



Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI)

**Report of the First Extraordinary Meeting
of the 2020 SACMI**

San Jose, Costa Rica
1 October 2020

Introduction

An Extraordinary Meeting of the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) was convened on 1 October 2020 at 8:30 a.m. (Costa Rica time), via videoconference, pursuant to Resolution No. 660 of the Executive Committee, “Support for IICA’s Institutional Transformation Process”.

The Technical Secretary briefly explained the origins, objectives and duties of the SACMI. He stressed the importance of the Commission’s role in facilitating regular interaction between the Director General and the Member States about initiatives involving management, budgetary and strategic technical cooperation issues, with the aim of establishing a consensus on these matters prior to meetings of the Executive Committee and the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA).

He then proceeded to read out Resolution No. 660, emphasizing two operative paragraphs, namely: 1) To support the Director General’s initiative to advance the institutional transformation process, which should involve efforts consistent with the Institute’s objectives, including: a) the definition of a new business model, b) the development of a new financial architecture and c) the mobilization and collection of external resources from various funding sources; and 2) To instruct the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI) to serve as an extended permanent working group aimed at supporting, analyzing and developing a proposal for IICA’s comprehensive transformation.

He mentioned that SACMI is comprised of nine Member States: six permanent members—Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, the United States and Venezuela—and three Member States selected for one-year periods, with Bolivia, Nicaragua and Saint Lucia having been appointed for the year 2020.

He also advised the meeting that the following IICA Member States were also in attendance on that occasion: Antigua and Barbuda, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Uruguay. Annex 1 includes the list of participants.

Remarks by the Director General

The Director General of the Institute welcomed the 26 representatives of the Member States that had joined the extraordinary meeting of the SACMI and thanked them for their interest and commitment.

He indicated that since he had assumed office, he had been mindful of the need to implement a series of reforms that would lay the foundation for IICA 4.0. He mentioned that the emergence of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had compelled the Institute to deepen its transformation process and to assist in repositioning agriculture as a strategic sector for the post-pandemic recovery period.

He explained that the basis for the foundation of the new business model was in line with the priorities stipulated in the 2018-2022 Medium-term Plan (MTP), striving for greater institutional alignment, under the theme of “doing more with less and doing it differently”.

He mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated that technical cooperation models had lost their relevance and that it had now become necessary to introduce new approaches involving the generation of supranational public goods, development of public-private partnerships, promotion of inter-cooperation, while emphasizing cooperation among peers. In his opinion, agriculture would not be the same after the pandemic and certain trends would take place in the sector, such as the intensive use of digital technologies and the internalization of social and environmental dimensions. He added that countries should not lose sight of the fact that there are enormous gaps in productivity that need to be urgently rectified.

The Director General then described the three pillars or strategic lines of action of IICA’s business model: a) targeted actions, for the purpose of agreeing on more robust and relevant technical cooperation agendas in service to the countries; b) productivity of activities, to strengthen human resources and networking, as well as to define new products to enable countries to overcome obstacles that are hindering the agricultural and rural development of the hemisphere; and c) relevance and financial sustainability, to seek and evaluate new options to generate resources, in keeping with the conditions of the new multilateral cooperation environment.

He ended his opening remarks by recalling that this meeting was being held at a historic moment for the Institute— just a few days before its 78th anniversary. The Institute was founded in 1942 in the throes of a war and a global crisis. Thus, this was a historic opportunity to now consolidate the hemisphere’s position as the guarantor of the food and nutritional security and environmental sustainability of the planet. He closed with a quote from Charles de Gaulle: “Nothing lasts unless it is incessantly renewed”.

Presentation on the status of the new IICA business model

A video presentation then followed, entitled “Business Model - Towards a More Modern and Relevant IICA”. It began by stating that since 1942 IICA had served as an instrument in support of world peace, contributing to the development of the agriculture and rural sector of the Americas. The video explained that during its existence, IICA had undergone constant changes, adapting to the demands of the environment and the times. Thus, as an institution in service to 34 countries of the Americas, IICA maintains action agendas throughout the hemisphere, through five technical cooperation programs and two cross-cutting areas of focus; a network of approximately 600 specialists and associated experts; and more than 220 technical cooperation projects and initiatives, while actively participating in more than 13 regional cooperation and integration mechanisms.

The presentation stressed that the current administration had implemented a series of reforms that had been approved and validated within the framework of the 2018-2022 MTP, with a view to redefining the traditional cooperation model and working towards a knowledge management platform aimed at enhancing the Institute’s visibility and its relationships and partnerships with governments, the private sector and civil society organizations.

These reforms, it said, had been focused on: a) improving communication, consultancy and linkage strategies with different actors from agricultural institutions in the hemisphere; b) renewing partnerships, based on collaborative work plans and fostering greater cooperation with international organizations; c) generating joint cooperation agendas in agricultural integration forums; and d) establishing effective ways to collaborate with new partners and communities in the agriculture and rural sectors, placing particular priority on and fostering the participation of women and youth.

The video went on to explain that efficient and effective institutional management had been geared toward: a) rationalization and optimization of resources that had enabled the reallocation of more than USD 5 million for technical cooperation; b) increasing decentralization and reducing bureaucracy; c) strengthening leadership and the performance of human capital; d) ensuring financial and administrative management, as well as transparency in accountability processes; e) automating administrative processes and f) restructuring more than 50% of the Delegations in the 34 Member States. It emphasized the need to deepen the reform and transformation process, given the economic and financial situation of IICA and the pandemic that the world is now facing.

It stressed that this proposal by the Institute to its Member States was calling for an urgent review and implementation of a business model that would enable IICA to adapt to a new era of technical cooperation, in a bid to promote technical cooperation of excellence that would be to the greater benefit of countries.

It was also mentioned that the new business model should be seen as an effort to: a) bring about greater institutional alignment, b) generate more robust and relevant technical cooperation agendas in service to the countries, and c) establish the basis for a more productive, innovative and resilient Institute.

The expectation therefore is that IICA should become an innovation platform for agricultural development and rural well-being, which will align its knowledge management with the solutions called for by users, while expanding its network of strategic alliances and aiming to diversify its funding sources.

The three pillars of the business model were outlined: a) **targeted actions**, which will seek to agree on a relevant, updated agenda to channel the delivery of technical cooperation in response to real demands, b) **productivity**, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of institutional actions in the new cooperation agendas, and c) **institutional relevance and sustainability**, to increase the diplomatic and political capacity of the Institute and its level of recognition in the technical sphere.

The presentation also stressed that the business model includes the following six strategic guidelines: 1) identification of the demands of countries, 2) defining of the Institute's portfolio, comprising its products, services and the mechanisms for their implementation, 3) strengthening of human talent, 4) institutional governance to strengthen institutional operations, 5) improvement of external relations and greater institutional visibility, and 6) strengthening of financial models to ensure the Institute's sustainability, through the design of a cooperation fund for resilience. With respect to the above, the presentation indicated that IICA had devised work teams, work plans and schedules to develop the six strategies for implementation at the end of 2020.

On the matter of the financial architecture, an overview was provided of the Institute's budget, indicating the amount approved for the organization's management on a yearly basis and the breakdown of its income, by quotas from countries and miscellaneous income. The presentation also discussed the budget's heavy dependence on the contributions of Member States, as well as the regulatory provision that the budget should be fully executed on an annual basis.

The video revealed that over the last 15 years, IICA had received less than 80% of the expected quota resources, which had created a deficit of approximately USD 26 million in outstanding quotas, up to that date, putting the Institute in a highly precarious administrative and financial position. It went on to mention that the options for IICA to diversify its income streams were limited and that its capacity to sell or offer services, invest and undertake actions had been curtailed. Thus, the only way to supplement its budget was the traditional means of generating miscellaneous income and recovering indirect costs for the management of projects funded with externally funded resources, which had become more limited and in demand at this time. This had placed the Institute in an extremely vulnerable situation, which could worsen if steps are not taken to mitigate it.

It was pointed out that in recent years IICA had made extensive efforts to rationalize its expenditure and had redirected savings into technical cooperation actions. However, it would prove extremely difficult to continue in this vein, without compromising the quantity and quality of the Institute's technical cooperation services and without affecting its operations, as the reduction in real expenditure was fast approaching the permissible threshold.

It was said that, as at 31 August 2020, IICA had collected only 55.6% of the annual quotas, and the most optimistic estimates forecast that the Institute will collect 20% less than the amount projected in the budget. Moreover, it was specified that, notwithstanding the situation arising out of the pandemic, this had been a recurring issue over the last ten years. As such, it had now become a matter of urgency to prioritize the sixth strategy of the business model, which proposes that IICA should work on identifying new alternatives for the financial architecture and on creating an innovation fund for resilience. The video explained that this strategy proposes the following actions: a) continued rationalization and optimization of resources without affecting operational capacity; b) continued and insistent efforts to collect quotas, given that they are essential to the financial viability of the Institute; c) analysis and assessment of alternatives to recover outstanding quotas; d) consideration of voluntary contributions or extraordinary quotas from countries that are in a position to offer their support; e) creation of an aggressive plan to capture miscellaneous resources, through a portfolio of services that IICA can offer and sell to governments, multilateral organizations and public and private entities; f) procurement of accreditation by environmental financial entities, with the active support of Member States; g) fostering of crowdfunding initiatives; h) design and establishment of an innovation fund for resilience; i) modernization of treasury and financial management policies; and j) development of a detailed study on the creation of organizational structures to complement IICA's activities, such as the "IICA Group".

It was emphasized that the strategy aims to provide support that will stabilize the resources to cover operational costs and ensure the operational sustainability of the Institute, so that the collection of a pre-established percentage of quotas and the generation of miscellaneous income will allow the Institute to carry out its activities. Moreover, the voluntary contributions and extra-quotas,

complemented by increased miscellaneous income, through the delivery and sale of services by the IICA Group and the management of external projects, should be executed with more flexible budgets, aimed at generating investments and profit, which could serve as sources of income for the Innovation Fund for Resilience, which will be the main mechanism to fund the delivery of technical cooperation services.

Analysis and comments

The Representative of Brazil thanked the Director General and staff of the Institute for the preparation and presentation of the document, “Proposal for the Development of an IICA Business Model”. He also indicated that the discussions should focus on the prioritization of the actions to be taken and considered the sixth strategic line of action of the business model to be critical, focusing on institutional sustainability. He emphasized that the current model, which relies on quota resources from Member States, is subject to the bureaucratic procedures and policies of the countries, which delays the payment of the quotas. He also said that the process depends on public entities other than those involved in agriculture. He indicated that the current quota system and the stipulation that the entire budget be executed on an annual basis makes it difficult to adopt an approach that ensures financial and institutional sustainability.

He also felt that although the proposal regarding diversification was extremely important, the matter of voluntary contributions would be more feasible once the countries had greater financial liquidity, but not at the present time. He then commented on the plan to secure miscellaneous resources and pinpointed the actions of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), in this regard.

He concluded his remarks by stating that the challenge involved not undermining the Institute’s *raison d’être*, in order to achieve a balance between the cooperation model and the search for financial resources. He noted that the Innovation Fund for Resilience is an important mechanism that will free IICA from the obligation of executing its entire budget on an annual basis. He added that Brazil has a similar institutional financial mechanism for exports in the sector, involving a cash basis accounting system as well as a budgetary regime.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Brazil for his comments and pointed out that the discussion and analysis of these alternatives must never jeopardize the Institute’s mission, vision and values; on the contrary—the goal is to generate greater financial sustainability to fulfill the mandate with which the Member States have entrusted the Institute.

The Representative of Argentina indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic requires society to change, given the fact that its impact will be felt for many years and will affect the food production and marketing system. He acknowledged the efforts to advance towards IICA 4.0, which will enable the Institute to boost quality, efficiency and resource rationalization, as well as strike a balance between the quality of services and the rationalization of resources.

He agreed with the Representative of Brazil that the quest for financial sustainability must not distort the Institute’s mission, which is to provide the usual high-quality technical cooperation to its member countries. He expressly supported the new business model to foster and strengthen a

new financial architecture, which will provide innovative solutions for identifying new funding sources. Lastly, he acknowledged the efforts undertaken by the Director General and IICA personnel.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Argentina for his comments and took advantage of the opportunity to highlight the commitment of all Institute personnel to provide the member countries with high-quality, technical cooperation of excellence, while rationalizing resources.

The Representative of the United States of America congratulated and thanked the Institute and the Director General for their efforts to develop the proposal for the new business model and emphasized the need to channel efforts towards boosting productivity and financial sustainability. He mentioned that he valued IICA's status as an agency specializing in agricultural cooperation for the Americas, which serves as a forum for open technical discussions on trade and agriculture.

He considered that the Institute represents an investment that benefits countries in the Western Hemisphere, which is why its funding is so relevant. On the other hand, he expressed his support for the Director General's measures to maintain the Institute's financial sustainability and called on the member countries to pay their quotas. He added that he would like to learn more about the institutional sustainability pillar of the business model, particularly with respect to improving IICA's participation at the international level.

The Director General stated that, in the upcoming meetings, he would provide a detailed report on progress achieved in each of the strategies to be implemented under the business model, for analysis and feedback by the countries.

The Representative of Canada stressed the need for Member States to pay their quotas to the Institute so that it can continue to operate efficiently and increase prosperity in the Americas by designing and implementing various projects that improve food security and productivity. He indicated that his country would continue to value the Institute's technical capacities and to support their strengthening. He requested further information on the members of the working groups that are developing the six strategies outlined in IICA's business model.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Canada for urging member countries to bring their quota payments up to date. Regarding the members of the working groups responsible for developing the six strategies of the business model, he asked the Institute's Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager to provide information in this regard.

The Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager explained that these internal working groups are led by IICA directors based on their area of expertise. The groups follow a work agenda and involve different administrative and technical areas and units, both at Headquarters and in the Institute's Delegations in the member countries.

The Director General confirmed that the working groups are internal but mentioned that the Institute would be honored to work together with and receive support from a Member State, should it be interested in joining one of the groups.

The Representative of Mexico thanked the Director General for the “Proposal for the Development of an IICA Business Model” and recognized his leadership in the actions carried out by IICA to help address the COVID-19 pandemic, including the organization of 14 regional conferences and forums for dialogue that have generated successful results.

She expressed support for the proposed business model and considered that, of the three implementation approaches and six strategies mentioned to overcome the Institute’s difficult financial situation, one of the most important ones was the sixth strategy, entitled “Strengthening of the funding models for cooperation”, particularly as it relates to the new financial architecture. She mentioned that the new initiatives proposed could contribute to attracting more financial resources; however, if this were to lead to a greater number of cooperation projects, it could become necessary to increase the Institute’s human capital. She recommended coordinating all technical cooperation aspects so as not to affect the support provided to the member countries.

She suggested analyzing the possibility of making certain changes to the organizational structure and some regulatory adjustments that would allow for greater flexibility in the use of resources generated. She reiterated her agreement with the proposal presented and expressed her support for the institutional transformation process.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Mexico and assured her that none of the alternatives would affect the services provided to the member countries, given that the Institute has a duty towards its members.

The Representative of Haiti thanked the Director General for all of the efforts he has undertaken since the beginning of his administration. He stated that his country would continue to support IICA and seek to remain up to date in its quota payments, insofar as possible, as required by the Institute’s rules.

He mentioned that he was not opposed to IICA selling its technical services in order to obtain resources; however, he believed that this should be coordinated with the ministries of Agriculture, to ensure that those actions would allow for enhancing their technical capabilities and improving the effectiveness of their operations. He pointed out that, over the past few months, his country’s Ministry of Agriculture had been promoting efforts to undertake joint actions with the private sector, with a view to improving the capabilities of its technical specialists and providing the private sector with public institutional support to invest in agriculture.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Haiti for his contributions and pointed out that the discussion in that forum must not focus on the Institute’s survival, but rather on its institutional strengthening. He reiterated that IICA will continue to exist and that the countries will be able to come together to share their ideas and proposals, such as the proposal to foster linkages with the private sector.

He clarified that the proposal to “sell services” does not refer to charging for the support that the Institute provides to the Member States, but rather to the sale of products and services to

multilateral funding agencies or the private sector, including the development of studies, the performance of evaluations or the provision of services in the field of education.

He announced that IICA had recently launched a “Crowdfunding campaign to strengthen food security in Haiti and Antigua and Barbuda during COVID-19”. He explained that the campaign, which was geared towards individuals in all regions across the Americas, seeks to raise funds that would allow for providing basic agricultural inputs, such as seeds, irrigation equipment and other supplies, to thousands of inhabitants in the communities of Codrington and Burkes Sanderson in Antigua and Barbuda, and Bas Boen and Montrouis in Haiti.

Next, he asked IICA’s Director of Corporate Services to provide more information on the various options for the financial architecture.

The Director of Corporate Services referred to the proposal to implement the sixth strategy, whose objective is to generate more income by creating the Innovation Fund for Resilience, which would fund technical cooperation actions. He indicated that the work being carried out focuses on two areas: attracting more resources and creating the fund. Lastly, he clarified that the Institute’s proposal involved getting more work done with fewer resources; therefore, the Institute did not anticipate hiring more staff. He mentioned that the objective was to channel resources saved towards technical cooperation, the analysis and management of processes, and the reduction of bureaucracy.

The Representative of Panama expressed satisfaction with the proposed business model, which will enable the Institute to guide its activities under a new business dynamic to better meet the demands of the countries. She expressed her concern that delays in the payment of quotas would increase, due to the financial situation generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in the countries. She mentioned that, in order to implement the alternatives presented to strengthen the Institute’s sustainability, the Institute should consider making certain adjustments to its regulations, so as to adequately manage those funds.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Panama for voicing her concern regarding delays in the payment of quotas. He commented that he remained optimistic because the countries believe in the Institute, and stated that he trusts that the situation will improve. He noted that the goal is to boost IICA’s productivity, taking into account its *raison d’être* and ensuring that any change implemented is aligned with the principle of transparency. In this regard, he referred to the results of the 2019 report of the Audit Review Committee (ARC), which had issued a “clean” audit opinion regarding the Institute’s administration and finances.

The Representative of Costa Rica thanked IICA for allowing non-SACMI members to participate in the meeting and to share their opinions, thereby promoting access to information and transparency. He considered the proposal presented by the Institute to be timely, given that it has allowed for demonstrating to the governments that the amounts allocated to international organizations are properly managed and yield many benefits for the countries. He referred to the need for this plan to include the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE), in order to strengthen joint work between the two institutions, which is of great importance to Costa Rica, as well as to align the mandates issued in this regard by the Executive

Committee and the IABA. In closing, he thanked IICA's working teams for preparing the proposed business plan.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Costa Rica for his comments and highlighted the importance of identifying new funding sources. He mentioned that CATIE's establishment had coincided with IICA's transformation into a technical cooperation organization and that, since then, IICA has transferred up to 5% of its budget to the institution each year. This year, the percentage will be determined based on the quota amount collected.

He explained that, in addition to conducting research activities, CATIE also manages and executes external projects, which generates additional resources for the institution. He recalled that one of the mandates issued by the Executive Committee on 21 July 2020 was to prepare a business model to make the land where CATIE is located, and which belongs to IICA, more productive. Therefore, he indicated that increasing the productivity and profitability of those properties would enable IICA to eventually stop "paying" CATIE and for the two institutions to become partners in sharing potential excess revenue from those activities. Next, the Director General gave the floor to the Institute's Chief of Staff to expand on this topic.

The Chief of Staff noted that the remarks of the Representative of Costa Rica described the right way to move forward. He remarked that the business model indicates that IICA will not sit idly by and wait for others to resolve its issues. He added that the alternatives being proposed to the countries reflect the spirit with which the Institute was founded in 1942, and that these actions are viable, necessary and urgent. He explained that the Institute will soon reach a limit in terms of the constant budget cuts, increases in costs and the reallocation of resources; therefore, it is crucial to gain access to new types of resources, so as not to overburden the member countries with contributions that go beyond their current obligations. He added that the proposal is expected to represent an adequate and fair alternative.

He commented that many types of business activities could be undertaken in partnership with CATIE, which would allow not only for funding its operations, but also for generating a return on countries' investments in IICA and CATIE. He clarified that, although both institutions are non-profit, their actions should have a positive impact on the development of countries.

Next, the Deputy Director General of the Institute suggested that, due to its nature, CATIE should strengthen those aspects related to education, in light of the fact that its academic offerings have been affected by a drop in enrollment due to its education model — an issue that has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. He reported that IICA was working together with CATIE to assess different ways of improving its academic offerings, including through the creation of a virtual campus.

The Director General commented that the private sector had expressed an interest in jointly developing some courses; therefore, he reiterated the relevance of the sale of services, which would allow for meeting this request, based on the Institute's capabilities.

Lastly, he proposed continuing the dialogue with the countries and holding another extraordinary meeting of the SACMI on 3 December. He indicated that he would submit to the countries, for appropriate review, the document containing the business model, which includes its pillars and strategies, as well as the document relating to the financial architecture.

Close of the session

At 09:55 hours in Costa Rica, on 1 October 2020, having completed the analysis and discussion of the items proposed, the Director General thanked the members of the SACMI for their participation and declared the meeting closed.

Annex No. 1
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