



# RAFI

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## CGIAR Governance in 1997

### Governance and the CG's Third Review

*A Civil Society Report on International Agricultural Research*

In 1997, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) made notable progress in expanding the participation of the South and of women in their governance system. There is evidence that the trend that prevailed in the first half of the 1990's is reversing and that CG members and the Boards of Trustees of the 16 International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs) are moving, albeit slowly, to achieve a better regional ratio in their various levels of governance. Much of the credit for this shift goes to CGIAR's Chair. Nevertheless, many within the CGIAR seem to feel that a 50/50 South/North balance is adequate and little thinking has been done to consider an appropriate ratio - nor to address the continuing ambiguity of CG "membership" and the uncertain role of the new Global Forum. TAC's Biotech panels, indeed, seem to counter the constructive new trend. Although the improvement is significant, RAFI believes that much more needs to be done before the South in general, and farmers, in particular, have a proper voice in decision-making regarding agricultural research and development.

For Continuing coverage of the CGIAR External Review:  
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## The Invisible IARChy - 1986-97

*Funding fears drove IARCs in the first half of the 90's to seek out well-connected trustees from large donor countries and to look for Board Chairs and DGs from the "AgreeCulture" countries of Australia, Canada, UK, and USA. Pressed by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and, since 1994, by CGIAR's Chair, Ismail Serageldin, IARC Boards appear to be slowly coming around to a more responsible view of research governance.*

### Trustees in 1997

#### Best Ratio in Ten Years

The last recorded occasion when the number of Southern IARC board trustees matched or exceeded the number from the North was in 1981 at the time of the last System-wide External Review. In 1997, however, 48% of all the trustees from the 16 IARCs hailed from the South - the best ratio since 1987. Almost a fifth of all trustees came from Africa and Asia (18% and 19% respectively) and 11% were from Latin America and the Caribbean. The low figure for Latin America is probably because the region has only three international centres compared to four for Africa (previously five) and six for Asia. Two years ago in 1995, only 44% of all trustees were from the South, and the South/North ratio appeared to be on a worsening trend. (See figure 1 below.)

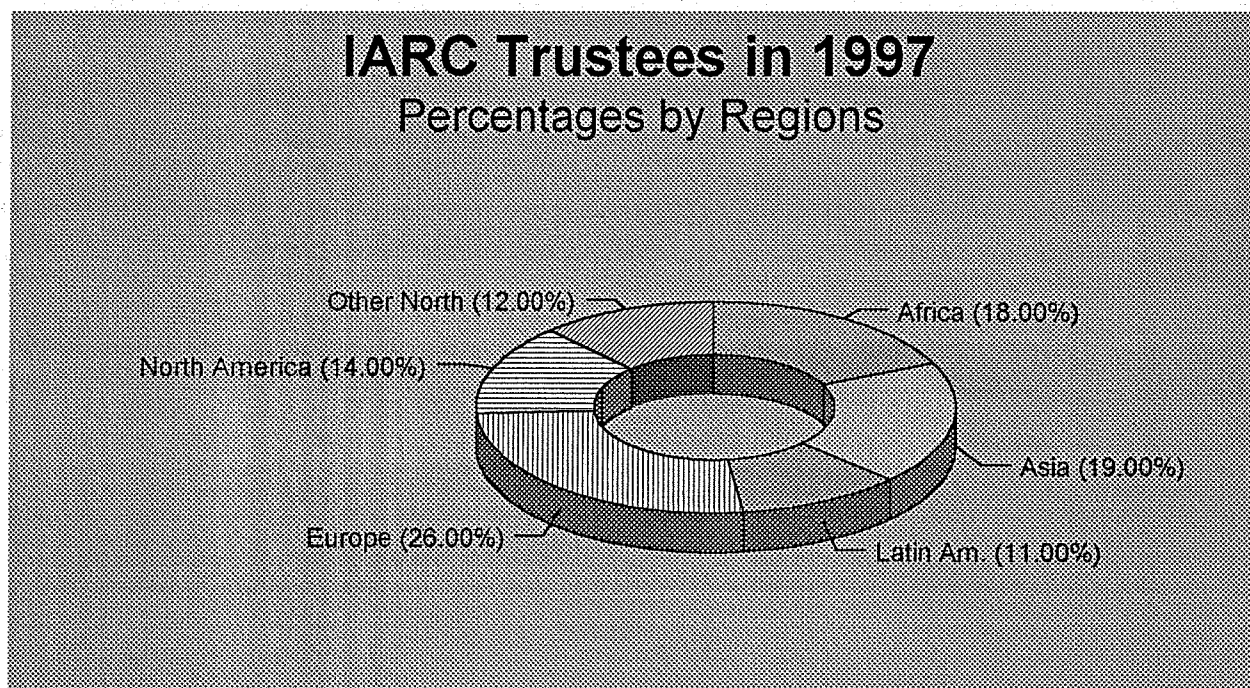


Figure 1

The participation of women in CG governance continued to improve in 1997. Twenty-three percent of all trustees are now women - up from 8% ten years ago. Although this is obviously a long way from equality, the figures are increasing steadily at 2% or more per annum.

Perhaps most telling of all is the declining influence of the CGIAR's *AgreeCulture*. (Figure 2 below) In 1997, 23% of trustees came from the "Gang of Four" (Australia, Canada, UK, and USA) down from the levels of 27%-28% that prevailed in the first half of the nineties.

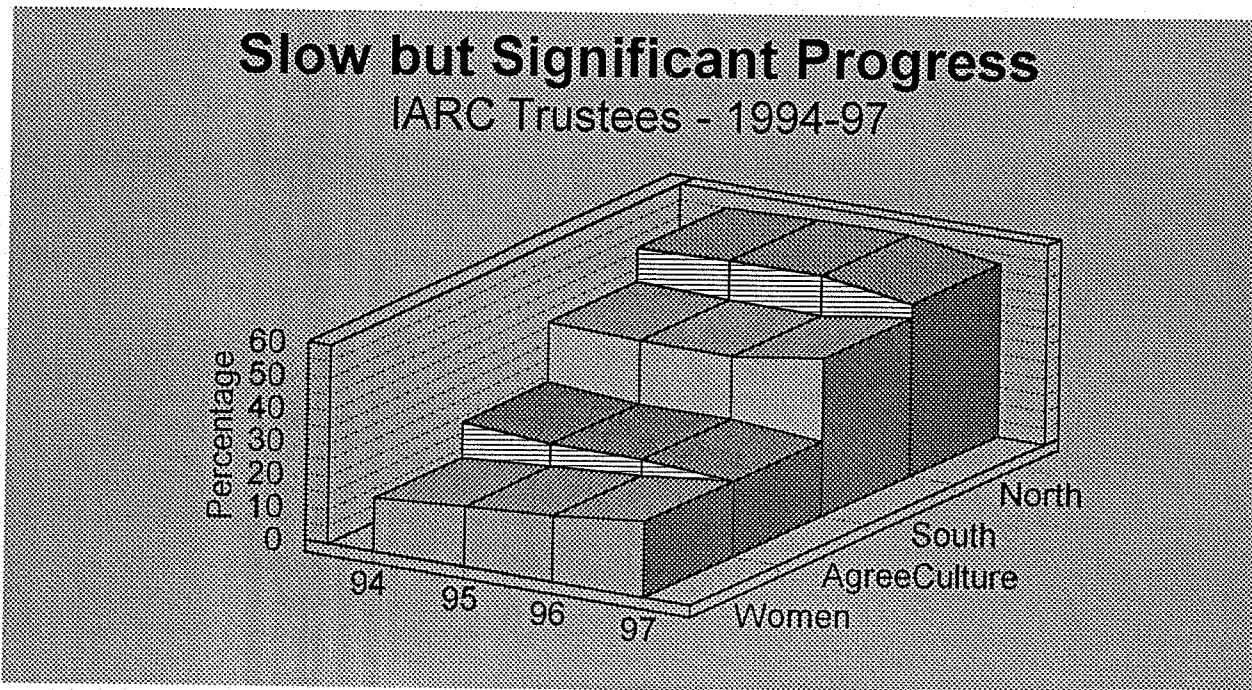


Figure 2

A closer examination of the data shows that this positive trend has a short history. Except for the role of women, the core indicators did not improve until 1995-96 when the CG's donors - led by the CG Chair - grew sufficiently uncomfortable with the South's evident absence from policy-making to apply real pressure on international centres. In the past year, two-thirds of all newly-appointed trustees have been from the South, and two-thirds have also been women. It remains to be seen whether or not the trend will continue, and how far it will go, but the progress is encouraging and those responsible can be congratulated.

### Key IARC Posts in 1997

#### Still a Long Way to Go

IARC boards meet infrequently, and many trustees devote only a few days a year to the contemplation of a centre's research programme or performance. RAFI's analysis of the 74 IARC committee chair positions suggests that the North's hold on key posts has slackened - but not much. In 1997, 60% of the "chair" positions were taken by the North. While this portion runs above the North's share of all trustee seats, the share of chair posts held by women is identical to their ratio of all trustee positions - 23%.

The most important posts, however, are those occupied by the Board Chairs. In 1996, 100% of all chairs were from the North, and in fact, a majority were from the *AgreeCulture*. In 1997, the North's share dipped to less than two-thirds, and the *AgreeCulture* occupied fewer than a third of the seats. Women continue to be grossly under-represented. (For the ratio of women see *figure 8*. For other information see *figures 3 and 4 below* (Chairs referred to in this chart are IARC board chairs only)

## The Eleven Year Trendline - 1986 - 1997

### No Grounds for Complacency

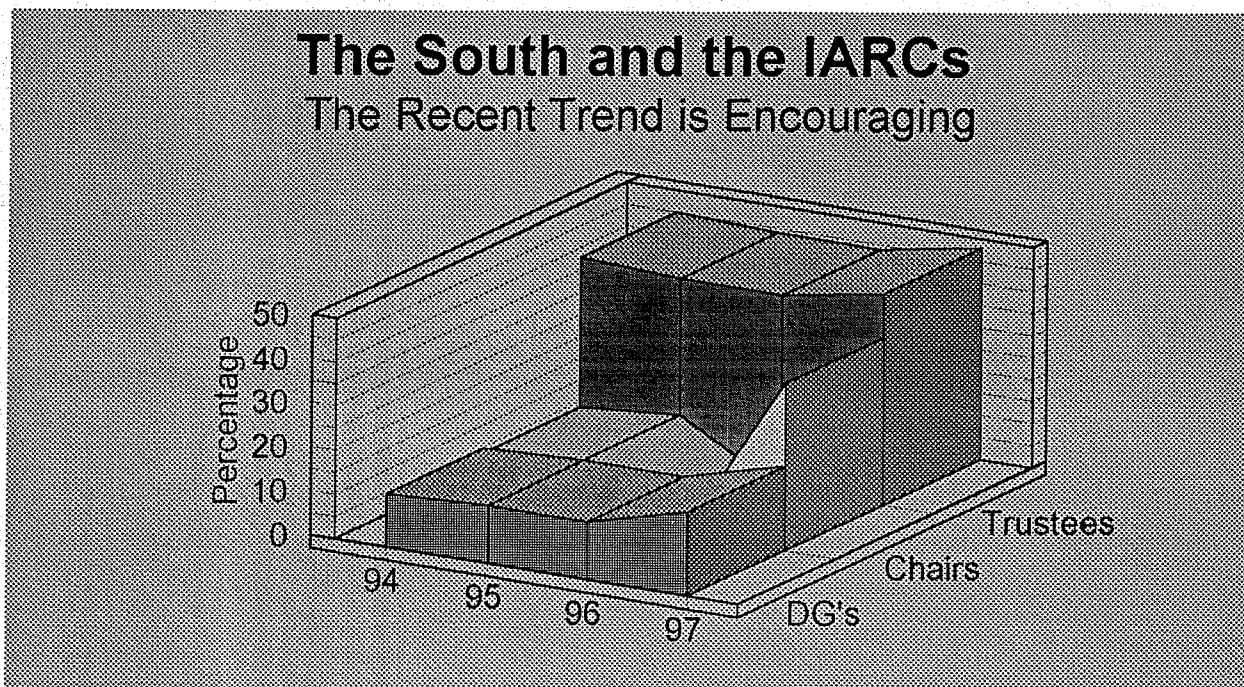


Figure 3

The solution to all of the CGIAR's problems cannot be found in the South/North ratios of the CG's governance. Nevertheless, representation and participation in the governance of agricultural research is a prerequisite for other constructive changes. The three charts below (*figures 5, 6, and 7*) provide a historical overview of CG governance (among the IARCs) since the current system of record-keeping began in 1986. The fluctuating trendline gives no cause for complacency.

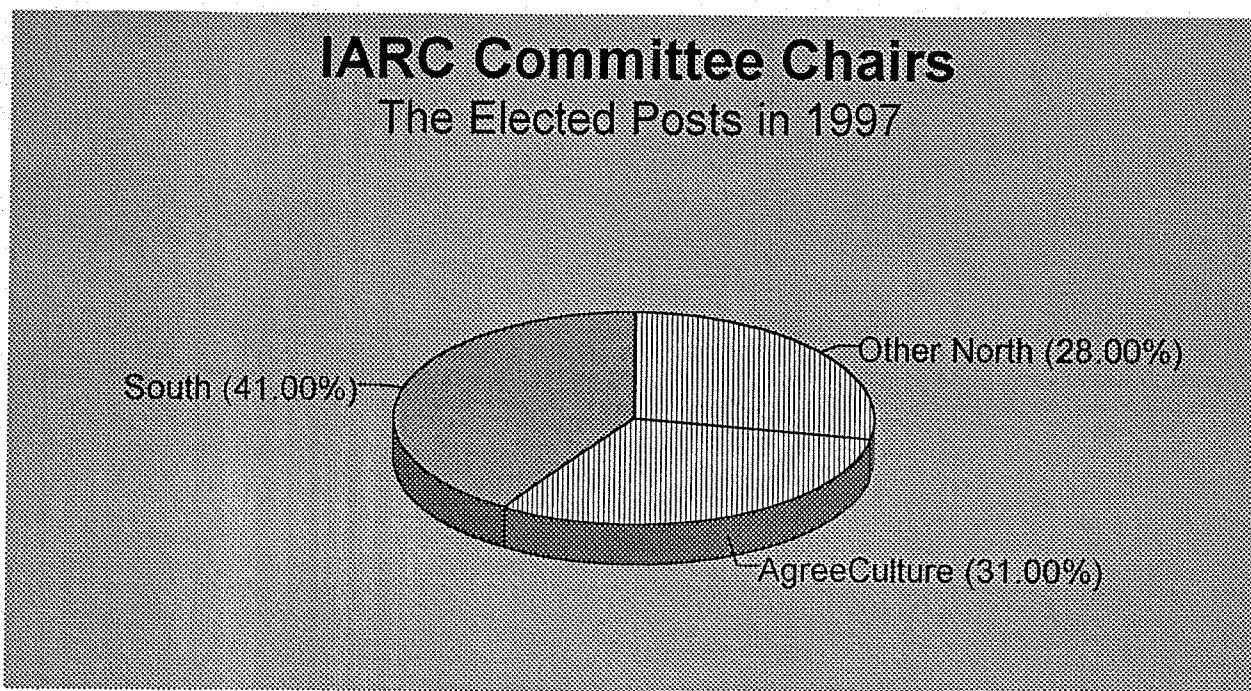
## System Governance in 1997

### Green Lights and Crossed Signals

**CG membership:** In 1997, 23 countries from the North and 19 from the South comprised the formal "State" membership of the System (55% North to 45% South). In addition, however, there are four Foundations - all from Canada or the United States, and 11 international or regional institutions including the four Co-Sponsors (World Bank, FAO, UNDP, UNEP) with IFAD, three regional development banks along with Opec, the Arab Fund and the EC. In total, the Invisible IARChy (it has no by-laws or constitution) claims 57 "voting" members of whom 28 are clearly "North", 21 are "South" and the remainder are intergovernmental bodies with both South and North membership. Although the number of South members has risen dramatically in the past three or four years, the South's share of the total CG budget, in 1996, was only U.S.\$8 million (less than 3%) of the \$304 million total.

During International Centres' Week (ICW), the Chair - on more than one occasion - reminded delegates that their annual gathering at the end of October is the ultimate decision-making authority. The ICWs are also very informal and open - facilitating an almost endless pageant of smaller meetings and financial

negotiations. While the final figures for ICW '97 are not yet in, they will not be significantly different from the participation last year when more than two-thirds of all attendees were from the North.



**Figure 4**

**System-wide Committees:** With the exception of the vital Finance Committee, there is a notable effort among the System-wide Committees to achieve a South/North balance. Indeed, the newest committees tend to give a majority of all positions to the South. However, the Chairs of the committees are usually from the North. The heads of the Oversight, Finance, TAC, and Impact committees are from the North. The Private Sector Committee is co-chaired (South and North), and only the Genetic Resources and NGO Committees are led by South members.

In 1996 (the most recent year for which data is available), there were two "Standing Committees" (Oversight and Finance). Of the six individuals who serve on the Oversight Committee, three (including the UK Chair) are from the North and three are from the South. Of the ten institutional members that form the Finance Committee, two are from the World Bank (the Chair - from the North again) and IFAD and eight are from governments. Of these eight, six are from the North.

Among Advisory Committees, the Genetic Resources Policy Committee, Chaired by M.S. Swaminathan of India, has nine members with four from the North and five from the South. The Impact Assessment and Evaluation Group has only three members and is chaired by an Australian. The all-important Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) - usually described as one of the three pillars of the CG System - is "legislated" to have a South/North balance including representation from the CG's seven regions and from four "disciplines". The Chair, however, is an American, and all TAC Chairs have always come from the North and almost always from the *AgreeCulture* (one exception only - France - since 1971).

Aside from Standing and Advisory Committees, the CG also has two Partnership Committees (NGO and Private Sector). The CG's reports do not attribute nationalities to the members of these committees but both

appear to have strong (possibly majority) South participation. The Chair of the NGO Committee is Chilean while the Private Sector Committee is, as already noted, co-chaired South and North.

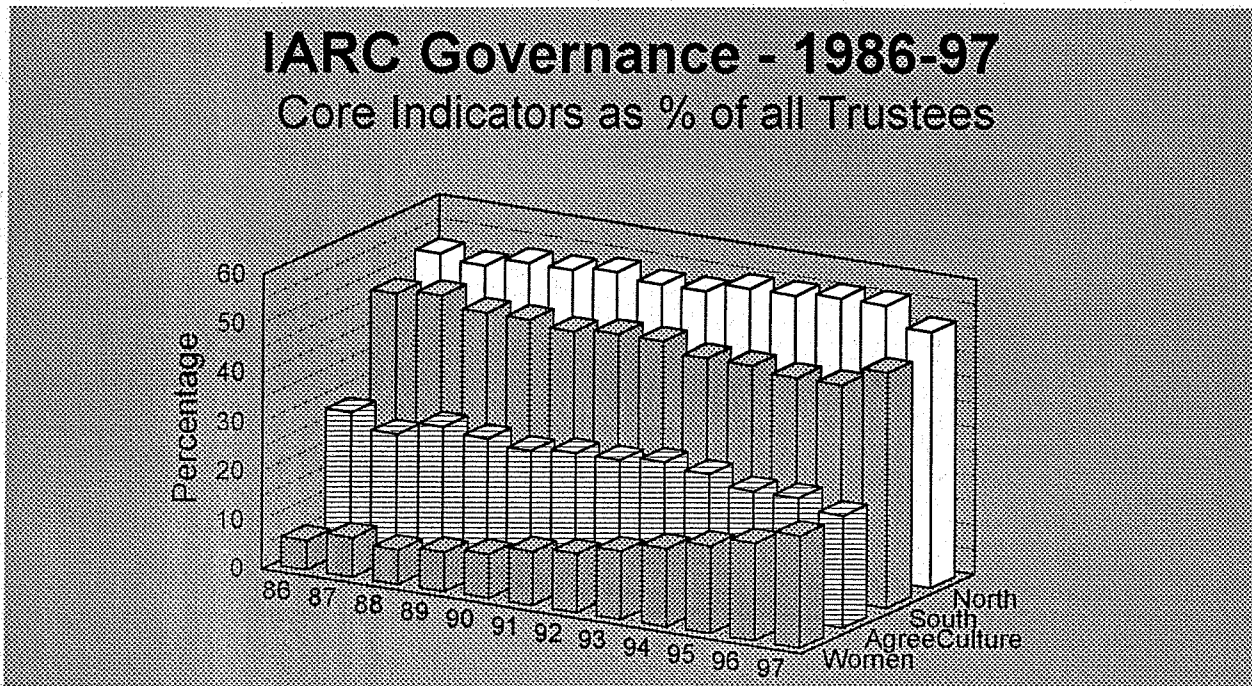


Figure 5

**IARC Senior Staff:** At the time of the CGIAR's second quinquennial review (1981), the panel noted with concern that only "about one-third" of the senior staff positions at the IARCs were held by persons from the South. This ratio may have changed little or not at all in the intervening years. Although CGIAR's secretariat does not appear to track the origin of IARC senior staff closely, its 1997 Gender Program Working Paper suggests that about 60% of the 1190 senior posts are occupied by persons from the North. The North also continues to dominate the posts of IARC Directors-General. While there is marginal improvement over 1996, more than four-fifths of CG DGs come from the North and more than half are still drawn from the *AgreeCulture*.

## Questioning Political Correctness

### Thoughts for the External Review

During ICW '97, several CG members expressed concern that both the External Review Panels and the TAC Biotech Panels do not adequately reflect the membership and partnerships that comprise the CG enterprise. Germany put its criticisms in writing, and a number of others, including The Netherlands, Norway, IDRC, and the chair of the NGO committee - indicated discomfort with the appointment of some (or all) of the panels. In response, the CG Chair attacked the "wave of political correctness" that he suggested was threatening the pursuit of excellence within the System. The TAC biotech panels have three-quarters of their membership in the North and fully half come from only two countries - the USA and the UK. No one from Africa - where the CG spends 40% of its money - is on the biotech panels. In a letter to RAFI in late September, Ismail Serageldin defended the biotech panels stating that they had the "practical experience and proven knowledge" necessary to advise TAC and the CGIAR.

*Questioning expertise:* The Chair's comments - and the make-up of the various panels - raises important questions regarding the nature of "expertise". It is undoubtedly true that the lion's share of the knowledge about molecular biology and genetic engineering resides in the North and that the greatest body of experience with respect to biosafety and intellectual property policy also resides among industrialized countries. Nevertheless, it is hard to understand how TAC and the CGIAR can draw conclusions about the role of biotechnology in agricultural research without a clear sense of the practical needs and working environments within which the new technologies must perform. Some years ago, a World Council of Churches conference

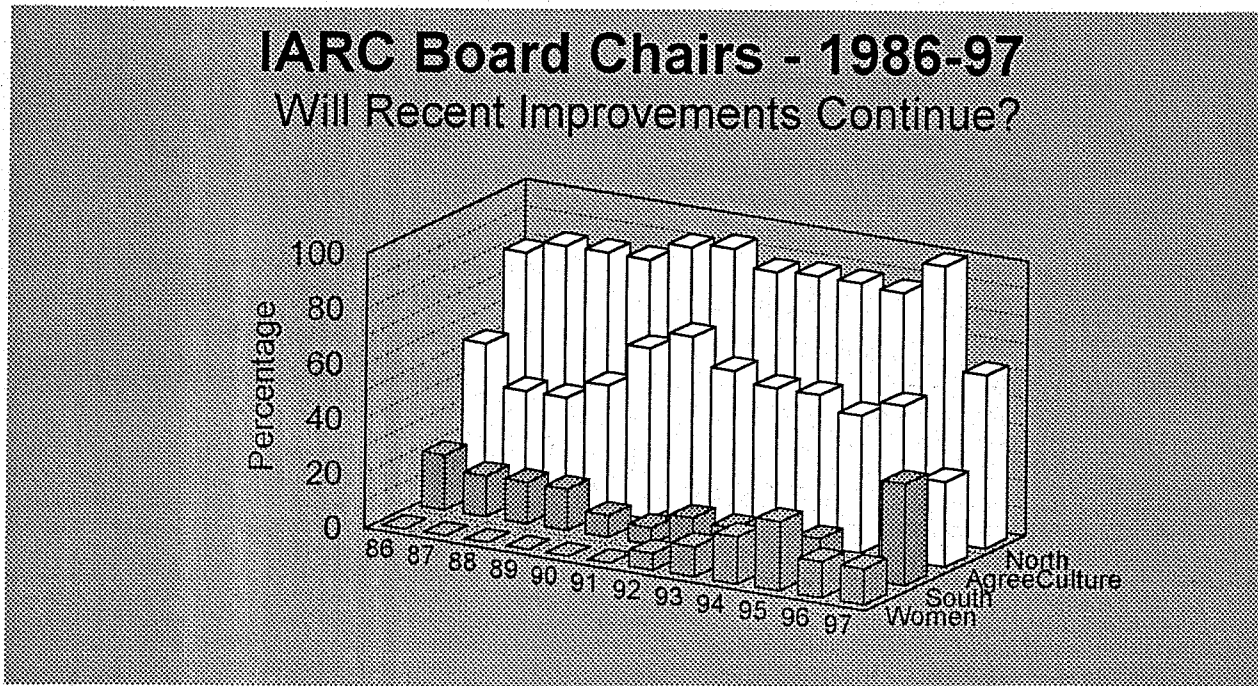


Figure 6

on science and society recorded the tale of a wolf and a lamb that carried out an extensive correspondence over their many useful qualities, contributions to the ecosystem, and shared concerns for the future. It was only when the lamb visited the wolf that they discovered that wolves like lamb chops... a fact of marginal political correctness for the wolf but of consummate significance for the lamb. Since there is almost no "practical experience" with biotechnology in the South, and absolutely no "proven knowledge" on its impact or implications, the need to incorporate the perspective of the potential recipients of the biotech industry's largesse would seem to be something more than an issue of political correctness.

*Questioning commitment:* Some of the statements made during ICW '97 cast doubt on the CG's commitment to achieving an equitable balance in CG governance. The CGIAR has always had a somewhat schizophrenic view of governance. For some years now, for example, it has monitored the participation of women on boards and staff with meticulous attention, providing regular reports identifying progress and shortcomings. As a consequence, the involvement of women has increased very substantially over several years. The CGIAR has not applied the same statistical rigour to South/North representation. Indeed, it is often difficult to identify the nationalities of individuals. Even here however, there is an exception. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that gave birth to the malstructured biotech panels - is committed to a South/North balance despite the heavy demands for specialist scientific expertise. And, according to several insiders, CGIAR has "rigorously monitored" trustee and other key appointments for the South/North balance over the last year or two. So, which is it? Does CGIAR believe in striking a South/North balance or not? Is there one view of political correctness for gender and another for regional representation? The rationale for

correctness amnesia and ambiguity, of course, is that the CG seeks the best and the brightest wherever they make their home (except when it comes to gender - and except when it comes to the highest levels of technical advice - ie. TAC).

**Questioning balance:** Throughout the ICW's debate over political correctness runs an assumption that "balance" means half South and half North. As much as there is merit in observing the continuing South/North (Poor/Rich, Developing/Developed, OECD/G77 & China) divide, the real need is to ensure that

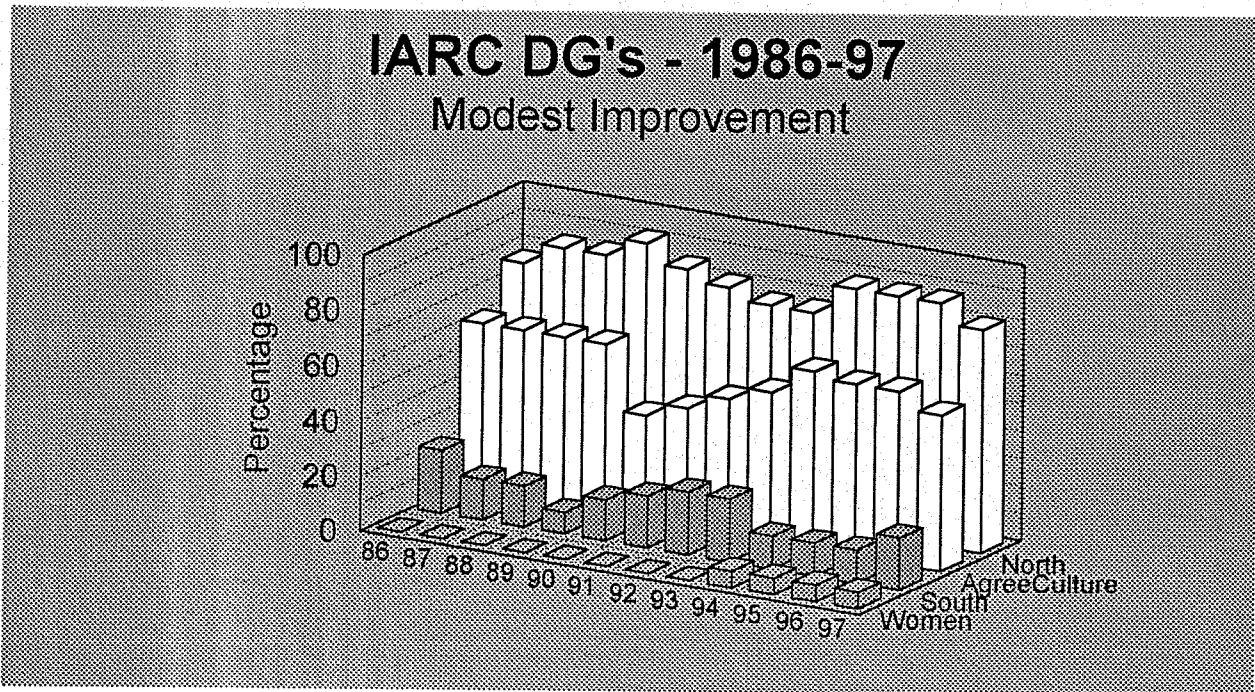


Figure 7

the voice of those who are the target of the CG mandate is heard clearly and in strength. TAC, oddly enough, has struggled with this more than others. TAC seeks representation from each of the seven regions (four South and three North) acknowledged by both CGIAR and FAO. It also seeks representation from physical and social scientists and has made modest efforts to achieve a gender balance. It may well be that the appropriate "balance" for System-wide committees and IARC boards (accepting that each IARC's mandate will necessitate some modifications) could be based on TAC's seven regions approach along with a blend of technical expertise and partnership representation. Should there be any doubt, this should explicitly mean representation from associations of small farmers and agricultural workers. In this era of over-communication, it is reasonable and realistic to involve farmers' associations directly in policy processes.

**Questioning membership:** CGIAR also argues that the South can participate in - even dominate - the System's consultative processes by simply becoming members. On the CG's worldwide web homepage, "membership" appears to be open to any public or private institution that accepts the CG's mission statement and is prepared to contribute to the research agenda. There is no mention of money. Practically, the membership "bar" has been set at somewhere between U.S.\$250,000 and a half-million dollars. This non-transparent membership fee gives rise to many concerns. It must be acknowledged, however, that the CGIAR - and especially Ismail Serageldin - have worked extremely hard and successfully to bring South governments into the CG System. RAFI believes that this initiative indicates an entirely genuine desire to correct a well-recognized inequity. Indeed, much of the present non-transparency in membership criteria is probably due to the desire to make it easier for the South to join while still trying to encourage the North to increase its



financial contributions. Thus, the comments below are not intended to be critical of these sincere efforts, but to identify continuing shortcomings.

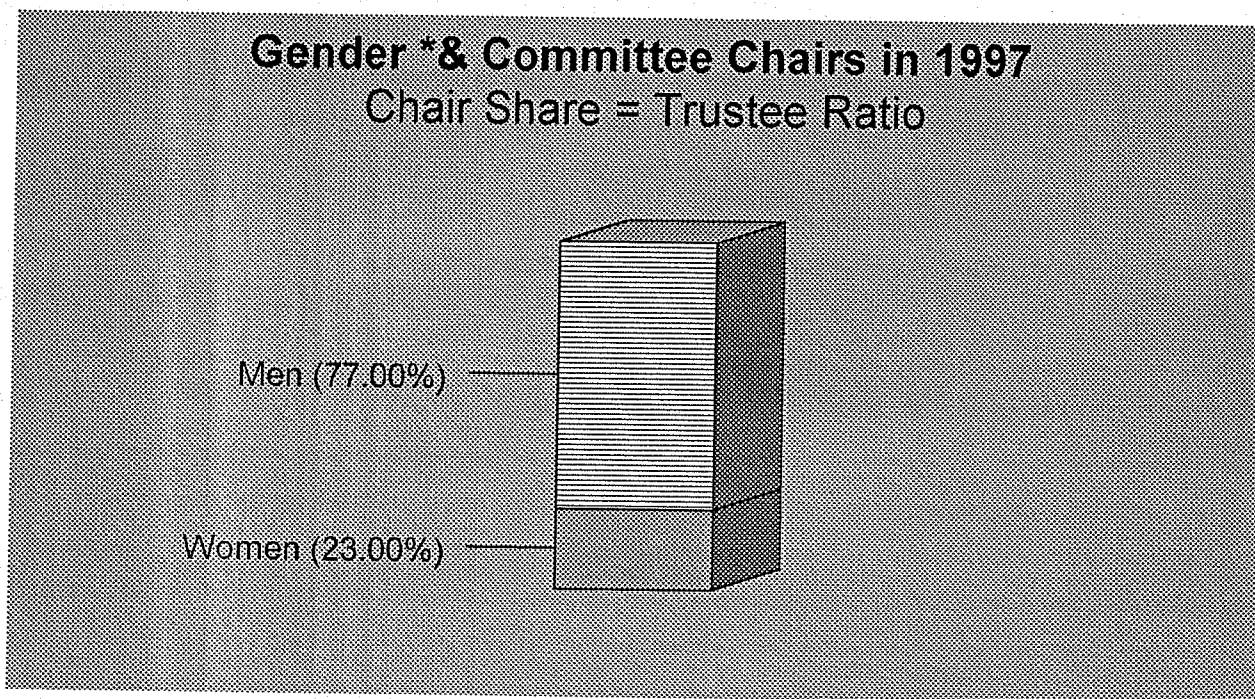


Figure 8

Our first concern is that so-called mandate beneficiaries must be full decision-making participants as a matter of fundamental democracy. It is unacceptable to maintain barriers to their membership. Full stop. If they wish to also contribute financially, that is a separate decision.

Secondly, the basis for financial contributions should, as in the UN, be scaled to national wealth. Otherwise, the CG's highest-priority food insecure countries will be the least able to participate in CG decision-making. This is obviously unreasonable.

Thirdly, the fee approach implicitly reinforces the assumption that those who pay the most have the most authority. This is manifested in the heavy participation of U.S. and Japanese trustees on IARC boards. In the absence of other-than-financial criteria, the current non-transparent approach encourages a "class" approach to governance.

Finally, the current system ignores that there are at least three kinds of CG donors: those who contribute money; those who contribute germplasm; and those who contribute human resources. Some, of course, contribute in more than one category. All three categories should have an equal place at the table. This is a concern that ventures far beyond political correctness. In the absence of the other categories of donors, there is the risk of political impropriety. Only recently has the CG System begun to reluctantly acknowledge that major research benefits have flowed Northward via CGIAR channels. RAFI has argued that the real flow of value to the North is in the order of \$5 billion per annum on an investment of only \$300 million. That the CG governance structure has managed to overlook this reverse flow of benefits is evidence enough that membership criteria and system governance is in sore need of restructuring.

*Questioning the Global Forum:* At its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1996, CGIAR launched the Global Forum on Agricultural Research. Technically, the Forum is not part of the CGIAR but a meeting ground for NARS, IARCS, and others engaged in research to come together and exchange views. In effect, it is an attempt by the CG System to create a protective international umbrella over the CGIAR that will encourage Southern participation while not directly affecting CG work and still avoiding UN-style intergovernmental processes. At this early stage, it is uncertain whether the forum is a true umbrella that will bring together all the actors influencing agricultural research and development - or merely a parasol to beguile frustrated NARS into feeling consulted on the CG's research agenda - or a parachute designed to get the CG out of trouble with Northern donors looking for practical accountability and closer links to national programmes.

International agricultural research is missing its context. The urgent need is for an informal forum within which all the actors - public and private, UN agencies, CGIAR, NARS, governments, foundations, farmers, and civil society organizations, can exchange information and encourage cooperation. It is no more acceptable to conduct supply-side science than it is to conduct agricultural extension or marketing policies in the absence of the best and latest technological advice. The entire international food and agriculture community has been missing a forum for dialogue since the 1974 World Food Congress. The CGIAR could take the lead and build upon its present initiative to turn the Forum on Agricultural Research into a Forum on Sustainable Food Security.

These are all issues which could be addressed by the System-wide Review over the coming months.

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