

## SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

### Commentary on the Sixth External Program and Management Review (EPMR) of the International Potato Center (CIP)

*20 September 2007*

The Report of the 6th EPMR of CIP was discussed at the Eighth Meeting of the Science Council, at FAO HQ in Rome Italy. Panel Chair Edgardo Moscardi presented the main findings and recommendations of the Report, on behalf of the Review team. CIP Board Chair Jim Godfrey and CIP Director General Pamela Anderson responded on behalf of the Center. The SC thanks the Panel for its comprehensive, frank and analytical assessment of the Centers research, management and governance. The review's report is well written, and the conclusions clearly documented, with a good strategic assessment.

The Panel finds CIP a Center much improved since the last EPMR, committed to adapt itself to changes in its external environment. Based on recommendations from the 5<sup>th</sup> (2002) EPMR, CIP has undertaken a visioning exercise, drafted a Strategic Plan, and revised its research structure as a result. The Panel feels that although these efforts are commendable, CIP's increased reliance on restricted funding has drifted the Center away from its core areas of research on potato and sweetpotato, and has weakened its regional work, essential to ensure that the output-outcome interface is realized. The reality of restricted funding for the System, and the potential for poor management of such funds (as seen in some other Centers) calls for CIP to have a clearer and more "robust" set of research priorities, along with a business plan to maintain a clear focus on the core business of CIP.

The SC agrees with the Panel that the high positive correlation between potato/sweetpotato production areas and poverty assures that, by concentrating its research work on these two commodities, CIP can achieve significant economic, employment, health and other beneficial impacts on the poor. The SC therefore views the Panel's 18 recommendations and 25 suggestions as intended to help CIP move forward in this direction. The SC is pleased to see that the Center has responded positively to the review's major findings and the majority of its recommendations. CIP had originally accepted thirteen of the Panel's recommendation, rejected two, and in its initial response had "partially" accepted three, two of which pertain to CIP's convening role of the Global Mountain Program (GMP) and Urban Harvest (UH) SWEPS. The issue for the latter two recommendations is that in the Panel's and the SC's view, these SWEPS do not contribute to CIP's core research, nor does their work pertain to the Center's comparative advantage. UH, furthermore, does not contribute to the SP either in its research on IPGs or on the focus on key ecosystems. After more discussion at SC08, CIP plans to disengage from hosting these two SWEPS. The other "partially" accepted recommendation refers to recommendation 1 on regional programs and partnerships, where CIP accepts rec. 1(i), that the Center create a Division on Partnerships and Research on Partnerships, but does not accept rec. 1(ii), that CIP establish Directors for each of the Center's four regions. The SC notes that the CIAT EPMR also has recommendations about the planning and focus of regional research (i.e. the concept of "output lines") that might be of relevance to CIP, and looks forward to seeing how CIP manages the regional aspect of its research to maintain a focus on IPG research.

CIP does not accept recommendation 11, that CIP "phase-out" the Agriculture and Human Health (AHH) Division and instead integrate AHH research into the work of the Center's other Divisions; and recommendation 12, that CIP disengage from convening CONDESAN. In developing the SPs, the SC was aware of the important link between food and health as a crosscutting issue. In the SC's view, the linkage is best achieved through partnership with the health sector, rather than by including health expertise within the CGIAR scientific capacity. Thus the SC agrees with the Panel's recommendation that CIP phase out the AHH Division, and suggests that CIP continue to undertake

work on the food-health linkage in nutrition and in health issues from the misuse of pesticides in potato/sweet potato systems, while seeking partners with expertise in the health sector.<sup>1</sup> In the case of CONDESAN, the SC agrees with the finding of the Panel (see below for details).

Based on the Panel's assessment and evidence provided in the report, the SC endorses the findings of the review and its 18 recommendations. Nevertheless, the SC understands that implementing the recommendations will have financial implications, which implies the need for careful financial planning, and that in disengaging from its hosting role of GMP, UH and CONDESAN, CIP will need to design appropriate exit strategies. Key issues addressed in the review are further discussed below.

### **Visioning and Strategic Planning**

The SC shares the Panel's concern that CIP's recently finished Strategic Plan was developed to address MDGs, but does not relate to the CGIAR System Priorities (SP) explicitly. The SP were also developed in the context of the MDGs, but with rigour to focus on the priorities for the CGIAR. Thus the Panel notes that the process used by CIP broadens the scope of the strategic areas (over the SP), and that this may be at the risk of moving CIP away from its core business. The SC is also concerned that the Center's strategic planning exercise appears not to have made use of the its own *ex-ante* impact assessment study (Fugile 2005). The study underlines CIP's, "excessive" concentration of work in Latin America compared to the expected benefits to the poor, which is, according to the Panel, mainly donor-driven. The SC finds CIP's justification in this respect, that LAC has been an "IPG generator" for CIP, and that CIP "does a lot of its learning" in that region, not fully convincing. Furthermore, while this lack of congruence between regional research resource allocation and expected benefits raises some important strategic considerations, it would be important to confirm that spillovers have been explicitly captured in Fuglie's analysis, as their existence can vitiate use of a simple congruence approach in such comparisons.

Regarding CIP's new programmatic structure, it is not clear to the SC why CIP has moved away from a project mode of management. HQ and regional integration can be facilitated through projects operated in a matrix mode, and the two dimensions are not necessarily in conflict if this is managed appropriately.

The Panel's recommendation on regionalisation is not accepted by CIP, in view of the history of this at the Center. CIP now conceives Regional hubs as only intended to be outcome vehicles to the research done at HQ, and considers that the creation of Regional Directorates would "be problematic" and would constitute an "institutional step backwards". The SC wonders whether this represents another "back to the future" pendulum effect of successive EPMRs, as noted by the SC in other recent Center EPMRs. In this context, it would have been informative if the panel had interviewed the immediately preceding DG. His views would have complemented those of CIP's founding DG, who was interviewed by the panel, and whose views the panel reports extensively in an annex to the report. The views of CIP's preceding DG would have had special weight, as the current EPMP covered a period when he was in office for some 70% of the time examined by the review.

### **Research Programs**

The Panel criticises social sciences work at CIP for ignoring the 2002 EPMP, and in particular for dropping adoption and priorities studies. As with other Centers, social science has lost focus and human resource capacity in recent years, especially economists. Because of the widespread problems in social science research in the CGIAR, the SC is planning a stripe review in 2008. It is anticipated that this review will provide insights that will also be useful for CIP. Thus the SC advises CIP to work

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<sup>1</sup> Note there are examples of this linkage in the CGIAR, e.g. the work on human nutrition in the CP HarvestPlus and the study by Pingali et al that linked excessive pesticide use in rice to poor health. In this study, the health research was conducted by the medical sector.

closely with the SC Stripe review when it convenes the CCER on social science research recommended by the Panel.

The SC agrees with the Panel, that potatoes and sweetpotatoes should be the focus of CIP's efforts on germplasm conservation and characterization, and that the characterization of 9 additional roots and tubers should concentrate on genetic diversity of germplasm, and should no longer involve breeders' traits of interest or nutritional and health related attributes; especially since, as claimed by the Panel, the discovery of useful bioactive ingredients and the additional fine work of characterization and evaluation probably needs more resources than currently available to CIP. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding CIP's explanation that lack of sufficient funds to speed-up the work on germplasm conservation and characterization is directly related to the drop in core funding, this remains an important concern for the SC, for CIP, and for the System as a whole. This work should be the heartland activity for CIP and for the System, and the SC concurs with the Panel about the importance of adequately resourcing this core business of the CGIAR.

The SC notes with some surprise the low adoption of CIP-derived varieties relative to the high number released. The SC suggests that the reasons for this need to be at the center of its decision about the management of its regional research, such that: a) parental lines/varieties expressing superiority over existing cultivars, and possessing required regional attributes are developed; and b) the main research interventions for better outcomes are identified c) NARS collaborative roles in this regional strategy are clarified and d) IPR issues are suitably addressed.

The Panel notes that NRM research uses and develops models, and that most of the outcomes will come from transfer of the models to researchers and policy makers. However, the SC sees that there are few examples of the latter, and so it will be important for CIP to demonstrate that its models are being adopted and used to generate on-the-ground impacts. Sometimes modellers so differentiate and protect their intellectual property and products that outcomes can be precluded, and therefore CIP's NRM strategy should address such IPG issues thoroughly. The fact that CONDESAN found that scaling up of accumulated NRM knowledge has had limited results, and that the benchmark sites approach has now been abandoned, gives the SC added cause for concern in this respect. Based on similar concerns, the 5<sup>th</sup> (2002) EPMR asked CIP to conduct a priority setting exercise for NRM, "using an appropriate methodology, to help focus the research agenda and develop a proper balance between process oriented and application oriented research..." CIP accepted the 2002 EPMR recommendation on NRM, claims that it has implemented it "incrementally", and commissioned an NRM CCER in early 2007 to obtain expert evaluation on progress made. However, when the Panel analyzed the ToR of the 2007 NRM CCER, it found, instead, that the the CCER aimed to shed light on CIP's options and means of addressing the 2002 EPMR recommendation. Nevertheless, the Panel concurs with the CCER's conclusions that a priority-setting exercise for CIP's NRM research has not yet been conducted. Although it seems somewhat prescriptive for the Panel to indicate that the Center should initiate the NRM priority-setting exercise without further delay, the SC understands that CIP has postponed this exercise for over five years now. The SC notes that the CIAT EPMR also provides good insights into the conduct of NRM research that may be of benefit to CIP.

### **Partnership programs**

The CGIAR conducts its research with a wide array of partners and through different mechanisms, of which networks are one. There is a generic issue in judging when, after periods of successful activities, the needs of both the Centers and the partners are best met by handing leadership responsibilities to others. Regarding CIP's role in hosting CONDESAN, the Panel states that the Program and CIP "have no extant, significant and fruitful working relations", in spite of strong 2002 EPMR recommendations in this regard, that CONDESAN "is no longer contributing to CIP's core research", and that although CONDESAN "is a success", it has "gone beyond" CIP because it has stopped its work on benchmark sites and has refocused its activities on "innovation systems" and water management, thus erasing the

logic of CIP continuing to convene the program. The SC agrees with the Panel's analysis and conclusions in this respect, reminds CIP that relinquishing hosting need not imply that no joint research is carried out, and hopes that the new Coordinator and Road Map strengthen CONDESAN and allow CIP to further engage in joint research with the program.

**Governance and Management**

The Panel's assessment of CIP's governance and management finds the Center well governed, with responsive leadership and management, but with space to improve Board delegation of leadership responsibilities and replacement processes, as well as human and financial resource management.