



Dear CGIAR colleagues,

In common with most stakeholders we are excited about the prospects for a revitalized **One CGIAR**, and remain committed and energized to contribute further to its guided evolution.

Given the magnitude and implications of change recommended in the final SRG Report (dated 31st October 2019) and the newly introduced “Initial Steps” document (dated 7 November); and alongside the upcoming System Council Meeting in Chengdu on 13-14th November - we quickly convened various internal and external discussions in our Centers. In line with paras 5.1(b) and 5.1(j) under Article 5: Role of Centers in the CGIAR System Organisation Charter, we offer directly to you as a group of “Due Diligence Like-Minded Centers” the following commentary. This is with a view to help guide your decision-making in Chengdu and thereafter, and to ensure our advice and positions are well documented for future reference. This letter is meant as a supplement to the individual and collective feedback from our Centers already provided to the SRG over the past 4 months.

To keep a sharper focus on our commentary, we limit this communique to three summarized points that are not treated, or are insufficiently treated, in the SRG Report. These three points are:

- (1) Anticipated Due Diligence Questions from Center Boards on Governance
- (2) Aligning Ambitions with Operational Realities
- (3) Accelerating and Rebalancing CGIAR Impact

(1) Anticipated Due Diligence Questions on Governance

Many Center Board Meetings and at least one General Assembly of Centers Meeting are planned for the next 3-6 months. At these meetings, as part of expected due diligence, fiduciary responsibilities and duty of care we can anticipate a number of important questions that will require comprehensive answers. Can the SC consider the points behind these questions in your deliberations and help provide necessary guidance to Center Boards? The type of questions envisaged from Board Members and Host Country *ex officio* reps might include:

- (a) can the SC/SMB please share the “Declaration/Conflict of Interests Log” and list of negative ethical issues to avoid, that were developed from the SRG Exercise?*
- (b) have advocates (individual donors and SMO) of the SRG Recommendations (2) and (3a) received independent legal advice and assurance on the scope and legitimacy of action and can it be shared?*
- (c) can donors provide us with assurance that none of the proposed recommendations trigger any donor safeguards hence possibly negatively affecting future revenue or allowable expenditures?*
- (d) can donors indemnify Centers against any legal jeopardy, financial losses, third party claims or disallowed expenditures by auditors arising from Centers implementing SC decisions or endorsed actions?*

(e) to ensure a good decision flow process, can SRG members provide written undertakings on many of the verbal yet undocumented assurances given to Centers during many of the SRG virtual meetings?

(f) can SC, irrespective of the final outcomes of Chengdu, please encourage the SMO to immediately put much more effort on communication as rumours, disinformation and some negative perceptions abound (e.g. a European-based independent International Organisation (SO) is seeking to take over CGIAR Centers which are mainly based in the Global South) as these may affect reputations, privileges and freedom to operate?

(2) Aligning Ambition with Operational Realities

We sense a profound imbalance in the SRG Report and Initial Steps document between the ambitious intentions and operational realities of **One CGIAR**. This imbalance concerns the actual and opportunity costs of trying to change everything in one go. The unbudgeted demands on the time of DGs, DDGs, CRP Directors, Senior Scientists, Administrators are huge, and would likely involve between 10-40% of individuals time in 2020 work plans alone. These risks seem multiplicative rather than additive and remain unaccounted for, and are likely to prompt instability in Center operations and poor delivery of existing commitments to CRPs and bilateral grants. We agree we need to move fast in many ways but let us prioritise these and not conclude it is all or none. In particular, we feel strongly that recommendations (2) and (3a) require thorough prior cost benefit analyses and risk assessments before being endorsed or decided upon.

The funding forecasts do not appear to line up. If we currently have \$190 million pooled W1W2 funding and \$660 million in un-pooled project funds (total \$850 million), it is unclear how in a few year's time this will move to \$1.4 billion pooled W1W2 funding and \$600 million un-pooled project funds (total \$2 billion)? That is more than a seven-fold increase on current levels of pooled funding and only 91% of current un-pooled funding. At a "big project" size of \$10m per year (\$30m over 3 years), this would equate to 140 projects needed and yet we have fewer than 10 of these currently. A portfolio of 140 "big projects" equates to 2.5 times the number of CRP flagships we currently have.

The upcoming Centers General Assembly Meeting in Rome (12-13th December) will be a useful event to get Centers to seek agreement amongst themselves on which elements of the SRG proposal they prioritise and which they would do anyway with or without extra funding. The Recommendations (2) and (3a) on a Central SO Board replicated at each Center and a new additional management layer are the most difficult, and of highest potential legal jeopardy - and should not be rushed in the weeks and months ahead, especially where they create irreversible outcomes and are absent of thorough risk assessments.

Boards are being prompted to take decisions and amend legal instruments on the basis of missing or incomplete: analyses; risk registers; alternate viable options/scenarios; and business cases to change. They are being placed in precarious situations caught between duty of care of legally established institutions, and unsubstantiated recommendations to relinquish governance control to a common Central Board (System Organisation Board).

(3) Accelerating and Rebalancing CGIAR Impact

It is unsatisfactory to read the SRG Report and find an over-specification of detail on Structures (Boards and new Management layers) and an under-specification on the value offers of CGIAR

Research. There is no unifying Theory of Change, no linking of work to SDG Target Indicators and no leveraging our work through other consortia, alliances or platforms. Following the Paris Aid Declaration principles any country programmed grants should be through country governments yet we want to position CGIAR to coordinate such funds and work. SDG2 and Hunger are important but as we seek genetic gains we often ignore the environmental losses. Before embarking on structural reform we need greater reform on research planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and reporting of Publicly Funded Goods. With increased attention also needed on trade-offs, carbon footprints, prioritization, handing off to NARIs/Private Sector and co-funding. Looking beyond individual commodity value chains but at value webs of multiple value chains. But this does not mean we should move from a paradigm of CGIAR.ORG to CGIAR.COM as the SRG Report implies.

We hope that these summarised comments contribute to the agenda setting of the CGIAR. For completeness sake, we also include in an Annex a compiled list of ideas and reactions submitted over the past 3 months that have not to date been included in the SRG issues log nor have been acknowledged or received replies from the SMO/SRG Co-Chairs.

We wish you wisdom and inclusive discussion in your deliberations in Chengdu and we all look forward to a more progressive and impactful **One CGIAR**.

Kind regards,

Board Chairs of CIFOR, ICRAF, IFPRI, ILRI, IIRI, WorldFish