

## **Review of Mega Programme Concept Note**

### **MP4: Agriculture for Improved Nutrition and Health**

This review is structured according to the specified review criteria

1. Is the conceptual framework clear and the approach proposed coherent?

The concept note outlines a general but credible framework for effective trans-disciplinary action involving all CGIAR Centres. The approach is coherent in that it links nutrition, health and poverty and it aims at environmental sustainability. The complexity of the agri-food systems which are to be influenced through agricultural interventions is acknowledged in the proposal.

The focus on nutrition links food production and human health/welfare logically, and is also connected to poverty. The key area of innovation is the integration of a wide range of subject specialties which needs to be combined with a strong socio-economic research element. The latter may well be implicit but is not quite as clearly described in the application document yet.

The programme emphasizes the integration of technological with methodological innovation. This is a necessary aim of the programme, and needs to be combined with effective translation into policy/practice. For the latter to happen, effective communication / understanding of stakeholder priorities are essential which suggests the need to incorporate strong social science expertise in this work. This element should be strengthened in a full application, as pointed out above.

The relevance and appropriateness of the framework should be reviewed and potentially revised after 1-2 years.

2. Are the partners the most appropriate?

The trans-, inter and cross-disciplinary linkages in this project between the CGIAR Centres and the listed external partners represent significant added

value if they are based on an intelligent combination of complementary areas of expertise. It is notable that most Centres have expertise in nutrition, but only few in economics and none mentions socio-economics/anthropology. Again, at least this is at least how it appears from the application document text.

It is essential for the Centres to have strategic and formal linkages with external partners in research, development and implementation. It is important that these are formalised so that partners are committed to this relationship, and the link is of mutual benefit. For these relationships to be strong and long-term, exchange of scientists between partner organisations and Centres for extended periods (several months) should become a strategic element of the collaborations.

The Centres themselves need to be considered by the global community as Centres of Scientific Excellence. For them to be able to achieve or maintain that status they need to work with research partners that have a high standing in the international community. The Centres need to provide incentives for potential research partners to become and remain involved in collaborative research.

It may be sensible to strengthen communication between partners, including increasing mutual awareness of expertise, and the resulting potential of collaborative research. This could be facilitated by appropriate management processes, conferences or strategic brainstorming meetings.

The Centres need to have a joint knowledge management and sharing strategy which will have the added benefit of facilitating the establishment of new collaborations.

3. Is the monitoring and evaluation process appropriate?

The proposed monitoring and evaluation process is appropriate, but still very general. The complexity of this programme will represent a major challenge for monitoring and evaluation. While annual reviews are probably more realistic and cost-effective than shorter review intervals, it needs to be recognised that it may be difficult, if not impossible, for these reviews to be effective at detecting and correcting any problems.

It is unclear how different MPs can be linked in a synergistic way so as to maximise impact in the most cost-effective way.

4. Has the literature been properly analysed?

There is no list of references, but the text does suggest a comprehensive assessment of the relevant literature.

5. Is the impact pathway clearly set out?

The proposal specifies three impact pathways: develop innovative coalitions, accelerate supply/demand and strengthen agri-health partnerships.

The programme aims to bring agricultural and livestock research into the centre of the global One Health initiative. This will be an important generic impact.

There is likely to be a fairly long delay between intervention implementation and impact and this will complicate attribution and correction.

The programme indicates that impacts will be delivered through others, and while this cannot be avoided, it also bears the risk of effectiveness of implementation being difficult or impossible to evaluate, and/or it may not be possible to attribute any failures to any particular actors involved. This further emphasizes the need for formal relationships with these partners.

It is a strength of the programme that it has a long-term perspective of 10 years plus. It appears that a 3-year period is planned for analysis and pilot testing of interventions, and the remaining 7 years for scaling up of interventions. There will be have to be flexibility with respect to the duration of the 3 year analysis and pilot testing period, and it cannot be expected that the scaling-up will go ahead without need for review and revision.

The importance of publication in the peer-reviewed scientific literature is currently not acknowledged. This will also be of importance to any research partners and will be an important criterion for Centres to be recognised by the international science community as Centres of Scientific Excellence. Clearly, while excellence is important, the science has to generate relevant and translatable outputs leading to impact in relation to the main target groups of this programme.

6. Is the proposed management structure appropriate and non-bureaucratic?

The management of the proposed programme represents a formidable challenge, since many of the partners have not worked together before, and may not be used to a multi-disciplinary approach of the scale proposed here. The success of the programme crucially depends on the management of the collaborative process, and it would be sensible to first assess the effectiveness of the management of previous research/policy/practice programmes involving multiple Centres (incl. HarvestPlus), and learn from any problems experienced.

There need to be clearly defined incentives for the partnership to be of benefit to individual scientists/partners/Centres. The prioritisation challenge associated with individuals being involved in multiple MPs needs to be well managed.

Having particular Centres lead an MP may not be compatible with encouraging functional partnership. A consortium-type agreement, possibly be with rotating Chair, would probably be more effective. Again, it is advisable to evaluate how previous such arrangements between CGIAR Centres have worked.

A strong advisory/steering committee consisting of members external to the MP and CGIAR will be required.

There is a danger that the scale and complexity of programme requires a significant and therefore costly management structure.

7. Advice to the authors when they develop the concept note into a full proposal?

The socio-economic aspects of the proposal need to be strengthened, potentially by linking with credible external partners should such expertise not be available within any of the Centres.

The capacity building element of the programme needs to be defined much more clearly. The Centres should more clearly strive towards being Centres of Scientific Excellence. This should include strategic exchange of scientists with external organisations.

Production of peer-reviewed scientific publications needs to be an important output of the programme.

The full proposal needs to better present the synergies between the different activity streams, since this will be a key added value of this programme.

It is currently unclear how synergies between different MPs can be maximised, while simultaneously rationalising costs.

Linkages with external partners need to be defined in more detail.

The importance of combining impact in relation to the stated aims of the programme with the highest standard of scientific excellence needs to be much more strongly emphasized and credible strategies for achieving, monitoring and evaluating this balance have to be outlined.

8. Advice to the Consortium Board about the acceptability of the concept note and the feasibility of developing it into a full proposal?

The concept note is acceptable and it should be possible to develop it into a meaningful full proposal.