

28th November 2011

ISPC Commentary on the October 2011 revised proposal for CRP2: Policies, Institutions and Markets to strengthen Food Security and Incomes for the Rural Poor

(Revision of October, 2011)

In its commentary on the May 2011 proposal, the ISPC highlighted four areas where it felt the CRP 2 proposal still needed strengthening: (i) analysis and articulation of the major problems and opportunities for research related to agricultural and rural development policies, institutions and markets; (ii) development of a strategic framework that encompasses (in addition to point above), analysis and elaboration of CGIAR's comparative advantage in addressing specific development issues through research on policies, institutions and markets, against the backdrop of relevant alternative suppliers, and articulation of the major priorities and rationale for them; (iii) enumeration of the value added of this CRP over existing work, particularly via collaborations within the CGIAR; and (iv) description and reasonable expectations about outcomes and impact pathways.

In this revised version, the proponents have made a serious attempt to address each of these issues, adding relevant sections to the narrative and annexes. Some of the measures taken by the proponents since the previous version are substantive, e.g., a sound strategy for maximizing uptake and developing an impact assessment framework, a specific plan for priority setting, and an extended and deepened cross-cutting data management strategy. Other measures are about communicating more clearly or in some cases retro-fitting a framework onto existing structures. Overall, we conclude that the proponents have made a satisfactory effort in providing pertinent information in these four areas and the issues raised by the Fund Council. It is unlikely that any gains from requesting further clarifications would be significant at this stage. Thus, while some concerns remain (details discussed below), the ISPC is confident that these can be more effectively addressed during the implementation phase of the CRP.

The ISPC recommends that the revised CRP 2 proposal be approved subject to further revisions to be addressed during the implementation phase taking into account the following commentary.

This commentary is structured according to the four ISPC and eight FC 'Must Haves' of the previous commentary.

ISPC-1. Analysis and articulation of the major problems and opportunities for research related to agricultural and rural development policies, institutions and markets.

A central tenet of this CRP proposal is that agricultural growth – which has been shown to reduce poverty by twice the rate of growth in nonagricultural sectors – has been held back by *failures related to policies, institutions, and markets* and will be further challenged by emerging trends such as climate change and natural resource scarcity. The proposal maintains that past agricultural growth has also been constrained by a narrow focus on agriculture that excluded macroeconomic dimensions, environmental inputs and outcomes, and important enabling conditions, such as rural infrastructure, effective markets, and complementary services like credit and agricultural extension. These are reasonable hypotheses to put forward, and are no doubt supportable to some extent. But the proposal provides little analytical or empirical work to substantiate these claims, or to adequately contextualize them, thereby providing some tangible measure of their importance (even qualitatively) relative to one

another, i.e., policies vs. markets vs. institutions, or against the host of other constraints (technological, political, etc.) impeding agricultural growth. The revised CRP is still deficient in this respect.

At the same time, the ISPC recognizes and agrees with the proponents that the specific development challenges, problems, opportunities, and required strategies under each sub-theme will vary depending on the characteristics of the different countries and regions within countries. To reflect this heterogeneity, the broad development challenges, approaches/strategies and major activities under each research subtheme have now been specified within a country/region typology (agriculture-based, transforming, and urbanized), drawing on the *World Development Report 2008*. While this is largely a retro-fitting exercise (no changes are evident in the research sub-theme activities), it nevertheless presents the development challenges, approaches and research activities for each type of country in a more structured and consistent framework. Nevertheless, this is an area which will require continued work and development—providing a more transparent analysis of key problems leading to an understanding of the relative importance of poor policies, neglected investments, inadequate institutions, and inefficient markets in constraining the achievement of food and agricultural development goals in a diverse array of developing countries. This sets the stage for developing a strategic framework focusing on the most relevant development constraints for contributing to the CGIAR's SLOs.

ISPC-2. Development of a strategic framework that encompasses (in addition to the point above):

a) analysis and elaboration of CGIAR's comparative advantage in addressing specific development issues through research on policies, institutions and markets, against the backdrop of relevant alternative suppliers

The proposal maintains that the CGIAR and its partners are well placed to provide the research laid out in CRP2. At the CRP level the case is made that while many institutions work on issues related to policies, institutions, and markets in developing countries, the CGIAR has a comparative advantage based on its (i) specific mandate related to the intersection of food security, poverty, and sustainable agriculture; (ii) focus on research-based capacity building in the public, civil society, and academic sectors; (iii) institutional and political independence; (iv) scale (large enough to generate intellectual critical mass but nimble enough to flexibly adjust to emerging needs); (v) recognized research capabilities; and (vi) large network for data collection in developing countries. Other institutions, they claim, possess some of these characteristics, but the combination of all of them is unique to the CG.

These are reasonable arguments at the general CRP level but, in themselves, do not make the case for involvement in specific areas of work where the CGIAR may have a comparative advantage. In this respect, the proponents have responded by, in addition to arguments sometimes put forward in the Rationale, adding a new section on Comparative Advantage under each sub-theme. This consists of a list of the main alternative suppliers followed by a list of the purported comparative advantages for undertaking this work (also shown in Annex 5). Not all of these speak strictly to 'comparative advantage', and there is little analysis or elaboration provided. Some are simply good reasons for this work being done without respect to the alternative provider. In fact, as they indicate, many of these alternative suppliers are actually partners in research, so it's unclear which of these competitors would be filling the void if the Centers were not there. Another way of looking at this is 'what is the added value of having the CRP 2 program' i.e., over and above what the situation would be in its absence? This helps distinguish between the CGIAR's competitive versus comparative advantage.¹

Also missing here is an analysis of the global R&D landscape related to key researchable issues, i.e., who is doing what and where are the gaps, as mentioned in the previous ISPC commentary. This should include recognition of the unique strengths that world-class alternative suppliers offer that the CRP 2 does not aim to compete with. Rather than giving long lists of alternative suppliers, it would have been helpful to provide a more detailed review of four or five main global players for each research theme, and contrast those with the unique strengths of CRP2 for the same themes. In short, there is now an explicit discussion of comparative advantage, but it is rather cursory and not convincing.

¹ Indeed, it may not be the case that CRP 2 partners have a comparative or even a competitive advantage in such things as "performing quantitative/statistical analysis" or "bringing together state of the art tools...".

b) articulation of the major priorities and rationale for them

The CRP2 team developed the current research areas and priorities “through a participatory process and an analysis of the major development challenges and strategies for each type of region.” This included an expert e-consultation with more than 200 participants and a face-to-face consultation with 50 participants (July & August 2010). While the proposal states that short-term priorities will be based on commitments in the existing pipeline, little is said about how longer term priorities and the research themes and subthemes and budgets were adjusted based on that priority setting process, over say the existing research structure and allocation. The decision to accommodate funding restrictions by changing the phasing and scaling of new subthemes and activities (rather than eliminating a subtheme altogether) suggests that the past structure and sets of activities are rather fixed, until such a time that a new priority setting process gets underway later this year. Indeed, considerable emphasis has been given to the next step of priority setting.

Research priorities among activities and regions are expected to be further developed and adjusted at the beginning of the program implementation phase. The team plans to organize participatory priority-setting workshops (specific dates for consultations in the various regions have been set), applying a multi-criteria scoring approach, and complementing these consultations with a modelling approach that uses quantitative *ex ante* assessment tools. Ultimately, this is expected to result in a ranking of priority research areas and regions aimed at optimizing CRP2’s contribution to the SLOs. The ISPC commends the proponents for laying out a clear plan and dates for this priority setting exercise.

ISPC-3. Enumeration of the value added of this CRP over existing work, particularly via collaborations within the CGIAR

The proposal emphasizes that this CRP combines research expertise in both the social and the biophysical sciences at key CGIAR centers. CRP2 will be one of the largest food policy research programs focused on improving outcomes for the rural poor in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The program will draw not only on the expertise of the CG system, but on other developed and developing country R & D organizations. This has always been one of the compelling rationales for this CRP. In previous versions, the nature and extent of collaboration between IFPRI and other CGIAR centers and between this CRP and other CRPs have not been made clear. In this version, the proponents have provided some additional clarity on these issues, but more is needed, particularly on inter-Center collaboration. Value added obtained through unique research complementarities should be emphasized.

(a) With respect to collaboration between IFPRI and other Centers, whether on-going or planned, the proposal provides only a few references in Sections 4 and 6, and two specific examples in Box 7.6 (partnership between IFPRI and four other CG centers) and Box 8.2 (Central American Learning Alliance for Rural Enterprise Development). However, these are far from convincing as the use of examples draws overwhelmingly on current work by IFPRI. Annex 4, as in the previous version, simply lists the various types of ‘involvement’ by the different Centers in various sub-themes. No sense of a true spirit of collaboration is given. This component, therefore, needs further elaboration. The proponents have indicated they would use the first months of the CRP2 implementation phase to finalize the roles and responsibilities among centers for each subtheme. During this time, a conscious effort should be made to plan more joint IFPRI-other CGIAR Center activities.

(b) With respect to collaboration between CRP2 and other CRPs, the proposal offers general principles about collaboration between CRP2 and other CRPs (described in Sections 2 and 3) and provides some specific examples of collaboration (and boundaries) between different lines of work between CRP2 and other CRPs in Section 4 by subtheme and in Section 7 (“Boundaries between CRP2 and other CRPs,” and Table 7.1). This has been given serious thought. A description of some of the potential areas of collaboration (based on what appears to be commonalities of work and research interest) between CRP2 and other CRPs is presented in detail in Annex 2 and Annex 3 of the proposal. This seems reasonable at this stage of CRP development across the System.

ISPC-4. Description and reasonable expectations about outcomes and impact pathways

In the previous commentary, the ISPC highlighted the need for a more convincing treatment and discussion of the ways to maximize the probability of research uptake in affecting policy decisions. The current revised version has addressed this concern by: (i) expanding the strategy to enhance probability of impact-on-the-ground and, (ii) expanding the discussion under each subtheme about the impact pathway, particularly with respect to client demand for key outputs. As for the latter, this is now quite good in many cases, e.g., sub-theme 1.1 and 2.3, while for others, where it only identifies who needs to use the research outputs or simply strives to make research findings relevant and available to a wide range of people, it could be strengthened.

The strategy to enhance uptake and impact from research is now well developed. Recognizing that high-quality research outputs alone is not enough to achieve impact, the approach identifies three dominant impact pathways reflecting the different clients of the research, as well as a number of tools that could be used to strengthen the link between researchers and clients: partnerships, capacity strengthening, communication and specific outreach strategies. These components are intended to “build bridges to users, going beyond the basic question of ‘what is produced?’ to address the broader issue of ‘who is being reached?’”. However, in many cases, it will require more than just working with organizations involved in developing or implementing policies to ensure that the research addresses their needs and the findings likely to be taken up. This is clearly recognized by including a component of research examining policy processes (Sub-theme 2.1) – which essentially acknowledges that political constraints, different values and motivations and vested interests of many actors often dictate the policymaking process. This suggests that in some cases, and perhaps often, different strategies are required, going beyond the tools proposed above.

The ISPC is pleased to note that once the final structure of CRP2 is approved, a workshop will be held to finalize the impact assessment framework. The targeted outputs of this workshop are highly commendable and should be pursued by other CRPs as they move into the implementation phase:

- a complete set of measurable indicators at the subtheme and research theme level and more globally aggregated at the CRP level;
- a baseline of the values of those indicators by target region, and the evolution of the values of those indicators by target region as expected over the CRP period;
- the modalities and timeframe for collecting and analyzing the information needed for assessing the values of the indicators; and
- the roles and responsibilities of the different partners in the measurement of indicators

These indicators would be aligned with the SLOs of reducing rural poverty, improving food security, enhancing nutrition and health, and facilitating sustainable management of natural resources.

FC-1. Need to address the concern that no adjustments were made in the budget in spite of a more focused proposal with a reduced number of subthemes

The proponents have explained that the financial officers of the Centers are currently working together to adjust budgets on a line item basis for 2012, but this does not respond to the question about why a more focused proposal with reduced number of themes has not resulted in a more streamlined budget.

FC-2. Clarify how the sub-themes are linked to the main themes and to the overarching objective of the CRP and their expected contribution to the CGIAR system level outcomes.

More information has now been added on the linkages between each theme and the corresponding sub-themes in the introductions to each theme (Section 4). As for the second part of this comment, Table 2.1 now includes information at the sub-theme level and this is supplemented by performance indicator information in Annex 1. While it is true that Table 2.1 is now cast at the sub-theme level, the information here is very general and is not very helpful in trying to understand the linkages between sub-theme outputs and impacts on SLOs. Sub-theme Foresight and Strategies Scenario, for example, will contribute to reducing poverty via “More effective prioritization of fiscal and public investment policies meet the needs of the rural poor”. This is quite vague, given that the same statement could be made about this sub-theme targeting the SLOs for increasing food security and increasing nutrition and health. The FC point had more to do with the relative importance of each of these themes and sub-themes in contributing to the SLOs, the specific channels through which that happens, and the likelihood of succeeding in the research and effective uptake. Under the section Measurable Impacts,

the *ex-ante* assessments using the IMPACT model show estimated impacts of CRP2 by 2025 in terms of a reduction of 7–10 percent in poverty due to improvements in market access, thereby reducing marketing margins, increasing farm-gate prices, and boosting the production incomes of rural households. Assuming the relevant assumptions about individual contributions from each of the sub-themes is available, providing this sort of specificity would be highly useful (even if heroic). In other words, it is not clear how the information about research outputs, indicators and metrics under each sub-theme as specified in Annex 1 has been translated into coefficients in the IMPACT model used to project measurable improvements in poverty reduction, food security, and health and nutrition.

FC-3. Acknowledge that leading expertise on some of the issues to be addressed by the proposal exist outside the CGIAR, and specify how these teams would be identified and approached to seek their contributions to the CRP

Point is addressed under ISPC-2a.

FC-4. The demonstrable links to NARES and regional research bodies (APAARI, GFAR, etc.) in practice should be specified

The revised proposal gives more emphasis to collaborations with NARES and regional forums, and provides specific examples in Sections 4, 5 and 7. This seems appropriately addressed.

FC-5. Provide some indicators of short, medium, and longer term implementation strategies for the multifarious subject issues raised in the CRP

This issue remains to be addressed as part of the priority setting exercises planned to be carried out during the implementation phase (discussed under ISPC-2b).

FC-6. Need to better articulate the impact pathway and the specific instruments (e.g., country strategies) along that pathway that can be used

This point is covered under ISPC-4 Must Have.

FC-7. Need clarity on how the other centers involved would participate in management and decision making

This is addressed in Box 10.1 of Section 10 and appears adequate.

FC-8. Should provide a consolidated framework for data management across the center with IFPRI playing a leading role in it.

In the ISPC commentary on the original CRP 2 proposal, the lack of a “data strategy” and the need to produce economies of scale across its research and activities and thereby contribute to high payoff IPGs were highlighted. This has now been comprehensively addressed in this revised CRP and is a strong point of the proposal. The section on Data Strategy has been expanded. The proponents recognize that the quality, credibility, and cost of CRP2 research, the program’s capacity to develop timely, relevant, and accessible research products and services, and its ability to respond to evolving research priorities will all be highly conditioned by CRP2’s data strategy, and therefore, the development of integrated data and knowledge management platforms is a priority of this CRP. CRP2’s data strategy aims to “reduce research costs, enrich analytical opportunities for CRP research partners, and deliver a major international public good in the form of an open-access data portal, which will foster broad opportunities for innovation beyond CRP2 by both the public and the private sectors.” The ISPC agrees that these objectives go beyond existing practices for data management and sharing within and across CGIAR centers, and thus is highly commendable.