

21st February 2012

ISPC Commentary on the revised proposal for **CRP 1.2 “Humidtropics: Integrated systems for the humid tropics”** (24 January 2012)

Summary

The revised proposal CRP 1.2 “Humidtropics: Integrated Systems for the Humid Tropics” seeks to transform the lives of rural poor in humid lowlands, moist savannas and tropical highlands of three major Impact Zones in sub-Saharan Africa, tropical America and Asia, containing a population of 2.9 billion, including many poor smallholder farmers. Humidtropics research is guided by a global hypothesis “*A stepwise series of preferred livelihood strategies exist within the humid tropics where poverty reduction, balanced household nutrition, system productivity and natural resource integrity are most effectively achieved and contribute best to human welfare*”, which addresses the development challenges of reducing poverty and improving ecosystem integrity in the humid and sub-humid tropics.

The humid tropics are distinguished from other ecoregions by their natural resource endowments in terms of water, biodiversity and soils, which provide unique opportunities for systems-level improvement. The proposal provides convincing justification for investing effort in the humid tropics consistent with the mission of the overall CGIAR system and the SRF. However, the proponents have re-written much of the proposal over the course of several weeks, a much shorter time than the ISPC recommended. As a result a common concern throughout the revised proposal is that it is generically written and the text is not well targeted at priority needs of the humid tropics.

The strategic direction, goal and objectives of the CRP are aligned with SLOs. The overall framework for the program is relatively coherent with the main change from the original proposal being a greater emphasis on value chains and markets in SRT 2.1 (proposal Figure 2). It proposes five strategic research themes (SRTs). SRT1 on Systems Analysis and Synthesis provides an analytical framework for identifying trajectories, bottlenecks and opportunities to address SLO targets. The core of the proposal are three SRTs on Integrated System Improvement, which will provide new opportunities derived from systems integration research: SRT 2.1 on Integrating Markets through System Intensification; SRT 2.2 on Increasing Systems Productivity; and SRT 2.3 on Natural Resources Improvement. These are complemented by SRT3 on Scaling and Institutional Innovation, focusing on achieving development outcomes and generating international public goods (most of which, initially, are methodological).

Within the SRTs, a substantial portfolio of activities is proposed for the initial three years. These activities target eleven major developing country regions with varying intensity and subjects for research. As the original proposal targeted only seven major developing country regions, the revised proposal is geographically broader than the original proposal although the regional definitions vary between the two proposals. Despite these major changes and many other changes in activities in the revised proposal which must result in changes in staff time, travel and operating expenses, the 3-year

total budget request is the same - USD 144 million with just under half (USD69 million) requested from CGIAR Fund windows 1 and 2.

The revised CRP 1.2 also fails to reflect serious consideration of the issues and concerns raised by the ISPC in its original review document. The response describes how the drafting team addressed the broader ISPC and FC “*must haves*”, but in some cases the meaning behind these (explained in our detailed discussion) was misunderstood. The key issue of focus is one example¹.

That said, the revised document is indeed an improvement on the original version. For instance, the humid tropics have been more clearly delineated in terms of their levels of development and potential, the criteria for selection of Action Sites are more appropriate than previously, Action Areas are better characterised, and the relationship among Impact Zones, Action Areas and Action Sites is more clearly defined – at least in terms of their relationships (no specific choices have yet been made on where the Action Sites will be located). Key elements for a fully developed proposal, however, remain largely undefined and this is a task awaiting implementation of the proposed SRT1.

There is a frustrating and unnecessary lack of precision in the document. Several terms that are foundational to the proposal are used without any clear definition. For example, the term “livelihood clusters” is used eight times on p13 alone, featuring in the global hypothesis and many of the specific hypotheses for the research program, despite its meaning not being at all intuitive, and without being defined. The term is then not referred to again anywhere in the rest of the proposal. “Sustainable intensification” is used multiple times throughout the document without being defined, despite being open to a wide range of possible interpretations.

Thus the ISPC finds that the revised version of CRP 1.2, although improved in structure, is still too ambitious, too broad in coverage, is dominated by innovations systems and complexity theories, and lacking in the requested details highlighted in the earlier ISPC commentary (in particular, there remains very little effort on tree crops, and the geographic scope has expanded). The revised proposal has thus insufficiently addressed most of the *must-haves* from the ISPC and the FC.

Recommendation:

Approval for SRT1 activities for 18 months only, with resubmission to the ISPC after 12 months

The revised CRP 1.2 still requires substantial revision before it is considered adequate as a proposal for a long-term research program. More attention should be paid to the comments made in the original commentary as well as those in this review. The proposal is still very ambitious and should certainly not be rolled out across all the proposed countries/regions/Action Areas during the first three years. A prudent approach would be to do pilots in selected Action Areas, certainly no more than three initially, with priority to those Action Areas where good basic partnerships already exist, which can be developed and new partners welcomed. Additional Action Areas may be added over time. Phasing the implementation of an approach to systems intensification which is still to be proven would be more sensible and would be potentially more cost-effective.

¹ The CRP 1.2 resubmission was accompanied by a list of six *must-haves* from the ISPC, coming out of the FC council meeting. However, the original ISPC commentary included a list of seven, and top of that list was the need to: “Narrow the geographical scope of the proposal to regions where a new CGIAR systems approach will have the greatest benefit in terms of poverty alleviation and ecosystem integrity”. It is not clear from the minutes of the FC meeting why this did not make it to the list of *must-haves* transmitted to the proponents. Nonetheless, we keep it here as the top priority for attention for any further revisions of this proposal and provide commentary on the revised proposal as if it were a “*must-have*”.

Approval is suggested for one year, only for those research activities in this CRP which are indispensable for a better definition of the location of Action Sites in the selected Action Areas and the activities to be carried out therein. This mainly falls under SRT 1. Currently-funded research should be continued, assuming this can be shown to be relevant to the hypotheses presented and the research questions proposed.

Discussion of the response to the ISPC “*Must-haves*”

ISPC Must have 1: Narrow down the geographical scope of the proposal to regions where a new CGIAR systems approach will have the greatest benefit in terms of poverty alleviation and ecosystem integrity.

Not Addressed.

This *must-have* has not been addressed by the proponents directly, nor has it been addressed indirectly through the response to the other *must-haves*. The program aims to contribute towards all 4 SLOs of the CGIAR; will work across all three eco-regions (humid tropics, tropical highlands, and savannas), and will work in all three of the agricultural worlds described by the World Bank Development Report 2008 (agriculture-based countries; transforming countries; and urbanized countries). While there is some geographic prioritization by continent, there is little by way of clear priority-setting. The ISPC suggested that emphasis on the lowland humid tropics and its systems may be an important aspect of focussing the proposal. This has been ignored in the revised proposal – the revised version still includes the moist savannas and highlands in Africa, and highlands in both Asia and the Americas. Although the regional descriptions have improved, there are more Action Areas – an increase to eleven from seven in the original proposal. The proposal is thus broader and less focussed without a justification being given.

The description of the Action Areas is much improved from the first version. Eleven Action Areas across three continents are proposed, but these areas are vast and the Action Sites (varying from 9-24 per Action Area, classified in three tiers 1-3 according to how well-established they are) where research is to be conducted, or R4D platforms, are yet to be identified, with the exception of the plan to work in some of the sites currently being used by the SSA-CP. The rationale for selecting 9 to 24 Action Sites per Action Area (giving rise to between 99 and 216 Action Sites in total) is weak and hard to defend. The definition of the “focus” for the proposal (p5) is that in the bulk of agricultural lands in humid and sub-humid tropics, where production systems are mainly rainfed, intensification faces a number of constraints. This is too large a geographical area to be effective as a coherent program and there is no quantitative framework given that justifies it, or for prioritizing among regions and subregions. Equally of concern is the large potential overlap with focus areas of other CRPs.

The revised CRP recognises (p115) the need to shift the bias away from Africa noting that the CRP expects a shift as it fully implements the program. SRT 3 in particular is expected to benefit all regions. If the issue of focus is addressed, it may be possible to subsequently make adjustments in the resource allocation before the CRP commences.

ISPC Must have 2: Prioritize research questions and approaches to be carried out at the most important Action Sites, paying due attention to the selection of sites and identifying jointly with other CRPs the research to be provided by other programs and partners active in humid zones. The

prioritization will take account of the scientific and socio-developmental lessons learned from prior research and relate this to hypotheses to alleviate the actual situation of poverty and resource degradation at the target sites. Means to evaluate the effectiveness of the hypothesised approaches needed to be included in the program.

Not met.

The CRP hypothesizes that a combination of biophysical, institutional, policy strategies will lead to solutions, identify positive development trajectories and result in robust outcomes that are consistent with the SLOs of the CGIAR. Currently, a similar approach is being tested in the SSA-CP which was recently reviewed by Lynam et al. (2010). Because the feasibility and success of the approach is still not yet proven, that report recommended that another few years will be needed to see if the approach works and whether it is cost-effective. Yet, this CRP suggests adopting an even more complex version of the SSA-CP approach, which is clearly a high risk strategy. As stated in the ISPC review and even more strongly recommended here, this approach must be explicitly tested and monitored for efficacy against robust controls such as linear uptake pathways.

A global hypothesis is offered that is untestable and too general:

“A stepwise series of preferred livelihood strategies exist within the humid tropics where poverty reduction, balanced household nutrition, system productivity and natural resource integrity are most effectively achieved and contribute best to human welfare”

Some of the nine specific hypotheses (p13) showed distinct progress in decomposing this high-order hypothesis into research-relevant components, but there was no justification for selection of these hypotheses and they seem to have been developed independent from the rest of the proposal.

A closer alignment with the major farming systems in selected Action Areas as outlined in Table 2, would have made the specific hypotheses more convincing. Instead, some of the Research Questions remain very generic ‘systems’ questions rather than clearly justified in relation to specific constraints within agricultural systems prevalent in the humid tropics. Overall, when one compares the original proposal to the revised one, there is substantially less information about the targeted main crops.

Lack of coordination and potential for overlap with commodity or natural resource CRPs has now been partly addressed in Section 9 of the revised proposal. There is now greater recognition of potential synergies with other CRPs, in particular the other ‘systems’ CRPs, although the lack of an explicit awareness of what was proposed in those CRPs does not give confidence as to what would be implemented. The Advisory Committee, with its role in relation to ‘priority setting, partnerships and the strategic allocation of resources’, will have to help ensure that this coordination occurs, in consultation with governance bodies from the other CRPs. Two DGs (one of whom is from IITA) will act as observers to the Advisory Committee, increasing the chances of avoiding duplication and establishing priorities drawn from past research experiences in the humid tropics.

The revised proposal provides more detail as to how Humidtropics plans to operationalize the framework and deliver the proposed research and development outcomes and contribute to the SLOs. More information is provided as to how Action Sites will be selected, research questions for each SRT are posed, more information is given about methodology, and division of the responsibilities for activities among CGIAR Centers is clearer. The International Public Goods that could be generated during the first three years are mainly methodological, and the section on analysis of trade offs and

synergies is very useful. However, there is still need to make stronger links between the overarching theory and the specific research opportunities in the selected Action Sites. Initial selection of Action Sites remains determined by current activities (e.g. SSA-CP) and no prioritization of research questions and intervention opportunities defining specific priority program activities and Action Areas have yet been made. The proposal suggests that SRT1 activities will allow the necessary prioritization and specification of Action Areas and their activities.

In the revised CRP there is much more information about process but not enough about the agricultural activities that will be implemented apart from the information about CIALCA and the STCP. Considering that for the first three years of the CRP, more than 50% of the budget will be supported by existing funded CGIAR activities, the proponents of the CRP must have a good idea of the kind of agricultural technologies that will be tested and promoted in most of the Action Areas and the proposal should include such details.

Overall, the revised CRP is very frustrating in its lack of scientific information. Even in SRT 2.2 and 2.3 where one would imagine CGIAR Center partners would wish to highlight their main scientific contributions to the proposal, the text emphasises approaches and generic inputs. It might help future evaluation of the program if examples of existing and planned scientific activities and inputs from already funded components could be included. Section 3 has a rather unclear discussion of the potential for intensification, and makes no use of data or evidence to support the arguments put forward. The yield gap concept is not mentioned at all, let alone used as a basis for priority-setting, and “sustainable intensification” is not defined.

The proposal states (p44): “*Markets as an area for research and institutional innovation are relatively recent and largely developed as a response to policy adjustment and market liberalization*”. There is a huge and growing body of literature on markets and marketing systems in the context of smallholders in developing countries which has been generated from 1970s onwards. In particular, for Africa, there are some excellent studies from the past 20 years for both perishable commodities (e.g. vegetables) and less perishable (e.g. grains). There are also some good examples where institutional innovation was a key to successful solution for smallholders (e.g. Hall’s work in India). CRP 2 on policies, markets and institutions is mentioned in the list of collaborating CRPs, but their input seems to be absent from the broad-brush descriptions of markets in the text. Better joint planning and thinking about division of responsibilities is required if, as with the SSA-CP, market access issues become central to the proposal.

Some of the contested assertions in the original proposal do not appear to have been addressed (e.g. the issue of rural-urban migration). It would be very useful through the course of the CRP to monitor population movements. Presumably the proponents hope that through successful system intensification and improved livelihoods, smallholder families will wish to remain in rural areas. This cannot be a foregone conclusion if rural-urban migration is driven by non-agricultural forces. As noted in the ISPC review of the original proposal, if migration is inevitable, then can this CRP help to provide good exits from agriculture for those wishing to get out? This revised proposal fails to synthesize and build on opportunities from past and current work as the basis for underpinning work at the new Action Sites. More rigorous analysis of past and on-going commodity-based system work in the humid tropics is urgently needed in a further revised CRP.

The idea of a panel survey to be carried out within Action Sites is an appealing one, and could take on International Public Good characteristics if done carefully and in a comparable manner across the Action Sites. The value of these data would be enhanced tremendously if data on other comparable

sites that are not Action Sites, were also collected in the same survey rounds. Randomized control trials are not embraced, despite being applicable to a downstream development-oriented proposal such as this. An intermediate option, that would certainly have research benefits with an international public goods nature, as well as providing convincing evidence on the efficacy of the approach, is for the program to collect data from inside and outside Action Sites in a comparable way (but not necessarily with randomization across these pairs of sites). However, as stated, it is hard to see how the proposed Action Research approach, even when combined with the proposed standardized M&E approach across sites, would deliver convincing evidence of the effectiveness of the R4D activities carried out.

ISPC Must have 3: Identify impact pathways for the new research that map directly, through aggregated research outcomes where necessary, to the SLOs.

Partially met.

The revised proposal addressed this *must have* through defining longer-term targets contributing directly to SLOs and devoting the entire SRT3 as an integral research mechanism for achieving impact. SRT3 now contains specific scaling-up activities defined for understanding system complexities, testing methods to assess impact and evaluate performance in attaining development outcomes. A stepwise impact pathways approach is adopted where scaling to impact becomes a design feature with research activities evaluating alternative pathways to impact under a range of market, policy, institutional and resource endowment circumstances.

Nowhere in the document is there any explanation of where the list of high-level targets (increasing staple food yields by 60%; increasing average farm income by 50%; lifting 25% of poor households above the poverty line; reduced the number of malnourished children by 30%; restoring 40% of these farms to sustainable resource management) introduced in Section 1 has come from, which completely undermines confidence in the proponents' ability to meet them through the proposed research. There is no analysis of previous efforts to achieve such ambitious milestones, beyond the failed efforts described in pp90-91. It is not clear whether the impacts sought by the program are relative to a baseline of the situation in 2011, or relative to a counterfactual of the situation in comparable areas outside Humidtropics Action Sites².

Despite the fact that the basis for setting program long-term targets is not clear, there are specific plans outlined for evaluating performance of the scaling to impact. The experiences of the SSA-CP innovation platforms appear to be the guiding example for the scaling-up and impact assessment approach of Humidtropics. Impact pathways have been set out more clearly than the previous version but there is still a preponderance of space and thought devoted to the networks, frameworks and approaches, rather than the outcomes required to achieve change for people living in poverty in the target Action Sites. The proposal provides the R4D Humid Tropics Conceptual Model and the R4D Impact model to describe the outcome pathways. The revised proposal has strengthened the approaches to delivery and impact by detailed research questions, rationales and methodologies in

² The latter is of course the correct comparison (albeit one that is difficult to construct) as a number of exogenous factors may contribute to progress on these targets over a 15-year period that have nothing to do with the program. Conversely, global economic stagnation or natural resource shocks may serve to make the background context much worse over a 15-year period than it currently is. In such a case, even a strikingly effective program would struggle to meet the targets as set.

each of the SRTs. However, only SRT1 has a timeframe with quantifiable targets which perhaps could be translated into milestones. The key output SRTs – 2.1, 2.2 & 2.3 – do not appear to have any milestones, although some of this work will be done through already approved projects that make up more than 50% of the budget. While it may be too difficult at this stage to draft specific milestones for SRT3, some attempt could be made. The reluctance of this CRP to at least identify the priority Action Sites, where milestones should be possible to identify, is likely to delay its approval. It is still not possible to assess plausibility of impact of the first three years of this CRP.

CRP1.2 authors often state that not much is understood about poverty dynamics, interventions and their impact pathways (see p9, for example). Certainly, the ways in which different parts of the CRP 1.2 proposed program relate to the wider economy remain poorly defined, and this in turn raises questions about the proposal's theory of change. Perhaps in an effort to focus down the proposal in response to comments on an earlier version, the theory of change in the current proposal is based almost entirely on changes to the productivity of agriculture/natural resource-based systems, with technology (in its broadest definition) driving such changes, against differing backgrounds of natural resource productivity, population density etc. There are occasional references to how the proposed work may help in the design of rural development programs (p3) and in "rural poverty reduction" (p6). There is also acknowledgement that "farming systems are conditioned by the relative prices of land and labour and by the access and distance to markets" (p6). However, there is no attempt to draw out the implications of these important observations for humid tropics research. Strategies to convince farmers to invest in the natural resource base - especially if the returns are long-term - will not be easy and the need for innovative thinking on how to achieve such a change cries out for better articulation.

Ellis, Freeman and others have argued for Africa, for instance, that single-source livelihoods are becoming the exception rather than the rule, and that livelihoods are becoming not only multi-source but multi-locational, with some family members living more or less permanently in urban (or other rural) areas. What does this imply for future population projections in humid areas, and, in turn, for the type of research agenda proposed here? Temporary migration may be a precursor to multi-locational livelihoods, but is mentioned only once in the proposal. For populations "left behind", what are the implications in terms of remittances? Will more capital be available to invest in agriculture/natural resource systems? And what then are the implications for a technological change agenda? Similarly, if the major breadwinner is the one to migrate, what decision-taking authority remains with those left behind? Can we expect it to be sufficient to allow innovation based on the outcomes of research? Consideration of these social issues would greatly strengthen the proposal's plausibility and help describe how it will meet the targets it has set for itself.

ISPC Must have 4: Similarly, the different elements of gender to be included in a gender strategy need to be drawn together coherently and linked to the processes of technological innovation and research.

Met.

This 'must have' has been satisfactorily addressed with gender equity and welfare aspects and objectives adequately mainstreamed, although it is still not clear at what depth gender relations and gender roles will be reviewed in the different proposed Action Areas. The absence of proposals under the Strategic Gender Research Program makes it impossible to assess whether this would represent value for money. Even the inclusion of a few outline ideas here would be useful. The tenor of the gender component is also at times highly aspirational. To promote "equal access to assets" as a key

objective, for instance, would require resources far greater and more diverse than are likely to be available within the CRP 1.2, and a large part of the objectives such as these are more the stuff of advocacy campaigns than of research.

ISPC Must have 5: Consider the best means to address high priority research to enhance the contribution of tree crops to livelihoods in the humid tropics.

Not met.

The ISPC recommended that a focus on the humid tropics would also allow an improved focus on systems in which tree crops are important. This remains a gap in the CGIAR portfolio with potentially important links with the CRP6 on forests. Tree crops are the major farming system noted in two of the 11 Action Areas (Table 2 – West African humid lowlands and Indonesian humid lowlands). The revised CRP emphasises that it will incorporate the Sustainable Tree Crops Program, mainly focused on cocoa in West Africa, as an R4D model platform but further details are lacking. There do not appear to be any plans in the revised CRP to include other tree crops e.g. coffee, rubber, oil palm, spices, tropical fruits etc. based on partnerships listed in Tables 5, 7 & 9 although ICRAF is listed as a link to CRP 6 in forest margins. Apart from the West African humid lowlands, the range of agencies mandated in areas such as forestry is still lacking. How will the CRP incorporate a greater level of activities on tree crops and forestry in general? There are no apparent links with CIFOR although policy could be an important issue with these crops. It is not yet clear, therefore, as to how the needs of these two Action Areas where tree crops are important will be addressed.

ISPC Must have 6: Show how and in what time frame the program will change from the current aggregation of partner Centers' research to new place-based research according to the hypotheses and models espoused, and with an appropriate growth rate and budget.

Not met.

The section on three tiers of Action Areas is welcome, but the reader doesn't get a real sense of how the hypotheses (p13) link to the interventions proposed for each of the tiers. The expanded section on 'Time-frame' (pp105-7) is helpful, though some (p105) is a repeat of the earlier section and the logic (p106) makes little reference back to the Research Questions, instead moving to a rather rapid focus on generic outcomes expected. This gives the impression of being very theoretical rather than having been clearly thought through with respect to the challenges and constraints in the humid tropics and where these could benefit from the collaboration between the different Centers.

The original ISPC commentary highlighted that intellectual leadership for such a new innovation systems paradigm largely lies outside the CGIAR system. It is still not clear how leadership will be accommodated into the CRP. Expertise is based in Wageningen University which is listed as a primary partner but it is not clear if it will provide the program leadership. In addition, there are many other ARIs with diverse approaches to systems research which may have relevant findings and it is hoped that this CRP will tap into a broader range of such expertise. Aside from the SSA-CP, whose success is still unknown, all other innovations systems approach successes have been local (i.e. comparable in scale to the Action Site level). There must be serious questions as to the potential for an R4D approach to deliver international public goods consistent with the mandate of the CGIAR.

The budget for partners and collaborators has still not been qualified (i.e. no further details have been provided). In spite of the major rewriting of the proposal, the budget components and the total budget for the project over three years have not been modified. No strategy has been put forward to reduce the institutional overhead which is about 20 percent of direct costs. This is being requested by the Fund Council via Centers costing more items traditionally under overhead to the work plan budget. For example, there is still no separate line item for communications or for monitoring and evaluation.

While the time frame section describes explicit plans for progression of work over the first three years, it only describes a process of extending work at current Action Sites to other sites, while adding new components to ongoing research to include other elements of integrated systems and also broadening partnerships beyond current ones. The planned time frame reveals no clear strategy for transforming existing programs to the envisaged R4D innovative integrated systems approach.

The proposal also expects very rapid and unrealistic progression; from achieving results from SRT1 situation analysis (identification of intervention packages) to dissemination and scaling up within one year, without sufficient evaluation and testing time. The revised proposal actually does not list specific activities for SRTs (except for SRT1) and activities are only briefly and broadly mentioned under Introduction and Outcomes subsections (compared to the long list of activities annexed to the previous version of the proposal).

ISPC Must have 7: Present new governance arrangements that will enable growth of a new CRP1.2 for humid zones as a genuinely cross-Center program working effectively with external partners.

Mostly met.

The main governance changes from the original CRP are: a) the Steering Committee has been eliminated (as recommended); b) the office of the Executive Director has been enhanced with an M&E Unit and Communications support (as recommended); the Program Management Team has been downsized; and the Advisory Committee has been modified. As for other CRPs, it is critical that the IITA DG actively consults with the DGs of other primary partner Centers in fulfilling his/her oversight responsibilities with regard to CRP1.2. The proposed role of the IITA DG as ‘champion for Humidtropics’ could still lead to potential conflict between her/his responsibilities for the Center and for a CRP which encompasses the work of many Centers and partners. Hence, the revised structure still gives the impression of a Center which wishes ‘to retain the existing authority.’

The Executive Director appears to now have more authority and empowerment as this position will Chair the Program Management Team. The Executive Director functions have been enhanced and support in the office has been improved with inclusion of the M&E Unit and Communications support directly under this position.

In the original proposal, the Program Management Team included both the leaders of the SRTs and the Action Area coordinators. Now it only includes the SRT leaders, although reference to the Action Area coordinators remaining on the Management Team persists in 10.7.1. Previously the PMT was too large and geographically diverse. Also the roles of the SRTs and the Action Area coordinators are quite different (responsible for strategy vs. coordination). The new structure is probably an improvement, provided that the communications between the groups are well-maintained.

The planned independent oversight of the R4D Advisory Committee is acknowledged but it risks not being sufficiently informed of CGIAR governance norms. Other CRPs have decided on a mix of

Center Board members and independent members with several DGs as *ex-officios*. This arrangement is more likely to provide the needed CGIAR context than a totally independent committee and can still reflect the regional focus of the program, maintain a strong gender balance and incorporate relevant partnership, communications, gender and systems experience. The Chair should be from among the independent members.

The CRP proposes a complex partnership strategy of 10 primary partners, including seven CGIAR Centers, FARA on behalf of the SSA Challenge Program, AVRDC and WUR that will align resources and research staff within the overall framework of the program. It is noted that ICIPE is no longer a primary partner but is still listed as a major budget recipient (USD 5.5 million over 3 years). Apart from this core group, partnerships function at many levels and in a number of dimensions—at the levels of Action Sites, Action Areas and finally, regional/global relationships (see Tables 5, 7, 9, 11, & 12). Many are the “usual” and existing partners and there are still a lot of gaps in columns on NGOs and private sector collaborators in all eco-geographical zones. Although most primary partners have a good history of collaboration, one must question whether Action Areas, where partners are currently very deficient, should be included at this stage. Partnership development takes time and effort. In the short- to medium term, another way to focus this CRP would be to give priority to those Action Areas where good basic partnerships already exist, which can be developed and enhanced and new partners welcomed.

The revised CRP still lacks a detailed strategy to engage with new partners or types of partners (e.g. health, education or ICT partners), or to leverage existing relationships in new ways. It also fails to demonstrate an appetite to increase the engagement of strategically significant partners by providing them with visible or substantive roles in governing or advising the program.

AVRDC is presumably included at a budget of USD 6.2 million (most of which is from Window 1 & 2) for activities on vegetables. However their activities in Africa are largely restricted to Tanzania and their expertise in humid tropics systems must be questioned. Their involvement in the major undertaking for SE Asia appears to be an add-on to the general thrust of the program, which suggests it could be omitted to allow improved focus of the CRP..

Overview of adequacy of response to Fund Council *Must-Haves*:

1. *Need to demonstrate genuine cross-Center collaboration and with development results as the key objectives, a key objective of the reformed CGIAR system.*

Partially met – see comments under ISPC must-haves 6 and 2 above.

2. *Make a convincing case that the proposal will make a difference for the people of the humid tropics and will have an impact on the 4 System Level Outcomes of the CGIAR*

Partially met – see comments under ISPC must-haves 2 and 3 above.

3. *Clearly outline what needs to be achieved and what is going to be achieved; the proposal needs to be clear on the program’s deliverables.*

Partially met – see comments under ISPC must-have 3 above.

4. *Provide further justification for the dominant focus on humid lowlands as opposed to humid tropical highlands.*

Conflicts with advice from ISPC on original proposal which was to focus down, and one way of achieving this was to concentrate on the humid lowlands.

5. Clearly elaborate on the cross linkages with other CRPs; it is not clear how these collaborations will work in practice as the current proposal does not integrate clearly issues such as climate change, deforestation, agroforestry or nutrition.

Partially met – see comments under ISPC must-haves 6 and 2 above. Recognition should be given for the details provided in section 9 of the revised proposal on how the CRP will interact with other CRPs.

6. The section on proposed partnerships requires clarification on the basis for engagement of the different partners (including farmer organizations, NGOs, extension workers, and the private sector).

Mostly met – See comments under ISPC must-have 7 above. Recognition should be given to the proponents for section 6 of the revised proposal which outlines the basis for engagement (especially pp75, 81).

7. Capacity development should focus not only on production research, but also on skills required for opportunities in post-harvest innovation and value addition, or new approaches to knowledge sharing, scaling up and fostering small enterprise.

Met – Capacity building at all levels appears to have been given higher priority in the revised CRP.