



Special Advisory Commission on Management Issues (SACMI)

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

San Jose, Costa Rica
3 December 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 3 December 2020 at 8:35 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 administrative, budgetary and strategic technical cooperation issues, with the aim of building consensus on these matters prior to meetings of the Executive Committee (EC) and the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA).

He recalled that, via Resolution No. 660, approved at its Fortieth Regular Meeting on 21 July 2020, the Executive Committee resolved: 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 SACMI to serve as an extended permanent working group aimed at supporting, analyzing and developing a proposal for IICA’s comprehensive transformation.

In this regard, he noted that both the report of the First Extraordinary Meeting of the SACMI, held on 1 October 2020, and the document to be analyzed during the Second Extraordinary Meeting, had been made available on the Institute’s online information system in a timely manner.

He mentioned that the 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 mentioned that the following IICA member countries were also in attendance on that occasion: Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. Annex 1 includes the list of participants.

Remarks by the Director General

The Director General welcomed the participants of the Second Extraordinary Meeting of the 2020 SACMI. Next, he expressed his condolences and solidarity to the Central American and Caribbean countries that had been affected by hurricanes Eta and Iota in November. He remarked that these catastrophic events had once again demonstrated the fragility of ecosystems in those regions, whose resilience must be strengthened as a matter of urgency. He also conveyed his condolences to the families who had lost loved ones to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

He mentioned that, after nearly a year since the onset of the pandemic, the world was facing the worst economic recession of the century, and extreme poverty had increased for the first time in

20 years, affecting one tenth of the world's population and generating food and nutritional insecurity. Consequently, the Americas was facing a dramatic situation.

He highlighted the fact that agriculture had been able to feed 650 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean and to maintain a growing share of international markets, despite the overall decline in global trade. He also emphasized the key role that agriculture and associated production chains were playing in preventing the health crisis from becoming a food crisis.

He noted that the Institute was certain that the agriculture sector must play a strategic role in driving the economic reactivation of all countries, with a social and environmental focus. He stressed the fact that the new frontiers of knowledge and the role of information and communication technologies offered great possibilities to be explored.

The Director General added that the crisis was highlighting the value of cooperation between nations and that technical cooperation agencies must support this process by making the requisite adjustments and changes to respond to the circumstances in the best way possible, as well as to develop national, regional and hemispheric agendas that take into account new demands and needs.

He underscored the fact that IICA listens, proposes and takes timely action to respond to the demands of the countries. Therefore, despite existing difficulties, the Institute had accelerated its transformation process and begun to implement the new business model that had been announced to the Executive Committee. He also pointed out that, in addition to boosting productivity, focusing on relevant actions and fostering financial sustainability, the model was promoting an increasingly horizontal, decentralized organization that works closely with the countries, meeting their demands and needs by providing new technical cooperation services with a forward-looking and proactive approach.

He mentioned that, as a follow-up to the commitment he had undertaken during the previous extraordinary meeting of the SACMI, he had presented the foundation for the Institute's new financial architecture and continued to engage in dialogue in this regard with the countries, which had enabled him to address their doubts, listen to their suggestions and gain their support. He highlighted the fact that the initiative was responding to the growing financial difficulties that the Institute had been experiencing, whose resolution required, more than ever, a renewed commitment on the part of the Member States, in keeping with the "spirit of '42".

The Director General concluded his remarks by stating that, in 2021, international cooperation in the Americas would be the subject of a very intense agenda, including at the United Nations Food Systems Summit, in which IICA would play a key role and which would be preceded by the Twenty-first Regular Meeting of the IABA.

Report of the Director General on progress achieved in implementing IICA's new financial architecture

The Director General presented the video entitled "Business model and proposal for a new financial architecture: Towards IICA 4.0", which summarized the progress achieved in implementing the model.

The presentation began by highlighting the high level of uncertainty that the Institute was facing with respect to guaranteeing its financial sustainability and maintaining the timeliness and quality of its technical cooperation response capacity.

Next, it explained that the new business model involved: a) the dissemination of science and technology applications in agriculture and its connection to rural life (knowledge management); b) the establishment of cooperation and coordination relationships with institutions that pursue similar objectives (management of networks); and c) IICA serving as an entity for consultation, administration and technical execution of programs and projects, based on agreements with governments and other regional or international entities (project management).

The presentation described the development of a roadmap involving three lines of action: a) targeting of the Institute's technical cooperation agenda, based on the current priorities of the Member States; b) increasing the productivity of institutional resources; and c) sustainably and significantly increasing the relevance of the Institute's cooperation services.

It listed the progress achieved, including: a) a methodology to tailor the cooperation agendas of the countries to the post-COVID-19 scenarios; b) a more horizontal organizational structure, with a network and project management focus, which proactively incorporates human talent skills certification; and c) a proposal for a new financial architecture.

Next, the presentation referred to the context that made it necessary to implement a new financial architecture. It stated that, as at October 2020, there was a balance of USD 25.3 million in outstanding quotas from Member States – equivalent to 87% of the Institute's annual quota budget. The delayed payment of quotas, which had been further aggravated by the health crisis, had greatly affected IICA's operational capacity and sustainability in the medium term. The video highlighted a key aspect of the business model – reducing the level of outstanding quotas. It also stated the need to encourage countries to make voluntary contributions, as had occurred in previous years.

The video further indicated that miscellaneous income had steadily declined over the past six years, amounting to USD 1.5 million at that time, which was USD 1 million less than the amount projected in the 2020-2021 Program Budget. It showed that indirect cost recovery (ICR) from the management of projects was expected to reach close to USD 6 million (figures available as at 31 October) in 2020, given that the health measures implemented by the countries to curb the spread of COVID-19 were significantly limiting the implementation of projects.

The presentation stressed that the aforementioned situation demonstrated the Institute's financial vulnerability, which would make it necessary to redesign its financial architecture in the short term.

It was explained that, in addition to including the three main funding sources (Member State quotas, miscellaneous income and income derived from ICR for the management of technical cooperation projects), the new financial architecture was seeking to obtain resources from new sources, which might include: a) accreditation to global climate funds, b) expansion of the portfolio of externally funded projects, c) use of existing institutional capacities to provide services, d) establishment of

partnerships to identify solutions, e) trust mechanisms, f) investment diversification and upgrading of the institutional treasury, and g) creation of the Innovation Fund for Resilience in the Americas.

The video also indicated that IICA was in the final phase of its Green Climate Fund accreditation process, which would enable the Institute to be in a position to better support its member countries.

With respect to expanding the portfolio of externally funded projects, it was stated that this could be achieved by incorporating more external resources, whether from Member States, associate states or permanent observer countries, as well as by making greater use of pre-investment funds and new types of support from international cooperation agencies and international financial organizations. To this end, it would be advisable to establish a common goal for 2024: to guarantee an IICA portfolio of projects and initiatives, valued at close to USD 250 million per year.

Regarding the proposal to better capitalize on the Institute's existing capacities to offer services, the video highlighted IICA's vast store of knowledge in the thematic areas of its five technical programs, which it could offer to various beneficiaries, such as multilateral funding agencies, by implementing a cost recovery policy.

It was noted that "win-win" partnerships to identify solutions, such as agreements with companies or organizations, would facilitate the development of business undertakings; the promotion of essential goods and services, such as agricultural insurance and certifications; the development of information and communication technologies; as well as capacity building and educational training.

On the matter of fund or trust administration, it was stressed that the Institute could make available its vast experience in this field and in technical cooperation management to provide support for causes or development projects for businessmen or farmers, while strictly adhering to standards of transparency and accountability. This would expand IICA's portfolio of third-party services.

The video explained that the creation of an Innovation Fund for Resilience in the Americas would allow for supporting agricultural development through a series of cooperation initiatives funded with its own resources, external resources and new funds that incorporate financial innovations and integrate solutions to respond to the needs of countries in a timely manner.

Lastly, it was indicated that defining and implementing the new business model and the new financial architecture, with the support of Member States, were tasks that were permissible under the rules and regulations of IICA, and were feasible, given the Institute's accumulated experience in resource management and cooperation, in keeping with the objectives established in its current Medium-term Plan (MTP).

Analysis and comments by SACMI member countries

The Representative of Brazil indicated that a more resilient Institute was needed to overcome cash flow limitations resulting from countries' late quota payments, which was generating a great deal of uncertainty. He mentioned the need to identify alternatives to eliminate that uncertainty, such as

the new sources of income identified by IICA in the proposal for the new business model and financial architecture.

He recommended that the Institute conduct market research to identify best practices applied by other organizations to access new funds. He highlighted IICA's efforts to generate opportunities for technical cooperation, such as the events related to living soils that it had recently organized. He also expressed his satisfaction with the Institute's upcoming participation in the United Nations Food Systems Summit, to be held in 2021. He concluded his remarks by stating that his country would comply with the payment of its quotas and undertake efforts to avoid falling into arrears in the future.

The Representative of Canada recognized IICA's initiative to improve its financial architecture. He noted that, for more than 50 years, Canada had worked closely with the Institute to strengthen agricultural development in the Americas. He highlighted the value of IICA's technical cooperation in designing and implementing food security projects that boost prosperity in the countries. He also underscored the financial prudence with which the Institute was carrying out its activities and the efforts undertaken to implement the necessary reforms that would enable it to continue fulfilling its role for the benefit of the Member States. He acknowledged the efforts of the countries to remain up to date with their quota payments and urged those in arrears to do so as well.

He added that Canada supported the proposal to expand IICA's portfolio of externally funded projects to USD 250 million. He asked the Director General how that goal would be achieved. He also inquired as to whether the Institute was planning to hold a virtual hemispheric meeting of ministers in December 2020.

The Director General addressed the remarks made by the Representatives of Brazil and Canada, explaining that one of the proposals for the new financial architecture arose after having realized that other organizations had been seeking to diversify their income for some time, with the support of their member countries. He indicated that, in general, voluntary contributions accounted for between 40% and 60% of resources in the budgets of those organizations and stressed that many of them had already been accredited to the Green Climate Fund – something that the Institute was expecting to achieve in June 2021.

He explained that in 2018, the execution of external resources was approximately USD 154 million, but that there had been a downward trend over the last two years, which had been further aggravated by the current COVID-19 crisis. However, he explained that the expected increase was posited on the formulation of better projects, through the application of a bottom-up approach, which would facilitate the development of proposals that were more relevant to the demands and needs of the countries. He appealed to the countries to entrust IICA to execute a greater number of projects. As such, he referred to successful projects in Honduras in the area of coffee cultivation and the solidarity bonus for food security. He also spoke of Mexico, where IICA had undertaken highly technical projects in agricultural health and food safety, involving considerable sums.

With respect to the query about the hemispheric ministerial meetings, he pointed out that the first meeting was chaired by the Minister of Agriculture of Chile and the second by the Secretary of Agriculture of Mexico, both with the joint support of the Institute and the Food and Agriculture

Organization of the United Nations (FAO). He remarked that in the second meeting, consideration was given to the request by Peru's Minister of Agriculture to host a third high-level meeting in December 2020, but this had not materialized, due to unforeseen circumstances. The Director General also advised that, at the request of the countries, IICA had also conducted regional meetings with the members of the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC), the members of the Southern Agricultural Council (CAS) and the ministers of the Caribbean. The Director General then advised that the next meeting of the IABA would be held in September 2021, prior to the United Nations Food Systems Summit.

The Representative of Argentina thanked the Institute for its support in preventing the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic from becoming even more challenging. He remarked on the clarity with which the information on the financial architecture and the business model had been presented. He said that he felt the moment was ideal for the institutional transformation that these initiatives would require, while expressing support for IICA's proposal to identify other sources of funding.

The Representative of the United States of America thanked the team for the presentation on the current financial situation of the Institute and underscored the important role that IICA plays as a specialized agency for agriculture and food safety technical cooperation in the Americas. He commented that the new business model and financial architecture should be implemented on a solid foundation and one that was sustainable in the future. He endorsed the work of the Director General and stressed the importance of IICA responding to the needs of Member States. He also encouraged countries to continue providing funding to the Institute, which would allow it to reduce the current level of outstanding quotas, which account for 87% of the annual quota budget.

The Representative of Mexico thanked the Director General for the updates regarding the developments in the business model. She felt that the study was extremely well structured, with strategic proposals that were relevant and timely, given the current context. She referred to its most innovative aspects, specifically, the following: a) the combination of three strategies for financial strengthening: quota collection, provision of voluntary quotas and new mechanisms to mobilize external resources, and b) skills certification at IICA, which would assist it to strengthen its *raison d'être*, spur innovation, as well as enhance productivity, relevance and sustainability. Additionally, she expressed her satisfaction that, amidst the current uncertainties, the Institute had devised a clearly defined roadmap that would guarantee it the financial sustainability to support member countries that were faced with greater demands due to the existing crisis. On the other hand, she indicated that competition between international organizations to capture resources would become increasingly fierce, and thus it would be critical to devise a proposal based on the issues of production development, climate change, innovation and hemispheric infrastructure, in order to forge permanent alliances.

Finally, she reiterated her support for the Director General's implementation of the new business model and encouraged countries to utilize IICA's services. By way of example, she mentioned that the Institute's Delegation in Mexico enjoyed the confidence of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER) and other decentralized agencies, such as the National Service for Agrifood Health, Safety and Quality (SENASICA), which had entrusted IICA to execute close to

USD 90 million and had widely recognized the excellence with which it had undertaken these efforts.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Mexico for her remarks, indicating that the Institute would continue to support actions geared towards production development in that country. He also reiterated that he would continue to work to rationalize the use of financial resources to inspire confidence in the countries with respect to IICA's management of its resources. On the other hand, he thanked the Representative of the United States of America for urging countries to reduce the level of outstanding quotas owed to the Institute.

The Deputy Director General of the Institute stressed that financial sustainability was vital to ensuring IICA's ability to positively impact the countries. He pointed out that the United Nations Food Systems Summit would be held in the upcoming year and that the Americas would play a key role in the event. Thus, under the leadership of the Director General, IICA would work alongside Member States to defend agriculture, science and sustainable forms of production at the summit, seeking to make certain that Member States would be duly represented at that forum.

Analysis and comments by non-members of the SACMI

The Representative of Saint Lucia recognized and endorsed the efforts to develop a financial architecture that would place the Institute at the forefront of agriculture 4.0. He expressed gratitude for the support that IICA had given to his country during the ongoing period. He indicated that the business model should be geared towards addressing the demands and needs of the countries. So too did he reaffirm his country's commitment to maintaining its quota payments up to date and urged others to do the same, with a view to strengthening the financial position of the Institute.

The Representative of Honduras highlighted the close partnership maintained between IICA and his country over the preceding year. He mentioned that the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock (SAG) had noted the transparency with which the Institute had presented its expenditure and the practical and expeditious way in which it had undertaken projects. He advised that, as at that date, his country had entrusted IICA to administer more than USD 13 million and that the intention was for it to administer a further USD 9 million in the future.

He explained that the Institute had collaborated in administering resources for the following projects: a) a coffee fertilization project that would benefit 91,000 producers; b) a solidarity production bonus project, through which improved bean and corn seeds, strawberry cuttings, and avocado and *pitahaya* plants had been distributed to farmers, as well as kits to fishermen in the Mosquitia region; c) a biosecurity measures project for one million coffee pickers; and d) a project to provide an emergency bonus. He thanked the Director General for the support offered in transparently and effectively executing these nationally funded projects. He ended by indicating that, in the short term, he hoped to engage IICA to execute other externally funded projects.

The Representative of Peru thanked IICA for the cooperation provided to his country and endorsed the proposed financial architecture to capture funding. He informed the meeting that the payment of Peru's outstanding quota would be settled in short order. He highlighted the importance of forging partnerships with multilateral agencies, such as the Latin American Development Bank

(CAF), the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which all offer loans to the agriculture sector in various countries. In Peru's case, specifically, he expressed the need to improve strategic support to small farmers, in order to boost their productivity and increase their income. This would necessitate the provision of services tailored to specific territories, given the heterogeneity of the Andean region and the effects of climate change.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Saint Lucia for his message and for ensuring quota payments were kept up to date. He advised him that IICA had created a fund to support the countries of the Caribbean and indicated that the Institute would continue to strengthen its project portfolio. He welcomed the comment by the Representative of Honduras on the transparency and agility with which IICA had responded to that country's demands.

He then underscored the importance of the work undertaken to capture external resources and diversify funding sources in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Peru, Ecuador and El Salvador, where resources have been mobilized from national institutions and multilateral agencies. With respect to the comments by the Representative of Peru, he stated that the Institute was working with CAF on issues such as blockchain technology, for which pre-investment funds had been obtained.

The Director General reported that significant progress had been achieved in respect of public-private partnerships with Bayer, Microsoft, Syngenta and Corteva Agriscience, and announced the establishment of a new partnership with the non-governmental organization, Precision Agriculture for Development (PAD), headed by Mr. Michael Kremer, Nobel Prize winner for Economics. IICA would be executing a project with PAD in Brazil, along with similar projects in other countries on family farming-related issues.

He announced that on 4 December, IICA would launch the "Living Soils of the Americas" program, in partnership with Dr. Rattan Lal, Director of the Carbon Management and Sequestration Center (CMASC) of Ohio State University. He explained that the program had garnered the support of private sector organizations and multilateral funding agencies for soil regeneration – an area in which the Institute was seeking to make headway, in view of its participation in the Food Systems Summit in 2021.

The Representative of Haiti expressed support for the implementation of IICA's new financial architecture, which he said was timely, given the difficult global situation affecting the Caribbean and his country. He thanked the Institute for having responded to the technical cooperation demands of his country's agrifood sector. He urged other member countries to support the proposal.

The Director General thanked the Representative of Haiti for the support pledged, reiterating IICA's commitment to work with Haiti to transform its agriculture sector, which has such enormous potential.

He made special mention of the extensive participation of the countries in the two extraordinary meetings of the SACMI in 2020, with a view to complying with Resolution IICA/CE/Res. 660 (XL-O/20). This, he said, demonstrated the support and interest of the Member States in the ongoing transformation process, amidst the difficult financial situation facing the Institute.

He ended by summarizing the main points of agreement that had arisen out of the meeting: a) the promotion of greater efforts in each of the countries to bring outstanding quotas up to date, mindful of the challenges that everyone was facing and considering the possibility of voluntary contributions; b) facilitating greater participation by IICA in externally funded projects, which would also enable it to bolster its technical cooperation services and finances; and c) providing political support to the efforts of the General Directorate at the national, regional and hemispheric levels, both in terms of accreditation to international funds, as well as the establishment of partnerships that would equip IICA to expand its range of technical cooperation services.

Close of the session

At 10:03 a.m. in Costa Rica, on 3 December 2020, having completed the analysis and discussion of the items proposed, the Director General thanked the members of the SACMI and the other participants and declared the meeting closed.

Annex No. 1
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