CGIAR
EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS):

A WORKING PAPER IN SUPPORT OF DELIVERY ON THE FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN CGIAR'S WORKPLACES AND THE ACCOMPANYING ACTION PLAN (2020-2021)

Gender, Diversity and Inclusion in CGIAR's Workplaces

CGIAR

1. Introduction

This Working Paper is in support of the implementation of activities under the approved Framework for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) in CGIAR's Workplaces, and the accompanying Action Plan (2020-2021). Principle 1 of the GDI Framework states a commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion and includes a specific Objective (# 1.3): **Open, voluntary platforms are created where staff can gather in communities to share common interests, concerns and support.** Under this objective are specific deliverables:

> 1.3.1   *CGIAR Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) leverage existing platforms and networks to promote diversity, facilitate member networking, promote belonging, and provide voice to a diverse range of groups.*
>
> 1.3.2   *ERGs serve as partners in advancing GDI knowledge bringing valued perspectives to the CGIAR's workplaces and to the substantive work of CGIAR (linked to Principle 3 to address biases)*

The specific target set for mid-2020 in this area is that a Consultation process has been completed which explores which ERGs to establish.

This target was met during the first global Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Workshop, which was held from 16-20 March 2020. The results are outlined later in this report and the workshop report is attached in Annex A.

The specific targets to be met by the end of 2020 are:

> a.   *A range of pioneering ERGs are launched, such as Women Scientists, People with Disabilities and Pride@Work/LGBTIQA+, and other groups addressing diversity dimensions, where the legal context permits this*
>
> b.   *ERGs involved in the onboarding process and acting as outreach channels for diverse talent acquisition*
>
> c.   *ERGs share activities and progress.*

This report describes CGIAR's understanding of ERGs, and the next steps that will be taken to meet the GDI Action Plan targets.

2. Defining ERGs

The approved Action Plan for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion in CGIAR's Workplaces (2020-2021) defines "employee resource groups" or "ERGs" as being *groups of individuals within workplaces who join together in a network, based on shared characteristics, or life experiences. ERGs provide support and contribute to a sense of belonging and inclusive workplaces.*

ERGs are also referred to as: affinity groups, advocacy groups and networks. They all refer to groups of employees or staff that have formally connected in the workplace based on a shared diversity characteristic such as gender, generation, culture, ethnicity, disability, LGBTQ, etc., or based on an intersectional group such as Women in Science.

The purpose of an ERG is to provide support to members, enhance career opportunities, assist in personal development, advocacy, and/or in some cases directly support the organization externally in better serving its diverse clients. ERGs are useful organizational structures that can lead to greater engagement, inclusion and a stronger sense of belonging in the organization, which in turn can lead to improved motivation, morale and innovation.

ERGs have been present in organizations for well over 40 years. They began in the USA as ethnic-based groups of employees advocating for equal opportunity and equal pay. Today ERGs (or employee networks or affinity groups) are commonplace across organizations and are usually structured within Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs. By as early as 2007, 90% of Fortune 500 companies had ERGs, and in the last two decades they have gone global, starting out primarily with women's ERGs and now increasingly including LGBTQ employees and people with disabilities. ERGs are now prevalent in Asia and Latin America, in addition to North America and Europe.

The case for ERGs, through existing research and benchmarking, shows that they can benefit organizations in a number of areas, including:

1. **Workforce Talent and Workplace Culture**: ERGs can assist with recruiting diverse candidates, promoting leadership and professional development activities, increasing engagement and morale, and providing learning on D&I topics.
2. **Business impact**: ERGs can support innovative development and research by ensuring diverse perspectives; they may also add value in managing diverse stakeholder relationships.
3. **Community and sustainability**: ERGs can organize external events with community partners and increase awareness of specific D&I issues.

The literature[1] also shows that ERGs can provide a variety of benefits. For employees, group membership affords exposure to professional development, increased sense of belonging and engagement, and greater visibility with senior leaders. For employees who assume ERG leadership responsibilities, they develop strategic capabilities and get to work closely with senior leaders and executive sponsors.

In recognition of the key role that ERGs can bring to attaining CGIAR's vision[2] for GDI in the workplace, work has been initiated towards delivery on the related sections of the Action Plan.

3.   ERGs in CGIAR: Current state analysis

Prior to the first global Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Workshop in March 2020, participating Centers/Alliances were requested to complete a pre-workshop assessment that provided an overview of the current state of ERGs cross-System. The 9 responses provided valuable insights, confirming that 4 Centers/Alliances have no ERGs. The other 5 Centers/Alliances have a GDI committee, a Gender and Diversity (G&D) advisory team, a D&I task force, a Women in Africa and a Women in India network, respectively. Feedback was mixed on their effectiveness.

Through a series of activities at the March GDI workshop, including polling and moderated discussions, the following findings emerged:

- Participants agreed that benefits could be gained from cross-System collaboration on ERGs. The greatest preference was for a shared "Women in Research & Science" ERG with 64% in favour.
- There was also a strong preference for an ERG on Wellbeing -- especially given the unprecedented global challenges presented by Covid-19.
- Other options considered were "Young New Hires" and/or "New parents / Caregivers".
- ERGs with less support included a Disability ERG (44% favourable) and a LGBTQIA+ ERG (40% favourable).

An important outcome from the Workshop was the agreement to establish two cross-System ERGs in 2020: "Women in Research & Science" ERG and a "Wellbeing" ERG.

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1   Sources: The case for employee resource groups: A review and social identity theory-based research agenda; Theresa M. Welbourne, Personnel Review, 2017; "What's Next for Employee Groups?" The Conference Board Research Report, 2019; ERG Leadership Handbook, Diversity Best Practices; The Effects of Employee Resource Groups on Work Engagement and Workplace Inclusion, Ada T. T. T. Cenkci , Jeffrey Zimmerman, Tuba Bircan, The International Journal of Organizational Diversity, 2019.

2   As stated in the Framework for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion in CGIAR's Workplaces, "CGIAR's workplaces are enabling and inclusive. Diversity in all its dimensions is embraces and every person is supported to reach their full potential, so as to drive the engagement and innovation needed for a world free of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation"

4. Comparative Lessons Learned

From the varied literature on ERGs, some comparative lessons emerge for international organizations. One example is **UN Globe**, which is an ERG across the United Nations system for LGBTI issues – they advocate for the equality of LGBTI staff in the UN system and in peacekeeping operations. UN Globe has a Statute (last revised in 2012) that serves the organization's charter, covering the ERG's mission, membership, meetings, officers, etc. Aside from their advocacy work on the elimination of homophobia and transphobia in the workplace, providing safe and equal mobility and opportunity, and equality in parental leave and pension benefits, UN Globe also recently launched an internship program to better support the careers of people who identify as LGBTI. For more information see: www.unglobe.org

Global ERGs have greater penetration in the corporate world. One example is **Nielsen**, the media giant; see: https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/. They have 9 ERGs across 70+ countries, with 7,000+ active members, and with each country selecting which ERGs to activate locally, based on local and cultural factors.

Another Example is **Zurich Insurance** which is EDGE-certified and has 6 global ERGs. The ERGs were not regarded as well integrated into the business so their solution was to develop a forum and tools to institutionalize cross-ERG collaboration. This led to consistency in ERG approaches and successful collaboration with well over 2,000 ERG participants; see: https://www.zurich.com/en/careers/our-people

Bayer has Business Resource Groups (BRGs) which are a vital part of Bayer's Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) efforts, as they assist Bayer with cultivating an inclusive workplace and bringing targeted products and services to customers. BRGs are voluntary, company sponsored groups of employees who work together to promote cultural diversity, awareness and I&D education. The nine BRGs (catering to: women, a range of ethnicities, disability, LGBT+, new leaders, family and veterans) present opportunities for employees to participate in on-the-job leadership development experiences at the site, national and global level that align with Bayer values. See: https://www.bayer.us/en/corporate-responsibility/diversity-inclusion/

At the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, the Women Connect ERG started a Male Allies initiative in an effort to explore the role of men as supporters of women inside and outside the workplace. Supporters of the initiative held an event to co-create an '11 Ways To Be a Male Ally' tip sheet, which contains simple, accessible ways for men to champion, empower, and elevate female colleagues. The tip sheet has been well received and continues to create dialogue as it has been posted in copy rooms and cubicles, forwarded internally and externally, and was recently highlighted by Melinda. In a show of transparency and trust, two male directors sent it to their teams with a request to hold them accountable to the actions on the tip sheet. (See their publication: Innovative Practices for Leading Culture, 2017.)

DFID has a range of 14 staff networks which continue to play a vital role in delivering workplace inclusion for all their employees. The value of the networks is recognized in DFID and they encourage those who play key roles in networks to include this as part of their performance objectives. An example is the women's network, whose overall objective is to support and inspire women at all levels in DFID to achieve their potential. Its work focuses on a number of activities, such as:

- inspiring women - through events, external speakers, workshops and seminars
- building confidence - through networking, mentoring and learning from others
- empowering women - overcoming barriers to success and engaging on key issues that affect them

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-gender-pay-gap-report-2019

At the US **Food & Drug Administration** (FDA) affinity groups (AGs) and/or employee resource groups (ERGs) work together to support and enhance diversity and inclusion and foster collaboration to promote hiring, retention and career development of underrepresented groups; there are nine such groups:

- ACED (Advisory Committee for Employees with Disabilities)
- ApaNet (Asian Pacific American Network)
- BIG (Blacks in Government)
- FDA Globe (LGBTQ employees)
- MVAG (FDA Military Veterans Advisory Group)
- FEW (Federal Employed Women)
- FIIG (FDA Interfaith Insight Group)
- HOLA FDA (Hispanic Employee Resource Group)
- SHIP (Society of Hispanic Professionals)

See: https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/center-veterinary-medicine/fda-affinity-groups-and-employee-resource-groups

In a time of crisis – with COVID-19 changing our working conditions globally – we find reports of ERGs being of great help to organizations:

"...today, when fear is escalating from the unknowns associated with the coronavirus, ERGs can be a tool to help drive higher levels of coping within an organization. The bottom-up approach that is an ERG provides a tool that can be leveraged to help isolated employees who are self-quarantined or who are working from home. Employees trust their peers, and ERG leaders."

See: https://morningconsult.com/opinions/how-employee-resource-groups-can-help-manage-covid-19-or-coronavirus-fears/

"ERGs can help to quantify the "differences that have been valued" over the last decade so they are tangibly valued when restructuring occurs. Our research shows that diversity and inclusion efforts are central to financial success during a recession. The organizations that most consistently created a great workplace experience for all their people outperformed peers in the last recession."

See: https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/making-it-through-the-covid-19-crisis-together-lessons-from-our-recent-webinars

" ..we recommend creating an ERG with mental health as the primary focus, or, at a minimum, defining mental health as a focus area of a more broadly defined ERG. Doing so helps narrow the focus and reduces barriers to entry for people who may not identify with the larger group.

Further, ERGs that try to address all aspects of wellness or disability, without distinction, run the risk of "charter overload," according to Rachel Parrott, diversity & inclusion manager at New Relic… Among the most powerful tools that an ERG has is the ability to create a forum for storytelling… Like any initiative, ERGs that are under¬resourced and lack real influence will do little to change the overall culture at a company. However, if integrated with company priorities, they can be a powerful grassroots way of creating healthy workplaces. As companies continue to weather the Covid¬19 outbreak and plan for a return to the office, those who have effective mental health ERGs, as part of a broader mental health strategy, will see higher engagement, increased productivity, and fewer instances of burnout

See: https://hbr.org/2020/05/how-to-form-a-mental-health-employee-resource-group

In considering how best to advance ERGs in a manner that is efficient, effective, sustainable and in keeping with CGIAR's vision for workplace GDI, a number of these lessons learned have been incorporated into a proposed ERG vision and architecture for CGIAR.

5. The proposed CGIAR ERG Vision and Architecture

ERGs do not exist in a vacuum. Almost all organizations that launch ERGs do it under a D&I or GDI framework, so that there is alignment between the organization's mission and goals, and the ERG. Now that CGIAR has a GDI Framework and Action Plan, and a GDI Network, it makes sense to launch ERGs under that architecture.

The proposed CGIAR vision is that all Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led groups that foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with our shared mission, values, practices and objectives.

Each ERG will be inclusive in nature and open to all CGIAR staff. Membership of an ERG will mean that an individual has signed up to receive communications about that ERG and is alerted to all ERG-related events. Each member can choose to participate in the ERG as best suits them.

In CGIAR, each cross-System ERG will evolve according to the needs of their membership. However, a key activity of all ERGs will be to provide input and feedback to the System GDI Function in support of the implementation of the approved GDI Framework and Action Plan.

The proposed approach to operationalization includes:

- The creation of an ERG Coordination Committee (ERGCC) for each ERG;
- Each ERGCC will:
  - operate according to a written Charter and with support provided through the System GDI Function;
  - be co-chaired by the CGIAR System Senior Advisor, GDI in partnership with an ERG President which has been nominated from amongst ERG members;
  - be supported by an elected Vice-President and Secretary;
  - have a CGIAR senior executive to act as the executive sponsor or champion; and
  - have a shared space through which they can share knowledge with their ERG members. This shared space will evolve over time to include minutes of meetings, targeted communications, member events, membership appeals, developmental opportunities and resources, the extent of which will depend on member involvement.

6. The First ERGs:

The first ERG will be a Wellbeing ERG, as an immediate response to the workplace challenges provided by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second ERG will focus on Women in Research & Science.

The launch of these first two ERGs will require that the System GDI function, in partnership with volunteers from the HR Community of Practice:

- Draft a mission statement and charter for each ERG;
- Plan and implement a cross-System communication strategy to announce the ERGs, initiate events, and invite membership; and
- Plan and implement opening events as part of the official ERG launch and invite attendance;

Valuable lessons will be learned from the implement of these first two ERGs, especially in terms of measuring success.

Metrics to be tracked could include:

Membership
- % annual membership growth
- Membership as a % of employee population
- Membership satisfaction

Events
- % increase in average event attendance
- Average rating of events by participants

Organization Impact (longer-term measures)
- Advancement rate of ERG members
- Retention rate of ERG members
- Relative engagement of ERG members
- Degree to which ERG enhances CGIAR reputation and operations

7.   Risk Mitigation, Challenges and Barriers to Address

Many organizations struggle to launch and sustain ERGs over time. The main challenges are effectively aligning groups with their strategy, providing relevant events to members, and tracking membership and results, especially across regions.

In the recent Conference Board Research Report (cited above) participants identified a few common challenges to effective implementation of ERGs across regions. Interviewees spoke about member engagement and measuring results. Almost half of respondents (48%) struggled with sustaining their ERGs and keeping ERG momentum, though only 14% selected employee willingness to become ERG members as a challenge. To achieve sustainability, organizations need to offer the right types of reward or recognition for employees engaged with ERGs, either in performance evaluations or as part of individual development plans or both. Longer-term sustainability is predicated on ERGs maturing to actively support the organizational strategy and should be considered in a risk management strategy.

No.	Risk	Cause	Effect/comments
1	**Low uptake of membership; engagement**	Staff do not see value in ERG membership	ERGs require staff interest and engagement to be successful. Timeliness and relevance are crucial, as well as the opportunities to connect socially – which in the time of COVID-19 seems ideal.
2	**Sustainable commitment of leaders / ERG Council**	Individuals are unwilling/unable to take ERG leadership roles	Identification of energetic and committed individuals to launch the first two ERGs will set the bar. Limiting officer roles for a set time period (e.g. annual or bi-annual) allows for rotation of leadership and fresh ideas.

8.   Next Steps

A detailed project plan with actions, delivery dates and a carefully considered risk management plan will be created in conjunction with the working group from the HR COP.

It will include:

1. The creation of a clear **Mission** for each ERG.
2. Broadcasting the Mission for each ERG (Wellbeing and Women in Research & Science) and inviting nominations from across CGIAR for membership of the **ERGCC**
3. The development of a clear and concise **Charter** for each ERG. The Charter for each ERG will include: the ERG Goals; Architecture; selection of ERG officers; membership (open to all); outline of activities; success metrics; communications and outreach; oversight mechanisms and accountabilities.
4. Search for **Executive sponsorship** for each ERG.
5. The **start-up of the ERGs** will require the ERGCC to plan opening events as part of the official launch and invite attendance. Attendees will also be invited to become foundation members of the ERG.

The **Wellbeing ERG will be prioritized**.

For the **Women in Research & Science ERG**, a starting point could be to assemble (virtually) all the leaders of Center/Alliance-specific women's ERGs (one identified in Africa and one in Asia) as well as gender committees or councils at the Centers. These representatives are then voluntarily invited to become the ERG Council which then leads to steps 3, 4 and 5 above.