

Summary of ExCo Discussions on CP Pre-proposals "semi-endorsed" by iSC

ExCo Communications from CGIAR Director

January 8, 2003

Dear Colleagues:

Happy New Year! I am writing to brief you on where the CGIAR stands on the development and initiation of CPs, including the status of the four CP pre-proposals semi-endorsed by the iSC, and inform you of the tentative dates for a face-to-face ExCo meeting, if one were required before AGM2003.

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Challenge Programs--Regular Process

4. ExCo has endorsed the pre-proposal "Improving Livelihoods and Natural Resources Management in sub-Saharan Africa: Securing the Future for Africa's Children" for full proposal development. Comments made by ExCo and the CGIAR have been shared with FARA and the funds (200K) to support full proposal development have been transferred. FARA expects to submit the proposal to the interim Science Council by early June 2003.
5. You will recall that the iSC has also identified four other pre-proposals (from among the 15 submitted originally) as "promising" but "not quite ready for full proposal development." These are on climate change, rainforests, desertification, and coastal zones. The key proponents of these CPs were given an opportunity to discuss their ideas with the CGIAR stakeholders during parallel sessions held at AGM2002.
6. The iSC has further recommended that (ref. the first two attachments to my November 18, 2002 message) the proponents of these four pre-proposals "be encouraged to continue exploring their prospective partnerships and work programs," through small grants from the CGIAR until sometime in 2004, at which time those still interested in being considered as a CP would submit their revised proposals to the CGIAR (in the first instance to the SC for assessment of their science). This approach is being recommended on two main grounds: (1) to slow down the pace of introducing CPs so that the System has time to "digest" the first batch of (2-4) CPs; (2) to enable the proponents of the latter group of four CPs to "clarify and fine tune their research and business plans" as "they need more focus and clearer priorities and specificity of deliverables."
7. While there is certainly merit in the arguments made by iSC, the following points suggest that ExCo considers an alternative scenario: (1) at AGM2002 the CGIAR

strongly supported the CP concept and continuation with the CP process, while learning from the pilots; (2) together with the sub-Saharan Africa, these are in fact the very first batch of pre-proposals in the regular process which was open to all; (3) the proponents of these four CPs expressed their readiness to revise their pre-proposals over a much shorter period than suggested by the iSC (e.g., by July 2003); (4) providing financial support to these four CPs for pre-proposal development does not seem to be a viable alternative and is a deviation from the agreed process; (5) there is little value in prolonging uncertainty for the proponents of these CPs, some of which are outside the CGIAR and have expressed the need for clear signals from the CGIAR.

8. Therefore, I suggest that ExCo considers the following 3-step process and tentative timetable for handling these four CPs:

STEP 1: Proponents are invited to revise their pre-proposals by June 30, 2003, taking into account comments by iSC and CGIAR stakeholders. No funding would be provided for this activity.

STEP 2: The SC would review the revised pre-proposals and make recommendations to ExCo for full proposal development (by August 31, 2003)

STEP 3: ExCo would act on SC's recommendations (by Sept 30, 2003). Proponents of endorsed CPs (if any) would be provided funds for full proposal development.

9. Let me remind you that at AGM2002 CGIAR members expressed a strong need for having a clear strategic context within which CPs and other CGIAR activities are to be placed. In particular, clarity was sought in the strategic directions of the CPs, vis-a-vis those of other CGIAR activities, and how these all contribute to the development agenda. The input to be received from the iSC, as well as additional inputs on the theme, should provide us with elements which will help the CGIAR to continuously adjust one of the four initial pillars of the reform program, the CPs.

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With best wishes,

Francisco

February 5, 2003

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to summarize the outcome of the lively discussion among ExCo members on the next steps on the Challenge Programs and brief you on the status of two ExCo-initiated activities: the ISNAR Restructuring Team and the Search and Nominations Committee (SNC) for the Science Council.

Challenge Programs

1. My January 8, 2003 message to ExCo sought your reactions to two action items: (a) mechanisms for ExCo oversight of CPs; and (b) a process and tentative timetable for handling the four CP pre-proposals found by the iSC to be "promising" but "not quite ready for full proposal development." Regarding the first, ExCo members agree with the Executive Council's oversight role on CPs, but several members see pitfalls in having ExCo members themselves serve on governance bodies of the CPs, even as observers. There is broad agreement, however, that ExCo could perform the oversight role through individuals identified by ExCo, who are at an arms-length from the Council. We will do further background work on suitable mechanisms that meet this requirement and bring a proposal for discussion by ExCo.

2. The members who commented on the proposed process were divided between those who agreed with it and those who favored a pause in the CP process. In order to find a common ground we contacted several ExCo members, including those who had not expressed a view previously. During these discussions it became clear that:

(a) greater clarity was needed in the commitment the CGIAR had made to the public at large at the start of the CP Regular Process, with the Call for Ideas for CPs. The process proposed in my January 8 message to ExCo promoted conformity with the initially announced principles and arrangements for handling the proposals received. The attached timeline chart (prepared at the request of some members) shows how the process proposed for the four CP pre-proposals compares with the process used for the other CP pre-proposals that are part of the same Batch 1 of the Regular Process.

(b) ExCo's role in the CP process, especially at the pre-proposal stage, was not entirely clear. To clarify the matter, the CGIAR decisions on the Reform Program show that the Group's approval is necessary in (i) choosing CP ideas that should be advanced to the pre-proposal stage, and (ii) choosing from among the full proposals recommended by ExCo, those that should be implemented. The CGIAR has delegated to ExCo the responsibility to coordinate the process in the in-between stages from concept to full proposal development, with advice from the Science Council. Therefore, making decisions on CP pre-proposals (i.e., whether they should proceed to full-proposal stage) is a legitimate task for ExCo.

(c) greater clarity was needed in the guidance given by the CGIAR at AGM02 on the CP process. In particular, some members inquired if the CGIAR had decided to suspend the CP process now so that a strategic framework could be developed before proceeding with decisions on additional CPs. An examination of the record of discussions at AGM shows that while this was preferred by some members, other views were also expressed, and no specific decision was taken by the CGIAR to halt the process. In summing the discussion, the Chairman noted that "he sensed a consensus of support for CPs as a concept, willingness to approve the two pilots endorsed by ExCo, a desire for prudence in going forward in terms of priorities within a strategic framework, and concerns about cannibalizing funding." (p.18, Summary Record of Proceedings and Decisions, AGM02)

3. Clearly, there is a full range of options open to ExCo for deciding on the 4 CP pre-proposals. By way of explaining our rationale in suggesting the process outlined in my January 8 message, I note below the three principal options that were considered:

Option 1: Suspending the CP process now for all CPs that have not reached the full proposal stage. This would mean that, in addition to the two approved CPs, the process would continue for the two at the full proposal stage (Genetic Diversity and SSA). The proponents of the four "promising" CPs at the pre-proposal stage would be informed that the CGIAR would not consider their proposals at this time. The CGIAR would conduct two studies (one on lessons learned and the other on a strategic framework that includes overall directions for the System and the full portfolio of activities supported by the CGIAR). Decisions on the CP process would be made after the completion of these studies.

Option 2: Endorse the iSC proposal (i.e., to encourage the proponents of the four pre-proposals to continue exploring their prospective partnerships and work programs through small grants from the CGIAR until sometime in 2004, at which time those still interested in being considered as a CP would submit their revised proposals to the CGIAR (in the first instance to the SC for assessment of their science)).

Option 3: Adopt a middle of the road approach that provides a chance to the proponents of the 4 CP pre-proposals to revise their pre-proposals within the timeframe they identified as being adequate, while the CGIAR conducts the two studies mentioned under Option 1. ExCo would have two opportunities to review the emerging pre-proposals: first, when the revised pre-proposals are submitted (and after the SC has reviewed them), and second, when the full proposals, if any, are developed.

4. Option 1 was favored by some CGIAR members, but the overall opinion of the members at the AGM was in favor of continuing with the CP process. Option 2, submitted to you after AGM, recommended making significant changes in the CGIAR-agreed and publicly-announced process for CPs. Option 3, on the other hand, followed the "pragmatic" route sought by Ian and the CGIAR, and ensured the broadest possible consensus.

5. From your public and private comments it is clear to me that there is substantial (but not full) agreement that the CGIAR should honor the principles and procedures it announced to the public at the start of Batch 1 of the Regular CP process by adopting Option 3. There is also substantial agreement that we should not initiate the Batch 2 before a broad discussion takes place.

6. In view of these considerations, I suggest that, unless there are strong objections from ExCo members, we proceed as follows:

6.a. Adopt the proposed revised schedule shown in the attachment (see below) for the 4 pre-proposals that are still part of the Batch 1 of the Regular Process, and inform the proponents of the agreed schedule;

6.b. Ask iSC and the CGIAR Secretariat to summarize lessons learned from the pilot CPs and from the First Batch of the Regular Process (on both science and business plan development) by June 30, 2003;

6.c. Initiate process for developing a strategic framework for CPs as soon after the summary of lessons learned is available, which will require strong CGIAR involvement.

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With best wishes,

Francisco

Challenge Programs—Regular Process (First Batch)

(From February 5, 2003 briefing to ExCo)

Challenge Program—Regular Process (Batch 1)—Original Schedule

The original timeline for the first batch of CPs—Regular Process, agreed to and being followed by the CGIAR in processing the “Improving Livelihoods and Natural Resources Management in sub-Saharan Africa” pre-proposal, is as follows:

1. ExCo selection of ideas (February 18—March 15, 2002)
2. CGIAR approval of ideas (March 18—April 12, 2002)
3. ExCo call for pre-proposals (April 15—April 26, 2002)
4. Pre-proposal development (May 13—August 31, 2002)
5. iSC evaluation of pre-proposals (September 1—October 18, 2002)
6. ExCo selection of pre-proposals (October 23—December 6, 2002)
7. Full proposal development (December 17—May 31, 2003)
8. iSC/SC evaluation (June 1—July 15, 2003)
9. ExCo selection (July 16—August 8, 2003)
10. CGIAR decision-making (August 11—September 12, 2003)

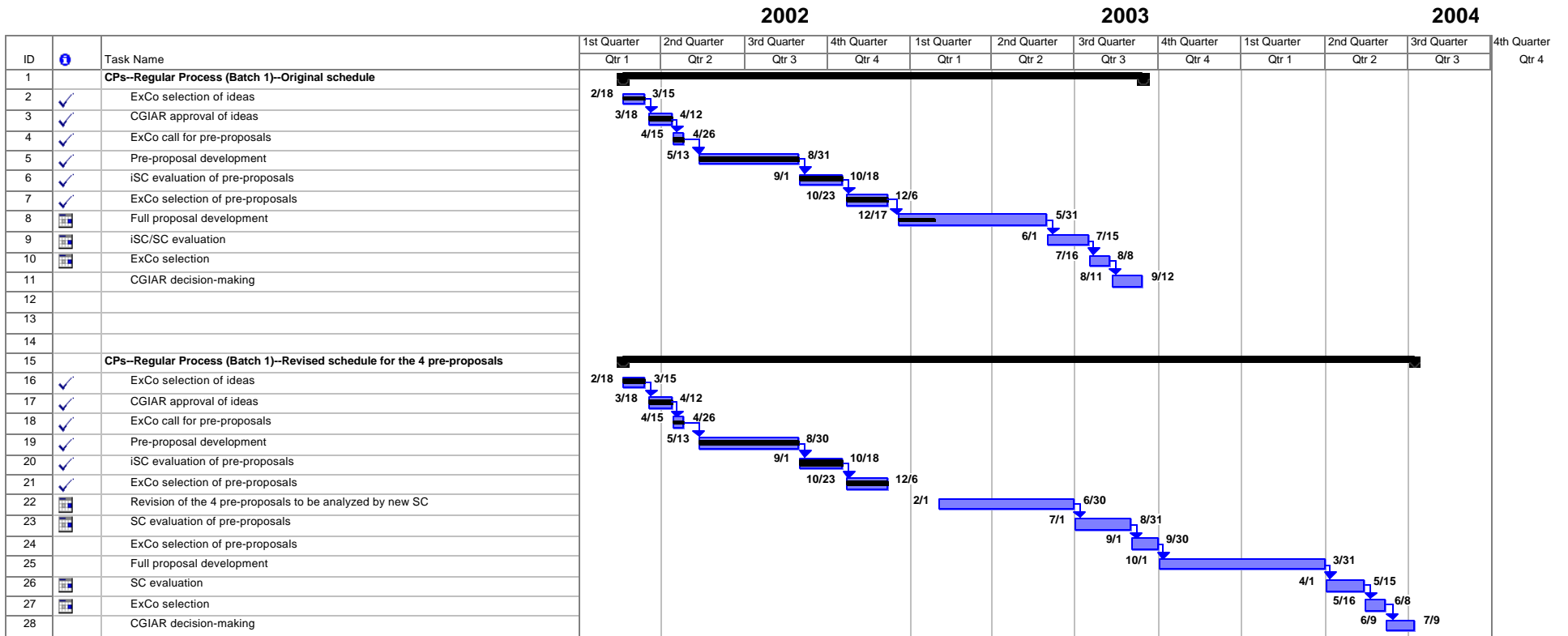
The first section of the attached chart shows this timeline graphically.

Challenge Program—Regular Process (Batch 1)—Revised Schedule for the 4 Promising Pre-proposals

The revised schedule for the four pre-proposals identified by iSC as “promising” (which are also part of the first batch in the regular process) modifies steps 4 through 10 of the above timeline to be completed as follows:

4. Submission of revised pre-proposals to the *new* SC (June 30, 2003)
5. SC evaluation of pre-proposals (August 31, 2003—tentative date, pending SC decision for its first meeting)
6. ExCo selection of 0 to 4 pre-proposals to move to full proposal preparation (September 30, 2003—or later if SC meets at a later date than August 31)
7. Full proposals, if any, developed and submitted to SC (No earlier than March 2004)
8. SC evaluation (April 1—May 15, 2004, pending above schedule)
9. ExCo selection (May 16—June 8, 2004, pending above schedule)
10. CGIAR decision-making (June 9—July 9, 2004, pending above schedule)

The revised schedule is shown graphically in the second section of the attached chart. Please note that it delays the original timeline for the first batch of CPs—Regular Process by nearly one year.



February 21, 2003

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to brief you on the outcome of the recent ExCo discussions on the four Challenge Program pre-proposals "semi-endorsed" by the iSC, go over several information items; and seek your endorsement of (a) the revised Genetic Resources Challenge Program full proposal and (b) an interim process for conducting external reviews of centers, and comments on (c) a draft terms of reference for an external review of partnership committees and (d) the theme of this year's CGIAR Annual Report.

Outcome of ExCo Discussions on 4 CP
Pre-proposals "semi-endorsed" by iSC

1. Given the polarity of the views, and the implications for the future CP process, ExCo seems to have exhausted its means for settling this matter through virtual discussion, and needs to address the questions raised in face-to-face dialogue at the next scheduled meeting on 16-17 May, 2003. In view of this, the System Office will inform the proponents of the 4 CP pre-proposals that ExCo expects to make a decision on the continuity of pre-proposal development for these four CPs at its face-to-face meeting in May.
2. In a related development, Emil Javier has informed us of the iSC's plans for developing a new priorities and strategy framework, for helping place the CPs and other CGIAR-supported activities in a broader strategic context, as requested by the Group at AGM02. The planned work would proceed in two stages, a highly participatory first phase to harvest opinions from stakeholders on priority outputs and impacts for the CGIAR, and a second "synthesis" phase where global priorities would be set. iSC plans to complete Phase 1 during its tenure, leaving Phase 2 to the new Science Council.

Cordially,

Francisco