



Chair's Summary

Adhoc System Council call – 30 April 2020

Dear System Council Members, Active Observers, and invited guests,

As we prepare for what is certainly going to be some important System Council business next month at SC10, this note shares the main points raised and discussed last week at our well attended SC adhoc call.

First, in the face of what are unprecedented times, CGIAR is keenly focused on ensuring the safety and well-being of its staff and their families. This is undeniably our first priority as Funders, managers, board members and colleagues. Just as our respective organizations have reacted, so too the System Organization and CGIAR Centers have acted responsibly and with determination under extremely challenging circumstances. System Council members acknowledge these efforts to manage business continuity and the uncertainty that the current pandemic creates as it unfolds.

Second, I heard much welcomed solidarity around the need for all CGIAR Funders to apply as much funding flexibility as they are able for the duration of the pandemic. During the call it was heartening to hear from all those who made interventions how much effort is being made inside governments, agencies, and other organizations and foundations to limit the financial shock to CGIAR by various means such as, adjustments to program end dates, overhead cost arrangements and reporting responsibilities etc., so as to provide greater operating flexibility. This will give headroom for CGIAR to take stock of what the Covid-19 pandemic means for near, medium and longer-term research priorities.

Although no one was able to make definitive promises, it was inspiring to hear the pace at which we as Funders are working to provide early indications of our financing flexibility. I also took note of a much-welcomed suggestion to further engage on new opportunities arising from this situation. Working together, Funders can keep CGIAR in a strong position to make valuable contributions to addressing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the arising disruptions in food and agriculture systems. I particularly want to thank those colleagues in the call that were able to highlight where additional funding is being explored.

Third, we as a System Council welcomed the momentum that is building around the delivery of a coordinated One CGIAR research response to Covid-19. We heard that IFPRI and ILRI, together with the System Organization, are developing, a system-wide research response in collaboration with all other CGIAR Centers. This is based on four key pillars: food systems; one health, inclusive public programs; and policies and investments. Whilst appreciating that designing a long-run research strategy will take many more months, it was positive news that we will soon receive a proposal for several early key initiatives for discussion in the virtual SC10 meeting in the week of 8 June 2020. As I sought to emphasize in our call – as Funders – we also need to do our part to reduce fragmentation in the

development and implementation of the CGIAR response. Instead of individually approaching specific CGIAR Centers, to the extent possible, we should ideally use the System Organization in the way intended, as our coordinating and synthesizing partner for a more impactful CGIAR. Appreciating that clarity of message is critical at this juncture in our capitals and respective management teams, we also proposed that in the next few days, we receive a consolidated briefing note via the System Organization, on the reasons and justifications for why CGIAR needs our ongoing support at this time.

Fourth, I heard that as a Council, we are fully aligned that CGIAR needs to more proactively demonstrate that ‘CGIAR’ is part of the solution to the world’s needs. Indeed, many commented during our call that had there already been ‘One CGIAR’ - the argument to continue and/or increase funding would be so much more compelling. The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to the most drastic economic consequences in living memory. CGIAR needs to be at the forefront of assessing short-term shocks, recovery efforts, and then ways of building back better. The move to a fully integrated, aligned, operational One CGIAR is precisely what we as Funders need to ensure so that CGIAR delivers as a multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral research for development institution with coherent, highly relevant offerings for those most in need of innovation and transformative solutions on the ground.

Finally, I heard that the Covid-19 pandemic presents to CGIAR a compelling reason to accelerate rather than slow down implementing the 5 interconnected elements of One CGIAR. The System Council sees it as crucial for an empowered One CGIAR Executive Management Team to be appointed by the System Management Board by not later than 1 July 2020. With recognition of the cadre of talent already working in and with CGIAR, we also benefited from the persuasive view that as the world reels from the global shocks and impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is incumbent on the System Management Board to be fully empowered to take a route to the appointment decision that best responds to the environment in which we find ourselves – with emphasis on pace, pragmatism and professionalism.

As always, the quality of the pre-read and call materials from our System Organization colleagues were excellent, and I am constantly impressed with the way that the team works so effectively across CGIAR to convene and synthesize data for our collective benefit.

In closing, I would like to sincerely thank every Council member for their time and dedication at this remarkably dynamic and complex time. I know that many of you are working around the clock, not only on CGIAR but on all your other areas of responsibility. That so many Council members joined our call, contributed, and expressed their desire for a truly impactful One CGIAR was an important signal, and one that I hope can be conveyed widely through this brief summary of our discussions across the whole CGIAR.

Yours sincerely,
Juergen Voegele, Ph.D.
Chair, System Council