



Consortium Board approval letter for CRP 1.3 “Harnessing the development potential of aquatic agricultural systems for the poor and vulnerable”

Date: 11 March 2011

Dear Inger,

The Consortium Board (CB) of the CGIAR has the pleasure to submit to the Fund Council (FC), for its consideration and approval, the CGIAR Research Programme (CRP), entitled **“Harnessing the development potential of aquatic agricultural systems for the poor and vulnerable”**.

This proposal, submitted by the WorldFish Centre (lead center), Bioversity, CIAT and IWMI, focuses on improving the livelihoods of the smallholders and vulnerable farmers and fishermen who live in coastal zones and along river flood plains. It deals with the different improvements (policy, technology, social) needed in such aquatic agricultural systems for the most vulnerable, including women, to benefit from interventions and options. It plays a unique role in the CGIAR portfolio of CRPs because it focuses on a specific vulnerable group whose needs are not addressed in any other CRP. This group is significant since more than 700 million people depend on these aquatic agricultural systems for their livelihoods, and a third of them live in extreme poverty. The CB considers that the work presented in this proposal is not only very well aligned with the Strategy and Results Framework and its strategic level outcomes, but is also of strategic importance for the livelihoods of a large group of relatively marginalized people in developing countries.

The challenge in this CRP is to make research breakthroughs by working on the design of options and solutions at the level of entire agroecosystems. This is a departure from more one-dimensional approaches, in which solutions are sought for one component of a system (e.g., one crop). In this approach, the interactions among the different components and among ecological, economic and social dimensions are taken into consideration so that tradeoffs between equity, profitability and sustainability can be optimized. An additional challenge, fully in line with the spirit of the reform, is to create new synergies in research and in development by working on these issues across a range of partners.

The first version of this CRP proposal (September 2010) was reviewed by four external reviewers (including one on Gender), chosen for their international scientific standing and knowledge of the subject matter, as well as a thorough examination by the CB. The CB provided comments and recommendations for improvement, in accordance with the common agreed criteria established by the CB and the ISPC for approval of CRPs.

In terms of **strategic coherence and clarity of objectives**, the CB had asked for a better demonstration of how work under each of the six objectives of the CRP will contribute to resolving the dilemma of high vulnerability and poverty in very productive ecosystems.

The proponents revised the presentation of the strategic frame of the programme and added two new Figures (3 and 5). The strategic rationale is also set out in Table 1, where the linkages between the constraints, hypotheses of change and objectives are given. These



figures and the table, highlight the multiple constraints driving poverty in aquatic agricultural systems and the multiple pathways to realizing their potential.

The proponents have tightened and expanded, when appropriate, the description of each research theme in order to address specific questions raised by the CB and external reviewers. They have revised the research questions under each theme, and added a new sub-section on “Research Priorities” to explain their priority setting process, from a thematic and regional perspective, including integrating a global perspective on macro-drivers. They use the example of Bangladesh to illustrate the specificity of the research priorities that will be pursued regionally, and the linkages to development challenges and the proposed hypotheses of change. They also added a new sub-section on the international public goods the proposed work will generate, to address a point from the CB about a potential criticism that the work proposed might lead to local public goods only. The CB finds these various amendments very convincing and satisfactory.

Concerning **delivery focus and plausibility of impact**, the CB appreciated the discussion of impact pathways but raised some questions about the section linking outputs, outcomes, impacts (table 1 in particular), and the indicators of impact proposed in this section, which appeared to be fairly business as usual for the CGIAR. In the revised proposal, the proponents have expanded the impact pathways section to include a new sub-section about linkages that builds on the strategic framework. Figures 3 and 5 show how CRP 1.3 expects to link objectives, outcomes and impacts, whereas new Table 1, which summarizes the alignment between CRP 1.3 objectives and impacts and links to the SRF and CGIAR system level objectives, gives further details along with sample indicators for outcomes and impacts. The CB considers that its recommendations have been addressed very effectively.

The recommendations of the Gender Scoping Study for streamlining gender research in CRPs have been addressed in several sections of the amended text, notably in the research theme on gender equity (section 6), the gender strategy (section 7), and the description of the impact pathways of the programme (section 5) where greater attention has been given to specific gender indicators. In addition Annex 2 has been modified to provide more information on the gender network CRP 1.3 will be working with, and provides a section (Annex 2c) on mainstreaming gender under each research theme, and another section (Annex 2d) on monitoring and evaluation. These amendments further strengthen the gender dimensions of the proposal.

Concerning the **quality of science**, the Board was very satisfied with the initial submission and finds that the above amendments have further strengthened the quality of science in the proposal.

On the subject of **quality of research and development partners and partnership management**, the CB had requested more information on the type of partnerships envisaged. A new annex (6) is included in the updated proposal to illustrate the potential range of global partners with whom the proponents may engage for implementing this CRP. The partnership strategy of the programme (Section 9) has also been modified to explain how partnerships will be funded. The budget section of the amended proposal specifies how the CRP funds will be used, providing the percentage planned for partners, and separates



this from consultants. The updated text shows the levels of partners' engagement and addresses the CB and reviewers' comments on partnership management and funding. We find these various amendments very convincing.

Regarding the **appropriateness and efficiency of CRP management**, the CB considered that the management structure presented in the first version appeared bureaucratic and we requested that milestones and quality indicators against which the management of the program can be judged and adjusted, should be added to the proposal. The revised text clarifies governance and management structures and the roles of the different actors. The proponents have also explained how they will monitor and evaluate the management of CRP 1.3 (which include establishment of milestones and indicators as proposed in the CB guideline). Figure 13 reflects these adjustments in an effective manner.

New text in updated proposal defines the role of the Programme Leadership Team. The Director General (DG) of WorldFish will not be a member of the Programme leadership team, but either he or a WorldFish Board member will participate in the Programme Oversight Panel, without ever chairing it. The CRP leader will report to the Programme Oversight Panel. The DG of WorldFish will provide day-to-day oversight and the chair of the Programme Oversight Panel and the DG of WorldFish will jointly conduct the annual performance appraisal of the leader of CRP 1.3. The CB considers that the proponents have addressed this issue in a very appropriate and convincing manner. A good description of the relative responsibilities of all management levels is now provided.

Concerning **accountability and financial soundness, and efficiency of governance**, the CB had asked for more details and justification of the requested budget, and for an explanation of what would be cut in case of budget shortfall in terms of relative priorities of the proposed activities. Finally, we recommended that the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) section of the proposal be expanded to provide more details. The budget included in the revised proposal provides details according to cost category, research theme and country. A description of key cost categories is also provided. Likewise, the updated text on the -20% budget scenario explains the CRP priorities in case of a budget shortfall.

The section on impact assessment has been fully rewritten in the updated proposal and re-named as "Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment". More details are provided in an Annex describing the results-based management approach that CRP 1.3 will pursue. The CB guidelines on budget were addressed to a large extent in the updated proposal. More budget details will be forthcoming when the operation plan of this CRP and the performance contract with the Lead Centre are developed. Likewise, the expanded section on M&E, though more detailed than in the original submission of CRP 1.3, will have to be discussed, along with indicators, during the inception workshop(s) for this CRP, as is the case for other CRPs.

In submitting this proposal for the approval of the Fund Council, the CB would like to stress once more the importance and relevance of this CRP in the current CGIAR reform process. This proposal focuses on a set of issues and challenges germane to vulnerable resource poor farmers and fishermen in aquatic agricultural systems in developing countries. It is unique in terms of this focus. The system level approach that it depicts to successfully address these



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challenges should generate many an international public good and research innovations, in addition to significant impacts on the livelihoods of these most vulnerable smallholders. We consider that this proposal has adequately responded to the comments and suggestions from the CB and those from the four external reviewers. It fulfills the common criteria developed by the CB and the ISPC, and as such, is a comprehensive and strategic work program to address the CGIAR vision.

With my best regards on behalf of the CGIAR Consortium Board,

Carlos Pérez del Castillo