

Workshop Report # 1

CG-Open University Program Development Workshop Washington, D.C. July 28-30, 2003

Organized by IFPRI¹

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(DRAFT)

In response to the Centers' Director Committee (CDC) request to develop a CG-Open University program document, IFPRI invited a core team of national and international experts to a CGIAR-Open University Program Development Workshop held at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) from July 28-30, 2003. This program development workshop brought together a core team of experts to:

- Develop an operational CG-Open University program,
- Establish the key outputs for this program,
- Set up milestones,
- Establish tools for monitoring and evaluating the program, and
- Project a budget.

This report summarizes the key issues that were discussed during the CG-Open University Program Development workshop. The report also lays down the agreed follow-up activities for initiating and implementing the CG-Open University. During July 28-30, 2003 a select group of leaders representing the national agricultural research systems, national agricultural universities, global distance education organizations, the donor community, and the members of select CGIAR centers came together to discuss the concept note that has been developed by IFPRI on behalf of the CGIAR centers and to review feedback received from the task force members (represented by the training officers of the CGIAR centers). The select group also discussed various ways and means of developing and implementing the CG-Open University Program over the next five years.

The workshop participants included:

Stein Bie, Agricultural University of Norway (NORAGRIC)
Joe Coffey (Scholars Without Borders, AAEA)
Michael Foley, Senior Distance Learning Specialist, GDLN, The World Bank
Heather Harkins, Distance Learning Specialist, The World Bank
Manuel Lantin, CGIAR Secretariat
Hussein Mansour, Agricultural Minister, Embassy of Egypt
Peter Materu, Former Interim Executive Director, African Virtual University
Julien de Meyer, Training Officer, CIMMYT
Rex L. Navarro, ICRISAT
Willis Oluoch-Kosura, Planning Coordinator, East and Southern African Programs for Agricultural Economics
Panjab Singh, Director, Indira Gandhi Open University
Paul West, Educational Specialist, Commonwealth Virtual University
Suresh Babu, Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI

Ashwin Bhouraskar, Senior Research Assistant, IFPRI
Valerie Rhoe, Research Analyst, IFPRI

The workshop participants undertook three major groups of activities during the three days of the workshop.

The first major activity was to take stock of virtual university activities that have been implemented at the global level and to learn lessons from existing initiatives. Key people involved in such activities made a series of presentations on the following:

- Experiences of the African Virtual University (AVU)
- Lessons from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)
- The Challenges Faced by the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN, The World Bank)
- The East Africa Regional Program on the Postgraduate Degree in Agricultural Economics
- Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, India)
- Scholars Without Borders – A Program Being Developed by the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA)
- The Distance Education Experiences of Norwegian Agricultural University

The second group of activities of the workshop included a thorough understanding and discussion of the CG-OU draft concept note that was presented during the CDC meeting in May 2003. Thus far, 15 CGIAR centers have given their comments on the draft concept note through their task force members. The revised concept note along with the feedback from the CGIAR centers was presented to the participants and discussed. Also, the existing distance learning activities of the CGIAR centers were also reviewed by participants in order to determine what is currently available that can contribute to CG-OU activities in the next year.

The third group of activities related to developing a road map for the CG-OU in two phases. The first phase would cover the next two years with the initial period leading up to the AGM 2003 meeting. In phase two, additional activities for expanding and increasing the sustainability of the CG-OU have been identified.

Major outcomes of the discussions were:

- There was a *consensus* that the CGIAR centers as a whole endorsed the idea of a system-wide program that should be organized in order to build serious agricultural research capacity in developing countries. In this the CGIAR system

members including the NARS should be partners in developing and delivering the capacity strengthening programs through CG-OU.

- The workshop participants clearly identified various *comparative advantages* that CGIAR centers have in providing capacity strengthening activities including high-quality teaching and training materials that can be used for strengthening capacity of developing country professionals through CG-OU.
- It is important that the CG-Open University *adds value* to the existing training activities of the CGIAR centers and to the existing capacity strengthening program of the national, regional, and international partners.
- It was recognized that the efforts to start and implement the CG-Open University be *initiated immediately* with the consent of the Center Directors and the core courses be started in the areas where CGIAR centers have a niche to contribute to the existing capacity strengthening activities in developing and developed countries.
- CGIAR centers are in the business of *producing public goods* and as part of it the training and teaching materials and the capacity strengthening activities of the CG-OU should be considered a public good from the CGIAR centers and the capacity of the CGIAR centers in producing such public good should be effectively utilized for implementing the CG-OU activities.
- In order to obtain formal acceptance and approval of the CDC, which is currently overseeing the activities of the CG-OU, following this meeting, a *detailed proposal including a business plan* and budget should be produced. Initially the proposal will be circulated among task force members of the CG centers and finalized for presentation to the CDC before submission to stakeholders at the 2003 AGM meeting in Nairobi.
- One of the immediate activities recommended is to *undertake an inventory* of the existing modules that can be readily used for distance education, and which can become open access materials, at least at the Masters-level. Also, modules that can be quickly re-engineered in order to include them in the basic courses for the CG-Open University should be quickly identified.
- As a next step these *modules can be made available* within the next six months for the normal accredited universities as well as open universities in developing and developed countries for full or partial use in their own ongoing capacity building activities.
- While Masters-level and mid-career level capacity strengthening should be the *primary focus* in the first two years, the next three years of the program should focus on Ph.D. degree programs in collaboration with degree-awarding

institutions and keeping in mind that there is room for CG-OU to offer degrees in the long run with proper accreditation procedures.

- In terms of funding, it is important that this CG-OU initiative *identifies new funding sources* since the CGIAR centers, which are already stretched for funding and existing training budgets, can only contribute marginally to the CG-OU.
- It is also important that we package the CG-OU activity with an *attractive name*, a brand established *with a logo* and information materials in the form of brochures be prepared for marketing the initiative during the AGM meeting in Nairobi.
- The primary goal of the CG-OU activity should be to place in *open access* a sufficient number of modules from the CGIAR centers that may form 3-5 M.Sc. programs that generate momentum both among national partners as well as among the donor community for sustaining the activities.
- On a *pilot basis* CG-OU should offer these 3-5 M.Sc. programs in collaboration with the universities in developing and developed countries that can pick and choose various modules and CG-OU should assist in the formulation of the program when materials are borrowed from it.
- The *issue of language* should be seriously considered. In addition to English, the materials could be produced in French, Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish in order to reach more participants and attract non-conventional donors who support CG-OU activities.
- The business plan to be prepared should indicate to CDC various modes of operation including the possibility of implementing CG-OU as a *system-wide program*.
- It is important that a *dynamic individual* be identified to initiate activities and run the core activities of the CG-OU and can take a small group of people along with him/her in order to create the needed momentum for establishing and implementing the CG-OU.
- IFPRI's Director General, Dr. Joachim Von Braun, will present the program document/business plan/budget at the next CDC meeting. The participants of the meeting agreed that IFPRI has so far taken serious efforts to lead the initiative and hence should be the *focal point for continuing the process* of initiating the CG-OU activity.

The participants focused on extensive discussion in order to develop the program document. They agreed that the following must be emphasized in the program documents:

- The concept of CG-OU and the context in which CG-OU can be developed and implemented in order to add value to the capacity strengthening efforts of the CGIAR centers as well as *national partners* in developing and developed countries.
- Content creation and delivery of capacity strengthening activities through CG-OU was discussed. While CGIAR centers can come together in the form of CG-OU to provide the contents for creating the courses and academic programs, the existing delivery mechanisms of the national partners in developing and developed could be used for implementing capacity strengthening activities. This should be done with an *imprint of CGIAR quality and excellence* in the subject matter.
- Discussions also focused on developing a *consortium of CG-OU-related institutions* with identifying clear roles for CGIAR centers as content provider, as a catalyst for further developing capacity for agricultural research in developing countries, and for coalition building among the CGIAR partners as well as the national and international partners in developing and delivering the capacity strengthening activities under the CG-OU.
- Detailed discussions on the *clients and targets for the CG-OU activities* indicated that the key starting point could be the M.Sc. and Ph.D. programs as primary activities followed by development of mid-career professionals for undertaking agricultural development activities. This could be further extended to create capacity for creating awareness among the agriculture professionals in developing countries.
- The *comparative advantage of CGIAR* in terms of the large volumes of content that have been created through research in the past was discussed along with the nature of the international public good that is being created both through research and training and outreach activities of the CGIAR institutions. Such comparative advantage puts CG-OU in position to provide the teaching and training materials in an open access form as a global public good to benefit the capacity strengthening activities, and to innovate capacity strengthening in agricultural development.
- Discussions also focused on program *costs and funding* that may be required to initiate and implement the program. It was agreed that it may be essential to have new funding to initiate the activities. The funding should be considered seed funding in order to provide the basic public goods from CG-OU at least over the next five years after which the self-sustaining nature of CG-OU could be considered and developed as the program further develops.
- In the closing session, it was suggested and agreed upon among the participants that the CG-OU should immediately increase awareness among the international players and the donors in order to generate momentum for CG-OU. The

upcoming AGM meeting is an opportunity for initiating such momentum. Efforts should be made to work with the CGIAR Secretariat to hold a presentation on the CG-OU during AGM in Nairobi. Once the attention is received it is important to keep the interest of the donors and key stakeholders on CG-OU activity by: focusing on the positive energy that has been created so far; moving along with the positive force of the players and actors who are willing to cooperate and work with the system. The initial activities of CG-OU should also create desire for broader players, such as the international and donor communities to participate and implement the project activities. It may be useful to produce a 4-page brochure explaining the activities of the CG-OU to the donor community for distribution at AGM. It is important that the CG-OU take a dynamic approach in order to initiate activities on several fronts including conducting a feasibility study and developing coalitions among CGIAR centers and global institutions to prepare them to initiate CG-OU activities immediately after the 2003 AGM.