

## CGIAR SCIENCE COUNCIL

### Criteria for Assessing Proposals for new Systemwide Programs

SC Secretariat, January 2006

CGIAR Centers currently use two main vehicles to jointly plan and implement complex research issues. Systemwide programs (SWPs), some of which are defined as ecoregional programs, are a joint research effort of two or more Centers with a limited number of external partners, while Challenge Programs (CPs) include a variety of non-CGIAR partners in addition to CG Centers. The SWPs were initiated in the early 1990s to foster partnerships and close links with global strategic commodity/subject matter research.<sup>1</sup> Regarding agenda and budget these programs remained relatively small compared to the CPs, which were introduced in 2002 to bring a new programmatic approach to CGIAR research to significantly expand partnerships and attract funding to tackle major research problems.

Although SWPs are more restricted regarding scope of research and other activities than the CPs, there are commonalities between SWPs and CPs in the criteria to assess programmatic quality and relevance. Initially SWPs were approved by the TAC (SC's predecessor), and TAC/SC has reviewed most SWPs as they have matured. However, several SWPs and systemwide initiative have been established without formal SC approval.

The first CPs were initiated through a pilot process involving ten CGIAR-led proposals, and one round of regular process where an open global call was made, followed by three-stage selection by the TAC/SC. With the forthcoming implementation of the new CGIAR System Priorities approved by the Group in December 2005, there may be a need for new SWPs and CPs. In order to secure the coherence of the CGIAR research agenda and help address the most pertinent research problems, there may be a need to initiate new CPs through a call for proposals. The SWPs however may remain a tool for the Centers at their own initiative to build around relevant research topics common to more than one Center to foster synergy and enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

The SC has drawn on this past experience, including previous selection of CPs, to develop the following guidelines for the evaluation of future proposed SWPs.

**Suggested general outline:**

- Project summary (not to exceed one page).

---

<sup>1</sup> An update on current SWPs "*Status of monitoring and evaluation of the CGIAR Systemwide and Ecoregional Programmes*", has been prepared by the SC Secretariat and can be found under publications at [www.sciencecouncil.cgiar.org](http://www.sciencecouncil.cgiar.org).

- Project description and business plan including letters of intent by all partners.
- The **rationale** for the program including an elaboration on the type of collaborative arrangement among all partners.
- Description of any prior work and achievements to-date.
- List of senior scientists involved in the program from all participating Centers and organizations.
- Budget; current and pending support.
- Governance and management plan including arrangement for coordination, advisory mechanisms and secretariat.
- Facilities, equipment, and other resources (Appendix).

The full proposal **should not exceed 40 pages** in length, excluding appendices.

The SC will use the following criteria in the assessment the quality of the proposals:

### **1. Relevance of the expected outputs criteria**

- The proposed research program aims at delivering outputs that very significantly enhance the objectives sought by the CGIAR, namely: poverty reduction, food security, and sustainability of resource use. The proposal shows evidence of consistency with CG System Priorities for research.
- The expected results can uniquely be obtained through such a Program as opposed to the other CGIAR research mechanisms, such as regular partnerships arrangements.
- The research is planned to provide technologies and knowledge of an international public goods nature
- The program has a fixed time line and the expected outputs are clearly defined and are achievable within the proposed time frame.
- The expected outputs are achievable within the planned budget.

### **2. Quality of science criteria**

- The research hypotheses are clearly specified in relation to the proposed challenge, and the proposed research methodology is directly relevant to the outputs sought.
- The research is based on state of the arts knowledge in the domain, and the proposal explicitly places itself relative to the most recent advances in the field.
- The research itself is likely to lead to important advances in science and knowledge.

### **3. Strategy for utilizing and applying results**

- The research proposal is accompanied by an explicit plan for delivery, communication, and dissemination of results and outputs, to maximize benefits to CGIAR stakeholders.
- The research proposal addresses not only the fundamental scientific aspects but also the applied and adaptive stages of the research, in a realistic manner, and the uptake of research outputs in order to produce high impact outcomes.
- A plausible impact pathway for the delivery of program outputs to the end users is defined
- A plausible “exit” strategy” is defined and is consistent with the research plan

### **4. Collaborative arrangements and beneficiaries involvement in research**

- The program partners include the most relevant CGIAR Centers and external partners to enhance synergy and research effectiveness.
- The synergies, value added and mutual benefits among partners are clear.
- The roles and responsibilities of partners reflect their respective complementary advantages.
- The proposal gives clear evidence that consultations have been held with proposed research partners, in particular in the regions of relevance.

### **5. Governance and management criteria:**

- The program is to be coordinated by an agreed management structure endorsed by Director Generals of the Centers involved in the partnership.
- The arrangements for administrative support (to be provided by one of the core parties) are satisfactory. The Board of each participating Center is accountable for the input resources and delivery of agreed outputs of that core party.
- There are clear lines of accountability and clear institutional arrangements spelling out roles, responsibilities, rules of operation, and conflict resolution in a formal agreement signed off at the appropriate legal level by each Program party.
- There are clear and satisfactory arrangements for handling legal responsibilities and there is full adherence to the CGIAR’s IPR policy.

### **6. Performance evaluation and impact analysis criteria:**

- Internal peer review mechanisms for quality and relevance and for performance evaluation are present and sound.

- Procedures are in place for the continuing monitoring of progress and adjustments of the program (as needed) in the course of implementation.
- Indicators are identified and benchmark information is available to measure project impact.
- The proposal should include an internal time-bound work plan on the project's progress, specifying stages and milestones, with intermediate deliverable products subject to independent peer reviews.

**7. Budget and finance criteria:**

- The business plan outlines a strategy to mobilize new resources (in cash and in kind).
- The proposed budget and its allocation are appropriate and agreed among partners.
- There is evidence of availability of sufficient up-front funding for the first 3-5 years of the program.
- A viable exit strategy is defined.