



Frequently Asked Questions Regarding The Improvement Plan

The CGIAR Excellence in Breeding Platform has identified many important questions asked during the improvement plans process. Many important questions have been raised during this process, which are compiled and answered in this document. These FAQs will be regularly updated, so please share any comments directly with your EiB contact or [communicate by email](#).

What is the improvement plan and why is it important?

The objective of using a standardized improvement plan template in the CGIAR is to outline a high-level vision for the transformation of breeding program operations and impact at each Center.

Specific improvements are defined, justified and prioritized to provide a roadmap towards achieving this vision, detailing roles, responsibilities and resources that may be required – though the majority of innovations should require little to no additional resources. Management involvement in the development of this vision is essential.

In addition, the improvement plan outlines specific responses to BPAT recommendations and communicates to EiB each Centers' ambition for making improvements. With this EiB can know specifically what ambitions we can support at each the respective Centers to achieve. The improvement plan also communicates to Funders how each of the Centers' plan to modernise their breeding.

What is Crops to End Hunger (CtEH), and how does it relate to EiB and the improvement plans?

CtEH is an initiative taken by CGIAR funders to establish an agenda for the modernization of CGIAR breeding programs and to ensure sufficient funding for breeding of the highest priority crop by region combinations. EiB works with CGIAR centers and NARS breeding programs to define and promote this common modernization agenda with funders through CtEH, and the co-development of improvement plans with centers is a key component of this effort.

Crop breeding is a pillar of the CGIAR system impact, into which a large proportion of Center resources is invested. The goal of CtEH is to modernize the programs and variety development-deployment systems in which these resources are invested, to ensure that these resources have the impact that Funders wish to see. The goal of the improvement plans is to identify a

vision and strategy for how this modernization will occur, ensuring sustained and coherent support for plant breeding over the long term.

As a part of the CtEH agenda, some resources will be made available for high priority breeding programs with opportunity for high-impact interventions that will catalyse or transform their operations to deliver significantly higher rates of genetic gain to farmers. This funding is not for routine operations. Funding will be disbursed according to a set criteria which has been shared with each of the Centers via the EiB Platform Steering Committee. These disbursements will be in the form of one-off grants that increase the results obtained by core funding for breeding activities.

What is the Breeding Program Assessment Tool (BPAT), and how does it relate to EiB and the improvement plans?

The BPAT is a structured evaluation process for breeding programs that assesses their management and organization using a standardized assessment process. The evaluation program consists of a questionnaire followed by an evaluation visit by a team of cultivar development experts. Afterwards a scorecard and report are generated describing program strengths and areas for improvement. The recommendations help guide the breeding programs to use their current resources to have greater impact in developing a higher rate of variety replacement and genetic gain.

The BPAT has been undertaken by almost all CGIAR centers, resulting in clear recommendations that Funders have requested each Center address through the improvement plans. However, the purpose of the improvement plans is to define a high-level strategic vision at the center level; the specific actions identified, even when tied to the BPAT, will be of limited utility if they are not articulated with the other actions within the context of a clear strategy.

As a result, while BPAT recommendations should be addressed in the plan (or non-action justified within the document), Center management should begin the process by defining a high-level strategy based on the priorities identified by breeding teams, in addition to the BPAT recommendations.

Q: Is the improvement plan considered an application for the “Crops to End Hunger” (CtEH) initiative or for continued CGIAR funding?

A: The main objective of the improvement plan is to set out a high-level vision and clear plan for the actions to be taken for the modernization of breeding programs. The main focus of the improvement plan exercise is to ensure that existing funding sources are directed towards activities that have a greater impact on rates of genetic gain and variety turnover. In this way it is about making breeding faster and more accurate for the right products; for increased impact. It is not about expansion of breeding.

As a result of this effort, the improvement plan may identify areas where specific investment has the potential to have a transformational impact on modernization of the breeding program. In

this case, Funders have made some resources available through CtEH to fund these specific interventions. The extent to which these opportunities satisfy the criteria provided through the Platform Steering Committee will determine the likelihood of funding. In addition, the stronger the case made by centers in the improvement plans for impact on rate of genetic gain and ultimately poverty alleviation, the more likely that funds will be made available.

However, if approached as a funding application exercise, the improvement plans will not have the desired impact. The existence of a Center-level improvement and modernization agenda supported by management and breeding teams is a prerequisite for modern breeding programs. The objectives should be prioritized so that it is clear which objectives are the most important to the Centers' to achieve. The action items addressed should be mutually supportive and contribute to the overall vision, and the majority of these will not require additional funding. Potential investments in specific improvements by funders will be evaluated in light of the strength of the overall strategy and coherence with their own goals.

In addition to their inherent value to each Center, the improvement plan should be seen as a broad opportunity to communicate breeding program targets to funders and establish accountability for results, which may then form the basis for additional funding for specific improvements.

As additional funds are limited and temporary, when identifying potential Funder interventions Centers should focus on those with the greatest return on investment, in contrast to providing an extensive "wish-list" of funding projects. When the budget for improvement ends, Centers will continue to take responsibility for operating costs. At this point, breeding programs are expected to be achieving higher rates of genetic gain per dollar spent.

Q: Should centers submit improvement plans on a center level or on an individual breeding program or pipeline level?

A: Improvement plans should be submitted at a center level, including both center-level improvements and crop-specific improvements in the same document. In order to better streamline investment, identify synergies and top priorities. These improvements should then be ranked on priority. Where improvements that could assist multiple programs are identified, they could be considered institution level (for example if all pipelines require biometrics support).

Q: Originally, we focused on correcting the issues raised by the BPAT assessment, is that still the focus?

A: Addressing the BPAT is an important component of the improvement plan, and a key request made by Funders. Where breeding programs have decided not to act on BPAT recommendations, they should identify this in the improvement plan and provide justification for the decision.

However, the main focus of the improvement plan is to articulate a high-level vision at the Center level, and while BPAT recommendations are an important source of detail and ideas, the Plan should also include actions identified by Center management and breeding teams.

The funders expect that modernizing CGIAR breeding programs and addressing most of the BPAT recommendations will require little or limited budget. Many improvements should result in cost savings. Where BPAT recommendations require additional investment, these should be prioritized according to potential return on investment along with the other action items identified in the plan submitted across all breeding pipelines.

Q: Does CtEH funding replace the CRP funding in the future? Will this be the core funding for the centers or for the crops?

A: CtEH is focused on transforming the impact of current funding sources, rather than adding to or expanding these sources. There is an acknowledgement that some funding may be needed to make this transformation. Future funding after the CRP funding ends is under discussion by the CGIAR leadership.

Q: What level of detail should be used in the improvement plan, and how can we communicate funding needs?

A: The improvement plan should firstly provide a high-level vision for breeding program transformation. Action items should then be identified with sufficient detail to provide a viable roadmap towards achieving this vision. It should be clear what action will be taken, what improvements will result, who will be responsible, when the deliverables should be delivered and what will be the likely budget requirements. Following this, it is an important exercise to assess these action items across the organization, identifying gaps, synergies and opportunities. The final step is to prioritize these items according to necessity and potential return on investment, taking into account donor goals in each breeding pipeline. By focusing on the highest priority objectives and not creating a “wish list” of everything that could be done, this will likely reduce the total number of objectives and allow for detail for those highest priority objectives without creating an unnecessarily large document. For objectives that do not require additional (or limited) funding, please stick to those objectives that your Center is committed to making happen; even if technical consultation from EiB is required to make it happen. For objectives that do require some additional funding, please stick to those objectives for which a strong business case can be developed. These are additional ways to be more focused with the objectives being listed.

Q: How long do you estimate the CtEH initiative will last? Could I propose and improvement with an extended operating costs?

The funding available through CtEH is a result of donor recognition that some investment will be needed to kickstart the modernization of breeding programs. EiB is working with CtEH to help identify these high-potential areas. The availability of funding is at the discretion of Funders, dependent on availability and potential impact. Breeding operations should be funded using

current sources, though the improvement plan initiative and CtEH funds should be seen as an opportunity to increase savings and efficiencies, allowing for re-allocation of funds in new areas. Successful use of the improvement plans should also result in improved communication and accountability with Funders.

Q: Should the improvement plans include national program collaborations?

A: While the improvement plan is developed at the Center-level, CGIAR-NARS collaborations are central to impact, and should be developed further in the future. As a result, the plan should take into account where improvements can strengthen the activities of all partners in the breeding pipeline, including CGIAR and NARS, etc. In the end, each Plan should be assessed on the ability to increase rates of genetic gain and variety turnover in priority breeding pipelines, in which networks of different actors are responsible for delivery.

Q: Is CtEH funding only for CGIAR organizations?

CtEH funding is directed at the CGIAR, but CGIAR-NARS collaborations are of central importance in many areas, such as trialing. Therefore, it is appropriate for CtEH money to assist improvements in CGIAR-NARS breeding pipelines even when hosted by NARS. When requests for funding are evaluated, funders will consider impact on the whole network from development through to delivery, and NARS are an important part of that consideration.

Q: Is the improvement plan limited to only breeding efforts?

A: Yes. When the centers prioritize their improvement plan requests, they should be focus on how to best increase their rate of variety replacement and genetic gain of their breeding programs focused on the most critical pipelines.

Q: Will the improvement plans result in significant reform?

A: Yes: by definition, the plans should be bold and transformative. For this reason, it is important that the improvement plans are first and foremost a strategy identified by the Centers with buy-in from management, rather than being aimed at satisfying donor requirements such as the BPAT recommendations. The center should focus on proposing improvement ideas with the high ROI resulting in an increase the rate of variety turnover and genetic gain.