



Cirad-INRA Joint Consultative Committee on Ethics in Agricultural Research

FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD CONSUMPTION MODELS

Abstract of the Statement issued at the 20 November 2009 meeting

Conversely, food self-sufficiency is a reality for a mere fraction of the human race, and has been achieved by implementing ambitious agricultural policies, notably backed up by the scientific and technical progress made as a result of agricultural research, often at a cost of high pressure on ecosystems. However, the persistent poverty and food insecurity still seen even in so-called “rich” countries, is proof of the weaknesses of the models applied: development policies geared towards productivity that pay no heed to negative consequences, international trade practices that exacerbate the dependency of southern countries on the global market, unequal sharing of scientific and technical progress combined with a failure to make full use of local know-how, and lastly, health and prevention policies that have failed to keep pace with changing food consumption habits.

Food is not just any good: it serves to meet vital requirements, but also to create and sustain social bonds centring on sharing and conviviality: food models¹ are an integral part of cultural models. Addressing the question of food security² is inextricably linked with analysing the behaviour and values of societies or social groups faced with the above difficulties. Current observations prompt concerns for the future, since if the major trends continue, the very substantial pressure on food, water and soil resources looks set to exacerbate inequality of access and shortages, with exponential growth in ecological migration, adverse effects on ecosystems and greenhouse gas emissions, and threats to peace. National and international expectations of research, particularly agricultural research, are still high in terms of the generation of knowledge, innovative solutions and support for political decision-making, in order to put a stop to poverty.

The Presidents of CIRAD and INRA have asked the Ethics Committee to issue a statement on the issue of food security, with its many facets, in order to feed ethical debate within their two organizations and make recommendations to guide their decisions or actions. The Committee highlighted the concerns relating to the resources mobilized by research, including the question of partnerships and intellectual property rights, the objectives and targets set for research and appraisals undertaken in a range of disciplinary fields, use of research results, and lastly, their medium- and long-term impacts, placing them at the heart of this question of food security and consumption patterns.

¹ “Food models are bodies of technological knowledge built up from generation to generation, used to select resources from a natural area, prepare them to make food, then dishes, and consume them. However, they are also symbolic code systems that reflect the values of a human group that participate in the construction of cultural identities and personalization processes”. (Translated from Poulain J.P. in *Manger aujourd’hui. Attitudes, normes et pratiques*, Paris; Editions Privat, 2002)

² “Food security exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. (World Food Summit, 1996)

The **NINE RECOMMENDATIONS** made by the Committee tally with the framework³ it has set itself, and encourage the research community to put questions relating to food security and consumption models on different scales, notably national and international, in their social, institutional and environmental contexts. Agricultural research aimed at ensuring universal, perpetual food security, which questions its right to intervene in consumption models, is the keystone of the comments and recommendations made in this statement.

IN TERMS OF OPERATING PROCEDURES

1. The Committee recommends introducing within the two organizations training in awareness of ethical considerations, while encouraging the creation of a group of researchers specifically tasked with monitoring ethical approaches within research fields.
2. As regards partnerships, the Committee notes that INRA and CIRAD work with both public- and private-sector partners. It recommends drawing up a good practice guide and establishing a reference group to resolve any conflicts of interest that may jeopardize the independence of research. The Committee recommends that the technological capacities that underlie the development of research also be used for the benefit of developing countries.

IN TERMS OF RESEARCH OPERATIONS

3. The Committee proposes extending to the two organizations the recommendations made previously by the CIRAD Ethics Committee (8 March 2004), concerning strengthening and promoting the involvement of stakeholders from rural and urban societies in the different stages of research processes relating to food.
4. The Committee recommends remaining vigilant concerning the range of food models, studying the nutritional requirements of least favoured groups, promoting more sustainable consumption models, and making use of the organizations' expertise in terms of agricultural and food market dynamics and the factors that determine prices in their research results and in support of public policy.
5. The Committee recommends that research projects linked to development be supported by a debate on their economic impact, their consequences for ecosystems and ways of cutting wastage, and that public food and health policy be an integral part of research programmes.
6. The Committee recommends that CIRAD and INRA develop impact assessment methodologies specific to food security and food consumption issues, including price formation aspects.
7. The Committee recommends equitable sharing of scientific knowledge and intellectual property as part of North-South cooperation.

IN TERMS OF INTERVENTION IN CIVIL SOCIETY

8. The Committee recommends that each year, the two organizations draft a joint inventory of the current situation, distinct from their annual reports, to be submitted to their supervising ministries, notably concerning major changes on a global scale in the field of food security and including an inventory of "low intensity signals" that shed light on the future in this field.
9. The Committee encourages researchers to take part in civil society debates, education and increasing consumer awareness, and to express themselves publicly so as to publicize the values of agricultural research and the significance of their individual and social responsibility.

³ See the preamble to the two statements: principles and values of the Committee on Ethics in Agricultural Research