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August 22, 2012

Dr. Rajiv Shah
Administrator
U. S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Administrator Shah,

On behalf of the BIFAD, I am transmitting to you with this letter the CRSP Review Study team report, "BIFAD Review of the Collaborative Research Support Program." We find the report to be balanced in its approach and excellent overall in its findings. As the creator of the CRSPs in the late 1970's, BIFAD has a special interest in this important USAID/university partnership and its evolution over time. The report reaffirms that these partnerships are good value investments for the US Government, but suggests areas for improvement.

The issues addressed in the review address core global issues related to hunger and poverty. The Feed the Future goals of access to and availability of food for nine billion people by 2050 underline the critical need to strategically align US Government, US university and private sector resources to address this challenge. We believe that changes recommended in the review will increase effectiveness of the CRSPs in achieving these goals and deepen their contributions to global food security objectives.

The CRSP Review Team has taken important initial steps to address the strategic alignment and prioritization of research and HICD priorities. The critical "big issue" remains further development of just such an ongoing, effective process. The key challenge of leveraging whole of government, university and private sector linkages, a difficult task, remains at the heart of the findings and deserves additional consideration by BIFAD.

In terms of specific recommendations, here are our comments:

- 1) We strongly endorse *Recommendation One* of the study that calls for development of an overarching strategy for engaging US universities in agriculture and food security research, and HICD, which retains the CRSPs as a central component. The full range of science and technology must be embraced in the research and HICD programs at USAID, which draws upon a full partnership among government agencies, foundations, universities, and private sector entities. The study recognizes this challenge, but does not fully address the means of marshaling the support and energy that will be needed. USAID field missions must be drawn into dialogue with research partners and universities within their countries and within the US in order to insure that the latest science and technology addresses new enterprise development and evolving economic and social needs of target countries. BIFAD can play a key role in supporting USAID efforts in this regard.
- 2) We have reservations about *Recommendation Two*, which would create a Scientific Advisory Council (SAC) under BIFAD. We concur with the findings behind the recommendation, but question whether a SAC is the appropriate response. The BIFAD will give additional consideration to how to achieve the goal of strategic alignment of research and HICD articulated in the CRSP study - the BIFAD itself possesses considerable scientific expertise already that may be applied to this process. USAID benefits from the Congressional charge of the BIFAD and an additional committee may in some way duplicate efforts. We would not want to see any recommendation diminish the potential strength that BIFAD can contribute to USAID. Our sense also is that the technical demands of prioritization are more than a few experts can meet - an ad hoc diverse, multi-layered process may be preferable. Further, BIFAD is cognizant of the need to use budgetary resources judiciously as we draw upon any additional scientific expertise.
- 3) We also have reservations about *Recommendation Three* that recommends a Chief Scientist at USAID/BFS to oversee food security research and HICD and to liaise with an independent advisory body. While being USAID's prerogative, we would like to consider more fully how the board would engage with a chief scientist. The BIFAD wishes to more deeply discuss ways to address the breadth and depth of research knowledge brought to bear in USAID programming. We will be discussing various ideas to achieve this goal - USAID's efforts in building the FtF research strategy and USAID's recent experience in the FtF Inception workshops on the ground are commendable, and provide one good model to follow.
- 4) We endorse *Recommendation Four* that discusses two new CRSP models, which address the need both for globally strategic and country-driven demand approaches. We recognize that the models need to be flexible, as global and national priorities shift.
- 5) We strongly agree with *Recommendation Five*, which calls for strengthened USAID and CRSP management through centralized functions and use of technology. A chief scientist or principal director might add value here.

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- 6) The BIFAD endorses *Recommendation Six* to foster and enhance the institutional capacity development dimension of CRSPs and other USAID/university projects. We do believe, though, that the report underestimates the degree of institutional capacity development that has taken place. The BIFAD study on HICD will shed light on this issue.
- 7) In principle, we concur with *Recommendation Seven* that calls for a new funding paradigm that aligns funding with development priorities and research strategies. BFS advises that under your leadership USAID has already moved to align resources with priorities in support of the FtF research strategy. BIFAD supports these focused efforts in USAID to develop basic principles and strategic review processes that will guide realignment and reallocation of resources over time to address priorities among the CRSPs. The resulting differential allocation of resources among CRSPs can then be understood and justified programmatically.
- 8) We endorse *Recommendation Eight*, which advocates leveraging CRSPs with other resources, including private sector partners. The BIFAD is committed to showing leadership in this area, while acknowledging that finding traction on this issue is difficult. The CRSPs have proven powers of incentivization to build upon in this regard.
- 9) As to *Recommendation Nine*, while realizing the need for additional resources, we hesitate to recommend higher funding in the current budget climate. At the same time, it is clear that many of the weaknesses among the CRSPs stem from lack resources, in particular the objective of advancing research, human and institutional capacity with a \$31.5 annual USAID investment.

In closing, one general comment is that the study gives limited attention to how the recommendations will be implemented, nor is there sufficient focus on impact, which leaves much work to be done. These and other parallel questions before BIFAD present a rich agenda of additional work, which we embrace and look forward to further board discussions regarding these issues.

The BIFAD welcomes the opportunity to discuss with you our views about next steps in this process. Also, as we earlier discussed, Dr. Robert J. Jones, CRSP Report Team leader, and I would welcome a meeting with you and USAID Bureau for Food Security senior management at a mutually convenient time in September or early October to discuss the report and BIFAD follow-on engagement. Many thanks for your continued support of BIFAD.

Sincerely,



Brady J. Deaton, Ph.D.
BIFAD Chair