

SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

SC COMMENTARY AND CENTER RESPONSES

ON

CGIAR CENTER AND CHALLENGE PROGRAM MEDIUM TERM PLANS 2007-2009

Overview and Summary of SC Commentary

SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

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**CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
SCIENCE COUNCIL**

2 October 2006
Ms Katherine Sierra
CGIAR Chair
1776 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006, USA

Dear Katherine,

I am pleased to submit to you the Science Council's Commentary on the Centers' and Challenge Programs' 2007-09 Medium Term Plans (MTPs). Centers and Challenge Programs were invited to prepare a response to the SC Commentary, which is inserted in the attached document. I look forward to discussing the Report with ExCo members at its next meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Per Pinstrup-Andersen
Chair, Science Council

OVERVIEW

This overview highlights the Science Council's (SC) key observations to the System for support of the work Plan for 2007. **The rolling three-year MTPs of the Centers and Challenge Program's (CPs) provide three key functions:** (i) the first year of the MTP (i.e. 2007) is the workplan and budget for the next year to be approved by the CGIAR; (ii) the plans show how the research will contribute to the goals and priorities of the CGIAR through international agriculture research; and (iii) the logframe analysis is the basis for the self-monitoring by the Center/CP of their performance in delivering outputs, outcomes and impact. Each Center will report on its achievement of the output targets for the first year (i.e. 2007) in the performance reporting of the subsequent year (i.e. 2008). In addition to these key functions the MTPs provide an overview of the efficiency of the System in implementing the research agenda through partnerships and a tracking of the actions taken in response to the recommendations of recent EPMRs.

The MTPs for 2007-2009 provide a detailed account of the CGIAR's research agenda for the next three years. There is much improvement in the overall clarity of the documents; and as a new element the MTPs include impact pathways descriptions for each MTP Project. There are a number of other recurring issues that the SC feels should be reiterated such as the need to focus on strategic research to produce international public goods (IPGs) and the need to clearly specify roles and responsibilities of key development partners rather than undertake development activities.

The SC notes that efforts have been made to elaborate on the research programs in terms of the SPs, as requested, but also expected to see far more systematic and inter-center realignment to address specific priorities rather than trying to accommodate them all. Also the SC had anticipated that the MTPs would show clear linkages to the common regional MTPs for SSA (ESA and WCA) for all activities. However, this was not the case.

Setting the research agenda to impact on CGIAR Priorities. The first step in the transition process to implement the new SPs was to begin with the MTPs developed for 2007-09. However the SC sees little evidence of the beginning of a transition to 20 cohesive programs. Rather, in this first year, centers have shown the percentage allocation of their ongoing projects to the each of the SPs. This serves to show the relative allocation of resources among priorities, at the system level, but does little to build cohesive research programs. The MTPs still reveal a large number of disjointed projects that do not add up to a cohesive research effort with sufficient critical mass. In the next two years of the transition phase cohesive programs around the SP need to be developed. This will require far more cross-center discussion and planning perhaps under the aegis of the Alliance, than was evident so far. Success in implementing SPs will depend on effective implementation vehicles. That is why it is important to reach consensus on the right vehicles for each of the 20 priorities, e.g. CPs, SWEPS, Task Forces or more loosely coordinated programs. SC, together with the Alliance, will encourage the development of Framework Plans for all SP over the next two years and these will inform the choice of vehicle. These are particularly urgent for SP involving high value crops and market chain analysis, where many centers are adding new research initiatives. Research on markets and poverty is not new but it has largely been addressed by Centers in a piecemeal fashion and could benefit greatly from renewed focus and collaboration for example with external social science centers of excellence working on agricultural trade policy. Much of the research capacity in high value crops, particularly in fruits lies outside the CGIAR and with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), ARIs and the private sector. The CGIAR effort in this area urgently needs to be integrated into a rational global research program.

There is a disappointing lack of activities reported outside the SP. Most centers have endeavored to

show that the ongoing activities fit the SPs. The SC sees this as a lost opportunity for the Centers to embrace new innovations that may lead to *new* SP in the future and to enhance stand alone capacity building which is vital for impact as shown in the pathways. The SC suggests not trying so hard to force everything into one or the other SP, but rather show some exciting illustrations of activities that fall outside the 80% but for which research should be done. Such new activities could eventually develop into a SP. The SC would like to see at least half of the resources outside the SP agenda targeted to innovative new research.

The SC welcomes Centers' increased emphasis on enhancing capacity, but notes that MTPs still need to make more explicit mention of capacity building in project output targets, and to separate clearly project-linked capacity strengthening from stand-alone training.

Last year the SC commented that many of the activities planned in the MTPs are aimed at producing local rather than IPGs. This year the MTPs are much more explicit about the intention to generate IPGs but much of the locally focused research activities remain. There is no doubt that the intention to produce IPGs is of major importance but it must also be supported by comprehensive plans to link the outputs of locally focused research together and extrapolate new knowledge and technologies that are of value to more than one country. This component of the MTPs is still weak and more effort is required to demonstrate the selection, *ex ante* of sites for locally focused research in terms of the intention to produce IPGs as the primary goal.

Planning and measuring performance. In the MTP Guidelines for 2007-09, the SC requested for the first time the inclusion of a succinct description of the plausible impact pathway for each project, from research outputs through outcomes to the ultimate impacts for achieving CGIAR goals. Although most MTPs this year included a brief section on impact pathways, generally, these descriptions were too 'succinct', too generic, or simply failed to adequately describe the pathway. In addition, very few Centers identified the specific "conditioning factors", such as policy and institutional constraints that were perceived to inhibit outcome and/or limit the range of impact. The SC encourages the Centers/CPs to be as specific as possible in identifying target groups (a common problem is that all possible groups are listed), regions and specific impact indicators when describing the targeted intermediate or ultimate impacts. The SC suggests that well prepared impact pathways analyses may provide investors with additional information and confidence that an investment in the center's and its partners' research will give good returns.

On the whole the MTPs this year are more focused on research and clear efforts have been made to reduce the amount of stand alone development activities being planned. Nevertheless, the pressure on Centers to fill local development gaps is likely to continue to draw them in the direction of engaging in disparate activities to disseminate their technologies. The MTPs can go further to preempt this by making the pathways for impact explicit, indicating the partners to undertake the development. The SC believes a more explicit analysis would allow the Centers to remain focused on their core advantage yet allow for the catalyzing or facilitating the complementary roles of specific partners. Across the MTPs these roles are not well defined and impact pathway descriptions are not sufficiently explicit about partners' roles in delivery and uptake. In many instances long lists of partners are provided without any reference to roles and responsibilities. Where the latter are provided often there is no specific reference as to whether they have agreed *ex ante* to play the roles indicated and have made resource provisions accordingly.

For most Centers, there has been an improvement in the logframes that describe output targets that are time bound and measurable. There is still scope for further improvement, however. While most of the Centers' output targets describe research results and not process, in many cases the output targets remain broad and vague. Some Centers have chosen to describe a very small number of broad output

targets, possibly in response to an earlier request for them to be of sufficient magnitude.

While peer-reviewed publications are an important measure of scientific performance, what is expected from the Centers as results are outputs and outcomes from research and capacity building that are relevant for achieving the goals of the CGIAR.

The SC plans to continue to work with the centers to improve the impact pathway definitions and logframe analysis as the key for improved performance measurement

Partnerships. It is evident from this year's MTPs that Centers have developed an impressive array of collaborative arrangements. These range from network models that allow continuous two-way consultation, to task force and consortia approaches that tackle key research themes, to critical research partnerships where responsibilities and resources are shared, to CPs that capture research capacity outside the CGIAR System. While Centers must actively pursue collaboration within and outside the CGIAR as a means to reach CGIAR goals, having large numbers of partners need not lead Centers in that direction. Indeed, partnerships and collaboration in general may bring substantial coordination and operation costs, which may weigh heavily against the value that such arrangements end up adding to the Center's performance. The SC considers that it is important that MTPs explain more fully the rationale and criteria for choosing partners and collaborative arrangements. A key question is to assess what is the added value from partnerships and what output and outcome can be attributed to it.

Implementation of the recommendations from recent EPMRs. An important means of improving the efficiency of the monitoring and evaluation process is systematic tracking of the implementation of the recommendations from recent EPMRs. The SC notes the satisfactory progress in implementation of recommendations from past EPMRs of IRRI, IPGRI, CIMMYT and World Fish Center (all conducted within the last two years).

SUMMARY OF SC COMMENTARIES ON CENTERS AND CHALLENGE PROGRAMS MTPs

AFRICA RICE CENTER (WARDA). WARDA's Project portfolio is essentially the same as introduced in 2005 with some changes at the output level, which have not been fully explained. The MTP provides a qualitative assessment of how WARDA's projects contribute to the SPs, but it doesn't show adjustment of research to implement the SPs. In the rice-based projects WARDA presents good scientific agenda with clear IPG focus. In molecular genetics, WARDA should make sure that it pursues appropriate partnerships to prevent detracting from its primary business of applied breeding. The partnership with the Asian Vegetable Research and Development Corporation (AVRDC) and others for diversifying rice-based production systems with livestock, fish and vegetables are welcome, but should be carefully focused. Stronger linkage with IFPRI could provide better impact pathway analysis, now very deficient in the MTP. Much more clarity is needed on the roles of partners and their contributions in specific research at the output level. WARDA should monitor the potentially high transaction costs with the network-based model for research collaboration. The forthcoming EPMR should assess WARDA's strategic involvement in the Consortium for the Sustainable Development of Inland Valley Agro-Ecosystems in Sub-Saharan Africa (IVC). WARDA's role in the regional MTPs, particularly for WCA, need to be clarified, and the Center should be cautious in its geographic expansion to guarantee that critical mass is not diminished in the process.

CIAT. The Center presents 12 MTP projects organized within two Development Challenges. Two Projects are being phased out in 2006 due to a significant reduction in unrestricted funding and some

refocusing. Development Challenge III, Rural Innovation, is now placed under Agroecosystems, following a recommendation of a recent CCER. The SC encourages CIAT to apply in the forthcoming downsizing efforts the principle, as stated in the MTP, of concentrating on fewer, well-selected areas of high potential benefit to the poor in the tropics. CIAT appears to have low comparative advantage for aspects of market research and the small isolated projects proposed under the rural agro-enterprise development project may not result in significant IPG contributions. The logframes are generally well-developed, although there are still problems with output target specificity. The impact pathways are mostly described only in generic terms, as is for the most part, the Center's role as primary researcher or facilitator. The integration of the CIAT convened Systemwide Program on Participatory Research and Gender Analysis (PRGA) with Center programs is not clear.

CIFOR. CIFOR's project portfolio is the same as last year, and changes at the output level are explained well. While emphasis is being reduced in the host country and increased mainly in Africa, the MTP does not clarify why more efforts are not being devoted to Latin America. In response to the SC comments to last year, Project 5 now has a much improved orientation with respect to IPGs; it has new content to make it more relevant and addresses the difficult topic of policy implementation. Breakthroughs can be expected mainly in analyzing and designing policies and institutional setups and indicators of success for such outcomes and impacts need to be developed. The MTP clearly articulates how the portfolio addresses the SPs, and provides the relative resources invested in them by each project. CIFOR should consider the advantages in merging projects 2 and 6, since they both address SP4A. Some activities still appear to be consultancies without clear IPG attributes. CIFOR's logframes are greatly improved and the output targets are mostly clear enough for monitoring. The impact pathways are adequately described and include, for most part, conditioning factors.

CIMMYT. The Center has a new project structure to implement its Business Plan 2006-10. The linkages to previous research are not clear although most research seems to be continuing. The new projects show reorientation toward CIMMYT's core areas of expertise with a strong focus on germplasm improvement. CIMMYT reports a good level of implementation of the recommendations of its 5th EP MR and has made commendable progress in all the crucial areas of operations. Its research addresses SPs and is mostly of an IPG nature. CIMMYT focuses strongly on internationalizing its research. Only Projects 5 and 6 include some rather local activities, but the proportion is small. The output targets are not clear enough for verification of achievement, mostly because they are not explicit for 2007. The impact pathway descriptions from outputs to outcomes are good but they lack identification of the conditioning factors for reaching impacts which, for instance, for genetically modified crops, could be significant.

CIP. CIP's project portfolio is the same as last year with minor changes at the Output level. The MTP appears to be based on solid empirical evidence about potential payoffs. CIP is increasing its involvement in Africa, Asia and the Caucasus Region. The MTP shows a full alignment with the SPs but the SC considers that part of the agenda, like the Urban Harvest and components of Projects 5 on NRM and 6 Agriculture and Human Health do not address priority research. Most of CIP's activities seem likely to contribute to IPGs but the integration of the CONDESAN network with the Global Mountain Program should be improved as a strategy to contribute to IPGs. Nearly all CIP's output targets describe research achievements and most of them are sufficiently clear for monitoring achievement. CIP's partners and their roles at the output level are clearly identified. CIP will hopefully delegate more of its more locally-focused activities to the collaborating NARS. The rate of implementation of previous EP MR recommendations has been slow (two still remaining to be addressed in 2006 and 2007), as the Center's next EP MR is scheduled to start in 2007.

ICARDA. ICARDA's project portfolio is the same as last year. Generally, the Project narratives are adequate and elaborate on how work addresses the relevant SPs. ICARDA estimates 90% of its

resources are devoted to SPs. Overall, the planned research is focused very much on solving regional problems. ICARDA should consider the analysis of the content and structure of its MPs in the recent EPMP report. Further, ICARDA should continue its move to develop a more globally relevant research agenda, accompanied by more explicit exit strategies from development assistance-type work, as identified in previous MTP Commentaries. The MTP logframe is in general inadequate in its specification of outputs and not sufficient for monitoring and needs to be improved. About one fourth of output targets describe process rather than research products. The impact statements are not specific and the pathway descriptions are generic without highlighting the conditioning factors. The SC is pleased to note the agreement with CIMMYT on wheat research in CWANA. There are good links and sharing of responsibilities with IWMI for water research and with ILRI on constraints to livestock marketing.

ICRISAT. The MTP proposes a new project structure (of eleven projects compared with three regional mega-projects in the previous MTP) that should provide greater transparency and accountability. However, although the MTP addresses a number of relevant and appropriate areas of research, much of the research program appears to be a collection of activities, and much continues to be too far downstream to be generating IPGs. The Center often justifies such activities by referring to them as “proof-of-concept” research, but without a clear exit and multiplier strategy in place. Reference to research planning for the development of IPGs should be provided for each project stating the current state of research to allow future progress to be assessed. The logframes are vague and seem inadequate for monitoring and evaluating research progress. With a few exceptions, output targets have not been defined. The MTP provides a good description of ICRISAT’s role and the roles of its partners and their contributions, although the Center still undertakes some research which would be more effectively carried out by NGOs and national institutions.

IFPRI. IFPRI’s program for 2007-2009 is very similar to last year’s. Changes in the project portfolio are mostly explicitly and sufficiently described, and the reasons for the change are provided. The MTP provides a good strategic overview. IFPRI is making good progress to implement EPMP recommendations. IFPRI reports that 75% of its agenda is within the SPs but its priority setting criteria and process does not allow any objective validation. Half of the non-SP agenda is commendably focused on new research. The project narratives need more clarity on the IPG attributes of IFPRI’s research and how it is likely to contribute to solving significant constraints to reaching the CGIAR goals. The Logframes are much improved and the output targets describe research results, but they need more clarity for easy monitoring and verification. Impact pathways are informative for most projects, but not always sufficiently specific on the conditioning factors. IFPRI has a significant portion of stand alone non-SP training and more clarity is needed on the project-linked capacity building. The SC is concerned that the MTP provides little information about the earlier ISNAR’s research portfolio, and looks forward to seeing the CCER on the ISNAR Division.

IITA. The Center has changed its project structure and presents 7 MTP Projects and the Systemwide Program on Integrated Pest Management (SWP-IPM). The presentation of the MTP is much improved from previous years. The Center has been slow to respond to the 2001 EPMP recommendations but the MTP now provides a response to some, although not yet all, of the recommendations. The Project narratives report that almost all current work of IITA contributes to the SPs. However, it is not clear whether programmatic adjustments have actually been made or the description of research simply improved. The research appears well planned and the MTP provides a good logframe plan, which adequately identifies the outputs, measurable output targets and the intended users and beneficiaries. However, there appears to be a very high cost to each of the output targets. The MTP provides a description of the roles of partners and their comparative advantage in the research process. However, the nature of the relationship with IPGRI in work on Musa, with CIAT on cassava, and with CIMMYT on maize remains to be described. IITA has played an important role in the development of the CP for

SSA and in the regional MTP for Africa, but the MTP provides little information on the linkages of IITA research to these two initiatives.

ILRI. ILRI's Project portfolio includes four Projects, as a result of merging earlier Themes 1 and 2, and the SLP. The SC notices a tendency in the MTP to broaden the spectrum of research topics within Projects. The SC looks forward to the EPMP Report for a further discussion of the geographical balance for research, and an assessment of the feasibility of delivery in traditional and new research areas. The logframes appear appropriate. However, it is not feasible, without knowing the point of departure for the currently planned research, to ascertain how likely the achievement of the outputs is. Nearly all output targets describe research results and are very much in line with the Center's responsibilities in terms of SPs, but they should be more specific for monitoring. The impact pathway presentation is convincing. The partnerships are extensive and of various types. The SLP has become very effective in linking the CGIAR Centers.

IPGRI. IPGRI's project portfolio remains the same as last year. The Center, however, continues broadening its scope to animal genetic resources in collaboration with other institutions. IPGRI reports that it has implemented all the 5th EPMP recommendations. However, it is not clear from the MTP whether the Center is focusing on some areas of research where it has the comparative advantage and can excel. IPGRI's plan gives the impression that the Center is more a management than a research institute. IPGRI's strong area is its support to national programs with the implementation of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The portfolio remains very project-driven and not yet driven by the SPs; it is difficult to find the strategic center of the activities. The output targets, although mostly about research results, are still rather vague for monitoring and verification. Most projects have identified appropriate partners, but IPGRI's collaboration with other CGIAR partners, e.g. IITA, ICRISAT and ILRI, and the CPs is not elaborated. In contrast, the work of the Systemwide Genetic Resources Program is well presented.

IRRI. The Center has a new project structure to implement its new Strategic Plan. The SPs have greatly influenced the adjustment of IRRI's research portfolio and allocations. IRRI has made adequate progress to address the 6th EPMP recommendations, but two areas need more attention: improving the effectiveness of the INGER network and addressing the water related problems in intensive rice systems. IRRI's program shows good alignment with the SP, with the exception of work on water-borne and zoonotic diseases. IRRI has commendably identified new areas of research conducted outside the SPs. Most of the research is generating IPGs. The rationale for IRRI's health-related research is not clear. Despite the shortcoming the MTP presents a strong research agenda with several new elements.

IWMI. The center presents a research agenda similar to last year's MTP consisting of four projects. It has devolved its lead responsibility in the systemwide program on malaria and agriculture to regional partners and completed the comprehensive assessment on water management (SWIM2). The MTP focuses on IWMI's core strengths on mapping water productivity, mapping water poverty, analyzing high potential interventions (at the basin level) and assessing the impacts. The center has responded in a positive fashion to most earlier concerns: there is now a good description of how the CP on Water and Food fits with the IWMI MTP; project logframe presentations are somewhat improved; and the different roles of the Center in providing IPGs from research is identified. However, very little specific information about the 2007 research portfolio is provided, possibly as the 2007-09 MTP outdistances the Center's current strategic plan by a year. The means by which IWMI turns research into policy and practice-inspired change in the water sector seems to be missing. IWMI has positioned itself centrally for the provision of international expertise on water, food and livelihoods. The list of collaborators and their roles confirms this.

WORLD AGROFORESTRY CENTER (ICRAF). ICRAF has a new Project structure resulting in the reduction of the number of outputs and a clearer definition of the research-development-application continuum (the impact pathway). Most projects are now described as being linked to the SPs (including “secondary” and “indirect” linkages), but there is no justification for these allocation statements. ICRAF suggests a surprisingly high proportion of the portfolio (40% of the 2006 investment) addressing socioeconomic topics. The non-SP activities are identified and described, including activities within the Strengthening Institutions Theme and some 4% of new research, but there seem to be more than that falling outside the SPs. The MTP Overview and the Project narratives indicate that more integrated strategic planning is currently anticipated within the Center. A majority of ICRAF’s output targets are sufficiently specific. While the collaboration and partnerships are extensive, the partners’ roles in outputs are not always sufficiently described. The programmatic implications of the regional MTP for ESA are not elaborated. The SC awaits the completion of the African Highland Initiative review.

WORLD FISH CENTER. The WorldFish Center presents a research agenda of 8 projects. The MTP is considered as a work in progress towards a global agenda of research structured ultimately around seven regional portfolios and three global disciplines as a matrix. The SC urges the Center to undertake a CCER of this program arrangement in 2007 (as recommended in the EPMR). The majority of the proposed research fits with the SPs but the regionally-focused projects do not all show how the more location-specific work translates into IPGs. The increased emphasis on Africa is well justified but the continued priority on Asia deserves a better rationale than in the MTP. The Financial tables indicate major resource re-allocations which are not evident in the text and require explanation. Overall, the logframes are reasonably clear and adequately identify time bound outputs. A large majority of the output targets describe deliverable results from research but some of them are too vague and unclear to be measurable in the monitoring system. The collaborative arrangements made at administrative support and research levels with IWMI are commendable. The links are described to CPWF (especially in the Mekong region), in which WorldFish is an important player.

GENERATION CHALLENGE PROGRAM. The CP portfolio remains the same as last year, but the Program shows better focus and some re-orientation. This is partly due to very ambitious targets that have not been fully met. The SC agrees that ambition is commendable and understands that this has partly been the CP’s strategy in contracting partners especially from the North and keeping them focused. The SC sees that the CP can play a major role in convening implementation of priorities in SP1 and SP2. All the program activities lead to IPGs. The CP should address the questions related to involving the private sector (too little involvement), lack of clarity in the MTP about the relative financial allocations and research responsibilities at the output level of the individual CGIAR Centers, and the potential problems due to difficulty of germplasm movement out of China and Brazil. The CP presents much improved impact assessment plans. The logframe still includes a large proportion of process-related output targets, and many of the research-related ones appear like interim project targets. With the exception of the private sector, the CP partnerships are very strong and complementary, with evident synergies, and an appropriate prominence of the NARS.

HARVEST PLUS CHALLENGE PROGRAM. The project portfolio of Harvest Plus is the same as last year. The MTP shows cohesiveness and progress in research. Because securing funding for 2007 and beyond is critical, Harvest Plus should think strategically about what work makes sense to advance quickly to completion and the demonstration of biological efficacy over the next 3-5 years, rather than moving along a broad front of Phase I and II crops. As in last year’s MTP, capacity building, which is of great importance for the implementation and carrying forward of the outputs is rarely mentioned as an output target in the logframes. Involving more NARS could advance the delivery of the prototypes and their testing within the proposed timelines.

WATER AND FOOD CHALLENGE PROGRAM. The MTP presents a more cohesive research program with only one new project added compared to last year. The CP has commissioned research for filling gaps following a solid evaluation at the basin level. The CP has moved from a collection of more or less unrelated projects, to a program that, while still consisting of a large number of projects, is now more focused on a smaller number of key objectives. The SC now views the CPWF as being on track and tackling work which would be an integral part of the SPs. While most of the proposed research seems to fall within the SPs, particularly SP area 4, Project 7 does not. It would be helpful if the CP were more discriminating in this regard. The CPWF has assembled a large number of partners and it now provides a solid rationale for their various roles. The points of contact between the CP and IWMI Projects are now identified, but very little description is given of the nature of those links. Capacity strengthening is not adequately defined, given the emphasis on dissemination, application and behavioral change.