

System Management Board commentary on the Evaluation of Partnerships in CGIAR ¹

A. Overall Commentary

1. The Board recognizes the importance of both internal and external partnerships and remains committed to the sense from the 2008 reform that partnerships among Centers and with external organizations are essential for CGIAR to implement a shared research agenda and for the achievement of key objectives as defined in the Strategy and Results Framework (SRF) as well as for contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. The Board therefore welcomes the Evaluation of Partnerships in CGIAR which sought to “*assess the extent to which strategic partnerships in CGIAR have been strengthened and the System, including Center and CRPs, has responded to expectations of the reform*” (page vii) and offered some interesting observations and analysis of the role that various parts of the CGIAR System has played in partnerships.
3. The Board was particularly pleased to note the following areas which were highlighted as positive and could be built on to realize further success:
 - a. **With regard to strategic selection of partnerships:** “*Centers, and consequently CRPs, have been increasingly strategic in selecting partners. Centers have built on a long history of working with partners adding new partnerships according to need. CRPs have been influential in both increasing Centers’ collaboration within the programs and positioning of external partnerships along the impact pathway*” (page ix).
 - b. **In relation to partnerships with the private sector:** “*Reviewing the data on partnerships, the evaluation found that there has been some progress in engagement with private sector organization. The survey of critical partnerships showed that the percentage involving private sector partners increased over time, from 15% established before CRPs began, to 19% early in the CRP period and 28% established later*” (page 20).

¹ This commentary is prepared pursuant to Article 8.1(tt) of the *Charter of the CGIAR System Organization (June 2016)*, which provides that the System Management Board’s role is to ‘review IEA evaluations of the CGIAR Portfolio, functions and structures and provide comments to the System Council for its consideration’.

- c. **Considering the enabling environment:** *“Despite the transactions costs associated with the transition to common systems, the evaluation considers that the objective to harmonize administrative processes is positive and likely to facilitate partnership management and accountability”* (page 31).
- 4. Additionally, several improvements are also highlighted in the evaluation which will be useful for the CGIAR System to consider and the find the optimal way to act upon.
- 5. Particularly in the context of CGIAR’s new governance system, the Board has applied the guiding principle 12 of the CGIAR System Framework which states: *“The principle of subsidiarity should guide policies and implementation, and overreach must be avoided. The Centers should be responsible for system functions that can be more efficiently and effectively executed by them and by CGIAR research programs and for the use of funds provided to them. Center Boards have legal, governance and fiduciary responsibilities of their own, and these must be fully recognized and respected”*, in developing its comments and considering appropriate actions.

B. [Specific comments on recommendations](#)

- 6. **The evaluation team makes 6 recommendations**, with the first three related to strategic selection of partnerships, two related to the enabling environment and one focused on partnerships in action, which the Board comments on below.

Recommendation 1.

All CRPs should have a distinct partnership strategy and accompanying operational plan.

Strategies should clearly align approaches to partnerships with research strategies and theories of change, and make clear the objectives for partner selection and engagement to strengthen research implementation, delivery and scaling of results. Operational plans should provide a basis for monitoring progress in development of partnerships. There is value in developing these documents because of the collective analysis it will require, and to build on what was described in the Phase 2 proposals and ensure it is actioned.

Centers that have not recently **updated their partnership strategies** may find value in doing so. Documented strategies should reflect the internal relationships that Centers have in CRPs.

- 7. The System Management Board agrees with this recommendation, noting that partnership strategies were requested as part of the guidance for the full proposals for the 2017-2022 CGIAR Research Portfolio.
- 8. The Board also notes that the CRP annual plan of work and budget (POWB) template for 2017 requested information on plans and adjustments to partnership strategies and activities.

9. The performance-based management system currently being designed, with its results reporting and annual performance report elements, will be valuable tools to help capture progress and achievements in this area. It is noteworthy that one of the nine common indicators for aggregate reporting will be on partnerships.
10. The Board is interested in seeing how Centers partner in CRPs and plans for strengthening these important partnerships.

Recommendation 2.

Strategic reviews should be conducted of multi-stakeholder partnership models.

In order to optimize CGIAR's involvement and investment of resources in multi-stakeholder platforms, System-level strategic reviews should be conducted of the types of partnerships in which CGIAR has invested heavily or where it expects to expand participation. Global MSPs dealing with environment, food security and nutrition are a priority for such a review.

The aim of these reviews would be to draw lessons on the following:

- i. the objectives of CGIAR participation in this type of partnership
- ii. CGIAR's comparative advantage and role in these this type of multi-stakeholder platform;
- iii. resources and capacities involved; and
- iv. their potential to enhance program objectives, and to offer strategic guidance for future engagement.
- v. The evaluation sees this review as a follow-on exercise to the report on partnerships that has been published by the ISPC, and therefore something that it may be appropriate for the ISPC to undertake.

11. The Board supports better sharing and learning on multi-stakeholder partnership models across the System, potentially achieved through encouraging and supporting the CRPs and Centers to engage in a collective reflection on this rather than a formal review which may not capture the time and context specific nature of these models.
12. The performance-based management system currently being designed, with its results reporting and annual performance report elements will be valuable tools to help capture progress and achievements in this area. It is noteworthy that one of the nine common indicators for aggregate reporting will be on partnerships.
13. The CGIAR Country Collaboration approach which is currently being refined and strengthened offers a good opportunity for meaningful exchange amongst CGIAR and non-CGIAR entities on partnership models being used at country and regional levels.

Recommendation 3.

A strategic analysis should be conducted at System level for guiding the development of public-private partnership. Given the importance attached to partnership with the private sector and the uneven progress that has so far been made, an analysis should be carried out at System level of the following aspects:

- i. a broad plan for engagement with multinationals and smaller companies to best fit the needs of the SRF; and
- ii. drawing on experience to date, principles of engaging with private sector organizations according to their size and global reach.

The strategy should acknowledge both CGIAR's comparative advantage as a public-sector entity with field presence in developing countries, and any potential risks to reputation. The evaluation sees the strategy development process as a way of consolidating and expanding the thinking that has been done by CGIAR's governing bodies previously, and progressing towards implementable guidelines. It may be necessary to implement practical measures to support the implementation of the strategy, such as support on due diligence processes to assess partners and advice to Centers from IPR specialists.

- 14. The Board is a strong supporter of effective public-private partnerships where they can advance achievement of the CGIAR shared agenda, recognizing that the level at which these are engaged in is most often with the Centers. The Board has and will continue to encourage Centers to find appropriate ways to exchange experiences and ideas in this area.

Recommendation 4.

A position paper on funding should be prepared and used for influencing discussion and decisions on funding of partnerships. Given the growing contribution of bilateral funding to total CGIAR funding, the System Council should prepare guidance on how it expects CGIAR and Centers to contribute to supporting partnerships when funding is dominated by primarily bilateral projects, and how co-financing of research and development by partners and stakeholders can be best stimulated. This discussion should be linked to a reassessment of the scope of CGIAR's research portfolio and funding requirements relative to the SLOs. At the same time, in order to minimize disruption to partnerships resulting from problems with funding, the System Council and System Organization should work together to a) reduce to the extent possible large fluctuations and late delivery of Window 1 and 2 funding, and b) attempt to find a way to provide funding with multi-annual budgets.

- 15. The Board supports the concept of designing optimal arrangements that guide support to partnerships and co-financing by partners.
- 16. The Board believes that one key opportunity to consider adequate financing of non-CGIAR partners and stakeholders is at the mid-term review stage of the current portfolio, whilst remaining open and flexible to any earlier window that may arise for specific CRP or Platform elements. The Board will ensure that any guidance for new proposals (whether mid-stream or a new phase) takes this into account. With the System Management Board focusing on developing a new multi-year business cycle proposal for approval by the System Council in 2018 as a means to deliver more predictable and sustainable funding into the CGIAR Portfolio, it believes that this collaborative approach is preferable.

Recommendation 5.

System-wide organizational learning on using partnerships to best effect should be enhanced. The System Management Board should oversee activities to enhance organizational learning about partnerships through the following activities, with support from central funding:

- i. taking advantage of opportunities offered by existing activities that bring scientists together across Centers and CRPs;
- ii. preparing periodic meta-synthesis report on partnerships from narrative information in the annual reports; and
- iii. in selected countries that are a focus for the country collaboration process, introducing mechanisms by which locally-based Centers and their partners can reflect and learn together about their partnerships.

17. The Board agrees with this recommendation, noting that
 - a. The System Organization provides support to activities that bring scientists together cross Centers and CRPs, namely the Science Leaders community and its annual meeting, where exchange and learning on partnerships would be appropriate.
 - b. The new Annual Performance Report being developed will provide an effective mechanism to capture and showcase key information on partnerships.
 - c. The CGIAR Country Collaboration approach offers a mechanism for Centers, Programs and partners to reflect and learn together about their partnerships.

Recommendation 6.

Emerging and developing country NARS with strong capacity should be more closely involved in research management in CRPs. In order to strengthen relationships with those emerging and developing country NARS who have strong research capacity, CRPs and Centers should increase their efforts to involve these institutions in planning and management of CRP research. The evaluation recognizes that the recommendation to increase developing country NARS involvement in research management will be challenging to implement. As well as commitment from CGIAR, it requires that the home organizations of the science leaders from NARS encompasses regional or global development issues, and are willing to express their interest in CGIAR through engagement with the CRP process and investment of resources. For this reason, only a small number of developing country partners are likely to be interested and qualified for direct involvement in research management.

18. The Board agrees that CRPs can benefit from stronger and closer relationships with NARS, recognizing that both capacity and appropriate engagement mechanisms are key elements in directly involving national stakeholders in research management.
19. The Board will encourage CRPs to explore innovative modalities to involve National Agricultural Research Services in their research management.