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Global Rice Roundtable**Future options for the International Rice Commission (IRC)**

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**Options for the Future of the International Rice Commission
and its Secretariat- Working Document****Introduction**

1. The objective of the International Rice Commission (IRC) is to promote national and international action with respect to production, conservation, distribution and consumption of rice. It does not address matters relating to international trade.

2. The Constitution of the IRC was approved by the FAO Conference at its Fourth Session in 1948. Established under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, the IRC has the nature of an international treaty within the framework of FAO. It entered into force on 4 January 1949, upon acceptance by 10 Member Nations. At present, the Commission has 62 Members, 19 from Africa, 16 from Asia and the Pacific, 16 from Latin-America, 7 from Europe, 3 from the Near East, and 1 from North America.

3. The Constitution, which was amended in 1961 and 1973, establishes the International Rice Commission¹. It includes functions of the Commission, makes provisions for its secretariat, for working parties and expert groups and establishes administrative arrangements for its operation and amendment. The Constitution was amended in 1973 so as to have the Regular Sessions of the Commission convening at least once every four years instead of once every two years.

4. The Commission has met 21 times since it entered into force. Interest in the Commission's work has been waning. The number of Members participating in the Commission sessions has steadily declined that there was no quorum for decisions at the 20th and 21st sessions respectively. The objective of the present agenda item is to seek the views of the Commission on the future actions of the Commission.

The Commissions functions and activities.

5. The Commission's functions, as identified in Article IV of the Constitution, all relate to rice. They include: keeping under review the scientific, technical and economic problems; encouraging and coordinating research and promoting its practical application; undertaking, where necessary and appropriate, cooperative projects; recommending to Members of the Commission, relevant national and international actions, recommending technical assistance to Members; and assembling, collating and disseminating information.

6. The work of the Commission evolved from an early emphasis on breeding and international nurseries to the implementation during the 1970s and 1980s of a large number of rice development projects and

¹ The Constitution and its Rules of Procedure are included as Annex 1.

programmes in support of the Green Revolution. Recently, the Commission has taken an approach which focussed on on-farm technologies *inter-alia* to the conservation of the environment, human and institutional improvement and natural resources of rice production systems and action that will enhance the income of rice producers.

7. The International Rice Commission has struggled to retain its relevance in a rapidly changing operating environment. The number of Members participating in Commission sessions has declined and resources for technical and secretarial support have dwindled. At the same time there has been a proliferation of other international and regional rice fora and networks addressing rice production technology, development and adoption.

8. The FAO Independent External Evaluation (FAO IEE) recommended in 2007 that “... *there are two CGIAR centres dealing exclusively with rice; trade aspects are addressed by an Inter-Governmental Commodity Group in FAO. The International Rice Commission should be wound up. If the CGIAR wishes, some of its work may be continued under the CGIAR*”²³.

9. In response to the IEE recommendation, FAO commissioned in 2009 a working paper on the future of the International Rice Commission. The overriding message from the paper was that without significant change the IRC will become irrelevant and, consequently, unviable.

10. The working paper took into account, past assessments, written submissions from key international rice experts and stakeholders; information gathered from discussions with experts both within and outside FAO; and desktop research. It identified major issues around which there was a broad consensus for change. The general conclusions were:

10.1. **Core strengths of the IRC arise from its nature as an international agreement, within the framework of FAO**, thereby providing an intergovernmental ‘neutral’ forum for discussion and evaluation of issues pertaining to the world’s most important food crop. The IRC is unique, as a single commodity Intergovernmental Commission, and should not be discarded without serious deliberation on its future.

10.2. **The potential of the IRC as a high-level forum to debate and advise international joint action and action and policy formulation in Member Countries is not being fully realized.** The agenda of recent sessions has been mainly focused towards on-farm technologies.

10.3. **There are many international, national, and regional fora** focused on rice technologies and related issues that have much larger, and in many cases, higher level participation than the IRC. For example, the International Rice Congress includes a Ministerial Round Table, comprising Agriculture Ministers from rice-producing and rice-consuming countries.

10.4 **There are significant opportunities** for a rejuvenated IRC to complement the activities of others by shifting its attention from a farm technology focus (better done by others) to a high-level policy discussion forum focusing on the overarching, and cross-cutting issues that are critical to sustainable rice production into the future.

10.5. **A renewed IRC should include discussion, debate and policy influence on rice production**, of the following issues:

² The two CGIAR centres dealing exclusively with rice are the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the West Africa Rice Centre.

³ In considering any procedural steps to be taken for the termination of the IRC, it is important to understand the dual nature of the agreements concluded under Article XIV of the FAO Constitution. This dual nature arises from the fact that agreements concluded under Article XIV of the Constitution are placed within the framework of FAO and act through FAO but, at the same time, are treaties, governed by international law and have a “life of their own”. Any initiative aimed at terminating the IRC would have to reflect these considerations. Members would be actively invited to submit instruments of withdrawal under Article XII of the IRC Constitution and 53 Members would have to withdraw from the Commission following the procedure established in the Articles XII and XIII.

- Water and land availability,
- Climate change,
- Carbon pollution reduction schemes,
- Energy/biofuel policies,
- Inputs and input costs,
- Nutrition and food safety,
- Genetic resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services,
- Production standards, and
- Human and institutional capacity building.

10.6. **Mechanisms and resources are needed** to ensure that the programs and decisions of the IRC can be effectively implemented in a timely manner, with a substantial part of the implementation occurring between meetings.

10.7. **The status quo for the IRC is not viable**, and without significant change the IRC should be wound up, in accordance with the FAO IEE recommendation.

Possible Options for the Future of the International Rice Commission

11. These options are neither mutually exclusive nor the only options available. They do however address the concerns identified by IRC Members, and other key stakeholders and reflect the dramatically changing environment in which the IRC operates.

Option 1 – Status quo

12. This is not considered to be viable given the declining participation of Members at meetings; the lack of mechanisms and resourcing to implement programs and the plethora of other organizations, networks and bodies that more effectively deal with rice technologies and their adoption for development. This option will result in the discontinuation of the Commission.

Option 2 – Discontinue the International Rice Commission and, if the CGIAR wishes, continuation of some of its work under the CGIAR.

13. A transfer of some functions from the IRC to the CGIAR, has already happened by default, given the work on rice of three CGIAR Centres in Asia Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. There are flourishing rice technology networks in each of these continents, with substantial support from both countries and the donor community. The attention to technology-focussed issues characteristic of IRC activities is already being addressed by a wider range of partners, through projects, networks and specialized meetings including the International Rice Congress.

14. An intergovernmental forum on rice cannot be provided by the CGIAR or any other Organization that does not have a large majority of the rice producing countries as member. The intergovernmental convening and informing powers would be lost, together with the potential to address major issues impacting on rice production. Other fora would be required to consider high level policy issues. In this respect, it should be noted that rice production could be adversely impacted by policy decisions in other sectors such as water, environment, and energy, where there are powerful influences at play.

Option 3 – Associate the IRC with the FAO Intergovernmental Working Group on Rice (IGG).

15. The FAO Intergovernmental Group on Rice (IGG) deals primarily with trade. It is a forum for intergovernmental consultation and exchange on trends in production, consumption, trade, stocks and prices of rice, including regular appraisal of the world rice situation and short term outlook. It considers changes in national rice policies and examines their international effects as pertaining to the current and prospective rice situation. The group is a subsidiary body of the Committee on Commodity Problems, which is itself a subsidiary body of the FAO Council. Membership is open to all FAO Member Nations and Associate Members of the Organization.

16. An association between the IRC and the IGG may be of relevance as they address complementary issues and, thus jointly address the whole value chain of rice. An association would, however, not necessarily address the key issue of IRC relevance unless there were also significant changes in the IRC programmes and activities.

17. The IGG and the IRC have a different legal status, and a different membership, while the recommendations and decisions may have a different status. If option 3 were pursued, back to back sessions of the IGG and the IRC appear to be the most viable possibility. However, the IGG on Rice may meet less frequently in the future than in the past (last session was in November 2009, followed by an extraordinary session in September 2010). This is because of the recent launching of AMIS (Agricultural Market Information System) by the G-20, an initiative which is housed at FAO. Rice is one of the commodities to be monitored under AMIS. Nine international organizations have committed to this initiative, including the World Bank and the OECD, with much emphasis to be placed government policies and statistics.

Option 4 – Reform of the IRC.

19. Reform is required if the IRC is to meet the new global challenges facing rice production, and to complement the role of partner organizations in what has been, and remains, a significantly changing operating environment. A rejuvenated and dynamic Commission could steer the complex path for sustainable rice production intensification, an outcome vital to many developing countries. In this option, the IRC should become a high-level policy forum addressing issues not normally tackled by other fora and seek consensus on policy issues (such as in paragraph 10.5).

20. Reform would need to address the following issues:

20.1. Agenda and programmatic changes to address those issues where IRC deliberations have a comparative advantage in the global rice scenario: Member Nations would need to decide what the policy issues are. They, and others, have in recent times identified dwindling water and land availability; climate change; carbon pollution reduction schemes; energy/biofuel policies; inputs and input costs; nutrition genetic resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services; nutrition and foodsafety; production standards; and human and institutional capacity building as potential areas for attention.

20.2. Complementarity with partner organizations and other fora: The IRC would have to sequence its meetings in ways that add value to the global 'rice timetable' and in so doing also maximise the flow-on of these other fora to IRC decisions and recommendations. An opportunity for such complementarity is in relation to the International Rice Congress, the world largest gathering of rice specialists, from both developing and industrialized countries. Furthermore the complementarity with the CGIAR Centres and with global and regional rice centres should be considered. In this respect, consideration should also be given on the relation and co-operation with the IGG on rice as indicated in option 3.

20.3. Ability to conduct work between meetings: The IRC Constitution and Rules of Procedure foresee work to be performed within the period between Commission sessions. The Commission should clearly identify the work and the resources required for these activities. Better use could be made of CGIAR Centres, regional rice networks and others, to carry out key studies and other tasks as part of Working Groups. Such an approach could not only be

cost-effective, but would also help to ensure a stronger partnership with the CGIAR, and other organizations.

20.4. **Resourcing issues:** As identified in the Constitution (Article VII) the expenses in relation to the Secretariat are provided by FAO within the limits of the budget of the Organization prepared and approved by the FAO Conference. Expenses for co-operative projects by Members can be paid by FAO from any other source “or shall be determined and paid by Members in such manner and proportions as they may mutually agree”. A special trust fund for the contributions should be established. The use of such a trust fund for activities agreed by the Commission could be explored.

20.5. **Overall efficiency and effectiveness:** The Commission would need a full time Secretariat with clear functions, which would assure appropriate action in relation to the Commission sessions and the interim activities. To assure Member supervision and involvement in the preparation of sessions and interim activities an active Bureau would be required.

20.6. The Constitution and Rules of the IRC may need to be modified.

21. Reform of the IRC (Option 4) would address the issues raised by Members and other stakeholders, including the IEE reviewers. It could also complement the activities of partner organizations in ways that could be of great benefit to sustainable intensification of rice production. However, it requires additional resources to support intersessional work. Members would also need to change their level of support to intersessional work and level of participants at meetings enabling the Commission to take decisions and make recommendations on policies and international actions in relation to rice.

Considerations by the Commission.

22. The Commission may wish to:

22.1. Consider the functions of the Commission as defined in Article IV of the Constitution and indicate which functions could be addressed through the Commission and which functions could be best addressed through other entities.

22.2. Consider the possible options for the future of the Commission including those presented in this paper.

23. Depending on its conclusions on the future of the Commission, the Commission may wish to consider the relevance and desirability of follow-up actions, including:

23.1. Request Members to withdraw from the Commission.

23.2. Amend the Constitution of the Commission, as indicated in Article X of the Constitution and its Rules of Procedure.

23.3. Consider the financial arrangements for the Secretariat and for additional projects, as indicated in Article VIII of the Constitution, and make recommendations on the implementation of this Article.

23.4. Instruct the Secretariat to seek additional views of the Members of the Commission, taking into account the deliberations, conclusions and decisions of the Commission at its 22nd meeting, on the functions of the Commission, the future of the Commission, issues for the amendment of the Constitution and the funding of the Commission, its Secretariat and its common projects.

23.5. Intersessional work, which may include the establishment of a working party or expert meeting, to consider the report of the Commission, and the additional comments of the Members with the aim to prepare a proposal on the future of the Commission and, if appropriate, its activities, and funding and the amendment of its Constitution for consideration and decision by the Commission at its next session.