



Date: 23 March 2017

ISPC Comments on GLDC Expert Panel report dated 15 March 2017

The ISPC commends the panel on a thoughtful and diligent report, clearly based on the synthesis of a large amount of material, including the ISPC's previous commentaries on the various phases of proposal development for this CRP. The ISPC also welcomes the inclusion of bold recommendations that, if implemented, will have significant implications for the development of a new proposal.

The ISPC's main role in CRP development is in assessing the proposals rather than in commenting on what should, or should not, be included in the proposal, nor which Center should take the lead or even be involved. For Phase 2 of the CRPs that decision was taken by the DGs (in the Windsor meeting) and in the new governance structure we assume the final decision on that rests with the SMB.

The ISPC comments on the Panel's recommendations, therefore, are restricted to highlighting where we foresee that implementation of those recommendations could have a potentially negative impact on our assessment in relation to our published criteria.

1) The Panel recommends focusing this CRP by limiting the geographic coverage to semi-arid and sub-humid zones of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

- a. The ISPC notes that this recommendation does not align well with **the CGIAR comparative advantage** in cereals, legumes or drylands research. If implemented the recommendation would essentially leave out some very important drylands locations and crops (Arid and semi-arid zones in North Africa, West Asia, Central Asia and Caucasus and the Arabian Peninsula) and where CGIAR has already done considerable work. **It may be intended that this work is done outside the CRP portfolio, but if so, the proposal should make this transparent and at this point, the ISPC wishes to bring this omission to the attention of the SMB and SC.** The Panel also recommends bringing in **sub-humid areas in South Asia** where there are already others working – do the Centers involved have strong comparative advantage here? The case will have to be well made for this since '*Comparative advantage*' is one of the criteria assessed by our reviewers.
 - b. The ISPC has repeatedly asked the authors of the earlier versions of the CRP on grain legumes and dryland cereals for a robust scientific justification as to **why research on cereals and legumes should be combined within one Agri-food system CRP**. It is not clear that there are particularly strong complementarities in the pre-breeding and breeding of cereals and legumes. The applicants have not managed to convince the ISPC reviewers in the past and the Panel bases their case on complementarities at the field and household level when much of the program is about breeding. If the case is not well made in the resubmission, the proposal is again likely to be marked down against the criterion of '*the rigor and credibility of the scientific arguments underpinning the rationale for the proposal*'.
 - c. The Panel recommendation of building an AFS-CRP based so strongly on agro-ecological zones is a significant departure from other AFS-CRPs and the ISPC wish for **confirmation from the SMB that they recognize this difference and accept that this is acceptable for this particular CRP**.
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- 2) The Panel is recommending an agri-food system CRP focusing on *“increasing the productivity, resilience and profitability of the most important cereals and grain legumes grown within the semi-arid and sub-humid agroecologies of SSA and South Asia.”*
- a. This focus seems to be over-emphasizing yield at the expense of other breeding targets that are more relevant in a CRP that wants to adopt a systems approach. It may well be the case that addressing yield gaps is not the important issue, but rather targeting traits related to short duration legumes to enhance soil quality may be more important than high yielding ones, in relation to development outcomes.
 - b. In the same vein, while the Panel recognize the importance of livestock in the target farming systems, research on livestock appears to be delegated to links outside the program rather than including enough internal focus on livestock to ensure that traits of importance for livestock feeds are at least considered during priority setting of breeding traits.
 - c. The report recognizes the potential value of adopting innovation system approaches and of strengthening capacity on policy, markets and institutions, although again it is suggested this is done through collaboration outside the program.
 - d. In both of these cases, since other CRPs have already allocated their budgets, care will need to be taken that this new program can actually incentivize the links it needs and that a convincing case for this is made within the proposal.
 - e. The **SMB need to confirm that they consider that this focus is closely enough aligned with the breadth of the SLOs in the SRF**, since alignment with the SRF is an important aspect of the ISPC assessment.
- 3) The Panel makes a large number of recommendations, on specific topics such as which crops and which Centers should be included in the CRP as well as recommendations on how the research should be undertaken such as closer partnerships with NARS and SROs (one which the ISPC would support, but would be more convincing if it is shown how such partnerships might also influence which crops are priorities). The ISPC recognizes, however, that implementation of all of these is likely to increase costs significantly. The ISPC considers that the **SMB should give strong guidance to the Panel regarding the W1/2 budget for the CRP** and ask the **Panel to prioritize the recommendations** to enable the CRP to remain within that budget.



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