

EVALUATION BRIEF

CGIAR Research Program on WHEAT

July 2015



Independent
Evaluation
Arrangement



Background and Context

CGIAR Research Program on Wheat (CRP WHEAT) is led by CIMMYT, includes ICARDA as a main CGIAR partner, and involves over 200 partners globally, including NARS, advanced institutions (ARI) and private enterprises.

CRP WHEAT responds to rising demand for wheat as a primary food staple for much of the global population including many fast growing populations in the developing world. The research at CRP WHEAT contributes to all CGIAR's System Level Outcomes aimed at reducing rural poverty, improving food and nutrition security and enhancing sustainable management of natural resources. CRP WHEAT is organized around five inter-connected Flagship Projects for implementing two main research strategies: genetic interventions and sustainable intensifications of wheat systems.

Evaluation Methodology

CRP WHEAT was evaluated according to criteria consistent with the CGIAR Evaluation Policy and Standards, covering relevance, quality of science, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation includes both summative and formative aspects. The summative components include assessments of outputs and the extent to which they have enabled outcomes from continuing activities. The formative components focus on current research and CRP evolution over the past three years, including its management and governance arrangements.

The evaluation based its findings, conclusions and recommendations on multiple data collection methods and analysis, and the triangulation of evidence collected from different sources. Methods used included: desk review of key program documents and assessments; researcher survey and interviews of approximately 200 CRP stakeholders, staff, partners, and beneficiaries; field visits to selected sites in seven countries; bibliometric analysis of CRP WHEAT publications and H-index analysis of research leaders, as well as quality of science peer review analyses of a sample of 36 publications.

Main Findings and Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation concluded that CRP WHEAT is contributing sufficient value from CGIAR's research investments to generate results to warrant continuation during the extension-phase (2015-16) and beyond.

Resources (staff, facilities and funding) were found to have grown considerably since WHEAT was launched, largely as a result of increased bilateral funding that has been outcome-oriented, but also region- and project-specific, which has been challenging for the CRP in terms of its ability to maintain and enhance program coherence.

One of the main conclusions was that programmatic orientation and management focus on results that enable IDOs and impact should be enhanced in the CRP. This needs to involve reorientation of resource mobilization to be better align bilateral funding with priorities. Program oversight, strategy development

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and refinement, and management, including monitoring and evaluation, need to better focus on the CRP's purpose, and to the extent possible, 'partners' and collaborators' contributions should be aligned with the same purpose.

The evaluation team also found that CRP WHEAT is affected by the System-level governance. More transparency is needed in decisions on core funding allocations and in communications and reporting for accountability in order to eliminate misunderstandings, improve clarity about decision-making and streamline reporting.

Program focus, relevance, quality of science and likely effectiveness

CRP WHEAT was found to exploit its comparative advantage, which is unique in terms of access to and knowledge of wheat germplasm, experienced researchers, focus on a crop that is not attractive to the private sector, particularly for addressing developing country needs, and long standing relationships with the relevant and highly committed NARS and ARIs.

CRP WHEAT quality of science was assessed to be on par with ARIs, particularly considering that WHEAT produces both scientific outputs and enhanced germplasm. Evidence indicated high quality thinking in research project design and use of state of the art methodologies in project execution. Program approaches were found to be appropriate, building on latest scientific thinking and latest research results, and incorporating novel science in some of the exploratory projects. In research on sustainable intensification, the evaluation team, however, stated the need for greater lateral learning spanning across CRPs and crops and greater use of synthesis reviews and meta-analysis to enhance the international public goods nature of the knowledge generated. Data management investments and data infrastructure are both a science quality and a monitoring issue, and both need attention.

The evaluation team noted that the impact pathways for the two main research strategies meet at the farm gate and collectively farmer decisions determine the degree of adoption, progress towards the intermediate development outcomes and ultimate impact. Slow farmer adoption of wheat varieties reflect constraints in CRP WHEAT impact pathways, which need to be understood and addressed, some in the program and others through CRP WHEAT partners.

Funding through Windows 1 and 2 has been considerably less than originally proposed by CRP WHEAT and has been declining as a percentage of total funding. As bilateral funding remains critical to sustaining WHEAT, the evaluation concluded that WHEAT should use its recently improved program management and ISC functions, and refined regional and global strategies, as tools to mobilize bilateral support for highest priority activities within its strategies while also being selective to keep its portfolio focused.

Value added by WHEAT

The evaluation team concluded that implementation of wheat research within a CRP has started to add value, particularly by linking the operations of CIMMYT, ICARDA (in breeding) and their respective partners, which is now demonstrated in a formal effort to integrate the two centers' programs into one wheat program with global reach. This is a major step towards increased synergy, efficiency and likely effectiveness. Currently three quarters of total research funding comes from bilateral sources and much of research is influenced by a few large donors with interests in specific regions. The evaluation team stated that while this is not necessarily at odds with CRP WHEAT's primary purpose, the program needs better

defined, coherent and congruent strategies to be used in resource mobilization, and greater alignment of different sources of funding to support the CRP agenda for commitment and accountability in the delivery of results contributing to the intermediate development outcomes that CRP WHEAT targets.

Recommendations

The Evaluation Team made a total of 12 recommendations, summarized below:

Relevance

1. WHEAT should **improve the refinement of its strategies**, and better alignment and management of projects (activities) that enable priority WHEAT IDOs and SLOs objectives within its strategies. Each proposed FP project should define its intended output(s), its impact pathway, details of its ToC with critical assumptions, and checkpoints (points in time when assumptions can and should be validated). WHEAT should **determine priority of projects based on their costs and risk-adjusted contribution to the Program priority IDOs**.
2. Bilateral funding remains critical to WHEAT's sustainability WHEAT should **use its recently improved program management and ISC functions, and refined regional and global strategies, as tools to mobilize bilateral support for highest priority activities** within its strategies while also being selective to keep its portfolio focused.

Quality of Science

3. WHEAT, particularly in the sustainable intensification strategy, should **enhance lateral learning to accelerate the rate of knowledge gain**.
4. WHEAT should **improve its data management and infrastructure**, as part of enhancing the utility of the Research Management System for researchers and Program-level management.
5. WHEAT should **establish internal mentoring within the CRP for safe-guarding the quality of science** in the face of rapid programmatic growth and institutional integration..

Likely Effectiveness

6. WHEAT should **establish an inter-FP special traits team to accelerate delivery of multiple genes for multiple traits into multiple high performance lines**.
7. To improve wheat genetic yield progress in future, WHEAT should, over the next two years, **review the current approaches in FP3, and those used by partners in order systematically explore advanced wheat germplasm sources improve utilization of both additive, and additive X additive interactions among wheat's genomes; and (iii) more efficiently advance populations to homozygosity for subsequently application of selection**.
8. In order to help narrow the gap between potential and realized wheat productivity WHEAT in **FP4 should re-establish its priorities (regions and focus) in the context of the evolving CGIAR research agenda and other CRPs contributing to it**.

Impact and likely sustainability

9. WHEAT should **develop a clear impact assessment strategy for learning and accountability**. The strategy should be based on the needs and priorities of the key audiences for these assessments to assure that the studies and evaluations are both useful and utilized.

Gender

10. WHEAT should **strengthen the development and implementation of the gender strategy by acquiring the necessary expertise either internally or by engaging specialists** outside of WHEAT. This should include explicitly addressing gender in the Program, FP and project impact pathways towards WHEAT gender equitable outcomes, sensitizing staff and partners to the need for gender disaggregated data where possible, and promoting equitable access to capacity development initiatives.

Partnerships

11. WHEAT should **develop a partnership strategy that should address the following purposes and partners: program strategy development and priorities; impact pathway development and adjustments following constraint analysis**

Adding value from WHEAT

12. Programmatic orientation and management focus on results that enable IDOs and impact should be enhanced in WHEAT. This involves **reorientation of resource mobilization aligned with priorities**, WHEAT oversight, strategy development and refinement, and management, including M&E, on WHEAT's purpose, and to the extent possible, aligning partners' and collaborators' contributions towards the same purpose.

Management Response

The WHEAT Independent Stakeholder Committee and Management Committee submitted a CRP management response to the evaluation, and indicated that the CRP's appreciation of the effort by the evaluation team and IEA. The CRP management response stated that while the review recognized many positive developments, there were a wide range of valuable recommendations for improvement that CRP WHEAT will build on. It further stated that while the evaluation proposes increased investments in implementing the key areas such as gender strategy, data management, impact assessment and capacity building; it did not balance these with recommendations for deemphasizing other areas. Therefore, CRP management stated that action on the recommendations would be dependent on sufficient Window 1/2 funding. The CRP management response included a matrix detailing the response, timeframe and associated costs (if any) to each individual recommendation.

The response stated full agreement with eleven of the twelve evaluation recommendations, with partial agreement with one recommendation. For recommendation 1, regarding CRP strategy refinement and priority setting, the CRP management response accepted the recommendation partially, stating that while Theory of Change workshops are ongoing, alignment with bilaterally funded projects was not easy to achieve.

Further Information

Visit the IEA website for evaluation outputs and information (team profiles, TORs, Inception Report, Final Evaluation Report, and Annexes) as well as the CRP Management Response and Consortium Response:

<http://iea.cgiar.org/evaluation/crp-evaluation-wheat>