

EVALUATION BRIEF

CGIAR Research Program on Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP) March 2016



Independent
Evaluation
Arrangement

Background and Context

The Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP) brings together three CGIAR centers—the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice) and Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT)—and three non-CGIAR Institutions—Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences (JIRCAS) and Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)—as core partners. Together with about 900 other partners worldwide GRiSP engages in development outcome-oriented research designed to contribute to the objectives of CGIAR. GRiSP began in 2011 with approval for five years at a budget of USD 593 million—the largest of the 15 CGIAR Research Programs (CRP). Its accumulated expenditure in the first four years was USD 381 million, with 37% coming from Windows 1 and 2.



Evaluation of the
CGIAR Research Program on
Global Rice Science Partnership
(GRiSP)

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Rice, as the world's most important food crop, is critical to global food security. About three billion people, including many of the world's poorest, consume rice as their staple food and hundreds of millions of poor people depend on rice farming for their livelihood many of them in high-risk rainfed environments. There are major constraints to meeting future rice production needs including loss of land, labor and water resources in Asia to other crops and nonfarm uses, and slow genetic yield gains. GRiSP formulated three objectives to confront these challenges—to increase rice productivity, foster sustainable rice-based cropping systems, and improve efficiency and equity of the rice sector.

Evaluation methodology

The Evaluation examined the extent to which GRiSP, within its mandate, along with its partners and donors, is responding to the key aspirations underlying the CGIAR reform related to vision and focus, delivery orientation, synergy through efficient and effective partnerships, and accountability. The Evaluation looked at both programmatic and organizational aspects of the CRP in relation to six main criteria: relevance, quality of science, likely effectiveness, efficiency (related to organizational arrangements), impact and sustainability. In addition, the Evaluation Team identified a set of strategic overarching questions to be the focus of the evaluation.

The Evaluation drew information from multiple sources, including: document review, analysis of selected case studies for in-depth review of specific research areas, over 300 on-site and remote interviews with researchers, donors and stakeholders, field visits to ten national programs and partner Centers and organizations, researcher survey, bibliometric analyses and peer review of a sample of scientific articles.

Main findings and conclusions

Overall, the Evaluation concluded that, given the strength of its portfolio, the global importance of rice, and recent technological breakthroughs in less favored rice environments, GRiSP is poised to make major contributions to the CGIAR's objectives. The Team also concluded that GRiSP will require more time to develop into a truly integrative and collaborative global rice science partnership.

The Evaluation noted that, given the fast changing agro-ecological and socio-economic environment in many rice-producing countries, relevance can be further enhanced by a stronger engagement in foresight analysis. A major challenge for GRiSP will be to address trade-offs in benefits on the producer and consumer sides with respect to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where countries are rapidly urbanizing.

The Evaluation further noted that the current donor emphasis on short-term results has sometimes taken GRiSP very downstream into technology delivery and extension where it does not have a comparative advantage. At the same time, there was underinvestment in exploratory type research for long-term impacts including pest ecology and disease epidemiology, and value chains.

GRiSP was found to be well governed and managed in a complex and changing world. Governance practices could be improved at the level of the Oversight Committee by better communication with stakeholders about the processes for stakeholder input to strategic priority setting for GRiSP, and by the use of coordinated external evaluations of specific research themes across GRiSP.

Finally, the structure of GRiSP largely along disciplinary lines has sometimes been at the expense of interdisciplinary research. At the site or hub level, the Team noted considerable scope to strengthen user perspectives through participatory approaches and carefully designed diagnostic and adaptive research involving disciplinary skills from both the natural and social sciences.

Quality of Science, Partnerships, and Impact

Overall, the quality of science in GRiSP was found to be good, and in two main areas of research, molecular breeding and crop management, GRiSP compared well with the best in global rice science. The Evaluation nevertheless noted too many publications in journals with no or very low impact factor. Also, the Evaluation noted that science quality was somewhat uneven across centers and disciplines. Social science should be strengthened and the Evaluation called for more innovative interdisciplinary research in partnerships with Advanced Research Institutes (ARI). In Africa, stronger breeding programs are needed to address the many different rice environments and complex stresses in the region; AfricaRice breeding program could benefit from closer integration with IRRI and CIAT.

In terms of partnerships, the Evaluation found that much has been achieved in building collaboration among the core partners, but there is also a great deal of potential to further deepen collaboration through research on globally important challenges in rice. The most urgent task is to integrate the IRRI and AfricaRice programs around a common rice science strategy in Eastern and Southern Africa. In addition, the Evaluation noted work is needed to develop a strategy for scaling up site specific management technologies and value chain research.

Summary of Recommendations

The Evaluation recommended several areas where GRiSP could strengthen its relevance, effectiveness, and partnership to better realize its ambition.

The recommendations are summarized below:

- 1** GRiSP should work with national partners to ensure that interdisciplinary research on the social, economic and natural context is used to tailor crop and resource management technologies more precisely to the needs of intended beneficiaries
- 2** GRiSP management should encourage and incentivize stronger research collaboration among GRiSP centers and their partners in ARIs for improving the overall quality of the scientific output through jointly authored, high quality publications
- 3** GRiSP should articulate a strategy for scaling up and scaling out beyond its immediate beneficiaries, by researching methods and business models for effective and equitable delivery
- 4** GRiSP should without delay deliver a single integrated rice research program in Eastern & Southern Africa, coordinated by AfricaRice and drawing on the relative strengths of both AfricaRice and IRRI, in order to improve efficiency and complementarities, and enhance the image of GRiSP among its stakeholders in the region
- 5** AfricaRice should modernize and intensify its rice breeding program for feeding elite lines to the Africa-wide Rice Breeding Task Force (ARBTF), for all major rice ecosystems in Africa
- 6** Opportunities, incentives and modalities should be created to increase interdisciplinary research
- 7** GRiSP should enrich its portfolio of new frontier and discovery research projects in partnership with ARIs with the objective of exploring new concepts and tools to achieve its goals
- 8** GRiSP should support participating countries to develop long-term institutional capacity building strategies and tailor GRiSP capacity building support to the priorities of those strategies
- 9** GRiSP should do more in-depth analysis to understand opportunities and constraints of women in rice farming and value chains in order to better address the effectiveness and equity impacts of its research and technology delivery
- 10** GRiSP with its national partners should institutionalize a systematic process of assessing its equity, nutrition and environmental impacts at a global level, especially for its germplasm
- 11** The GRiSP Oversight Committee should define its processes of consultation for establishing global strategic priorities in rice research
- 12** GRiSP level external reviews of particular areas of research should be commissioned by the Oversight Committee in consultation with the Board Program Committees and managed by the Programme Management Unit (PMU)
- 13** GRiSP should review and clarify the roles and expectations of its non-CGIAR partners (JIRCAS, IRD and CIRAD) in governance, management and research implementation
- 14** The Consortium (W1) and the Fund Council (W2) should provide expanded and reliable core funding to GRiSP

Management Response

CRP GRiSP management provided a response to the evaluation, stating its appreciation for the conscientious and professional review. The response further noted that many of the actions proposed in response to the Evaluation recommendations will become part of the second phase of GRiSP.

Of the 14 recommendations, CRP management fully accepted 11 recommendations, and partially accepted the remaining three (recommendations 10, 11, and 12). For recommendation #10, the response indicated the need for a more nuanced approach for developing a robust framework of adoption studies and impact assessments, and offered proposals on how that would be achieved. For recommendation #11, regarding improved Oversight Committee consultations for establishing global strategic priorities, the response indicated that the CRP is exploring alternative established mechanisms for consultations, and offered examples that are currently being considered. As for the recommendation regarding commissioning external reviews (#12), the response indicated that in many instances, Center-commissioned reviews may be more appropriate than CRP commissioned evaluations.

A detailed CRP management response for each recommendation was provided, along with proposed actions, responsibility, and timeframe for completion.

Further Information

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

<http://iea.cgiar.org/evaluation/crp-evaluation-global-rice-science-partnership-grisp>

