

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

SCIENCE COUNCIL

CGIAR CENTER AND CHALLENGE PROGRAM MEDIUM TERM PLANS 2008-2010

SC COMMENTARY AND CENTER & CHALLENGE PROGRAM RESPONSES

SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

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SUMMARY

AFRICA RICE CENTER (WARDA). WARDA's Project portfolio has the same two-program format as last year but the earlier Project *Integrated management of drought in rainfed ecosystems in Africa* has been dissolved with some elements integrated into other projects. The MTP is not clear about the research vs. development content of the agenda and it seems that all activities are not addressing SPs. The SC considers WARDA's research agenda generally relevant to the SPs and geared towards generating IPGs. The development activities in post-conflict countries in SSA, evaluation of improved cultivars of high value vegetables, and the evaluation of germplasm accessions for adaptability to local stresses are activities that could be devolved to NARS. Research efforts on molecular markers to address biotic and abiotic stresses, mapping QTLs for drought tolerance, and new emphasis on gene introgression in Asian rices and some wild species are well placed. Development of tools, methods and new capacity for impact assessment, policy analysis and priority setting are commendable output targets. In the logframes, WARDA needs to improve the description of the outputs and output targets. The partnerships are well described with the exception of the Center's links to the SSA-CP. The SC will assess the Center's MTP in detail in 2008, including its follow-up to the recently completed EPMR.

BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL. This MTP presents a new portfolio of "F-Series" Projects. The changes from the earlier "E-Series" projects, from which the new projects derive, are clearly shown. The Center has identified six focus areas that the SC believes will lead to more focused research. The SP orientation of most research is clear, but the SC would have liked to see the framework plan for 1A, which SGRP has been coordinating, explicitly used for organizing Bioversity's research towards this SP. Projects F04-09 are generally well targeted on areas of the Center's comparative advantage. The new Project F10 on valuation of biodiversity seems relevant. Also the proposed research on nutritional properties of underutilized crops and on collection of beneficial soil micro-organisms are promising. The SC questions the Center's comparative advantage in some research activities in Projects F01-03 and F05, including research for developing pest management systems, improving water use efficiency and developing markets for underutilized crops. These are areas where there is a strong base of research and expertise elsewhere. It should seek synergies with those Centers that have the relevant long established expertise in those fields. It is important for Bioversity to be cautious not to let its broadened mandate (agricultural biodiversity) lead to drifting away from its core business. The 6th EPMR should look at the issues of research focus, comparative advantage and potential synergies. As Bioversity does not have its own research facilities, it would be important to see in the logframes where and by whom the research is conducted when it doesn't appear to be done by Bioversity itself. SC will review Bioversity's MTP in-depth in 2008.

CIAT. The MTP 2008-2010 presents a revised Project portfolio around six "product lines" that replace the previous 11 Projects. They encompass research on the four commodities (rice, beans, cassava and forages), tropical soils (TSBF) and "Markets, livelihoods and institutions". The latter is a newly formulated Project to address SPs 3, 4 and 5. CIAT also convenes the PRGA SWEP. Overall, CIAT has reduced its core research budget in the non-commodity research areas, a direction consistent with EPMR recommendations. Alignment to SPs has resulted in CIAT de-emphasising soils research in Latin America and reducing work in crop and agroecosystem health management, rural agroenterprise development, participatory research approaches, and spatial and economic analysis for policy support. In the current agenda, the SC notes areas of research of an adaptive nature, such as product and environmental quality, innovations for adaptations for change and vulnerability (both under *Markets* product line) where Africa based organisations such as ICIPE or IITA would have better comparative advantage to lead, and the downstream component of TSBF related to fertilizer that should be implemented by NARS in Africa. The SC suggests that CIAT revise its MTP in light of the recent EPMR recommendations and will review the MTP for 2009-2011 in detail.

CIFOR. CIFOR's project portfolio is the same as last year. The Center has embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to be fully reflected in the next MTP. The alignment of Project outputs to SP goals is described; there are no activities outside the SPs. The largest budget allocation goes to SP 4A, followed by 3A, but the Center notes that their research may contribute to multiple goals. All capacity building is integrated in the SP research, but this is not evident in the logframes. The SC is pleased to see more emphasis on smallholders in research towards improved NRM and livelihoods and a shift of resources to SSA and LAC from Asia. The river basins selected by the CPWF could provide an ideal environment for CIFOR's field work on forestry issues purposely integrated with other Centres' and partners' activities. For optimizing forestry research management outcomes, trade-offs with other sectors in a broader landscape context need to be explicitly considered. The breadth and depth of CIFOR's collaborative partnerships are impressive. The local activities considered crucial in the impact pathways are conducted by national and local organizations. The SC believes CIFOR has scope to play a more prominent role in influencing the agendas of the global institutions relevant for forestry policies and programs. The SC notes that the reflection of the implementation of the 2nd EPMR recommendations in the MTP is delayed pending the development of the new strategic plan. The SC will look at CIFOR's MTP in 2008 for changes following from strategic planning and for EPMR follow-up.

CIMMYT. CIMMYT has revised its Project portfolio by reducing its 11 MTP Projects into 8 new ones this year. These changes, influenced by the EPMR follow-up study in 2006, are intended to improve the alignment of CIMMYT's Projects and 9 flagship products (introduced last year) with the SPs. It is, however, not obvious that anything has been phased out. Almost two thirds of the agenda contributes to SP 2. The IPG orientation of CIMMYT's work is, in general, clear. However, work continuing from the old *African livelihoods* could be too location-specific and there are other activities on, for example, conservation agriculture and rice-maize based stress management, where NARS should now be taking the lead. CIMMYT is committed to getting drought resistant wheat varieties released, which is likely to boost drought-resistance breeding also in NARS. The SC notes CIMMYT's involvement in exploratory research related to nitrogen use efficiency, mycotoxins and association genomics. The CIMMYT-IRRI joint program is highly commendable and the CIMMYT-ICARDA alliance is also showing promise. The Center's relationship with the GCP should be better shown. The SC feels that CIMMYT's MTP is of good quality, with the exception of some sections in the logframe and impact pathways. The 2009-2011 MTP will not require an in-depth SC assessment.

CIP. CIP's project portfolio is the same as last year. The Project linkages with the SPs are described. The IPG nature of CIP's research is clear, particularly in Projects 1-7. Capacity building should be made more explicit in the logframes. The SC notes that although CIP is expanding its work in Eastern and Southern Africa, there is no elaboration of how its new activities fit with the regional alignment, shared platforms and collaborative efforts in the region. The SC highlights two issues where it agrees with the recommendations of CIP's recent EPMR: a) The Center should not expand its research into the health sector in Project 6 (*Agriculture and human health*). This project includes innovative research linking misuse of pesticides to human epidemiology. The SC feels that CIP, rather than developing a capacity in human epidemiology (CIP is hiring an epidemiologist), seeks partnership with the health sector to undertake the work, thereby linking its work on the agriculture sector with that of the health sector; b) CIP should devolve its role in the CONDESAN, Global Mountain Program and Urban Harvest SWEPs. The first two are unrelated to CIP's core research, and the SC considers the Urban Harvest initiative to be outside SP research. The SC will assess CIP's MTP for 2009-2011 in detail.

ICARDA. ICARDA's MTP presents a new project structure, with 8 new Projects replacing six Mega Projects, a result of the 5th EPMR and recent strategic planning. ICARDA also convenes the CAC ecoregional program. The Center has responded well to the EPMR and rapidly developed a more coherent presentation of the program. New activities added or anticipated are clearly indicated.

Projects 6 on diversification and 7 on water and land management will require more work to develop into well integrated and focused projects. The research focus on SPs 1A and 1C is good, but the other projects are somewhat more dispersed in addressing different SPs and require better definition or purpose and clear SP linkage. The IPG nature of research is variably described and the SC would like to see more evidence of cross-country comparisons and syntheses and the IPG-orientation. Capacity building as supporting project work is generally appropriate. The MTP is not clear about what are development activities, but it is evident that some activities, e.g., assistance in rehabilitation of agriculture, are neither research nor IPG-oriented. These and other local and development oriented activities should be identified as such. The strategic partnerships are well described and ICARDA's collaboration with the CPs and other Centers is clear. It is important for ICARDA to produce knowledge on dry areas for extrapolation and use globally, but to be cautious of expanding its mandate to include all non-tropical dry-areas. Given the importance of the new Strategic Plan, project structure and the need for better targeting in some Projects, the SC will assess ICARDA's MTP 2009-2011 in detail.

ICRISAT. This year's MTP presents no major changes although several activities, some non-SPs, have been phased out due to project completion or end of special project funding. The MTP has a considerably improved structure, project narratives and discussion on output contribution to SP goals. Projects 1-6 contribute fully to SPs and two Projects (10 and 11) are outside the SPs. ICRISAT is engaged in research on sweet sorghum and bioethanol production and considers this work as contributing to SPs 2D and 3D. The SC feels that before embarking on genetic improvement for biofuel use, there is a need to undertake a thorough market and constraints analysis to carefully assess the potential for a crop using rainfall in the semi arid tropics to produce and transport bioenergy to a processor efficiently. Project 8 on desert margins consists of scaling out activities of developmental nature and appears to be outside the SPs. The IPG orientation of the outputs is mostly clear, but the activities on African Market Gardens, warrantage and bioethanol do not seem to generate IPGs. For some region-specific activities a better "roadmap" from locally produced outputs to international relevance needs to be shown; the "proof of concept" justification does not seem adequate. Hybrid seed production activities have already been devolved but the SC believes that ICRISAT should also devolve some routine breeding to capable NARS and focus more on pre-breeding. The INRM-based work in Asia should also be devolved. The Project partners and their roles are well described. The MTP could have more clarity about capacity building and ICRISAT's collaboration with others in this regard. The SC would like to see more specificity about the issues to be investigated for producing the outputs and more elaboration on the "innovativeness" of the research. The SC will assess ICRISAT's MTP for 2009 -2011 in detail.

IFPRI. The changes in IFPRI's research portfolio, consisting of 26 individual Projects, are clearly shown in the MTP, and include some new research, projects at an exploratory stage and others subject to mid-course modification. IFPRI addresses 18 of the 20 SPs and estimates that nearly 80% is SP research. While a majority of the work contributes to SP 5, many Projects address multiple SPs and may not be optimally focused. In the Development Strategies and Governance Division there are activities such as understanding the effect of governance and institutional structures on off farm employment, rural finance and local infrastructure that could be done by others. IFPRI has checked the IPG nature of its project activities using its own priority criteria but the IPG descriptions are variable and not convincing in all cases. Capacity building is embedded in research but not explicit in the research plans. Partnerships are well described for about half of the Projects; in others they are very generic. IFPRI's comparative advantage is in general well defined, but not always, e.g., Avian Flu Policy in Theme 8. The SC notes the lack of integration between work on economy-wide models for issues like biofuels and trade policy (in Sub-theme 2.1) and other work on those topics in Theme 1. There is also lack of clarity about the division of labor between the Development Strategy and Governance Division (DSGD) and the ISNAR Division. In 2008 the SC will review IFPRI's MTP only

for clarity and major changes.

IITA. The MTP presents the same project portfolio as last year. IITA also convenes the SP-IPM which seems to be overcoming its difficulties through inter-Center deliberations and its recent CCER. The major emphasis will be in SPs 1A, 2A, 3A and 4D. The latter represents the largest share in terms of budget allocation (32%). There is no allocation to non-SP activities, which is surprising given the nature of the R4D approach. The SP nature of some aspects of the *Agriculture and health* Project is not clear. The IPG orientation of IITA's research is described in a generic way. For some research with very local characteristics, e.g., business plans for agricultural enterprises and local NRM activities; extrapolation of lessons relevant for IPGs is not clearly planned. Reducing focus on benchmark sites would seem to make this more difficult. The SC agrees that, as discussed in IITA's recent EPMP, the Project *Opportunities and threats* deserves reconsideration and change. As in the previous MTP logframe there are few output targets—only 6 for the very large *Roots and tuber systems* Project. Although partnerships are generally well described, there seems to be no collaboration with AVRDC on horticulture and with IFPRI on adoption constraints studies. An important issue, also raised by the EPMP, is that collaboration with CIAT on cassava is also lacking. The SC finds the IITA MTP is brief and rather vague in several parts. More clarity is needed regarding IITA's development activities and the IPG nature of its outputs. The strategic planning remains to be completed. The SC will review in detail IITA's next MTP, which should include updates in these important areas and on implementation of EPMP recommendations.

ILRI. ILRI's project portfolio includes the same four Projects as last year and the SLP. Several adjustments have been made for each Theme in response to the recent EPMP and to the SC's earlier critique. For instance, the *Human livestock and health* Theme is aligned now with the epidemiological requirements and with the *Markets* theme – rather than human nutrition *per se*; the *Biotechnology* Theme encompasses vaccines and diagnostics, livestock genetics and breeding; *People, livestock and the environment* Theme plans to broaden the work on pastoral systems beyond Africa, although not until 2009. ILRI is active in developing the BecA facility and it should be clear in the MTP that most of ILRI's research activities in molecular biology and bioinformatics are within BecA. Half of ILRI's resources are allocated to SPs 3B and 1C. Linking breeding of indigenous breeds to drivers of change and conservation work reflects operationalization in the MTP of the framework plan for 1C and ILRI's contributions to SPs 1C and 2D. Description of the IPG nature of research is mostly clear. However, the *Targeting and innovation* Theme logframe is so fuzzy that it casts doubt on its value; constraints to adoption and research gaps are dealt with as if they were the same. Also other output targets ("evaluations", "understanding") seem to serve internal process functions and monitoring these will be difficult. ILRI should aim at demonstrating that its strategic intent to produce IPGs is indeed correct – for instance in its role as a knowledge provider, advisor on trends and indicator of points of application for policy. ILRI's intention to limit its interventions in the Improving Productivity and Market Success program to science inputs are welcome. ILRI's MTP 2009-2011 does not require a detailed review with the exception of the status of ILRI's vaccine research related to its involvement in BecA, and checking the clarity regarding the *Targets and innovation theme* and the logframes.

IRRI. The MTP presents the same portfolio as last year. It shows a comprehensive and well conceived research agenda with several new components including new Frontier Projects. Modifications at output level are described. IRRI's research is relevant to the SPs and the linkages between Project work and SP specific goals are clear. The plans appear developed in isolation even from the CPs in which IRRI participates. It is positive that the Project on rice genetic diversity and discovery now also includes work on genetic stocks in line with SP 1A goals. IRRI is engaged in potential new research on photosynthetic efficiency of the rice plant (which the SC welcomes to the SP agenda recognizing that it is risky and exploratory by nature), deployment of drought tolerance genes, and designing rice farming management systems with a perspective on climate change. Research on water born and

zoonotic diseases and on biofortification for high lysine content should not be considered SP research. In general IRRI's research is likely to generate IPGs, but there are areas that should be devolved to NARS, such as validating local solutions for best management practices in rice-maize systems and DNA fingerprinting of released varieties. Capacity building is incorporated well into the research agenda. In the logframes, some output targets are still too vague for monitoring. Partnerships appear appropriate, but participating NARS and NGOs and their roles are not specified. Collaboration with WARDA and CIAT in Africa, and the IRRI-CIMMYT alliance are visible in the MTP. IRRI's MTP for 2009 -2011 will not require SC assessment in detail in 2008, other than monitoring changes and progress in SP implementation.

IWMI. The Center presents principally the same research agenda around its four Projects. Cross-cutting work in Institutions and Policy, Groundwater and Health is clearly shown. The MTP is coherent and significantly improved from last year. A reformulation of the Strategic Plan is anticipated under the new leadership. With the exception of parts of Project 10, Projects are aligned with the SPs. This MTP, while showing very clearly the linkages between outputs and output targets with SP goals, does not show further adjustments, except sharper focus on SP area 4. Following the EPMR and SC's suggestions, greater emphasis appears to be given to policy and institutions and impact analysis. The IPGs are to be derived from cross-basin analysis and through synthesis and analysis of various datasets, but the relevance of outputs across national boundaries is not always clear. IWMI has an impressive set of partners which allows it to concentrate on the crosscutting IPG issues even more than is clear from the MTP. Strategic thinking about partnerships is needed. IWMI no longer convenes any SWEPS, but its role in the SLP and CAC is exemplary. The logframes are still weak and outputs and output targets are often vague. For example, much of the research produces "strategies", "syntheses", and "knowledge" – not clear products, and the value added of these, over and above existing information, is not clear. IWMI's comparative advantage in Projects 10 and 11 is unclear. As the Center is developing a new Strategic Plan and is still in the process of implementing the recommendations for the EPMR completed in 2007, the SC will review the MTP for 2009-2011, and these aspects in particular.

WORLD AGROFORESTRY CENTER. Following a new Strategic Plan, WorldAgroforestry has reconstituted its portfolio to comprise 9 Global Projects (GPs). However, the short project narratives do not yet show new directions and the MTP seems to be built around the existing research agenda. The Center foresees that aligning current research with the emerging science priorities will continue through 2008. The GPs' contribution to SPs is shown. All activities are allocated to SPs, and fall mainly into SPs 2D, 3A, 4A, 4D and 5D. There is considerable variability in the likely development of IPGs: work on carbon monitoring and assessment of vulnerability to climate variability and change clearly produce IPGs, but policy advice to national and local policy makers seems very local. Many output targets in the Center logframe and in those of the two SWEPS convened by WorldAgroforestry are too vague for monitoring and verification. The bulk of the capacity building is included in GP9, which is a cross-cutting Project. The Center's action for implementing the EPMR recommendations and the influence of its new Strategic Plan are not yet clear from this MTP. The research content needs strengthening and more detail is needed on how the SP goals are addressed. The SC will review the MTP for 2009-2011 in detail.

WORLD FISH CENTER. The MTP 2008-2010 is an extension to changes started earlier including the refinement of the "campaign" areas and definition of research entry points through an Impact Pathway Approach. The portfolio includes 8 Projects divided into two campaigns: small-scale fisheries and sustainable aquaculture. These replace the earlier regionally-based Projects. The agenda mainly contributes to SPs 4B and 3C. There is an appropriately broad view of the constraints to the campaigns: those governable by fisheries and fish farmers, such as inputs, and those not directly manageable by them, such as management of land and water inputs. The required policy and capacity

building elements are also set out in the portfolio. Although the IPG characteristics are carefully noted and are appropriate for much of the portfolio, some of the research does not seem very suitable for a CGIAR Center, e.g., sea ranching and restocking of sandfish in one country, mechanisms for increasing access of women to aquaculture value chain in some countries; shrimp export promotion in one country. Partnerships are well described and the link with FAO is encouraged and will be valuable for implementing SP 1D research in the future. Relations with the Water&Food CP are good and links with IFPRI are evident, but less so with other Centers. The logframes are generally well described. WorldFish has a major contribution to capacity building; however, the rationale of some of this activity is not clear; e.g. country specific plans, lecture tours and general support. The SC will assess the MTP 2009-2011 in detail, particularly looking at the consolidation of the new Projects and the remaining aspects of the implementation of the EPMR recommendations.

GENERATION CHALLENGE PROGRAM. The GCP Project portfolio remains the same as last year and changes at output level are described and justified, and adjustments due to SPs are shown. A new strategy is reflected particularly in added focus and clarity to the product delivery under Subprograms 3 and 5. The research agenda fits within the SPs and is of an advanced and global nature with clear and appropriate delegation of adaptive and local activities to NARS. Better linkage between the Subprogram outputs and SP goals would be desirable. The SC suggests that the temptation to spread to new areas should be resisted: in the MTP there is a notable spread of activities beyond drought stress, including Striga, aluminum, disease and virus tolerance/resistance. The program will generate IPGs, but so far major breakthroughs have not emerged. Tangible deliverables and outcomes are due soon to show the comparative advantage of this CP over more simple collaborative arrangements. The elements of capacity building are well built into the Program and explicit in the logframes. The SC sees some possibility of outsourcing activities such as genotyping. As observed before, the output targets often appear intermediate by nature and describe activities rather than deliverable results. The forthcoming external review is expected to consider the CP's focus and ability to deliver in the limited timeframe. The partnerships are broad and appropriate and their roles well described, although responsibilities are not shown in the logframes. The SC will review the next MTP for changes resulting from the external review.

HARVESTPLUS CHALLENGE PROGRAM. The project portfolio and outputs are the same as last year. The MTP is generally clear and well organised and of high quality. The CP contributes solely to SP 2C and the work is highly relevant to the SP goals. The CP is completing its phase 1 and lessons learnt will be applied to future allocation of resources to narrow down to the most promising crops. The new promising feature is having nutrition and socioeconomic research as an integral part of the crop improvement and product development concepts. The CP has not yet clarified its strategy on uptake and safety regulations regarding transgenic products. Capacity building targets are now incorporated into the logframes and the SC hopes that funding can be secured to maintain the level of activities in the next phase. IPGs are being generated, however, as observed in the recent external review, the program should be realistic about its impact expectations. Very young children are obviously not the group in which direct impacts can be expected. The outputs and output targets are sufficiently ambitious and timelines are realistic. The strategic alliances are clearly identified and the partners' roles are appropriate. NARS should lead activities in variety release and deployment and some of the activities to reach end users could be devolved. The SC will review the CP's MTP next year for changes resulting from the external review.

WATER AND FOOD CHALLENGE PROGRAM. As previously, the MTP presents a very large research portfolio where the many sub-projects are aggregated into 6 MTP Projects. The focus is primarily on SPs 4 (4C) and 5 (5C and 5D). There is a small effort on breeding for crop water use efficiency. The CP involves a very large and growing number of partners covering all roles from primary research provider to advocacy. It is notable that IWMI is the largest or second largest CG

partner in 5 of the 6 MTP Projects, and that very few external partners are identified as primary researchers – a keystone of the CP concept. Capacity building is not very visible in the MTP although it is implied through the consortium approach. The MTP describes how IPGs are intended to be developed, but clarity is lacking on, for example, how tools, technologies and even networks are justified as IPGs. Analyses and lessons learnt are often described in an effort to convert site-specific results to IPGs. The logframes, however, are too generic to reveal the IPG nature of results. The output targets are often too vague to allow assessment of their value to project goals. The CP is completing a round of competitive bidding. The SC considers that the advice from the recent external review and selection of projects in this round of bidding will give the CP an opportunity to address the dispersed nature of this program and the need for increased focus. The added value of the CP needs greater prominence in the MTP. The impact pathways are still rather generic. As the Phase 1 of this CP is ending, the external review is completed and a proposal for Phase 2 is likely to be presented in early 2008, the SC will conduct an in-depth assessment of the CP's MTP 2009-2011.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA CHALLENGE PROGRAM. The MTP 2008-2010 shows an effort to respond to the 2006 external review and the key recommendations endorsed by the SC/CGIAR to establish a proof of concept for the IAR4D approach. However, there are no details of reduction or addition in the agenda following from this re direction. The proof of concept research, if rightly done, can generate significant IPGs for Africa mainly in the area of institutional innovation and thereby contribute to the SP (SP5). However the MTP still lacks specificity in describing the outputs and how the IPGs, (and RPGs) will be developed and the amount of development activity still seems high. Also, linkages to SPs are not shown. In general, while the partnerships are sufficiently spelled out and cover a large number and diversity of partners, with good involvement of CGIAR Centers, the partners' roles in the research is not clear. The large number of partners results in a large number of activities at the local level and increases the difficulty of focusing in order to deliver the described outputs. The outputs for the sub-projects are yet to be defined and will be defined as work proceeds. The CP has engaged ARIs to help in the methodology in establishing the proof of concept research. However, how the empirical testing will be done is not clear and the plan lacks specificity and targets by which progress can be monitored. The CP approach is currently a compromise between what is doable (given the large number of partners and diversity of the activities at the local level) and what is scientifically needed to draw robust and transferable conclusions about the IAR4D research approach. This may compromise the CPs partners (and African institutions) future possibilities to scale up the approach. The CP needs to elucidate which discrete parts of the very large agenda it will and can tackle. The SC will review the 2009-2011 MTP in detail.

OVERVIEW

This overview highlights to the System the Science Council's major observations from its review of the Medium-Term Plans (MTP) 2008-2010 of the Centers and Challenge Programs (CP). The MTPs serve as the main planning instrument and describe each Center's and CP's research agenda. Since its inception in 2004, the SC has worked with the Centers to improve the substance and format of the rolling three-year MTPs. **The SC notes that overall much discipline and effort have gone into preparing the current MTP documents that, in general, follow a standardized format and show improvement in quality over last year's submissions.** This refers especially to the descriptions of the background and rationale for the proposed research and capacity building efforts, the results to be delivered in the Plan's timeframe, and the plausible outcomes expected in the near- and long-term. Centres have given particular attention to better articulation of the expected impact pathways, although some remain generic rather than project- and output-specific. The goal is for the Centers and CPs to develop quality MTPs such that they would require less frequent in-depth SC commentary. **This year, the SC identified six quality MTPs that will not require in-depth review in 2009.**

That said there is still room for improvement in many of the MTPs where the logframes mostly only include brief general and repetitive statements about the type of impacts anticipated. More attention to elaboration of the scope of the research planned and especially the points of departure from the past would be beneficial. Thus the SC has prepared a commentary to each Center and CP on its MTP.

Since approval in 2005 of the CGIAR System Priorities (SP), and as implementation of the SPs proceeds, the MTPs are becoming the primary means by which Centers' and CPs' demonstrate the contribution of their research to the SPs. Taken jointly, they describe the System's research agenda for the CGIAR and its stakeholders. The SC observes that Centers have, by and large, allocated their research to the SPs much more appropriately this year than last. However, the SC notes that the framework planning has been implemented more slowly than anticipated, and thus the SP allocations still do not represent a coherent agenda for priority research in the System. In cases where a framework plan has already been drafted following a collaborative process, for instance with 1A (currently accounting for 8% of resources), the plan should have been used as the organising principle for formulating the Center component of the research. The SC also notes that relatively few actual adjustments are evident in the MTPs as a result of explicit alignment to SPs. However, the classification in most MTPs of current research by SPs and SP goals is a good basis for the Centers to plan a coherent and integrated agenda for each SP; identify what instruments to utilize (CPs, SWEPs and task forces, in addition to Center programs), what areas to include, what areas to drop and which partners to engage. **The SC looks forward to seeing a more integrated (across Centers) approach to addressing the System's priorities in subsequent MTPs with clear roles and responsibilities elaborated.**

The SC emphasises, that notwithstanding the more realistic allocation of resources to SPs (so that this year, the plans reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the activities addressing SP goals much better than last year) the financial allocations are still only indications. For example, the research in the CGIAR's core areas 2A, 2B, 4A and 4D (reported to account for 36% of the agenda) is still pending coherent plans at the System level. There seems to be an oversubscription to SPs (only 5.7% is allocated to non-SP activities) due to inclusion of very downstream research and even development activities as part of the SP agenda. For example, the SC observed that sometimes Centers have referred to the weakness of NARS as a justification for conducting certain activities themselves that are not appropriate for an IARC. Much activity lacking research focus is still aligned to the least well defined SP, 5D. The SC expects that during framework planning these kinds of activities will be either dropped or devolved or, if Centers consider them essential for doing for securing impact, that they are presented in the non-SP agenda.

The SC commends several Centers and CPs for highlighting areas of exploratory and pioneering research. Most of this is not classified as non-SP, except with IFPRI that allocates nearly 12% of its resources to new research areas outside the SPs. Centers and CPs should be encouraged to include in the SP agenda elements of high-risk research when breakthroughs in research could lead to high impacts on agreed SPs, e.g., IRRI's work on the photosynthetic efficiency of the rice plant. Expectations for success from such research need to be commensurate with the challenges and potential impacts involved. Regarding capacity building, the SC noted that several Centers have appropriately identified these activities as integral to SP research in order to help build capacity in the core areas of research and increase the plausibility of outcomes and sustainable impact. Little capacity building now remains outside the SPs, but in several cases the rationale for classifying it as SP or stand-alone (i.e. non-SP) capacity building is not clear, nor is it explicit precisely what the Centers are doing.

Centers and CPs invariably describe their SP activities as IPGs. The SC encourages Centers to plan more carefully and better articulate the IPG nature of "networks", "knowledge", "understanding", "evaluation", "synthesis" and "proof of concept". In many MTPs the kinds of output targets often lack clarity in how they will contribute to IPGs. The relevance and robustness of results across boundaries accruing from local and national activities should be explained and not just stated. Free availability of research results such as tools, materials and publications is not sufficient to make them IPGs, nor use, *per se*, of a method, such as GIS that can facilitate cross-boundary analyses. The potentially widespread applicability of the research output targets should be evident.

Overall, the MTPs provide good evidence that the Centers are increasingly working together; several new alliances and joint programs around themes and commodities are described in the MTPs, in addition to the SWEPs and CP activities. This notwithstanding, the SC observed in almost all MTP logframes inadequate identification of the partner(s) responsible for the outputs and output targets that are products of collaborative work or sometimes seem to rely solely on partners for delivery. An additional concern is that the Centers hosting SWEPs do not all report those involved in the research, and those contributing to the SWEPs and CPs do not seem to be diligently identifying their component activities as part of the collaborative program. The SWEP budgets are sometimes included in their totality, sometimes not at all in the convening Center financial plan. In the Center MTPs, the work done for CPs may be significant, yet the CPs mostly do not indicate the partners responsible for outputs or output targets. As the CPs submit comprehensive financial plans, there is a risk of financial double counting in the System if the Centers also include work done within the CPs in their own budgets.

The SC observes a positive catalytic effect of the EPMRs in the way CIMMYT and ICARDA are tightening their focus and organization of research. Following EPMR recommendations, the World Agroforestry Center and CIFOR are also developing new strategic plans, but the implementation of these is not yet very clear in the MTPs, reflecting a slow pace in strategic planning. The WorldFish Center continues to develop its strategic approach and project structure following on from its EPMR and it is still in the process of implementing the EPMR recommendations. ILRI and IWMI show good preliminary responses to their recent EPMRs. The SC commends IFPRI for a good account of its implementation of all EPMR recommendations. **Overall the SC concludes that there is need to place more emphasis on ensuring that strategic plans reflect appropriate responses to the new SPs and that MTPs build on these two elements in a coherent and timely fashion.**

The SC recommends a change to the process of monitoring achievement at Centers. Setting output targets against which achievement can be monitored has become one of the key purposes of the MTPs. Presenting a set of clear, measurable and verifiable outputs and output targets that are ambitious and

that contribute to achieving the research goals has greatly enhanced the quality of the logframes. In the first years of the Performance Measurement System (PMS) exercise, emphasis was put on using the MTP as a basis for monitoring annual research achievement through the Output Target indicator. Experience to-date suggests that this created a strong disincentive to aim high, and hence may have adversely affected setting ambitious but appropriate targets for CGIAR science. **Therefore, the SC now recommends de-linking the MTP output planning from the PMS.** The monitoring of the achievement of output targets will be the responsibility of the Centers and CPs themselves. This change does not reduce the requirement for Centers/CPs to set clear, measurable and verifiable output targets—an area where the SC still observes scope for improvement. The instructions for on-line MTP reporting will be improved to facilitate this purpose. The fact that the EPMP teams and other external reviewers and users will be able to monitor achievement over time in a traceable MTP database will provide the impetus for Centers and CPs to carefully plan and internally monitor achievement of output targets.

The SC will continue working with the Centers and CPs to streamline the development of the rolling MTPs. The ICT-KM Unit of the System Office and some Centers are developing a very promising on-line MTP reporting tool that will consist of two components: Center modules for MTP compilation and submission, and a System database. The SC believes that the on-line MTP system will, in addition to simplifying the MTP preparation and submission, be beneficial in helping: (a) the Centers/CPs develop the MTP as an internal planning and monitoring document linked to the organisation's other internal research management components; and, (b) the SC and the System analyse plans and monitor progress both at Center/CP and System level over time. With the generally more satisfactory level of reporting now observed (beginning this year with six MTPs) and with the anticipated coherence and integration deriving from individual Center plans becoming linked at framework planning level, the SC believes it may not be necessary to assess MTPs every year in similar detail. More in-depth assessments of MTPs would occur when there are significant changes resulting from a new Strategic Plan, a recently completed EPMP, or major weaknesses in some part of the program identified by the SC. However, the SC will continue annual monitoring of the implementation of the SPs during the transitional period anticipating that by 2009 (MTP 2010-2012) all the MTPs will reflect collaborative SP implementation.