



Consortium Board approval letter on CRP 5 “Water, land and ecosystems”

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 “**Water, land and ecosystems**”.

This proposal, submitted by IWMI (lead center), on behalf of 13 of the CGIAR supported Centers, focuses on three critical issues for the sustainability and resilience of the resource base of agriculture. These are water scarcity, land degradation and ecosystem services. It uses a system approach at the river basin and landscape level to design integrated options for the long-term maintenance of the natural resources essential to agriculture. As such, it plays a unique role in the CGIAR portfolio of CRPs and constitutes a key link in the overall chain of impacts of the Strategy and Results Framework of the CGIAR. The CB considers that the work presented in this proposal is of strategic importance for the future of agricultural systems in developing countries and the livelihoods of the poor in these 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 aspect of a challenge (e.g., water scarcity). In this approach, the interactions among the different dimensions (e.g., decreasing soil fertility, water scarcity and various ecosystem functions) of a challenge to sustainable production are taken into consideration so that negative environmental feedback mechanisms are controlled and the production of negative externalities of technical options is minimized. An additional challenge, fully in line with the spirit of the reform, is to create new research synergies by working on these issues across 14 CGIAR centers in a more integrated manner than was possible before the reform.

The first version of this CRP proposal (September 13, 2010) was reviewed by four external reviewers (including one on Gender), chosen for their international scientific reputation 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 requested an explanation of how the on-going research projects that constitute one of the points of departure for this work are going to evolve into a coherent CRP. The CB also asked that the conceptual framework of CRP 5 be presented more clearly and that research methods be explained in more details. The proponents have added a section on operationalisation that explains how they intend to link existing projects, and move into a new phase where a new set of well-integrated cohesive projects are designed. The updated proposal also includes a section describing how partners are selected, based on research required, theories of change and uptake strategies. The updated CRP 5 proposal includes a new section on the conceptual



framework for the proposed work and another one on the objectives of the proposal and the interactions among these. Together these changes result into a coherent and integrated overall programme, with an explanation of how programme elements interact at research sites and in regions, and of overall research methods for setting up research in regions and within the Strategic Research Portfolios. The CB finds these amendments very convincing and satisfactory.

Concerning **delivery focus and plausibility of impact**, the CB requested a more detailed discussion of impact pathways, with an explanation of the different roles of partners. The Board also noted that the social and economic dimension of the work needed strengthening. The updated proposal elaborates further on impact pathways and responds to the CB request. The proponents have also substantially strengthened the social and economic dimension of the work described.

The gender dimension of the work proposed was, in the Board's view, not sufficiently convincing. The proponents commissioned an independent gender review of the CRP 5 original proposal. They have implemented the advice thus received, and the proposal has now a much strengthened gender dimension, reflected in the development of a completely revised gender strategy.

Concerning **quality of science**, the Board had requested that the research questions provided in the original submission be synthesized and prioritized into the smallest set of coherent and interdependent issues that needed to be addressed to fulfill the objectives of the proposal. The updated main proposal was completely re-written, keeping in mind this guideline from the CB. As a result, the work described under each Strategic Research Portfolio is more convincing and overall the proposed research appears to be of sound quality. The Board appreciates the effort the proponents have made in this respect.

On the subject of **quality of research and development partners and partnership management**, the CB requested more details on division of responsibilities among partners and modalities for partnership between institutions. The CB also recommended that linkages with other relevant CRPs be discussed in more depth. A new partnership strategy is now included in the updated proposal, which also describes in the operationalizing section, how partners are chosen. The updated proposal highlights the complementarities between CRPs including a graphic showing where they overlap. The proponents indicate that discussions were held with other CRP Leaders to help clarify these relationships. The CB considers that this clarification will provide a very good base for in-depth discussions of mechanisms to address possible overlaps with other CRPs once implementation has started.

Regarding the **appropriateness and efficiency of CRP management**, the CB considered that the management structure presented in the first version was not sufficiently explicit about reporting lines. The proponents have explained that the CRP Director (employed by the Lead Centre) leads the Management Committee and will report on progress annually to the Steering Committee that includes partner representatives. The Steering Committee will provide advice to the Lead Centre, who will be accountable to the Consortium Board for overall financial and legal management and delivery of this CRP. The management and



governance section of the updated proposal includes modifications that provide more clarity on this subject.

Concerning **accountability and financial soundness, and efficiency of governance**, the CB requested the proponents to include a monitoring and evaluation system and provide more details on the budget requested, in particular to highlight the concrete priorities of the proposal over the coming three years. The updated proposal includes an M&E plan and strategy. The CB guidelines were addressed to some extent in updated CRP 5 proposal. M&E system and indicators –to implement the suggested plan– will need to be further fine-tuned at the launching of this CRP.

In the amended version, the budget section has been totally rewritten, including a breakout of essential elements for the proposal. Further justification was given to the costs associated with coordination and management, gender, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and communications. The updated budget section includes two scenarios for five years: an “enhanced delivery” scenario (the budget the proponents wish to get), and a “baseline” scenario. The proponents provide explanations showing what the difference is between the two scenarios, highlighting priorities and places where they wish to increase expenditures. The CB is satisfied that the proponents have provided the details they could. As is the case with a number of CRPs, further refinement of the activities and budgetary allocations will take place when detailed annual operational plans are developed, following global and regional inception workshops.

The CB had also requested that **the part of the budget that will go to partners be more explicitly discussed**. The proponents indicate that in the enhanced budget scenario an increasing amount of budget goes to support partner activities, growing from 29% to 35%, whilst the baseline budget shows that around 29% of the total budget is allocated for partnership and collaboration.

In submitting this proposal for the approval of the Fund Council, the CB would like to stress the importance and relevance of this CRP in the current CGIAR reform process. This CRP shows how Centers working together in a more integrated manner, with a range of existing and new partners can catalyze innovation in research for development concerning agricultural sustainability and natural resources management. 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