorization in writing. ICARDA develops an effective modality for delegation of authority (June 2014).

ICARDA has a Board approved delegation policy, so this is already being addressed but needs to be assessed to the extent needed.

**Recommendation 9:** While the responsibility of variety release and seed certification lies with NARS, the CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA enhances its assistance through focused training and mentoring to the countries where the seed system has collapsed and needs to be rebuilt on a solid base for seed health and streamlined variety release processes.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA agrees that this is important; ICARDA has been and will continue working closely with concerned NARS to re-establish an effective seed system, examples include: Afghanistan, Iraq (HSAD), Ethiopia, Egypt, and Pakistan among other countries. This may require a scoping study by the Seed Systems Section.

**Recommendation 10:** Given that restricted funding of outreach projects may be directly reduced as funding is increasingly channeled through CRPs, the CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA develop a management plan that clarifies the role of the Regional Programs in the CRPs, the interaction between ICARDA Regional Programs and those of partner Centers in CRPs and the resulting costing arrangements.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA’s Regional Programs are well placed in ICARDA’s R-4-D continuum and thus their **sustainability** is crucial for achieving the desirable impacts. ICARDA Management has developed a financial system to cost the Regional Programs’ operations to different CRPs (when relevant and applicable). In addition, bi-lateral funding will continue to be an important tool for ICARDA’s resource mobilization for outreach programs not directly targeted by CRPs. The continuity of these projects depends on full cost recovery from those projects implemented in those regions.

**Recommendation 11:** Expand ICARDA’s work in the relevant CRPs to the drylands of West Africa from NARP to support research particularly on (i) drought management through improved on-farm water management including water harvesting, supplemental and raised bed irrigation; and (ii) improving the resilience of rangelands and small ruminants.

**Response: Accepted.** Indeed some of these options are already available. But this will depend on funding, which can be actively sought, mostly under CRP Dryland Systems. Given the relevant context (French speaking) of North Africa and West Africa, ICARDA’s agrees on the important role of its North Africa Regional Program (NARP) to serve ICARDA’s mandates in West Africa within the framework of CRP Dryland Systems, SARD-SC and other opportunities (continuous). Two positions have been added by DSIPS on rangelands and agronomy.

**Recommendation 12:** It is recommended that the research team at the North Africa platform based in Morocco be strengthened in the areas of agronomy and socio-economics.

**Response: Accepted.** Staffing of Platforms, including that of North Africa in Morocco, to ensure integration will be assessed (Dec. 2014). Some thematic gaps (if they exist) may be filled by NARS partners without necessarily posting new IRS staff in different platforms. One Agronomist has been already added by DSIPS Program.

**Recommendation 13:** In the process of transforming the Ethiopia office from a country program to a global platform and regional program to serve SSA, it is recommended that ICARDA hold stakeholder consultations meeting with SSA countries to develop updated regional research priorities and collaboration modalities.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA is planning to establish a regional program for East and Southern Africa (to be operated from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) in consultation with ASARECA, FARA, Center for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA) and CAADP. An informal consultation was started with FARA and CAADP and agreed on the stakeholders consultations (June 2014).

**Recommendation 14:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA reinforce the capacity of the Turkey country office in Ankara with a full time research assistant in breeding to allow the Country Coordinator to devote more time to breeding, facilitation and coordination.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA has recruited a winter wheat breeder (Post-doctoral level). He is currently being trained by the senior spring bread wheat breeder in Rabat and will take up his responsibility in Ankara during 2014. Also, the winter barley breeder has been transferred to Ankara.

**Recommendation 15:** To enhance the effectiveness of CAC counterpart scientists, the CCER Panel recommends that the CGIAR Regional Collaborative Research Program of which ICARDA is a member, include a budget item in the PFU budget for partner communications and training in the English language. This could be financed by a small increase of membership contributions, NARS contributions and partial cost recovery from trainees.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA and PFU have provided earlier several English training courses. This recommendation is in line with the last CGIAR-CAC Program Steering Committee Meeting report. The Steering Committee encouraged that a training course on science writing skills in English be organized by the Program. A proposal on partner communications training in the English language will be prepared by the PFU Head for discussion at the next SCM in 2014. (December 2014).

**Recommendation 16:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA accelerate the full implementation of the new harmonization policy for local support staff employment for the CGIAR PFU in Tashkentby issuing ICARDA contracts for existing employees with salary payment in USD through their local bank account, provided that these are transferred from abroad in line with the host country legislation.

**Response: Accepted.** Details of implementation have been worked out with Finance and HR, but difficulties were encountered as a result of the current sanctions imposed on Syria (since 2011). We need to pursue the proposed modality of staff salary payments through individual local bank accounts as soon as the situation permits.

**Recommendation 17:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA take the lead in reactivating the Highland Regional Network, locating it at the CGIAR PFU in Tashkent or another suitable country with a small catalytic financial contribution to periodically organize regional knowledge sharing events and support to resource mobilization efforts for a long-term mountainous highland ecosystem research project/program.

**Response: Partially accepted.** ICARDA’s Highland Regional Network is currently located in its country office in Tehran-Iran and funded by Iran. To activate this network, ICARDA organized an expert consultation workshop in February 2010 and agreed with the Agricultural Research and Extension Organization (AREO) Iran on hiring a “Regional Officer” to activate the Highland Network. This has been delayed by the economic sanctions on Iran. However, the Center needs to activate the Network by external financial resources through a resource mobilization plan (2014 and 2015).

**Recommendation 18:** ICARDA to consider expanding its CAC Regional Outreach Program to Mongolia and taking the lead in collaboration with the CGIAR PFU members in Tashkent to include Mongolia in ongoing and future regional projects on the improvement of crop and small ruminant production systems and capacity development.

**Response: Not accepted.** Under CRPs (particularly CRP Dryland Systems) ICARDA needs to focus its research to realize sizeable impact in line with its involvement in the current mandate and strategy.

**Recommendation 19:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA explore the potential to further mobilize resources through partnering with Indian State programs whilst ensuring the regional applicability of developed International Public Goods.

**Response: Accepted.** The South Asiaprogram has been very active in expanding its operations in India and securing funding from the Indian Government. The Center is also exploring collaboration and resource mobilization with different states in India such as Bihar, which already expressed interest in collaborating with ICARDA in areas of mutual interest. Furthermore, activities/projects will be developed in expanding operations to different countries in order to strengthen needed regional focus and applicability on South Asia and China.

**Recommendation 20:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA undertakes a high level mission to Pakistan to forge strategic partnerships. Utilizing NARs strengths and commitments, the delegation is likely to mobilize funds to do regionally significant R4D, focusing on integrated water and land management for implementation, potentially in collaboration with CACRP.

**Response: Accepted.** A delegation headed by the Director General and comprised of ADG-ICC, the Pakistan Country Manager and the Regional Coordinator for South Asia and China visited Pakistan on 22-24 October, 2013. Discussions with the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council and H.E. the Minister of Agriculture agreed on a large program to be implemented in Baluchistan. Discussions also covered a new project for soil fertility to be supported by USDA in addition to the projects on Wheat and Cotton-based production systems.

**Recommendation 21:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA identifies mechanisms for re-engaging with Pakistan around legume breeding programs from within or without the CRP Grain Legumes breeding programs led by ICRISAT.

**Response: Accepted.** Legumes in Pakistan do not seem to have been sufficiently addressed by the ICRISAT-led CRP Grain Legumes. Building on ICARDA’s successful collaborative program with Pakistan on food legumes, this area needs to be strengthened. This subject was already discussed by ICARDA’s delegation during their recent visit to Pakistan in October 2013. It was agreed that ICARDA’s Focal Point in CRP Grain Legumes will visit Pakistan for this purpose. This would be further explored during the development of the 2nd round of CRPs.

**Recommendation 22:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA undergo a strategic review of the Afghanistan Country Program to adjust to the new political climate with particular attention to staff requirements in loco, their welfare and options for proxy management for effective delivery.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA will undertake this review by December 2014.

**Recommendation 23:** While maintaining its good practice in engaging closely with NARS/ARIs, the CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA recognize that some NARS are more advanced than others. Strong NARS should be involved in support of the lesser advanced ones using both formal and informal south-south collaborative mechanisms facilitated by ICARDA, as well as to document and share best practices and learning through ICARDA’s sophisticated website for knowledge management referred to in ***Recommendation 2***. Above.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA clearly is very much aware that some NARS are more advanced than others. Beside its technical contribution, ICARDA has been playing a catalytic role and will continue to facilitate South-South collaboration in sharing of expertise, technologies and knowledge among NARS (continuous). This was started in 1979 in the Nile Valley Regional Program in Faba Bean supported by IFAD and the approach has been transferred to all ICARDA’s Regional Programs.

**Recommendation 24:** Based on past successful joint appointments between ICARDA and NARS, joint appointments is considered a powerful collaborative modality currently underutilized at the outreach level and should be used more often to enhance partnership, bring in needed expertise and save on costs such as the case with Morocco for biotechnology work.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA has recently explored the secondment of NARS scientists. Examples include Field Coordinators in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan under the project on Support to Agricultural Research Development for Strategic Crops (SARD-SC) supported by the African Development Bank. . ICARDA’s Decentralization Strategy necessitates such arrangements with partnerships in the form of secondment of NARS scientists to fully work under ICARDA supervision.

**Recommendation 25:** Whilst it is appropriate that ICARDA recognize research excellence through publication awards, the importance of outreach and partnership activities should also be recognized. The CCER Panel therefore recommends that ICARDA develop a “most successful partnership” award that celebrates excellence in outreach through effective partnerships.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA will add a new category on “successful partnerships” to its Annual Staff Awards. It is worth noting that ICARDA was awarded the CGIAR King Baudouin Award in 2009 for its partnership program in CAC region.

**Recommendation 26:** On the basisofon-going promising impact-oriented private sector partnerships, the CCER Panel recommends that (i) on-going and future outreach programs play a more active role in the promotion of private sector investment in support services for technology transfer and post-harvest activities; (ii) assess and document in the form of best practices some of the on-going promising experiences in the outreach programs starting with Turkey’s on-going experience in the seed sector to identify enabling conditions for up-scaling and (iii) more engagement with big and small international/national private sector companies such as those engaged in food processing and agribusinesses in general as well as individual and corporate philanthropies.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA will commission (outsource) an external expert to document its private-sector partnerships experience and recommend a plan for its strengthening. This is particularly needed for CRPs and large projects (by Dec. 2014). Issues related to the management of intellectual property will also need to be very carefully considered in public-private partnerships.

**Recommendation 27:** The CCER Panel endorses the restructuring of ICARDA’s regional outreach offices to align with the decentralized research platforms. This consists of

1. Evolving the Morocco country office into a regional office to align with the platform in Morocco. Tunisia remains a country office to service sub-regional outreach projects with reporting to the new Morocco regional office;

**Response: Accepted.** Rabat Office will become the Regional Office for North Africa starting January 2014. Tunis Office will continue to facilitate the implementation of the Libyan Project and the SARD-SC Project supported by the African Development Bank that currently has its headquarters in Tunis.

1. Evolving the Ethiopia country office into a regional office to align with the platform in Ethiopia. Egypt remains an enhanced country office reporting to Headquarters to service the specific thematic focus site on high input irrigated systems as well the sub-regional outreach activities in the Nile Valley in Egypt and Sudan;

**Response: Accepted.** The Regional Program will be established in 2014 for East and Southern Africa to be operational from its office in ILRI Campus in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The regional program for Nile Valley and Yemen will be maintained and strengthened to include Egypt, Sudan and Yemen.

1. The regional office in India matches the location of the platform in India;

**Response: Accepted**

1. The regional office in Uzbekistan matches the location of the specific thematic focus site on highlands systems.

**Response: Accepted.** The CGIAR PFU in Tashkent seems to be a natural location for facilitating the Highland Regional Network. However, adequate and additional resources would need to be mobilized for this new role.

**Recommendation 28:** The CCER Panel recommends that respective focus of research work at platforms and at outreach locations is guided by the complementarity and positioning along the R4D continuum and impact pathway. Platform research focuses primarily on upstream research to produce a range of alternative and broad outputs that need to be tested and evaluated with NARS and farmers through outreach programs that focus on downstream research to address specific agro-ecologies and socio economic conditions for the development of validated location specific outputs and technology transfer practices.

**Response: Accepted.** This has been followed before by ICARDA headquarters research and adaptive research and downstream research, verification of technologies has been done with partners in Regional Programs. With the implementation of ICARDA’s Decentralization Strategy, basic and upstream research will be conducted in the Platforms and Thematic Research Locations, while downstream research and technology transfer will be through Regional Programs. This approach will be further mainstreamed through CRPs and the development of new restricted projects.

**Recommendation 29:** The CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA takes the lead in appropriately addressing the systems research approach by ensuring that crop agronomy and husbandry work is adequately and timely addressed as an integrated part of breeding activities in all outreach programs and IWWIP. The systems research work would need also to be complemented by more ICARDA research on commodity value chain to maximize impact.

**Response: Accepted.** ICARDA has been implementing the systems approach in its R-4-D agenda. Within the framework of the CRP on Dryland Systems, ICARDA is further strengthening and promoting the integrated systems approach; including integrating crop agronomy and husbandry research with breeding activities in all outreach programs and IWWIP. ICARDA may seek a joint appointment with Turkey on agronomy. ICARDA will explore this possibility with Turkey and discuss it at IWWIP Steering Committee Meeting (June 2014)

The recent IWWIP review was in fact not as positive in terms of identifying significant impact, as this Panel is. It is correct that there is a potentially greater role for ICARDA agronomy input through DSIPS, which will need to be budgeted for.

**Recommendation 30:** To improve on weak coordination among research programs and ensure system research integration, the CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA address this gap through the formation, at an early stage for each research project, a well-staffed and result-based multidisciplinary implementation team with a binding financing plan regardless of source of funding across collaborating research and outreach programs within ICARDA.

**Response: Accepted.** Enhancing integration is well placed in ICARDA’s Strategic Plan, 2007-2016 and CRP Dryland Systems. ICARDA has adopted project-based staffing to provide needed technical support to projects implementation on the ground. Examples include those followed in SARD-SC and HSAD projects as well as projects implemented in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and other partner countries. ICARDA will continue hiring project-based staff and post them in the outreach.

**Recommendation 31:** The CCER Panel endorses the Decentralization principle in that ICARDA will function as one management entity at the Regional/Country level to service both outreach and platform research work and capacity development. The full responsibility in terms of science quality, deliverables and reporting of research activities both at platform and outreach levels is under the Directors of the four Research Programs. The Regional Programs/Coordinators are in charge of facilitating the research for development collaboration with partners to enhance impact and ensure that the complementary down-stream research conducted by collaborating NARS is well coordinated.

**Response: Accepted.** This recommendation endorses and confirms ICARDA’s Decentralization Strategy.

**Recommendation 32:** Given the increasingdemand onadministrative support services at the regional offices as a result of the establishment of large decentralized platforms, the CCER Panel recommends that ICARDA reviews the staffing requirements of support staff at regional offices where research platforms are established.

**Response: Accepted.** Although ICARDA has expanded the administrative and financial support staff in platform/thematic locations, this needs further revision by the end of 2014 as it is already included and budgeted for under the investment plan for implementing ICARDA’s Decentralization Strategy.

3 November 2013