

Summary of ExCo 13 Discussion and Recommendations to the CGIAR on Challenge Programs External Reviews¹

R. Rabbinge presented SC comments on the two CP external reviews, HarvestPlus CP and CP on Water and Food (CPWF).

He congratulated HarvestPlus for a positive review and highlighted the following:

- SC agrees with the review panel that HarvestPlus is a value-adding program with major potential impacts on nutrition and health of the poor in developing countries. SC endorsed all the program-related recommendations of the review panel.
- On recommendation 3 which is about deployment, testing of adoption and the impact of nutritionally enhanced varieties, SC concurs with the panel's recommendation for the program to involve NARS at an early stage of the development of implementation strategy.
- SC also agrees that stronger links should be forged with conventional breeding programs that aim at improving other traits of value to farmers. It considers this as a critical factor to adoption and therefore an important component of the testing of proof-of-concept of biofortification.

On the CPWF external review report, he pointed out the following:

- SC compliments the review panel for the good analysis of key issues concerning CPWF and endorses its recommendations and suggestions.
- The panel's assessment confirms SC's views (based on its review of the CPWF MTP) that the CP should have a more focused set of objectives and overall program strategy.
- SC supports the panel's recommendation to critically reassess the benchmark basins concept and choice of basins to achieve greater focus.
- SC recommends that the development of a "well-conceived and more tightly focused strategy and implementation and monitoring plan for Phase 2, as well as clear strategy and timeline" be set as condition for continuation of CPWF.

Namita Datta (CGIAR Secretariat) presented the CGIAR Secretariat comments on the governance, management and finance aspects of the CPER reports. She pointed out the following on the results of the HarvestPlus external review:

- HarvestPlus governance structure is pragmatic. The governance body is largely external but has four institutional members from the two Centers who have displayed a high degree of professionalism and sensitivity to ensure quality of research and independence of governance. The CGIAR Secretariat agreed with the review panel's observation that independence of the governing body of HarvestPlus from institutional interests is critical.
- The CGIAR Secretariat complimented HarvestPlus for its good financial health but cautioned the risk on overdependence on a few large donors.

¹ Excerpt from Thirteenth Meeting of the CGIAR Executive Council (October 16-17, 2007) Summary Record of Proceedings, November 2, 2007.

- The idea of maintaining a cash reserve, as endorsed by the Panel, is good but the level should be much lower than what is expected of a Center.

On the CPWF review, she highlighted the following:

- The CGIAR Secretariat endorsed the panel's recommendation that the CP should undertake a reform plan in its governance mechanism, i.e. in structure, composition, and functioning, giving emphasis on the need for a higher degree of independence. The CGIAR Secretariat is pleased that CPWF has taken this recommendation into account in developing its plan for Phase 2 of the program.
- There is a need for greater clarity in the respective domains of the CPWF and IWMI, its host institution, in terms of programs, governance and finance.
- The CGIAR Secretariat also agrees with the panel's recommendation that the Program Coordinator be given greater responsibility in performance evaluation of the program management team members, theme leaders and basin coordinators.
- The fiduciary standards of the CP should be strengthened.

N. Datta further pointed out that both reviews should have undertaken a more in-depth analysis of how partners, particularly the NARS, assessed the CPs, i.e. in terms of clarity of their roles, contribution to their own research objectives, and overall effectiveness of the CP partnership model.

Discussion:

- ExCo has an obligation to establish a best practice governance model for CPs, i.e. one that is streamlined and cost-effective.
- A concern was expressed about proposed changes in governance and structure of CPWF in terms of cost involved and potential confusion to partners.
- Citing the case of HarvestPlus which depends a great deal on the support of one donor, ExCo stressed the need for Members to support a more balanced funding portfolio for CPs.
- CPs need to be reassessed in terms of overlaps with Centers' work and key assumptions when they are first established.
- Responding to the issue on the relationship of CPWF with its host institution, the Program Coordinator indicated that a working group is preparing proposals for changes in the steering committee, including how its chair is identified.
- While a formal recommendation from ExCo is not necessary, it is understood that both HarvestPlus and CPWF should proceed to Phase 2.

Conclusion and ExCo Recommendation to the CGIAR:

- *ExCo congratulated HarvestPlus for a favorable external review report, and recommends that the CGIAR endorse the HarvestPlus CPER recommendations and the CP should proceed to Phase 2.*
- *ExCo should have more in depth discussion and develop a strategy in response to the fact of one new donor providing a significant amount of funding to the HarvestPlus CP.*
- *ExCo recommends that the CGIAR endorse the CPWF CPER recommendations and the CP should proceed to Phase 2. CPWF was requested to report back to SC*

and then to ExCo in May 2008 for a review of its Phase 2 plan towards a more focused program and reformed governance structure.

- *ExCo should determine the minimum requirement for CP governance and agree on a set of principles on governance and good practices with adequate flexibility.*