RICE Independent Steering Committee (ISC) Meeting

9-10 March 2017

IRRI Headquarters

Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines

Attendance

ISC: Pascal Kosuth (Chair, Agropolis Fondation, France), Kei Otsuka (GRiPS, Japan), Luciano Nass (EMBRAPA, Brazil), Ambrose Agona (NARO, Uganda), Jan Leach (CSU, USA), Shaobing Peng (HZAU, China), Masa Iwanaga (AfricaRice BOT and JIRCAS, Japan) , Kaye Basford (IRRI BOT), Suthad Setboonsarng (IRRI BOT), Agnes Rola (CIAT BOT), Harold Roy-Macauley (AfricaRice DG), and Matthew Morell (IRRI DG)

Regrets: Aime Lala Razafinjara (AfricaRice BOT)

Program Planning and Management Team (PPMT): Bas Bouman, Jackie Hughes (IRRI), Etienne Duveiller (AfricaRice), Joe Tohme (CIAT), Nour Ahmadi (Cirad), Alain Ghesquiere (IRD),and Seiji Yanagihara (JIRCAS)

Resource persons: Sam Mohanty (FP1), Matty Demont (FP2), Kazuki Saito (FP3), Camila Rebolledo (FP4), Arvind Kumar (FP5), Ranjitha Puskur (Gender), Bas Bouman (Monitoring Evaluation & Learning), Temina Lalani-Shariff (Communication)

Agenda items

1. Approval of 2017 agenda
2. Lessons from GRiSP experience (by each center)
3. General introduction to RICE
4. RICE Flagship projects update
5. RICE Cross-cutting topics
6. Closed session to discuss recommendations; synthesis of targets and indicators for March 2018; ISC TORs, modus operandi, timelines, ISC- IRRI BOT relationships, new members, other topics related to operations

Note: ISC recommendations are printed in blue and numbered to facilitate interactions

1. Welcome and introduction of participants

Pascal Kosuth, ISC Chair, welcomed everyone to the 1st RICE ISC meeting hosted at IRRI headquarters in Los Baños, Philippines. RICE, known as GRiSP during Phase 1 of the Consortium Research Programs (CRP), has been approved by the System Council for its second phase, including all of its five flagship projects. It is considered an important platform for bringing together partners within and outside the CG system to address issues on reducing poverty and hunger, improving human health and nutrition, adapting rice based-farming systems to climate change, promoting women's empowerment and youth mobilization, and reducing rice's environmental footprint. The ISC's main task is to provide strategic and scientific guidance to the CRP. The ISC members have also agreed to lead in closely monitoring the different flagships and cross cutting topics in their chosen domain during the course of the RICE program.

After a brief self-introduction of all participants, the ISC members moved for the approval of the 2017 meeting agenda.

2. Lessons from the GRiSP Experience

The experience of the six major partner institutions during GRiSP (CRP Phase 1) was worth looking back to serve as a guide for implementing RICE (CRP Phase II).

The initial main challenge identified was the establishment of good mechanisms for collaboration among the three CG centers IRRI, AfricaRice, and CIAT and three non-CG centers Cirad, IRD, JIRCAS. Also, there were implications of being a CGIAR program because the CG system has imposed a number of directives which impacted on the centers' IP policies, data management and access, and gender equity, among others. However, the CRP was seen as a coordinating vehicle for other funding mechanisms like bilateral grants. The centers have continued to work with synergy and ensured that science was integrated and connected.

How has GRiSP changed the way scientists worked and interacted with each other?

- ***IRRI***- Putting international rice research together (the 6 GRISP partners) has averted duplication, but it came with a highly demanding time for paperwork. On institutional versus CRP delivery, there was a 'slight tension' because the CRPs seemed to have a bigger say than the centers. However, for cross cutting areas such as private-public partnership, open access, and signing various agreements with the NARES, dealing with these issues was done through partnerships mechanisms led by center directors.

- ***AfricaRice***- The centers have come a long way in collaborating with each other. The CRPs were established with a lot of expectations but the level of complexity in reporting what we are trying to achieve has increased and science management has become onerous. We are progressing and maturing with lots of challenges ahead. Target partnership is extremely positive and exciting**.**
- ***CIAT***- There is strength in synergy. Transaction costs have been reduced but sometimes affecting productivity. The competitive grants and scholarships which GRiSP had started are highly commendable and this needs to be revisited if funding becomes more stable.
- ***IRD***- GRiSP has provided interesting concepts to get more involved in research. There were opportunities to have joint projects and training, connect French system with international laboratories, and collaborate with NARES partners. A broader system of partnership has created a bigger impact and bigger opportunity to broaden the collaboration.
- ***Cirad***- A number of advantages has happened such as scientist exchange between Cirad and various CG centers, enhancement of core funding, new open positions, leverage for getting bilateral funding, and enhanced upstream research through inter-center/international collaboration. There's a need for more integration and accountability with respect to CG system rules but overall, there was nice collaboration with CG centers.
- ***JIRCAS***- previous activities were based on common collaboration with CG centers while other research areas were existing subject areas in JIRCAS' own structure. With the new CRP, there will be fund allocation in flagship projects and clearer points of collaboration than with the previous CRP. More scientists like breeders, geneticists, agronomists, postharvest specialists will be participating resulting in a bigger collaboration between JIRCAS and CG centers.
- There were difficulties with GRiSP such as system vulnerability to donors, tendency of over-commitment because of the amount of work in the proposal, and seeming tension between CRPs and centers. ***Ways to reach policy makers and donors through short reports as part of the communication strategy should be better enhanced***. But overall, there was synergy between centers and internal and external partners, more resource mobilization, increased scientific circle with high end scientific results due to international partnership, and formulation of broad vision theories which were put forward to policy makers.

3. General Introduction to RICE

Bas Bouman gave a brief overview of the rice agri-food system CRP or RICE (CRP Phase II).

The RICE proposal was one of the CRPs rated highly by the Independent Science and Partnership Council and the System Council. The document contains 17 annexes, budget narratives, performance indicator matrix, and companion documents, and a comprehensive description of the five flagships projects which were all approved.

The steps by which the whole RICE CRP and its components have been conceptualized are described through the dynamic RICE prioritization (strategic planning) framework.

- It started with horizon scanning whereby donors, partners, beneficiaries, stakeholders were engaged and their needs, priorities, and strategies of the rice sector were known.
- The next step was program definition by determining the overall rice R & D needs and priorities.
- Adoption studies and ex-post impact assessments were undertaken to document benefits derived from research and to know the partners' niche and comparative advantage.
- Then, using three budget scenarios, an implementation planning was formulated where flagship projects, clusters of activities, and outputs, outcomes and targets were identified.
- An annual monitoring, evaluation, and learning exercise will be undertaken and be able to engage with the drivers of change.

The mission of the RICE CRP is aligned with the system level outcomes and sustainable development goals such as poverty and hunger reduction, improvement of human health and nutrition, and reduction of the environmental footprint and enhancing ecosystem resilience of rice production systems, through rice science for development.

The five flagship projects namely targeting & delivery of science based information, rice value chains upgrading, diversified farming systems, global rice array, and new rice varieties are highly interconnected. Through them, rice products and services will be developed and delivered for achieving the development outcomes.

Governance is provided by the Board of the lead center, IRRI, and by the ISC built on the GRiSP Oversight Committee (Phase 1). The ISC has a significant representation of external experts, board members from the three CG centers, and the directors general of IRRI and AfricaRice.

Overall management of the CRP will be ensured by the PPMT chaired by the program director and that has a representative from the senior management of each coordinating partner. They decide on the budget allocation across the flagships and centers and on other CRP-related

issues, and will have full internal accountability.

Day to day management will be provided by the RICE operational management team (OMT) headed by the RICE director and composed of flagship project leaders and leads for Gender, for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning ME&L, and for Communications.

Distribution of budget over clusters of activities will be done by center per flagship, through a percentage-wise fractional distribution to the six partners (per flagship; see also section 6.3 below).

RICE's interaction with the Independent Science and Partnership Council and with other CRPs had been smooth sailing.

Discussion, comments, and ISC recommendations

The RICE director was commended for doing a great job in managing the GRiSP program and for transitioning smoothly into RICE despite the challenges and the new system reforms.

On March 8th, IRRI has just received the financial framework agreement to manage the CRP, which needs to be reviewed for its financial and legal implications. Another document, the framework agreement describing the role of each coordinating CG centers and how to achieve the set objectives, will be drafted afterwards.

1. It was also suggested to document lessons learned from the institutional challenges encountered and how they were overcome so others can benefit from the experience.
2. If we focus on partnerships as basis for operation, we can leverage at lot of positive things including extra funding.

4. RICE Flagship Projects update

Flagship Project 1: Accelerating Impact and Equity- targeting and delivery of science-based information

Presentation by Sam Mohanty

ISC members in charge: Agnes Rola & Suthad Setboonsarng

The presentation of Flagship Project 1 was perceived as staying too general, with no clear introduction of work that will be realized in 2017.

3. Need to clarify FP1 outputs: FP1 particular outputs should be made clearer. FP1 appears to be more about knowledge management activity. There is a need to state

activities per year. Indicators resulting from FP1 works should be clear to policy makers (do we send FP1 results to policymakers?).

4. Exploration of scenarios, foresight modelling: Particularly FP1 should explore the response of the rice sector to such drivers of change as population (demographic changes) and urbanization. Scenarios should be analyzed in major populations such as in India, China, and Vietnam. There is a need to do more foresight modelling for scenario setting.
5. Interaction with other FPs: Foresight within FP1, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (LE&L) should have convergence with the other FPs. The question is raised of FP1 relationship with other FPs: FP1 gathers data on socio-economic environment for the other FPs but it is unclear how these are used and whether FP1 also influences the objectives of the other FPs.
6. Need to engage with key stakeholders: There is a need to engage with key stakeholders, especially policy makers, scientist community, and general public. FP1 should have a clear strategy to communicate with stakeholders.

Flagship Project 2: Upgrading Rice Value Chains

Presentation by Matty Demont

ISC members in charge: Kei Otsuka & Aimé Lala Razafinjara (abs.)

This new and ambitious project covers a wide range of issues in upgrading rice value chain. Since no project of this kind has been implemented to date, there is undoubtedly value in this project. In particular, inter-country comparisons of production, processing, distribution, and marketing systems will provide useful insights into the ways to improve the rice value chains.

7. Need to clarify the overall framework and justify targets: A broad spectrum of issues is covered without providing clear justifications and criteria that led to choose them. For example, why is assessment of employment opportunities for youth particularly important in Nigeria? why is skill training of mechanics important in Cambodia ? and why is assessment of financial services important in Bangladesh? are the analyses of financial services, packaging, and labeling, the development of "business models," and transfer of technology to local manufacturers tasks that need to be carried out by CG centers?

8. Identifying market failures and addressing them: Since in given environments some segments of rice market work and others do not, a critical approach would be to identify where markets fail, and focus on the issue of how to reduce market failures. For example one segment of rice market which does not work in sub-Saharan Africa is rice milling, thus capacity building of rice millers by means of training can be recommended: larger allocation of budget for rice processing and novel products seems justifiable.
9. Defining indicators of project output and outcome: Another worrisome aspect of this FP is the lack of clear indicators of project output and outcomes.
10. Impact on small farmers: Another area which needs more attention is the strategy to make small farmers better off by upgrading rice value chains. Entrepreneurship training of farmers, particularly young and women farmers, may be considered in the development of business models in order to provide relevant knowledge on input procurement, designing production, and marketing for farmers, in addition to production knowledge.

FP3: Sustainable farming systems

Presentation by Kazuki Saito

ISC members in charge: Shaobing Peng & James Ambrose Agona

Generally the Flagship Project is well thought, the strategies defined for achieving desired targets are well articulated, project implementation sites in which impacts are going to be achieved are well selected, and the project team is well constituted.

It is noted, however, that if some of the issues identified below are addressed more coherently and/or holistically, a greater understanding of the project shall be realized.

11. Developing / integrating new crop management technologies: FP3 should focus more on the development and/or integration of new crop management technologies for the intensive rice system. By the end of 2022, FP3 should have developed and/or integrated two to three new technologies with higher input use efficiency. These new crop management technologies should be adopted by large number of rice farmers.
12. Rice farming and greenhouse gas emission: Rice farming is reportedly associated with substantial production of GHG, especially methane. The proposal, however, is silent

on the succinct climate smart management practices that are prescribed against methane mitigation, and for instance, there are no targets set for methane reduction. The target set for carbon dioxide reduction is well appreciated.

13. Developing new cropping/farming systems: FP3 should also focus more on the development of new cropping/farming systems with higher income and environmental sustainability. The development of new cropping/farming systems should be based on the changes and trends of agricultural sector in mechanization, farming scale, labor cost, etc. Rice variety plays a vital role in developing new cropping/farming systems. FP3 should link closely with FP5 and FP4 in breeding or screening suitable rice varieties for the new cropping/farming systems.
14. Farm intensification and diversification: It is important that crop/ enterprise suitability mapping is conducted to determine what commodity can be / will be integrated into the rice farming systems. It is noted that of the more than 400 million rice producers, the majority own less than 2 ha of land. There is however, paucity of information on how much land will be freed for diversification of farm enterprises, how labour will be distributed to the different competing enterprises, farmers' capacity to manage the new enterprises and impact on future rice production.
15. Impact of mechanization in the livelihoods of the farming communities and role of women: The role of mechanization in reducing drudgery and labour bottlenecks is well appreciated. However, the proposal is silent on the type of mechanization being heralded to cause significant impact in the livelihoods of the farming communities. Is it tractorisation to be introduced? While mechanization may lead to easing the burden of women involved in the rice farming systems, it is observed that the impact of introducing mechanization in displacing women whose livelihoods depend on providing farm labour is not well spelt out. What alternatives services after displacement could be tenable for the vulnerable women?
16. Labour cost and labour demanding operation for poor farmers: It is important to identify and map out the most labour demanding operations in the different project implementation countries. The timely availability and affordability of machinery and equipment to be introduced should be factored in targeting beneficiaries, especially the resource poor farmers.

17. Develop strategies for engaging the youth into rice production: It is known that most of the rice farmers are ageing, and therefore the potential replacements are the youths. There are however, no specific strategies outlined for engaging the youth in the rice production side- but more on the ICT and other upstream value chains. How will the youth be mobilized to go into farming?
18. Metrics to assess nutrition / health security impact: On the aspects of nutrition for health security, there is lack of information on the metrics to be used in setting the right targets- caloric values, micronutrient deficiency and malnutrition levels. What the baseline figures for the different requirement?

FP4 Global Rice Array

Presentation by Camila Rebolledo

ISC members in charge: Jan Leach & Kaye Basford

The FP4 team presented a well-organized plan that defines a new approach to stay ahead of climate variability and climate change. A major outcome of FP4 is the development and validation of new tools to accelerate breeding for climate smart varieties. Strengths of FP4 are the breadth of skills of team members, the novelty and careful planning of projects under the umbrella of FP4, and the integration of novel genetic populations, phenotyping tools and sites, and computational resources already developed under GRiSP.

19. Projects prioritization within FP4: The ability of the team to accomplish all of the projects well with the limited budget seems unrealistic. We recommend a careful prioritization of projects within FP4 each year to ensure overall success, particularly in the likely event of additional cuts in funding.
20. Adapting the number of experimental sites and ensuring quality data: FP4 scaled back the number of experimental sites in response to budgetary concerns. The plan to recruit 'self-supported' sites through collaborations is great, but it is important to determine how those experiments will be managed so that they contribute quality data to FP4's goals. This will be challenging, and will require considerable communication and coordination among FP4 team members and the independent collaborators. Attracting and coordinating 'self-supported' partners for the phenotyping studies will require significant persuasion. An FP4 project person should be designated to undertake this task.

Identification of the critical 'antennae' lines for deployment at all phenotyping sites will occur over the next few months. This is an important process because getting the selection of these control lines 'right' is critical to the project's success and impact.

21. Annual assessment of the most informative phenotypes to measure climate change effects: Careful consideration of what 'measures' of the effects of climate change on rice, i.e., what phenotypes are meaningful, is important. Given the cost and effort required to collect the data, the development of improved tools for assessment over the course of the project, and the need for storage and manipulation of the data, we recommend that the team build in annual assessment of what are the most informative phenotypes to measure for the stated outcomes.
22. Data storage: Data storage will be an issue as the project progresses due to the diverse and massive data collection in this flagship. The team is aware of and planning for this. One suggestion is that they continually re-evaluate what data are most relevant to best inform their models, and use this evaluation to guide collection and storage of data. However, we must keep aware that ceasing to record certain variables will impact on the ability to include them at a later date (if others find them useful).
23. Recording pedigree information on the trial lines: It will be important to record the pedigree information on the lines in these trials. This will enable the relationships between the lines to also be used in the analysis.
24. Relation with other FPs: FP4-generated information will be important for other FP's, and for the rice research community, in general. For example, the disease hot-spot screens, tools for high throughput phenotyping, and data management and modeling will be particularly relevant to FP5 and to other researchers.

FP5 – New Rice Varieties

Presentation by Arvind Kumar

ISC members in charge: Luciano Nass & Masa Iwanaga

FP5 is a core driver of the RICE-CRP since it produces the original and most tangible outputs: new rice varieties. Overall, the theme is well structured, addressing and highlighting the importance of genetic breeding to RICE. The plan of product development (e.g. new traits, trait donors, advanced lines, potential varieties) is well articulated, building on past progress

(GRiSP) and excellent partnership they have successfully build up.

25. Prioritization of activities: Overall, FP5 looks too ambitious trying to cover several topics and taking advantage of modern genetic tools available: with the funding gap reported it is important to pay attention and have some prioritization in mind.
26. Capacity building: FP5 has the opportunity and must consider some efforts and resources in terms of capacity building in order to guarantee the next generation of rice breeders.
27. Synergy among activities within FP5: The leader has a very good communication plan to keep synergy among the activities, both inside FP5 and across FPs; we suggest him enhancing the role further.
28. Gender efforts: FP5 main gender efforts will consist in considering the quality traits in rice that can contribute to improve the nutrition security. This could be enlarged.
29. Developing new pest resistant varieties: Despite all the activities included in FP5, there is also an opportunity to develop some preventive breeding (e.g. developing resistance lines before unfortunate and unintended arrival of new pests) that can be very helpful for several countries. This effort can contribute in advance developing new resistant varieties.
30. Product delivery plan : Product delivery plans (turning outputs to outcomes) requires a better articulation, especially paying attention to role and involvement of other stakeholders (private sector, policy makers, NARS, regional germplasm evaluation network, regional organization, development agency, community-based organizations).

5. Cross-cutting Topics

Cross cutting topic 1 – Gender

Presentation by Ranjitha Puskur

ISC members in charge: Agnes Rola & James Ambrose Agona & Aimé Lala Razafinjara (abs.)

31. Relation between Cross-cutting topic and FPs: There seems to be confusion in gender research and the role of the cross-cutting topic: (i) identify the strategic research focusing on the dynamics of gender and gender mainstreaming and influence / contribute to the programming of flagship projects, or (ii) integrate research done in the flagship projects. The first year of activity should clarify the relation / interactions between CCT and FPs: having a focal gender person in each FP; developing a community of practice.
32. Focusing on contexts, areas where women are more mistreated and marginalized: Identify, analyze, inform contexts and situations where women are mistreated, and develop activities to correct these. Targeted studies may be done in the rainfed and upland environments where women are more marginalized. Rainfed and uplands can be given more efforts and resource allocation for women's studies.
33. Indicators of women empowerment- what are these in gender studies? Women are both beneficiaries and participants of research. What are indicators for women empowerment? Can women in the uplands and rainfed areas achieve some level of empowerment? What other enabling conditions can be developed?
34. Scaling up: There is a need for more concrete statements, methods and activities about scaling up. What products, technologies, policies are expected to be scaled up to achieve the targets, and how? Ex. how do we improve women's access to seed & extension services? What are the spill-over effects?
35. Enlarging the gender vision (all CRPs): Gender studies before were deemed for equity consideration. Major changes in the cropping systems, farming systems and their dynamics lead to changing role of women. Gender issues must be looked at with this broader picture in mind and an evolution from equity towards effectiveness issue. Furthermore gender goes beyond men and women: Youth issue should be incorporated. These are not specific to RICE CRP as all CRPs face the same issues and would benefit of a common cross-CRP strategy.

36. Methods and approaches: Sex-disaggregated analysis may not be sufficient when analyzing / forecasting the impacts & trade-offs of innovative systems on gender (for example trade-offs between mechanized farming to reduce drudgery by women and employment opportunity; impact of diversification. Methods and approaches should be assessed and shared.
37. Gender balance within the CRP staff. To be informed

Cross cutting topic 2 – Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Presentation by Bas Bouman

ISC members in charge : Suthad Setboonsarng& Kei Otsuka & Luciano Nass

Information system : It is important to have an advanced information system to manage the whole project. A well-designed data system should reduce management burden of the project. The information generated should help both internal and external communication.

The ISC takes note that this will be a rapidly evolving field and that we will have a clearer vision by beginning of 2018.

Cross cutting topic 3 – Communication

Presentation by Temina Lalani-Shariff

ISC members in charge: Masa Iwanaga & Jan Leach

The Communications team presented an excellent plan for a comprehensive outward communication to raise the profile of RICE. This plan evolved through meetings with each RICE FP team where key messages that needed to be communicated were articulated. These outward communications will deliver the impact messages of RICE, and are important venues to inform and engage the donors and other stakeholders.

Internal RICE communication:

38. Although some internal communication mechanisms were mentioned during the FP presentations, it was not clear that a concerted and coordinated plan that was understood and adopted across the FPs was in place. Thus, we recommend a strong and clear plan be articulated for how communications will be fostered or encouraged internally, across the FPs. Several possible mechanisms were discussed, e.g., cross-training of researchers, students/post docs; joint workshops or meetings; etc.,

but no coordination plan was articulated. Some of this communication is implicit in capacity development. Such communications will facilitate the systems level solutions RICE aspires to accomplish.

External communication

39. Communication training within RICE CRP: The communications team is a valuable resource and should be tapped for training within RICE. For example, RICE scientists could be given the opportunity for communication training that could be directed towards messaging to diverse audiences, such as media, policy makers, donors, farmers, NARES partners, other scientists, etc. These training opportunities could be short courses offered through the training centers at IRRI, CIAT, and AfricaRice.
40. RICE website: We commend the RICE communication team for their successful development of the RICE website (to be launched soon) that will be the main tool for RICE external communication.
41. Communication to practitioners and farmers: For RICE research to ultimately have the impacts that FP1 seeks to measure, there needs to be a communication pathway to translate the research to practitioners and farmers.
42. Communication to policy makers: We advise RICE to develop a better and more effective communication strategy to policy makers.
43. Where do we want to put RICE in the world of media? There is a need for a broader vision and objectives about where we want RICE in the world of media, and to choose a passive versus aggressive approach to getting the media to pick up. The message to each stakeholder should be proactively managed (what are they responding to? What do they want to hear?). This is particularly important towards the donors (what, when and where the donors want to hear?), policy makers and decision makers.

Cross cutting topic 4 – Budget

Comments from IRRI, Lead Center, and from the RICE CRP:

ISC members in charge: Kaye Basford & Shaobing Peng

The budget has been carefully prepared using a defined prioritization within the various flagships in the RICE CRP. By late 2016, the CGIAR System Council approved an indicative budget of US$78.3 M for 2017, which is $7 M below the developed medium budget scenario

and $13 M above the low budget scenario (page 24 of RICE proposal). However, within the total of $78.3 M a total indicative amount of $16.1 M was approved for W1,2 which was only $0.25 M below the requested $16.35 M in the medium budget scenario (page 57 of the RICE proposal).

It was pointed by some ISC members that *nearly $2M out of the roughly $16M budget from W1 and W2 has been allocated to the Director for general management activities, which seems a bit excessive*". Nevertheless Joe Tohme of CIAT who is also involved with 2 other CRPs, underlined that the RICE management cost is actually one of the leanest among CRPs.

It is important that the CRP budgets (and items on which the budget will be spent) are discussed carefully with the person responsible for the research program at each of the Centers because the latter is ultimately responsible for staff and operational costs associated with the research within the Center. It must be reminded that the CRP Director and/or Flagship Lead are not responsible for the allocation of resources within each Center: this can be done only under the responsibility of (i.e. in full agreement with) the person responsible for the research program at each Center. This will enable each Center to appropriately manage their component of the CRP within their overall research program. This is critical, as if there are any cost overruns (or promised funds are not forthcoming), the respective Center will be responsible for the shortfall (and it may need to come from their Reserves).

44. ISC understands the concern by Centers and the constraints they have experienced. This emphasizes the critical importance of the close relation and smooth process by which the persons responsible for the research program at each of the Centers, the CRP Director, and the Flagship Leaders must work together to define optimal strategy and actions.

Given that the Director General of IRRI doesn't expect the roughly $16M specified to come from W1 and W2 will be forthcoming (based on previous experience), it is recommended that the Centers only plan to spend about 90% of the funds expected to come from this source. This will enable them to absorb any shortfall in promised money not being paid to the Centers. If the money is forthcoming, then it can be allocated (within 2017) to any planned activities not already undertaken this year. Some 2017 activities will undoubtedly be completed in 2018 anyway.

45. It is recommended that the CRP budget should not be set in concrete - there must be flexibility to change allocation of the funds depending on the progress (and outcomes) as the research progresses.

The CRP has made the decision that, for the coming three years or so, any deviation in funding (up- or downward) will be distributed according to a fixed % among centers for each flagship project, so as to provide as much stability and reduce uncertainties as much as possible. Per flagship project, centers will yearly decide how to allocate funding to clusters of activities through an interplay between flagship project leaders (in the OMT) and deputy director generals/directors for research (in the PPMT). In the absence of funding decisions down to flagship project level by the System Council, the distribution of funds over flagship projects within RICE will follow the original proposal plus/minus deviations of around 10%. As long as the approved total RICE budget by the System Council stays between the low ($65 M/y) and high ($105 M/y) budget scenarios developed in the original project proposal, the outcomes developed for the different budget scenarios will guide the priorities and yearly planned annual activities. When budgets become bigger than the high budget scenario, additional priorities and outcomes were developed in the original proposal under a so-called 'uplift budget'. When budgets drop below the low budget scenario', the PPMT will review priorities and adjust flagship projects and clusters of activities accordingly. The PPMT will closely monitor budget developments during the year to be able to timely initiate corrective measures.

46. While this is a worthwhile ambition, keeping solidarity within the community, it may not lead to the best possible outcome. An activity may be cut to such an extent that it is really not viable. It may be more sensible to cut one of the clusters of activities within a flagship and leave the other clusters of activities intact. Any such decision on the application of funding cuts should be made in conjunction with the research directors at the various centers.

ISC overall recommendations on budget (comments to System Management Board):

It appears unreasonable to RICE ISC to expect that the RICE partners and Centers will undertake CRPs with defined milestones and outputs when there is no guarantee of the funding for the activities.

47. Funding should be guaranteed and preferably provided in advance. Centers cannot be expected to absorb cuts in W1 and W2 funding from their reserves (which is the case when notice that the funding is not being provided is given very late in the year).

48. It would be more sensible to allocate funding to the overall CRP and allow the lead center and their partner centers to distribute funding to the various Flagships in agreement with the CRP director. This would enable them to be more responsive to the progress (and outcomes) of the research being undertaken within the Flagships. Additionally, fewer conditions on the use of W1 & W2 funding would enable to achieve the desired outcomes in the most appropriate way.

6. Closed session - General Comments and Recommendations

Discussions of the ISC may be related along nine (9) main axes.

1. Annual programming; OMT - ISC interactions ; towards more synthesized presentations

There is huge enthusiasm for RICE, and much thought has gone into the design of the projects/experiments. These efforts are prized and much appreciated by the ISC, as they will help ensure success of RICE.

The presentations to the ISC may not have been as polished and refined as we would have liked, probably due to the major planned event held at the first part of the week. This resulted in the ISC getting (too) much information, sometimes too general and not focused, sometimes giving too much detail and lacking synthesis. This is rich but difficult to handle in a short period of time, which results in being counter-productive.

Globally, and despite the synthesized RICE Plan of Work and Budget 2017 document, it was hard for the ISC to succeed in getting a clear vision of the 2017 programing, the budget situation, the deliverables and indicator targets that can be expected by the end of 2017 for each of the FPs and CCTs. It was not clear enough through the presentations (with some exceptions) what 2017 specific objectives are and how they will be achieved. This is mainly due to the overall volume of information.

This is a concern for the ISC to correctly play its role, although the positive side of it is that feedback from this early ISC meeting will allow us to collectively improve the reporting and discussion frame for the next meeting, thus improving ISC added value in the future.

ISC expresses the following recommendations

49. The ISC feels the need to have less presentation time and more discussion time. Presentations should be synthetic. Some templates that indicate what the content required is will be developed
50. The presentation for each FP (as well as CCT) could adopt the following structure (draft proposal to be worked on) :
    - Previous year : (i-a) highlights of activities and achievements; evolutions of the domain to be taken into account; (i-b) status of deliverables and indicators and explanation of deviation from expected targets; (i-c) use of resources
    - Synthetic vision of the FP (CCT) advance status in the overall CRP programming
    - Coming year : (ii-a) planned activities and related objectives; (ii-b) expected deliverables and indicator targets; (ii-c) use of resources

This could be accompanied by a 2 to 4 pages synthesis for each FP or CCT, sent in advance (based on the model of annual Plan of Work and Budget).

2. Alleviating the reporting and assessment process

ISC is aware of the large administrative burden to manage the project. It is important to minimize the paperwork to allow the scientists more time to do research, e.g. using IT technology. ISC is fully aware that the assessment process is already onerous and does not want to add reporting burden on the OMT.

ISC formulates the following recommendations:

51. Alleviate the reporting exercise, considering it is counter-productive to demand too detailed reporting effort.
52. ISC will support the RICE CRP Director in trying to make the reporting process reasonable and both palatable to the scientists and answering Donors expectations and ISC information needs to ensure its efficiency.
53. The RICE ISC could, if asked together with other CRP ISC, provide feedback to the System Office to help tune a reasonable level of reporting.

3. Managing budget cuts and risk of over-commitment. Need for prioritization

The planned program, as exposed in the CRP document, is huge for all 5 FPs. Annual plans of activity (particularly for 2017) must be consistent with (i) the initial program, (ii) the effective level of funding available and (iii) the Centers message as they are the ones responsible for resource management, particularly human resources.

The ISC has been informed on the uncertain 2017 budget and on probable budget cuts during the year. ISC thought such scenarios would end with the implementation of the new CRPs, and collectively expresses its concern. ISC opinion is that such an ambitious program as RICE CRP cannot be managed correctly under an uncertain budget. The risk is high of over-commitment, exhaustion of CRP team and Centers, loss of confidence and disengagement of partners, loss of the CRP global picture under funding realities, all this resulting in jeopardizing the CRP.

As a result ISC expresses the following recommendations

54. The strategy of evenly spreading potential budget cuts among FPs and clusters of activities, although commendable for the solidarity within the team, can be optimal

for marginal budget cuts (5%-10%) but is no more an optimal strategy beyond these levels. RICE CRP must start thinking about prioritization.

55. Prioritization could/should rely on (i) scientific priorities in each FP (both in terms of challenges and programmatic), (ii) Windows and donors expectations (for instance priority regions), while (iii) respecting the CRP overall framework and logics.
56. Prioritization of objectives and related activities and deliverables must be expressed early in the process.
57. Once the available budget in the various Windows is estimated in a reliable and secure way ("known" would be better), the programing must be finalized, based on prioritization, in a realistic way, focusing on those key things that can really be achieved. It may then be adapted along the year when information on budget is actualized.
58. Coordination must be done in tight link between the CRP Director (and OMT) and the Centers. In particular, it appears reasonable that Centers play a central role when it comes to using W3 and bilateral.
59. A clear presentation of prioritization levels and what will be done and cannot be done in a given funding context may induce other donors to come in to support specific activities.

4. Research for impact – measuring the impact, developing a broad vision

The question of impact, the strategies for it and the tools to assess it, did not come out strongly enough in the presentations. The theory of change is there but it is still hard to define exactly what will be achieved in terms of real impact.

ISC recommends the following:

60. There is a need for a few global indicators at a high level, for instance to assess the progress on rice value chains, the progress in sustainability, as well as metrics for measuring progress in food security, nutrition, and health.
61. There is a need within RICE to collectively think about big pictures. This implies strengthening the forecast /foresight approaches as a collective tool.
62. As an example: why should we work on youth in the rice systems? because of future scenario change? What could be these scenarios?

5. Communication – internal and external

ISC unanimously considers communication as a critical component of RICE, both for internal communication within the CRP (the various FPs, the various Centers, the various countries), for external communication with the scientific community, the stakeholders (from farmers to policy makers), and the donors.

Resulting ISC recommendations are:

Internal

63. Communication across Centers must be powerful to ensure RICE cohesion, in continuity with GRISP.

External

64. It is highly recommended to use 21st century communication tools such as social media. This will contribute to promoting the vision of the global system.
65. Communication to given target publics / stakeholders must rely on a preliminary analysis of their expectations and needs.
66. There is a need to better build in communications with extension and delivery partners (translational communication), in order to realistically achieve impact: how will the work be translated to the practitioners and farmers to show the impacts?

6. Engaging with stakeholders; Presenting RICE to policy makers and stakeholders.

Engagement with stakeholders, including policy makers, is another key component of RICE CRP. It appeared to ISC that staff did not consider sufficiently how they engage with partners and stakeholders, sometimes giving the impression they are working alone. This relates both to communication (see "translational communication above) and partnership.

ISC formulates the following recommendations:

67. Clarify a plan of action for engagement with stakeholders
68. Work with policy makers through partnership to convert the information / knowledge into policy analysis and efficacy

7. Strengthening, fostering relationships between FPs

RICE CRP promotes system level research. Therefore, communication and interactions across FPs is critical for systems level approaches, analysis and solutions.

ISC formulates the following recommendations:

69. Internal communication between FPs and CCTs is of utter importance (see above "communication")
70. Impact & equity and sustainability in rice systems are tightly linked. Corresponding FPs (FP1 and FP3) should be more closely linked, as they presently seem too separated.
71. Cross-training of researchers, students/post docs can be a good way to encourage / foster communication across FPs.

8. Nominating Committee

The ISC Nominating Committee will screen new candidates to replace vacant positions. Appointed members are the DG's of IRRI and AfricaRice due to partnership issues at international level, and two external members, Drs. Luciano Nass (chair) and Shaobing Peng. They will define and determine which profiles are appropriate and if the candidates are motivated and committed to attend the annual meetings.

Vacant positions

1) Representative from India to replace Dr. T. Mohapatra who has resigned
2) Representative from JIRCAS (ex-officio)- to be filled by Dr. M. Iwanaga after he finishes his term as AfricaRice BOT Program Committee Chair (April 2017)

(**Note: Done- Dr. Iwanaga has accepted the nomination as JIRCAS representative *ex-officio* beginning May 2017).**

9. **Proposed dates and venue for next meeting-** 2nd or 3rd week of March 2018 in Peru to coincide with CIAT's 50th anniversary celebration and the Latin American Rice Congress or link with the 5th International Rice Congress in October 2018 in Asia (venue to be decided).