

EVALUATION OF THE INDEPENDENT SCIENCE AND PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL (ISPC) MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

This management response reflects the consolidated views of the ISPC including input from both outgoing and incoming SPIA Chairs and the Secretariat.

The Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC) greatly appreciates the time, effort and thoughtfulness of the Evaluators in conducting this evaluation, as well as the considerable challenges faced in terms of time and budget constraints. We also appreciate that the evaluation team took on board many of the comments we made on the first draft of the report – as well as incorporating factual corrections that were suggested. We do consider, however, that the extent of the radical change recommended is not well supported by the evidence provided on the responses from interviews and surveys conducted across the System.

ISPC notes with satisfaction the following findings of the evaluation:

- The ISPC and Secretariat deliver significant output professionally;
- That the ISPC has generated considerable value in various ways (e.g. in terms of global public goods, adding value to the research program of the System as a whole through CRP assessment activities and through the work of SPIA) albeit qualified in some cases. (See Evaluation finding on ISPC Value on Page 48);
- The functional performance of the ISPC as a whole, and in its areas of activity is good, especially given the limitations associated with the ongoing change in the System and the lack of formal ISPC terms of reference;
- The operational performance of the ISPC as a whole and in its areas of activity is very good. The ISPC, its Secretariat, and especially its Chair are to be commended for such a strong operational performance in the face of a considerable workload on CRP proposal reviews and the recent changes in CGIAR governance and funding arrangements.

We also appreciate the many positive comments on activities and outputs of Council and of individual work streams, as well as on the strong culture of self-evaluation and reflection. The importance of ISPC as the only entity that ‘looks across the entire CGIAR System’ is also appropriately noted.

We have been aware for some time of some key points the evaluation makes – e.g. “*many in the system suggest that ISPC’s role needs to change significantly*” or “*whether the ISPC is value for money is questioned by many.*” We have responded through a concerted effort to identify the demand for our services and, as part of this, developed a new Theory of Change in 2016 that identified work streams similar to those under consideration by SIMEC. We note that difficulty reconciling diverse views within the decision making bodies of CGIAR is an ongoing challenge that is very relevant to this evaluation and our response.

Accurate representation of the activities of the ISPC was also hampered (understandably given budget restrictions and timing) by the limited window of time considered by the Evaluation team. The report

refers to a “snapshot” of ISPC work which was taken following a period of intense ISPC activity focused primarily on the reviews of CRPs. This had two consequences: first, it gave an above average reflection of the number of days Council allocated to ISPC work above the “steady state”. Second, the CRP review process was undertaken during a period of widely fluctuating funding and a lack of consensus across the System on the priority use of Window 1 and 2 funding. Neither of these points were registered by the Evaluation team as significant factors but they certainly had a major impact on ISPC efficiency.

Despite our concern with some of the approaches and findings, we wholeheartedly agree with the overarching conclusions that underlie the recommendations, in particular:

- That clearer and stronger linkages should be established between the advisory body and both SC and SMB;
- That the advisory body should focus on high-level strategic and forward-looking issues, and not get caught up “in the weeds”;
- That reducing cost is essential given the current financial situation of CGIAR.

ISPC COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations are unusual in that the expected implementer is not the body being evaluated. A standard response of how they would be acted upon is therefore not appropriate. Instead we are taking the opportunity to comment based on our 6 years of operation, before, during and after the most recent governance reform.

Structure of our comments. The evaluation report provided one major and pivotal recommendation (e.g. Recommendation 1) and then a set of recommendations structured around 3 options for the structure of the science body. These options are the following: 1) New advisory body 2) Ad hoc Advice and 3) ISPC modifies its operations. We have focused our comments on Recommendation 1 and the Recommendations 2-5 under Option 1 as these were the preferred options presented by the evaluation team. However we have also provided an appendix which provides the **ISPC Views on Key Elements of CGIAR Science Advisory Services**. This lays out how we envision Option 3 - which is our preferred option – could be implemented.

For each of the recommendations we have responded to, we have copied the relevant text from the evaluation recommendations (which have somewhat confusing numbering). The evaluation text is in italic script and our response in bold type.

Recommendation 1 – establishing what kind of advice and advisory structures are needed. *“That the System Council, including through its SIMEC, continues to move its focus from trying to finalize terms of reference for advisory bodies to re-addressing first the questions of exactly what types of advice the System needs, secondly how to measure the quality of this advice, and after these matters are settled, how that advice is best commissioned and delivered, be it via standing committees or specially-commissioned ad hoc arrangements, or a mixture of the two.”*

Comment: By identifying the need for clarity of what the System Council expects of the ISPC as the first recommendation, the Evaluation Team have identified a major constraint to the success of any advisory body. We welcome the fact that this is the first recommendation *and* that it includes advice that a stepwise process be taken to deciding on options. This lack of clarity has been the source of major

frustration within the ISPC since its inception (starting e.g. with confusion over what is meant by “independent” and “partnership”). Thus, we welcome SIMEC’s recent activities in this regard, but we note that there remains a lack of consensus on the full nature of advisory services desired – e.g. the lack of agreement during the recent SIMEC briefing of the System Council. Some diversity of opinion between donors is to be expected. However, it is important to identify a way of moving forward expeditiously. We acknowledge emerging unanimity on the need for activities relating to Foresight, Impact Assessment and stronger links to development implementation. Expert assessment of proposals will also be needed. In the final section of our response we put forward a proposal on structuring an advisory body to meet these needs.

Recommendation 2 – a possible new advisory body *“That, if the System Council decides to proceed with a standing committee, it avoids minor adjustments to the current ISPC given the widespread unease with the ISPC, and considers more radical change by establishing a new, high-level and eminent science/research/ innovation/development body with a new name and a new mission, with the characteristics set out below. This body would be a formal but independently constituted and operated sub-committee of the System Council and would have strong links to the System Management Board.”*

Comment: The ISPC has been uncomfortable with the lack of definition of its role vis-a-vis the SMB since the governance reform. Nonetheless, we have provided information to the SMB on request and have also provided active input, e.g. as an active observer on the SMB on the sub-committee on governance. It is assumed that SMB views on the future of advisory bodies have been sought and that these will form part of the evidence considered during the discussion on this item at SC5.

“It would receive formal references from both bodies, requesting advice and guidance both on major science/research/innovation/development issues and on processes. In turn, the new body would provide the advice needed back to these bodies within agreed timeframes. It would also have the ability to send advice it initiated itself to the two bodies for consideration. The governing bodies would maintain the discipline of formally responding to the advice.”

Since the governance changes in 2016, the ISPC has been providing advice to both the SC and the SMB, generally in the form of written comments and inputs to position papers but also significantly through participation in calls and meetings. Such activity has represented a significant amount of time commitment on the part of ISPC. However, since there is no mechanism for making this advice transparent, it is easily overlooked. We suggest this may be remedied through institution of more formal mechanisms as proposed in the Appendix.

“Operationally, the new body would have strong working links with sub-committees of both bodies (such as their SIMECs) and would be served by a high-quality secretariat operating to support the independent thinking of the new body but maintaining strong links with the System Office. Options for enhancing these links and achieving greater efficiency and economies of scale should be carefully considered by the System Council in consultation with the new body and System Office.”

This recommendation lacks clarity. It suggests that it is the experts who would have interactions with the sub-committees - yet if they have only 15 days, it is unrealistic to expect there would be time to deliver measurable outputs and to interact with both the committees and with the SC and SMB. As mentioned above, the absence of written records of the extent and depth of ISPC activity in response to requests for inputs underpins its lack of visibility.

“The membership of the new advisory would be relatively small with up to six members in addition to the chair.....Their eminence would likely limit their availability to serve more than, say, 15 days a year. The

members would be drawn from diverse backgrounds. Gender balance and appointment of people from developing countries would be important.”

Our experience has indicated that achieving gender, geographical and disciplinary balance in six members could prove challenging. About 15 to 20 days seems reasonable if proposal assessment is not included.

“Terms would be 3- 5 years with a rolling appointment structure so the whole body does not turn over at once. Given the limited time availability of members, it will be important for the body to be supported by strong secretariat that can work with others to assist the System Organization to follow through on decisions about science, research, innovation and development impact.”

We would agree that strong professional support is essential for delivery. The CGIAR System is complex, particularly with reference to the matrix management of CRPs and Centers and the funding windows. Having the support of a professional team who understand the impact on research quality across the System will be essential for efficient functioning of an expert advisory group with reduced number of days and who have not had the advantage of immersing themselves in the CRP proposals!

Overall comments on Recommendation 2:

We suggest that the System would benefit from maintaining the aspects of ISPC that have allowed it to be successful in delivering high quality outputs, and focus on changes that address the issues raised by the evaluation. These include an explicit mechanism for expressing System demands for advisory services, and active participation in SIMEC of both System Council and SMB, as well as a reduced Council size. In the effort to improve the effectiveness of the System advisory services we suggest that Option 3, Recommendation 2 (para 6.5) which involves a process of reforming advisory services to respond to shortcomings identified by the evaluation through a consultative process between the current ISPC, SIMEC and the System Council is the best way to retain the value already generated – and effectively move ahead to enhancing that value in ways that best serve the System Council. It is important to estimate the costs of the time and the direct costs that would be required to recreate the high functionality of the current ISPC in a new body.

Recommendation 3 – a simple measure of success. *“That the System Council adopts a relatively simple metric for assessing success of the new body, such as that the System Council and System Management Board find their interactions with the new body deliver significant insights and help to the System Council and SMB in major areas of concern. The success or otherwise of the body would be assessed at least once annually. If it is not meeting expectations, it should be disbanded quickly and another mechanism such as commissioning ad hoc advice substituted.*

As well the new body would also need to:

- be seen to add significant value to the System in terms of reaching the System goals more effectively and sooner;*
- provide advice the System absorbs and uses;*
- be perceived as good value for money.”*

Comments: We welcome the suggestion of regularly assessing the success of advisory services, but if the current mechanism is disbanded, it is unlikely that any significant replacement body could get up to speed within one year for the reasons of the complexity of the System. We agree that having measurable indicators of success or Key Performance Indicators would help to clarify the relationship between the advisory body and its owner(s) but suggest that this cannot be boiled down to only one measure.

Recommendation 4 – some existing structures will be needed to support the new body. *“That, while the new advisory body would offer high-level commentary on issues such as mechanisms for research assessment, evaluation and metrics, specialist bodies such as SPIA and specially constituted assessment panels would still be needed to feed into the new advisory body and to carry out the detailed work involved in evaluations, assessments and measuring research quality.”*

Comments: We agree that specialist bodies will still be needed, but we would add that the question of critical mass needs to be considered for quality advice to be delivered. In the case of SPIA for example, there has been an analysis of the value of being part of ISPC and the conclusion is that indeed it has been very valuable, both for facilitating interactions with CGIAR management while safeguarding independence.

Recommendation 5 – transition arrangements *“That, given the multi-year hiatus on the formal arrangements for high-level science advice to the System, any new body should be planned to commence by end of 2018 at the latest and the current ISPC would finish up by the same time.”*

Comments: We support the suggestion of having a one year transition period if a radical reform of the current ISPC goes forward, since it will take some time to make necessary administrative arrangements, and to ensure that value from activities of the current ISPC are realized.

Appendix: ISPC Views on Key Elements of CGIAR Science Advisory Services

With respect to the options for future provision of science advice, rather than comment on each one, we prefer to suggest principles based on our experience, as well as on our understanding of emerging areas of potential agreement. We would be happy to discuss these with SIMEC and the SC.

- a. Council consisting of 5-6 members who are globally recognized experts in fields related to current *and expected future* domains of CGIAR research, with both gender and geographic (in addition to disciplinary) balance. Selection through SIMEC of SC. Time allotted to duties: 15-20 days/year.
- b. Work program: set in agreement with System Council, reported upon and updated on an annual basis at SC meeting.
- c. Secretariat: located in Rome (to facilitate continuity, continue to strengthen emerging collaboration with development agencies and maintain close links with Rome-based impact assessment community) with potential for some changes in hosting agreement and cost sharing, and further cost savings through combining administrative operations with IEA.
- d. Relationship to SMB and SMO: Once the advisory body agrees on the annual work plan and budget with the System Council, it could have an annual consultation with the SMB to identify ways in which to connect ISPC results to system outcomes. The advisory body would be independent of SMO, however, working in close cooperation through membership on the SMB, SIMEC, as well as task forces aimed at System-wide issues such as performance management.
- e. Budget: the budget discussions should follow from agreement on the functions though there is undoubtedly scope for reduction.
- f. Composition of work program: generally high level and strategic.
 - Foresight work program: includes an annual horizon scanning function, together with bi-annual scenario analysis indicating major risk and opportunities specific to CGIAR System.
 - SPiA: continues to provide rigorous evidence on the impacts at the System level of past CGIAR activities as well as expanding capacity building and methodological advances under a SIAC Phase II program.
 - Program review and performance assessment: Council members develop criteria for research reviews and also participate in periodic review regarding overall content of the CRP portfolio. They also act as a “moderating panel” integrating the views of commissioned external experts, whose reviews are made available to proponents.
 - Closer links to development implementation: considerable momentum has been generated in the new work stream on innovation and development. Including experts from the private sector and CSOs either as full members or (if precluded by donor regulations) as co-opted members or consultants in the advisory body would help to accelerate progress. The activities here could include joint programming with major agricultural development agencies (FAO, IFAD and national agencies) on development of innovation facilities and processes to better link research to action and impact.