



Thirty-seventh Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee

**Final Report of the 2017 Regular Meeting of the Special
Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI)**

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18-19 July 2017

Introduction

Pursuant to the provisions of its statute and rules, the Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI) was convened on April 24, 2017, at 8:40 a.m. (Costa Rica time) via videoconference, as required by Resolution No. 580 of the Executive Committee. Representatives from the following countries participated: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, El Salvador, Guyana, Mexico, Paraguay, the United States of America and Venezuela.

Message from the Director General

The Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) welcomed participants and informed them that the process for electing a new Director General of the Institute began on April 25, 2017, and that the election would be held during the next regular meeting of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), within the framework of IICA's 75th anniversary. Next, he explained the schedule and methodology of the meeting.

The Director General described the global situation regarding agriculture, and made reference to the four challenges outlined by the ministers of agriculture of the hemisphere in 2011 as well as the status of inter-American and global technical cooperation. In relation to this topic, he mentioned Resolution No. 501 of the IABA (2015), "Institutional Process for the Formulation and Presentation of Proposals for the Financial Strengthening and Strategic Restructuring of the Institute" and Resolution No. 615 of the Executive Committee (2016), "Progress Made in Drafting Proposals for the Financial Strengthening and Strategic Restructuring of the Institute."

He commented that in the operative paragraphs of the latter document, the Committee resolved to request that the Director General analyze the potential benefits, legal framework and ways in which an alliance between IICA and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) could be established, following the current model between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO); and that he submit a report on this topic at the next regular meeting of the SACMI, including recommendations that the Office of the Director General supported for implementation.

Alliance between IICA and FAO

The Director General stated that, in accordance with this mandate, IICA had prepared a study for consideration by the Member States, which contained the following conclusions:

- ***Viability of an alliance between IICA and FAO.*** It is considered feasible to establish a partnership model between IICA and FAO, in which IICA could maintain its inter-American nature and its autonomy in managing the hemispheric cooperation agenda.
- ***Similarity to the PAHO-WHO model.*** This model has functioned successfully for the past seventy years in the relationship between these two organizations.

- ***Relevance and effectiveness of cooperation from PAHO as a regional office of WHO.*** The work of PAHO, in its dual role as the Pan American Health Office and as the WHO Regional Office for the Americas, has facilitated the development and implementation of a hemispheric cooperation agenda aligned with the global agenda.
- ***Potential financial strengthening as a result of the partnership between IICA and FAO.*** The biannual quotas that the 34 Member States pay to IICA amount to USD 60.1 million, while the total quotas paid by these same countries to FAO amount to USD 163.2 million (not including Cuba). The Institute allocates 100% of its Regular Budget to the provision of technical cooperation services to its Member States, while FAO had assigned a budget of USD 83.8 million to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) for the 2016-2017 biennium.
- ***Viability and relevance of a joint operational structure between IICA and FAO.*** IICA is headquartered in Costa Rica and has offices in each of its 34 Member States, as well as in Spain. For its part, FAO has a regional office in the Chilean capital, Santiago, plus two subregional offices, one in Panama and another in Barbados. Therefore, it would be relatively simple to build a single structure covering all the countries of the Americas, using IICA's physical capacities. This would mean significant savings in operating costs.
- ***Joint meetings between IICA and FAO within the framework of the IABA and ministerial meetings.*** The regular meetings of the IABA and FAO's Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean take place every two years, a few months apart, and are held at the ministerial level. Consequently, an agreement establishing the IABA as this regional conference would facilitate strategic multilateral discussions and save resources that could be used for cooperation.
- ***Inclusion of all countries in the Americas in the partnership between IICA and FAO.*** FAO's Regional Office in Santiago, Chile, covers LAC; therefore, it does not include Canada or the United States of America (USA), but does include Cuba. IICA does include those countries, but does not include Cuba. However, through a simple resolution by its Conference, FAO could redefine its regional structure so that Canada and the USA could be included in the LAC region; and, if IICA were to serve as the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAO RLC) and as the FAO Regional Conference, Cuba could participate in IICA, following the same reasoning that has enabled that country to participate in PAHO.
- ***Surmountable difficulty: difference in the appointment of high-level authorities for IICA and FAO at the regional level.*** There is a crucial difference between both organizations in this regard: whereas the Director General of IICA is elected by affirmative vote of the majority of Member States, the representative of the RLC is appointed and can be removed by the Director General of FAO. This difference could be resolved by including a provision in the Basic Agreement between IICA and FAO, requiring that the Director General of FAO appoint the Director General of IICA as Director of the FAO RLC.

- ***Gradual transition toward a PAHO/WHO model.*** Adoption of the PAHO/WHO model would entail a process of negotiation and gradual transition.
- ***Need for a basic agreement approved by the highest governing bodies of both institutions.*** This negotiation process should culminate with the signing of a Basic Agreement, approved both by the FAO Conference and by the IABA, so that no amendment of the constituent instruments of either organization would be required.
- ***Role of the next IABA meeting to drive the partnership proposal.*** The next regular meeting of the IABA could be used to advance the political process toward the possible establishment of the PAHO/WHO model for the IICA/FAO partnership, by means of a resolution declaring the implementation of said model as an “objective” and calling on Member States to adopt a similar resolution at the next meeting of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- ***Joint agenda that responds to food and agriculture needs.*** Finally, the most important point about this proposal was that it represented an opportunity to align the cooperation agendas of both institutions.

The Director General underscored the fact that this idea was innovative because it proposed that IICA take on the functions currently carried out by the FAO RLC as well as the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean. In doing so, the Institute would preserve its inter-American nature and its political, programmatic and institutional autonomy, while also maintaining its hemispheric cooperation agenda in agriculture, in alignment with the global food agenda that corresponded to FAO.

The Director General ended the presentation by stating that the establishment of this partnership would be a historic decision, proportional to the enormous challenges that agriculture in the Americas would face in the years to come.

Analysis and comments

The representative of Argentina commented that the possibility of establishing a partnership between IICA and FAO would be an ambitious task that would require a paradigm shift in the Institute’s way of working and thinking. However, he considered that the member countries possessed the capabilities needed to accomplish this task. He recommended analyzing the proposal from three different perspectives, considering substantive, economic and legal aspects.

From a substantive point of view, he anticipated that the Institute would encounter similarities between the IABA, IICA’s highest governing body, and the FAO Regional Conference, given that certain aspects of their agendas and modes of operation coincided, making their alignment feasible. From an economic point of view, the aspects that were presented when the proposal was described were categorical; therefore, he recommended delving deeper into the financial repercussions of the

proposal. He added that IICA and its member countries were facing challenges in optimizing the use of resources, and that, as a result, a partnership between IICA and FAO could offer a solution.

Lastly, from a legal point of view, the representative felt it was important to consider the fact that the member countries of the IABA and the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean were not the same. He added that work would need to be carried out in relation to certain statutory issues, but that political willingness would facilitate the establishment of the partnership. He asked if the study that was presented would be shared with the delegates, to enable them to analyze it in greater detail and issue recommendations.

The representative of Brazil stated that the establishment of a partnership between IICA and FAO would be very important for the countries, but would represent a great challenge, given that the institutions had different histories, cultures and areas of specialization. He stated that Brazil would be willing to discuss the possibility of establishing the partnership, and expressed his desire to receive a copy of the study to analyze it and provide recommendations.

The representative of Canada stated that he was familiar with the analysis that IICA had conducted on the financial limitations that the Institute has been facing for some time. This study cited an unfavorable financial gap of approximately USD 10 million; as a result, any action aimed at solving this problem would be of great relevance. The representative considered that IICA possessed the best technical knowledge network on the American continent, and that it would therefore be wise to keep it operational.

The representative commented that the analysis of the proposed partnership between IICA and FAO had focused on legal aspects. He requested a copy of the study that was presented during the meeting, in order to learn more about certain aspects of the partnership, including the financial benefits for IICA; the way in which contributions from Member States would be provided and managed; the way in which the United States and Canada would continue to participate in IICA; and the amount of progress that had been achieved in the negotiation with FAO. He also asked if the topic would be addressed at the upcoming regular meeting of the Executive Committee.

The Director General stated that the study presented during the meeting would be sent to the participating countries as soon as possible. He added that there were still many questions surrounding the possible partnership between IICA and FAO, but that it was necessary to begin addressing the topic at the internal level.

The representative of El Salvador commended the administration for the efforts it had undertaken to fulfill the four strategic objectives, which had yielded benefits for the countries. He highlighted the importance of the study and asked about the level of progress achieved in the negotiations with FAO. He recommended preparing a more detailed proposal of a model that would benefit both institutions, and added that, at the next regular meeting of the IABA, it would be advisable to have a more advanced proposal that had been agreed upon, with the aim of consolidating the partnership as soon as possible.

The representative of the United States of America expressed his gratitude for the presentation on the progress made with respect to the proposed partnership between IICA and FAO. He emphasized the significance of the topic and congratulated the Director General for bringing forth this initiative before completing his term. He expressed interest in a more detailed analysis, so that a more elaborate proposal could be finalized as soon as possible. He felt that it would be wise for the Institute to make progress in the search for greater efficiency and in the identification of commonalities with other organizations. He referred to the challenge faced by IICA as a result of the decreased value of quotas received, which had remained frozen for a long period of time. He asked how much time would be needed to implement the proposal, and whether an updated version of the proposal would be available before the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

The representative of Guyana lauded the seriousness of the proposal and anticipated possible support from her country's government.

The representative of Mexico expressed her appreciation for the presentation of the report. She commented that the agendas of FAO and IICA contained many common aspects, and that the IABA meeting and the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean also dealt with similar topics. Therefore, she considered that the establishment of a partnership by means of which the Institute could operate as a FAO regional organization in the Americas would be a significant accomplishment that would generate important savings for the Member States. She acknowledged the fact that the consolidation of the initiative would require political will and adjustments in FAO's governance mechanisms, in such a way as to include all countries in the Americas in a single regional block. She added that her government was available to support IICA as needed.

The representative of Paraguay thanked the working group for preparing the proposal, and stated that the countries should conduct an in-depth analysis of the proposal in order to identify greater synergies. He expressed his interest in ensuring that a possible fusion would not unfavorably impact the support that the Institute offered to its Member States.

The representative of Venezuela commented that the proposal was ambitious and stated that the Ministry of Popular Power for Productive Agriculture and Land was willing to contribute to the preparation of documents as well as to the overall process.

The Director General mentioned that the working group that prepared the proposal had analyzed and identified very few realistic possibilities for strengthening the Institute. Therefore, the group was open to considering any other options proposed by the members of the SACMI, in their role as advisors. He noted that application of the PAHO/WHO model in the IICA/FAO relationship was emerging as a viable option for guaranteeing the future of the Institute, and that it would therefore be presented to the Executive Committee. He added that the preparation of the proposal was a historic event, consistent with the need to address the uncertainty and challenges faced by agriculture at the global level, and to respond to the demands of the Member States to achieve greater efficiency, avoid duplicity of efforts and accomplish more with less resources.

He felt that the fact that no members had rejected the proposal during the meeting was a good sign, and that it was normal for certain questions to arise, as they did within the working group, regarding

the implementation of the partnership and the timeframe needed to prepare a proposal that would generate benefits for all parties involved (a win-win situation). He informed the Commission that the document would be sent to the delegates, who would be asked to inform IICA of the mode of operation of PAHO as a regional office of WHO in their respective countries; this would enable the Institute to learn about their experiences and lessons learned and, in this way, strengthen the IICA/FAO partnership proposal.

The Director General noted that a document would need to be presented to the Executive Committee, detailing all of the concerns that the delegates had expressed during the meeting, which were primarily related to the financial repercussions of the initiative, which would need to be analyzed very carefully, as well as the political negotiation process that the countries would need to carry out should the proposal be accepted. He added that he had spoken with Mr. Graciano Da Silva, Director General of FAO, in February, about the possibility of IICA executing its own cooperation agenda in addition to that of FAO; this would not entail a fusion of the organizations, but rather the adoption of a cooperation model similar to that of PAHO and WHO. The Director General of FAO had a positive response to the idea; he showed interest in staying informed about the process and expressed willingness to become directly involved in the process.

Next, some of the potential benefits of a partnership between IICA and FAO were listed: a) the use of IICA offices as platforms for technical cooperation provided under a joint agenda would generate substantial savings in terms of funds and personnel; b) the organizations would share a common agenda and hold a single meeting (the IABA), which would serve as the FAO Regional Conference, thus generating additional savings; c) the freeing-up of resources would enable FAO to channel resources toward addressing priorities in other parts of the world; d) countries would have consolidated agendas and would save economic resources; e) IICA could benefit from specialized FAO personnel and possible additional resources; f) FAO's agenda would be adequately addressed by an institution that, in the opinion of its own Member States, has demonstrated a high level of efficiency in the provision of its technical cooperation services.

He concluded by stating that the success of this ambitious and visionary proposal would depend on the political will and efforts undertaken by the countries involved to make it a reality.

2018-2019 Program Budget

The Director of the Programming, Budgeting and Control Division of IICA listed the main criteria applied in drawing up the 2018-2019 Program Budget: a) definition of the quotas of the Member States based on the scale approved by the Organization of American States (OAS); b) consolidation of the results-based technical cooperation structure established in the 2014-2018 Medium-term Plan (MTP), managed through four instruments (flagship projects, rapid response actions, FonTC and externally funded projects); c) the application of a budgetary approach that establishes a direct link between projects and their proposed results, strengthening the processes of planning, programming, monitoring, evaluation and accountability; d) a global budget aligned with the Institute's strategic planning; and e) a budget geared toward projects that contribute more efficiently to meeting the needs of agriculture in the Member States, considering the strategic objectives and contributions detailed in the MTP.

She added that the Institute financed its technical cooperation and operating activities with resources from the Regular Fund, which was made up of Member State quotas and miscellaneous income. She noted that the income budget of resources from the Regular Fund was USD 34,364,900 for each year of the 2018-2019 biennium, made up of USD 30,064,900 from Member State quotas, some over-quotas, and USD 4,300,000 in miscellaneous income.

She clarified that a detailed allocation of the resources in the expenditure budget for 2018 would be presented, along with a general estimate for 2019, so as to afford the new administration the necessary flexibility to propose the allocation of resources for that year. Lastly, she explained that the 2018-2019 Program Budget would be executed in strict adherence to the strategic management model, addressing financial constraints in a responsible manner by applying criteria such as quality, effectiveness, rationality, equity, transparency and accountability, within the framework of a policy based on continuous improvement.

Report on the collection of quotas

The Director of the Financial Management Division presented a report on the collection of quotas. She stated that the quota contributions of the Member States were the main source of financial resources for the Regular Fund, which the Institute utilized to carry out its cooperation programs in each country in order to meet the needs and demands of the agricultural sector, as well as promote sustainable and competitive agriculture for the Americas. She added that, via Resolution 493 of the IABA, “2016-2017 Program Budget,” the Member States had adopted the biennial budget with quota financing of USD 30,064,900 per year. This amount included the first increase in the quota budget since 1995, aimed at recovering the loss of resources from the Miscellaneous Income Fund, and USD 873,800 as over-quota contributions pledged by the Member States.

She stated that for the year ended December 31, 2016, the Institute had collected quotas in the amount of USD 24.2 million, 80% of the annual quota budget. She mentioned that by April 2017, 50% of the total amount to be collected had been received, and noted that 17 countries were up to date, 14 were under regular status (owing no more than two years of quotas), and 3 were in arrears (owing more than two years of quotas).

Lastly, she clarified that Resolution No. 414 of the IABA establishes that quotas for the current year become past due if not paid by June 30 of the year, the period considered reasonable to make payment of annual quotas that fall due as of January 1 of the given year. She requested the support of the Member States in complying with their quota commitments, which would enable the Institute to carry out its work plan.

Salary structure for International Professional Personnel (IPP)

The Director of the Financial Management Division explained that the salary structure for IPP at IICA was divided into three elements: a) basic salary, b) post adjustment and c) other emoluments. She commented that, in the past, the basic salary accounted for over 50% of the total salary of an international staff member at the Institute, but that this ratio had been decreasing.

She indicated that this change had resulted from the application of part of the IPP salary increases to the “post adjustment” rubric instead of the basic salary. As a result, the basic salary represented less than 50% of the total salary for international personnel. She added that this distribution contrasted with that utilized by other international organizations, where the basic salary and other emoluments represented 65% and 35% of the total remuneration, respectively. This represented a disadvantage for IICA in attracting highly qualified personnel, as well as competing for the execution of projects with other development agencies.

She explained that, in an effort to correct this imbalance, the salary increase for IPP under the 2016-2017 budget had been entirely applied to the “basic salary” rubric. She clarified that, in applying this adjustment to the basic salary, the total salary amounts would remain the same, except in the social security rubrics, which were calculated in relation to the basic salary. She added that this adjustment would only affect IPP and would not increase the budgets geared toward financing costs for this category of personnel.

Lastly, she noted that to correct the deficiencies in the retirement and pension savings systems which had resulted from this situation, and to return to a more adequate remuneration structure, additional corrections would need to be made in a gradual and systematic manner, in order to achieve the more customary balance between the basic salary and other benefits received by IPP, as was the case at IICA in the past, and as is common at other comparable international organizations.

Analysis and comments

The representative of Argentina expressed his gratitude for the information that was presented. He commented that, at the last meeting of the IABA in 2015, IICA Member States approved an increase in quotas, following a period of 20 years in which these contributions had been frozen. This milestone, as well as the possibility of establishing a partnership with FAO based on the PAHO/WHO model, responded to the need to identify options that would lead to the financial and strategic strengthening of the Institute.

He then referred to the Program Budget, and highlighted the importance of its results-based approach, and its emphasis on quality and efficiency in the provision of services, as well as continuous improvement. He recommended that the report detail the resources allocated to the four strategic objectives of the 2014-2018 MTP, as had been done in the past. Additionally, he reminded the Commission that significant improvements had been made recently with respect to the recovery of indirect costs, and he requested that this topic be included in the report.

With respect to the salary structure, he requested more information about the shift made in the salary structure for IPP, as well as its potential impacts on the Institute’s budget. The representatives of El Salvador and the United States of America agreed with this request.

The representative of Brazil agreed that it would be advisable for IICA to present a budget broken down by strategic areas and operational units. He noted that the Ministry of Agriculture of Brazil was executing two programs of great impact. One of them was geared toward rationalizing and

modernizing institutional regulations, and the other focused on agribusiness. He then referred to the quota payments due, and indicated that his country would pay the 2015 quota in the following two months, and that it would comply with payment of the 2016 quotas within three or four months.

The Director General thanked Brazil for the information regarding its financial status. He added that, during a recent meeting of the Southern Agricultural Council (CAS), the Minister of Agriculture of Brazil referred to both of the programs mentioned. He reiterated IICA's willingness to continue collaborating in those areas, which formed part of its Flagship Projects.

The representative of Canada expressed his appreciation for the presentations and inquired about the way in which the miscellaneous income was calculated, considering the fact that a constant value of USD 4.3 million for 2016 to 2018 was estimated, despite the decreasing trend reported over the past few years. He also requested further information on the recovery of indirect costs from the execution of external resources. He commented that, in the previous year, effective costs reached 11.5% while the rate established was 8.1%, which had relevant effects on the regular budget. He agreed with the representative of Argentina on the need for more detailed information on the budget as well as the possible financial consequences of an adjustment to the proposed salary structure.

The representative of El Salvador requested clarification regarding the way in which the salary structure was reflected in the Program Budget as well as the method that was used to calculate over-quotas, and inquired about the actions that had been undertaken to promote timely payment of quotas.

The representative of the United States of America recognized the effort that IICA had put into the collection of quotas. She requested clarification on the definition of over-quota, as well as a report on the actions that had been carried out to prevent Member States from falling into arrears with respect to quota payments. She compared the 2018-2019 Program Budget to that of the previous biennium, and requested more detailed information on expenditures, the salary structure, and the relationship between the working capital and the use of reserves. Regarding the proposed salary structure for IPP, she expressed interest in having more information on actuarial calculations of severance payments, pensions and subsidies, among other aspects.

The representative of Mexico highlighted the consistency of the proposed Program Budget with the Institute's strategic objectives and Flagship Projects, as well as some of the programs conducted by the government of Mexico in the areas of sustainable agriculture, climate change, innovation and support for small-scale farming. She acknowledged the efforts that IICA had made to efficiently use resources available and satisfy increasingly complex demands for cooperation. She agreed on the need for more information about the salary structure for IPP.

The representative of Paraguay endorsed the request of several delegates for more information on the salary structure for IPP. He explained that he was not very familiar with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project that was mentioned, and would therefore appreciate more information in that regard.

The representative of Venezuela stated that she did not have official information regarding processing of her country's quota payments, but would provide information as soon as it became available.

The Director of the Financial Management Division referred to the comments made by the participants. She explained that "over-quota" was understood to mean an additional voluntary contribution, which the majority of Member States had agreed to pay in order to strengthen the Institute's budget, and which totaled approximately USD 875,000. Next, she stated that the Miscellaneous Income Fund had been decreasing, and that its resources would run out this year. As a result, it would be necessary to generate resources for the fund. She stated that improvements had been made with respect to the recovery of indirect costs from the management of externally funded projects, and that, as a result, the effective rate had moved closer to the target rate of 8.1%.

In response to the requests for additional information about the salary structure for IPP, she commented that the adjustment represented USD 2,500 per staff member and that, as a result, it would not be necessary to adjust the draft Program Budget. She explained that, unlike other institutions, IICA was not required to fulfill after-service obligations. Next, she noted that the Institute was working to revert the basic salary and post adjustment ratio, to better resemble that of other organizations. She clarified that the situation with the USAID project that was mentioned was specifically related to the salary structure; the fact that the post adjustment surpassed the basic salary was considered inadequate by USAID.

The Director General stated that the comments made by the countries were important in order to improve the information that would be presented at the next regular meeting of the Executive Committee, which would be held in July of 2017. He then referred to the proposed salary structure for IPP, which sought to gradually correct a practice of many years that had been affecting recruitment of high-level personnel, given that IICA's salaries were not competitive.

The Technical Secretary of the meetings of the governing bodies referred to Resolution No. 615 of the Executive Committee, "Progress Made in Drafting Proposals for the Financial Strengthening and Strategic Restructuring of the Institute." In order to comply with this resolution, the Institute had prepared the study to analyze the viability of applying the PAHO/WHO model to a possible partnership between IICA and FAO, as was requested in the third operative paragraph. Next, he referred to the fourth operative paragraph of the resolution, by means of which Member States were invited to send to the Director General, by December 31, 2016, their proposals and recommendations for the financial strengthening and strategic restructuring of the Institute. He commented that only two notes had been received, one from Panama and another from Jamaica, and that they did not necessarily provide proposals or recommendations. In the case of Jamaica particularly, the notes provided words of support for the actions that the Director General had been promoting. He stated that the Institute would welcome any ideas that could be used as input for institutional improvement.

The Director General thanked the SACMI members for their comments, and encouraged them to continue supporting IICA's financial strengthening, in light of its 75 years of experience and the challenges that agriculture would face in the future.

Next, he asked the members of the SACMI if they had any further comments, and given that there were none, he declared the meeting closed.

At 11:00 a.m. in Costa Rica, on April 24, 2017, 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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