

## ISDC advice on proposals submitted in response to the Call for Proposals: CGIAR Gender Equality in Food Systems Research Platform

*Two proposals were submitted:*

*Enabling Global Agricultural Research for Gender Equality (ENGAGE)*

*Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results (GENDER)*

The Call for Proposals and the ISDC sought a forward-looking proposal offering a new approach that was not simply a new administrative mechanism for funding ongoing and repetitive studies but rather a new way of approaching the problem that offered the potential for transformative change both in the research agenda and the research process in CGIAR. **Both the ENGAGE and the GENDER proposals represent credible, fundable options for meeting the objectives as set out in the Call for Proposals. For the reasons outlined below, the ISDC considers that the GENDER proposal has the best chance to deliver on the platform objectives and recommends that ILRI be named lead Center for the platform.**

### Rationale behind recommendation

All reviewers considered that both proposals could enhance the contribution of the CGIAR to advancing the role women in global agriculture. The breadth and quality of the teams behind the proposals are impressive, as are the partnerships they propose to leverage. Both proposals reflect significant improvements in CGIAR's commitment to gender and capacity to conduct gender research since the reform in 2011.

Despite improvements since 2011, gender is not yet where it needs to be in CGIAR, especially in terms of how it is reflected in the CRP research agendas, questions, methods and outputs.

At the 6th System Council meeting in May 2018, the System Council "**endorsed the concept that the currently named 'CGIAR Collaborative platform for gender research' become elevated to a fully-fledged CGIAR Platform, making it of equivalent status to the Excellence in Breeding, Big Data and Genebanks Platforms**".

The ISDC understood its task as being, therefore, to assess the proposals with regard to how well they met the criteria for a CGIAR **Platform**. As defined in this Call and in the [CRP2 call](#), a platform is very different from a CRP or a Flagship. Specifically, as system-level service providers, platforms exist to ensure that CGIAR programs and their partners are able to define and deliver the best possible AR4D agendas across the entire CGIAR. While high-quality, International Public Good

gender research is a key output of the platform, the ISDC interprets the definition of a platform to mean that **success of the platform will in part be measured by its ability to influence the way the other CGIAR research programs incorporate platform thinking and networks into their agendas, design and implementation of AR4D.**

ISDC also considered it important that the proposals should be forward looking since the Platform must support research agendas and programs that will not only align with national and regional priorities but also with global challenges and an evolving CGIAR structure designed to respond to them. This is particularly important at a time of transformational change within the CGIAR.

The criteria provided to the external reviewers were those agreed with the SMO in March 2019 and included in the Call for Proposals. As can be seen in the separate summaries, both proposals had strengths and weaknesses. While the external reviewers did not agree on the ratings of individual elements nor on the rankings of the overall proposals, all reviewers recognized that the two proposals represented very different visions and approaches and that the ENGAGE proposal had an advantage through the lead Center having had responsibility for the current Flagship.

While not unanimous on overall ranking, the reviewers all recognized the innovative nature of the GENDER proposal. The “Funder experts” ranked the ENGAGE proposal higher than or equal to the GENDER proposal on most criteria but noted that GENDER has a “*vision of greater outreach to Centers, CRPs and non-gender scientists in the CGIAR*”. **It is this stronger vision that the ISDC regarded as being particularly important for the establishment of a new platform.**

GENDER also seems to have positioned itself to better connect with the commodity-based research agendas that still form a large part of the CGIAR’s research, whereas the ENGAGE proposal could be interpreted as operating more like a funding agency. The GENDER proposal came across more strongly in its ability to extract useful insights from end-users to influence the research agenda.

**Taking all the information available into account, the ISDC considers that the GENDER proposal has the best chance to deliver on the platform objectives and recommends that ILRI be named lead center for the platform.** The GENDER proposal should provide the overarching vision for the platform, however we agree with the “Funder Experts” that “*the talents and excellent ideas from both be fully leveraged going forward*”. Active engagement of all parts of the System will be essential for System-wide success.

Regarding the budget, the base budgets for both proposals are similar, with the GENDER budget higher across most categories, resulting in a base budget 46% higher than that of ENGAGE. None of the base budget items at this level of detail for either proposal appear to be exceptional. GENDER has allocated 40% of total budget for CGIAR collaborations and non-CGIAR collaborations whereas ENGAGE only allocates 21% for these items. Personnel costs for GENDER are higher (though a smaller proportion of costs) even though the core management team is smaller, which should be checked in a more detailed personnel budget.

We strongly recommend that the GENDER team be provided with more detailed guidance on what resources are likely available so that they can move efficiently towards finalizing and operationalizing the Platform. It should be noted that the budgets were not explicitly considered in the recommendation to support the GENDER proposal over the ENGAGE proposal, however if the availability of new funding differs significantly from what is requested it could imperil the ability of the team to deliver on outputs and outcomes.

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