Independent Science and Partnership Council

14 September 2016

ISPC Assessment of the Excellence in Breeding Platform (EiB) revised proposal (2017-2022)

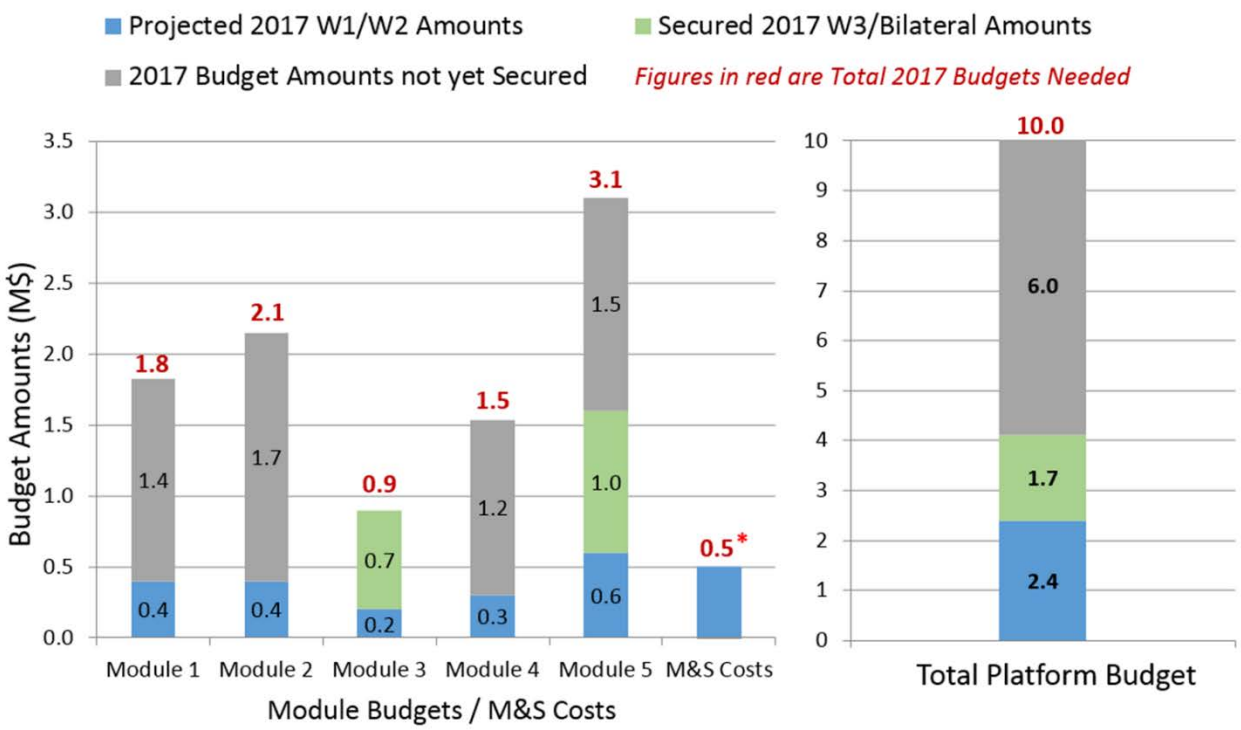
ISPC PLATFORM RATING[1]: A-

1. Summary

- This Platform has strategic relevance for the CGIAR; there are important reasons to look for the synergies in breeding and genetics programs across the system. Increasing the efficiency and technical quality of these multiple programs is critically important for the CGIAR. The proposal makes a convincing argument that there are economies of scale, and that many individual breeding programs in the System are too small to make full use of key genetic and genomic technologies or to keep up to date with the most advanced equipment and expertise.
- Crop improvement programs coupled with the genetic resource collections have been the greatest strength of the CGIAR system. This Platform seeks to add value to these activities by enhancing the ability of improvement programs to access and apply new technologies. The CGIAR is the most important source of publicly provided breeding germplasm (cultivars, lines, populations) for the developing world, particularly in low and lower-middle income countries (which grow 45% of global area for major staples and where 48% of the world population lives, of which 84% are poor).
- This Platform demonstrates comparative advantage as it shows how the collaborating CGIAR Centers and AFS CRPs may add value by working together (including with breeding programs in national systems). It pursues the use and procurement of technologies and common services that will contribute to its objectives for economy of scale. The platform's contribution to value addition will be highly dependent on the quality of the selected leadership.
- The Platform is expected to add value to the AFS CRPs by changing CGIAR breeding approach(es) through identification, development and promotion of best practices. The workflow will also be linking to the Genebank and Big Data Platforms, the AFS CRPs, and national breeding programs to ensure data sharing.

[1] A+: Outstanding - of the highest quality, at the forefront of research in the field (fully evolved, exceeds expectations; recommended unconditionally).
A: Excellent – high quality research and a strongly compelling proposal that is at an advanced stage of evolution as a CRP, with strong leadership which can be relied on to continue making improvements.
A-: Very good – a sound and compelling proposal displaying high quality research and drawing on established areas of strength, which could benefit from a more forward-looking vision.
B+: Good – a sound research proposal but one which is largely framed by 'business as usual' and is deficient in some key aspects of a CRP that can contribute to System-wide SLOs.
B: Fair – Elements of a sound proposal but has one or more serious flaws rendering it uncompetitive; not recommended without significant change.
C: Unsatisfactory – Does not make an effective case for the significance or quality of the proposed research.

Excellence in Breeding - 2017 Module and Platform Budgets:
W1/W2 Amounts, W3/Bilateral Amounts & Shortfalls (US$M)



* *includes bilaterally-funded M&S Costs in the amount of US$0.4 M*

Data Source: CGIAR System Management Office

2. Assessment of the Platform response to the ISPC major comments

Initial ISPC comment (16 June 2016)	Platform response/changes proposed (31 July)	ISPC assessment (14 September)
1. Consider changing the name of the Platform to avoid potential misinterpretation with one of the key objectives of the portfolio, while reflecting the primary purpose of this Platform.	Renamed as "Excellence in Breeding Platform" with a subtitle telling "Tools and services that create synergies and accelerate genetic gains of breeding programs targeting the developing world." Text and figures adjusted accordingly.	**Satisfactorily addressed.** The proposal has taken the suggestion of the ISPC into account, but there are still concerns over the tendency for the language of "genetic gain" to pop up in the proposal (more than 60 times, not counting references and CVs).
2. The ISPC recommends that proponents provide an analysis of funding scenarios, and in particular the use of W1/W2 funds versus bilateral grants and W3 funding for the Platform as well as the participating AFS CRPs. The analysis should include a discussion of the management costs, justifying the high proportion of the budget or reducing it, and taking into account that that the costs of applying a new strategy that may require additional populations, new infrastructure and staff time allocation may be a significant impediment.	Proposal includes Table 12 for base budget, Table 13 for uplift budget and Table 14 showing scenarios for [W1 + W2] only versus using [W1 + W2] only if W3 and bilateral funding becomes available (as noted in Table 15 by increasing it from US$ 2 million to US$ 10 million). Further details are given in addenda response to the sub-commentary regarding management costs. The changes are clearly noted to follow up in proposal's budget tables.	**Partially addressed.** Proponents acknowledge that this platform, to succeed, needs to raiseW3 and bilateral funding to end with a platform budget of US$ 15 million. However, that seems to be "hopeful thinking" because they do not give any realistic ideas on how to obtain such extra funding. Proponents give explanations in depth on how changes, which lead to savings in management to strengthening the entry point of the platform; i.e., Module 1 (Breeding Program Excellence), as well as budget shifts to follow the recommendation from reviewers regarding support to small breeding programs to implement change.
3. Adjust the assessment process and metrics to take into account variations in the stage of development, available resources and target regions for the different commodities for Module 1 (Breeding Program Excellence).	There were budget changes and shifts to related Agrifood Systems CRPs and within the platform to ensure staff time allocation does not affect small program (Module 1) and more resource to become available for translating and validating genotyping techniques in their crops.	**Partially addressed.** Proponents address this commentary through adjusting the budget but they do not take into account that it also refers to adjusting the process and metrics considering the breeding programs' stage of development and target population of environments for the various crops, particularly those in RTB and GLDC CRPs.