

Update on Challenge Program: Unlocking Genetic Diversity in Crops for the Resource-poor, August 2003

Considerable progress has been made towards implementation of the Challenge Program (CP) since its formal approval by the CGIAR, mid- July 2003. A technical planning workshop, comprising more than 40 participants from 19 different organizations was held in Wageningen, The Netherlands, 25-29 August. All 15 CP consortium members were represented along with GFAR and the Private Sector Committee of the CGIAR. The workshop resulted in the development of a strong collaborative spirit and cohesion around the research agenda of the CP with consensus reached on the objectives for the first 5 years together with a detailed plan of work for the next 12 months. In addition, the workshop agreed on a commissioned research approach for the first phase of activities.

The CP held its first Program Steering Committee (PSC) meeting , 1-2 September, also in Wageningen. The PSC comprises the Chair (I Serageldin); senior representatives of the 15 consortium members; GFAR (Dr O Smith); and, a nominee of ExCo (P Vialatte) as an observer.

The meeting discussed a number of governance, management and research issues and agreed on a process or next steps on the following:

- the CP will issue clarifying statements on IP policy and genetic resource stewardship, consistent with CGIAR guidelines;
- the PSC endorsed a process for appointing the CP Director;
- the CP research plan was endorsed together with a first year plan of work;
- a process for developing commissioned research projects, including capacity building activities, was endorsed;
- a quality assurance process was implemented through the formation of a sub-committee of the PSC, charged with responsibility for overseeing the call for proposals and review of projects- this process will be further described at the AGM in Nairobi;
- clarification of the role of the CP host centre;
- a process for developing partnerships; resource mobilisation; and, communications.

The CP is currently appointing a Director. An announcement is expected in late September. During this first year, the CP will disburse about \$6M in research and capacity building funding targeted towards the aims of the Program. It is expected that 12 major “clusters” of work will commence by early November following a rigorous evaluation and review process.

Partnership building with NARS and the private sector is a priority for the CP over the few months and, to this aim, a meeting with a subgroup of the CGIAR Private Sector Committee will be held in Washington, 17 September. Additionally, the CP will aim to meet with the GFAR Stakeholders’ Committee during the AGM in the last week of October.