

1st October 2010

Ms Inger Andersen
CGIAR Fund Council Chair

Dear Inger,

I am pleased to forward the ISPC's commentary following its review of the most recent version of the proposal for a Global Rice Science Partnership, GRiSP. We recommend that GRiSP be fully funded as a CGIAR Research Program. The proposal makes a compelling case for the CGIAR's contribution to improving the productivity of rice and rice systems as they underpin the goals of the CGIAR. The ISPC is impressed by the science quality inherent in the biophysical approaches espoused, the substantial efforts the proponents have made in ex ante priority setting (which is continuing) and the efforts to respond in a thoughtful manner to earlier comments. The proposal is significantly improved over the version reviewed in July. The CGIAR partnership which has made this possible, so that it addresses three major global regions and drawing in high quality collaborators, is to be commended. Our commentary points out areas that the developing program will continue to have to address. These include the regional balance of research priorities, and identifying sufficient funding for capacity building to meet the expected outcomes. There is a need to ensure that progress towards poverty alleviation through a focus on rice productivity gains, continues to be tested by integrated and analytical approaches as understanding of systems effects and contexts change.

Our review of this, the first CRP proposal, has raised issues of a general nature which we bring to the attention of the Fund Council. The GRiSP is proposed as one part of a bigger MegaProgram encompassing work on other cereals. It is a strong program when judged in a stand alone manner, but gives little indication of how it will work with the other programmatic elements of the CGIAR. In the absence of an adequate strategic description of the overarching CGIAR portfolio and the rationale for placing activities under different programs, the ISPC has noted missed opportunities for cereals and systems research and potentially the delivery of outputs to regions (through systems work yet to be defined in other potential MPs). We urge the Consortium Board to work actively with the GRiSP and proponents of other related programs to advance consideration of the major cereals programs simultaneously. There is a need to establish the necessary boundaries as well as the research synergies and linkages to collaborative regional systems work. These aspects of the GRiSP program cannot be considered as completed. We suggest therefore that more CGIAR energy should be placed on establishing the final SRF to guide the remaining portfolio development, rather than on program development at this stage.

Secondly, we note that currently the Centre genebank costs are excluded from the total budget and this too needs to be regularised at the system level as part of a strategic underpinning not only of the rice proposal but of the systems work on cereals and other genetic resources.

Thirdly, we expect that the areas to which attention has been drawn in the ISPC commentary will be addressed and direct future action as the program matures from a collection of current grant-supported activities to Fund-supported activity within an overall strategy for the CGIAR. We anticipate that it will be appropriate to review this CRP again when the final SRF is in place to confirm the proper "bench-marking" of this and other programs.

Finally, we encourage the Consortium Board to take the lead in reviewing appropriate governance mechanisms for future CRPs and before proposals are presented. The new programs will need to respond flexibly to the requirements of the new CGIAR. The ISPC believes that more than one governance model may be appropriate, and that the lead centre model may at times be a hindrance to programmatic flexibility and development with time.

We are pleased to provide support to the Fund Council deliberations in this manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rudy Rabbinge', written in a cursive style.

Rudy Rabbinge,
Chair, ISPC