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# Summary Report Evaluation of Results-Based Management in CGIAR

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## Summary Report

### Background and context

The CGIAR is a global agricultural research partnership that implements research through a network of research Centers and their partners. In 2009, following an independent external review, and as part of a comprehensive organization reform process, CGIAR committed to Results-Based Management (RBM), which was one of the core reform principles.

The CGIAR Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) is responsible for conducting external evaluations of CGIAR research, functions and structures. This formative evaluation of RBM in CGIAR was managed by IEA as part of its 2017 program of work, approved by the System Council. The evaluation, conducted over a 7-month period, was guided by Terms of Reference developed by IEA, and subsequently, a detailed Inception Report prepared by the independent Evaluation Team.

### Objectives and scope

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to learn lessons from the experience of CGIAR introducing and implementing different aspects of RBM. The objectives of the evaluation were two-fold: to provide evidence and lessons as an input to implementing an RBM framework during the most recent phase of CGIAR's Research Programs (CRPs); and to formulate recommendations for increasing the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of further RBM iterations.

The evaluation covers the period from initiation of the CRPs and related RBM initiatives in 2009, until end-July 2017. It examined the institutions and actors across CGIAR System for their role and involvement related to RBM. It assessed the extent to which relevant and useful lessons have been learned and invested as CGIAR has proceeded with RBM implementation across the System. The evaluation assessed the experience of CRPs, and Centers involved in them, with RBM, and especially their experience implementing RBM pilots in 2004.

### Methodology

Four key evaluation questions structured the design of the evaluation and focused on (i) the drivers and objectives of CGIAR's RBM; (ii) lessons from piloting RBM; (iii) support at System, CRP and Center level to facilitate implementation of RBM; and (iv) in light of experience optimizing RBM for CGIAR.

The evaluation adopted a consultative approach. It was desk-based and used extensive review of documents and interviews with representative group of stakeholders, including focus group discussions, for gathering evidence for qualitative analysis. Stakeholders were also engaged during the design phase and in discussions for validating the findings and conclusions. The evaluation team conducted three in-depth case studies on piloting RBM and two reference studies, one of them on a comparator organization. Meta-assessment of 15 CRP evaluations and program appraisals was conducted to consolidate information directly related to RBM implementation.

The evaluators drafted a Theory of Change for how RBM was envisaged to become a central management feature of the CGIAR System. This helped the evaluators understand and assess both how RBM has unfolded in CGIAR since 2009, and how it might have unfolded differently given other factors and management adjustments. The evaluators also developed a short-list of best practice principles for RBM. These the evaluation used as criteria to define and consistently assess the full spectrum of RBM components and practices across CGIAR.

### Main findings and conclusions

#### Drivers and objectives of CGIAR's RBM approach

The motivation for and the understood purpose of RBM have been mixed across CGIAR. There have been different drivers for RBM and this has created tension rather than supporting collaboration for performance management across CGIAR. The drivers for RBM included a) a reform process that called for strategic focus and results around CRPs, b) the interest of independent Centers to do meaningful research through integrated research programs, and c) the expectation that CRPs be accountable for System-level outcomes and impact.

CGIAR has lacked shared conceptual understanding of RBM. There has been no detailed RBM-specific policy that would have underpinned common conceptualization among stakeholders; nor a change management strategy, or theory of change to explain how CGIAR's RBM approach should unfold. At System level, CGIAR saw RBM mainly in relation to the SRF and results-based reporting to donors. This perspective tended to reduce the goal of RBM to closely aligning CRP objectives, indicators and targets within a single System-level framework. This in turn reduced the learning potential of RBM, and subverted CRP and Center performance management needs to more immediate System-level demands. It also created confusion about what RBM was meant to do for CGIAR and partially undermined the original (2009) motivation for RBM. Although CGIAR's goals are about contributing to development impacts, CGIAR is a research organization with a mandate to deliver research results. This important matter was not sufficiently considered.

The evaluation found that Centres, responding to a global context in which performance management requirements were becoming more pronounced, were already engaged to varying degree in RBM prior to the 2009 CGIAR reform commitments, and continued to be so during the period covered by this evaluation. Many of the Centres, that are the foundation of the CRPs, have embraced their own RBM approaches, and some are notably providing leadership from below to System-level efforts. CRPs, supported by their lead Centres, began to work with their own logic models and monitoring frameworks, and did their best to respond to requirements for outcome-oriented data. This compliance by CRPs to System-level requirements, became a strong driver for some aspects of RBM.

#### RBM at Centers and CRPs: learning from the RBM pilots

The 2014 pilots, supported by USD 4 million of specially designated funds, were an important System-funded initiative that led to significant RBM learning within the CRPs where the piloting took place. The evaluation found that, through these pilots, CRPs engaged with different RBM principles (as

defined by the evaluators). The CRPs that were involved showed an interest and willingness to use the RBM approach to enhance effectiveness during the pilot and beyond. These were valued learning opportunities and the RBM pilots were extensively documented. Learning benefitted many participating Centers and informally supported cross-CRP learning and collaboration.

Those directly involved in the pilots expected that learning from them would be collated and used to boost System-wide knowledge of RBM good practice. Unfortunately, the process of sharing lessons learned across CRPs was not systematic and the pilots did not lead to a formal consolidation of lessons learned to inform subsequent development of RBM for CGIAR. Instead, the pilots were primarily tuned to make sense and meaning from a CRP and Center perspective, and as such did not fully serve System-level learning or outcome reporting requirements. The System-level did benefit from the experience of individuals involved in the pilots, who continued to share experience, for example, through the processes to develop harmonized indicators.

Importantly, each CRP, and their leading research Centers, have taken learning journeys to adopt RBM, and there has been significant progress in developing their RBM-related processes, tools, and methods. The evaluation found that within CRPs, and some Centers, there has been a positive dynamic of trying to better understand and embrace RBM, making it work for enhanced effectiveness of agricultural research. Some Centers have made significant investment in RBM and have provided strong leadership and support for RBM within CRPs. A nascent culture shift has taken place towards performance management. Without suggesting that Centres have invested all the necessary capacity, and are fully implementing RBM, a key finding was that Centres are not blocking the full embrace of RBM by CGIAR.

### **Management support for RBM**

The evaluation found that management support for RBM within CGIAR pulls in two directions: CRP-based RBM application focuses on making RBM work for the CRPs with a mixed level of support from participating Centers. At the same time, the System level strives to align indicators, targets and related reporting to serve System-level interests and funding decisions. RBM guidance from the System to the CRPs has been paper-based, limited mostly to provision of a SRF, call-for-proposal guidelines and templates for reporting. This creates tension between what the System thinks it needs from CRPs, and what CRPs consider to be realistic and meaningful given their limited spheres of control and influence. Tension is exacerbated by the System attempting to use the same outcome statements and indicators for all CRPs. It is doubtful that striving for full alignment of CRP results to System-level SRF outcomes, indicators and targets will lead to better CGIAR results reporting. Closing attribution gaps will be impossible, and comparing different types of CRPs using one set of common indicators is unlikely to satisfy any stakeholder group. Accountability as such has not been the problem, but the emphasis on control by the System and compliance by CRPs based on a standard set of indicators created tension and a heavy administrative burden on Centers implementing CRPs.

Important progress has clearly been made for adapting RBM to the unique CGIAR context. Experience, knowledge and skills have been accumulated, and an array of support to help CRPs implement RBM have been introduced. These provide experience which CGIAR can build on. However, not all this



support was found to have been adequate and appropriate. For example, System-level support for development of a) IDO indicators, b) a comprehensive CGIAR monitoring and evaluation framework, and c) an appropriate CGIAR management information system (MIS) have not been effective or sufficient. There was System-level investment, for example, on the One Corporate System, and for one year of RBM piloting, but this was to some extent detached from CRP requirements. While important steps towards developing MISs have been made by a few CRPs, the evaluators found broad agreement that MIS is presently underdeveloped both at CRP and System levels and System-level investment has been largely absent.

Full acknowledgement of the complex realities and ambitious agendas of CRP work, and using RBM to learn and innovate in an open and transparent manner demands appropriate leadership. Leadership needs to become more engaged in consciously creating an enabling environment for RBM. Successful RBM within CGIAR will require empowered RBM champions working together at different levels of CGIAR. More advocacy of RBM for sense-making, learning, and partnership building, and more credible reporting on performance and results that considers the unique context of each CRP, would aid further adoption of RBM.

Further adoption of RBM by CGIAR requires investment and capacity building for the RBM function. This so far has been insufficient, or limited resources have been used to comply with System demands for data and reporting upwards. Structures are already in place to support RBM. These include the independent advisory bodies, the communities of practice and the System Management Office. Unfortunately, these important bodies tend to work too much in silos, without an overarching capacity building and collaborative work plan to build further momentum for RBM across CGIAR.

There is a need to be accountable at System level, and to be able to produce reports that both reflect the common vision and perspective to which all CRPs contribute and highlight CRP-specific results through credible outcome and impact narratives. CRP evaluations also provide comprehensive coverage of performance issues, but to-date the System Council has not discussed or used such performance information as much as it could have. Attempts to use harmonized indicators to collect meaningful performance data from CRPs on progress in achieving System-level outcomes have been mostly unsuccessful and unhelpful. The evaluation concludes that there is a need to decouple System-level performance measurement from the performance management led by CRPs and Centers.

### **RBM remains a relevant management approach for CGIAR**

Operationalizing RBM in CGIAR's complex structure and for its research mandate has been problematic. However, despite the level of confusion created, and the challenges remaining, the evaluation team concludes that RBM is a suitable management approach for CGIAR's research context and remains relevant to CGIAR and its CRPs. The extensive discussion and learning around how to measure CGIAR's outcomes will be helpful in guiding the way forward. Further innovation by CRPs and Centers can be sustained and even accelerated. To improve relevance, RBM should be conceived by CGIAR as a holistic approach that serves the CRPs and Centers and their respective mandates. A prerequisite for implementing this management approach in CGIAR is that the System's conceptualization of RBM is more effectively aligned with how the CRPs and Centers understand,

experience and support it. The overall purpose of increasing CGIAR effectiveness using this approach can potentially help to unite key stakeholders in the face of unstable funding. The evaluation concludes that the call for CGIAR to embrace good-practice RBM is stronger today than it was in 2009 when the commitment to performance management became a cornerstone of its organizational reform process.

### Recommendations

Many recommendations are eluded to in the main body of this report. To assure focus on the most prominent issues, a list of 5 key practical and feasible recommendations directly linked to the findings and conclusions, are presented by the evaluation:

#### **Recommendation 1 – Develop system-level conceptualization and guidance for RBM**

The CGIAR System Organization should develop a conceptual paper that describes its vision, objectives expected results, and implications from using an RBM approach that embraces good practice principles. The paper should include a theory of change (considering the one developed by this evaluation) that describes how this management approach is expected to make a difference for CGIAR at System, CRP and Center levels, and what moving in that direction is anticipated to involve both in strategic and operational terms. This is not about creating a top-down reference framework to comply with, but something that can help RBM better serve CGIAR in fulfilling its mission at all levels. The SRF, in its periodic iterations, should be aligned with this RBM conceptualization and guidance paper.

In its conceptualization of RBM, the CGIAR should embrace both accountability and learning as equally important for adaptive management. Further adaptations of RBM by CGIAR should balance these two RBM competencies and champion both equally. The foundation of CGIAR's RBM should be built on capacity-based accountability; the notion that member Centers are centres of excellence, that CRPs bring together enormous organizational capacity, and that System-level structures that support RBM (SMO, IEA, ISPC/SPIA) provide investors with a foundation for due-diligence and results accountability. Accountability, should embrace not just the need to provide credible performance data, but also to support learning i.e. evidence of effective learning as an important component of accountability.

#### **Recommendation 2 – At System level, decouple budget allocation and performance assessment**

The System should support the development of a RBM framework that has dual functions: 1) helping CRPs (and Centers) further develop their own internal and cross-Center RBM processes, and 2) helping the CRPs report on outcomes and impacts from their research as contribution to CGIAR's collective results. This means "letting go to get more": system-level information needs should serve related but distinct purposes of prioritizing CRP research and allocating budgets, and this should be decoupled from CRP and Center efforts to manage their own results frameworks.

Allocation of budgets, and budget shortfalls, should be based holistically on an array of credible types of performance information and on considerations of research priorities for CGIAR, and not rely on reported achievements against targets for a single set of SRF outcome indicators. Annual performance assessment and performance reporting by the SMO should be based on the latest information from a

constantly renewed dashboard fed by IEA evaluation reports, ISPC proposal and impact assessment work, annual CRP reports related to their own performance frameworks, and selected, valid operational indicators.

### **Recommendation 3 – Invest in CRP driven, system-relevant Management Information Systems**

RBM is based on an ability to collect, analyse and use massive amounts of data that can be safely stored and easily accessed and sorted. This is doubly the case for CGIAR which works to coordinate efforts of a complex array of CRPs and a large number of implementing partners. Significant investment in MISs is a pre-requisite for CGIAR's success with the RBM approach. When building CGIAR's MIS, CRP and Center needs must come first. As such, the System should support the ongoing development of MARLO and similar initiatives in CGIAR, if seen promising, with annual core funding. The challenge is to make the systems simple enough to make RBM easier rather than more complicated.

### **Recommendation 4 – Identify and empower RBM support function at System level**

Support for RBM from System level should be more conscious and coherent than in the past and the RBM function should be clearly mandated to provide practical and helpful RBM services directed to the needs of the CRPs. There should be at least one SMO-based, full-time specialist with competence in RBM and with specific terms of reference to encourage collaboration around shared MISs, shared learning, and innovation related to RBM process and tools. The schedule for external evaluations and impact assessments should be coherent and mutually supportive. The SMO should lead the development of best practice RBM that draws on relevant technical expertise from IEA and SPIA as independent advisory bodies. The goal should be to strengthen CGIAR's vision for RBM best practice, and have the System Organization more successfully conceptualize and coordinate the further adaptation and adoption of effective RBM.

### **Recommendation 5 – Develop and implement annual RBM capacity building work plans**

The SMO should prepare an annual workplan for RBM capacity building and learning, and a budget should be allocated for the priority initiatives outlined in the work breakdown structure of that work plan. In 2014, RBM piloting was allocated USD 4 million for learning. This is an indication of the type and level of investment, targeted to support RBM adaptation, learning and sharing, that is needed on an annual basis. The following elements should be a central part of ongoing RBM capacity building efforts:

- A cascading range of appropriate experts should be identified as **RBM champions** from Centers, to CRPs, to System. These champions should have clear responsibilities to support RBM imbedded in their individual terms of reference and job descriptions. These RBM champions should together identify and support priority RBM capacity building initiatives and advocate collectively for donor support. The focus of this support should be on making RBM work for CRPs in enhancing and sustaining their effectiveness.



- An active **CGIAR monitoring, evaluation and learning community of practice** should continue to be supported, and be facilitated by the SMO. It should be directed by CRP priorities and consciously embrace RBM best-practice principles.
- To further boost RBM learning and expertise, CGIAR should provide **an innovation fund** that serves CRP-based learning and development of practical tools and options related to RBM.