

**Alliance's response to
'The Role of Systemwide Initiatives in Implementing
the CGIAR's Research Agenda'
April 15, 2008**

The Science Council (SC) assessment document addresses two large subjects: an analysis of the role of the System-wide and Eco-Regional Programs [SWEPs] (Part 1) and an evaluation of the existing SWEPs with recommendations for continuing or ending the programs (Part 2). The Alliance has discussed the first part of the document concerning the role of SWEPs. It is in the process of analyzing possible options for ongoing SWEPs and will be able to report to next ExCo on the outcomes of this assessment.

What follows presents the position of the Alliance, developed through the Alliance Deputy Executive-Science, concerning the role which SWEPs play in the system.

SWEPs as a collective action mechanism to implement system agenda

- We agree with the SC that SWEPs are a useful mechanism for coordinating collective action; it is of course one mechanism out of a number of possible options. The Alliance has just initiated an analysis of possible mechanisms for collective action, with an emphasis on the effectiveness, transaction costs and nimbleness of these mechanisms.
- SWEPs offer a platform for working together on issues and areas of common interest and enhancing synergies and efficiencies through improved coordination, collaboration and communication across centres. No two SWEPs are necessarily the same. We agree with the SC categorization of '3 profiles for future systemwide initiatives' in this respect.
- It seems the SC review of SWEPs would move towards closure of SWEPs defined by eco-region. This approach makes sense in that now we have regional plans also working in some areas and this type of activity could fall under that umbrella.
- In general we appreciate any attempt to review or update and simplify the existing CGIAR structures
- We disagree that the focus of SWEPs should be on 'scaling up- and out rather than on original research - an outcome oriented program.' This does not fit many of the modes for SWEP as later described, nor does it capture the model of particularly successful SWEPs in the past, e.g. the Alternatives to Slash and Burn Program (ASB), or the Systemwide Livestock Program (SLP).

Typology of SWEPs

The SC proposes the following typology which we find helpful.

1. *System-wide coordination programs (communities of practice):*

This is a very useful function for our overall research agenda. We however do not agree that it should be restricted to self-funding by participants. For example, some experiences show that communities of practice with no resources do not function well; examples include the Inter-Center Working Group on Natural Resources Management in the past or now the Genomics Task Force.

2. *System-wide natural resources management (NRM) initiatives*

This concept should be further elaborated. It sounds like the SC is referring to a Challenge Programme (CP) (e.g. the CP on Water and Food) rather than a SWEp per se. We see a significant possibility for confusion between the type of SWEps as described by the SC under this heading and the CPs dealing with NRM. The description provided by the SC also seems to imply that all NRM research in the System is undertaken as a systemwide activity. This is not automatically the case since it is the core business of a number of centres to undertake various kinds of NRM research.

3. *Short term system-wide task forces*

We agree that this is a useful function; we have in some cases implemented such types of collaborative activities (e.g., the former inter-centre working group on climate change). The advantage here is that transaction costs are minimal, as Centres decide upon the need for such a task force, and they decide upon closure (in this specific example, the Alliance) once the need is met.

Evaluation system for SWEps

We very much agree that there should be a new and light evaluation system for SWEps.

Distinction between SWEps and CPs

- The possible confusion between SWEps and CPs was raised as an issue by the Meta Review Team. The SC response was that “The distinction between CPs and systemwide initiatives is very clear”. However, the devil, they say, is in the detail. Different people clearly have a different understanding of these two mechanisms, which leads to confusion.
- We agree with the SC that CPs deal with major challenges requiring research partnerships between Centres and outside parties and with a time bound nature. SWEps need to be seen more as “internal” partnership initiatives (even though they could involve some partnerships with outside parties – NARS, ARIs).

- We are not comfortable with the point made by the SC that a reason to create new CPs is that they are “intended to capture new money for the CGIAR research agenda”. Whilst of course funds should be captured, CPs should be created primarily to strengthen the agenda of the system.

Lifecycle of SWEPS

- We consider that the starting, implementation and completion of system-wide initiatives are important phases that have to be managed in a transparent manner. At the beginning of a SWEPE there needs to be a careful discussion of what is the scope, who should lead and who should be involved. Other questions posed in the SC review should also be considered when a SWEPE is started. Furthermore, collective decision making systems for monitoring and evaluation, and closing of SWEPEs need to be agreed upon. We consider that the Alliance needs to play a more pro-active role in how SWEPEs are started, managed and closed.
- We agree with the distinction made between formal and informal SWEPEs by the SC. We would argue that the most successful SWEPEs are those that may begin as ‘self induced’ informal partnership initiatives, and which then take on formalization through the Alliance and the Science Council. SWEPEs should happen because a number of Centres working on a particular theme or within a particular agro-ecological zone discover that they could function better if they work together. Once this is the case, there is a greater opportunity for success.

Funding for SWEPEs

It should come from multiple sources:

- Individual centre budgets for the work that they do in that particular SWEPE topic area. This investment will vary from centre to centre.
- System level funding: this would be additional resources generated through the system to support key SWEPE activities. Such resources could then support
 - i. Coordination activities for the SWEPE
 - ii. New joint SWEPE activities, e.g. capacity building initiatives.
 - iii. Leveraging additional resources to support Centres research. A good example is resources generated through SGRP’s efforts – Global Public Goods (GPG) 1 and GPG 2.