

RTB Management Response and Action Plan to the CGIAR-IEA (2015), Evaluation of CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB). Rome, Italy: Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) of the CGIAR

(Version 24 January 2016)

1) Overall response

We appreciate that this is a very well-crafted and thorough review, and we would like to thank the team and IEA. Overall we think it's a fair and balanced evaluation. It is very constructive in the way it is written, carefully crafted and looking to support the development of the RTB 2nd phase. The IEA evaluation team did a terrific job by visiting a wide selection of sites, analyzing a large array of supporting documentation, keeping close interaction with the RTB team and handling the process in a coherent and inclusive way.

RTB management notes with satisfaction the team's conclusions, in particular:

- Notable progress in past 4 years
- Strongly warrants continuing
- Well directed, and achieving reasonable number of milestones
- Adding value across crops and centers mainly through complementary funded projects
- Science sound
- NARs appreciative
- Good progress gender strategy
- Good program governance and management

There were some areas where we did not fully agree with the report.

- RTB breeding programs have made good progress in introducing modern breeding approaches and this has been a central thrust of complementary funding. Recommendation #7 is somewhat misleading in this regard, and does not capture the good progress already made and reflected in the in the Executive summary assessment of breeding programs as "using both sound and novel approaches but should continue to improve".
- Window1&2 funding is passing through a rather dramatic downturn at the moment, hopefully this situation will change from 2017 as there is a huge value in having a more integrated CRP which this makes possible. At the current decreasing levels of overall W1&2 funding it will be

challenging to implement several recommendations including Recommendation 1 for further integration of breeding programs given increased dependence on bilaterally funded projects.

2) Responses by recommendation

Evaluation Recommendation	Management Response to the Recommendation	Management Follow up			
		Action to be taken	Who Responsible for Action	Timeframe	Is additional funding required to implement recommendation?
RELEVANCE					
<p>Recommendation 1 (integrated breeding programs):</p> <p>RTB needs to make further efforts to enhance integration beyond individual time-bound projects.</p> <p>In particular, further value would be gained by fully integrating the IITA and CIAT cassava breeding programs.</p> <p>There is also clear potential for integration and consolidation of all RTB research on banana and plantain by IITA and Bioversity.</p> <p>This would likely result in rationalization of staff positions, allow better targeting of scarce W1/W2 funds and improve the ability to approach donors as an integrated program.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>Agree with the general point that RTB needs to enhance integration beyond individual projects and this will occur with design and implementation of the new RTB Program structure (based on clusters), rationalization of use of W1&2 funds and also with a CGIAR genetic gains platform currently under development which will link all Agri-Food Systems CRPs including RTB.</p> <p>Cassava program: Cassava breeders in IITA and CIAT note that “fully integrating” cassava breeding comes with some caveats. Breeding program objectives are different in the three important cassava growing regions, and LAC cassava material is very sensitive to viruses prevalent in Africa and quarantine issues prevent transfer of material. Hence full integration is desirable, but within the context of recognized regionally specific objectives</p>	<p>1.1 Joint leadership of varietal development clusters of cassava and banana, as well as cross-cutting clusters, under FP1 (Discovery Flagship)</p> <p>1.2 Evaluation of progress in cross center clusters for varietal development in cassava and bananas and FP 1 clusters</p> <p>1.3 Active and effective breeding platform cluster</p>	<p>1.1 IITA, CIAT, Bioversity (and PMU)</p> <p>1.2 PMU, Flagship and cluster leaders in reporting</p> <p>1.3 PMU, Flagship and cluster leaders</p>	<p>Beginning 01/16</p>	<p>Yes – especially for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> integrating mechanisms as: Frequent exchange visits between involved centers (including CIRAD) shared training among regions

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	and constraints. Banana program: More interaction between the IITA breeders with the Bioversity scientists, within the framework of RTB, will ensure that breeder and end user preferred traits are characterized and integrated into breeding programs.				
<p>Recommendation 2 (coherence/ consistencies of clusters):</p> <p>The restructuring of the program into inter-disciplinary and integrated FPs adds coherence to RTB compared to the Theme-based structure.</p> <p>However in some cases the definition of clusters of activities lacks coherence and consistency with the FP problem definition e.g. the banana disease clusters, single yam cluster and complex clusters in FP4.</p> <p>RTB should review and revise the clusters for improved congruence with the FP problem definition</p>	<p>Fully accepted</p> <p>We fully agree that the clusters need to be revised for congruence with FP problem definition.</p> <p>In the light of reduction in W1&2 and donor requirements for structuring CRP Phase II, there is also a need to reduce the number of clusters. We have already reduced from 32 to 25 clusters, based on five Flagships, including a reduction from three to two banana disease clusters.</p> <p>Given this general reduction in numbers of flagships and clusters (coherence in aggregation levels, funding size, etc.) we feel that a single yam cluster is appropriate. In comparison, there are only two clusters each for the geographically much more widely cultivated crops of potato and sweetpotato.</p>	<p>2.1 Prepare consolidated content for 2 banana disease clusters</p> <p>2.2 Improve coherence of clusters in FP4 during preparation of full proposal</p> <p>2.3 Continue congruence analysis and fit of resources to FP problem definition and numbers of beneficiaries and size of benefits</p>	<p>2.1 PMU, Bioversity, IITA and FP/cluster leaders</p> <p>2.2 PMU, Priority Assessment Focal points in each Center</p> <p>2.3 PMU, Flagship and cluster leaders</p>	<p>2.1 03/2016</p> <p>2.2 03/2016</p> <p>2.3 12/2016</p>	No

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<p>Recommendation 3 (fund allocation): During 2012-2015, with the exception of complementary and cross-cutting funds, RTB allocated W1/W2 funds to partner centers based on historical funding. RTB has now recognized the need to move towards more strategic allocation of these funds based on program priorities and performance. In the current environment of decreasing W1/W2 funds, RTB should ensure that W1/W2 funds are directed at the highest program priorities as informed by priority assessment and performance evaluation.</p>	<p>Fully accepted The concept of maturing the fund allocation methodology in support of the evolution of the overall system and RTB objectives makes sense. In our view, refining the methodology should consider diverse elements such as: lessons learned, impact potential, programmatic performance (e.g. against indicators), financial performance (e.g. expenditure or absorption rates), as well as set aside needs, mechanisms to apportion funds and risks to build a sustainable program and attain an effective return on investment. We agree that priority assessment can give some insights across crops and technologies but it is one element of several and would not e.g. address how much to assign to cross cutting activities or to gender research or CapDev. Also, should recognize that diminished W1&2 reduces ability to direct investment and abrupt shifts in funding may be counter to the notion of RTB as an “alliance”.</p>	<p>3.1 Finalize congruence analysis from priority assessment and take this into consideration in setting budgets by cluster/flagship in full proposal 3.2 Implement more systematic performance evaluation of base and complementary funding and at cluster level as pilot in 2016 and from 2017 3.3 Investment flow through projectized investment at the cluster level.</p>	<p>3.1 PMU, Priority Assessment Focal points in each Center 3.2 PMU, FP/cluster leaders 3.3 PMU</p>	<p>3.1 in process 3.2 & 3.3 02/2016</p>	No
<p>Recommendation 4 (Priority Assessment): RTB should use priority assessment</p>	<p>Partially accepted The assumptions behind the priority assessment results need to be cross</p>	<p>4.1 Upgrade full set of priority assessment data every three years</p>	<p>4.1 & 4.2 PMU, Priority Assessment/ Impact</p>	<p>4.1 2018 4.2 2021</p>	Yes, priority assessment and ex post impact

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<p>results for setting program priorities and in program planning, including fundraising.</p> <p>In doing so, RTB should also plan for continuous improvements in the data and estimates that support priority assessment.</p>	<p>checked in light of more recent evidence and unless sound and upto-date assumptions are used for ex-ante estimates, investment decisions could be misleading.</p> <p>Also need to be aware of cost implications of continuous improvements under very limited W1&2 funding. Need also to invest scarce resources in ex-post impact studies.</p> <p>Continuous improvement of data and estimates: Improved information should be available through M&E. But there are cost implications of continuous data improvements. More reasonable to upgrade every three years and major priority assessment every 6 years.</p> <p>Using priority assessment results for fundraising has its limitations as donors in majority have their own mechanisms for setting priorities.</p>	4.2 Major priority assessment every 6 years	Assessment focal points		<p>assessment are costly activities, and require substantial time input both from the social scientist who lead this and the biological scientists who provide key information.</p> <p>Continuous improvement in data and estimates will require additional funding.</p>
QUALITY OF SCIENCE					
<p>Recommendation 5 (publications):</p> <p>RTB has published some excellent research papers in appropriate journals with high impact.</p> <p>At the same time, the percentage of publications in non-IF journals is</p>	<p>Fully accepted</p> <p>As the reviewers mention, there are good reasons for where RTB science is published. With emphasis on delivery, this kind of work does not usually go to high impact journals. Giving emphasis to discovery research in Phase II will lead to</p>	5.1 Insist on (clearer) attribution/acknowledgment/branding and tagging of key words of RTB in publications.	5.1 PMU, MC/DDGs Research of each Center, communication Center Focal points		<p>Yes, if resources are used to cover open access costs in high impact journals.</p>

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<p>disturbingly high – 39 percent.</p> <p>While it is recognized that most RTB crops are at a disadvantage in terms of the range of journals willing to publish on these crops and the need to target African journals to promote research findings to the most appropriate stakeholders, RTB should endeavor to assure that its science quality is consistently high in order to target and publish in higher quality journals for greater international impact.</p>	<p>high-impact publications, but with a longer time-frame.</p> <p>One topic for analysis at the CGIAR-wide level is the trade off between publication in the higher impact journals and opting for open access journals which may have lower impact factors.</p>	5.2 Create incentives for more publications through reporting and performance evaluation.	5.2 PMU, MC/DDGs Research of each Center		
<p>Recommendation 6 (monitoring quality of science):</p> <p>Although individual Centers are responsible for the performance of their scientists, RTB is responsible for the quality of science implemented and generated by the program.</p> <p>The MC in consultation with the FP leaders should play a more active role in monitoring the quality of science produced by RTB with oversight by the ISC.</p> <p>Reviving Commissioned External Evaluations at CRP-level would be of greatest value.</p>	<p>Fully accepted</p> <p>This is a good suggestion. ToRs of both flagship project and cluster leaders will include this aspect.</p> <p>We also agree on the value of CRP commissioned External Evaluations; however, the frequency and intensity of these evaluations should be related to the level of available W1&2 funding, with perhaps an evaluation of one flagship per year under higher levels of funding or in alternate years under a lower funding scenario. It is not only the direct cost of implementation but also the cost of the scientists' time involved which now has to be fully budgeted for.</p>	6.1 CRP commissioned evaluations will be included in the Evaluation plan, developed for the 2nd Phase.	6.1 PMU	01/2017	Yes for CRP commissioned evaluations

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<p>Recommendation 7 (strengthening breeding programs):</p> <p>RTB needs to further modernize and strengthen its breeding programs. Within the current funding climate, highest priority should be given to:</p> <p>a) Adoption of the best breeding strategies for its crops that involve harmonizing breeding approaches within crops and transferring lessons across crops, where possible;</p> <p>b) A benchmark study of its utilization of genomic technologies with the most adopted ones by the private sector to identify opportunities for improvement in the deployment of techniques such as gene editing and MAB;</p> <p>c) Deployment of precise high-throughput phenotyping methods, novel breeding techniques and modelling for traits such as drought and temperature stress through engagement with best practice in ARIs;</p> <p>d) Attracting young scientists working in genomics-led breeding, bioinformatics or omics research for both accelerating breeding and increasing genetic gains; and</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>We agree with the idea of strengthening the breeding programs. However this recommendation understates good progress already made and the continuous aim to use up-to-date breeding methods.</p> <p>The new genetic gain platform under discussion should help to address all of these points.</p> <p>However, also need to recognize that strengthening breeding programs requires funding and infrastructure to improve the level of excellence. A complementary option is to intensify partnership with private sector and ARIs and with other organizations to increase access to the latest advances in breeding techniques and infrastructure</p> <p>The training of next generation of plant breeders is critical. However, this may be best achieved by partnering and leveraging other institutions with capabilities and resources for training the next generation of breeders that can complement our limited W1&2 funding.</p>	<p>7.1 As part of the redesign of RTB structure a breeders' community of practice is being set up.</p> <p>7.2 RTB to strongly engage in design of proposal of new genetic gains platform and ensure articulation with RTB FP1 and the breeding community of practice.</p> <p>7.3 Identify partnering opportunities for training next generation of breeders</p>	<p>7.1 PMU, FP and cluster leaders</p> <p>7.2 PMU and FP1 Flagship and cluster leaders</p> <p>7.3 Flagship 1 and 2 leaders and their respective clusters with DDGs Research and PMU</p>	<p>7.1 in process</p> <p>7.2 03/2016</p> <p>7.3 12/2017</p>	<p>Yes, especially on points:</p> <p>c) Requires funding and infrastructure.. Collaborations work better for this, but need to consider long term sustainability (even if train local young scientists, they need support back in their country NARS to continue this kind of work). Perhaps a moment to acknowledge cross AFS synergies regarding the Genetic Gains Initiative (to not call it a CRP or Platform) This could get at the comment below regarding limited funds</p> <p>d) Same comment above.</p> <p>Questions around resourcing this on</p>

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e) Placing more emphasis on training the next generation of plant breeders so that breeding will continue after the termination of the short term bilateral project funding.					current budgets – training best achieved by leveraging others with deeper pockets and not from our limited W1&2.
<p>Recommendation 8 (NARS/consumer needs):</p> <p>RTB should better target client needs by delivering only two to three achievable product profiles for each mandate crop to NARS and placing even greater emphasis on farmer and consumer needs.</p> <p>RTB and NARS should decide together on the division of labor based on NARS capability in each target country.</p> <p>This will allow RTB to provide appropriate back-stopping to NARS in further development of the products into cultivar(s) for release to farmers.</p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>This is consistent with our approach to have better variety and technology delivery pipelines responding to user demand.</p>	<p>8.1 Revisit clusters to assure proper integration and visibility of consumer needs and feedback loops between FP1/FP2 and clusters of other FPs.</p> <p>8.2 Strategic review of NARS breeding capability for key crops and targeted countries potentially linked with genetic gains platform</p>	<p>8.1 & 8.2 PMU, FP and cluster leaders</p>	<p>8.1 in process</p> <p>8.2 12/2017</p>	<p>Yes, for strategic review of NARS breeding capability</p>
EFFECTIVENESS					
<p>Recommendation 9 (CoP Breeding):</p> <p>RTB should develop a community of practice of researchers across all crop breeding undertakings for enhancing effectiveness through better synergy.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>Fully agree on the community of practice as noted under recommendation #1, we have reservation about a single RTB breeding program for cassava.</p>	<p>9.1 As part of the redesign of RTB structure a breeders community of practice is being set up</p>	<p>9.1 PMU, FP1 and FP leaders and cluster leaders</p>	<p>In process</p>	<p>Yes, for joint workshops, face to face meetings, etc.</p>

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It will allow the sharing of ideas on methods, data, results and user feedback, thus leading to integrated data platforms, developing inter-center working groups on traits, enhancing the inter-disciplinarity between lab-genomics and field-breeding, establishing single RTB breeding programs for banana and cassava, and sharing experiences among those engaged in transgenic breeding.	All RTB center geneticists and breeders are involved in the planning of the breeding activities for 2016 and Phase II, thus promoting collaboration and a shared mission, enhancing inter-disciplinarity.				
<p>Recommendation 10 (seed system):</p> <p>The establishment of economically sustainable seed systems for RTB crops is of core importance for program effectiveness.</p> <p>Priority should be given to assessing demand for clean high quality planting material throughout the seed value chain; on understanding the incentives for small holders to purchase quality planting material; as well as mechanisms for strengthening the supply chain with links to marketing and processing.</p> <p>Due to the importance of seed systems research for impact, as RTB moves into scaling-up and scaling-out seed systems activities, it should recruit an expert in RTB seed systems rather than relying on</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>We agree on the importance of seed work in RTB because they are all clonally propagated – and have therefore set up FP2.</p> <p>Seed system experts should be contracted via the relevant centers and not form part of PMU. Given the volatile and limited nature of W1&2 funds this should be encouraged via the relevant bilateral or W3 project opportunities.</p>	<p>10.1 Continue supporting work on assessing demand for quality planting materials and market driven approaches</p> <p>10.2 Enable cross crop/cross Partner collaboration on variety release and dissemination for clonally propagated crops.</p>	<p>10.1 FP2 leader and relevant cluster leaders</p> <p>10.2 PMU with FP1, FP2, FP5 Leaders and relevant cluster leaders</p>	2017-2019	<p>Yes</p> <p>For 10.2 Yes for enabling collaboration, establishing guidelines and gathering best practices.</p>

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short term inputs from consultants and partners as was noted in Chapter 4.					
<p>Recommendation 11 (agronomy/crop management):</p> <p>Some aspects of crop management research, for example agronomy and soil fertility research in Theme 5, have not been well-supported.</p> <p>Narrowing the yield gap for farmers may require rebalancing the RTB portfolio towards agronomic and soil fertility research.</p> <p>In order to improve the realized yields in farmer’s fields, RTB needs to better integrate research on crop improvement and crop management which have been implemented in different Themes to date and will be implemented in different FPs in the new program structure.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>We agree that better integration and visibility in the cluster structure is needed.</p> <p>Agronomic aspects are mainly focused in FP3 but due to the nature/logic of the cluster set up, integrated in different clusters also under other FPs.</p> <p>Yield gap analysis shows a strong role for agronomy and soil fertility in improving yields. However, until recently this area of work in RTB crops often appears as more location specific and has not really demonstrated IPGs. And impact assessments with RTB have shown less clear evidence of impacts of agronomic/crop management work.</p> <p>However, this is an important area and inclusion of more systems work with implementation as Agri-food System CRP, RTB should strengthen human resources and bring novel approaches to bear.</p>	11.1 Revisit FP 3, its clusters and all other relevant clusters to assure proper integration and visibility of agronomic aspects and feedback loops with FP3.	11.1 PMU, FP and cluster leaders	In process	Yes Staffing in all Centers in crop management/improvement and agronomic aspects is quite weak and requires additional funding for new employments
<p>Recommendation 12 (post-harvest research):</p> <p>RTB should focus post-harvest research on the crop-specific aspects of value chain improvements that can deliver</p>	<p>Fully accepted</p> <p>However, should note that cassava has by some distance the greatest potential currently for local value added from processing driven in part by rapid</p>	12.1 Revisit FP 4, its clusters and all other relevant clusters to assure proper integration and visibility of	12.1 PMU, FP and cluster leaders	In process	No

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<p>added value, as these are most likely to generate global public goods.</p> <p>Assessing lessons from the emerging cassava Theme 6 research results should help to identify transferable lessons and strategies for other RTB crops, providing a basis for scalability of lessons learned.</p>	<p>postharvest physiological deterioration and also by local food preferences. This explains why it has a cluster for post-harvest innovation. All crops have some potential.</p> <p>Some value chain aspects are crop related and are not easily transferable as such.</p>	<p>post-harvest lessons learnt into other clusters.</p>			
GENDER, CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS					
<p>Recommendation 13 (communication/ knowledge management):</p> <p>It is recommended that RTB management ensures that adequate resources are made available to develop and implement the needed strategy for communication and knowledge management.</p> <p>Flagship and cluster leaders as well as bilateral project leaders will need access to communication and knowledge management expertise, and be enabled to incorporate knowledge management ‘experiments’ into the design of new projects to achieve the ambitious intentions laid out in the pre-proposal.</p>	<p>Fully accepted</p> <p>We agree with the need to include communication and knowledge management aspects in the research program. However, given shrinking share of W1&2 more of this should be embedded in bilateral and W3 projects whilst providing a critical support and oversight function at the overall program level. The M&E capability of RTB will help to underpin the design and utility of both Recommendations 13 and 14 in an integrated way.</p>	<p>13.1 Communication (strategy/action plan) will be integral part of the 2nd Phase proposal.</p>	<p>PMU, Center communication and KM focal points</p>	<p>01/2017</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Staffing in all Centers in communication/KM aspects – related to CRPs - is quite weak and requires additional funding for new employments</p>

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A strategy similar to the one proposed on capacity development (and drawing on lessons from the approach adopted to address gender issues) is recommended.					
IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY					
<p>Recommendation 14 (impact assessment): Impact assessment is strategically important for demonstrating impact, justifying resources, and informing program planning.</p> <p>RTB needs a clear strategy of how priority and impact assessments will be linked over time, and how the results from <i>ex-post</i> assessments, complementing <i>ex-ante</i> assessment, will inform program planning. This may lead to changes in the design of <i>ex-post</i> assessments.</p> <p>In formulating an impact assessment plan, RTB should scale up activities and apply lessons from the SIAC projects they are currently engaged in. It should also ensure comparable quality of efforts across crops and regions.</p>	<p>Fully accepted However see point on continuous updating of data for priority assessment (recommendation #4).</p>	<p>14.1 Finalize ongoing Impact Assessment</p> <p>14.2 CRP commissioned evaluations; Impact Assessment will be included in the RBM set-up and Evaluation plan, developed for the 2nd Phase.</p>	<p>14.1 PMU & Impact Assessment Center focal points</p> <p>14.2 PMU, MC</p>	<p>14.1 During 2016</p> <p>14.2 01/2017</p>	Yes
GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT					
Recommendation 15 (leadership	Fully accepted	Reformulation of the Terms	PMU, MC and	In process	No

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<p>roles/responsibilities): RTB should bring clarity to the respective roles, relationships and accountabilities of FP leaders, cluster leaders and bilateral project leaders within the management structures of RTB and the centers.</p>	<p>The continuous improvement of leadership roles and responsibilities is seen as a natural progression in the evolution of the program. RTB intends to maximize its management effectiveness based on its institutional memory and lessons learned.</p> <p>ToR of FP and cluster leaders, and work plans of individual scientists within centers contributing to RTB should be streamlined to clarify the contribution to RTB deliverables, and staff members should be assessed in terms of fulfillment of the commitments</p>	<p>of Reference for all these positions as we move to flagship based program structure</p>	<p>ISC</p>		
<p>Recommendation 16 (alliance compact): RTB partners should develop and agree on an alliance compact building on the progress already made in inter-center collaboration.</p> <p>Such an alliance would bring clarity and greater understanding to critical partnership questions such as: allocation and use of W1/W2 funds, handling of W3/bilateral projects, participation in RTB governance and management, alignment of management processes, handling of joint appointments, handling joint undertakings and codes of conduct in</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>We appreciate the acknowledgement that "RTB has made significant progress in establishing G&M structures and processes that create new ways of working to promote the inter-dependence of the members of the RTB alliance. The creation of the ISC has improved governance and works well with the Program Management Unit."</p> <p>Although the concept of an alliance compact is not fully developed in the evaluation, we concur with the basic concept that a soft contractual vehicle, among centers, to better define basic</p>	<p>16. 1 Identify potential governance, operational and business relationships which could further enhance the alignment of partner objectives for strategic goals and could be included in a soft contractual vehicle such as an alliance compact or similar alternative model.</p> <p>16.2. Building on analysis under 16.1, agree Strategy Statements which would constitute "soft contracts"</p>	<p>16.1 ISC and PMU/MC followed by CIP BoT</p> <p>16.2. ISC and PMU/MC followed by CIP BoT</p>	<p>16.1 from 06/2016 once the new Systems Office is in place</p> <p>16.2. until 11/2016</p>	

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program participation.	<p>rules of engagement, could strengthen the partnership.</p> <p>It should be noted that some of the topics indicated for this 'alliance compact' are currently under examination by the Transition Team (TT) working to establish the System Council, Systems Office and associated functions (notably the finance working group of the TT on aspects such as the allocation of W1/W2 funds, handling of W3 and bilateral projects, participation in CRP G&M, alignment of management processes...). The outcome of the TT work should be considered and be aligned with new mechanisms such as an 'alliance compact'.</p>	to be achieved through Compact or other mechanisms for improving Governance and Management and agree a timeline for implementation			