

The Future of CGIAR's Advisory Bodies SIMEC Think Piece

Purpose

This paper outlines the future layout of the CGIAR's advisory services on science and development advice as well as evaluations.

The revision of this paper was done by SIMEC in close consultation with the current ISPC and IEA as well as with the voting members of the CGIAR System Council. This paper should provide the basis for a System Council decision on the future layout of the CGIAR's advisory services, which will be followed by the design of new terms of reference for the advisory services under the leadership of SIMEC. It is foreseen that the new layout of the advisory services becomes operational at 1 January 2019.

Document category: Working document of the System Council

There is no restriction on the circulation of this document

Prepared by: System Council's Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee

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 bodies 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 in Cali.

The paper was 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 the first edition of this paper (2 November) 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.

Since submission of the preliminary version of this paper on 2 November 2017 as a working document for SC5, SIMEC has had the benefit of reading the *'Evaluation of the Independent Science and Partnership Council, Final Report'*, October 2017, and *'ISPC's management response'*, dated 26 October 2017, as circulated to all System Council members and active observers on 2 November 2017. As scheduled, SIMEC met in person in Cali on 7 November 2017 to further consider this paper. During this meeting, SIMEC was briefed by the current and former chair of the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment ('SPIA'), a sub-group of ISPC, together with a senior member of the ISPC Secretariat who supports SPIA.

B. State of Affairs

Since the successful CGIAR governance transition in mid-2016, CGIAR's ISPC and IEA are without current terms of reference. Additionally, the *Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR, 2013 – 2017*, a special initiative project managed by SPIA has recently come to an end¹, with a recommendation from SPIA that it be considered for a further term.

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 workplans and budgets approved in November 2016 by the then 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 management response, 26 October 2017
7. ISPC Think Piece to inform priorities for agricultural research in the 21st century (Maggie Gill)
8. ISPC Briefing No. 62: Quality of Research for Development in the CGIAR Context
9. ISPC Draft Terms of Reference (post-transition, SIMEC-M2-02, Appendix 1)
10. IEA Position Paper: Proposal for a cost-effective and utility-focused evaluation system in CGIAR (Rachel Sauvinet-Bedouin)
11. CGIAR RBM Framework Development: Taking Stock (Julia Compton & Philippe Elul)
12. SIMEC Presentation for Virtual System Council Meeting (11 October 2017)
13. SPIA virtual presentation to SIMEC, 7 November 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 future scenario have taken form.

¹ https://ispc.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/files/documents/impact%20assessment/SIAC_Program_Final_Report.pdf

C. Principles for Advisory Services in CGIAR

For CGIAR's Funders, the following five principles are central regarding the new design for CGIAR's advisory services: (i) improved efficiency; (ii) improved communication between the services and the System; (iii) improved and systematic linkages between science and development; (iv) higher ownership of the advice produced by the services by the System; (v) 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 being separate from the operations of the System Management Office ('SMO') the right location option?). It emerged that many Funders perceive that the ISPC should engage less in certain areas (proposal assessment, annual performance assessment) as 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, and a stable core being built around a business cycle with regular performance monitoring, Funders generally perceive a reduced demand on advisory services and do not support the advisory services to be "frontloading" with new, non-essential tasks.

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, in particular, the new business cycle requirements. These are, amongst others, proposal assessment, annual performance assessment and adjustment, programmatic evaluations, foresight advice and based on this, new programming.

Linked to the principles of improved communications is the principle of ensuring an **improved and systematic linkage between science and development through innovation and effective partnerships**. For many funders, this principle is important if CGIAR is to deliver on the ambitious targets of the 2016-2020 CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework ('SRF'). However, innovation and partnership are not objectives in themselves, but a means to contribute meaningfully to the SRF and development outcomes. Innovation and partnerships are therefore essential to embed in all aspects of CGIAR's advisory functions, and reflected in the staffing of the units dealing with these as work areas.

Many Funders agree that these work streams could be better harmonized by coordinating these services as one unit, with the unit being co-located with the System Organization to enable **higher ownership** and improved coordination of the advice by the System itself. Funders perceive the current arrangement with the advisory services being separate and disconnected from the System Organization, and its higher body, the System Council, as suboptimal. The advice provided by the advisory services needs to be communicated to and formally discussed by the System Council on a regular basis. The System Organization should only act on strategic advice that goes through structured consideration and is endorsed by the System Council so as to avoid ambiguity and strengthen decision making processes. If it is considered useful in strategic direction setting, it will be provided to the System Management Board for formal consideration (see also document 5 listed on page 3).

By bundling the different work streams better and co-locating them next to the System Management Office, Funders see an opportunity for achieving improved communication, higher ownership and greater efficiencies.

Linked to the ownership question is also the question of **independence of advice**, and a need to avoid potential conflicts of interests through the co-location the advisory services with the System Organization. To ensure independence of advice and avoid conflicts of interests, a co-location of the advisory services with the System Organization would be realized through the administrative secretariat being relocated. While the actual work (foresight, horizon scanning, evaluations, etc., as discussed below) would be the responsibility of relevant independent panels, with expertise commissioned through external providers and provided, as now, from expertise across the globe. The co-hosting provision would not alter reporting arrangements and they would continue to report to the System Council, through SIMEC. This kind of arrangement is common place 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 considering advisory services, five areas of work were consistently most important for Funders and other components of the System. These are: (i) foresight; (ii) proposal assessment and (iii) performance assessment, (iv) programmatic evaluations, and (v) impact assessment, with guidance on innovation and partnerships being embedded in all that is undertaken.

1. Foresight

What the System wants: First, the System is seeking 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. Second, the System has identified a need for periodic 'horizon scanning' inputs to be provided (both backwards and forward looking), with a view to keeping watch on emerging issues. This advice could be linked to mid-program reviews to both inform potential mid-program revisions to CRPs (e.g. reprioritizing within a CRP or adding/removing a flagship) and potentially provided on a more regular basis (annually) to facilitate the System remaining nimble and able to react to the dynamic external environment in which we operate.

Potential arrangement: Advice to be provided by an independent, standing high-level panel of experts in science and development subject matters, including beyond the agriculture sector, known as the "Independent Science and Development Council", ISDC. The advice provided by this panel will be communicated and discussed at the System Council level (standing agenda item for at least one meeting per year) on a regular basis, so that it can formally be discussed and considered. The panel members will be international experts in science or development (including innovation matters) and will be given an annual amount of work days (to be capped) by the ISDC Chair to participate on the panel.

The panel will be supported by a small secretariat which is also staffed by experts in science or development. The panel members will be selected by a selection panel consisting of members of the System Council and the System Management Board as well as external members with experience in agricultural research for development matters.

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. This would be programmed into the business cycle of the System, with the information coming sufficiently early to inform development of each successive research phase. Horizon scanning would operate more flexibly, with the high-level panel having a mandate to bring to the System Council annually a broad look on forthcoming issues and how these issues relate to or potentially impact on CGIAR's portfolio in the shorter to medium term.

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 (each 4 to 6 years, or as required) and (annual) performance assessment, the latter of which falls outside of the mandate of the new Independent Science and Development Council (ISDC).

Potential arrangement of proposal assessment: A preferred arrangement would be that the ISDC advises on the development of guidelines for proposal development and assessment, with the secretariat supporting the panel, who contracts external subject matter experts for independent proposal assessment. Whilst the secretariat would facilitate the proposal assessment process, they would not themselves be involved in the technical review. This would be conducted by external subject matter experts which the ISDC would moderate while overseeing the evaluation process and providing guidance. Coaching to bring proposals up to standard would be the responsibility of the System Management Board.

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 a comprehensive program performance management system (including the elements of a results-based management framework based on an interoperable dashboard; an allocation model, with 12 building blocks proposed at SC5 for consideration; and science output reporting on CGIAR's Portfolio on the 9 common reporting indicators agreed at SC5 (Number of innovations per stage, Altmetrics etc.)).

The System Council will advise the System Organization on Funder requirements and on crucial components and criteria of the overall performance management system (with its various parts including results-based management framework) needed to provide the information required by Funders to properly justify their investments in agricultural research for development. The advisory services 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 CGIAR: programmatic CRP evaluations and evaluations on cross-cutting issues. For Funders, programmatic evaluations summarizing available information on progress towards the SRF targets on a regular basis are most important. Evaluation reports require a clear-cut, comparable and easy to digest format, in order to also support management and funding allocation decisions.

Potential arrangement: A small expert evaluation team to assure standards, comparability and quality control of externally commissioned evaluations. Evaluation requests would be aligned to the CGIAR business cycle, to ensure that the independent evidence from such evaluations is informing decision making at strategic opportunities.

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 commissioned by the System Council on an as required basis.

4. Impact Assessment

What the System wants: The System voices unanimous support for impact assessment in CGIAR. There is however a desire to embed a culture of impact assessment into the System more closely, particularly in the Centers and through the CRPs and Platforms.

Potential arrangement: The current Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) arrangement will be kept with a shared small secretariat (that also supports the ISDC). A focus on testing new impact assessment methods and pioneering new ways of gathering data is considered important, as is finding ways to better establish impact assessment capacity within the Portfolio so that responsibility for undertaking impact assessments is not seen as the longer-term role of SPIA. SPIA could also have a role in assessing research Theories of Change ex post and ensuring a strong interaction with the other advisory bodies, so that advice and assessments on all levels and stages are considered for decision making of the business cycle.

Potential process: SPIA's work is to continue, including a focus on ensuring that the impact assessment capacities of the System are strengthened, and that in particular, Centers and CRPs build up their own capacity for impact assessment. To provide the opportunity for improved capacity for impact assessment across the System the System Council should consider a renewal of the 'Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR' (SIAC) program.

E. Recommendation

The Independent Science and Development Council (ISDC), the evaluation function, and SPIA will have a shared secretariat and will all be co-located with the System Management Office. In terms of staffing, the secretariat will have an appropriate balance between experts in science, development and innovation, and monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. For an interim period of one year (2019) the three functions will be based at Bioversity International in Rome with appropriate System Management Office presence to ensure a smooth transition to full integration of the advisory services functions with the System Management Office.

The **Independent Science and Development Council** will report to the System Council, through SIMEC. It will retain a similar structure to the current ISPC, namely an external standing panel of experts in science and development subject matters, which is supported by a small secretariat that reports to and takes direction from that panel.

The panel's functions are to provide: foresight work at required intervals to inform the research proposal development business cycle; horizon scanning to put before the System emerging issues and trends (including through the successful Science Fora) that help inform periodic reviews of the ongoing relevance of research activities; and providing guidance for the CRP proposal assessment process that will be then undertaken by external independent reviewers.

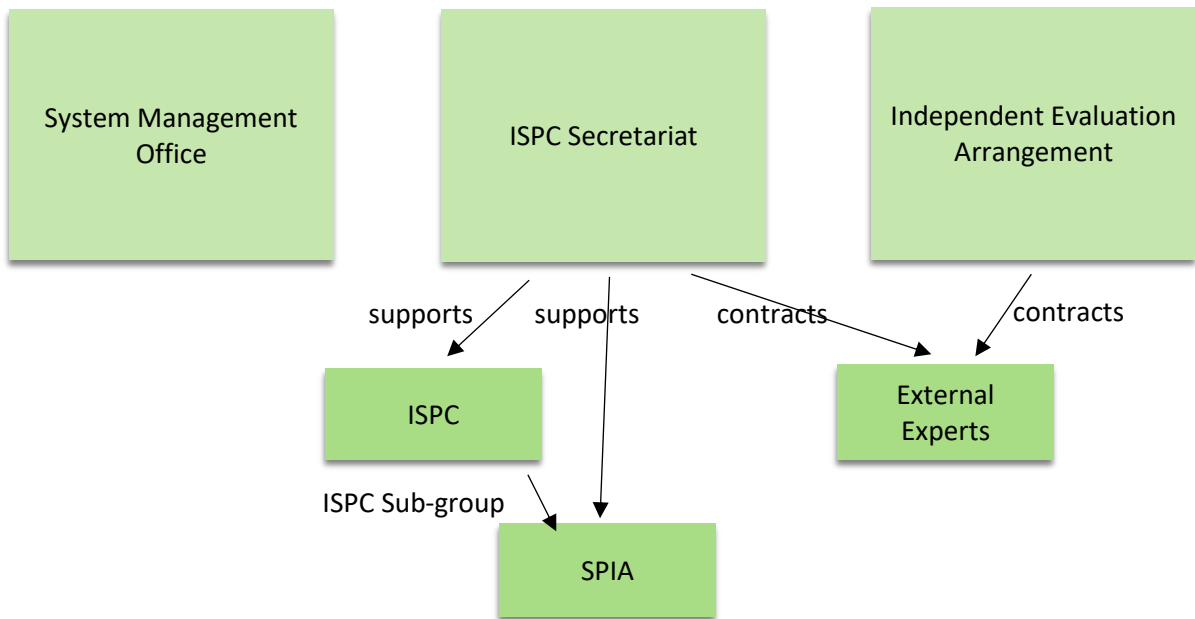
In addition, the secretariat would contract actual proposal assessment tasks to external subject matter experts, but not themselves be involved in the technical review of the proposals.

Support for the System Council's evaluation needs will be provided by a small expert evaluation team, part of the shared secretariat also co-located with the System Management Office, which serves as a quality assurance mechanism for regular programmatic and other on-demand evaluations that are to be undertaken by externally commissioned evaluators. The head of the evaluation team will report on programmatic deliverables to the System Council through SIMEC.

The role of the "Standing Panel on Impact Assessment" (SPIA) will remain the same, with a support provided by the shared secretariat. SPIA as a panel will report to the System Council through SIMEC. There will be regular exchanges between SPIA and the ISDC.

All functions will have guaranteed operational independence, which would be further strengthened by having SIMEC oversee and guide the workplan. Further efficiencies may be able to be achieved by administrative support being provided to these bodies through the System Management Office (e.g. procurement, budget, recruitment support, travel arrangements).

Current Arrangement



New Arrangement

