

GCHERA BACKGROUND

Dr. Ernst Lindemann and Dr. Dymtro Melnychuk

GCHERA Founder members

His Excellency Hon. Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, GCHERA President Prof. Nick Wanjohi, members of the Executive and the Scientific Committee, the Conference Local Organising Committee, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a special honour for us, today, ten years after the founding of GCHERA, to speak to you about the development of the consortium, the challenges it has faced and its perspectives.

GCHERA was founded in 1998 and now has more than 400 members from more than 100 countries. The initiative to form GCHERA goes back to the celebrations of the 100th jubilee of the National Agricultural University, Kiev, Ukraine, in 1998. On that occasion, an international conference with the theme “*Global Reforms in Higher Agricultural Education and Research: Responding to Challenges to Quality and Safety of Food and Agricultural Products*” was held. After a year, the Executive Committee of consortium was elected and the name ‘Global Consortium of Higher Education and Research for Agriculture (GCHERA)’ adopted. Among the founders included Dymtro Melnychuk, and colleagues Jischke (President of Iowa State University) and Lindemann (Dean of the faculty of agriculture and horticulture of Humboldt University). The formation arose from the need to create a forum for the most important global economic and social factors, namely agriculture and related disciplines. Professor Martin Jischke was elected the first president of the consortium, with Professor Dymtro Melnychuk becoming the president-elect. This consortium covering the field of agricultural university education, and in the future possibly also of research, is unique and carries immense potential to all. It is an organisation that overrides national, political, religious and other barriers, as it seeks to harmonise education while communicating best practices.

The past few years have been very exiting for all of us, for Ernst Lindemann especially, because he became a pensioner. This new status allows him to concentrate more on issues he regards as important, one of them certainly being GCHERA.

Let us now enumerate what we deem necessary to improve our consortium. In this regard, we will refer to various GCHERA documents, and especially the speech by our colleague Maguire in Costa Rica, which, in our view, provided an excellent summary.

We are representing disciplines which hold the key to the solution of most problems which confront mankind on daily basis. Consider hunger und climate change. Can a non-governmental organisation like GCHERA play an active role in the solutions to these problems? We are not a small United Nations Organisation, and we don’t have and will never have enough resources. We cannot indeed solve all problems merely by organising biennial conferences.

We are of the opinion, that we should not overstretch ourselves by aiming too high. We should instead strive to make small steps, and create common standards. This is the only way to become successful. Most of us are working in agricultural education, and

this is what we should concentrate. Everything done to adapt our study systems to present challenges will lead to progress. Students will become more flexible in accepting exchange programmes. The credits they gain will become more easily acceptable and their horizons will broaden, providing work opportunities. And if we include young scientists, professors and global economic players in these efforts, then this will show progress in research and the solution of global problems. We should encourage co-operation and exchange of knowledge at all levels, as we make small steps, and agree on issues which can be put into practice.

Our colleague Maguire had the same critical view. He suggested building regional consortia, whose results would be presented at the world conference every three or four years. These regional organisations could work on sub-themes such as curricula or research strategies. This work would be done, not by university presidents, but by well chosen experts in education and research. This will lead to efficiently made decisions.

All this work – as colleague Maguire suggested – should be co-ordinated by a permanent secretariat, with one position for a scientific co-coordinator and another for a secretary. Rooms and equipment for this can surely be found within many member universities. Together, both positions will cost approximately US\$ 60,000. Divided among 100 members, and with increasing support from sponsors, this should indeed be feasible.

Future GCHERA conferences should take place every third year, so as to generate additional savings. Small workgroups could meet on a regular basis and publish their results in such publications as half-yearly GCHERA journal. Besides this, the internet presence should be enhanced. There could be chat rooms as well as news tickers, all managed by the secretariat. Less major conferences require more intensive inter-conference contact.

Let us save GCHERA by making it more effective. We cannot solve all the problems of mankind, but we can be efficient in solving problems in education and research, in supporting small members and in exchanging best practices for our universities.

We need countries such as China and India, but eventually every nation in our boat, because everyone is responsible for this planet, which – for the foreseeable future – will be the only one on which we can live.

We wish that this conference would decide about the proposals made in this speech. We look back over a number of talks and discussions amongst members. Our conferences have always brought countless impressions of the differing situations in our countries. Conferences should be consistently aimed at the exchange of progressive developments in the member nations. Secrecy, arrogance and discrimination of any kind, have never been characteristics of our consortium, and should never be.

In the last ten years, the optimism of GCHERA has somewhat decreased. Let us engender more enthusiasm, include more specialists, and work regionally. Then we will be taken more seriously in the future. This will also bring us more new members. Let us advertise GCHERA.

Finally, we would like to recommend the following:

- (i) Executive Committee has to be re-structured as per our bylaws.
- (ii) Consortium members should search for new members from related universities, private industry and the public sector.
- (iii) A secretariat should be established before January 2010. We propose that the office be set up in Kiev, the birthplace of GCHERA, where excellent conditions can be found. The secretariat will have two officers who will be paid by GCHERA. The secretariat will operate as per GCHERA bylaws. It will report twice a year about its work and financing plan, and publish a biannual GCHERA journal.
- (iv) Two working groups per continent should be established, led by an executive committee member. The working groups will include representatives from institutions in science, and those in practice as well as students. Education matters will have primacy in the work. The working groups will report twice a year to the secretariat. The reports will be published in the journal. The listing of agricultural universities worldwide will be regularly updated.
- (v) During this conference, we should elect a new president. We recommend the Rector of Russian State Agrarian University named after K. A. Timiryazev, V. M. Bautin and Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture of Humboldt University (Berlin, Germany), Otto Kaufman, as suitable candidates for this position. Volodymyr Bautin is also a President of Higher Agricultural Universities of CIS countries, and Otto Kaufman is well-known in European Agricultural Education. We are sure they can perform their duties very well.
- (vi) Because of the working groups, the cycle of conferences has to be discussed.
- (vii) The Executive Committee should meet twice a year.

We are convinced, that GCHERA President Wanjohi and his Executive Committee, together with the Local Organising Committee will conduct a wonderful conference.

May the dawn of the African continent send impulses to GCHERA! Many thanks.