

SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

Guidelines for Council's Commentary of Center's Strategic Plans

SC Secretariat, 30 June 2008

The Science Council (SC) has assessed research programs of CGIAR Centers and Challenge Programs through commentary on the three year rolling Medium Term Plans. The aim was two fold—(i) to improve the quality in planning for better monitoring of research for outcomes and impact and (ii) to improve the relevance of science within the CGIAR in terms of a focus on system priorities.¹ That process has improved the quality of research planning such that many centers and challenge programs now use MTPs for their own internal processes; it has lead to a more rigorous results based performance monitoring. In turn with this improved instrument for planning of research and, with the internal ownership of it, the SC is gradually focusing its annual review of the MTPs to a “needs based” review.

In order to ensure the relevance of the research by centers at the system level it is logical for the SC to also interact with the Centers at the strategic level because MTPs by their very nature are framed by the Board-approved overall strategy of a Center. Thus the SC will take an active role in providing comments on the Center's strategy with the intention of enhancing the overall cohesion at the system level. In this context, the rolling MTP should be seen as the Center's translation of its strategy in a transparent implementation plan of the agreed upon priorities for the CGIAR.

The **objective** of the SC consideration of the Strategic Plans will be to provide commentary on the research relevance in terms of focus on CGIAR priorities, system linkages and nature of the research as reflected in the vision, mission and programs of the Centers strategic plans. The SC recognises the value in the uniqueness and multi- purposes of the Strategic Plans at each of the Centers and their value for System coherence; hence it is not the intention to propose a common format. Of interest to the SC are only those elements of the Strategic Plan that would guide the Center in undertaking research and capacity strengthening consistent with the priorities and goals of the CGIAR system.

To this end **the SC commentary would focus on the following elements of the strategy:**

1. Center's Mission, Goals and Strategy as they relate to overall CGIAR vision, mission, strategic objectives, priorities and key research opportunities.
2. Achieving the Goals
 - Objectives, targets and monitoring
 - Changing drivers of research and implications to the center
 - Alliances and partnerships for undertaking research
 - Targeted domains
3. Maintaining the core business of the CGIAR centers in international research and capacity strengthening
 - Changing capacity by the NARS and realignment of Center business
 - Positioning of the Center in research for development and role in development activities
 - Capacity strengthening

¹ Note the term *priorities* is being used here generically; it refers to those areas of endeavour for which the CGIAR agrees are the major focus of the CG System.

The specific criteria to be addressed by SC will be:

1. Does the strategy explicitly lay out the Center's contribution to CGIAR key research opportunities and strategic objectives? Are the goals and objectives clearly stated? Are the target domains clear and well justified?
2. Does the strategy clarify the Center's role and focus of core business in a changing research environment? Is the Center's comparative advantage relative to other suppliers well defined?
3. Does the strategy respond to changing needs, capacities and opportunities of NARS? Is a strategy for capacity strengthening well defined?
4. Are the research alliances and partnerships strategic – within and outside the CGIAR system; is research collaboration within the System maximised?
5. Has the process for preparing the Strategic Plan (including stakeholder consultations) been described?

The proposed **procedure** for Centers undertaking a new or updating their Strategic Plan would be to submit an almost final draft of the Strategy to the SC for comments before the Strategic Plan is sent to the Center Board for approval. The SC Chair would convey the SC commentary to the Board Chair within six weeks of having received the draft document from the Center. The Center will be at liberty to use the commentary to finalize the Strategic Plan.