SCIENCE COUNCIL
CGIAR

SCIENCE COUNCIL REPORT TO EXCO MEMBERS

October 2009

The Science Council traditionally reports to each ExCo on its activities in the previous six months, providing advice and highlighting subject matter that will come to ExCo for its decision. However, in 2009, such is the focus of the CGIAR on the CGIAR Change Process that ExCo 17 will only consider aspects of change and there is no place on the regular agenda for other matters of continuing importance for the CGIAR and its donors. Several of these topics will have to be taken up virtually and systematic follow up arranged. The purpose of this note is therefore to highlight these subjects and point to available information from the SC and its contributions for the future. All the documents can be found at http://www.sciencecouncil.cgiar.org/documents/exco17.

SC Commentary on the External Program and Management Review (EPMR) of Bioversity International: The Report and Recommendations of the 6th EPMR of Bioversity were discussed by the SC with the EPMR Panel Chair, Richard Flavell in the presence of the Center DG, Emile Frison. The many achievements of Bioversity and its role in the genetic resources policy arena are recognized. The Report addresses particularly the need for Bioversity to choose its research activities so as to maximize its comparative advantage and gain synergy within the Center. The Panel endorses Bioversity's decision to broaden its research agenda and recommends research to identify the potential benefits of high biodiversity, evaluating the tradeoffs within different types of agricultural systems. The report also raises the need to increase bioinformatics investment; enhance cohesiveness and learning between programs; define and express its deliverable results and communicate the value its work; re-formulate the forest and crop wild relatives research; and examine the organizational structure. The SC Commentary endorses the Report and Recommendations which it notes are accepted by the Center. It urges the Center to consider the analysis of the Report in detail for additional evaluation and context for the recommendations.

SC Commentary on the Stripe Review of Social Science in the CGIAR: The impetus for the Stripe Review on Social Sciences in the CGIAR arose from concerns expressed in many EPMRs that social science capacity in Centers was deteriorating. A review was therefore conducted in two phases (over 2008/9) and the Science Council discussed the Report at its Meeting in September with Panel Chair Christopher Barrett of Cornell University, USA. The Report concludes that the simultaneous shift from unrestricted core funding to restricted project funding, a lack of vision of what social science should be doing and the Centers' desire to maintain highly trained international social science staff has led to fragmentation of social science research. While the Panel found the CGIAR to be very heterogeneous regarding quality and relevance of social sciences, it

also identified several pockets of excellence. The SC finds the Report frank and insightful and agrees with the core analysis which reveals shortcomings in Centers' ability to plan coherent research agendas based on clear strategies and prioritization and then defend these agendas in negotiations with donors thereby resisting funding-driven fragmentation. The SC observes that this diagnosis signals broader problems within the System that triggered the Change management process. The CGIAR system should be concerned by the findings that social science research is judged to be methodologically weak and declining in quality and less likely to contribute to impacts. The Report also observes a fall in staff morale and difficulties in recruitment and retention of skilled social scientists. The SC Commentary provides a perspective on the way ahead. While the CGIAR change process may address several issues of management reform and donor discipline, the SC strongly recommends that the System and Centers collectively and without delay put in place a process to further discuss and implement the timely recommendations of this report.

SC Commentary on the Center and Challenge Program Medium Term Plans for 2010-2012: The SC has continued to review the MTPs of Centers and Challenge Programs. However, according to recent practice it has given the MTPs considered adequate previously a more general review and focussed mainly on the remaining MTPs. Both general and Center/CP specific commentaries are provided for the information and review of ExCo Members. Even in a time of transition it is important that the consolidated workplan of the CGIAR is formally endorsed, particularly as for several of the MegaPrograms the change may be evolutionary, based on existing work where the Centers' and CPs' research agendas or components of them can be considered building blocks.

SC contributions to the change process

Over and above its agreed activities for the biennium, the SC has made a number of documentary contributions to the Change Process; both as it affects the SC/ISPC transition but more broadly on providing lessons learned from its prior role in monitoring and evaluation over many years.

- SC Response to the ITG Report on: "Establishment of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC)" (September 2009).
- Experiences from Five Years of Performance Measurement System: Research-related Indicators. Lessons drawn by the Science Council (final draft, September 2009).
- Defining the role of an Independent Science and Partnership Council (April 2009), a Discussion Document contributing to the CGIAR Transition.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Processes and Experiences (April 2009) - a document detailing some of the lessons learned from Science Council's experiences in M&E.
- Monitoring and Evaluation in the new CGIAR (May 2009) - a discussion document that looks at the likely needs for monitoring and evaluation processes in the new CGIAR and the points at which they may operate.
- Key research opportunities for the CGIAR (June 2008) - Science Council's contribution to the paper of Working Group 1

It is suggested that the CGIAR may make better use of some of this systematic learning in such required activities as the design of a Monitoring and Evaluation system for the forthcoming MegaPrograms, including use of annual indicators, the Accountability Framework and understanding the relationships between ex ante assessment, monitoring and ex post impact assessment.

ISPC Work Plan and Budget 2010-2011

The Work Plan and budget provides a report (as Annexes) on the completed actions of the SC during the biennium 2008/9. It estimates a provisional budget for transitional and continuation activities in 2010 of USD 3.97 million, placing emphasis on new impact assessment activities, foresight and the mobilisation of science and a reduced portfolio of activities on monitoring and evaluation. A nominal budget for ISPC in 2011 of USD 3.615 million is provided awaiting refinement of the ISPC Terms of Reference. Given the changes in the CGIAR, the provenance of the support should be discussed by the co-sponsors in collaboration with ExCo/the Fund Council as a matter of urgency.

Changes in SC Membership

New SC Member Beatriz da Silveira Pinheiro of Brazil was welcomed starting from SC12 and took up one of the free SC positions. The SC is sad to report the death of SC Member Mike Gale in July 2009. He was a respected member of the global scientific and CGIAR communities. He contributed to the Priorities and Strategies portfolio and was SC's joint member on the Genetic Resources Policy Committee. No planned changes in Membership are expected until the terms of reference and the timetable for the implementation of the new ISPC are decided.

Report of most recent Science Council Meeting

Several of the above matters were discussed and SC advice finalised during the Science Council's most recent meeting held 3-5th September at CIFOR, Bogor, Indonesia. The SC12 End of Meeting Report is available on the Science Council website.