

Submitted by the CGIAR Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC), 1 April 2011

ISPC Note on the Proposal to the Fund Council by the Consortium Board of Trustees for Financial Support to the CGIAR Centre Genebanks in 2011

This note responds to two independently produced but related documents: (1) “The Cost of the CGIAR Centres of Maintaining and Distributing Germplasm”, jointly commissioned by the CGIAR Consortium and the Conservation Trust” – referred to simply as “GR Costing Study”, and (2) “CGIAR Consortium Board-Commissioned Genetic Resources Scoping Study”, referred to in this commentary as the “Scoping Study”. Both studies were produced by competent specialists with extensive experience in germplasm conservation.

Comments on the GR Costing Study

The ISPC finds this study to be one of the best of its kind. The study objective is to estimate the costs of maintaining the 700,000 genetic resource accessions of food crop species found in the CGIAR collections. The study is the result of extensive consultation with CGIAR genebank managers. Results are based on costing methods developed specifically for this purpose. The topic is both technically-challenging and politically sensitive. The ISPC believes the methods applied for estimating costs are robust and appropriate and endorses the estimates made, including those related to one-time costs.

It is proposed in the Costing Study that use of funds allocate to genebank support will be subject to oversight from the Consortium and the Global Crop Diversity Trust (GCDDT). The ISPC agrees and accepts as reasonable the proposal for annual technical and financial reports to be generated using the performance measurement and reporting tools developed by the GCDDT.

The ISPC calls attention to the need to undertake similar studies and to estimate the costs of maintenance of plant genetic resources conserved *ex situ* by the CGIAR which were not included in this study, e.g. for forest species. In addition, genetic resources of livestock, fish, and microbial species were not included as part of this study. The ISPC calls attention to the need to assess the value and cost of maintaining these collections as well.

The cost estimates produced do not include important aspects of managing genetic resources. Those activities not included involve some things that might reduce the cost of maintenance over time (such as molecular characterization and research activities on conservation methodologies). Other important activities not included are those that relate to research (such as pre-breeding and evaluation for important traits). It is the opinion of the ISPC that any comprehensive strategy would have to encompass the identified gaps.

The ISPC recommends that the proposal for financial support for the CGIAR Centre Genebanks in 2011, as detailed in the proposal, be accepted by the Fund Council.

Comments on the Scoping Study

The Scoping Study provides 21 recommendations addressed to a number of Cross Cutting Issues, or CCIs, impacting the maintenance of genetic resources, associated research activities and services provided by the CGIAR Centres, including funding possibilities and governance structures.

In the opinion of the ISPC the key issue addressed by the panel of consultants is related to *how best the new research structure of the CGIAR will accommodate on-going genetic*

resources research and services activities, in addition to the genetic resources components already included in current CRP proposals.

The Scoping Study favours the creation of a *Genetic Resources Research and Services Platform* as a mechanism to deal with CCIs in a separate research structure, on the understanding that the CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework – SRF, in its current version, does not support the creation of a separate CRP for genetic resources. The ISPC supports that “proposal”, noting that the research required to deal with conservation and use of genetic resources which are not crop-specific can be better managed by the joint collaboration of all CGIAR genebank managers and their partners. One relevant example is the research done by IFPRI to develop the method used to estimate costs of conservation at the genebank level in the costing study. Other examples are the development of genebank standards, global information systems and new GIS applications, fine tuning of molecular characterization of genetic materials, methods for the safe movement of germplasm, policy aspects of conservation and use, among others identified by the panel. The recommendation to retain “on-going activities, such as the Inter-Centre Working Group for Genetic Resources and the Systemwide Genetic Resources Program for at least one year” is also supported by the ISPC, in a transition phase towards new mechanisms to deal with cross cutting issues for genetic resources.

On the other hand, the ISPC believes that the suggestion of operating the new Research and Services Platform at the Consortium Office level deserves more attention from the Consortium Board. Ideally, the Consortium Board could identify the best positioned Centre to house the office for the new platform; Bioversity International being the logical option. The reason why this was not proposed in advance is not clear in the panel’s report but it seems clear to the ISPC that managing CCIs associated with genetic resources will require technical expertise that seems to be better located in one of the CGIAR Centres, in order to facilitate day-to-day interactions among the main stakeholders.