



Terms of Reference of CGIAR's Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC)

1. Background

- 1.1 The Independent Science for Development Council ('ISDC') is an external, impartial standing panel of experts in science and development subject matters (including food systems innovation matters that extend beyond the agricultural sector) appointed by the System Council¹ and accountable to it, with the responsibility of providing rigorous, independent strategic advice to the System Council, and based on decisions taken by the System Council, the broader CGIAR System as a whole.
- 1.2 The ISDC provides its advice within the broader context of CGIAR's Strategy and Results Framework ('SRF'), and successive multi-year CGIAR Business Plans approved by the System Council upon the recommendation of the System Board. Within this strategic context, the System Council has agreed that the following operational principles guide the role and operations of the ISDC:
 - a. **Independence of advice**, being neither Funders, members of the System Council, nor implementers of CGIAR research programs and/or platforms and avoiding other potential conflicts of interest;
 - b. **Improved efficiency**, with a view to providing advice that maximizes CGIAR's impact while reducing overall costs;
 - c. **Improved communication**, such that various assessments and evaluation workstreams in the System are aligned with CGIAR Business Plan cycles;
 - d. **Improved and systematic linkage between science and development through innovation and effective partnerships**, such that innovation and partnerships are embedded in all aspects of CGIAR's advisory services; and
 - e. **Higher ownership and improved coordination of the advice by the System itself**, such that the advice provided by the advisory services needs to be communicated to and formally discussed by the System Council on a regular basis.
- 1.3 These terms of reference shall be effective on 1 January 2019.

¹ As provided for in Article 3.1 of the CGIAR System Framework, as set out in section 2 (Key terms) below.

2. Key terms

CGIAR Business Plan is a 3-year implementation plan that provide a common planning framework to ensure better alignment in how CGIAR operates as a System, and successive 3-year plans are intended by the System to provide that alignment through to 2030.

CGIAR Research means the research carried out by the Centers and CGIAR System Partners in support of the CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework.²

Foresight studies are periodically (typically each 6 – 10 years) commissioned to inform the development of CGIAR’s longer term research strategy, with a view to ensuring that CGIAR’s research agenda is resilient to the future. Foresight studies are commissioned on topics where the issue has a strong science and research element, so that science can play a role in solving or helping the CGIAR System understand it, and there is a significant future element to the issue, either because it relates to long term trends like climate change, or because there is uncertainty to how an issue will develop in the future.

At specified points in time in line with CGIAR Business Plan cycles (typically each 3 years), **horizon scanning** exercises provide analysis on how emerging trends and developments might potentially affect CGIAR’s current research agenda, thereby assisting the System Council to develop new insights into novel and unexpected issues as well as persistent problems and trends, including matters at the margins of current thinking that challenge past assumptions.

Priority setting exercises, integrating both *ex-post* and *ex-ante* analyses, assist CGIAR, and especially the System Council, to discern the relevance, weighting and emphasis to be accorded to the range of proposed CGIAR research programs in order that those programs achieve strategic coherence and optimally advance the relevance and impact of CGIAR-generated research outputs. Such guidance also assists efficient and focused use of limited research financing invested in CGIAR, particularly in regard to shared science investments funded via Pooled and Designated Funding from the CGIAR Trust Fund.

CGIAR’s Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service³) provides operational support as the secretariat for the Independent Science for Development Council (‘ISDC’) and the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (‘SPIA’), and implements CGIAR’s multi-year evaluation plan as approved by the System Council. It operates according to its own Terms of Reference.

² Definition from the CGIAR System Framework. CGIAR Research was defined this broadly to incorporate all the sources of funding for such research, whether from the CGIAR Trust Fund or bilateral.

³ With effect from 20 July 2022, and following a decision of the CGIAR System Council (Decision Ref: SC/M16/DP5), any and all references to ‘CGIAR Advisory Services Shared Secretariat’ were amended to ‘CGIAR’s Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service’ in this document. This change does not affect the substantive content or operational effect of the document.

Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee ('SIMEC') means the standing committee of the System Council as defined in Article 8.2 b) of the CGIAR System Framework

System Council means the strategic governing and oversight body of the CGIAR System, which is comprised of both voting and ex-officio non-voting members. A reference in these terms of reference to the System Council means that body as fully constituted with both members and ex-officio non-voting members.

3. Mandate

3.1 The ISDC performs the following functions and fulfills its mandate under the overall oversight of the System Council.

Foresight work to inform CGIAR's longer term research strategy

3.2 At strategically relevant periods for the development and/or review of CGIAR's Strategy and Results Framework, the System Council will request foresight studies based on proposals that may arise from deliberations of the System Council and from the ISDC considering the broader global context itself. When delivering such studies, the ISDC is responsible for providing the System Council with evidence-based, impartial and strategic advice on future critical research for development areas for which CGIAR has a comparative advantage. This includes the following responsibilities to provide an evidence base to support research programming and major potential shifts in the focus of CGIAR Research:

- a. Leading CGIAR System foresighting studies to provide robust advice on the core science and development challenges inherent in delivering on CGIAR's System goals, how these should be tackled in the System's research and innovation agendas, and how science breakthroughs and major emerging science developments might be harnessed to assist, taking on board the expertise in the Centers, and ensuring effective partnering with on-going and future foresight work internationally in sectors beyond agriculture, including food, nutrition, energy and others.
- b. Based upon outcomes of foresighting studies and System Council discussion and deliberations thereon, providing recommendations and/or proposed adjustments vis-a-viz the relative priorities for CGIAR Research in order to strengthen alignment with CGIAR's System goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- c. Provide expert contributions to the System Council during the development and periodic review of the implementation of the CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework and such other research frameworks envisioned to be adopted as mid-term guidance aligned to CGIAR's planning cycles.

Horizon scanning

3.3 Aligned with CGIAR Business Plan cycles, and as requested by the System Council, the ISDC is responsible for providing the System Council with both backwards and forward-looking horizon scanning inputs that put before the System emerging issues and trends that help inform periodic reviews of the ongoing relevance of research activities within a current portfolio of CGIAR Research. Proposals for horizon scanning exercises may arise from deliberations of the System Council and the ISDC considering the broader global context itself. Delivered as impartial inputs to guide System Council deliberations, this includes:

- a. Providing analysis and assessments of developments in key aspects of agricultural research for development and food systems innovation relevant to CGIAR's goals for System Council consideration and deliberation on a regular basis. This may include amongst other areas, providing strategic advice on shifts in agricultural development policies and priorities at international and national levels, as well as shifts in public/private sector roles, mechanisms and financing, and the potential of new and innovative technologies and institutions to enhance development impact in food systems.
- b. Based on System Council deliberations on horizon scanning inputs, commissioning in-depth studies on any relevant issues that have emerged and would provide valuable information to the System.
- c. At the request of the System Council, overseeing the translation of outcomes of in-depth studies into pragmatic guidelines, best practice briefs and protocols on key aspects of innovation systems such as partnership, financing and business model strategies.
- d. Contributing to mid-CGIAR Business Plan cycle reviews through the provision of advice to the System through the System Council on how the outcome of horizon scanning activities could potentially affect the CGIAR Portfolio, thereby facilitating a conversation between the System Council and System Board on possible reprioritizing and/or rebalancing of research efforts in a successive CGIAR Business Plan implementation period, including adding or removing specific elements.
- e. Linked to the outcome of horizon scanning activities and deliberations of the System Council, within each CGIAR Business Plan implementation period, providing commentary to the System Council on the annual performance reporting of the CGIAR Portfolio.

Priority setting exercises and analyses

3.4 At strategically relevant periods for purposes of informing periodic proposal development and assessment processes, the ISDC is responsible for:

- a. Conducting rigorous, independent analytical work on priorities and trade-offs, making use of state-of-the-art knowledge from foresight, horizon scanning and other commissioned activities; and
- b. Based upon such work, and with a focus on those resources that are provided via the CGIAR Trust Fund, as well as bilateral, providing guidance and, where appropriate, objective independent analyses to the CGIAR System through the System Council on the suggested optimal allocation of System resources to be accorded to various CGIAR research programs and platforms in order that the research activities achieve strategic coherence and optimally advance the relevance and impact of CGIAR-generated research outputs.

Guidance for periodic proposal assessment processes

- 3.5 The ISDC is responsible for providing strategic guidance and oversight to ensure a robust impartial assessment of the focus, scientific excellence, adequacy of scientific and institutional research resource capacity, and potential for impact of funding requests for research proposals in accordance with the CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework and such other research frameworks intended as mid-term guidance and approved by the System Council on the recommendation of the System Board.
- 3.6 As commissioned by the System Council, and subject to paragraph 3.7, this includes:
 - a. For new calls for proposals for a whole portfolio or major additional elements, and based on System Council deliberations on foresighting studies and horizon scanning activities, identifying for consideration and strategic direction by the System Council in advance of System Board adoption for the call for proposals:
 - i. Analysis and advice on optimizing the CGIAR Portfolio as a whole;
 - ii. Effective research modalities and structures for delivering high quality research to solve challenges relevant to CGIAR's mandate using a Quality of Research for Development Framework agreed by the System Council in consultation with the System Board;
 - iii. Efficient processes for calling for and assessing proposals, including the appropriate proposal assessment metrics as well as linkages between proposals to achieve the high-level outcomes of a call for proposals; and
 - iv. Any updated guidance relevant to the quality and relevance at entry stage of proposals taking into account the quality of research for development frame of reference and internationally accepted research standards, and the evidence-base supporting further investment as aligned to the CGIAR System Risk Management Framework and the CGIAR System's risk appetite statement.

- b. For material proposed adjustments to the prioritization, flagship elements and/or research structures within a current CGIAR Research Portfolio, providing commentary to support informed discussion and decision-making by the relevant governance bodies, taking guidance from horizon scanning activities, engagement with the System Council, and where necessary, inputs from the System Board and contracted external subject matter experts.
 - c. Moderating the proposal review assessment process undertaken by external subject matters experts, which experts are contracted by CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service, to undertake independent proposal assessment. The profile of experts and consequent search process for such experts to undertake proposal assessments will be developed by the ISDC with support from CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service. This process will be informed by suggestions from other bodies as necessary and considering System Council needs and the development relevancy analog. The final selection of experts will be made by the ISDC itself. With respect to the moderation of the expert assessments, Conflicts of Interest of individual ISDC members must be declared with the decision on recusal of individual members from specific expert assessments to be decided by the ISDC Chair and Head, Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service.
- 3.7 Recognizing the benefit of ISDC guidance to the System Council on appropriate modalities and processes for proposal reviews being informed by the views and experiences of the CGIAR Research leaders, at relevant times in the CGIAR Business Plan cycle, CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service will facilitate the exchange of information between ISDC members and CGIAR Research leaders through a series of open webinars that are transparently scheduled to facilitate broad participation.

Other functions

- 3.8 From time to time, the System Council may also formally request broader guidance from the ISDC on matters concerning the strategic direction of CGIAR and the value of its research agenda, including:
- a. Advising the System Council on how to maximize the value of the extensive research advice available across the System, for example, where appropriate, leveraging the expertise that sits in advisory bodies to the CGIAR Centers and research programs in System-wide foresighting and horizon scanning exercises.
 - b. Providing advice, when necessary, on appropriate policies and approaches with respect to research infrastructure and platforms across CGIAR, including regarding shared and remote equipment access.

- 3.9 At strategic opportunities aligned to the CGIAR Business Plan so as to ensure that the outcomes of such conversations can be tabled at and discussed by the System Council, the System Council may request the ISDC to convene and/or broker strategic science discussions and international fora between outside experts and science groups within the CGIAR System to facilitate relationship building, knowledge exchange and stronger positioning of CGIAR as a global thought leader in the global arena.

4. Members and appointment process

Membership

- 4.1 ISDC will consist of up to eight (8) standing members, which number can be reviewed by the System Council based on need and required expertise coverage, one of whom serves as ISDC Chair and one as Vice Chair. The role specification and key competencies desired for ISDC members, as well as those specific to the ISDC Chair and Vice Chair will be approved and reviewed periodically by the System Council to ensure that they represent the optimal guidance on capacities required.
- 4.2 ISDC members will serve an initial three years, with the possibility of renewal up to three additional years without further extension. To the extent possible, membership terms will be staggered to ensure a gradual refreshing of members.

Appointment process

- 4.3 ISDC members, including the ISDC Chair and Vice Chair, are appointed by the System Council based upon a merit-based, open and competitive selection process that includes the following elements:
- a. A broad call for applications and nominations, including a visible public element as part of that call;
 - b. Review and consideration of applications and nominations by a nominations panel comprised of up to six (6) persons from the following groups as chaired by the SIMEC Chair:
 - i. At least two System Council members appointed by the System Council Chair, one of whom shall be the SIMEC Chair or her/his delegate;
 - ii. Two science leaders appointed by the System Council Chair, one involved in the delivery of research outputs in a development context and one other individual associated with major science bodies working across a range of disciplines; and
 - iii. Two persons fully external to CGIAR, with a preference for at least one of those persons to be a highly experienced individual involved in innovation from a sector beyond agriculture.

- 4.4 The terms of reference for the nominations panel, including membership, will be approved by the System Council through electronic means. The membership of the nominations panel will be diverse and demonstrate CGIAR's strong commitment to ensuring gender equality in all facets of its work. The nominations panel will be permitted to seek the views of the Chair of the ISDC during the screening process for new ISDC members, but the ISDC Chair will not personally serve on the nominations panel.
- 4.5 The search and nominations process will be undertaken according to the administrative policies of the CGIAR System Organization and be managed by the System Management Office under the overall oversight of the nominations panel. For the avoidance of doubt, the CGIAR System Organization has no decision-making role in regard to the selection of ISDC members.

5. Ethics and management of conflicts of interest

- 5.1 All ISDC members shall act in good faith in the interests of the CGIAR System.⁴
- 5.2 All ISDC members shall comply with the ISDC Conflict of Interest Policy (which policy shall be consistent with any approved CGIAR policy on ethics and conflicts of interest) and abide by ISDC procedures for managing conflicts of interest.
- 5.3 The ISDC may agree additional internal rules of procedure for itself that are consistent with these terms of reference and the operational policies of the CGIAR System Organization, which additional rules of procedure of ISDC shall be publicly disclosed by the CGIAR System Organization.

6. Engagement modalities

- 6.1 **Representative role of the ISDC Chair and Vice Chair:** The ISDC Chair and Vice Chair represents all ISDC Members in accordance with their respective Terms of Reference, unless the ISDC Chair has tasked another ISDC member to serve as a focal point on a matter.
- 6.2 **Linkages and engagement with the System Council:** To facilitate effective linkages with and engagement between ISDC and the System Council, the following modalities apply:
- a. Pursuant to Article 3.2 of the *CGIAR System Framework*⁵, the ISDC shall have the right to appoint a representative to participate as an Active Observer at System Council meetings. This representative is expected to be the ISDC Chair unless that person is not available or delegates to another person.

⁴ In line with Article 3.5 of the CGIAR System Framework

⁵ <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10947/4371/CGIAR%20System%20Framework%20-%20WEB.pdf?sequence=7>

- b. Relevant to a standing ISDC agenda item for at least one meeting each year, and at both System Council meetings each year if confirmed by the System Council Chair, the ISDC Chair or her/his designated representative will be invited to provide the System Council with a presentation, report or other think-piece to guide System Council deliberations. Should the ISDC Chair perceive that the scheduling of ISDC matters for discussion in the System Council meetings are insufficient to provide the System Council with adequate opportunity to deliberate on ISDC inputs, the matter should be raised with the System Council Chair after engagement with the Secretary to the System Council.
 - c. The ISDC Chair may engage directly with the Chair of the System Council on a strategic level when need arises from either Chair.
 - d. SIMEC is the key forum for preparatory conversations with ISDC on workflow design and the schedule of delivery to facilitate alignment with System Council workplans and priorities.
 - e. ISDC is encouraged to seek broader System Council inputs on key studies and other deliverables. Written requests for System Council inputs will be undertaken through the System Council Secretariat.
 - f. As outputs of ISDC studies or activities become available to the System Council direct, SIMEC is a forum for discussing possible mechanisms to facilitate the structured consideration and endorsement by the System Council of effective responses to the ISDC's studies or advice, so as to avoid ambiguity and strengthen decision making processes.
 - g. A key responsibility of the System Council on ISDC inputs is to provide a formal reaction, including, when relevant, the pathway for advice or proposals of the ISDC to be put before the System Board for consideration and formal response to the System Council.
- 6.3 **Engagement with SIMEC:** As determined by the SIMEC Chair relevant to agenda SIMEC items, the ISDC Chair will be invited to participate in SIMEC meetings.⁶ Depending on the subject matter, the ISDC Chair may propose that additional ISDC members and/or the Head, Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service also join the agenda item(s).
- 6.4 **Engagement with the CGIAR System Board:** Pursuant to Article 7.8 of the *Charter of the CGIAR System Organization*, a representative of the ISDC is invited by the Chair of the System Board to attend System Board meetings as an Active Observer. Based

⁶ Participation may be in person or virtually as scheduled by the SIMEC Chair.

on consultation with the System Board Chair, the ISDC Chair will identify the appropriate representative and notify the Secretary of the System Board accordingly.

- 6.5 **Engagement with other advisory and assurance bodies:** To facilitate effective operational alignment in the respective priorities and areas of focus of both the ISDC and CGIAR's Standing Panel on Impact Assessment ('SPIA'), the ISDC Chair will engage regularly with the SPIA Chair, including through the participation of the respective Chairs at the other body's key meetings with SPIA Chair as an ex-officio member of ISDC.
- 6.6 **Engagement with CGIAR Centers and programs:** Recognizing that the maintenance of impartiality and independence is critical to the ISDC's ability to deliver against its mandate, direct engagement of ISDC members with researchers and research managers in Centers, CGIAR research programs and platforms is expected to be through transparent mechanisms as facilitated by the Head, Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service and in compliance with the ISDC Conflict of Interest Policy.

7. ISDC operational support and budget

- 7.1 The work of the ISDC will be supported by CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service, which will also be responsible for supporting the work of CGIAR's Standing Panel on Impact Assessment ('SPIA') and providing operational support for the delivery of robust, independent evaluations undertaken by external evaluators at the request of the System Council.
- 7.2 CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service will be located in Rome and will be hosted by and co-located with the CGIAR System Organization at a suitable location ensuring appropriate System Management Office presence. The CGIAR System Organization is responsible for providing appropriate office accommodation for CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service in a manner that ensures the day to day operational independence of CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service.
- 7.3 The terms of reference for CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service and the job description for its Head will be formally endorsed by the System Board as the legally responsible governing body of the CGIAR System Organization, following electronic approval by the System Council. Development of the terms of reference will be undertaken by SIMEC, based on consultations with the System Council members and other key stakeholders including the ISDC and SPIA Chairs.
- 7.4 ISDC's work will be planned and implemented according to:
- a. **A multi-year workplan and budget:** ISDC, with support from CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service, will direct the development of a multi-year workplan and budget with objectives and deliverables that are aligned to successive CGIAR Business Plan cycles using a template provided by the System Management Office for all System entities and the mandated

functions described in these terms of reference. After a review by SIMEC for alignment with business planning cycles, the multi-year workplan and budget will be approved by the System Council as part of the multi-year consolidated budget and work plan for CGIAR System entities that is submitted to the System Council through the CGIAR System Organization according to the provisions of the CGIAR System Framework. For the avoidance of doubt, the System Organization does not determine the work plan or budget for the ISDC and is not involved in oversight of implementation of the ISDC workplan or budget.

- b. **Annual planning:** On an annual basis, a review of the optimal allocation of agreed budget ceiling and scope of activities will be undertaken by ISDC in consultation with SIMEC and the System Council's Assurance Oversight Committee.

7.5 ISDC members are entitled to receive an honorarium for actual services provided, in addition to payment of travel expenses according to the policies of the CGIAR System Organization. The amount of honorarium will be determined in accordance with policies approved by the System Council and paid according to the administrative policies of the CGIAR System Organization. Honorarium amounts will be included in the multi-year consolidated work plan and budget for the CGIAR System and its advisory bodies. Where institutional arrangements of an individual ISDC member may require it, the CGIAR System Organization is authorized by the System Council to make payment of the value of the honorarium to an organization affiliated with a relevant ISDC member.

8. Periodically assessing ISDC performance

- 8.1 Every three years, with the assistance of SIMEC, the System Council will undertake a review of ISDC according to criteria agreed by the System Council. Such reviews will be overseen by the System Council Chair and informed by inputs received from System Council members, the System Board members, and Center leadership and staff, including those responsible for leading CGIAR research programs and platforms.
- 8.2 The System Council Chair, on behalf of the System Council, will ensure that the ISDC Chair's performance is assessed at the end of year two of each three-year term in accordance with an assessment process that has been presented to the System Council for endorsement. Inputs from SIMEC members, System Council members and elsewhere within or beyond the CGIAR System are anticipated to be included in the assessment process.
- 8.3 ISDC may undertake internal self-assessment processes more frequently and should welcome input from non-ISDC members into those processes. ISDC is invited to submit the outputs from any self-review processes into the periodic review that is undertaken by the System Council according to paragraph 8.1.