

7th Meeting of the Standing Panel on Monitoring and Evaluation (SPME)
ICRISAT, Hyderabad: September 14:00-17:00

Proceedings

Present:

Ken Fischer, SPME Chair
Vir Chopra
Paul Vlek
Oswaldo Feinstein
Sirkka Immonen, SPME Secretary

The meeting was preceded by internal SPME discussion of some of the items from 9:00-12:00. Rudy Rabbinge (SC Chair) and Ruben Echeverria (SC Executive Director) attended the MTP discussion during the closed session. Manuel Lantin (CGIAR Secretariat) and Dyno Keatinge (ICRISAT) attended part of the meeting as observers. The sessions on Item 7 on the PRGA review and 8 on PM, discussed jointly with SPIA, were attended by Ian MacGillivray (Canada), Simon Best (Board Chair, ICRISAT), Staffan Wikteliuss (SIDA), Manuel Lantin and Dyno Keatinge as observers. These proceeding cover all sessions.

Item 1: Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed all to the SPME meeting. He welcomed the observers, Manuel Lantin and Dyno Keatinge who attended part of the meeting. He stated the importance of the collaboration in issues on monitoring and evaluation with the CGIAR Secretariat on the one hand and of the need to interact with Centers on the other hand.

Item 2: Review and Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted with no changes.

Item 3: Minutes and Follow up Action from last SPME Meeting

The Chair went through the action items reporting briefly on achievement. Pending activities were dealt with under the respective agenda items of this 7th meeting.

Item 4: Medium-Term Plans

The Chair identified the main issues that needed attention: a) streamlining of the MTP process. b) the SC's assessment of the MTP submissions in 2007; and c) assessment of the regional MTPs in 2007.

SPME had held virtually a brief discussion on the basis of a background note on the MTPs in order to identify the main topics related to the purpose of MTPs, SC's strategic assessment of them and the use of MTPs for the System and the Centers. SPME members discussed the principle features of the MTP assessment. SPME needs to develop the MTP process as an instrument for the SC to monitor relevance, i.e. alignment of Center research with the System Priorities (a matrix on SP alignment by resources and research content can be produced from

the MTPs), generation of International Public Goods (IPG), and to some degree, effectiveness and efficiency towards outcomes and eventually impacts along the defined impact pathway. The MTP is now also the forum for reporting implementation of EP MR recommendations. While SPME felt that other tools, such as EP MR were to be used for assessing the quality of research, the assessment of the logframe plan and the type of research proposed implies also assessment of quality. The members emphasised that the MTPs are a planning tool and as such have internal utility to Centers for increasing their effectiveness.

The frequency of detailed review of MTPs by the SC was discussed. SPME noted that in most areas the MTPs have been consistently improving from the past. Currently there is still however very large variability among the Center /CP MTPs regarding inclusion of information and the content. Also all Centers are in a transition of aligning their MTPs to SP. With this background the SPME discussed a means of streamlining the SC evaluation of MTPs. including:

- Rotation, say every 3 years.
- Random assessments
- Scheduling based on the quality of the MTP.

The SPME determined that the best staggering would be based on the quality of the MTPs. The SPME proposed a system where by the SC would thoroughly review good quality MTPs only on a three-year basis. It would however continue to comment on alignment with SP, on any large changes in the Center portfolio and in follow up to recent EP MR recommendations. The SC would continue to thoroughly review on an annual basis those MTP which in their view need further improvement.

The first year of the three-year rolling MTPs provides the workplan and budget for the coming year. It is this workplan that is endorsed by the SC to the AGM. Thus the SC does need to receive a rolling MTP on an annual basis. As noted above the SC will only make detailed comments on specific issues on the MTPs of good quality but will continue to review more thoroughly the others. To facilitate the annual submission the SPME endorses the Center/System Office initiative for an on-line submission that will also provide a common approach of form and content. The system level on-line MTP application being developed is expected to improve the form and clarity of the MTPs for Center and system level analysis, in addition to making the submission easier for Centers and CPs.

In 2007, the SC will assess all Center and CP MTPs for clearly defined areas of content reflecting the MTP guidelines. SPME agreed that the assessment template needs to be simplified to focus on the key elements of assessment, which should be made clear to the Centers. SPME members agreed that the discussion of the MTPs at the SC meeting (SC8) needed tightening by focusing only on Centers and aspects of the MTP where consensus needed to be reached.

SPME discussed the assessment of the regional plans for ESA and WCA. Because of the evolving state of these plans and the different approaches taken by the ESA to the WCA, SPME decided to seek more guidance at the SC plenary.

Action for SPME

- SPME will share a draft MTP assessment template and an assignment plan with the SC.
- SPME will present to the SC its suggestion for streamlining the MTP process to more effectively fulfil the purpose of the MTPs. The steps include enhancing the uniformity and quality (form and content) of the MTP submissions and subsequent staggering of the

detailed assessment by the SC of those MTPs that fulfil the criteria. Annual monitoring across all MTPs will be performed.

- Consultants will be engaged to help in the assessment of some MTPs.

Item 5: Follow up action from the Meta study of the Systemwide Programs

The SPME Chair briefed the meeting about the SWEP meta-study. SPME members would be asked to contribute to preparing the SC's commentary to the meta-study report. The members agreed that the report did not address many of the specific issue in the TOR. However, it had addressed certain issues that could be distilled, for instance related to institutional set-up and funding. The useful information and analysis embedded in the report could be used in an internal follow-up that may be able to provide more clear guidance on the profile and use of different SWEPS as instruments for implementing the SP agenda. The SPME suggested that there was still a need to better differentiate between the different kinds of SWEPS and to reach conclusion of their continuation and the utility of the SWEP instrument in the context of implementing the SPs.

Action for SPME

- SPME recommends that it with follow up on the SWEPS meta-study internally to elucidate some clarity on the role of the SWEPS among various instruments for implementing system priority research. The SC Secretariat should assist in drafting a follow-up report.

Item 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

a) Update on EPMRs and CPERs

The SPME Secretary gave a brief update on the ongoing EPMRs and CPERs. The EPMRs of IITA, CIAT, CIP and WARDA were being implemented during the first half of 2007 and they were expected to be completed by end of July. Two CPERs, those of Water & Food CP and HarvestPlus were under way and the CPER of the Generation CP was planned to start during the 4th quarter of 2007. The SPME Chair raised the issue of how to engage the SC members in the oversight of the reviews and in the discussion of the results of the EPMRs. In SC8 there will be 4 EPMRs, and some reports are expected to come to the Council very late. The mechanism has been to use *ad hoc* teams. They have worked variably. To improve the contribution of the *ad hoc* teams, it was suggested that the team should prepare discussion items prior to the SC meeting to be shared with the SC membership so that the discussion during the meeting would be focused on the key areas.

The Standing Panel reviewed the tentative plan for future EPMRs. The EPMRs of Bioversity International (6th) and ICRISAT (6th) are scheduled to be implemented in 2008. SPME decided to recommend to the SC to commission these EPMRs.

Regarding the CPERs specifically, SPME discussed the SC oversight to these reviews. They have a reduced involvement of the SC Secretariat staff that provides support only virtually. One of the observers to the SPME meeting reinforced the importance of the "oversight" role of the SC Secretariat in providing quality control to ALL reviews including those of the CPs which were seen of equal importance to those of the Centers. Three stages of intervention to ensure quality control were considered: a) briefing at the very beginning of the review was traditionally done by the SC Chair and this briefing should be very thorough. It was proposed that this practice be maintained for all Center and CP reviews. In the case of other reviews the

Chair of SPME could provide the briefing if the SC chair is not available; b) a focal person among the SC Secretariat senior staff be identified who would assist with the CPER review although not present in person; and c) CPER draft report for would be checked for quality assurance to see whether it fulfils the TOR and whether the statements were backed by sufficient justification. Such a review of the report draft could be organised by SPME, but the timing was important as the Panel needed time to react to the feed-back. It was noted that the CGIAR Secretariat provides face-to-face briefing to the CPERs' governance and management panel member.

SPME briefly discussed the TOR to the CPERs. There are two documents that guide the Panel's work: the Guidelines for conducting CPERs contain the most important key aspects of the reviews that generic to CPs and are to be covered by each CPER Panel. The brief specific TOR for each CPER contains a short list of specific issues to be addressed by the Panel for that CP. The SPME members felt that a single document would have been clearer for the Panels and this should be the practice in the future, including the Guidelines (or part of them) within the TOR.

b) EPMR meta-study and System level M&E

SPME received a brief update about the on-going EPMR meta-study that had been requested by ExCo and was organised jointly by the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat. The study is conducted by Howard Elliot (programmatic aspects) and Maureen Robinson (governance and management aspects) and will be completed by SC8. The SPME Chair suggested that SC Chair should brief the team and if he is not available, SPME Chair should do that.

c) Extraction of 'nuggets' from each of the external reviews.

SPME noted that each EPMR is the hard work and dedication of a team of experts. Often their recommendations and sound advise have utility to the system as a whole, not just to the particular center /CP of review. Those "nuggets" are often lost (to the system) although one of the tasks of the EPMR meta-study is to extract such information from the recent past EPMRs. SPME discussed the convenience of doing this for all External reviews and will begin a trial run for the upcoming EPMRs and CPERs.

d) Assessment of the whole M&E processes.

SPME discussed further needs to assess the different components of the CGIAR's M&E system. There is a perception that the overall system is burdensome. However, this M&E system has internal and external sub-systems which are interlinked. The internal components include the planning, which the Centers and CPs report in their MTPs, the PM system and the Center Commissioned External Reviews. The external components are restricted to the EPMRs and the new CPERs. Streamlining the M&E system should involve both sub-systems, and the improved internal M&E processes (including the MTPs) will lead to a better external M&E sub-system, as the EPMRs and other external reviews will find better inputs for their work. SPME can play a supporting role. The on-going EPMR meta-study is expected to help improve the EPMR process. In addition, SPME can develop a simple post-EPMR follow-up survey/interview to draw lessons for constant improvement of the efficiency of the reviews as part of the overall M&E. Furthermore, after the completion of the EPMR meta-study SPME will consider a broader look at all the components of the M&E, which all should be linked thereby increasing the overall efficiency of the M&E system. SPME recognises the value of

the impact focal points system through which SPIA engages the Centers in issues on impact assessment. SPME will further develop its communication with the ADE, with which it has engaged in two pre-AGM meetings to discuss primarily the MTP and PM processes.

Action for SPME

- Engagement of SC in discussion of EPMR and CPER reports: The SPME Chair will present to the SC the suggested process required for SC8. The *ad hoc* teams to oversee reviews and prepare the discussion can be led either by a SC or a SP member.
- SPME will recommend to the SC to commission the EPMRs of Bioversity International and ICRISAT to be implemented in 2008.
- Quality assurance of the CPERs: SPME will suggest to the SC that the SC Chair will brief the CPER team. SPME will introduce a step of quality assurance to the CPERs by coordinating a short review of a final report draft before its completion.
- SPME will carry out a trial exercise of extracting “nuggets” for the system from the external reviews
- SPME will develop a post-EPMR follow-up tool to get impressions of the key parties involved for continuously improving the EPMR process

Item 7: On-going Systemwide Program Reviews

External Review of the Systemwide Program: Participatory Research and Gender Analysis

The agenda item was discussed jointly with SPIA to distil the key issues to be brought up during the plenary discussion of the PRGA report with the Panel Chair. From the report it was apparent that the program had been to some extent successful in mainstreaming participatory approaches in plant breeding, but its participatory NRM and gender analysis work had not been very successful. The report itself, including the companion impact assessment literature survey, had not done an adequate job in reviewing the extent and quality of *ex post* impact assessment of PR, and SPIA would consider further work on the literature review. The Canadian observer stated that restricting the GA only to participatory approaches had been unfortunate, and hoped that the SC in its commentary would draw attention to GA specifically, and not only to PR. If the intention is to strengthen GA, it should not be restricted to participatory research. Canada is interested in the *ex ante* analysis of what gender analysis can achieve. It was mentioned that in Africa there is a close relation between GA and NRM and there is limited understanding of the gender roles in NRM (land and water allocation). Gender research in this context would be very relevant to continue.

Item 8: Performance Measurement System (PMS)

The discussion of the PMS item included a session within SPME and a joint session with SPIA. Concerning the PMS in general, SPME argued that a PMS provides signals of what is important. There is a need to upgrade the PMS so that it can reflect the priorities. Any upgrading must avoid making the system more burdensome. The EPMRs should provide concrete evidence on how the PMS has been working or not working. This can be used as a basis for considering the need and, if so, ways to improve it.

There are already two cases where donors appear to have interpreted impact indicator results in 3a to indicate the magnitude of actual impact, rather than as a measure of Centers' efforts

in documenting impact and building a culture of impact assessment. The limitation of the numbers as indicators, the potential for misinterpretation and the implication for funding was noted. It is risky to use a few numbers for guiding funding decisions. The SC should consider what the potential risks associated with the indicators are, and how they could be managed through guidelines or other measures. There are several measures that could be taken: a) Guidelines for how to use the PMS would be one of them. The SC has a duty of care to advise on the appropriate interpretation of the indicators, what their limitations are and how to consider them as a set; b) There is a need to establish a rationale for each indicator thereby imposing a discipline on those that design indicators so that the indicators chosen justify the effort; c) Re-labelling may be needed. SC can try to avert misinterpretation of the indicators by checking that the indicator titles are accurate (e.g. change of indicator 3a title) and by conveying information about the limitations of the indicators. It was noted that the impact indicators which are part of the “Results” element of the PMS are actually not indicating results but practice. It was noted that when PMS is linked with funding, the probability of manipulation of the indicators (“gaming”) increases. It was also noted that it is important to consider and develop the entire set of indicators, so that those that appear easy to interpret and allow differentiation among Centers do not dominate in the overall use of the indicators. The PMS should be complemented by combining other evidence of performance (MTP assessment, EPMR evaluation which differentiates between well and poorly performing components of the institute). Currently it is possible that the entire Center gets penalised for a low average irrespective of the performance of the different components. One way of avoiding donor reactions to single numbers would be to move towards Moody’s type of ratings, from quantitative to qualitative indicators that could inform investment decisions. However, donors may feel that moving away from the quantitative indicators is backtracking, because they like the quantitative indicators precisely for their simplicity. One participant noted that the trend is rather from qualitative to quantitative indicators, and the SC might consider adding more quantitative indicators to reflect qualitative issues.

The Canadian observer noted that donor transparency is being talked about and that donors should share the basis of their decision making. He supported the plan to provide advice on the use and limitation of the indicators. The PMS affects the unrestricted funding and puts the focus on the Centers rather than on the programs, which otherwise are increasingly the focus in research implementation. At the moment, for a donor to decide which institute to invest in, there is little else than the PMS, but a more holistic approach is needed. The Swedish observer commented that Sweden is starting to consider information from MTPs, PMS and EPMRs for making funding decisions. There is plan for the Nordic countries to jointly discuss how to use the PMS. A Center observer noted that initially the PMS was not supposed to facilitate funding decisions through comparing the Centers with each other, but the main purpose was to encourage performance management of each Center through comparison of trends in its results over time. It was noted that currently the PM results—particularly for some of the results indicators—are not directly comparable for each Center from year to year because of adjustments in the data requirement and scoring. Furthermore, the Center observer pointed out that capacity development is an important dimension of the Center’s work that is not appropriately covered by the PMS.

There has been discussion of extending the PMS to the Challenge Programs. It was noted that the TOR of the on-going CPERs contained a set of issues that are essential for evaluating the CPs. Although these issues were of great interest, as expressed by a Board observer, it was felt that they were more appropriately covered in a Panel review rather than through an annual PMS. In a recent workshop the impact assessment focal point group had expressed some

nervousness about adopting the PMS to CPs, particularly regarding impact. However, some components related to impact could apply to the CPs, such as establishing baselines. Also as CPs were predicated on the basis that they were to be impact-oriented, it is inescapable that they be subjected to an appropriate form of impact assessment that duly recognised their youth. It was noted that the CPs have more quality checks than Centers in that they are peer-reviewed before they are established, they conduct competitive grants schemes for selection of projects, they get major funding from other sources than the CGIAR's membership of a longer term nature than the Centers and therefore the purpose of the annual indicators for advising donors is not as clear as with Centers. In conclusion, there was agreement that it was important to develop indicators also for the CPs because they represented a considerable investment, but the indicators should be tailor made to include the most relevant ones considering the unique characteristics of CPs; i.e. their time bound problem orientation in particular, the fact that they are in different stages of maturity, they are built around extensive partnerships and have unique governance systems.

Action for SPME

- SPME and SPIA agreed as a first measure to improve the wording in the indicator titles to better reflect their intent, and to provide guidance on the limitations of the indicators.
- SPME will coordinate work to consider clustering of the indicators for analysis and interpretation.
- SPME will coordinate development of a specific set of indicators for the CPs

Item 9: Selection of new Challenge Programs

As an information item, the SPME Secretary briefed SPME about the process of selecting CP concept notes where the SC had already submitted its recommendations to the ExCo. After Group endorsement of the final set of ideas, the SC will conduct a peer-review of the pre-proposals and subsequently the full-proposals.

Item 10: Other business

SPME discussed the need to organise a stripe study on social sciences in the CGIAR. The SPME Chair explained the background to this study that has been on the list of potential SPME activities for some time. SPME agreed to recommend to the SC that a social science stripe study be included in the SPME work plan for 2008-2009.

Action for SPME

- SPME will seek the SC's approval to prepare a plan to conduct a social science stripe study to be included in the SPME 2008/9 work plan, and subsequently prepare the draft plan.