

Update on Challenge Program on Water and Food, August 2003

Key achievements following the first progress report include the launch of the competitive grants process, the preparation for the Baseline Conference in Nairobi and the strengthening of the management team in the CP secretariat by adding a program manager. The construction of the meta data base for use in the CP benchmark basins and elsewhere is almost complete. It will undergo “beta” testing in workshops in two basins, for which trainers are presently being prepared in collaboration with Jena University. A workshop was held in May 2003 in Colombo for database managers and coordinators from the basins, and theme leaders, to obtain their input to the development process. Two further ‘kick-off’ workshops were held, both in the Nile benchmark basin convened by the Nile Basin Coordinator, to ensure coverage of the lower and upper regions. The Challenge Program is now established and publicized, with high quality proposals due to be submitted by September 15th. The continued support of the CGIAR fraternity and donor community remains critical – more so now that the Challenge Program has attracted much interest from the global research and development community.

The first call for concept notes, that closed in April 2003, resulted in over 340 valid concept notes (CNs). Sixty percent of the CNs submitted were led by institutions that are not members of the CP W&F consortium. Taking consortium and non-consortium institutions together, more CNs came from NARES than CG centers. There were also significant contributions of CNs from ARIs. The CNs were evaluated by a panel of 28 independent external reviewers. As a result, 99 full proposals are currently being developed for submission involving all themes and basins and a wide range of institutions: CG centres, NARES, ARIs and some NGOs. A proposal writing workshop was hosted in August by the Challenge Program at IWMI headquarters that attracted 35 project leaders from NARES, NGOs and ARIs, or their representatives. Arrangements are underway for proposals to be reviewed by the external panel in late September, followed by selection in October by the Consortium Steering Committee. Simultaneously, contractual and reporting procedures continue to be developed in consultation with the CP Management Team.

Preparations are well advanced for the important Baseline Conference in Nairobi immediately following the AGM. The structure of the agenda supports the objectives of facilitating scientific debate; strengthening the ‘community of practice’, and sharing progress and experiences to date with colleagues from the CGIAR and the wider development network. This public statement on the use of a competitive funding mechanism within an innovative governance and management structure, and inclusive prioritization process, will provide some lessons on the assumptions made when establishing Challenge Programs as part of the CGIAR renewal process.

Total funding for activities to end of 2003 is US\$5.9m with actual and projected expenditures of \$5.1m. The remaining US\$.8m is available for the competitive grants process. Commitments, counting projects under preparation (Netherlands and France, 11 million Euro), and assuming future support at the level of 2003 for World Bank, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and Norway, total between 7 and 8 million US\$/year from 2004. This is insufficient to support all high-quality projects resulting from the first round of competitive grants proposals, an important aspect of which is to establish the credentials of the program within the scientific community to attract their future interest in the program. We are currently engaging a number of key donors. Much has been achieved to date, but testing of this new approach requires adequate and sustained funding to ensure the Program reaches the potential expected at the time of its approval at the AGM in October 2002.