

## **ADE Study: Lessons Learnt Analysis of First Cycle Challenge Programs**

### **Executive summary**

The Alliance Deputy Executive (ADE) commissioned an internal Lessons Learnt analysis on the first cycle CPs. This exercise is intended to capture experiences from Centres in relation to their participation in the CPs, as an input into the development of second cycle CPs. A distillation of lessons learnt is presented below.

### **General**

- CPs present an opportunity to enhance the partnership approach to the CGIAR's work and tackle pressing challenges on the CGIAR agenda, particularly where there is a clear comparative advantage for the System. Participation in four first cycle CPs has provided a variety of experiences from Centre to Centre and CP to CP, with all offering lessons that can help to develop a successful a second cycle.
- Centre responses indicate that some problems can be teething troubles (some of the most positive experiences with CPs have been with the more mature ones), whereas others relate to systemic design and implementation issues. The Centres are optimistic that, through cross-learning among CPs, the results of this survey can inform the second cycle through capitalizing on positive experiences and using less positive ones to avoid repetitions that could reduce the impact of the CPs.

### **Partnerships**

- Partnership is implicit in the original idea of a CP to identify a researchable challenge and make available resources and critical mass to address it. Centres acknowledge that CPs can bring new partnerships and strengthen existing ones, and appreciate CPs that leverage partnerships and enhance Centre achievements.
- Drawing on a range of partners (CGIAR/non-CGIAR Centres, national ministry, NARS, private sector) in any project, and using external expertise rather than reinventing wheels within the CGIAR should be an effective formula. Centres recognise partnership with NARS as particularly important, provided that issues relating to their size, capacity, and mandate/motivation be addressed
- Centres have gained most from inter-Centre collaborations that take a multidisciplinary approach to areas of common interest or previously neglected areas. Yet partnership is already fundamental to the approach of most Centres and may not always need stimulation by a CP. Feelings of pressure to develop partnerships for cosmetic reasons and high opportunity costs would divert energy and resources from CP and CGIAR goals.

### **Adding value**

- Centre responses suggest that CPs can definitely add value to the way that science is conducted as well as to actual results, and Centres feel that they have been able to make meaningful contributions to this. However, whilst there are differences among CPs, not all are considered, on balance, to have made a strong contribution to maintaining focus on Centre/CGIAR missions.

### **Staffing**

- Centres acknowledge the benefits of bringing skills and critical mass to bear on priority issues, and many Centres have benefited from staffing provided through CPs. This has not always brought a net gain, however, and does not appear to be a strong benefit/incentive area for individual Centres to date. The experience of Centres losing staff time to coordination, administration or reporting tasks, and to

research less central to their institutional strategy, would point to a need for clear communication of expectations of Centres when negotiating involvement in CPs.

### **Funding**

- More Centres report some financial benefit than report loss, although high transaction costs can make CP funding less useful than other sources. There is a common feeling that, whilst one CP in particular has brought in new resources, CPs in general divert funds away from Centres and from core CGIAR research. This needs to be examined further and discussed with the Science Council.
- A mix of funding mechanisms including competitive and commissioned grants is seen as useful for meeting CP objectives. It will be important to institute grant awarding mechanisms that are efficient, fair and transparent, with good communications to minimise unfulfilled expectations, and that avoid spreading resources too thinly.

### **Hosting**

- Centre and non-Centre hosts clearly bring different skills and opportunities that should be capitalized upon, whilst providing support for weaker areas. Hosting arrangements should be designed and implemented to maximise transparency, and minimise bureaucracy and duplication of effort.
- The hosting of CPs at Centres has clear advantages of familiarity with the CGIAR but presents challenges (impacting on both hosts and non-hosts) to achieve transparency, to maximise synergy and reduce competition between CP and host, to properly resource host Centre inputs, to ensure that expertise from non-host Centres is used optimally, and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of CP staff.

### **Governance**

- First cycle experiences emphasise the benefits of clear vision and articulation of objectives and impact pathways, strong governance, open-minded leadership, and light and effective management and advisory structures. They also suggest that partnerships are more likely to flourish when there is proactive promotion of a collaborative spirit and visible observance of agreed rules.
- Experiences highlight the importance of continuity, consistency of direction, and an inclusive, open approach to communication with collaborators. Management procedures and instruments (collaboration agreements, contracts, fund submissions etc.) will benefit from review for efficiency to minimise transaction costs, and for clarity, simplicity and suitability for delivering success. Providing information on line whenever possible will promote a sense of inclusiveness.

### **Concluding points**

- Centres wish to keep a public goods focus and Centre involvement in the forefront so that the CPs remain CGIAR entities.
- Broad participation, especially by NRM Centres could be enhanced by an adjustment of focus in future CPs, and there could be advantages in CP design acknowledging the different emphases of development in Sub-Saharan Africa and sustainability and adaptive management in Asia and Latin America.
- CPs offer an opportunity to apply the main comparative advantage of Centres over NARS, i.e. multi-disciplinarity and integrated natural resources management. However, in view of the workload and financial pressure that most Centres experience, it will be important to judge the effectiveness of CPs over individual Centre action, and over successful and long-standing inter-Centre collaborations and System-wide Programmes, in order to achieve a sound mix of approaches to achieve the CGIAR's objectives.