

CGIAR System Council Strategic Reflections, Revised

Compilation of inputs received post 1st System Council

Preamble

Following a request for feedback from System Council Members and other stakeholders by 8 September 2016, this document presents a consolidation of those reflections, exhibited as the specific inputs beneath each theme, with more general feedback and inputs collated at the end of the document. Inputs are presented alphabetically by System Council constituency, then by other stakeholders.

Pursuant to the [Provisional Agenda](#) for the 2nd System Council meeting, it is proposed that the System Council return, as a first prioritization of the various topics, to topics 1 and 7, respectively: (1) Responding to new challenges and developing new solutions; and (7) Securing more – and more stable – funding for the new CGIAR Portfolio.

Distribution notice

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Part A - Introduction

1. At its inaugural meeting (12 July 2016, Paris), the System Council set aside quality time to reflect and brainstorm, to contemplate bigger things: hopes; expectations for the future; and ways in which the Council could contribute most significantly to the vital work and long term relevance and effectiveness of CGIAR.
2. At the conclusion of what was agreed were preliminary, but important discussions, the Council identified seven ‘buckets’ – as the themes that resonated most strongly, and called for more detailed reflection over the coming months.
3. Between 9 August and 8 September 2016, the System Council was invited to ‘self-select’ areas upon which to provide additional inputs, to further inform conversations at the System Council’s 2nd meeting. During that same period, other stakeholders also provided inputs, thus enabling the System Council to have a rich source of additional input on which to take these topics forward.
4. The following pages reproduce the account of the System Council’s reflections as per the record dated 8 August 2016, and provided via email the Council members on 9 August 2016, and incorporates comments subsequently received. The comments are grouped according to each theme, with general comments reproduced at the end of the document.
5. Noting the range of inputs, it is topics 1 and 7 that appear to have resonated most strongly. Consequently, these two topics have been proposed in the System Council’s provisional agenda for deeper reflection.

Part B - The seven themes ('the buckets') and Council and other stakeholder inputs

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In the material that follows, the theme as elaborated in the 8 August 2016 is reproduced, and immediately thereafter, inputs from System Council and other stakeholders follows.

1. Responding to new challenges and developing new solutions

The landscape of agricultural research for development is evolving rapidly. The world faces new, more complex, and more interrelated challenges, such as achieving food security in the face of climate change; reducing deforestation, biodiversity loss and water scarcity; creating meaningful employment for a rapidly growing youth population; and producing not only more food, but more nutritious food, in rapidly globalizing agri-food markets serving increasingly urbanized populations.

Within these changes there are complex and complicated questions: what is the role of livestock in a sustainable future? What is a healthy diet and what should we do to achieve it? Without good science, solutions to one problem can exacerbate another: hundreds of billions of dollars of agricultural and food subsidies actually work against sustainable outcomes. We need interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary solutions.

Biotic and abiotic stresses are changing more rapidly than ever before. CGIAR genebanks safeguard the world's largest germplasm collections for staple food crops, and enable scientists to respond to new stresses, and to continue to advance production and productivity. This is a one of our key comparative strengths and advantages.

Right now, there are 62 countries – or one-third of the countries on the planet – that either have conflict or are considered fragile – some, the entire country; some, significant regions. Very few organizations on this planet have the footprint – the global footprint – and a presence

in these countries. Are we, as a system, doing enough, or working coherently enough, in fragile and post-conflict states? With a focus on the Strategy and Results Framework (SRF), what can and should CGIAR do in respect to fragility, migration and job creation?

While we made strong progress against the Global Development Goals, future gains will be harder to realize. We cannot keep doing the same and just trying harder and expect different outcomes – we have to do things differently. We need to know we're addressing not only today's problems, but tomorrow's. We need to read the signs early enough and respond soon enough. CGIAR needs to ensure that robust foresight and world-class modeling inform our research agenda. New challenges require new science and new solutions that CGIAR could bring to bear.

Netherlands

This one is most crucial! It is crucial for the CGIAR to be recognized for the global force it actually is. But that hinges on also being able to respond and be meaningful to the challenges that emerge on the global agenda. It requires an attitude of service to the agenda of global and local communities with an eye for political and societal discussions on fragile environments, migration, gender roles, youth employment, economic/market development, SDGs etc. Service means reasoning from those problem areas to the role of FNS and natural resources management. Not the other way around.

The new System Organization is crucial to unite the system in that. It means something for the centers to come together and work together, it means for the System Council to have those strategic discussions and not be entirely focused on managing the system. And ultimately it means the ED needs to be able and have the profile to communicate the role and the power of the System on the global stage and in the offices of ministers in the North and the South. Always remember that resource mobilization is in essence a political process!

All that will also provide you the legitimacy and the cover to spend considerable resources to more fundamental research on the global knowledge base, breeding etc.

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)

The System Council has a responsibility to look ahead and identify new areas of importance to the system and to help the system move away from areas that are no longer of interest. The balance of how much of this occurs within the centers, the CRPs and the System Council is less clear. The System Council should focus on longer term, strategic issues.

Theme 1 identifies at least 13 major, global issues. I would hope the System Council could contribute to Theme 1 but hope that it focuses its attention on a relatively small number of

issues that are directly relevant to the system and its strengths (climate change?). I would hope the issues for the System Council could be addressed at the highest level.

USAID

We think this is probably not the most compelling way to start the paper, and the role of IPG research (and hence the CGIAR) is not all that clear in the context of a number of challenges (urbanization, youth employment). It's not that the CGIAR isn't relevant, it is, but it's really about ensuring some key outcomes with respect to food security and environmental management where its contributions lie. Having said this, I'm not sure we gain much by trying to map to all/most of the SDGs, more compelling to identify critical one(s).

The second paragraph (Within these changes....) approaches things differently than we would. Rather than asking "What is the role of livestock in a sustainable future?"... couldn't we be offering a vision ensuring the affordability of high quality food, including livestock products, produced in a sustainable manner" so that the poor no longer suffer from micronutrient and protein deficiencies. This seems to treat livestock as something controversial. For USAID anyway, it is not. Also, the anti-subsidy position—fair enough, but do we really want to start with that? If so I would prefer it be about "some donors" because USAID is not really in a position to comment on "subsidy policies working against sustainable outcomes." If IFPRI wants to do it, great, but if this is a donor/System Council paper, it pushes us into pretty shaky territory that cannot reflect USAID's views. I haven't checked with others on this but I'm surprised that some others wouldn't encounter similar situations.

The third paragraph is in our view the heart of the matter—farmers, especially smallholders, are going to be facing evolving challenges (biotic, abiotic, market demand) more rapidly than ever before. The CGIAR is uniquely situated to work with both upstream and downstream partners to develop, and through partnership, offer them choices. I would also want to mention the track record in terms of impact in underscoring particular CGIAR strengths in this area, but I guess that isn't essential.

Para 4 (While we have made...)...do we know this is true, that further gains will be harder to realize? It seems to me that the pace of progress is accelerating rather than the opposite! Science of all kinds is offering new solutions—including via ICT—more than ever before...we should strike an enthusiastic tone. Let's be bullish on leveraging science to deliver a sustainable, well-fed future. The second sentence strikes me as very odd. A lot of what we're doing is working. Let's focus on that. I don't know that we have the luxury of figuring out how to make what isn't working work by doing "things differently"?... The last sentences of that para in terms of modeling and foresight are good, but we would emphasize that capacity in terms of discerning priorities.

In sum, perhaps Bucket 1 doesn't really need to be a bucket, but rather part of a positive preamble that states the essential role in a world seeking to end hunger once and for all, and to do so in a world challenged by climate change and environmental degradation. That could be stated much more positively by using together key pieces of what is already there, but shortening them into a "CGIAR in a changing global context".

World Bank

This theme includes two components: (1) improving the ability of the CGIAR to identify emerging challenges early, and (2) ensuring that the CGIAR finds innovative new ways of addressing those emerging challenges. While the document refers to the need for "robust foresight" and "world class modeling," it's not clear that investing resources in formal modeling or scenario building will produce reliable predictions about what will be the priority challenges in the far-off future. That said, a couple of approaches could be considered to increase the likelihood that CGIAR work really is focusing on new challenges and addressing those challenges in innovative ways.

A more "top-down" approach would be to have the System Council or System Management Office identify "new challenges" and commit to giving priority consideration to CRPs (or flagships) that target those new challenges. A more "bottom-up" approach would be to engage an outside evaluator to screen CRP / flagship proposals for activities that specifically target new challenges and give those CRPs/flagships priority consideration.

Bioversity International Board of Trustees

This is largely within the purview of the foresight activities, which are undertaken within CRPs, ISPC, etc. The issue of operating in fragile, post-crisis settings is just one relatively new dimension to consider.

ISPC

CGIAR needs to ensure that robust foresight and world-class modelling inform our research agenda. New challenges require new science and new solutions that CGIAR could bring to bear.

In our Science Fora, we have been exploring scientific challenges and opportunities at the boundaries of CGIAR current comparative advantage with respect to the 3 SLOs. (SLO 3 in 2011, SLO2 in 2013 and SLO1 in 2016). It has become increasingly clear that effective strategic foresight needs to consider changes beyond our traditional drivers of growing population, land degradation and climate change.

During the discussions led by the transition team (ref document for final FC meeting on ‘Matrices on the Roles and Responsibilities of the System Entities’ it was recorded that the System Council would ‘initiate foresight’ and ‘decide the boundaries for strategy development based on ISPC review’. The roles for the ISPC were seen as: ‘lead process for SRF, drawing on and synthesizing Centers’ foresight reports and other sources, external data and studies and commission external experts as necessary’.

The ISPC has taken this forward by preparing a Concept Note on Foresight for discussion at our open meeting to be held in ICRISAT from 14th to 15th September 2016. One of our new ISPC Council members (Prabhu Pingali) has been assigned the task of leading this work stream with a secretariat –based team. The ISPC is planning a work program for 2017 on building system level foresight capacity that will incorporate feedback obtained during the ISPC meeting in September – as well as any further inputs that may come out of the System Council meeting in September.

2. Focusing on the right things

Getting the biggest impact from scarce resources means being focused on the right things. It means knowing where research is absolutely fundamental and where CGIAR is uniquely placed. It means prioritization. It means focused, targeted research.

Our Independent Science and Partnership Council needs to be empowered to provide the strategic guidance we need in order to prioritize where to put money. Science quality is essential; doing the right science is paramount. We want a prioritized research agenda aligning unique CGIAR capacities with critical research needs. A key measure of our success will be the extent to which funds return to the shared agenda; the willingness for hitherto bilateral donors to embrace programmatic or system-wide funding.

We need a rigorous system for identifying high-quality research, a robust system for peer review, and funding channeling mechanisms that reward performance. We desire the attributes of the best of the competitively managed research systems. We see value in a really comprehensive systematic approach. What would it take to become field-leading as a competitively managed research system? How do we take it to the next level?

We aspire to becoming a leader in women’s empowerment and gender equality.

We, as a system, must take into consideration the demand of the donors, but also the demands of developing countries, and how this demand is expressed. Our processes of consultation must be genuine and effective. The more relevant the research, the greater the demand.

BMGF

Focus and prioritization are essential if CGIAR is to move forward. The System Council can contribute to this focus. That said, I think it should be within the context of its normal operations and Theme 1 and 7. What should the system do and how can it fund the work? The ISPC is probably not the right group to do this. There was discussion about more clearly defining the remit of the ISPC. This would be worthwhile. This theme doesn't stand on its own.

Netherlands

(relates also to point 1 of course). Like all the points important, but lots of good stuff is already happening. The discussions we had on SRF, CRPs, the work of the ISPC (great!), the group looking at the Flagships, the way the system is evolving and adapting.....

USAID

Focusing on the right things...this section strikes a much more positive tone which is welcome. In para 2, how about emphasizing the advice needs to be of an adequately compelling and rigorous nature as to drive donor investments around the most critical research programs. This is suggested in the last sentence...it would be nice for donors to be calling for this—it's something we all need. We would talk about the right research avenues or programs rather than the *right science*. Emphasis on science quality has too often trumped science relevance which is just as important. So, high-quality, *productive* research...after all, we are mostly about purpose-driven scientific research. A minor point, instead of a “robust system for peer review”, how about “robust peer review”...one implies some oversight, the other implies doing it in a system....we think that really needs to be decentralized with some oversight from the ISPC as to the rigor/independence of the process. There is a mixed track record on this but when it works right, it's great.

Regarding attributes of competitively managed science—well perhaps that means quality/relevance/productivity if we're talking about development outcomes...fine as long as it can deliver research with longer time horizon than the length of grants/CRPs...so much of what the CGIAR does best is truly long term. What does it mean to refer to value of “a really comprehensive systematic approach”...not sure what that means—maybe to think in terms of a cohesive, highly-prioritized portfolio? The next sentence about being field-leading in competitively managed research...what does that imply? Most of what USAID does in research is competitive, it's true, and CGIAR remains an exception (although within various resource groupings/research areas, it does compete here in terms of budget), but for the kind of work

we prioritize, we think this exception is probably necessary, at least for some things (crop breeding, livestock vaccine development) that have long time horizons. This is not to disagree with the idea of getting the rigor and focus inherent in competitively based awards—but rather wondering if they would generate the evidence base we need for impact over the long term—the ex-post impact assessment side of the equation—something USAID values highly.

The gender sentence sort of hangs there...how about: “We recognize that gender equity is critical to both the outcomes we seek (higher productivity and incomes, improved nutrition, better management of natural resources) as well as to designing and carrying out research to meet the needs of diverse sets of smallholder producers and their communities. We will seek to pursue advanced approaches for integrating gender both in targeting research outcomes as well as in carrying our research ourselves and in partnership with others.” ...Something like that?

We might want to consider moving the gender piece and following short para on developing country needs/consultations/engagement up into the context section at the front of the paper?

World Bank

Among the many ideas articulated under this theme, the key idea appears to be the idea that CRPs should not only be doing high-quality work, but they should be prioritizing areas in which CGIAR has a comparative advantage and in which there may be few alternative sources of supply. It should be possible to include these considerations as part of the ISPC evaluations of CRP proposals, although any assessment of comparative advantage will inevitably be somewhat subjective. The FEWG has considered CGIAR comparative advantage as part of its “value for money” screening exercise, and the lessons learned from the work of the FEWG provide some useful insights about how to go about this.

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This is probably the most critical dimension to be considered in today's political and financial environment where aid is becoming less multilateral, more linked to trade, and where the globalized private sector is increasingly capable of delivering solutions to public goods if the policy environment and incentives are set appropriately. In a highly complex global food and agriculture system funded by multiple independent donors setting sharp priorities has historically proven very difficult. Increasingly donors are raising issues of “value for money” which reflect the perception that there are alternative lower cost suppliers to the CGIAR. It would be very useful to get the insights of the System Council as a body as to which specific areas of CRP Phase II proposed work are most promising and attractive (“big ideas” concept

used in marketing and product development) to increase the profile of the CGIAR as a meaningful international research for development system, to enhance opportunities for impact at scale, and to identify opportunities for engaging potential new donors. A further challenge to setting sharper priorities is the diversity of the issues that need to be considered. Our capacity to assess and rigorously compare research programs is relatively good when comparing specific technical innovations but we have serious difficulties to compare for example NRM or policy research with plant improvement work. The critical importance of improving priority setting approaches was also highlighted by the recently released “Synthesis and Lessons Learned from 15 CRP Evaluations” by the CGIAR Independent Evaluation Arrangement.

ISPC

Our ISPC needs to be empowered to provide the strategic guidance we need in order to prioritize where to put money... we need a rigorous system for identifying high-quality research.

The ISPC has been exploring ways in which other research organizations prioritize research since its 2012 White Paper (http://ispc.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/ISPC_WhitePaper_Prioritization.pdf).

In 2014/15 the ISPC facilitated discussions on prioritization with the donors and other parts of the System (August 2014 workshop in Washington and January meeting in Berne) and conducted a survey of donor priorities around the sub-IDOs. We are also currently exploring the potential of additional criteria beyond those already used to assess the quality of the CRP proposals, such as comparative advantage of the CGIAR, complexity of the challenge, balance of the portfolio between upstream and downstream research. These will be outlined in a paper to be presented at SC2. During the discussions led by the transition team (ref document for final FC meeting on ‘Matrices on the Roles and Responsibilities of the System Entities’ it was recorded that the System Council “would establish the strategic priorities and key initiatives of the organization”, while the ISPC would ‘lead and advise on prioritization of the research portfolio based on insights from foresight exercises and impact assessment among other sources”.

The ISPC also has a Concept Note on Prioritization drafted for discussion at the ISPC open meeting September 14th and 15th in ICRISAT. Patrick Webb, an ISPC council member, is working with the Secretariat on this topic and will chair a panel at the meeting. Jonathan Wadsworth and Peter Gardiner (from the System Management Office) will also be on the panel, along with the Chair of the ISPC. The outcome of the session on system level prioritization that will be held at the ISPC 14 meeting will be used to develop the 2017 work plan for the ISPC on

system level prioritization. It is anticipated that it will involve commissioning independent experts to address key issues such as assessing comparative advantage in the CGIAR, as well as workshops and meetings to facilitate dialogue between CGIAR system members to build system-wide coordination and agreement on the approach CGIAR uses for prioritization.

The anticipated results of the ISPC-led work on Quality of Science will also be an important input to designing the approach to system- level prioritization, since it entails the develop of a common framework for assessing quality of Science throughout the CGIAR. This work stream is led by a new council member, Holger Meinke, supported by the Secretariat. That work stream has already been discussed with CGIAR Science Leaders and the Head of IEA and representatives of these bodies will serve on the Working Group taking this forward. Additionally, it will be important to integrate the results from system level foresight work into the prioritization approach, and this too is an area that is being taken up in the ISPC 14 meeting in the session on foresight.

Interim Chair of System Management Board and on behalf of Center Directors General

The ISPC is already an empowered (well-funded and independent) body. If the System Council feels that research prioritization requires improvement, this will require strategies beyond further strengthening the ISPC.

The statement on gender is very brief, and merits further reflection from the System Council.

Margret Thalwitz, System Management Board Member

To achieve our goals we take into account the demand of donors; the requests of developing countries and take on a brokering role by offering pertinent research results.

Let's be more modest and aspire to help women's empowerment and achieve greater gender equality. We - the Centers - can't empower

3. Bridging research to impact – and the importance of partnerships

One of the most elusive challenges is for CGIAR research to really connect with that is going on in the field; for adoption of innovation at scale. There are many potential solutions out there and somehow they are not translating into results on the ground.

But CGIAR is not, nor should it become, an implementer. Scaling-up is very much a development business, so we must foster and nurture development partnerships – both public

and private – and it is incumbent on us to make successes of these downstream partnerships. We must catalyze and connect in ways that foster uptake and impact. Excellence in well-targeted research is our key to the network, and excellent partnership are key to delivering the scale of outcomes to which we aspire and to which our SRF commits us.

The responsibility falls not only on CGIAR. Both sides have a role to play. By engaging with CGIAR, national, regional and international development partners have the opportunity drive the relevance of research, to drive ‘coherence’, that builds on the nexus between agriculture, food security and climate, that fosters coherence with the global architecture, coherence in tax policies, coherence with other initiatives.

CGIAR needs to be more open to these other actors. There is a risk always for a strong system to live inside of its boundaries, to be closed. We have contacts, we need to multiply our linkages, we are not alone in the world. Let’s not try to do everything, but to demonstrate our added value to what others are doing.

Site integration is one way of connecting with others, of fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships - research, civil society and the private sector. We must genuinely involve countries in site integration to understand the real demand for science for development. Site integration has strong potential upside opportunities but, without due care, there may be downside risks. Transaction costs could become significant, and we may diminish our delivery of international public goods. It’s a balance between the national and the international, and it’s about getting the balance right.

CGIAR has great examples of cooperative research with partners that leverages capacity in carrying out our focused research agenda. We seek to multiply these successes.

BMGF

Partnerships are important. The Centers and the System Management Board should give this considerable attention. The System Council would benefit from ongoing updates on progress. This should not be a major initiative or activity of the System Council at this time.

Netherlands

Here we put a lot of emphasis. The text describes it well. In our view the concept of site integration is indeed very important for lots of reasons (see next point). While recognizing the crucial role of upstream research the Netherlands is usually (not exclusively) more of a party wanting to play a role and offering expertise and knowledge in downstream partnerships for impact and uptake. At that end of impact pathways partnerships are very important. The role of the private sector, concepts of market pull in defining success, consumer concerns and choices,

but also practical nutrition outcomes and sustainable farming systems are important from our perspective. In our new funding cycle we suggest to offer some help to the System Office in creating more capacity for public-private partnerships system-wide. A community of practice might be a good idea for starters, but we have various PPP expertise centers here in the Netherlands to help.

USAID

This next sentence is good, but there are two areas we wonder about. The part in para 4 about living in its boundaries...our sense is that this has been a problem that the reform made worse by emphasizing inter-center linkages/collaboration to excess. Maybe just some language that recognizes that partners outside the system are essential, as well as some within the system, in generating the most effective outcomes, whether in research or in technology/policy/resource management outside the system—amongst user communities and beneficiaries.

Wow, do we really want to double down on *site integration*? We are hearing that it is expensive, transaction-cost heavy and not really proven at this point. It's also centrally driven to significant degree. On the other hand, there are some instances—strategically founded, where centers are working together and with partners, that are really paying off. Could we talk about “where indicated” and based on bottom-up identification of opportunities, including involving local partners? The paragraph goes on to discuss the pitfalls.

World Bank

The CGIAR has always struggled to find the right balance between research and development, and over the decades we have seen most Centers move back and forth along the research-to-development spectrum. This is one area in which a formal evaluation should be able to generate useful insights about what is the optimal configuration, which will certainly differ depending on the type of product.

Bioversity International Board of Trustees

This issue has received a lot of attention in the recently formulated second generation CRPs (theories of change, impact pathways). A concrete short term related issue is the one of site integration. Science leaders have had discussions in Montpellier in June 2016. Further discussion particularly with national partners is needed to insure the process delivers value to our partners in the global South while managing transaction costs.

ISPC

Bridging research to impact and the importance of partnerships. CGIAR has great examples of cooperative research with partners that leverages capacity in carrying out our focused research agenda. We seek to multiply these successes.

The ISPC is tasked with “providing overview of strategies for effective partnerships along the research for development continuum”. The ISPC’s work in this area has focused on the development of a framework to better understand the relationship between different innovation configurations (partnerships, networks, and practices) and impact. Future approaches to this work stream will be led by Nighisty Ghezae, a newly appointed council member. It builds on the ISPC’s Strategic Study of Good Practice in AR4D Partnership (2016), a draft of which has already been circulated within the System and was used to inform the IEA evaluation of partnerships. Work in 2017 will specifically focus on providing frameworks to build effective partnership strategies for AR4D within the contours of the current CGIAR System, and partnership modalities that contribute to unlocking transformative agricultural innovation.

Margret Thalwitz, System Management Board Member

Proposed to edit the material as follows:

[One of the most elusive challenges is for CGIAR research} to provide the inputs that farmers will adopt and bring to scale. There is a policy element involved that is largely elusive to the CGIAR and better handled by other institutions equally disconnected from domestic policy making. How can the CGIAR more effectively work at country and global levels to help lay the foundation for scaling up??

[Proposal for revised paragraphs 2 and 3:] But CGIAR is not, nor should it become, an implementer. Scaling-up is very much a development business, so we must foster and nurture development partnerships – both public and private – and it is incumbent on us to make successes of these ~~downstream~~ partnerships. We must catalyze and connect in ways that foster uptake and impact. Excellence in well-targeted research is our ~~key to the network~~, and reaching out to others the means to excellent partnership are key to delivering the scale of outcomes to which we aspire and to which our SRF commits us.

~~The responsibility falls not only on CGIAR. Both sides have a role to play.~~ By engaging with CGIAR, national, regional and international development partners have the opportunity drive the relevance of research, to drive achieve ‘coherence’, that builds building on the nexus between agriculture, food security and climate, ~~that fosters coherence with the global architecture, coherence in tax policies, coherence with other initiatives.~~

[On site integration] What we might want to show is that site integration is a tool which helps to scale up research and solutions globally and not only in countries in which the research takes place. Wouldn't this be the justification for the CGIAR to commit to site integration in the first place?

4. Building and sustaining capacity in national systems

CGIAR needs to critically examine its role towards meaningfully establishing a constructive and viable platform for capacity development within the national agricultural research systems. This needs to span the full spectrum – from training of individuals; to collaborative learning; to institutional partnerships; to innovation in national systems. We need a better understanding of what we're doing presently. Basic metrics, such as how many Masters or Doctoral completions, would be a good start.

Importantly, we recognize that it is not only formal training that builds capacity. Cooperative research with partners plays a vital role, and capacity building must be mainstreamed into our research endeavor.

Strengthening and working closer with the national agricultural research systems can deliver important capacity gains. We should have a holistic approach that targets national agricultural research systems through better policies and research management capacities in leaders of these systems.

The challenges for building capacity in the developing world have changed. Its new science that we need to be able to bring to the national systems, amongst which there is great variability. So we have to address capacity development in the context of the heterogeneous situation in which we operate.

BMGF

Building capacity of national programs is a critical role of the CG and one that needs to be strengthened. The System Council should monitor this area and hold the centers and system to a much higher level. The fact that one of the metrics suggested is number of degrees completed implies that the CG is unclear about what it is trying to accomplish. We are not a university. In an ideal world the work done by the CG would be transitioned to the national programs over the next 30 years and the CG would work itself out of a job. It would be fascinating to see what a program for the CG to accomplish that would look like.

Netherlands

It is another kind of partnerships. Actually the point on site integration would be most valid here. Site integration in the 20 or so suggested countries would also focus your efforts in strengthening national systems and policies, preventing a too scattered approach. Site integration allows you to respond in a internally coherent way as a system to national agenda's and join up with donor dialogues in influencing national policies and institutions to do the right things on the basis of evidence. But it also allows you to join up with governments and donors in strengthening the capacity of agricultural knowledge/research and education institutions. The CGIAR cannot take full responsibility, but they can be helpful in creating powerful partnerships and help mobilizing bilateral resources. A rallying point for stronger National Agricultural Knowledge Systems.

USAID

Our only comment here is that the greatest contribution from CGIAR is through really meaningful research partnerships (mentioned, but not emphasized to the degree it might be) that leads to outputs and impacts. So getting partnerships right is critical to achieving both the outcomes and impacts, but also sustainability. This implies humility around the many other sources of supply and actors involved in capacity building. The note around heterogeneity is good. Some mention of regional approaches might also make sense here—recognizing that we may need to take our cues from regional as well as national partners.

World Bank

The CGIAR has an important role to play in building capacity in national programs, but we would be cautious about addressing this challenge in an overly structured way. A number of Centers that in the past used to run regular large-scale training programs for national program staff have moved away from these programs due to their high cost, which many donors are no longer willing to support. In addition, measuring the returns to investments in capacity building proved challenging, because graduates of CGIAR training programs often left public employment and disappeared into the private sector, where their contributions are difficult to track and measure. Most capacity building now takes place through collaborative research, often informally, which is appropriate. This could be encouraged in future by rewarding CRPs that include collaborative research components or even requiring CRPs to include collaborative research.

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Agreed, a critical issue embedded in the theories of change and impact pathways designed for the new CRPs.... Also linked to national engagement at the country level through site integration.

Interim Chair of System Management Board and on behalf of Center Directors General

Emphasize the importance of stronger partnerships with national research systems in middle income developing countries doing joint research increasingly funded by them, and with them expand work to the less developed research systems. In places where national systems are functional, working together will boost our productivity and impact, and in places where systems are not so functional, it might help boost national awareness of what research can contribute and stimulate more investment. Overall, working with countries is essential for achieving impact and success.

Margret Thalwitz, System Management Board Member

Is this an across the board challenge or predominantly an African one? I see NARS whose capacities are certainly as strong as the CGIAR's and we need a different way of cooperation with them than in other parts.

[On the third and fourth paragraphs]: This point may need clarification. Not clear to me what this sentence aims at and whether this is a deliverable the CGIAR is equipped to commit to.

5. Demonstrating performance

We truly believe that CGIAR has made a major contribution to poverty alleviation and to improved food and nutrition security, and natural resources and ecosystem services. But belief is not enough. We must have credible and truthful evidence of performance, and of CGIAR's contribution. We need well-articulated theories of change and impact pathways, underpinned by strong metrics. Robust, consistent reporting systems paired with rigorous, credible impact assessments will drive our narrative. Are we, as a system, doing enough to quantify and robustly demonstrate, for example, the poverty alleviating impact of our work?

Our performance claims will increasingly be scrutinized, and we should expect that any figures we produce will be looked at very closely. CGIAR credibility rests on high quality impact assessment evidence. Our value for money metrics are so weak and so poor they present a

reputational risk. Greater levels of transparency on performance reporting, simple value for money metrics and impact metrics, and data and stories would help assist in that regard too.

CGIAR must be able to demonstrate its comparative advantage and to show value for money – the results compared to the cost. Ultimately, CGIAR needs to shift to a more performance-based allocation model and to manage for results. We have to be able to effectively track progress. At the same time, scientists have to take risks and integrate failure as part of their research process.

Global challenges require us to work together as a system, where what we do is more than the sum of our individual contributions. While we have come some way, we have much further to go. The efficiency of CGIAR, as a system, has not met partners' expectations. There is far more we can do to drive down transaction costs, to be leaner, nimbler and more efficient.

Following the recent changes in governance, CGIAR now has the opportunity to focus on operating more strategically. Both the System Council and System Management Board need to contribute to this planning effort to reduce transaction costs, and focus on research for development.

Netherlands

Obvious. Having an impact at the local level is the raison-d'être of the whole system. Again the CGIAR is moving in the right direction in it is performance assessments and the crucial role of the ISPC and IEA. The CGIAR derives great strength from its long institutional history in its organizational capacity. A fact that the insiders sometimes overlook. Comparative assessments as now being done with the ABCD kind of ratings help donors a lot. Just surfing on the multitude of websites and newsletters within the system demonstrates a wealth of insights, successes, research results and knowledge. More important probably is to take this point together with 6. Communicating narratives and success stories. Do we communicate well enough? I recall the intervention by Marcel at the first System Council on the Brexit referendum. The fact that you have a powerful system doing mostly the right things does not guarantee support for it.

USAID

We would add credible, transparent accounting systems for resource allocation. We think that without those, there is a de-linking of resourcing and performance.

What do we mean by a performance-based allocation model? Also managing for results—these phrases are common but they are also not well defined. Do they mean rigorously prioritized, evidence-based and scientifically compelling research plans and impact pathways underpinning

resource allocation? Is this managing for successful outcomes, research progress made, milestones achieved, outputs generated, and continued strategic relevance? If so fine, but it wasn't really clear to us that was what the CO had in mind when using that terminology in the past...it seemed sometimes that it was about metrics that really weren't all that compelling.

Maybe it would make sense to include a strategic and focused approach to research reviews in this section with the goal of reassuring investors about continuing productivity and relevance of a given line of research/program?

World Bank

The description for this theme covers a lot of ground, and it's not clear what is the main point. If the main point is that the CGIAR needs to generate robust, credible evidence that it producing results and delivering value for money, certainly that's true. But as we all know, it's one thing to say "We need well-articulated theories of change and impact pathways, underpinned by strong metrics," and it's another thing to build the "robust, consistent reporting systems paired with rigorous, credible impact assessments" needed to drive the narrative.

The reality is that the impact pathways linking CGIAR activities with the desired outcomes and impacts are often very long, and rigorously documenting attribution is technically challenging and costly.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't try to strengthen our impacts assessment work, but we need to be realistic about what can be achieved. One place to start would be during the evaluation of CRP proposals.

The screening criteria developed by the FEWG explicitly consider aspects such as the presence (or not) of a theory of change, the plausibility of the described impact pathways, the robustness of the results framework, and the realism of the M&E plan.

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(see also point 2) the need for showing value for money in the present political context puts research at a disadvantage to many other development interventions. Efforts need to be strengthened to provide such evidence but at the same time the System Council needs to internalize the trade-off between easy measurement of results and addressing the complex systemic problems the CGIAR is expected to contribute significantly to solving.....

ISPC

Demonstrating performance – We need well-articulated theories of change and impact pathways, underpinned by strong metrics. Robust, consistent reporting systems paired with rigorous, credible impact assessments will drive our narrative.

The system-level impact assessment activities of the ISPC are carried out by its Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA). Through the provision of credible, high-quality impact assessments (IAs) that can inform CGIAR priority setting, and direct engagement in IA capacity development, SPIA's work strengthens the function/role of impact assessment in the system.

For the period 2013 to mid-2017, CGIAR funders, BMGF and DFID, committed substantial additional funding for a program to Strengthen Impact Assessment in the CGIAR (SIAC). SIAC has a number of significant outputs of direct relevance to this bucket. Examples include, adoption data for improved crop varieties (for South and South East Asia) and selected NRM practices, methodological guidance and training workshops involving Center/CRP IA scientists, among others. The SIAC activities are aimed at (a) developing and institutionalizing a strong IA culture within the CGIAR, such that *ex post* impact assessment is regarded as an essential part of prudent research management for accountability purposes and as an input to *ex ante* strategic planning; and (b) generating credible evidence about the nature and extent of realized impacts across the broad range of CGIAR research investments to guide future investments in the CGIAR.

A first SIAC synthesis report will be published in October 2016 on rigor in impact assessment and implications for the CGIAR system, that will be followed by a second synthesis report in 2017 entitled: “What do we know about the CGIAR system-level outcomes? Evidence from the past 10 years” that will draw on findings from studies funded under SIAC and other literature, and will discuss state of the evidence for a range of archetypal impact pathways between investments in CGIAR research and the CGIAR SLOs.

In May 2017, SPIA plans to hold a 4-day conference on diffusion and impact assessment activities in the CGIAR to: (1) discuss lessons learnt from SIAC Phase-I; and, (2) engage with the CGIAR community, donors, academic collaborators, and other institutions to discuss IA strategy development at the institutional level, and contextualize SPIA's vision for CGIAR's IA strategy to directly feed into the development of a proposal for a SIAC Phase-II program of work, starting in 2018.

In June 2016, IEA was commissioned by SPIA to carry out an external evaluation of the SIAC program which is currently underway. An initial report on findings and recommendations will be presented at the ISPC 14 open meeting in September.

Interim Chair of System Management Board and on behalf of Center Directors General

To ensure the System and CRPs can demonstrate performance, proper resources are needed for the full range of monitoring, evaluation, impact assessment and planning and reporting activities.

Refer to:

- ‘monitoring and reporting system’ rather than ‘reporting systems’
- ‘evaluations and impact assessments’ rather than ‘impact assessments’

[On driving down transaction costs]: This is closely linked with the funding structures and fully agree that we can become leaner, but the system has to allow for it - needs to revise the Financial Guidelines.

Margret Thalwitz, System Management Board Member

Remove the following sentences as this is not a matter of evidence: ‘*We truly believe that CGIAR has made a major contribution to poverty alleviation and to improved food and nutrition security, and natural resources and ecosystem services. But belief is not enough.*’

Should we rely on SPIA's work in making the case of performance? How do they assess the quality of our methodologies to articulate impact pathways and metrics and the actual impact measurements and results?

“*Our value for money metrics are so weak and so poor they present a reputational risk.*” It would be good for the System Management Board to understand why the criteria are poor so we could consider what might need to change.

Add: “*based on impartial, unbiased and globally relevant research. This is what should set us apart from other institutions, public and private.*” after “*CGIAR credibility rests on high quality impact assessment evidence*”

Why does CGIAR need to shift to a more performance-based allocation model? Do all these performance indicators reward risk taking, pushing the frontiers, striving for risky innovation, all things we need, or do they make ex post assessments potentially stifling innovation? Shall we look into these tensions and understand them better before concluding on what basis to make allocation decisions? I would put a lot emphasis on timely tracking of impact and timely correction of course if needed than indicators that measure what we did 5 years ago. Those are needed too, alone might not suffice.

CGIAR always had this opportunity [*to operate more strategically*], whether it uses it is the question, also for the System Council and System Management Board.

6. Communicating narratives and success stories

CGIAR is the only worldwide research partnership addressing agricultural research for development, whose work contributes to the global efforts to tackle poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, and environmental degradation. We firmly believe that the world needs CGIAR, but we're falling short in selling this message coherently and consistently.

CGIAR is rich with extraordinary stories of success and achievement. Massive progress has been made. CGIAR members have just won the World Food Prize. But we undersell ourselves. We fail to exploit successes or to weave them into a compelling narrative that resonates with decision makers. We need to get better at articulating our successes more clearly, of capturing stories, of showing impact. How do we get it to a narrative that is so appealing that the system as a whole gets the recognition it deserves, not the individual pieces?

We have not done a good job of 'selling research' – explaining the scientific process. There is much we can learn from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) process. There are voices saying why are we bothering with research, that we don't need more research, that the solutions are already there, that it's just a matter of getting them off the shelf and into the development community. We really have to build our case, to promote CGIAR research activities in the multilateral development frameworks, in the G7, the G20. We have to explain and demonstrate why research is relevant. There's certainly some good information out there, but it's not readily available and it's not consistently being used across the donor world. We need a much bigger effort in communicating what we do. CGIAR has also not said enough about what has changed through capacity building.

To resonate with decision makers, our narrative needs to speak to very simple, very tangible results: how many refugees have you been able to settle in their own country; how many jobs have you created for rural youth? We must be receptive to the major drivers of development thinking, and to showing what research can contribute towards that thinking: innovation, green job creation, climate smart solutions.

Should the System Council have a session on the success stories, and set aside time to know about the stories. If so, how and when?

USAID

We would not underestimate the establishment of a highly compelling, focused research agenda to generate critical IPGs that do not have alternative sources of supply to upping the visibility and credibility of the CGIAR on the global stage. That would provide the basis for renewed engagement by the System Management Office—an area that the CO tended not to prioritize adequately in our view. But it's being able to speak to specific areas of research in

areas people care about, rather than about the system *per se*, that is going to be compelling in our view.

World Bank

It may be true that the achievements of the CGIAR are underappreciated by the general public, but one has to wonder whether this is because of a lack of effective communications. CGIAR Centers use an increasingly diverse range of media to communicate the results of their work, and they seem to be quite adept at targeting relevant audiences. Does that mean the successes of the CGIAR are appreciated by the general public?

Unfortunately, no – but that is probably because public interest in and understanding of science and technology issues in general seems to be very low. In that context, it may be more important to focus communication efforts on the relatively small set of decision makers who have the ability to allocate resources. To avoid duplication of effort and ensure coherency in messaging, it would make sense to coordinate communication efforts at the system level (e.g., through the System Management Office).

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This is a generally accepted issue CRPs and centers are clearly doing much better than in the past. Still we need the System Council to amplify the messages building on the efforts by the CRPs and the System Office.

Interim Chair of System Management Board and on behalf of Center Directors General

There is an opportunity to use monitoring, evaluation and learning information to support communication of our results and impacts. e.g. CCAFS uses outcome case studies very much in this way and also as an outcome monitoring tool that then serves as a communications vehicle.

Emphasize the importance of scaling up high level global advocacy to improve agricultural, development and science policies (the real bottlenecks to impact if you consider both the underinvestment in knowledge in less developed countries, and the overinvestment in subsidies in the more developed countries).

[Selling research] Needs acknowledgment and support through integrated communication and engagement specialists.

Margret Thalwitz, System Management Board Member

Revise first two paragraphs:

"CGIAR is the only worldwide research partnership addressing agricultural research for development, ~~whose work contributes to the global efforts with a public mandate~~ to tackle poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, and environmental degradation. ~~We firmly believe that the world needs CGIAR, but we're falling short in selling this message coherently and consistently.~~

~~CGIAR is rich with extraordinary stories of success and achievement. Massive progress has been made. CGIAR members have just won the World Food Prize many times. But we undersell ourselves. We fail to exploit successes or to weave them into a compelling narrative that resonates with decision makers. We need to get better at articulating our successes more clearly, of capturing stories, of showing impact. How do we get it to a narrative that is so appealing that the system as a whole gets the recognition its mandate deserves, not the individual pieces?"~~

[Should the System Council have a session on the success stories?] Fine, but I don't think this is the solution. We need an ongoing dialogue with the System Council, not the type of dialogue we had the past 6 years. This requires from the Centers to develop a much more compelling story of collective action than you can get from CRPs.

7. Securing more – and more stable – funding

The lack of a stable, secure funding stream has long been recognized as a strategic risk to CGIAR. But the money is there. It's not that the world doesn't have the money to spend on agriculture and food security. It is spending \$500 billion every year on things called subsidies – this is money that tax payers around the world are providing to give to agriculture and food security. Unfortunately, 80% of that money is actually part of the problem, not part of the solution – it's unsustainable and it makes matters worse.

CGIAR needs to unlock money in many different ways. We need to link to the international G7 and G20 conversations, and to explore new funding modalities and other ways of financing what we would like to achieve. The Official Development Assistance (ODA) pot is shrinking, and the role of ODA is changing - more blending of loans with grants, and acting with the private sector. We need to be alert to new opportunities and to position for the future.

In relation to our research agenda, how can we make sure that new ideas that bubble up in CGIAR Research Programs are actually supported with funding? How do we get more money in

the shared agenda, moving from Window 3 into Window 2, or from Window 2 into Window 1?
How do we keep our transaction costs as low as practicable?

BMGF

(including 5 and 6 for supporting evidence) I was very surprised to hear the level of discontent expressed at the Paris meeting among the donors who fund through Window 1 and 2. The idea that these problems are solved is clearly mistaken. We are in the preliminary stages of addressing these issues. Focusing on Theme 7 for the next two years and insuring that we have a funding mechanism that can work and attract donors is essential. We are trying a few things to improve the situation with the donor reviews and subsequent W 1/2 discussion in September. Unfortunately, this will be a somewhat hurried, first attempt. We will know much more about how much progress we have made toward the end of the year. There was a very good discussion in Paris of how Window 1 funding might be defined (the most important things the centers do?), where W1 funding should be focused and how it should be used, that has not been taken up. It is unclear whether we have the right funding model, one that can support effective, focused research and also provide support for infrastructure and organizational requirements, for the future. We are attempting to patch the current model. We will benefit by seeing how successful we have been.

Netherlands

This one is most crucial to bring forward. Modernize resource mobilization in new instruments and new donors. Strongly related to point 1 as well. Go around emerging market governments and make an inventory of what would be needed to engage them in supporting the CGIAR. Work on new instruments as the Bank is doing with an investment fund. Check again the resource mobilisation study done a few years ago by a consultant (Lion's Head???). Understand partnerships as joint ventures where parties, including the private sector, bring their own resources without claiming each other's resources. The private sector is not a bag of money for the CGIAR. The CGIAR is not a bag of money for national systems or NGO's, even though the CRP's can invest in it like CCAFS often does. Approach bilateral donors to help out with strengthening national systems. The CGIAR has the power to be a convener (ref SRF values).

But also there is an important lessons for the System Council. The System Council should learn to negotiate more and more tough with itself and not just with the System Organization and the Centers. If we recognize the need for at least 30-40 % W1/2 funding in the total portfolio, then we need to adopt as a Council a donor policy stating that individual donors aim for a minimum of 30-40% W1/2 funding in their own portfolio.

Without having that as an obligation, but it can be a joint intention that should have meaning for individual donor decisions. Same with multi-year commitments. It should be part of a System Council accepted joint donor policy to do multi-year funding. Some naming and shaming is not bad if you deviate from that (like us this year, sorry). Could we have Flagship funding under W2?

It would:

- a. avoid donors mingling in the programming of flagships on the basis of bilateral or W3 funding and
- b. greatly facilitate admin burdens on both sides (donors and CRPs).

How do we approach such an issue in the System Council? Frank Rijsberman made suggestions in the last Fund Council in Rome for, amongst others, redefining definitions of W3 and fungibility between W1 and W2. But nothing was done with it. How do we bring these things to the Council as decision points?

In short: Be responsive and make sure CGIAR is globally recognized for the power house it is; Demonstrate impact at the local level; Communicate effectively; Modernize resource mobilization.

USAID

What we said about 6 above goes double/triple for this item. A large amount of time and money has gone into repeated consultancies etc about raising money, innovative approaches to funding, longer horizon funding—even during periods when little attention was being given to priority setting...this will not work. Again, attacking subsidies is easy but does it really help us make the case for funding? Most of the section is fine but we would make it hinge on reestablishment of a highly focused donor-funded research agenda that is going to merit the attention of world leaders and partner organizations.

The questions asked in the last para primarily hinge on making the choice of shared agenda programs the most—not the least—attractive places for donors committed to a compelling and focused set of research programs. Donor choice will also help—having to fund aggregated programs of mixed quality has not worked...we have to do better and offer donors more choices to attract money back into the shared agenda. One way to lower transaction costs referred to in the last para would be to have research programs that were more internally cohesive...our sense is that little benefit has come through agglomerating disparate lines of research with additional management layers that cut across multiple institutions, sometimes unnecessarily so. It's not clear how much real management those layers actually provide in many cases, as well.

World Bank

Given the erosion of W1/W2 funding in recent years, it's difficult to argue that this should not be the #1 priority.

The Big Question, of course, is how to achieve it. Demonstrating impact (Theme 5) and effectively communicating successes (Theme 6) would of course be good places to start. You are no doubt familiar with the discussions that have been taking place about possible non-traditional funding instruments (e.g., establishment of an endowment, offering investors a modest return on their investments), so we won't discuss those in detail.

Sara Boettiger, Fund Effectiveness Working Group Chair, former BMGF System Council Member

To me, #7 is at the core, but you can't do that unless you have 5 & 6. These, to me, are priorities together in a bundle.

For #7, we have three separate threads -

- a. **improve how the money flows.** We discussed, but (to my knowledge) not put a plan in place for possible changes to how the funding flows in the system (e.g. the 'pay forward' discussion we had earlier in the year).
- b. **increase funding from existing donors.**
- c. **identify new sources of funds.**

#5 is critical if we are going to do (b) and (c) above.

As a specific response to #7 language in the note, I think I would express doubt that links to G7 and G20 are the right place to put energy/resources. It is possible to spend a lot of energy/resources on those processes without getting anything tangible at the end of the day. In parallel as we approach other sources of funding (or expansion of existing donors' investments), we need the #5 done well, and #6. To get money from Window 3 into Window 2 requires focused, prioritized CRPs with clear definitions of what the money is buying, as well as good reporting and M&E strategies. To move money into Window 1 will require a reconsideration of what Window 1 can be spent on (i.e. avoiding the even spread and gap-filling rhetoric which causes problems for donors).

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Nobody disputes the need to find new ways of conducting our business to tap into new modalities of development funding, wider partnering also with the private sector. Clearly all parts of the CGIAR system need to join forces to creatively tackle this challenge. In the short term being able to set some priorities where the CGIAR's "unique selling proposition" is clear and documenting/sharing this evidence will be critical to set the CGIAR on a forward looking financing trajectory. This is of course linked to the earlier issue of focusing investment and communications on high impact, high visibility issues within the CRPs and platforms

Interim Chair of System Management Board and on behalf of Center Directors General

Need to catch up with private sector partnerships at a much higher scale, focusing on the small and medium size national (regional) ag input companies and others to scale up what we do, and promote sound business by such companies, producer associations and the like. Innovative financing mechanisms including with the private sector are critically important.

Margret Thalwitz, System Management Board Member

Yes, correct, and all concerned know that and yet not much has changed. Telling what is wrong is easy, convincing to bring about change so much more difficult. We have within the CGIAR between Centers and Boards an enormous expertise on the entire spectrum of making agriculture more productive, equitable and sustainable - how can we harness this in communicating and demonstrating our value added???

Do we need the window strait jackets at all? Can we initiate a conversation with old and new donors where the individual program and project approach inherent in the current system gets questioned and the relationship between funding and innovation revisited? We could start with the current System Council, but who takes the conversation up the ladder to the bosses of the bosses?

Broader System Council written inputs, not specifically attributable to 1 'bucket'

Australia

Introduction

These thoughts are intended to be constructive. They should be seen as tentative hypotheses from a newcomer who has not been engaged in the deliberations that led to the strategic reflections document circulated on 9 August, or indeed in the overall design of CGIAR architecture including the formation of the System Council. I am looking forward to joining the System Council and to getting a better understanding of the thinking of other members that underpins this strategic reflections document.

Analytical lens

About ten years ago I developed the simple framework below as a crude checklist against which to test national collaborative research initiatives in Australia. However, it seems to me to be readily applicable (or at least adaptable) for multilateral international research collaborations.

It is based on the premise that, in order to be effective and durable, multi-institutional collaborative research partnerships must satisfy, on an on-going basis, a simple value proposition:

For:

- Combining forces to build a critical mass of resources that would be infeasible and/or prohibitively difficult for individual partners to assemble on their own
- Tackling issues that are too big and/or risky for individual investors – sharing risk
- Avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort (not all duplication is bad)
- Making best use of scarce resources (especially people and infrastructure)
- Strategically building research capacity in gaps or weaknesses that undermine the whole system but are not core business for any individual investor

Against

- Transaction costs in time and money
- Opportunity costs for funds and personnel
- Brand dilution for individual investors
- Dilution of control for individual investors
- 'Group think' can lead to risk-averse, lowest common denominator approaches that are incremental rather than transformative

Where the 'for' arguments are demonstrably more compelling than the 'against' arguments, then the collaboration is worth initiating or continuing. Once such collaborations have

developed their own identity, brand and infrastructure, the personnel engaged in them obviously have a vested interest in perpetuating the collaboration. This can sometimes become an end in itself for the people involved, as opposed to a means to an end, which is how investors need to monitor it.

Feedback on the CGIAR System Council Strategic Reflections

Looking at the CGIAR through this lens, the questions that arise for me include:

1. Is the CG system focused on the really big global issues for which a global response is essential and/or demonstrably the best way forward?
2. Is the CG targeting problems, issues or opportunities, and/or developing new technologies and infrastructure, that are too big or risky for national and other donors?
3. Is the CG achieving economies of scale and/or efficiencies in identification, development and use of critical infrastructure that outweigh the transaction and opportunity costs?
4. Given the architecture of the CG - with its matrix of Centers and CRPs – is it well configured, either to undertake very risky, game-changing research, or to marshall sufficient resources to tackle the big issues in a suitably potent and integrated manner?
5. Where does the CG system enjoy a comparative advantage when compared with other big investors in agricultural R&D? To what extent are we investigating and trialling new investment models with other big donors/investors?
6. As particular countries and regions develop their own economies and agricultural research capability, is the CG displacing, retarding, catalyzing or complementing investment in NARS (people and funds) or regional initiatives that might be more appropriate vehicles for research investment?

Ambition

Working through these questions, the overall reach and scope of the seven ‘buckets’ seems too modest to me.

Coming out of the Paris climate COP, and reviewing the targets of individual countries, it is clear that the land sector, representing 20% of global emissions, has a huge role to play. Agriculture is also the biggest user by far of diverted freshwater, the largest contributor to deforestation and habitat loss and degradation, and a large consumer of fossil fuels. As the reflections document notes, there are also major issues around food security feeding into national and global security concerns, and also gender, human diet, nutrition and health.

On the other hand, agriculture and forestry offer most of the few realistic options for extracting CO₂ from the atmosphere as well as abating emissions, they are the single biggest lever in the toolbox of landscape restoration, and they are obviously central to food security, nutrition and

health. There is huge scope to increase the water, energy and nutrient productivity of agriculture in most countries and globally, including by reducing food loss and waste.

I agree strongly with the contention in the reflections document that there is much to learn from the IPCC process. In particular, the key metrics around the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, global emissions, target thresholds for global average surface air temperature increases, and nationally determined commitments within the framework of global agreements, informed by regular global Assessment Reports, provide an overall architecture that informs science and policy at multiple levels.

While of course the CGIAR System Council is not a global policy making body, as the document notes it is the “*only worldwide research partnership addressing agricultural research for development, whose work contributes to the global efforts to tackle poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, and environmental degradation.*”

It may be a useful thought experiment for the System Council to consider some global objectives and targets for agriculture that are consistent with achieving SDGs and NDCs post-Paris, and then to assess whether our annual investment of around one billion dollars is generating the knowledge base that could enable such targets to be achieved. The Strategy and Results Framework 2016-30 provides excellent scaffolding for this, but in my opinion there are too few quantified targets and those that are there appear way too modest. For example, reducing emissions from agriculture by 15% by 2030 appears timid and inconsistent with the national emissions reduction targets that many countries have set since the Paris CoP.

It might be instructive, for example, to think through the sorts of technologies and farming and land use systems that would be needed in different agri-ecological regions to achieve **net zero** emissions from the land sector at a landscape scale (not necessarily at field or farm or district scale). In my view, in most regions this will only be possible if we think about food, water and energy in a more integrated way. Consistent with a carbon neutrality objective (or even being a net sink), agriculture and forestry should aim to be a net producer of renewable energy (2nd generation biofuels, solar, wind, micro-hydro, algae, methane co-gen etc) rather than a large consumer of diesel.

CGIAR needs to be seen as a strategic player in the global decarbonising agenda (one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy) with substantial private sector interest and engagement. As the world decarbonises, and economies recalibrate accordingly, agriculture and in particular agricultural research needs to be seen as core to the solution, not part of the problem. I may be missing something, but this imperative does not come through in the material I have seen to date.

CGIAR should be establishing the global knowledge framework for what some authors have called “the third agricultural revolution”, based on very ambitious targets around increasing productivity and production without increasing the agricultural footprint, radically increasing water, energy and nutrient productivity, integrating renewables including 2nd generation biofuels, and looking for transformative innovations across whole value chains, including urban and peri-urban food production and exploiting waste streams. More ambitious targets will necessitate comparably ambitious agendas in strategic basic science – in areas such as biotech, ICT, energy, emissions reduction from ruminants and cropping systems – and equally ambitious agendas around integration, and policies, institutions and markets.

Focus

The points in the reflections document about focus, building capacity and communicating narratives are well made but generic. The mention of gender looks like an afterthought, and youth is underdone. If we are to be more ambitious, as proposed above, then we will need careful identification and scoping of those issues that need to be tackled or at least coordinated globally, and where the CGIAR has a comparative advantage. We will also need a robust process for identifying those areas constrained by fundamental knowledge gaps that need strategic basic science and/or substantial investments in building scientific capability in people and infrastructure. Of those, some may have characteristics well-matched to CGIAR capabilities, others less so, and obviously we should focus on the former.

As chair of one of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure platforms in Australia, I am all too aware of how long it takes to design and coordinate both the scientific input and financial investment to develop and implement new research infrastructure. As the document notes, the CG has done well with gene banks, driven by the long-range vision of some passionate individuals, backed up by astute institutional support. Where are the complementary investments in other areas of biotech, and other domains including for example, ICT, renewables and waste management? I’m not suggesting that the CG needs to own or even invest in new infrastructure in all of these areas, but at the very least we should have a good roadmap of what is being developed where, and the goodness of fit with our strategic agenda. There may be some useful co-investments we could make to ensure that new capabilities being funded by others can better service science needs for agriculture and food security.

By now, CGIAR collectively must be presiding over a mountain of data, with formidable potential to inform sophisticated modelling, foresighting and scenario development work. This could be one of the more compelling ‘value adds’ offered by the CGIAR with appeal to donors. Building our capabilities in this work obviously would also assist our impact assessment work, which I agree is vital, not optional. I am an enthusiastic advocate of the need to improve

impact evaluation. Australia is prepared to play a convening role in working with others to improve methodologies for evaluating research impact, demonstrating performance and telling the story in compelling ways. The economics profession has made a big contribution, but we need to get much better at measuring non-market values and the qualitative and quantitative co-benefits associated with improving food security and food system resilience.

In analyzing impact, and evaluating the CRPs, I hope we will undertake a ruthless examination of the current portfolio and new proposals to ensure that they are not crowding out NARS or incurring excessive opportunity and transaction costs, as well as being consistent with the more ambitious targets foreshadowed above. ‘Business as Usual’ (BAU) incrementalism would likely accentuate donor misgivings about the overall value proposition of the CG system.

My initial impression of the system is that much more and better integration across CGIAR centers (not just ‘site integration’) is needed to tackle the grand challenges of producing 70% more food by 2050 in a carbon-positive manner, using substantially less land, water, nutrients and energy per unit of output, protecting biodiversity and reversing deforestation, within more resilient and equitable food systems that empower women and girls, and better meet human nutrition and health objectives. While this may be a discussion for another day, are commodity/problem-based centers a hangover from the 20th century?

Picking up this point more broadly, I have a strong sense that if the CGIAR does not assume a much more ambitious, forward-looking stance that is at least as ambitious as the agenda mapped by world leaders in Paris, then we risk being seen as a 20th century response to 20th century problems, out of step with the urgency

BMGF

The CG has been on a disturbing path in terms of W 1/2 funding. While the organizational transition from the Consortium model to the new structure is encouraging, it is not clear if the system will be able to reverse the negative W 1/2 funding trend. Theme 7 (with 5 and 6 providing evidence for 7) is both the most important and the most urgent of the themes. The reviews of the CRPs by the foundation’s experts for the donor review process didn’t increase the perception that the foundation might be able to be comfortable funding through Window 2. When we reviewed the CRPs, using the BMGF standards for what we normally fund, we were disappointed that they lacked focus and a clear sense of priorities. This reinforces the need to seriously address Theme 7 and to maintain our focus until we are sure this theme has been addressed. This is not to say that the other themes are unimportant, only that we need priorities for how the System Council spends its time.

USAID

One challenge we have is on the one hand reflecting the discussion, and on the other hand generating what in our view would be the most strategic, compelling document. That is something that perhaps others will be thinking about also.

Context: We think the paper would be stronger by providing the SDG context up front, particularly SDG 2, which calls for ending hunger by 2030—only 14 years away. Research has to be part of achieving the goal—to us that is the most compelling context in which the CGIAR needs to step up. I think that this point came out in the discussions and that the 5-10 year timeframes needed to be seen as being milestones regarding being on track to the larger goal.

World Bank

If the idea is to identify a sub-set of themes that could be taken forward sooner rather than later, we would prioritize Themes 7, 1, and 3 (in that order). We suspect it will be difficult to secure more—and more stable—funding (Theme 7) unless we can demonstrate performance (Theme 5) and communicate impacts (Theme 6), which suggests that those three themes are linked.

Bioversity International Board of Trustees

Bioversity International strongly supports the initiative of the CGIAR System Council to conduct strategic reflections about the wider development issues the world needs to address and the best ways to tackle them. This has to include some deep thinking on how CGIAR will have to operate in the future to retain and enhance its value add to the multiple other actors operating in the complex and interlinked field of agriculture, development, natural resource management, nutrition and health.

The CGIAR has by now evolved into a rather complex system with multiple foci tasked with functions of foresight, impact assessment, priority setting, monitoring, evaluation and learning, results-based management etc. The development of the new set of CRPs has included thorough discussion of impact pathways, theories of change, gender strategies, etc. Platforms will address critical cross-cutting issues of genetic resources, plant breeding and big data.

Given the above institutional context Bioversity International considers it very timely for the System Council to identify a limited number of issues requiring more medium- to long-term reflection such as the seven “buckets”. Once the System Council has agreed on the issues, it should task the appropriate units within the organization to address them and report back to

the Council. The establishment of additional ad-hoc committees and taskforces should be avoided as much as possible.

[specific comments on individual ‘buckets’ in relevant sections above]

Alignment of donors behind shared priorities: the nature of the funding of the system largely invalidates clear priority setting as individual donors have to allocate resources following their national directives and priorities. In the early days of the CGIAR when it had a few like-minded donors it was possible to get to a consensus on a few priorities. At present this does not work. Donors participate in the governance mechanisms but allocate funds largely as individual donors, not as a multilateral system. It would therefore be helpful for the System Council to support some key “big ideas” around which most donors can rally. This issue is not on the “bucket” list but shapes most of the other topics.

In summary, the high level discussion of the “buckets” by the System council is welcome. The content of the buckets is timely and at least partially being addressed by the CGIAR system. The discussion by the System Council can insure needed long-term course corrections are anticipated while at the same time acknowledging that the CGIAR needs some degree of short-term stability to deliver the results envisioned in the recent and ongoing research programs.

Interim Chair of System Management Board and on behalf of Center Directors General

The introduction states that “The order in which the themes, or buckets, appear is not intended to reflect priority.” What methodologies will be used to (eventually) set priorities?

Several of these items could be undertaken jointly with the System Management Board, in particular #5 (demonstrating performance), #6 (communicating success), and #7 (securing funding), potentially among others. The System Management Board would welcome an opportunity to develop System-level priorities and implementation plans with the System Council.
