

CGIAR
CHALLENGE PROGRAM EXTERNAL REVIEWS (CPER)
GUIDELINES

Background

Challenge Programs (CPs) are time-bound, independently-governed programs of high-impact research that target CGIAR research goals and priorities and require partnerships with a wide range of organizations. CPs are meant to improve the CGIAR's relevance and impact, better target and integrate existing activities, achieve greater efficiency and cohesion among CGIAR Centers, widen and improve their partnerships with non-CGIAR research partners and mobilize more stable and long term financing.

Three CPs were approved for implementation beginning in 2003: Water and Food (W&F); HarvestPlus (HP+); and Generation (GCP). At AGM04, the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Program (SSA CP) was approved in principle for an 18-month inception phase. ExCo 6 (May 2004) requested the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat to synthesize some lessons learned from the three pilot CPs. One of the recommendations of the ensuing 2004 report was that "the current CPs be evaluated by an external panel after five years from start to assess the value added provided by the CP structure in terms of the effectiveness of partnerships and generation of outputs, evidence of adoption and impact of research, cost effectiveness of operations and sustained donor interest".

At the AGM 2005, the Group endorsed a set of 20 System Priorities to enhance the focus and cohesion of the CGIAR's research agenda. CPs may be an important option for the implementation of priority research and need to be reviewed also in this context to ensure that their rationale is validated by experience.

The guidelines for the CPERs have been prepared to address the particular characteristics of the programs that make their operations and governance distinctly different from those of the CGIAR Centers, and anticipating that CPs of different nature and duration will increasingly be used to implement a part of the CGIAR's research agenda, and help the CGIAR leverage external research capacities.

Issues

These guidelines provide the general principles that guide all CPERs. For each individual review, the specific Terms of Reference (TOR) will include both the generic issues listed below and a set of strategic issues identified through consultation with stakeholders, including the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat.

The CPER is aimed at informing the CGIAR members, stakeholders and other investors about the relevance of the program, and that the investment is sound, or recommend measures to make it so. It will advise the program and its partners about the efficiency and

effectiveness of their work and the appropriateness of their internal monitoring and evaluation, and make recommendations for improvements.

The CPER should address the overall scientific quality of the program, the program's effectiveness in reaching its research goals and the appropriateness of management and governance. The CPER should focus on the extent to which the key defining characteristics of a CP have been met: high-impact research; targets the CGIAR goals in relation to complex issues of overwhelming global and/or regional significance; requires partnerships among a wide range of institutions in order to deliver its products; is time-bound; and is independently-governed.

The individual CPERs are expected to provide inputs to a broader assessment or analysis of the extent to which the CP model is fulfilling its objectives, i.e. the purposes for which it was conceptualized and adopted.

The issues that the CPER needs to address can be clustered in two main categories:

Programmatic issues:

1. Is it likely that the CP research will eventually have a high impact based upon the conduct of the program to date? Has the CP clearly identified its direct and final beneficiaries? Were the CP's key assumptions/expected impact pathways concerning critical scientific and technological constraints, socioeconomic conditions, adoption, markets, researchers' motivation and donors' interests appropriate? Is there any evidence of progress along these pathways? Are there changes required to help increase the chances of success and the extent of impacts?
2. What has been the added scientific value from the CP; in particular, by the partnerships represented by the CP? What has been achieved by the CP that could not have been achieved without it, through Center activities or SWEPS? Is there any evidence of synergies and/or new modes of operation of the Centers involved in the CP? Can these synergies be improved?
3. Is the science in the CP overall and in the different components of high quality and are the scientific outputs recognised by peers? Does the CP, including all its partners, follow a clear policy of best practices regarding ethics and intellectual property?
4. Was the international public goods nature of the planned outputs clear at the outset and has this been reinforced from the conduct of the program?
5. To what extent have the objectives of the CP been achieved? Has the CP been effective in delivering outputs? Is there already evidence of adoption and other outcomes among the intended users? If there was a technology exchange process, how effective and efficient was it?
6. Is the CP cohesive, allocating a critical mass of resources to research with a clear set of goals in terms of outputs, outcomes, and impacts that can be monitored to measure collective progress at a system level? Was an appropriate M&E system included in the design of the CP and has it been implemented (including, inter alia, baseline data and

outcome monitoring) in order to be in a position to generate, disseminate and use credible and timely evidence concerning program impact?

7. In what ways has the CP contributed to capacity building of partners? Is capacity building included in the business plan and appropriately integrated into the program?

Management/governance/partnership issues:

1. Is there a clear, balanced, and formal governance structure involving research partners? Does it provide effective and adequate oversight, including financial oversight? Are there any perceived or real conflicts of interest in the governing body? Is there a clear and effective M&E system in place? What are the constraints and benefits for the CP (in terms of research, synergies, financial arrangements, etc) that result from the arrangements with the host institution?

2. What is the relationship between CP governance systems and the Boards of the Centers leading or participating in them?

3. Is the breadth of the CP in terms of partners optimal for reaching the objectives? Is there clarity of roles and responsibilities of all partners? Is there an effective system for internal knowledge sharing and communication across regions and research sites? Are the transaction costs in partnering well-managed?

4. What internal / external audit arrangements are in place, and do these cover site operations? For commissioned research, are the rules and mechanisms transparent? Is there a well-established, clearly defined and transparent internal control environment on implementing competitive grants?

5. How is the program's multi-year funding ensured? Is financial support diversified enough to avoid funding risks? How much is the deviation (if any) between budget and actual expenditures? What is the percentage of unidentified funding in budget at time of approval by the CP governing body? What is the proportion of transaction costs to expenditure/budget/funding?

The purpose and objectives of the CPER are to learn and to assess; hence the following general principles guide the conduct of the review:

- The Panel should take into account assessments made of the CP and available information such as MTP reviews, *ex ante* project reviews, reports to donors and any other information from internal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- The Panel should identify key program assumptions, particularly those having implications for costs, benefits, outcomes and impact, indicating which items are expected to be included as costs or benefits, their expected magnitudes and time profiles.
- The Program needs to ensure that critical data on performance, benchmarks and context are available at the time of the CPER.
- The Panel needs to document any unexpected costs and benefits of the CP, including spillovers.
- The review process should involve adequate communication of the CPER with the CP both during the review and after it, and the results should be communicated using various approaches, preferably electronic means, reaching also external audiences.

Implementation

The CPERs are commissioned by the SC on behalf of the Group. They are organized jointly by the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat and their implementation is coordinated by the SC Secretariat. They complement the other elements of the CGIAR's Monitoring and Evaluation systems, namely the annual MTP review by the SC and the Performance Measurement System, which will be adjusted also to accommodate the CPs.

An external review panel of at least two, maximum three members will be assembled. The Panel Chair should have demonstrated experience and skills in research management as well as in scientific research. The profile of the Panel Chair would also depend on the nature of the CP's research as well as the stage that the CP is in, in its life cycle. S/he would have an understanding of international agricultural research for development; have excellent analytical capability, and excellent command of English. S/he should have experience in reviewing complex research programs and demonstrated capacity to lead an independent external review. The Panel member responsible for the governance, management and partnership component of the review should have expertise in program governance, management of multi-partner consortia and program funding.

The review team may include 1-2 consultants to cover specific aspects corresponding to the complexity of the concerned program in which the Panel requires *ad hoc* expertise. Thus, the review Panel will have more flexibility to deal with issues that may not require an expert to be on board for the full period of the review. In consultation with the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat the Panel will determine if there is a need for consultants, who subsequently are selected through a standard Panel selection process led by the SC. The TOR of these consultants should include time for consultations upfront and towards the end of the review process.

All Panel members and consultants participate in the review in their personal capacity and should have no conflict of interest with the CP. Causes of potential conflict include: current employment with a CGIAR Center or CP; previous employment or consultancy with the CP; employment with any of the CP partners; participation or consultancy in planning of the CP or its components; representative of a donor to the CP with any responsibility related to the program funding.

In addition to the generic questions presented in this document, additional review questions will be included in the TOR for each CPER. These would reflect the specific nature and focus of the CP and its research and review history. The CPER should provide information to guide decisions about continuing the program's activities.

The review will include one visit to the host institution of the CP and also a visit to at least one CP partner. It is essential that the CPER reviews the efficiency of the partnerships and captures both the internal partners' and external stakeholders' perceptions.

The report should be clear and succinct. It should explicitly address all the points of the TOR with sufficient analysis to support the conclusions; and present clear and explicit recommendations for improvement, or for bringing the CP to closure. The report should be brief and concise (not to exceed 60 pages), and should include a short Executive Summary (not more than 2 pages). Any supplementary evidence and/or tables could be included in an annex, but the text should be self-contained.

The CP will prepare a response to the Panel report. The SC and CGIAR Secretariats will prepare a commentary to the report prior to its submission to the ExCo and to the Group. The SC and the CGIAR Secretariat will monitor the follow-up of the CPER through the MTP and report their assessment to ExCo.

Background Documents that the CPER Panel is expected to use

1. CP specific Terms of Reference
2. CP full project proposal
3. SC commentary on CP full proposal
4. CP final Business plan
5. CP Annual reports
6. CP MTPs, including annual work plans
7. SC commentaries of CP MTPs
8. CP annual budgets
9. Description of competitive grants process
10. Major funding applications
11. Reports to donors
12. Donor assessments
13. Description of internal monitoring and evaluation processes
14. Internal monitoring and evaluation reports
15. List of program publications by category (to be decided)
16. List of program partners, the specific contribution to the research and the associated budget share
17. CGIAR documents of lessons learned from CPs (e.g. 2004)
18. Selected peer reviewed papers/books produced by the CP