



LEARNING FROM PHASE I: A Survey of Project Leaders and Staff

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IN response to an on-line survey, 76 project leaders and staff gave CPWF Phase 1 a generally favorable review. Respondents came from 68 CPWF projects in 45 countries on three continents. The survey sought to help learn what went well in Phase 1, what did not go so well and can be improved in Phase 2.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents felt that they had achieved different research results, outcomes and impacts as a result of participation in the CPWF than otherwise possible from 'business as usual' research approaches. Most (84%) agreed that they had worked with more and different partners in the CPWF. Three-quarters agreed that this had contributed to different science and outcomes. Most respondents (80%) also valued the platform the CPWF provides for communicating project results. In areas to be improved, nearly half pointed to shortcomings in the scientific support provided to projects, in part due to lack of resources available to enable theme leaders to follow-up on project activities.

Most respondents were generally happy with the way the CPWF Secretariat (60%) and CGIAR Lead Centres (70%) had managed their projects. One quarter felt that CPWF technical reporting requirements had not been useful. Respondents expressed frustration that reporting formats changed during the course of the project, but more so that they were not conceived as a cumulative process. There were expectations that periodic technical reports would have been structured to be amalgamated into the final report at the end of the project, yet this was not so. Respondents also commented on lack of feedback by CPWF (Secretariat, Theme Leaders & Basin Coordinators) to project leaders after report submission. Bi-annual reporting, as opposed to quarterly reporting, was suggested as more appropriate.

Respondents were happier with financial reporting requirements and two thirds felt that financial disbursements had been timely. Several comments indicated problems early on that were resolved by the CPWF and partners. One recurring theme was the different accounting systems of various partners, which created delays in compiling and submitting reports in the required CPWF format.

Given the emphasis put on capacity building during Phase I, the survey assessed respondent's perceptions of the investment. Over 75% of respondents agreed that the CPWF provided valuable capacity building. A large majority (85%) agreed that student researchers were helpful and productive and comments were generally very positive on the role of student researchers. One respondent suggested student researchers had contributed more to project outputs than some of the professional researchers. However comments were also made about the time, money, and energy required to adequately supervise and monitor students to ensure their contributions to project teams and outputs.

What was good about working in the CPWF?

When asked what they thought had been good about working for the CPWF, many respondents mentioned the new people and networks they encountered and were able to link with their projects. Respondents mentioned diversity, multi-disciplinarity, trans-disciplinarity, and complementarity as benefits of their engagement with the CPWF. A number of positive comments were made about a wider geographical reach now possible due to CPWF activities. This included adopting a basin-scale perspective and approach, and also the way in which smaller institutions increased their reach (mainly via networks and partnerships) as a result of participating in the CPWF.

The CPWF focus on outcomes and impact was mentioned as a new and positive approach for some respondents. This links to other comments about the benefits to be derived from increased access to literature, data, technical pieces, high quality science, and an adaptive approach to research. In summary, respondents indicated many positive aspects of participating in the CPWF, perhaps best captured by one comment, "The whole is bigger and better than the sum of its parts".

What could be improved?

To help the CPWF improve in Phase 2, respondents were asked about what did not work so well. A recurring theme was a mismatch between the length of the project and expected impact. It was suggested that three years is too short a time to design and implement a project, realize impact and measure it, and synthesize and analyze results. This was repeated by a number of agronomists and other physical scientists who had a limited number of growing seasons within which to work, and were at the mercy of weather.

Lack of continuity was mentioned as a negative aspect of the CPWF. This issue included changes in project team composition, project leadership, CPWF Theme Leaders, CPWF Basin Coordinators, collaborating partners, and even governments. While many of these changes are outside of the control of the CPWF, this loss of institutional memory was seen to negatively impact project performance and delivery.

The most frequently mentioned negative aspect of the CPWF could be summed up as poor communication. Responses included the sense that communication was difficult between projects, within and across basins, and very limited within or across themes. One respondent suggested that communication deteriorated the further one got away from the CP Secretariat. Respondents cited a lack of feedback on reports as a disappointment and discouraging. Another example of poor communication offered was frequent, ad hoc requests for information by the CP Secretariat—with no further feedback once the information had been provided by projects.

Several aspects of planning were also mentioned as a weakness in CPWF Phase I. Some respondents claimed that they were expected to attend too many uncoordinated meetings, for which no budgets or time had been allocated. Others claimed that initial planning had been optimistic leading to shortages of both time and money as projects wound down. One respondent mentioned difficulty associated with coordinating team activities and outputs when many partners were not full-time on the project and had other professional responsibilities.

Recommendations for Phase II

Based on respondents own suggestions and the analysis of the survey results, the report authors make the following recommendations for CPWF Phase 2. Under each recommendation is a response from the CPWF management team on what they are doing, and planning to do, in response.

Evaluation recommendations	CPWF MT response
CPWF Phase I enhanced respondents' ability to achieve scientific results, outcomes and impact—and provided a useful platform from which to communicate results. The component pieces of these successes ought to be continued and built upon in Phase II	This recommendation is being fully implemented. Further, we are engaged in 'impact' research to better understand what it is about the CPWF's approach that works where, and why
Roles and responsibilities of Theme Leaders (or similar) should be clearly defined and understood in order to maximize potential benefit to project teams, research beneficiaries, and the CPWF in general.	Roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined in Phase II. Thematic integration is led by Topic Working Group leaders whose job it is to build and moderate groups of people working across CPWF basins and projects interested ensuring research quality, building skills and sharing insights in similar fields. There are no Theme Leaders in Phase II.
Successful multi-lateral partnerships were central to the success of CPWF Phase I, but were not without difficulties. Diverse, yet strategic, partnerships should be a feature of generating the best science, impact, and outcomes possible for Phase II	This recommendation is being fully implemented, as can be seen for example in the decision to form Basin Development Challenges (BDC).
CPWF project management should be streamlined and consistent, with clearly articulated expectations understood by all project participants from the outset. A common sense approach should be used to design bureaucratic administrative, financial and reporting requirements	CPWF Phase II research will tackle Basin Development Challenges, each being led by a Basin Leader with coordination and financial responsibilities for all work carried out in the BDC. All BDCs begin with an inception workshop in which expectations are articulated. Thereafter, the expectations, made explicit in what the CPWF calls "impact pathways" are regularly monitored and evaluated together with key stakeholders.
The CPWF should continue, if not increase, its investment in capacity building. While short term returns and contributions to projects are a bonus, the long term results of this investment should be a legacy of the CPWF	The CPWF has adopted capacity building as one of its four core values (alongside partnership, adaptive management and interdisciplinary research) which underscores our commitment to support capacity building at levels.
The CPWF should invest in improving communication, within and between all levels or programme actors (Secretariat, Basin, Theme, Project) during Phase II	The CPWF has recently appointed a communications coordinator and information manager as part of a knowledge management team to improve programmatic data management and communication

<p>The CPWF has created a global network of scientists whose interest in cross discipline and cross boundary collaboration has been piqued. This momentum should be built upon to launch Phase II activities</p>	<p>The momentum will be carried forward with Topic Working Groups conceived as communities of practice of scientists wishing to tackle common issues across basins</p>
<p>Phase II activities must be designed with a realistic view of impact and outcomes possible given time and financial constraints</p>	<p>Project staff themselves develop their own views of impact and outcomes possible using participatory impact pathways analysis (PIPA), an approach developed in Phase I. This begins in proposal writing and is built on in the BDC inception workshops and subsequent monitoring and evaluation</p>