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REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE PRESIDENT

TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD ON A PROPOSED

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT

TO THE

**INTERNATIONAL FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY NETWORK
(RIMISP)**

FOR THE

FIDAMERICA NETWORK – PHASE III



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PREVAL	Programme for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Poverty-Alleviation Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean
RIMISP	International Farming Systems Research Methodology Network



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FIDAMERICA NETWORK – PHASE III**

I submit the following Report and Recommendation on a proposed technical assistance grant to the International Farming Systems Research Methodology Network (RIMISP) to support the FIDAMERICA Network – Phase III, in the amount of USD 913 000 for a three-year period.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Executive Board at its Sixty-Fourth Session in September 1998 approved a TA grant to support Phase II of FIDAMERICA, a network of IFAD-supported projects and programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean. The institution in charge of organizing and coordinating FIDAMERICA is RIMISP, a region-wide network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, research centres and governmental development agencies (see <http://www.rimisp.cl>).

2. The concepts of knowledge management and learning processes have a central position in both IFAD V: Plan of Action (2000-2002) and its Strategic Framework for IFAD 2002-2006. The latter specifically mentions that IFAD needs to become a knowledge organization and to build on its role as an innovator through a process of mutual learning and lesson-sharing with other stakeholders active in the field. Through the FIDAMERICA network and with the active participation of other regional programmes, IFAD has helped to build the capacities of projects in the region, including their capacity to engage in learning processes.

3. During its first phase (1995-1998), FIDAMERICA emphasized building an Internet-based network involving all IFAD projects and programmes in the region. That accomplished, it shifted its emphasis in its second phase (1999-2001) from connectivity to content, seeking to organize the exchange so that it would contribute to an effective learning process and therefore to additional capacity-building. FIDAMERICA, with the active participation of the Programme for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Poverty-Alleviation Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREVAL), generated a simple method for taking stock of local experiences carried out or sponsored by IFAD. It trained over 80 staff members from 19 projects in Latin America and provided methodological backstopping to projects requesting it. This cycle came to an end in September 2001, when 150 persons from 39 IFAD projects and programmes and 30 community-based organizations (CBOs) from 18 countries participated in a region-wide meeting on “Knowledge and Innovation to Eliminate Rural Poverty”. At this meeting, 50 documented experiences were presented and discussed. Throughout this period, the exchange and comparative analysis of experiences has continued, both through FIDAMERICA’s electronic bulletin (3 300 recipients), its website (955 584 ‘hits’ in the year 2001 and an average of 75 000 hits per month in the last six months) and its electronic conferences.



II. RATIONALE/RELEVANCE TO IFAD

4. In the context of IFAD's operations in Latin America and the Caribbean, learning processes need to take place at two different levels. The fundamental one, on which the other one rests, is the level of the individual project. It is at the project level that the interaction with rural poverty, and its causes, dynamics and consequences, takes place; and it is there that strategies and interventions are designed and managed to reduce poverty. One main source of knowledge at this level is the day-to-day experience gained in the design, management and implementation of poverty-reduction initiatives. Systematic critical thinking about this experience by those directly involved can generate a wealth of knowledge.

5. It is essential to involve farmers and rural organizations in the learning processes at this level, since without their active participation, learning processes and their outputs will, at best, be seriously incomplete. To ensure the effective access of farmers and rural organizations to learning and knowledge-management processes, the third phase of FIDAMERICA will not depend solely on the use of Internet-based technologies. It will also develop, in close coordination with IFAD projects and other regional programmes, appropriate 'face to face' ways to stimulate dialogue, communication and exchange. In this phase, FIDAMERICA must and will make a deliberate effort to promote and increase the participation of the private and non-profit sector, as well as other donor agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the Department for International Development (DFID); the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ); the World Bank; the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); the International Development Research Centre (IDRC); and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

6. The second and complementary level is the sharing of lessons learned among projects. Thanks to the work carried out in previous years, communication and information exchange among projects have vastly improved. The new phase will seek to help projects learn from each other more effectively. This process will involve not only IFAD project staff, but also local development organizations and institutions, civil society and rural organizations. By providing them with access to best practices and learning processes, the project will contribute to disseminating this information and facilitating its use in policy orientation.

III. THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME

7. The programme's general objective will be to promote and facilitate communication and learning processes in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of poverty-reduction initiatives supported by IFAD in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its specific objectives will be to: (a) support IFAD projects in designing and organizing learning systems and processes for their own use; (b) facilitate communication processes across all projects, and with stakeholders from outside IFAD, allowing them to compare lessons learned at the field and project levels and to produce findings, recommendations and lessons learned that are generally valid across projects; (c) support the processes described in (a) and (b) by providing IFAD projects, local organizations, NGOs, farmers' groups, rural organizations and the private sector with easy and low-cost access to relevant and high-quality documentation, and analyses on concepts, approaches, methods and tools related to rural poverty reduction; (d) facilitate the development of a region-wide sub-network of rural grass-roots organizations working with IFAD projects; and (e) increase participation in the network of NGOs, the private sector, local and national governments, bilateral development agencies and other multilateral organizations.

Table 1: FIDAMERICA III and IFAD's Strategic Objectives

Thematic Areas of Knowledge Management in Latin America and the Caribbean	IFAD's Strategic Objectives 2002 - 2006		
	Strengthening the capacity of the rural poor and their organizations	Improving equitable access to productive natural resources and technology	Increasing access to financial assets and markets
<i>Rural financial services</i>	Rural financial services managed by the organizations of the rural poor	Investment poverty and natural resource management interactions	Emerging policies, strategies and practices to expand the rural poor's access to financial assets and markets
<i>Decentralization and empowerment</i>	Local economic development and rural poverty	Decentralized and farmer-led approaches to natural resource management and technological innovation	New institutional contexts for rural financial markets brought about by decentralization and empowerment
<i>Development of markets for services relevant to the rural poor</i>	Social capital, and markets for agricultural and rural services that are inclusive of the rural poor	New options and opportunities for income-generating strategies based on improved natural resource management	Emerging policies, strategies and practices to expand the rural poor's access to financial assets and markets
<i>Indigenous peoples</i>	Conditions for successful consolidation of social and economic organizations of indigenous peoples	Emerging methods, tools and approaches to facilitate the combined use of indigenous and non-indigenous technologies	Non-credit financial instruments appropriate to the needs of indigenous peoples
<i>Access to regional and international dynamic markets</i>	Effective and sustainable rural economic organizations	New options and opportunities for income-generating strategies based on improved natural resource management	New financial instruments to respond to the rural poor's investment needs and risk-management initiatives to access dynamic markets

8. From a programmatic point of view, FIDAMERICA III will respond both to IFAD's strategic objectives for 2002-2006 and to the thematic areas of knowledge management in the Latin America and Caribbean region (see Table 1). It must be emphasized that FIDAMERICA will not address these issues itself, but will instead facilitate communication and learning processes among those directly dealing with these issues at the project level.

9. To achieve its objectives FIDAMERICA will: (a) design and manage a learning systems fund to cofinance demand-driven projects aimed at developing and strengthening learning systems and processes within and across IFAD projects; (b) develop, maintain and update Internet-based facilities and systems, such as a website, monthly electronic newsletters, electronic mail lists and electronic conferencing facilities; and (c) organize electronic conferences on topics of high priority to IFAD and in which representatives from farmers' and rural organizations, NGOs, the private sector, local governments, the national government and other donor agencies will actively participate; (d) organize biannual region-wide workshops on knowledge and innovation for poverty reduction, allowing stakeholders from all IFAD projects in the region to meet to exchange and discuss approaches, concepts, methods and tools and thus improve their work performance; (e) provide technical assistance to projects so that they are better able to use the Internet in support of their rural poverty-elimination objectives; and (f) provide technical, methodological and logistical support to a new network of rural grass-roots organizations working with IFAD projects. This network cannot rely solely on Internet-based technologies, since they are still inaccessible to most rural organizations in the region.

10. To overcome this constraint, FIDAMERICA will: (a) reach agreements with IFAD projects to use both the Internet and traditional media to disseminate information to farmers and CBOs; (b) coordinate efforts with the Rural Microenterprise Support Programme in Latin America and the Caribbean (PROMER) so that its future centres of microenterprise interaction (CMI) are connected to the Internet; (c) engage in a dialogue with all IFAD projects seeking to improve public infrastructure in order to explore the possibility of supporting simple and low-cost facilities that



provide Internet access to rural communities; (d) organize thematic meetings and other face-to-face activities in close coordination with IFAD projects and regional programmes and as part of the activities supported through FIDAMERICA's learning systems fund. As it has increasingly done in the past, FIDAMERICA will make all possible efforts to coordinate these activities closely with the other regional programmes.

IV. EXPECTED OUTPUTS / EXPECTED BENEFITS

11. FIDAMERICA's objectives over the three-year period will include: (a) an updated website with complete information on IFAD activities in the region and a comprehensive and up-to-date collection of high-quality information and documents on concepts, approaches, methods, tools and other resources related to rural poverty reduction. The website will include an upgraded link to IFAD's website to improve dissemination in the region of relevant documents and information. An average of 100 000 hits per month is expected; (b) improved knowledge management and learning systems in about 18 IFAD projects in the region (around 50% of the total); (c) six position papers on strategic issues of priority interest to IFAD projects; (d) two workshops on knowledge and innovation for poverty reduction, bringing together most IFAD projects in the region and other selected organizations that can contribute valuable knowledge to IFAD projects. About 30 case studies will be presented and discussed in each workshop; and (e) a network of rural grass-roots organizations working with IFAD projects, allowing these essential IFAD partners to participate actively in the types of activities outlined above.

V. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

12. It is proposed that RIMISP continue to host and coordinate FIDAMERICA.

13. As previously, the strategic and programmatic management of FIDAMERICA will be the responsibility of an executive committee with representatives from IFAD and RIMISP. Meeting at least once a year, the committee will review and approve the annual workplan and the annual reports prepared by RIMISP following consultations with the directors and coordinators of IFAD projects and programmes.

14. FIDAMERICA will continue having one half-time coordinator, supported by one full-time assistant. Consultants may be hired for specific missions with well-defined terms of reference. The provision of Internet and computer services to the network will be outsourced to private companies based in Chile, on the basis of competitive bidding. FIDAMERICA and PREVAL will sign a cooperation agreement to obtain PREVAL's support to design a monitoring and evaluation system for FIDAMERICA and to advise FIDAMERICA on its implementation.

15. RIMISP will present annual progress reports to IFAD. One interim evaluation of the programme will be carried out, with IFAD's participation, approximately six months before programme completion. RIMISP will submit annual financial reports to IFAD, audited by an accredited external auditor.

**VI. INDICATIVE PROGRAMME COSTS AND FINANCING**

16. The total cost of this programme will be USD 1 465 000. IFAD's contribution will be USD 913 000, or 62% of the programme costs. RIMISP will contribute USD 87 000 (6%), and IFAD projects will finance almost the full direct costs of their participation in the network, with a total contribution of USD 465 000 (32%). The projects' contribution has been estimated on the basis of the experience gained between 1995 and 2001; however, an average contribution of approximately USD 5 000 per year per project, over the 30 projects presently involved in the network, is more than likely. RIMISP's contribution will be in kind: administrative personnel, office space and services, office materials, and the like. As in the past, FIDAMERICA will actively seek opportunities to enter into collaborative agreements with other IFAD and non-IFAD-supported organizations. The revenues or cost savings from these arrangements will be applied to FIDAMERICA activities. A summary of costs by component and cofinancier is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Programme Costs

Item	IFAD	RIMISP	Projects	Total	%
FIDAMERICA staff	108 000	27 000	0	135 000	9
Technical assistance to projects	75 000	0	0	75 000	5
Internet services	90 000	0	0	90 000	6
Learning systems fund	300 000	0	225 000	525 000	36
Electronic conferences	90 000	0	60 000	150 000	10
Knowledge and innovation workshops	80 000	0	135 000	215 000	15
Network of rural organizations	110 000	0	45 000	155 000	11
Administration costs (*)	60 000	60 000	0	120 000	8
Total	913 000	87 000	465 000	1 465 000	100

*Includes supervision, evaluation and audit.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

17. I recommend that the Executive Board approve the proposed technical assistance grant in terms of the following resolution:

RESOLVED: that the Fund, in order to finance, in part, Phase III of the FIDAMERICA network for three years, commencing on 1 May 2002, shall make a grant not exceeding nine hundred and thirteen thousand United States dollars (USD 913 000) to the International Farming Systems Research Methodology Network upon such terms and conditions as shall be substantially in accordance with the terms and conditions presented to the Executive Board in this Report and Recommendation of the President.

Lennart Båge
President