

ISPC paper to introduce discussion on CRPs at SC2

Background

The concept of CRPs arose during the CGIAR Reform process with a two-fold aim of integrating the work of the CGIAR research centers and enhancing collaboration with partners. In Phase 1, fifteen CRPs were submitted over a period of almost twenty four months and evaluated by the ISPC. The CRPs varied greatly in quality and size of budget and were not packaged as a portfolio.

In 2014/15, the DGs developed a 'designed portfolio' of CRPs, decreasing the total number from 15 to 12, by merging Dryland Cereals, with Grain Legumes and Dryland Systems, separating Livestock and Fish and agreeing to end the concept of Systems programs by closing AAS and Humid Tropics. The intention instead, was to develop integrated approaches to food and farming systems within 8 Agri-food systems CRPs alongside 4 'Global integrating' or 'Cross-cutting' CRPs + a number of Co-ordinating platforms.

The ISPC reviewed the original 15 CRPs, the 15 Extension proposals, the 12 pre-proposals and full proposals and 3 Platforms for the new portfolio and suggested areas for improvement, finally making assessments (ratings) of the 15 sets of documents submitted on 31 July 2016. The potential added value of CRPs as a construct within which to leverage the contribution of the CGIAR System to influencing global agendas has become clearer with each review. **Yet at no time was this portfolio viewed by the ISPC as an 'all or nothing' option. The final ratings were designed to enable individual donors to make selections from within an overall package.** The histograms depicting the different sources of funding for each CRP were included as part of this aim. For the avoidance of doubt, the 'projected W1 and 2' amounts are the amounts being *requested* by the CRPs within the portfolio W1 and 2 'envelope' agreed in Rome 2015. The ISPC recognizes that it is up to the donors to decide the potential level of funding they might wish to commit to each CRP/FP.

Positive progress

The two AFS CRPs which were reviewed as being 'excellent' by the ISPC in this last round of resubmissions (31 July 2016), were assessed as having strong and proven leadership (reflected in the coherence and structure of the CRP as a whole), a long-term strategic vision of how the context/external environment is changing as reflected in a picture of an adaptable CRP, international credibility to be in a position to provide global leadership (as evidenced in a strong partnership strategy), evidence of an ability to prioritize and a sense of coherence across CRPs both in choice of topics and the vision that each FP would provide international public goods.

In earlier commentaries the ISPC has commented positively on the potential it sees for the i-CRPs to raise the international profile of the CGIAR as a whole through providing evidence reflecting the collective knowledge of the System to high-level policy debates. The four i-CRPs were all assessed as being either excellent or very good. The two excellent proposals (CCAFS and A4NH) have very clear global policy bodies to relate to, while PIM and WLE have a more diffuse set of policy agencies to relate to, making their challenge more difficult.

Given the definition we give of the characteristics of excellent CRPs, the remaining cereal CRPs (Maize and Wheat) were assessed as 'very good' proposals, since while consisting of high quality research, they did not appear to recognize changes in the institutional (including the private sector) environment in which they are operating. Although these CRP proposals show an awareness of changes in the value chains and the structure of demand for their crops, this awareness does not seem to have filtered into the priorities or strategies for the breeding and pre-breeding programs. These programs still seem to be heavily emphasizing production-side traits rather than traits that would link to emerging sources of demand.

Of the three CRPs in the 'good' category, the separation of Fish from Livestock (despite the fact that the Livestock and Fish program in phase 1 was viewed as successful) means that both programs have had to identify new agendas and have chosen to emphasise technology development. For Livestock this approach might have been more compelling in the CRP construct (i.e. integration between Centers and interdisciplinary approaches) if the livelihoods component had been stronger and if the proposal had articulated a forward-looking and strategic vision that adequately recognized current and potential transformative changes in the smallholder production sectors. For Fish, its potential contribution to the wider portfolio (i.e. justification for W1 and 2 funding) still seemed to be in an early stage of development.

FTA on the other hand had 4 strong FPs, but the sections at the CRP level did not give confidence of coherence across the FPs. The ISPC noted that the weakness of this CRP was partly due to the lack of a permanent full-time CRP leader. FTA has just recently appointed a highly qualified leader for the CRP which bodes well for the further development of this CRP. The ISPC considers fish, forests and livestock to be key components of a CGIAR integrated portfolio and thus further evolution of these CRPs, is important for the delivery of integrated research outputs at the System level.

Grain legumes and dryland cereals (previously DCL)

The ISPC did not consider it appropriate to give a rating to the GLDC proposal since it is considered to be still be 'incomplete', unsurprising given the short time available for the rewriting. However, the Council did consider that the new focus on commercialisation had the potential to lead to the creation of a successful CRP. The thinking within the proposal reflected the emergence of a possible long-term strategic vision which could have a positive impact on the target beneficiaries of GLDC, but the proposal as submitted on 31 July was not yet strong enough to justify funding as a CRP.

The ISPC consider that delivery of the targets in the SRF does require that a CRP focused on GLDC's target beneficiaries should be included in the portfolio, given the CGIAR's comparative advantage in the breeding of grain legumes and dryland cereals. In light of this belief, the associated GLDC commentary puts forward 3 options for next steps, which the SMB/SC might like to consider.

Conclusions and points for discussion

CRPs are a complex construct, but they represent a significant step forward in terms of achieving innovative, multi-disciplinary and results-focussed research programs. They have received positive feedback, in the MTR and in the recently concluded synthesis of the evaluations of 15 CRPs by IEA.

Their internal structure has evolved and budgeting has become clearer with the introduction of Flagships. The nature of activities included in 'CRP 'management' costs and 'impact assessments' is becoming standardized which may facilitate a credible evaluation of the benefits of W1 and 2 investment in CRP management. Claims that W1 and 2 funding subsidises the impact of other donors

should be examined, to test the hypothesis that CRP management does indeed make the impact of the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

The ISPC recommends that their assessment ratings of the *proposals* should not be used on their own to prioritize allocation of W1 and 2 funding, but that more could be achieved through funding a portfolio which enabled some of the CRPs currently assessed as less strong, to mature.

The ISPC would also caution against placing too much reliance on the individual CRP estimates of target beneficiaries, since these have not been validated and in many cases appear to be aspirational in the absence of evidence of past delivery.

In making its decisions on investments in the new CGIAR portfolio, the ISPC urges the System Council to consider the following additional factors, in order to achieve a balanced, innovative and productive portfolio of investments.

- 1) **Balancing risky investments with “safe bets”:** Maintaining a long term, innovative and dynamic research portfolio (as required by the SRF) means accepting some risk in the investment decisions.
- 2) **Maturity of the research program:** Relatively new research elements cannot be expected to deliver at the outcome level over the same time frame as longer established research. Investment should support their capacity to develop.
- 3) **Comparative advantage:** The main comparative advantage of the CGIAR is delivery of International Public Goods, articulated in terms of the SLOs, IDOS, sub-IDOs etc. Comparative advantage of the CGIAR research programs needs to, and in some cases is, evolving in response to a dynamic external environment (e.g. climate change, changes in the global and local economies). Enabling comparative advantage across the CGIAR to be responsive to the rate of change, while protecting essential traditional strengths is an important consideration in the investment decision.
- 4) **Complexity of the problems addressed:** There is variation in the degree of uncertainty, complexity and dynamism in the policy, agro-ecological and socio-economic systems and challenges each research program addresses. This affects the time it can take to develop an effective research program and investment decisions need to take this into account.
- 5) **Minimum funding requirements for program viability:** Under- investment and uncertainty of investment resources will prejudice the delivery capacity of the research programs and thus careful consideration of these factors is warranted. This has already proven to be an issue affecting the quality of research that can be planned, implemented and results delivered.