

5 September 2011

ISPC Commentary on the revised proposal for CRP1.1 Dryland Systems: Integrated Agricultural Production Systems for the Poor and Vulnerable in Dry Areas.

The proposal for CRP 1.1 on Drylands has been revised by the ICARDA-led partnership to address the changes requested by the Fund Council for its full endorsement. The ISPC has considered the revised proposal against these requirements and provides summary comments and recommendation below, followed by a table with detailed ISPC comments on each of the “must have” elements.

Summary Comments

The ISPC believes progress has been made in response to the challenge of trying to define the dryland areas of the world on which the CRP will target attention. The characterization uses four quantitative variables (aridity index, length of growing season, environmental risk, and market access), plus one qualitative variable (land degradation), which allows explicit mapping of the regions in the SAT that are the focus of SRT2 and SRT3. These maps are already a product of the CRP and could indeed be considered an IPG if they were published in a peer-reviewed journal article (currently they are only published on ICRISAT's website). The ISPC encourages further improvements because the current framework is only a broad brush beginning. There is much more to be done before the background analysis is sufficient to support strategic planning and prioritization of research activities. Greater clarity needs to be achieved as the CRP is implemented.

The four strategic research themes (SRTs) are maintained and appear to address appropriate research and development challenges (reducing vulnerability and enhancing sustainable productivity) for the dry areas. Principles for engagement and criteria for site selection are given. Gender, for instance, is given prominent consideration in the participatory approaches and the roles of women farmers/herders/fishers and entrepreneurs are appropriately described in the overall research program. Research hypotheses are presented in the new draft, but these are too general to be useful in providing a foundation from which clear researchable questions can be formulated. An example of what was expected is the text on possible outcomes from the implementation of index-based livestock insurance (IBLI; P88, para 4), which provides some very specific testable hypotheses although they are not categorised as such.

The plan for the CRP is to define many of its elements through an implementation phase using participatory processes to engage many different stakeholder groups. As such, the revision offers virtually no concrete activities at this stage of proposal development. On P11 it states that the proposal does not describe specific activities in detail (i.e., the next level below outputs) but remains at a conceptual level. The Benchmark areas are very large and the majority of Action sites are still to be confirmed. Approaches to partnership are stated but the linkages remain generic or to be worked out, including collaborations with other CRPs. Because activities are not proposed, nor the contribution of earlier CGIAR experience to the

alleviation of the problems identified made clear, there is effectively no research plan and the quality of science in the proposal cannot be judged. The proposal's discussions of outcomes and how impacts might be derived or measured remain general and non-specific, except for two modest or incomplete examples. Because of these remaining issues, the ISPC does not consider that the proponents have met all the Fund Council's "Must Have" requirements at this time. As the proposal further envisages a needs assessment and development of agreed activities over the next three years, it is unclear what the three year budget covers, in addition to these start up activities.

Recommendation: The ISPC considers that some progress has clearly been made as a result of the two additional meetings held by program design partners. However, in the absence of concrete priorities and activities anchored in actual places, linked by a good rationale as to how the integrated agro-ecosystems approach will deliver impact at scale, the ISPC considers it is too early to consider this proposal as having met the specific requirements. The ISPC suggests that it will be necessary to make a further commentary on a more detailed proposal after the inception meetings have concluded and the outcomes have been analysed. This should be done within a year.

Detailed ISPC comments on eac of the “must haves” for CRP 1.1

Requirement	Response	ISPC commentary
<i>From ISPC</i>		
1. Clearly characterize the target dryland systems. The proposal must define dryland areas of the developing world and identify geospatial distribution using a water balance approach that quantifies risk and severity of water shortage as the basis for categorizing regions that fall into the “reduce vulnerability” focus of SRT1, or the “sustainable intensification” focus of SRT2	Global characterization data for each are given in Table 2 (page 27). Specific data for each Target Region are summarized in maps and tables available at http://crp11.icarda.cgiar.org This compilation of information is a key step for scaling out interventions beyond this CRP, and should be regarded as the first global public good generated by CRP1.1	<p>A definition of dryland areas is provided and the proponents have made a reasonable effort to characterize dryland systems as summarized in Table 2, and as presented in maps (http://crp11.icarda.cgiar.org). This is welcome. The definition does not correct for irrigation, however, and it could be argued that this definition is therefore too broad, relative to the overarching objective of targeting the poor and highly vulnerable sectors of the population in dry areas.</p> <p>The ISPC encourages the proponents to work towards publishing (in a peer reviewed journal) these maps on the semi-arid tropics as part of the thinking behind this program characterizing the current situation in these areas and the challenges confronting sustainable agricultural development. This would need the data on water scarcity to be considered at a level below the national level.</p> <p>The estimates of poverty and population (as pointed out in earlier comments) would appear to be over-inflated, especially in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Do these relate to the geospatial distribution of the targeted dryland systems as defined in Table 2 or to a different geospatial aggregation?</p> <p>The ISPC had expected the number of sites to decrease as the result of a tighter definition, to provide more focus, but more sites have been added. It is accepted that sites will come and go over the lifetime of the program, but such decisions should be based on how</p>

		<p>agricultural research can best contribute to the delivery of benefits to the poor and vulnerable in dry areas.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, the current framework is seen as a useful starting point which should be further developed to focus on the target areas of the individual SRTs</p>
2. Establish clear set of hypotheses as an organizing principle to help prioritize the research and results agenda	Hypotheses are described in detail for each SRT (e.g. pages 42, 48, 49)	<p>A section on hypotheses has now been included in each SRT. Many of these hypotheses are, however, written at a very generic level of premise and not specific to dryland systems. This gives the impression that the thinking on how agricultural research can help the poor and vulnerable in dryland systems by the team has not been done in depth. The hypotheses therefore cannot be used for prioritising research on dryland systems as requested.</p> <p>The hypotheses need to be further developed through discussion with stakeholders and then described with a tighter focus on the researchable issues and considering the requirements of high quality of science.</p>
3. Provide the criteria for choice of benchmark sites and the development of relevant data to inform research requirements in both the biophysical and social sciences, and their synthesis	The section on Benchmark Areas and Action Sites has been expanded to clearly explain the selection criteria. Annex 10 provides further details on the criteria used for selecting Action Sites. Annex 11 contains maps illustrating the key biophysical and socio-economic characteristics of each Target Region	The criteria for selection of these sites and development of site specific activities could have been better explained. Since the CGIAR cannot work in each and every location, it is important that sites vary significantly so that the research results (with some fine-tuning) can be adopted over large areas. The revised proposal could have defined problems specific to each region and a better estimate of past global experience (if any) in tackling such problems; strategies developed; major milestones and monitoring parameters. As mentioned, an activity plan and, subsequently, monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment goals etc. are yet to emerge clearly.
4. Refine site selection and	This comment was addressed	At a high level, the choice of “Benchmark” and “Action” sites is

<p>characterization and prioritize activities to be carried out, working from impacts to activities</p>	<p>through detailed discussions at the Regional Design Working Meeting (Nairobi, 27-30 June 2011). Maps of the Benchmark Areas, Action Sites and Satellites Sites are shown in Figs 10 to 14 (pages 69-77)</p>	<p>generally appropriate. The characterization (including on the web site) is of huge geographical regions and not on the basis of systems. Some criteria are given for site selection but there is very little information on specific sites where the work will be carried out and hence little insight into the types of problem which will be addressed. At a minimum it would have been useful to have had major sites characterised in terms of poverty, risks, major drivers etc together with problems and opportunities, as a basis for priority setting and targeting at those sites. “Action” sites appear similar to “sentinel” sites referred to in other CRPs, and the duration of research could be defined considering long-term data collection needs.</p> <p>A couple of the sites in east and southern Africa appear to have the potential to overlap with the CRP on maize which has a big systems component in this region. No mention is made of how this CRP will link with the maize CRP in this region.</p> <p>The site selection needs more planning and elaboration. The ISPC would wish to comment further once more details on this emerge.</p>
<p>5. Provide more detail on the underpinning science and agronomic, genetic, and farming system approaches to be evaluated once the first phase has progressed</p>	<p>Details have been added underpinning science as well as the methodology for each SRT (e.g. pages 43, 56, 57)</p>	<p>The added sections (with references) on methodology are welcomed but together with the hypotheses in each SRT, they still do not provide sufficient details on the underpinning science and approaches in the different areas of research. As mentioned above, most of the hypotheses are quite inadequate regarding specificity to the systems of focus in this CRP.</p> <p>It is difficult to justify long-term funding for a systems-specific CRP without more detail on the underpinning science and thus the ISPC would like to comment again once the detail has been developed.</p>
<p>6. Provide a more</p>	<p>Three paragraphs have been</p>	<p>At a conceptual level, an attempt has been made to link to a theory</p>

<p>comprehensive theory of how social change will result from the livelihood, gender and innovations systems approaches espoused in the current proposal</p>	<p>added in section on Impact Pathways (p 84) that address this point</p>	<p>of social change and define impact pathways, particularly using examples of previous experiences, e.g. alley cropping in North Africa and the IBLI example (although this still awaits results). Emphasis is on empowerment, which is necessary for achieving social change in these areas. How new activities yet to be defined will work and contribute under the integrating principles (gender, integrated systems, participation, communication) to effect social change and create the suggested impacts remains unclear. The proponents suggest that these parameters will evolve in the learning phase.</p> <p>The proposal suggests that “CRP1.1 will develop Region and Benchmark Area specific impact narratives and pathways based on the general frameworks presented” (p88 para 5). One major challenge defined is the uncertainty around the many more macro policy, institutional and socioeconomic circumstances determining uptake of innovations and subsequently outcomes and impact. While the proposed integrated framework will strive for more policy engagement and support for up- and out-scaling (two core components of SRT2 & 3 activities) it suggests diminishing roles for CRP1.1 during the adoption phases (beyond proof-of-concept phase) of the impact pathways (pp 84, 88 and figure 19). It is also clear from what is presented in Annex 1 (points of intersection and differences between CRP1.1 and CRP 5 on p128) that the overlap is so large between what these two programs will be working on that there is need for more careful thinking and programming to avoid duplication and redundancy. It is clear that both programs are still struggling with drawing boundary lines. What is more important is what is proposed in the distinctions made in Annex 1 that also confirms a diminishing role of CRP1.1 beyond field and farm levels. This poses the question of how the proposed integration principles will function along the defined impact</p>
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<p>7. Discuss current research priorities and how they would inform and complement new initiatives</p>	<p>Each SRT section now includes hypotheses that underpin research approaches and priorities. A partial inventory of current research priorities and ongoing initiatives by CGIAR Centers and partners is available at http://crp11.icarda.cgiar.org CRP1.1 will build on these initiatives during the transition phase and new funding will be sought for testing the indicated hypotheses</p>	<p>The response to this point was disappointing. The material at the cited url did not easily provide even a partial inventory. There are references in the text to work completed/in progress but description as to how this will be built on is patchy. The ISPC was looking for a much better review of lessons learned from successes and failures in the past. It is true that the CGIAR has not had many successes in these areas, but lessons could be drawn from elsewhere and an analysis of these should be part of the diagnosis. The few successes presented in Boxes 1-5 are not convincing—very small scale (integrated agroforestry livestock), pilot program (livestock insurance), development rather than research (watersheds), irrigated areas (Egypt only).</p> <p>If there is insufficient CGIAR expertise to develop the thinking, then the CGIAR should look beyond its own accomplishments and see what local organizations (Government and Non-government) have achieved in the past. Developing partnerships with those organizations will be extremely important.</p> <p>This point is underlined by the high dependence in the proposal on a paper by Cooper et al which appears to be an internal CGIAR document and not subject to peer review. The ISPC encourages</p>

		<p>better use of peer reviewed references.</p> <p>Presumably the links between past or current research and what is planned will be a point for discussion at the inception meetings and this argues for further detail to be presented in a report to the ISPC after the inception meetings have been held.</p>
<i>From Fund Council</i>		
8. Identify clearly the research interventions proposed as a result of the diagnosis of the problems	The SRT sections of the updated proposal provide details on problem-solving R4D for this CRP, whose priority interventions results after consulting with main stakeholder in Target Regions	<p>As mentioned above, the diagnosis of the problem and prioritization has not yet sufficiently drawn from past experiences (or at least this problem diagnosis/evaluation of experience/and prioritization of approach is not adequately reflected in the revised proposal). New sections on the methodologies which might be used have been inserted at the level of the SRTs. This illustrates that thought has been given to the options. The proponents appropriately recognise the need to consult the main stakeholders to help prioritise interventions.</p> <p>Here again review of a further revised proposal would be needed after the outcome of the inception meetings have been analysed and decisions on appropriate approaches taken.</p>
9. Describe the framework of selecting external and centers' partners, their respective research activities, how these activities collectively contribute to an integrated agro-ecosystem research agenda	The framework for selecting partners is addressed in the section International, Regional and National Partners (p 102-103). Table 7 indicates the value added for each partner type. CRP1.1 conceptual framework and ensuing SRTs show how they will contribute collectively to an integrated agro-ecosystem research-for-development	The section does not appear to have been changed. Despite considerable detail on different types of partners, the main points raised in the ISPC commentary of partner selection process and integration of the complementary competences and knowledge, have not been addressed. This could be helped by clarifying who in the CRP management team has overall responsibility for partnership management. Relationships with partners (apart from conflict resolution which is covered) appear to be delegated to Interdisciplinary research teams, which may mean that significant partnership opportunities (and hence integration) at a higher level of aggregation are missed.

	<p>undertaking.</p> <p>Inception workshops will further help to identify main partners and potential roles for implementing CRP1.1. The inception workshops will provide the opportunity for broadening the range of partners according to the testing hypotheses and R4D undertakings for this CRP</p>	<p>Decisions taken at the inception workshops will be crucial in determining the success of this CRP. During the workshop, the entire planning; deliverables; important milestones; implementation strategy etc. are to be worked out. The current revised proposal therefore remains incomplete.</p>
<p>10. Differentiate the roles of the crop/commodity CRPs and this system CRP</p>	<p>Updated text in section Integration with other CRPs addresses this point</p>	<p>The text on the interaction between this CRP and the ‘commodity’ CRPs is disappointing. The ISPC accepts that CRPs are at different stages of development and thus it is difficult to write more detail at this stage, but it would be helpful to understand what process will be put in place to ensure adequate communication between CRPs. As noted, the description of the relationship with CRP5 raises more questions than are answered and the linkages to the CRP3 series of CRPs are only sketched.</p>
<p>11. Integrate available lessons learned from SSA-CP</p>	<p>See Annex 12 (p 192)</p>	<p>There is a need to build on the conclusions from the SSA-CP on the validity and merits of the IAR4D approach, which are still pending. In the innovation systems approach (which SSA-CP has been testing) the issues of research content, quality of science, impact pathways, scalability and sustainability need to be considered. The lessons so far from the SSA-CP including scenarios for international research on the further activities and development of the Innovation Platforms, documented in the SSA-CP external review report from 2010, should be carefully considered. The SSA-CP lessons on experimental designs for</p>

		<p>impact assessment are very relevant. The CGIAR reform process seeks a step change to provide convincing SLO-level impact and the CRP1 series programs are a major tool of the portfolio to try and ensure this happens. There is a requirement to justify the sort of investment being asked for, and a clearer explanation of what is new and what will be delivered for the dry areas.</p>
<p>12. Develop a log frame and articulate impact pathways to explicitly link a cluster of outputs to outcomes, and impacts and to SRF system level outcomes</p>	<p>The updated proposal includes in its section System Level Outcomes and CRP1.1 Impacts the “mapping” of CRP1.1 outcomes to CGIAR system level outcomes (p92), which supplements the information provided in Fig. 5 (p32). This figure shows the major linkages amongst SRT outputs and overall CRP1.1 outcomes. Certainly, many outputs influence each outcome and single outputs may contribute to many outcomes, but only key linkages are highlighted in this figure</p>	<p>The revised proposal does not include a logframe. Table 5 and Figure 5 are at too general a level and the underpinning logic is weak. The IBLI model remains the closest attempt at characterizing what a cluster of research outputs aims to achieve and how it feeds into the wider research effort of the program.</p> <p>There is a conceptual discussion of CRP outputs, outcomes and impacts and this is related to System level outcomes (which actually are impacts), However, the text on p92 is not very convincing and concerns have been raised earlier about the feasibility of the impact pathways to deliver. One of the benefits of developing a full logframe is that it can highlight the risks at various stages of the process between research design and delivery and thus help in the management of those risks. Also, because the program is not designed at the activity level, there is no sense of magnitudes - of how many people would be targeted or how many hectares of land would be put on a sustainable footing – or of a time period for achieving those outcomes. The two impact examples provided are written up without numbers. This means that the discussion is at a very conceptual level at this stage with no detail on potential impacts. This also raises the issue that the ISPC alluded to in earlier comments that the scaling up issue is really left hanging. Working at sites is one thing but getting impacts to scale is much more challenging.</p> <p>The ISPC thus do not consider that this ‘must have’ has been met.</p>

13. Include a performance management framework	See updated M&E section that addresses this point (p 111-112)	The table on p112 provides an adequate framework for monitoring and evaluation at a general level and it includes reference to how the M&E results will be used and by whom. However, the effectiveness of M&E depends crucially on the characterization of outcomes and intermediate impacts and the ability to measure them in these large NR systems, which hasn't been well addressed. It is advisable to set quantitative goals to make evaluation more meaningful. The proponents appropriately state that outcome monitoring needs to be an important focus and it should cover monitoring of near-term changes and early impacts.
14. Build climate variability resilience and sustainable dry land systems through an integrated program combining indigenous knowledge with improved technologies, information dissemination and engagement with stakeholders	The updated proposal addresses this point throughout and wherever appropriate highlights the use of indigenous knowledge	The ISPC believes this request has been met. More can always be done, such as exploring whether and how small and marginal farmers could earn carbon credits by leading the development and testing of methodologies for studying carbon foot prints in highly variable dryland agroecosystems.
15. Redefine management structure to ensure that the Steering Committee (strategic oversight) and the Research Management Committee (manage research) are not both chaired by the DG for the lead center to avoid potential conflict of interest	The Director General of the Lead Center will chair the Steering Committee (SC). The Research Management Committee is not chaired by the Director General of the Lead Center, but by the CRP1.1 Leader appointed by the SC (see p 95)	The proponents' statement is clear and adequate. This request may have arisen from a mis-reading of the original proposal.
16. Broaden the focus of the proposal to include Latin America and South Asia (cereal system)	CRP1.1 includes northeast Brazil and the dry Andes of South America as Knowledge Sharing Centers (p 78 and	The proposal suggests that regions not targeted in the CRP, such as Latin America, could be included in the Knowledge Sharing Centers, and EMPRABA is now mentioned as one of the knowledge providing institution. Thus there are no explicit plans to

	Annex 13 for further details)	broaden the geographic focus, and the proponents may have felt this would be beyond the capability of the already broad program. The ISPC supports the proposed geographic focus of CRP1.1.