

1 November 2011

## **ISPC Commentary on the revised proposal for CRP3.4: Roots, tubers and bananas for food security and income**

*(Revision of September 2011)*

In its commentary on the original proposal, the ISPC acknowledged the importance of roots, tubers and banana crops for the CGIAR SLOs, and highlighted several strengths of CRP3.4 as initially submitted. In the revised proposal more attention has been given to defining the elements in the CRP that add value over and above individual Center programs. The revised proposal conveys a greater sense that the whole will likely have greater impact than the sum of its parts. The sections on justification and data have been expanded, but not yet sufficiently analysed. Prioritization, integration and identifying cross-crop learning opportunities and spill-over possibilities remain for the program to demonstrate. It is acknowledged in the proposal that prioritization is essential and will need to be done as implementation begins. As prioritization may occasionally work against an individual partner Center's interests, such prioritization will require leadership and negotiation among the collaborating Centers.

In addressing the "Must haves" from the ISPC and the Fund Council that asked for significant analysis and changes in the program plans, the proponents have, in most cases, added more elaborate discussion and data. Still lacking are clear indications about how the program will be shaped as a consequence of the more elaborate analysis. In fact, the CRP3.4 proponents acknowledge these shortcomings but argue that a thorough priority setting based on credible data will take time and can be performed once the CRP implementation has begun. Justifications given for this argument are: (i) available data on the RTB crops is often inadequate and somewhat dubious in quality; (ii) the participating Centers are still conducting contractual research and follow their own priority setting mechanisms.

The ISPC believes that a more thorough effort is possible to address the "Must haves" not only in description but through more concrete ways that include substantive changes and additions to the CRP proposal. In several places where changes have been made, there is a clear appreciation of the critical nature of the key requirements. Nevertheless, we trust that the CRP3.4 proponents will address the remaining issues when program management with sufficient authority is in place. Given this, the considerable merits of the proposal, and the efforts made to address the additional requirements – efforts which the proponents indicate will be continued during the first year of implementation - the ISPC now considers the investment worthiness of CRP3.4 to be adequate.

**Therefore, the ISPC recommends that the revised CRP3.4 proposal be approved. During the implementation phase, the CRP should take into account the original commentary of the ISPC and the comments given here.** The ISPC's assessment of how the revised proposal responds to the individual "Must Haves" is given below.

1. *Stronger justification for a CRP on RTB crops that provides details on how the proposed themes and work plans will leverage the assets of the four Centers involved, and harness synergies and complementarities to deliver greater efficiencies and impact, compared with individual Center programs as they now exist.*

Satisfactorily addressed

The proposal now includes an expanded and more detailed discussion of where synergies might be created through improved collaboration among Centers on RTB research, making the justification for having the CRP a bit stronger. There also is discussion on efficiency gains and possibilities for spill-over and greater detail about potential synergies that can add value over individual Center programs: shared laboratory facilities to provide services associated with breeding, phytopathology (including testing against major diseases), clonal propagation techniques; genebank management, post harvesting, seed systems, quality properties of commercial materials etc., and potential to expand the use from food, to feed and industrial uses across crops. The joint development and use of databases to rationalize management of genetic resources and the proposed “validation exercise” for RTB conservation methods could also be another advantage of having the proposed research organized through this CRP in comparison of having it done individually by each Center.

The revised sections are part of the overall introduction of the framework. As the theme descriptions are also at a somewhat generic level, the extent to which greater efficiency (in common mandate crops) and synergies (on research across crops) can be achieved remains an important task for the CRP to demonstrate in its first years of implementation. There clearly exists opportunities through effective coordination and integrated management to do this.

*2. Better description and analysis of data and key information required for effective prioritization of research activities. This includes crop-specific information on areas of cultivation relative to prevalence of poverty, utilization (subsistence vs. commercial; food vs. feed) and value chains, gaps in research knowledge, and reasons for success, or lack thereof, from prior research in terms of impact, including reasons underpinning substantial productivity gains made in some RTB crops, and not in others.*

Partially addressed

The proponents claim that due to the highly variable use of the crops and crop context specificity, and also the fact that RTB crops have received less attention than major cereal crops, data on production and use are less reliable and less available. Some new data, figures (source of the poverty maps is not given) and related descriptions have been added that strengthen the proposal. Inclusion and consideration of these data (also data referred to under #3) is not reflected yet in any prioritization. Still lacking is an analysis and more thorough presentation of research gaps, reasons for success in the past or lack of it, and reasons for the variability in productivity gains across the RTB crops. It is argued that due to the different crop contexts and priority setting practices in the Centers, systematic CRP level priority setting, which is essential, can only be pursued in the first year of implementation. In this sense CRP3.4 is facing a very similar situation to several other CRPs.

*3. The rationale for the research objectives on specific RTB crops needs to be strengthened; the underlying assumptions on returns to research investments in the development of RTB technologies (Table 2.2) needs greater transparency. Ranking of global importance of RTB crops should be based on caloric content or value, rather than fresh weight.*

Satisfactorily addressed

A very brief and very generic section on SRF and SLO linkages has been added. While the direct linkages are described for the SLOs 1 and 2 (rural poverty and food security), the potential of the CRP to contribute also to SLOs 3 and 4 (nutrition and health and sustainable management of natural resources) is discussed. Annex 3 includes somewhat expanded information on the assumptions underlying the estimates for returns on investment for RTB crops. Data on crop production, consumption and energy value of the CRP3.4 crops have been added.

*4. Critically assess the comparative advantage of this CRP for a number of product line activities proposed within Themes 3, 5, and 7; deemphasize or omit unless a stronger case can be made for their inclusion.*

Partially addressed

For Theme 3 the proponents have made adjustments in the wording of PL 3, *Ecology and management of beneficial organisms* explaining that the focus on soil health will be limited to relevant soil-borne pathogens only. This focus on integrated pest management and biocontrol is appropriate. Greater emphasis on integrated nutrient pest management is relevant for RTBs particularly when grown at small scale by resource-poor farmers.

Regarding Theme 5, the proponents have expanded a section on partnerships acknowledging work done elsewhere and the dependency of this CRP on results and contributions elsewhere, partly as the Theme will be receiving less funding than the other Themes. Mapping of partners, which is still to be done, should include also mapping of the complementary work done elsewhere.

The proponents have clarified that PLs 2, 3, and 4 of Theme 7 (on effective partnerships, communications, and capacity strengthening, respectively) are intended to be cross-CRP functions where there is some opportunity for diagnosis and learning, particularly regarding PL 2 on partnerships. The cross-CRP orientation integrating these topics with PLs is necessary and the CRP should reconsider whether partnerships are appropriately located under a research Theme.

*5. The proposal should specify which activities are continuing, what is new, and how a transition will be made to a new agenda based on a prioritization process during the initial year. More substantive evaluation of the lessons learnt, particularly regarding success in terms of adoption of technologies and impact, would help support this discussion.*

*6. The proposal would be strengthened by detail as to how the four Centers will set priorities and negotiate the process of where to concentrate critical mass, taking into account the relative capacities of the Centers involved.*

Inadequately addressed

“Must haves” 5 and 6 have been combined in the response. The modifications made to the proposal are minor. There is reference to existing research contracts which are argued to prevent changes from current activities for a year or two. The added tables show some shift of emphasis (rather than clear novelty), but there remains lack of clarity about what is being de-emphasised and what implications the shifts have in maintaining or establishing critical mass. Whether the choice of the areas of increased emphasis has been influenced by an analysis of previous success or lack of it is not indicated.

*7. The CRP management team should play a leadership role in developing the program partnership strategy; communications and knowledge-management should be part of management functions. Specification of Research Theme Leaders on the basis of a “Center quota” is not appropriate.*

Satisfactorily addressed

These recommendations have been accepted and incorporated. The ISPC emphasises the importance of partnership management and management roles in the topics which in the CRP organizational design have been located under Themes (PLs 2, 3 and 4). It is gratifying that the proponents agree with the importance of competence for successful implementation of the program, given the critical need to prioritize and integrate research for enhancing CRP coherence, efficiency and effectiveness.

*8. Clarify potential duplications, in activities and/or in funding, with other CGIAR programs such as the biofortification component of CRP 4, and between Theme 1 of this CRP and the funding already approved for the management of germplasm collections in the genebanks.*

Satisfactorily addressed

CRP4 is now explicitly mentioned as a current collaborator regarding biofortification that provides networks of nutrition and health professionals. Further clarity on who does what is desirable as both CRPs begin implementation.

9. *Improve nutritional targeting and linkages with nutrition in the impact pathways envisaged for Theme 1 and 2.*

Satisfactorily addressed

Appropriate intentions are expressed. The CRP has clear incentives for collaborating with CRP4 on nutritional issues and biofortification. It is important for CRP3.4 that the genetic resources generated in this CRP find their way to CRP4.

10. *Consider adjustments in budget distribution among themes; Themes 5 and 6 would need additional budget allocation.*

Acceptable response

The proponents argue for finalizing budget allocations following the results of careful prioritization that is proposed for the first year of implementation.

11. *On gender aspects, women's participation in the value chains should be considered as a good indicator for gender equality. Also, gender analysis should specifically address the role that institutions play in determining the processes of inclusion/exclusion of women from economic activities, as well as the role that they can play in closing the gender gap.*

Acceptable response

Appropriate intentions are expressed. The proponents should take into account the suggestions and best practice highlights included in the cross-CRP assessment of gender research submitted by the ISPC to the Fund Council for FC6.

12. *Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach should be developed in the proposal.*

Satisfactorily addressed

The importance of IPM to the RTB crops has been emphasised and the proposal has a sufficient elaboration on how IPM will be addressed.

13. *Proposal should not rest entirely on breeding activities and genetic stock management. Storage, transportation, processing, and market development are issues that need to be developed in the agenda.*

Satisfactorily addressed

14. *The features describing "new ways of doing business" are process rather than content oriented. The proposal needs to spell out the areas that would be targeted (research investments) for innovations and scientific breakthroughs.*

Inadequately addressed

See ISPC comments on #5 and #6.

15. *Re-consider the strengths the consortium has in themes 5, 6, and 7, (ecologically robust cropping systems, postharvest, impact through partnerships). Some of the included product lines could be better addressed through stronger partnership with institutions where this knowledge and capacity already exist.*

Satisfactorily addressed

These questions have been also included in "Must haves" 4 and 16, and with some caveats (regarding PL2 in Theme 7) the right intentions are expressed in the revised proposal.

16. *Individual centers come with their network of partners and stakeholders, but it needs to be clearer how these will translate into a functional partnership for this CRP. Rather than being a specific theme, partnerships should cut across all the themes and be strategically selected.*

Partially addressed

The sections on partnership within the individual themes have been improved, with some recognition of the potential benefits to both partners and Centers through participation in CRP3.4, as compared to individual efforts operating unilaterally. The theory of how partnerships are intended to be made functional is described in Theme 7. The ISPC emphasizes that this, or any other CRP, should not engage in research on partnerships. Locating partnerships as a component of a Theme should not reduce need for management leadership in managing partnerships and the cross-cutting nature the activity.

*17. Identify the demonstrable links to NARES and relevant regional bodies to ensure inclusiveness.*

Satisfactorily addressed

It is important to monitor the adjustment of existing relations and development of new linkages with NARS as the CRP implementation proceeds.

*18. Specify clear geographic priorities.*

Inadequately addressed

This section is still the weakest in the revised proposal. Further efforts on prioritization across all regions and RTB crops are needed for distribution of the investments by region. Considerable potential synergy and increased efficiency is likely to result from shared use of common infrastructure spread over the different locations where the Centers operate. In a single program the current Center-specific allocations are likely to require new consideration.

*19. Clarification is required of the basis for the management, coordination and governance costs being charged in the CRP.*

Satisfactorily addressed

A new table (8.6) has been included which gives details of management and coordination costs totalling US \$3.0 million by 2013.

*20. Justify the investments on the basis of a quantification of the impact the research will have on making dramatic advances in poverty reduction or food production*

Satisfactorily addressed

The effort to address this issue is reasonable and sensible as some very specific problem/solution areas have been selected for impact assessment. It is not comprehensive but better than assuming fixed levels of yield gains across all crops and regions. As a first step the approach taken is sufficient but it will need to be enhanced during the early phases of program implementation.