Agenda item 10
For Discussion

Document: SMB5-10D

Draft Terms of Reference:
Evaluation of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC)

Purpose

The IEA works under the direction of the System Council. Pursuant to the IEA 2017 approved work plan, 2017 represents the year that the IEA will conduct an evaluation of the ISPC. The evaluation TOR set out at Appendix 1 was shared on 20 March 2017 with the System Council for feedback by 31 March 2017.

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

Evaluation of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC)

Independent Evaluation Arrangement

CGIAR

Draft – Issued for System Council inputs on 20 March 2017

1. Background

1.1. Rationale and Context

The Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC) is an independent scientific advisory body of the CGIAR. It was formally constituted in January 2011, in response to the 2008 CGIAR Reform that called for changes to the CGIAR Science Council, which was the science advisory body at the time. The ISPC was to provide independent scientific advice and expertise to the CGIAR Fund Council (now System Council), to serve as an intellectual bridge between CGIAR funders and implementers, and to catalyze partnerships with other international agricultural research institutions[1].

The evaluation of the ISPC is being conducted by the Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) of the CGIAR which is responsible for System-level external evaluations of CGIAR. The main purposes of the evaluation are twofold:1) to **provide accountability to System Council and CGIAR as a whole** on the relevance and overall performance of the ISPC with respect to all dimensions of the ISPC's functions and work and 2) to **draw lessons and make recommendations for the future,** with a view for the ISPC to best serve the System Council and CGIAR as a whole in the context of the governance reform and the implementation of the Strategic and Results Framework 2016-30 (SRF 2016-2030).

The results of this evaluation are also expected to provide inputs for the finalization of the ISPC Terms of Reference which are expected to be submitted to the System Council for its approval at its November 2017 session.

Overview and evolution of the ISPC

The ISPC was established in January 2011 as an independent scientific advisory body whose mission is to strengthen the quality, relevance and impact of science in CGIAR. The CGIAR System Framework, in its article 2 (n) defines the ISPC as:

"a standing panel of experts appointed by the System Council to serve as an independent advisor to the System Council on science and research matters, including strategies for effective partnerships along the research for development continuum. ISPC is functionally independent from the System Organization and the organization hosting the ISPC Secretariat."

The Council comprises of eminent scientists from a broad range of disciplines serving in their personal capacity and supported by a Secretariat located at FAO headquarters, Rome.

[1] Roles and Responsibilities of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (Annex 1 of the document ISPC: Search and Selection Process, FC1, February 2010).

Since its establishment in 1971, CGIAR has always included an entity tasked with providing independent scientific and strategic advice and with ensuring the quality of the science produced by its Centers. In 1971, the founders of CGIAR established a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of international experts to advise on matters such as CGIAR System's overall directions and substantive issues related to agricultural research, as well as the evaluation of CGIAR Centers and the allocation of core funding within the system. In 2001, CGIAR initiated a reform program, which led to the transformation of the TAC into a Science Council. An interim Science Council took over from the TAC while a *Working Group on the Establishment of CGIAR Science Council* prepared a detailed proposal for the conceptual and operational aspects of the Science Council. The Science Council officially begun its operations in 2004, and, as recommended by the Working Group, included the additional responsibility of "helping to mobilize the best global scientific expertise for addressing the goals of the international agricultural research community"[2].

In terms of composition, the Science Council was much smaller than the TAC (see Table 1 below), but similar to the TAC carried out much of its work through four Standing Panels covering its four principal functional areas. Each Standing Panel was chaired by a System Council member (*ex officio* member in case of SPIA) and included two additional, external members.

Table 1 – CGIAR's Science Advisory Bodies over time

	Technical Advisory Committee (1971 – 2001)	**Science Council (2002[3]- 2010)**	**ISPC (2011-present)**
Main Functions (+) indicates functions that have been added	• provide independent advice and judgements on strategic issues and on the quality of the scientific programs supported by CGIAR • recommend research priorities and strategies to CGIAR • ensure the quality of research supported by the Group and its relevance to the CGIAR's goals and objectives • recommend the allocation of resources among Centers in the context of CGIAR-approved priorities and strategies • assess the impact of CGIAR research	• ensure the relevance of science • enhance the quality of science • assess the impact of CGIAR research • mobilize the global scientific community (+)	• contribute to the system strategy and priorities • promote the quality and relevance of science • assessing the impact of CGIAR research • mobilize the global scientific community / convene periodic high-level scientific dialogue on high priority issues • Providing strategic guidance on partnerships (+)
Membership	Up to 14 (and Secretariat)	6 plus Chair	6 (8 from 2016) plus Chair
Reporting lines	CGIAR as a whole (through International Centers Week and Mid-term meeting)	Both CGIAR as a whole (through Annual General Meeting) and Executive Committee	Fund Council/System Council

[2] 2002. Report of the Executive Council's Working Group on the Establishment of a CGIAR Science Council.
[3] Interim Science Council (2002-2004).

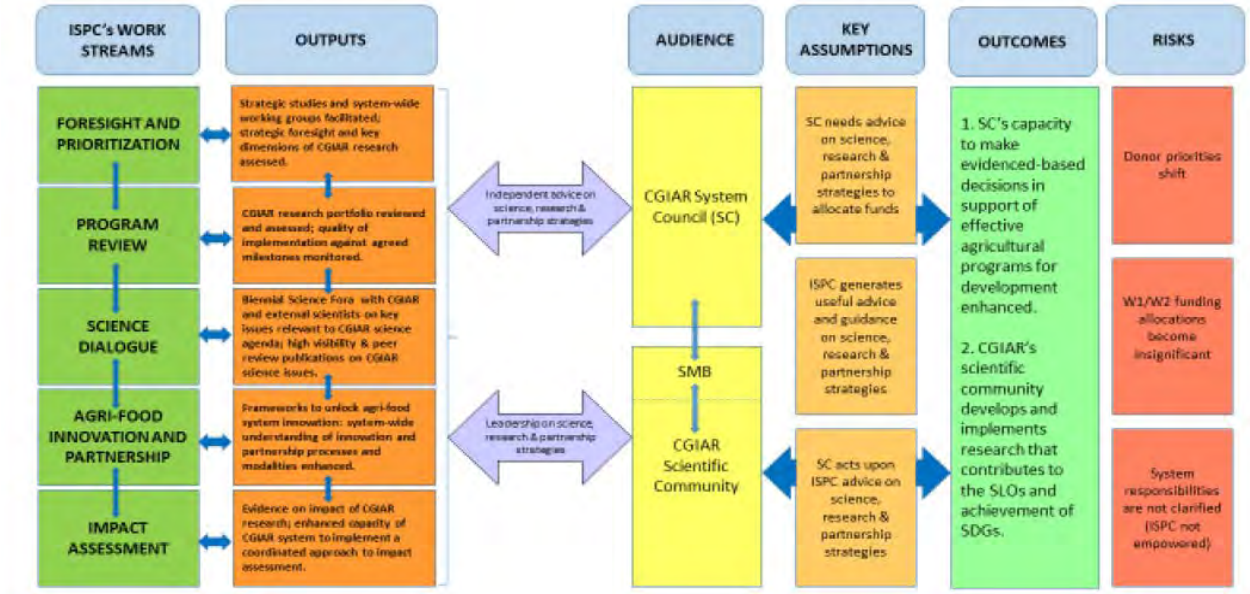
In 2008, another wave of reforms brought about two major changes in the mandate of CGIAR's science advisory body, by giving the Independent Science and Partnership Council a prominent role in providing strategic guidance on partnerships and by removing the responsibility for evaluations. The 2008 external review of CGIAR concluded that the Science Council, which provided scientific and programmatic advice, could not also be responsible for evaluating performance arising from its own advice, and thus recommended that a more systematic approach to evaluation be adopted. As a result, in 2010, two separate entities were established – the ISPC, with a similar mandate to its predecessors TAC and Science Council to provide expert advice to CGIAR governance and to strengthen the quality, relevance and impact of CGIAR research, and the new IEA, responsible for conducting independent evaluations of CGIAR research programs and institutions.

In 2014, a Mid-Term Review (MTR) was carried out to assess the progress made since the implementation of the reform in delivering the overall objectives of CGIAR, and, in particular, whether the structure and governance model had delivered the intended increases in effectiveness and efficiency. With respect to the ISPC, the MTR concluded that "the reform, replacing the Technical and Advisory Committee (TAC) and later the Science Council with the ISPC, somewhat diluted the ability of the internal research review process" and recommended that the responsibilities of the ISPC "be elevated to empower it to be proactive in terms of providing strategic guidance, foresight analyses, and assessing and reporting on quality of research results across the system". It recommended that a detailed proposal for the new functions of the ISPC be prepared. As a result, a Task Force for strengthening the ISPC was constituted in 2015, at the request of the CGIAR Fund Council. The Task Force made a number of recommendations that under the evolving governance transition process, were never endorsed. The proposed revised functions of the ISPC suggested by the Task Force were then articulated into a draft set of TORS by the science working group of the CGIAR Transition Team. These TORS are currently under discussion at the System Council.

Theory of Change and Activities

The ISPC has recently developed a Theory of Change (ToC) centred around its role of providing independent advice (to the System Council) and leadership (to CGIAR scientific community) on science, research and partnership strategies. The Theory of Change describes outputs for each of the ISPC's work streams and outlines key assumptions and risks in achieving two outcomes: enhancing the SC's capacity to make evidence-based decisions in support of effective agricultural programs for development, and CGIAR's scientific community developing and implementing research that contributes to the SLOs.

Figure 1: 2017 ISPC Theory of Change



Source: ISPC Work Plan and Budget 2017

Although this ToC was developed only recently, it largely reflects the impact pathways and assumptions that have underpinned the work of the ISPC since its establishment. Until the end of 2016, the ISPC has operated in four main areas of activity:

- *Strategy and Trends*
- *Independent Program Review*
- *Mobilizing Science and Partnerships*
- *Impact Assessment*[4]

In 2017, as illustrated in ToC diagram, these areas have become five, mainly because the work on mobilizing science and partnerships has been divided into two separate work streams (Science Dialogue and Agri-Food Innovation and Partnerships).

Although the *Impact Assessment* work stream of the ISPC has been the largest in terms of expenditures, since the 2008 reform, the ISPC has been significantly involved in providing guidance and independent advice to CGIAR governance through its involvement in the development of the Strategic and Results Framework 2016-30 and a prioritization exercise to help guide the review of the second round of CRP proposals (*Strategy and Trends*), and it has carried out independent peer reviews for two rounds of CRP proposals (*Independent Program Review*).

To implement its activities in the four areas of work, since 2010 the ISPC has had an annual budget ranging from USD 3.4 million in 2012 to USD 3.9 million in 2016, even though expenditures have been below the approved budget every year with the exception of 2015. Until 2015, approximately

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30 percent of the ISPC budget was financed by FAO, however since 2016 the entire budget is funded from CGIAR funds. In 2016, the ISPC included a Chair, eight Council Members, eight professional staff and two administrative staff[5].

2. Evaluation Purpose and Stakeholders

The main purposes of the evaluation are twofold:

The evaluation will **provide accountability to System Council and CGIAR as a whole** on the relevance, valued-added and overall performance of the ISPC with respect to all dimensions of the ISPC's functions and work. The evaluation will provide an assessment on the extent to which the ISPC is fulfilling the purpose of a science advisory body of a research organization, by reviewing its overall mandate, scope, functions, governance and operational modalities. As reference to assess the performance of the ISPC, the evaluation will use documentation from the 2008 Reform that defined System needs for leadership and advice on science, research and partnership.

The evaluation will **draw lessons and make recommendations for the future,** with a view for the ISPC to best serve the System Council and CGIAR as a whole in the context of the governance reform and the implementation of the SRF 2016-30. The evaluation will have a **formative dimension**, basing considerations for the future not only on an examination of past performance, but also considering emerging challenges and evolving needs of the System in an innovative manner. The evaluation is also expected to provide inputs for the finalization of the ISPC's Terms of Reference, drafted by the science working group of the CGIAR transition team in 2016 and currently under discussion at the System Council.

The main stakeholders in the evaluation are listed in Table 2 below.

[5] Including SPIA and ISPC Secretariat. Source: ISPC Workplan and budget 2016.

Table 2 - Evaluation Stakeholders

Type of stakeholder	Role	Interest in evaluation
CGIAR level		
CGIAR System Council	Setting policy and research strategy; Mobilizing resources	Recipient of the ISPC's independent advice on science, research, and partnership strategies
System Management Board	Strategic direction and effective governance and leadership	Implements the independent scientific advice from the ISPC.
System Management Office	Monitoring and reporting, developing guidelines and research standards	Benefit from the ISPC leadership and guidance on science research, and partnership strategies
ISPC (including SPIA and ISPC Secretariat)	Strategic advice, Impact Assessment and review of CRP proposals	Lesson learnt and opportunities for increased relevance and effectiveness
Independent Evaluation Arrangement	Evaluation of CGIAR Research Programs, Developing guidelines and standards for Evaluation	User of ISPC/SPIA products
CGIAR Centers and Boards	Oversight of CRP activities, Program Management	Benefit from the ISPC leadership and guidance on science research, and partnership strategies User of ISPC/SPIA products
CRP Independent Steering Committees and other scientific advisory bodies	Advice on strategic direction and priority-setting for CRPs	
CRPs Management	Management of CRPs	
CGIAR Scientific Community (including DDG Research, Senior Science Leaders, CGIAR Impact Assessment Focal Points, etc.)	Develop and implement research that contributes to CGIAR System-Level Outcomes	
External Stakeholders		
Main suppliers of international agricultural research (non CGIAR Scientific Centers, Universities, etc.)	Partners in CGIAR research	Benefit from the ISPC leadership and guidance on science research, and partnership strategies
GFAR and development partners	Partners in the implementation and uptake of CGIAR research	

3. Evaluation scope

The evaluation will cover all activities of the ISPC since its establishment in 2011 taking into account a historical perspective, when appropriate, with a view to understanding how the System's needs for scientific advice have evolved over time.

The evaluation will assess the relevance and scope of the leadership and advisory functions as well as of the work of the ISPC; the operational and functional performance of the ISPC as a whole and in its areas of activity; and the value it adds to other actors in the System that have similar functions at different levels. The evaluation will review the ISPC's contributions to CGIAR in the development of the latest SRF and in light of future expectations of the ISPC's role in developing the next one. The evaluation will also cover the ISPC work on program and portfolio appraisal, which has been a major activity during the period being considered. The evaluation will assess how and to what extent the recent changes in CGIAR governance have impacted the ability of the ISPC to deliver.

Relevance of the ISPC functions, scope and work will be assessed in relation to past and evolving System needs and expectations, distinguishing various stakeholder groups, and in a context of emerging challenges in agriculture research for development.

The evaluation will consider two dimensions of performance: functional and operational. **Functional performance** is defined as including credibility, which in turn depends on the independence and quality of the ISPC's advice, and on the utility and influence of its products and services for the System Council, as the prime recipient of its advice, and for CGIAR scientific community as a whole.

Operational performance includes an assessment of the extent to which the governance, management and capacity of the ISPC, including SPIA and the ISPC Secretariat, optimally support the ISPC in delivering on its mandate. This will include, *inter alia*, looking at the governance and institutional setting, capacity, human and financial resources, the terms of reference of the ISPC/SPIA members and Chairs and the work processes. To the extent possible, the evaluation will compare the design and operational model of the ISPC to that of similar scientific advisory bodies of international organizations and draw lessons for the future.

With respect to *ex post* impact assessment, the evaluation will take into consideration the evaluation of the Project "Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR" completed in 2016[6]. Following the recommendation of the latter, and considering that SIAC is the main vector of SPIA activities, this evaluation will not provide a detailed assessment of SIAC performance except for major outputs that would have been produced after the SIAC evaluation was completed. However, this evaluation will look at the specific role and performance of SPIA in relation to those of the Centers and CRPs with respect to impact assessment in the System.

While it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to evaluate all arrangements for the provision of scientific directions in Centers and CRPs, the evaluation will look at the value of the ISPC guidance and advice within such environment.

4. Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions are as follows:

Relevance and adequacy

- Are the mandate, functions, and scope of the ISPC relevant and adequate, in particular in the context of the Reform of CGIAR, and of the evolving challenges in agriculture research for development?
- Is the new Theory of Change appropriate and fit for purpose in light of evolving system needs?
- Was the balance of efforts among the four strategic pillars of the ISPC appropriate at the time they were in place - and is the current structure appropriate for the changing conditions?

[6] IEA has recently completed the ISPC commissioned evaluation "Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR" (SIAC) project. More information is available online: http://iea.cgiar.org/evaluating/evaluation-of-strengthening-impact-assessment-in-cgiar-siac/

- What is the relevance, value-added and adequacy of the ISPC roles and activities with respect to: strategies for partnerships along the research for development continuum, strategy and trends, science leadership, and *ex post* assessment vis-à-vis other CGIAR stakeholders involved in these activities? Are there gaps or redundancies?

Functional Performance

- Is the advice that the ISPC provides to the System Council, System Management Board (previously Consortium) and CGIAR scientific community credible and is it used by these entities?
- To what extent have outputs been produced as planned under each activity area? What are the main enabling factors or constraints that explain the achievement of plans (or lack of)? And, to what extent have the ISPC's outputs been used by its main stakeholder groups?
- How effective is the ISPC in communicating and disseminating its products and advice to the System Council and other CGIAR stakeholders it targets?
- To what extent has the ISPC leadership and advice influenced CGIAR strategic directions, learning and decision-making, in particular (but not exclusively) with respect to: research prioritization, approval of CRPs (past and current portfolio), SRF, effective partnership strategies, and *ex post* impact assessment?

Operational Performance

- Are the institutional set-up, composition, processes and modalities of work of the ISPC, including SPIA and ISPC Secretariat, appropriate for the ISPC to perform its functions effectively and in a timely, cost-effective manner?
- Does the Council operate in a manner optimal for it to be able to provide independent advice while being sufficiently informed about the entities and activities its advice concerns?
  In particular:
    - Is the selection of the ISPC members congruent with the requirement of independence? Are the roles and functions of its members clear as per their Terms of Reference?
    - Is there clarity (on the part of the ISPC council members, SPIA members and/or others in the CGIAR system) on the respective roles and functions of SPIA and the ISPC?
    - Is the relationship between the ISPC, SPIA and the ISPC and SPIA Secretariats effective?
    - To what extent does the ISPC Council and Secretariat expertise cover research areas and interests relative to aspects of the CGIAR mandate? Is there appropriate use of external expertise?
    - To what extent has the Fund Council (now System Council) been effective as a mechanism for oversight and guidance?
    - Are the levels and forms of interaction with CGIAR system units (System Council, System Organization, IEA) adequate for serving the needs of both the ISPC and its CGIAR stakeholders?

Specifically on the ISPC Secretariat:

- Is the Secretariat adequately set up and organized to support the mission and the work of the ISPC?
- How adequate are the Secretariat's human and financial resources to perform its function?

This set of questions will be reviewed and refined by the team leader and the IEA in consultation with stakeholders during the inception phase.

5. Evaluation approach and methods

The evaluation will cover the four strategic areas the ISPC's activities were organized under during the period being considered, as well as the governance and management of the ISPC. Each of these requires a different approach. During the Inception Phase, the Evaluation team leader, in collaboration with the IEA, will develop an evaluation framework.

The evaluation will review the assumptions underpinning the impact pathways and the articulation of the four pillars around which the ISPC organized its activities until the end of 2016. The evaluation will also consider whether the new ISPC ToC and associated work streams respond adequately to the lessons learned and evolving system needs.

The evaluation will adopt a consultative approach, engaging with a range of internal stakeholders as well as key informants from outside CGIAR, and seeking feedback at key moments particularly during the analysis and reporting phases. The groups of stakeholders with whom the evaluation team will interact are listed in Table 2 above. In conducting interviews, there will be a focus on assessing the role and work of the ISPC from the point of view of clients and users of its products and services. While the ISPC eventually serves the system as a whole, the ISPC Chair reports to the System Council. Therefore, special attention will be given throughout the evaluation to capture the expectations and views of the System Council members.

In addition to structured interviews, the evaluation will use a wide range of tools and methods, including: analysis of documents and reports, publications, guidelines, etc.; desk studies, issue papers and observation at the ISPC-related events. A survey will be conducted to cost-effectively reach a wide range of internal stakeholders. Webinars will be organized for consultation with various groups of CGIAR stakeholders at different stages of the evaluation and in particular on early findings.

In order to optimize the use of the external team, the IEA will prepare background papers including, among others, on the following themes: Evolution of system-level scientific advice in CGIAR; Mapping institutional arrangements for the provision of scientific advice at Center and CRP levels; Tracing study on the ISPC's guidance to the System Council concerning CRP selection; Comparative analysis of scientific bodies of international/multilateral organizations.

The key documents to be used in refining the evaluation's design and used as the sources of evidence include the following:

- ISPC work plans and budgets, activity and financial reports over the evaluation period
- ISPC Meeting Reports
- ISPC and SPIA strategic studies, papers and reports (through the ISPC website)
- Roles and Responsibilities of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (Annex 1 of the document ISPC: Search and Selection Process, FC1, February 2010)
- SPIA Strategy and Operational Plan 2011-13
- Preliminary Draft Revised Terms of Reference of the Independent Science and Partnership Council, 3 March 2017
- Bringing together the Best of Science and the Best of Development: Independent Review of the CGIAR System, 2008
- An Evaluation of the ISPC Science Fora (both April 2014 and April 2016)
- Final Report from the Mid-Term Review Panel of the CGIAR Reform, 2014

- ISPC Task Force Report, 2015
- IEA Evaluation of the "Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR" (SIAC), 2016

To ensure credibility, the Evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the following principles:

a) independence and impartiality
b) involvement of stakeholders
c) transparency
d) reference to CGIAR standards for evaluation

Challenges

The evaluation will look at the performance of the ISPC against the backdrop of the full range of scientific guidance and advice in the System, although it will not be possible to do a detailed analysis of the latter. Interviews with key informants and triangulation using other tools will help the team make an objective judgement on the performance of the ISPC.

A similar limitation applies to the analysis of the value-added and roles of SPIA relative to those involved in impact assessment in CGIAR, especially when formulating a vision and recommendations for the future. It will not be possible to assess comprehensively the quality of impact assessment work in the Centers and CRPs. However, in parallel to this evaluation, the IEA is conducting a mapping exercise of evaluative studies, adoption studies and impact assessment. Together with views of targeted informants, this will provide some insights on coverage, quality, opportunities and constraints at Center and CRP levels.

6. Evaluation Management

6.1. Team composition

The evaluation will be conducted by a small team of three senior consultants with expertise in science and research for development, experience in managing science and scientific advisory bodies. The need for expertise for specific tasks will be assessed during the Inception Phase and cost-effective ways to provide such inputs will be sought.

In addition, an Expert Panel will be formed to act as an advisory body to the evaluation and provide guidance and expert opinion during key stages of the Evaluation (Inception Phase, early Findings and Draft Report). It will not have an oversight role. The Expert panel will be composed of independent internationally renowned experts from across a range of disciplines relevant to the work of the ISPC.

6.2. Governance of the Evaluation

The Team Leader is accountable to the Head of the IEA and has final responsibility for the evaluation report and all findings and recommendations, subject to adherence to CGIAR Evaluation Standards. The Evaluation Team is responsible for submitting the deliverables as outlined in more detail below.

The IEA is responsible for planning, designing, and managing the evaluation. The IEA will also be responsible for the quality assurance of the evaluation process and outputs, and for the dissemination

of the results, including facilitation of webinars to present preliminary findings. The IEA will take an active role in the preparatory phase of the evaluation by collecting background data and information and by carrying out preliminary analysis. An Evaluation Manager, supported by an Evaluation Analyst, will provide support to the team throughout the evaluation.

6.3. Timeline of the Evaluation

Phase	Period	Main activities and outputs	Responsibility
Preparatory Phase	Feb-March	**Terms of Reference** Evaluation team recruited Ad-hoc Expertise required identified	IEA
Inception phase	April -May	Refine approach/methodology	Evaluation Team Leader
Inquiry phase	Jun-Sept	Interviews, desk review etc.	Evaluation Team
Reporting phase			
	Sept	Preliminary Findings	
	Oct	Draft Evaluation Report Consultation on the draft	Evaluation team
	Nov	Final Evaluation Report	Team leader, IEA

6.4. Deliverables and dissemination

The **Inception Report** (maximum 10 pages and with the evaluation matrix in an annex) will build on the original terms of reference for the evaluation and propose the approach to the main phase of the evaluation. It will constitute the guide for conducting the evaluation, by (i) outlining the scope of the evaluation; (ii) providing an evaluation matrix; (iii) clarifying the analytical frameworks that will be utilized by the evaluation; (iv) developing the methodological tools; and (v) providing a detailed work plan for the Evaluation.

As requested by the System Council Chair, an **intermediary Report**, including main preliminary findings, will be ready by mid-September for presentation to the System Council. Prior to this, the intermediary report will be discussed first with the ISPC and then with a wider audience of CGIAR internal stakeholders.

The **evaluation report** (maximum 60 pages without annexes) will be the main output of this evaluation and will describe findings, conclusions and recommendations, based on the evidence collected in the framework of the evaluation questions defined in the Inception Report. The recommendations will be informed by evidence and will be relevant, focused, clearly formulated and actionable. They will be prioritized and addressed to the different stakeholders responsible for their implementation. The main findings and recommendations will be summarized in an executive summary.

The ISPC Chair, in close consultation with the ISPC members and the Secretariat, will be responsible for preparing a **Management Response** (with specific identification of recommendations that are fully accepted, partially accepted, or otherwise). The IEA will submit the final evaluation Report and the Management Response for consideration and decision of the System Council.