



4 February 2011

**COMMENTS AND GUIDELINES FROM THE CONSORTIUM BOARD
BASED ON THE SUBMISSION SEPTEMBER 10**

Agriculture for improved nutrition and health

The Consortium Board (CB) appreciates the effort made by the proponents in elaborating a full proposal of this CGIAR Research Programme taking into consideration the comments and guidelines provided by the CB on 24 June 2010.

The CB appreciates the vision and the justification provided in CRP 4. These are well written and convincing. The CB considers that it is very important for the CGIAR to have a CRP that effectively fosters the emergence of a system for agriculture for health and nutrition (AHN) operating at the intersection of three as yet unconnected systems. Persistent hunger and nutritional deficiencies have a direct impact across MDG targets, reducing child and maternal health, increasing the impact of infectious diseases and educational under-attainment, and contribute to life-long reduction in economic productivity.

The proposal is nevertheless very ambitious and encompasses objectives, in some of the sub-components, that will be very difficult to fulfil in a programme of this size and that depend upon many assumptions that may not be realised. The Board would thus like the proponents to bring more focus to the proposal, with a clearer research priority setting process. Interactions and linkages among the five research components and their various sub-components also need to be further clarified. The number of different objectives, at component and sub-component level, of rationales and justifications gives an impression that the proposal actually consists of separate components, working rather independently. This is probably not the case, but this is how the proposal comes over.

The text of this proposal contains much of value. However, there are some specific issues indicated below that need further thoughts for a revised version to fulfil the criteria for approval by the CB.

1. Strategic coherence and clarity of CRP objectives

CRP4 works across disciplines and sectors, and does so in an innovative manner. It is therefore essential, because such work is a tall order, that the overall strategic coherence of the work proposed be better demonstrated. The overall objectives of CRP 4 should be something more than simply implementing five research components. A set of objectives applying across all components would strengthen the proposal. A possible way of demonstrating the strategic coherence of the work would be to use Component 4 and Component 5 as the overall frame for the work (Figure 9, page 68 would be a good point of departure) , with Components 1, 2, 3 being undertaken within this overall frame. There are of course other ways of increasing overall coherence, and the proponents have no doubt already discussed this among themselves.



As it stands, the proposal gives the impression that the work undertaken in Components 1, 2, 3 is somewhat stand alone with respect to the work proposed under Components 4 and 5. For instance, as noted by one reviewer, component 4 primary focus appears to be on case studies (Table2: 77-78pp) that are unrelated to other components of the CRP. It is acknowledged that it is necessary for the component to analyse activities conducted outside CRP4 to be able to come up with recommended approaches and models, but the CRP will benefit from linking with components 1-3 as well as 5.

The CB thinks that a re-visiting of the components, with a view to simplify the proposal, and increase its focus on fewer challenges, would strengthen the credibility of the work proposed and its overall strategic coherence. A question that is not answered with sufficient clarity is the relative importance of working on new technologies, practices, policies to improve health and nutrition in agriculture by comparison with working on improving access to the already existing nutritious food by the marginalised and poor people in areas undergoing intensification. Much has been written (e.g., Amartya Sen) about the fact lack of access and entitlements leads the poor to hunger, as a primary cause, not lack of overall quantity and quality of food. It is of course not the one or the other, and both dimensions are needed. A discussion of the relative importance of these two intertwined dimensions of the challenges addressed by CRP 4 would also increase its overall strategic coherence.

The proponents implicitly give priority to work on new technologies over work on policies and institutional arrangements, since work on new technologies receives the lion's share of the proposed budget. Given the objective of CRP 4 to increase access of the poor to more nutritious food, this emphasis on new technologies needs to be justified, to also increase the overall coherence of the proposal.

2. Delivery focus and plausibility of impact

The proposal has a strong delivery focus, which the CB appreciates. This would be further strengthened by an explanation of how the target populations are defined, and thus identified, as well as a more detailed explanation of how the work will be prioritised geographically. The various impact pathways described in the proposal are relatively generic, and the re-visiting of the articulation of the components discussed in the above section, along with a greater focus on fewer challenges should lead to more concrete and thus more convincing impact pathways.

3. Quality of science

The quality of science is difficult to ascertain because the proposal is wide ranging and therefore does not describe research methods in sufficient detail.

The proponents should delete the first section of the proposal –as noted by one referee- as it is redundant with the following sections, which all provide, again, the rationale and objectives of each component and sub-component. This will allow the proponents to provide more details on the methods and activities under each component.



In Component 1 (nutrition in value chains), the research question: ‘*how can the poor (and especially women) participate in the value chain and achieve greater access to high quality nutrient rich foods and commercial products*’ (page 23) is a key overriding question, that should be decomposed into more specific questions to guide the proposed work under this component.

In component 3, diseases, it is unclear whether there is a policy and institutional arrangement dimension, in particular for the food safety sub-component, or whether all policy issues are addressed in Components 4 and 5. The activities listed in the activity, output, outcome, impact table for Component 3 do not come over as being particularly coherent; they read more like a set of various activities, rather independent.

The gender mainstreaming in this proposal is appreciated by the CB, but the Board would have expected that there would be more research questions in the proposals that are related to the particular circumstances of women and to access and entitlements, more generally.

The referees have made detailed comments on each component. The proposers should consider these comments to update CRP4 proposal.

4. Quality of research and development partners and partnership management

A partnership strategy is discussed, which is clear and credible. The management of the CRP is however entirely CGIAR based. The CB recommends that a minimum of key partners be involved in making decisions about research directions and about allocation of funds to different activities and partners in the CRP, to better reflect the global partnership nature of this CRP. Many critics of the CGIAR reform point out that the CRPs are really Centre programmes, in which partners have no voice, but are sub-contracted to do part of the work. It is important to provide mechanisms for key partners to have a voice and to contribute to strategic decisions for the CRP.

The partnerships in this CRP are numerous and wide-ranging. The coordination task will not be an easy one, and an explanation of how this is going to be accomplished would strengthen the proposal.

5. Appropriateness and efficiency of CRP management

The CB has looked at the proposal by the proponents of CRP4 for a ‘joint venture’ between ILRI and IFPRI for the management of this research programme. The CB has reiterated in many occasions that it will adhere to the principle of only one lead centre and will sign a performance contract with one centre. Donors have also expressed their concern that fiduciary responsibilities are not going to be sufficiently clear if there are multiple lead centres. The CB has adhered to this concept in all CRPs that have been developed. It is also embedded into a number of key CGIAR documents for the creation of the CGIAR Fund.

The CB has furthermore promoted the idea that it should be the centres themselves that should come to an agreement with regards to the designation of the lead centre, and has



only intervened when this has not been possible, and was requested by the proponents of the CRP to make the designation.

After given this matter due consideration and engaging in consultations with the proponents of the “joint venture” proposal, the CB has decided that CRP 4 needs to comply with this principle, as all other CRPs have. We fully understand that the agriculture-nutrition-health challenge is complex, interdisciplinary and responds to different characteristics and specificities. We also acknowledge that these three sectors are seldom coordinated in their strategic planning and response. We agree however with the proponents, that they require an integrated and multidisciplinary analysis and response, and the CB is confident that the research under CRP 4 will fill this gap, and show the benefits of overcoming the sectoral divides that have prevented agriculture, health and nutrition from working well together in the past.

The CB designates IFPRI as the lead centre for CRP 4. In order to ensure that agricultural research in nutrition and health are not just complementary but realize powerful synergies, the CB attaches great importance to the governance functions and composition of the Management Committee, where the programmatic strategic policy decisions and priorities will be formulated. The management structure should reflect the differences, interface and synergies among agriculture, health and nutrition. The CB recommends that ILRI should assume the chairmanship of that committee in the first years of implementation of CRP4. The Chairmanship could subsequently rotate among members of the Committee. The CB further recommends that ILRI should assume leadership - although in close consultation with IFPRI – for the implementation of component 3: Control of Agriculture- associated diseases. Finally, the CB also recommends that the designation of the Managing Director of CRP 4 should be a joint undertaking by IFPRI and ILRI and the decision taken by consensus.

With regards to other management issues, the Consortium Board appreciates that Harvest Plus and AgroSalud are presented as fully fledged subcomponents of component 2. However, the statement in page 30 that “HarvestPlus and AgroSalud are independent organizations, with their own well-established goals, visions, governance, management and funding base.... “ may be interpreted that there is no planned integration, but simply a juxtaposition of on-going work. The CB has previously indicated that all the challenge programmes should be integrated into CRPs. This implies that they do not continue with their own independent structure and management. The CB understands that different Challenge Programs (CP) may have to be handled differently. The proposal thus needs to clarify how both the CP and AgroSalud are actually integrated into this CRP, by opposition to being ‘housed’ by CRP 4 without having any interactions with the rest of the work, which is how the proposal currently reads.

6. Clear accountability and financial soundness, and efficiency of governance

The initial 3-year budget appears to be reasonable, credible and defensible, given the problem being addressed and the partnerships involved. However, further details on the budget lines are needed, to justify the sums requested. Donors will request this further level of details, in the name of accountability.



It is not entirely clear how specific research projects in CRP4 will be evaluated and monitored. As mentioned above, research activities, as currently specified in each of the components, are very general. Mechanisms need to be put in place that will allow implementation of measures to deal with any problems that emerge during programme implementation. Milestones or trigger points need to be specified as well as a pathway leading to corrective action should it become apparent that particular work plans, projects or activities are not achieving their objectives. The monitoring and evaluation system of this CRP should be further developed and clearly outlined in a separate chapter of the updated proposal.

Recommendation

The CB reconfirms the importance and relevance of this CRP in the current CGIAR reform process. Designing effective means of delivering nutrient-rich foods to vulnerable groups and reducing agriculturally –related disease at critical stages of maternal and child development, will contribute to the attainment of one of the four CGIAR system level outcomes. In light of the above comments, and those of the reviewers that are in line with the CB thoughts, the CB considers that the proposal should be further improved before it can be submitted to the Fund Council.