

REPORT
FROM THE
STANDING COMMITTEE

The Creation of an International
Center for Cotton Research

to the 70th Plenary Meeting of the

INTERNATIONAL COTTON
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Question:

Should the ICAC endorse efforts to create an international center for cotton research, and if so, what form would such a center take?

Alternatives:

Status quo, no center,
 An international center with its own campus,
 A formal network of cooperating nodes,
 A virtual center.

Recommendation:

The Standing Committee is not prepared to make a recommendation.

Purpose of this Report:

The purpose of this report is to summarize discussions that have occurred in the Standing Committee on the subject of an international center for cotton research.

Background

The 68th Plenary Meeting of the ICAC in Cape Town, South Africa in 2009 directed the Standing Committee to consider establishing an International Research Center for Cotton. Mr. Syed Hassan Raza, a cotton grower from Pakistan, had proposed the creation of an international cotton institute during the Second Open Session. The topic of the session was "Facilitating Small-Holder Cotton Production," and Mr. Raza had suggested that an international cotton institute should be created to assist small holders in raising yields and improving quality. In addition, The Committee on Cotton Production Research had received a paper from the ICAC Cotton Researcher of the Year, Dr. Keshav Kranthi of India. Dr. Kranthi recommended the establishment of an international cotton research institute. The Statement of the 68th Plenary Meeting included the observation that some Members of the ICAC voiced support for the creation of an international research center for cotton, and that the Standing Committee was directed to give this proposal further consideration.

During the 69th Plenary Meeting in Lubbock, USA in 2010, during the Second Open Session on New Developments in Cotton Technologies, the delegate of Colombia suggested that the ICAC should support the establishment of an international research center for cotton. She stated that an international center could produce results more quickly, could save on costs by working on problems common to many countries and would be an instrument for sharing results. The delegate of Sudan observed that almost all other crops have international research centers. He said that cotton should be treated equally, and that an international research center for cotton should be established. The delegate of Argentina supported the establishment of an international research center on cotton. He noted that the theme of the 69th Plenary Meeting was 'Cotton Industry Growth Through Global Unity,' and he said that countries must be united in the long-term interest of the commodity. The delegate of Turkey also supported the establishment of an international research center for cotton. The Statement of the 69th Plenary Meeting noted that the Standing Committee should prepare a report for consideration at the 70th Plenary Meeting.

The Secretariat prepared reports dealing with the ICCR for the Standing Committee in January 2010 and March 2011. In addition, an Expert Group prepared a paper for Standing Committee consideration in August 2010.

First Proposal: Creation of a new International Center

In a January 2010 report to the Standing Committee (Attachment II SC-N-502), the Secretariat advocated the creation of an international research center to serve as an international cotton germplasm center, to address regional issues of wide interest, to serve as an international training center, to serve as an international fiber testing lab, to undertake contractual research in collaboration with the private sector, to serve as an international training center on ginning and to initiate research on cottonseed, byproducts and other topics not fully covered by national research programs.

The Secretariat emphasized that the purposes of the proposed research center in cotton were not to compete with established institutions but to: pool resources, serve as a focal point for cotton research, enhance the sharing of information and research materials, and use economies of scale to the advantage of the cotton industry.

During discussion of the Secretariat's paper in the 502nd Meeting of the Standing Committee in January 2010, several delegates agreed that the ICAC is the proper venue for the discussion of a proposal to create an international cotton research center, that support for agricultural research worldwide, including research on cotton, has been in decline for decades, and that the creation of an international cotton research center would be one avenue by which the objective of increasing support for cotton research and extension could be achieved.

However, a majority of Standing Committee delegates expressed skepticism about the creation of an international center and said that the Secretariat proposal lacked supporting analysis of the research need. They voiced numerous objections and asked a series of questions:

- There are already many research institutes and universities. What evidence is there that current institutions are failing so as to create a need for an international cotton research center?
- Why was it necessary to create a new international institution; could not international cotton research be coordinated from within the ICAC or from within an existing research institution?
- How could the sound long-term financial basis of an international center be established without resorting to recurrent assessments on governments, which governments were loath to approve?
- The development of new technologies requires substantial investment that must be recouped. What evidence is there to suggest that an international center could develop technologies faster or at lower cost than the private sector or established research institutions?
- Would an international center organize and facilitate research, or would such a center actually conduct research?
- How would an international center augment, and not duplicate or crowd out, research already being conducted by universities, existing national institutions and the private sector?
- Who would be the beneficiaries and who would be the competitors of an international center, and what evidence is there of a need for an international center for cotton research?
- What evidence is there that universities, research centers or the private sector are interested in collaborating with an international center, sharing intellectual property, or working collaboratively within an international network?

Three Proposed Variations for an International Center

Following the 502nd Meeting of the Standing Committee, the Secretariat asked four leaders in cotton industry research (Dr. Keshav Kranthi of India, Mr. Ralph Schulz  of Australia, Dr. Roy Cantrell of the United States, and Ing. Axel Drieling of Germany) to consider the proposal to create an International Research Center for Cotton in light of the reservations and questions raised by members of the Standing Committee.

The Expert Group agreed that an international center is necessary to cover global topics not sufficiently covered by national research programs, and they suggested three variations for the establishment of an international center for cotton research:

1. An international center with its own campus,
2. A formal network of cooperating nodes,
3. A virtual center.

The Expert Group said that the mandate of the international center should be to conduct and coordinate basic, strategic and advance research, to foster linkages and cooperation, and to develop and maintain a repository of open-access intellectual property.

The Expert Group identified core activities for an international center, including genetic resources, molecular markers, gene constructs and biotech cotton, research on climate change, and bio-resources for

pest management. The Expert Group listed many topics/projects/areas of activity for an international center.

508th Meeting of the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee considered the report of the Expert Group during its 508th Meeting in December 2010. There was agreement that the creation of a new institution was not feasible, but some countries indicated that the creation of a virtual research center within the ICAC might be considered. India endorsed the creation of an ICCR in the form of a virtual center supported by the ICAC Secretariat. Germany, Israel and the USA agreed that the formation of a virtual ICCR supported by the Secretariat was a possibility, but each government expressed concerns over budget implications.

However, as in the 502nd Standing Committee Meeting, delegates, particularly those from Australia and Brazil, questioned the need for an international center, noting that the Expert Group had asserted such a need but had not provided evidence. Delegates questioned what value an international center could add, and they were skeptical that an international center, even a virtual center, could be supported financially.

Standing Committee delegates agreed that there was support among governments for the current mission and activities of the Secretariat, and they were cautious about suggestions that would necessitate a reordering of priorities or an increase in assessments. Delegates suggested that the Secretariat should investigate funding sources and potential budget requirements, the financial viability, the structure and the organization of a virtual ICCR working in a network with existing institutions before the Standing Committee would be in a position to comment further.

510th Meeting of the Standing Committee

After considering the comments of delegates to the Standing Committee, the Secretariat presented a proposal to the 510th Meeting of the Standing Committee for the creation of an International Cotton Solutions Center (Attachment III to SC-N-510). The Secretariat noted that there had been support for the creation of a virtual research center, but that delegates were not enthusiastic about any proposal that would alter or expand the budget of the Secretariat. Accordingly, the Secretariat proposed the creation of a Solutions Center to be housed within the Secretariat but with a separate identity with separate sources of funding.

The Secretariat suggested that the Standing Committee recommend to the Plenary Meeting that the ICAC establish an International Cotton Solutions Center within the Secretariat. The Secretariat suggested that the ICAC might choose to make membership in the Solutions Center compulsory for ICAC members, or voluntary for ICAC members and open to membership from non-ICAC member countries. If all ICAC members chose to support the Solutions Center, the average assessment was estimated at approximately \$6,000.

It was proposed that funding for cotton development projects would be secured primarily through grant-based proposals prepared by the Secretariat of the Solutions Center under the supervision of the executive director who answers to either the Standing Committee or a board established by members of the Solutions Center.

During the 510th Meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2011, some delegates said they were still asking what failures in existing research structures necessitate the creation of an international center, and they were asking what need is to be filled by an international organization. Delegates thanked the Secretariat for the papers provided but noted that an unambiguous need for an international research center had not been demonstrated. Delegates noted that it was a difficult time to be trying to expand budgets and increase activities in international organizations. Even delegates who agreed with the basic premise that research leads to solutions, that all countries would benefit from improved coordination of efforts on shared challenges and that increased productivity is key to the long term health of the cotton sector, said that the relative advantage of an international cotton center was not clear and that the underlying need for an international center had not been demonstrated. There were concerns that an international center might not address foundational issues but would instead respond to funding availability.

On the other hand, during the 510th Meeting, several delegates from developing countries noted that an international center would be of benefit. Some delegates agreed that a common platform for the dissemination of cotton research was needed, and that an international center for cotton research, however formulated, could serve as a clearinghouse for solutions to shared challenges.

512th Meeting of the Standing Committee

At the 512th Meeting in June 2011, the Secretariat presented a revised proposal for the creation of a Cotton Solutions Center. As before, some countries said that they remained unconvinced of the need for an international center for cotton research, and countries also expressed misgivings about the implications for increases in government assessments.

In an effort to move forward, the Government of AUSTRALIA presented a proposal to have a small group of experts develop a strategy for world cotton research. According to Australia, such a strategy would help to develop a shared understanding of world cotton research priorities, existing research capabilities, gaps between needs and capabilities, and the strategy would include a plan to address those gaps and improve collaboration and coordination.

Australia suggested that the 70th Plenary Meeting could endorse the approach, and that the strategy could be discussed at the World Cotton Research Conference – 5 in Mumbai in November 2011, with the expectation that the small group could complete its work and report to the 71st Plenary Meeting in Switzerland in 2012. Australia observed that the need for an international cotton research center had not been made convincingly and that by first focusing on strategy, it might be possible to move forward toward consensus. Australia said that with such a plan in place there would be a higher likelihood of a positive response from investors toward the formation of a Cotton Solutions Center.

Australia indicated that it may be willing to offer financial and in-kind support to the strategy development exercise, and Australia asked that if the Standing Committee supported this approach that the details of concept, management and financing of the strategy development exercise should be completed before submission to the plenary meeting in Argentina.

The Chair found that there was a consensus to include the recommendation of Australia for the development of a world cotton research strategy in the report to the Plenary Meeting.

Conclusions

The Standing Committee explored the recommendation to establish an International Cotton Research Center and considered different forms that such a center might take. While some countries expressed support for a center, other countries indicated that the need for an international center and the potential benefits had not been made clear. Some countries also expressed their concerns with any proposal that would result in an increase in government assessments. The Standing Committee offers this summary report and the full contents of its discussions (available on the ICAC website) for further deliberation and discussion during the 70th Plenary Meeting.