

WORKPLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS – Response to ExCo concerns expressed during creation of the Challenge Program for Unlocking Genetic Diversity in Crops for the Resource Poor

By Masa Iwanaga (December 2003)

PROGRAM ADJUSTMENTS

Initial Program Design

The concept note for the Challenge Program for Unlocking Genetic Diversity in Crops for the Resource-Poor was first presented to the AGM in October 2001. This Challenge Program was then selected as a Pilot Challenge Program along with the Water for Food and Biofortification Challenge Programs. The full program proposal was developed over the course of several meetings in 2002 and was submitted to the Interim Science Council (iSC) in July 2002. The iSC raised some questions about the business section of the proposal but gave a strong endorsement on the proposal's science and technical aspects. The Challenge Program proposal then went to ExCo and AGM (September and October 2002, respectively), at which concern on several issues in the document were raised, primarily related to adequate stakeholder participation in the program development. The ExCo wisely counseled more stakeholder consultation (described below). Though these consultations delayed the implementation of the Challenge Program, it was time well spent and will reap large rewards as the program develops.

Stakeholders Meeting in Alexandria

In January 2003, a UGDPCP stakeholders meeting was convened in Alexandria, Egypt, to address the concerns raised by ExCo and AGM. At that meeting, stakeholders discussed whether the scope and focus of the Challenge Program were appropriate; how to establish better partnerships with NARS, ARIs, and the private sector; how to incorporate better mechanisms for capacity-building; strategies for handling IP issues; competitive grants systems; and the governance structure of the Challenge Program. The resulting new draft proposal now incorporated all the mandate crops of the CGIAR system, added Capacity-Building as a separate but cross-cutting sub-program, expanded the Program Steering Committee to include GFAR and *ex officio* ExCo representation, and laid out numerous management recommendations (including parameters for a competitive grants program). The Challenge Program drafting team submitted a revised proposal to ExCo in February 2003 that reflected the outcomes of the Alexandria meeting and addressed ExCo's comments on the earlier draft. After another round of review, ExCo gave final endorsement of the Challenge Program proposal in late May 2003, and the CGIAR approved it in July. As of the CGIAR's approval, the World Bank had pledged US \$3M and the European Union had pledged 4M Euro per annum to the Challenge Program for Unlocking Genetic Diversity in Crops for the Resource-Poor.

WORKPLAN DEVELOPMENT

Technical Planning Workshop

The Challenge Program held its Technical Planning Workshop in Wageningen, the Netherlands, from 25-29 August 2003. More than 40 scientists from 15 participating institutes, ARIs, and NARS attended the workshop (Appendix 5), as well as representatives from GFAR and the Private Sector Committee. Through a collegial and

collaborative process, the workshop participants developed a five-year agenda for the Challenge Program, objectives for the first year of work and an outline for the detailed first year workplans, guidelines for commissioned research, and comprehensive expectations of the Challenge Program Director and the Program Steering Committee. The Program Steering Committee met 1-2 September in Wageningen, where they endorsed the outputs of the Technical Planning Workshop and established several committees to facilitate workplan development and oversee research once it gets underway.

At the Technical Planning Workshop, the five Subprograms of the Challenge Program were further segmented into “research clusters.” Fourteen total, each research cluster was assigned a cluster lead (one of the workshop participants) to head up the discussion and development of a detailed first year workplan over email in the coming months. First drafts of the workplans were due 7 October. The cluster leads dedicated immense amounts of time and energy to maintaining the collegial spirit of the Technical Planning Workshop and developing comprehensive, collaborative workplans with all of the Challenge Program partners.

WORKPLAN REFINEMENT

An external review panel reviewed the workplans from 13-17 October and sent them back to the cluster leads with comments and suggestions. The cluster leads incorporated the external review panel’s comments where possible (while adhering to principles agreed upon at the Technical Planning Workshop) and submitted their final workplans on 24 October. Once the Subprogram Leaders (SPLs) are in place—we aim to have them on board by mid-January 2004—there will be further opportunity for review and adjustments to the first year workplans. In the future, the Challenge Program’s research and development will be directed by the four SPLs under the management of the Challenge Program Director (who will also serve as the leader for the fifth sub-program, Capacity Building).

The Challenge Program for Unlocking Genetic Diversity in Crops for the Resource-Poor got a later start—nine months later, in fact—than the other two pilot Challenge Programs, but the Challenge Program participants are enthusiastic about and dedicated to a strong first year for this Challenge Program. Although there was limited time to develop the first year workplans, the participating institutes have been receptive to external review of the workplans and flexible about redistributing funds and rearranging research activities when necessary to accommodate important scientific or application considerations.

DIRECTOR RECRUITMENT

The process for the CP Program Director selection and terms of reference were agreed upon at the Stakeholders Meeting in Alexandria. Immediately after the final Challenge Program approval from the ExCo an international search was initiated and a search committee formed. The search committee consisted of Masa Iwanaga of CIMMYT; Desiree Hautea of the Institute for Plant Breeding at the University of the Philippines; Zhihua Ye of CAAS; Yves Savidan of Agropolis; and Hubert Zandstra of CIP. The

search process included notification of institutions in the broader CGIAR stakeholder community, publication of the announcement in prestigious journals (*Nature* and *The Economist*), and newsletters of professional societies. Three top candidates were invited for interview at IPGRI, immediately following the PSC meeting in early September. The top candidate, Robert Zeigler, was offered and accepted the position and will formally assume the position on 15 December 2003. He will be hosted by CIMMYT.

SUB-PROGRAM LEADER RECRUITMENT

The management team of the Challenge Program will be made up of the Director and four Sub-Program Leaders. The Sub-Program Leaders are currently under recruitment (see Appendix 7 for the terms of reference for their responsibilities and the process by which they will be selected).

LESSONS LEARNED

Among the many lessons learned in the development of this Challenge Program, four categories stand out: process, science, governance and management, and resources.

Process

At the earliest stages of proposal development, there were negative feelings among some key stakeholders about the process. Some felt excluded from the process, and some felt that key resources were migrating or being directed away from what they felt were integral aspects of this Challenge Program. Some worried that the heavy focus on a science framework came at the expense of due process among Challenge Program partners and stakeholders. Also, the sheer size and scope of this Challenge Program is uncharted territory for molecular biologists and geneticists, which presented challenges as well. Wide participation in the development of the proposal was clearly essential, but a common vision (for instance, drought tolerance as proof-of-concept) was not easily achieved among such a diverse group of partners and stakeholders. In addition, this Challenge Program was delayed nine months, but the delay afforded the CP team ample time to engage disgruntled or previously uninvolved stakeholders.

Science

In the arena of science, the UGDCP encountered several challenges. Many CGIAR centers count their gene collections as sources of intense pride, so where to locate the Challenge Program leadership was a difficult decision. Navigating the perceptions among scientists and stakeholders—and the general public—of genomics, genetic modification, and the concept of a “science-driven” agricultural development program was also a difficult task. The UGDCP encompasses some of the most contentious scientific issues of our era: GMOs, public-private sector interactions, and IPR management, among others. The mission to develop a public platform for the products of the UGDCP has also proved easier said than done. But the excitement among partner scientists has been palpable throughout the development of the UGDCP. The power of comparative biology and enhanced utilization of genetic potential are compelling arguments to move a program such as the UGDCP forward.

Governance and Management

The UGDCP has three lead centers—IPGRI, IRRI, and CIMMYT—which has helped ensure its success so far. As the Host Center, CIMMYT is responsible for the UGDCP's finances, as well as IP management. The Program Steering Committee includes not only representatives from the various CG centers, ARIs, and NARS partners, but also from GFAR. The Program Director's role has taken on increasing importance as the UGDCP has developed, as has the involvement of other stakeholders, such as the private sector and small NARS. Concerns over transaction costs have arisen as well.

Resources

The quest for new non-traditional resources versus redirection of traditional funds translated into a slow start for the UGDCP, and meant that the Challenge Program had to confront early on the perceptions of biotechnology as well as issues related to adopting a program that was so close to the “heartland” of the CGIAR system. That is, there is possible inherent conflict between maintaining adequate funding for ongoing essential activities related to genetic resources and crop improvement and generating new financial support for this Challenge Program. The private sector will be a key provider of proprietary technologies and other in-kind support (e.g., capacity building). An important lesson learned is that it is imperative that the UGDCP be specific in its requests of the private sector. The other Challenge Programs will also be an important resource for the UGDCP, in terms of sharing of experiences, ideas, results, and strategies for handling IPR, public relations and communications, and resource mobilization.

Further Response To Concerns Raised During the Challenge Programme Approval Process (complementing the thorough responses provided by Dr. Iwanaga)

By Robert Zeigler (April 2004)

Clear Definition of Outputs

The development of our first year workplan has been a major step in providing more detail to our expected outputs. During the coming year the Programme Management Team will continue to develop more specificity. This growing clarity will most certainly attract additional partners and donors.

Intellectual Property Management

For the Challenge Programme to have a plan to manage intellectual property, we must first know what is being brought to the programme by our partners. Further, we must know which of that property was developed by the partner and which may be third party IP or otherwise encumbered. Thus we have developed a standard IP inventory form based on a model developed by IRRI to satisfy much the same need (Appendix 2). This form has been distributed to all members and the results will form the basis for creating an IP registry for the Programme. This registry will include all pre-existing IP as well as serving as a repository of record for IP generated by partners in the Programme as part of their Programme activities. IRRI will develop a computer-based registry that will allow all partners to conveniently record and monitor their IP commitments.

The CP has contracted a patent, trademark and copyright attorney to assist us in developing both an annual collaborative agreement and the platform CP agreement that will set forth the operating principles of the CP. The latter document specifies how intellectual property will be managed. Included in this is a provision that will allow a Consortium member to enter into a bilateral or multilateral agreement with a private sector entity. The products of such collaboration will contribute to the outputs of the CP while respecting the confidentiality and other requirements that such an agreement might impose.

An IP workshop at IPGRI has been scheduled for last week of June among the three Challenge Programmes to develop a common strategy to manage IP. We will use our registry as a departure point for planning the details of the workshop. The private sector should be rich source of experience and advice on how to (and not to) manage IP issues.

Transaction Costs

The CGIAR has become known for creating cumbersome, top-heavy mechanisms in response to calls for change in its manner of doing business. Thus donors and stakeholders are rightfully concerned that the Challenge Programmes will place yet another layer of transaction costs on the system's scientists and further reduce their ability to undertake productive research. This Challenge Programme is mindful of this concern, yet recognizes that if scientists from different institutions are to forge new and productive relationships, they must be able to meet and communicate. To balance concerns with needs we are taking the following steps to reduce the transactions costs

- 1) *Research meetings scheduled to add value to the participants.* For example, two Subprogrammes scheduled meetings during the plant and Animal Genome meeting in San Diego, California last January. No additional travel time or costs we incurred by those already attending PAG, and those few who were not normally going to attend had the enriching experience of PAG while fulfilling their GCP obligations. That philosophy and approach will govern the scheduling of as many meetings as possible. The 2004 annual research meeting of the Challenge Programme is now considered to be an official satellite meeting of the International Crop Science Congress, for the same reason. To further save on travel time and have full buy-in from our stakeholders, we are proposing that the Stakeholder Committee participate in our annual research meetings.
- 2) *Scrutinize composition of workshops, training courses and planning meetings.* It is already apparent that many of the same people will attend multiple functions. Where there are obvious savings in travel time and expense, we will organize meetings back to back.
- 3) *Full use of electronic means for communications.* We are developing an information rich website that will have modules to allow sub-programmes to engage in virtual meetings, as well as post information. We are exploring the use of advanced and secure web-based communications packages that avoid the many constraints of e-mail. Video conferencing should play an increasing role as the programme develops. At the very least, we expect that the Subprogramme Leaders will participate in PSC meetings via video conference rather than travel

to the meetings. A target is to provide the possibility for projects within the Subprogrammes to have regular video conference lab meetings.

- 4) *Standardized reporting formats*. As in the reporting of Consortium member cash and in-kind contributions and the development of the IP Registry, we will develop common templates for reporting and monitoring activities in the Programme.

Drought Versus Other Traits

The Programme will address other more tractable problems in the early years as well as maintain a longer term vision on drought tolerance. Likely targets are biotic stresses (e.g. *Striga* resistance, the rice/wheat/blast complex that may be a serious threat to global wheat production and lends itself to a comparative genomics approach) and abiotic stresses (cold, aluminum, and salt tolerance). Certainly there will be spill over from some of the other abiotic stress studies that will benefit research on drought tolerance.

Links with Private Sector

This is an area that has great potential, yet carries some risk, as well. The Programme stands to benefit mightily from the vast stores of knowledge generated by private sector companies that have worked for years and invested many millions of dollars in the very areas that the Programme seeks to work. There are two challenges that must be met to make these resources available:

- 1) The companies that participate must not risk their access and legitimate claims to lucrative markets.
- 2) Participating companies should not be expected to release information that would provide an advantage to one or more of their competitors.

To deal with these challenges it will be essential to clearly identify what inputs are required or desired from the private sector, and from whom in the private sector, more precisely. It will also be important to clearly, explicitly, and transparently identify and describe the terms of our relationship. One of the strengths of the Programme is that it is a new public platform to bring the products of biotechnology to resource-poor farmers and consumers. There are those who would love to tarnish our image and remove us from the moral high ground by painting us as pawns of multinationals. The manner in which we develop our partnerships must *ex ante* defuse any such potential attacks.