

## The Future of CGIAR's Advisory Bodies SIMEC Think Piece

### Purpose

This paper is presented to stimulate discussion among the System Council on future scenarios for CGIAR's advisory bodies to support the System Council's decision making on this matter at its Cali, Colombia 5th meeting. Should the System Council be in the position to take final decisions on the future functions of its science and evaluation advisory functions in Cali, it is proposed that SIMEC present, for System Council electronic approval by mid-December, new Terms of Reference that reflect the System Council's Cali decisions.

### **Document category: Working document of the System Council**

There is no restriction on the circulation of this document

Prepared by: SIMEC taking into account various inputs, including feedback during an adhoc call with System Council members on 11 October 2017.

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### A. Introduction

At the 4th System Council Meeting in May 2017 in Amsterdam, SIMEC was asked by the System Council to work on two tasks.

Task 1 referred to: *“explore a range of options on how best advisory services could now be provided to the Council, responding to key questions such as: what is the profound role that they are to play in the current system and what are the best and most efficient institutional arrangements to deliver these services?”*

Task 2 referred to: *“how can the relevant conversations with both the Chair of the ISPC and Head of IEA to identify how some of the Council's early thoughts on priorities for the ISPC and IEA be taken up, so that for the remainder of 2017 the focus of effort is directed to those activities that bring most added value to our work.”*

Task 2 was worked on by SIMEC in close cooperation with IEA and ISPC and led to the proposal to adjust the POWB 2017 of both entities to focus on the most essential activities and put non-essential activities on hold until further notice. This proposal was submitted to the System Council and accepted on a non-objection basis in July 2017, thereby saving US\$ 360,000 USD. To take forward task 1, SIMEC held an in-person meeting in Paris on 18 August 2017. The meeting focused largely on sharing ideas and key priorities for the future design and roles of CGIAR's advisory bodies on science and partnership advice as well as evaluations. During the meeting, SIMEC also had the opportunity to review early thinking by the evaluators (led by Mary O'Kane) and discuss member views as well as interest in using the evaluation as one source of guidance in developing a Think Piece for the System Council's 5th Meeting.

The remainder of this paper only focuses on task 1: the future of the advisory bodies in the CGIAR. The paper is conceived to stimulate discussion among the System Council. SIMEC's early thinking on this paper was circulated in a PowerPoint format to System Council members and discussed during the adhoc virtual call with System Council members on 11 October 2017. Feedback received was integrated into this paper in order to present a set of future scenarios for CGIAR's advisory bodies at the 5th System Council meeting in Cali to support the System Council's decision making on this matter.

### B. State of Affairs

Since the successful CGIAR governance transition in mid-2016, CGIAR's advisory bodies ISPC and IEA are without current terms of reference. While the overall governance structure of the system has changed, the advisory bodies are still operating according to the pre-transition logic. Despite this unsatisfactory situation, the advisory bodies have delivered high-quality work and outputs (e.g. review process of the new CRPs and Platforms, and evaluations of

CGIAR's Genebanks, and of gender equity in CGIAR by looking at both gender in CGIAR research, and gender at the workplace) and had their annual 2017 POWBs approved in November 2016 by the newly formed System Council. In 2017, several members of the System started to deliberate on what the future advisory bodies of the CGIAR might look like. The following are the most central think pieces on the future of the advisory bodies or topics closely linked to them. All were considered in the preparation of this paper:

1. System Council Thoughts on Advisory Bodies at System Council Meeting 4 (May 2017)
2. SIMEC Paris Principles
3. EIARD Position on ISPC & IEA
4. ISPC evaluation overview for August 2017 SIMEC meeting (Mary O'Kane)
5. Final Report of the Evaluation of the ISPC (Mary O'Kane and Eija Pehu)
6. ISPC Think Piece to inform priorities for agricultural research in the 21st century (Maggie Gill)
7. ISPC Briefing No. 62: Quality of Research for Development in the CGIAR Context
8. ISPC Draft Terms of Reference (post-transition, SIMEC-M2-02, Appendix 1)
9. IEA Position Paper: Proposal for a cost-effective and utility-focused evaluation system in CGIAR (Rachel Sauvinet-Bedouin)
10. CGIAR RBM Framework Development: Taking Stock (Julia Compton & Philippe Elul)
11. SIMEC Presentation for Virtual System Council Meeting (11 October 2017)

In addition, during SIMEC's adhoc call with System Council members on 11 October 2017, SIMEC collected feedback and opinions from members. Subsequently, on 23 October 2017, SIMEC held talks with ISPC (Maggie Gill, Leslie Lipper) and IEA (Rachel Bedouin) to hear their ideas and thinking on the advisory services. Based on these inputs and consultations, the following principles, areas of work and options have taken form.

### C. Principles for Advisory Services in the CGIAR

For CGIAR's funders, the following four principles are central with regard to the new design for CGIAR's advisory services: (i) improved efficiency, (ii) improved communication between the services and the system, and (iii) higher ownership of the advice produced by the services by the system, (iv) while also ensuring independence of the content-matter of the advice.

The principle of **improved efficiency** is linked to the area of work of the advisory services (should they do what they have been doing in the past?) as well as to the question of location of advisory services (is Rome the right location?). It emerged that many funders perceive that the ISPC should engage less in certain areas (proposal assessment, annual performance assessment) and should the IEA (less long broad evaluations, and focus more on programmatic evaluations). Overall, now the system has a new portfolio of CRPs and Platforms, funders generally perceive a reduced demand on advisory services and do not support the advisory services to be "frontloading" with new, non-essential tasks.

At the same time, many funders considered the question "what would be a potential cost-effective hosting environment for the advisory services look like?" In order to answer this

question, SIMEC looked into the cost-structure of the status quo (advisory services based in Rome) as well as into an alternative scenario (advisory services based in Montpellier and hosted by the CGIAR System Organization). The reason for considering the System Organization as a potential location for the advisory services is based on the perceived need for improved communication and higher ownership (see principles 2-3, as well as document 4 listed above). A preliminary cost-structure assessment showed that having the advisory services in Montpellier instead of Rome could reduce costs *per position on average* by 65.000 USD/year; especially for mid-level graded positions, resulting in substantial cost savings through moving to Montpellier. In case that the number of staff would remain the same for both services, the cost saving against the 2017 base line scenario would accrue to about US\$ 360,000 year. However, in case of a relocation to Montpellier, once-off costs for relocation and additional transaction costs, which are difficult to quantify at this stage, (hiring of personnel, job orientation etc.) must be considered. It is also important to note that FAO does not charge overheads and office fees as the hosting entity for ISPC and IEA.

In addition to this, the projected budgets of ISPC and IEA for 2018 must be considered, which show a partially sharp reduction in costs against 2017: IEA -50%, ISPC -11% to -16% (two budget scenarios were tabled<sup>1</sup>). This is particularly the case for the IEA which is considering working with a "light footprint" budget for 2018 with only 2 FTE professional staff and 0,5 FTE admin staff. That said, there exists additional saving potential with the ISPC, which for 2018 plans with 8,5 FTE (7 professional, 1,5 admin). Under the condition that the areas of work of the ISPC are reduced (see below areas of work) the staffing would potentially decrease, thus creating additional cost savings to the estimated figure of US\$ 360,000 mentioned above.

The principle of **improved communication** between the advice produced by the services and the system, refers to the strongly articulated need to bring in line the various assessment and evaluation work streams in the System. These are, amongst others, proposal assessment, annual performance assessment and adjustment, programmatic evaluations, foresight advice and based on this, new programming. Many funders had the impression that these work streams could be better harmonized by putting it in the hand of one unit and that it would be worthwhile to consider hosting this unit at the System Organization in order to bring about **higher ownership** of the advice by the system itself. Funders perceive the current arrangement with the advisory services being in Rome as not optimal as it creates a disconnect between the CRPs and Centers on the one hand side and the advisory bodies on the other hand side, thereby creating a situation in which the advice is not fully embraced by the system itself (see also document 4 listed above). By bundling the different work streams better and co-locating them with the System Management Office, funders see an opportunity for achieving improved communication, higher ownership and greater efficiencies.

Linked to the ownership question, however, is the question of independence of advice and the need to avoid potential conflicts of interests through the co-location the advisory services with the System Management Office. In order to ensure independence of advice and avoid conflicts of interests, a relocation of the advisory services to Montpellier would happen in the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cgiar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SC5-09B\\_Annex1\\_Sub-group1\\_Budgets.pdf](https://www.cgiar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SC5-09B_Annex1_Sub-group1_Budgets.pdf)

form that the advisory services function more as administrative support units, while the actual work (evaluations, foresight etc.) would be commissioned to external providers, utilizing a high-level standing panel of providers for science advice (see areas of work below). This kind of arrangement is commonplace in various funder agencies and actually does not differ much from the past ISPC and IEA arrangements under which the actual work was often conducted by external providers.

#### **D. Areas of Work of Advisory Services**

The consultations as well as the ISPC evaluation showed that when it comes to the advisory services five areas of work were consistently most important for donors as well as other components of the system. These are: foresight, proposal assessment and performance assessment, programmatic evaluations, impact assessment and guidance on innovation and partnership.

##### **1. Foresight**

What the System wants: Improved strategic advice on future critical R4D research areas for which CGIAR has a comparative advantage and which are relevant for delivering its mission (SRF). To provide an evidence base to support research shifts in the system. This advice would be designed to influence programming at specified times (every 3-4 years) in accordance with the overall business plan development of CGIAR (currently CRPs are planned for 6 year cycles, potential look at a future 4 year cycle).

Potential arrangement: Advice to be provided by an independent, high-level panel of experts in science and development subject matters, even beyond the agriculture sector, coordinated by a unit co-located in the System Management Office.

Potential process: Foresight advice to be commissioned by the System Council and submitted to the System Management Board for consideration and response with regards to what aspects could be incorporated into new or adjusted research.

##### **2. Proposal Assessment and Performance Assessment**

What the System wants: A separation of functions of CRP proposal coaching and detailed, independent CRP proposal assessment, unlike the current arrangement which was deemed unsatisfactory. Furthermore, a separation of proposal assessment and (annual) performance assessment, the later to be handled by the System Management Office.

Potential arrangement of proposal assessment: A preferred arrangement would be that an expert panel advises on the development of guidelines for proposal development and assessment and the System Management Office contracts external subject matter experts for independent proposal assessment. (To be considered: continued use of QoR4D criteria.)

Potential arrangement on performance assessment: On annual priority setting, the System Council would provide guidance to the System Management Board based on information received from the performance-based management system (RMB-F, MARLO, 12 building

blocks system, science output reporting by Centers (PlumX, Altmetrics etc.)); the advisory function would not play a role in this “day-to-day” business.

### **3. Evaluations**

What the System wants: Historically, there have been two types of evaluations in the CGIAR: programmatic CRP evaluations and evaluations on cross-cutting issues. For funders, programmatic CRP evaluations demonstrating clear progress towards the SRF targets on a regular basis are most important and require a clear-cut, comparable and easy to digest format in order to also support management decisions.

Potential arrangement: Managed by a small expert evaluation unit at the System Organization to assure standards, comparability and quality control of externally commissioned evaluations to be used in line with overall business plan of CGIAR.

Potential process: The outcomes of programmatic evaluations should be available the year before a new phase is commissioned, limited to key criteria such as contribution to SRF. Other evaluations to be produced on demand of the System Council linked to assurance needs.

### **4. Impact Assessment**

What the System wants: The System voices unanimous support for impact assessment in CGIAR and is very satisfied with the work of SPIA. There is a desire to embed a culture of impact assessment into the system more closely.

Potential arrangement: The current Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) arrangement will be kept, while administrative support will be provided by the System Management Office.

Potential process: It is important that SPIA's work be able to continue, that overall impact assessment capacities for the System are strengthened and that Centers and CRPs also build their capacities on impact assessment. To do so, the System Council should consider a renewal of the Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR (SIAC) program.

### **5. Innovation and Partnership**

What the System wants: For many funders, an improved and systematic linkage between science and development is important if CGIAR is to deliver on the ambitious targets of the SRF. However, innovation and partnership are not objectives in themselves, but a means to contribute meaningfully to the SRF and development outcomes.

Potential arrangement: Innovation and partnerships therefore are essentially embedded in all work areas mentioned so far and must also be reflected in the staffing of the units dealing with these as work areas; a balance between science and development is essential for the success of CGIAR. Thinking must be embedded in DNA of the advisory services.

## E. Options

In the following four options for the future layout of the advisory services in the CGIAR are described briefly.

### **Option 1: Relocation & Adjustment of Scope**

ISPC and IEA would be moved to Montpellier and operate as two distinct units on science advice and evaluations. The science advice unit would cover foresight, proposal assessment, impact assessment as well as contribute to partnership and innovation guidance. In doing so, the unit would support the "Science and Development Council" (or panel) which as an external body comprised of eminent experts in the field of science, innovation and development, is in charge of delivering foresight work at required intervals, providing guidance for proposal assessment as well as partnership and innovation matters.

The same arrangement as current would be kept for the "Standing Panel on Impact Assessment" (SPIA). In addition, the unit would contract actual proposal assessment tasks to external subject matter experts, while only defining the framework and criteria for those assessments. Similarly, the unit on evaluations would act as a quality assurance mechanism for the programmatic (and on-demand evaluations on other areas) CRP evaluations, which according to clear-cut criteria and assessment frameworks that track progress towards SRF targets would be contracted to external service providers. Both units would be guaranteed certain operational independence, which would be further strengthened by having SIMEC oversee and guide the work of the two units.

### **Option 2: Merger & Adjustment of Scope**

ISPC and IEA would remain in Rome, but both bodies would be merged into one singular body and its scope of work would be reduced to the areas of work specified above, while additional activities would be on-demand only of the System Council. The composition of the 'Science and Development Council' (or panel) would change to account for more development and innovation expertise (see document item (4) above, the independent evaluation).

### **Option 3: Status Quo & Adjustment of Scope**

ISPC and IEA would remain as two separate entities in Rome, but their scope and areas of work would be adjusted as under Option 2.

### **Option 4: Partial Relocation & Adjustment of Scope**

IEA would be moved to the System Management Office to constitute a new unit on evaluations as described under Option 1, while the ISPC would remain in Rome. The scope of both services would be adjusted as described above.