

## ISDC 2020 Progress and 2021 Look Forward

### Purpose

This additional resource illustrates key achievements of the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) since June 2020, outlines the 2021 workplan priorities, and describes the synergy among the CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS) that comprise the three independent advisory functions of ISDC, the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA), and the Independent Evaluation Function.

### Action Requested

No action required for System Council.

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Prepared by: CGIAR Advisory Services Shared Secretariat in consultation with ISDC .

## ISDC 2020 Progress and 2021 Look Forward

This pre-read for SC11 illustrates key achievements of the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) since June 2020, outlines the 2021 workplan priorities, and describes the synergy among the CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS) that comprise the three independent advisory functions of ISDC, the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA), and the Independent Evaluation Function.

As mandated in the ISDC Terms of Reference summarized below (3.6 and 3.7), ISDC provides guidance comprising:

- “analysis and advice on optimizing the CGIAR Portfolio as a whole
- 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
- 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. . .”

### ISDC 2020 Review

In the second half of 2020, ISDC focused on operationalizing the Quality of Research for Development Framework (QoR4D). This was the overarching theme of the second 2020 semiannual meeting, which was a need discussed during the first meeting among the Executive Management Team (EMT), ISDC and SPIA Chairs, and CAS Secretariat in late September 2020, and re-iterated when EMT met with the wider ISDC in its first semiannual meeting session. The meeting was held virtually through five sessions commencing on 21 October and concluding on 16 November.

The work to develop QoR4D metrics was complemented by the ISDC review of the One CGIAR Research Initiative proposal template draft, delivered to the System Organization Programs Unit, and the invitation to provide [feedback](#) on the second draft of the One CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy.

### *Applying QoR4D in Assessment of Research Initiative Proposals*

QoR4D was developed in 2017, adopted in 2018, and revised in 2020. The Framework was designed to help CGIAR in:

- Developing research strategies and programs,
- Establishing a new research portfolio,
- Monitoring systems and,
- Designing performance management standards.

To fulfill its mandate related to assessing proposals, ISDC is creating metrics to operationalize the QoR4D Framework. The metrics will be applied at different stages of the Research Initiative proposal assessments. These metrics were co-designed with Science Leaders during one of the sessions of the semiannual meeting.

The four key elements of the QoR4D Framework were the starting point for the operationalization process.

1. *Relevance* refers to the importance, significance, and usefulness of the research objectives, processes, and findings to the problem context and to society.
2. *Scientific credibility* requires that research findings be robust and that sources of knowledge be dependable and sound.
3. *Legitimacy* means that the research process is fair and ethical and perceived as such.
4. *Effectiveness* means that research generates knowledge, products, and services with high potential to address a problem and contribute to innovations and solutions. *Effectiveness* in this context means research is positioned for use.

In addition to the four key elements, the Eschborn Principles (April 2020) also are being integrated into the development of metrics. This will ensure that the proposed metrics are responsive to and reflect the fundamental criteria funders set out for CGIAR Initiatives through a codesign engagement.

With the active input from CGIAR Science Leaders, the ISDC developed a robust set of proposed criteria stemming from the QoR4D Framework:

1. consultation with Brian Belcher—an expert on research effectiveness—whose publications also provided much of the foundation to the QoR4D Framework
2. consultation with the CAS Secretariat Evaluation team that provided input based on recent and ongoing experience in evaluating CRPs
3. a set of draft criteria were subsequently developed by ISDC. These encompassed the four key elements of the Framework, and addressed the main headings within the Proposal template, which the System Organization Programs Unit circulated for ISDC feedback
4. a virtual discussion and feedback session was held with CGIAR Science Leaders (40+ in attendance) where working groups reviewed the criteria and provided strengthening feedback to ISDC
5. ISDC currently is revising the criteria based on this feedback and to incorporate the Eschborn Principles, and that will be finalized in an iterative process with the development of the Research Initiative Proposal templates
6. a scoring system for the criteria is currently under development
7. when finalized the operationalization of the QoR4D for proposal assessment will be documented as an addendum to the main QoR4D Framework.

#### Examples of Metrics

- Relevance: Theory of Change rated according to identifiable linkage from the research inputs to the outcomes and impacts.
  - *Eschborn Principle: Compelling theory of change to achieve impact at scale on SDG2 and other Sustainable Development Goals (as framed by CGIAR's five Impact Areas).*
- Credibility: Innovation packages may receive a low rating if policy engagement is not described.
  - *Eschborn Principle: Generate diverse approaches designed to address the stated problem as effectively as possible using an integrated systems-based approach, rather than relying on supply-driven solutions.*

#### *Publishing ISDC Foresight and Trade-off Work in Q Journal*

The two commissioned foresight reviews focusing on the One CGIAR impact areas and the follow-up trade-off report were adapted to a more general audience and will be published online on 15 December in the first issue of *Q Open*, a new agricultural economics journal published by Oxford Press. ISDC wrote an introduction for the articles and the CGIAR Foresight Team co-leads authored a commentary.

#### **A Look Forward into 2021**

As described above, ISDC will continue its work on making QoR4D fit-for-purpose for a One CGIAR Research Initiative review process in line with the Eschborn Principles. The process of operationalizing QoR4D includes consultations and communications with EMT, System Organization Programs Unit, System Board, SIMEC, and Science Leaders. ISDC will assess the proposed seven One CGIAR Research Initiative fast-track proposals against the agreed metrics. This may include inviting additional subject matter reviewers to compliment the skillsets of current ISDC members. These reviews are likely to take place over a six-week period in June and July, with planning starting in early 2021.

ISDC will welcome three new members in early Spring 2021. One ISDC member will serve as an observer on the nomination panel during the recruitment process starting in January. ISDC and the CAS Secretariat will

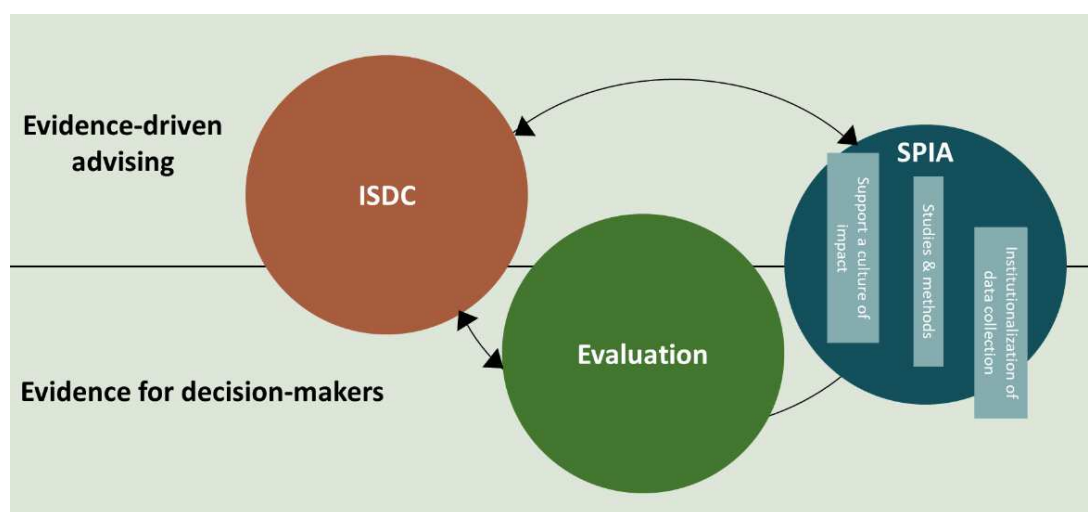
support the System Organization with advertising the vacancies in key CGIAR geographies to ensure diversity among its new members. Orientation, onboarding, and induction of these new members will be a priority, with the ISDC Chair and the CAS Director playing active roles in this process.

In keeping with adaptive management and codesign principles, ISDC will advise on science for development for arising and ad hoc needs. This includes standing ready to assist System Council and work closely with EMT and the System Organization Programs Unit on review of the Investment Plan and strategies or initiatives. Once the new members have been appointed, ISDC will hold another semiannual meeting. A date for this and the subsequent meeting will be set once there is more clarity about the impact of COVID on travel in 2021. As 2020 has shown, some face-to-face meetings will remain essential for the effective delivery of outcomes by building cohesion among ISDC members.

In addition to semiannual meetings, ISDC will explore a theme for the science for development symposium anticipated for 2022. ISDC will begin the work to codesign a research symposium in support of the One CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy and new portfolio, in collaboration with EMT. Input and consultation with System Board and System Council via SIMEC will inform the agenda.

### Synergy within CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS)

Together, CAS functions provide external, impartial, and expert advice on strategy and positioning, program evaluation, and impact assessment. CAS activities gather and generate evidence for decision-making at all levels of the System through evaluation and impact assessment activities. The figure below illustrates how ISDC, Evaluation Function, and SPIA gather and generate evidence and formulate advice.



*Figure: ISDC, Evaluation Function, and SPIA gather and generate evidence and provide advice. ISDC and SPIA have the strongest advisory emphasis, whereas Evaluation and SPIA have an evidence provision emphasis. The three functions cross-reference their work.*

Among the three CAS functions—ISDC, Evaluation, and SPIA—the flow of evidence to advising is facilitated by the support from a single Secretariat. ISDC uses evidence gathered and generated by the Evaluation and SPIA functions to inform its evidence-based advising. For instance, in 2021 ISDC will call on the CRP 2020 Reviews and the SPIA country studies. Conversely, ISDC work on metrics to assess One CGIAR Research Initiatives will inform the revision of the Evaluation Policy. Additionally, the SPIA and ISDC chairs participate in group meetings. Support to the three functions by a single CAS Secretariat promotes and facilitates this knowledge and information flow, both leveraging the evidence and creating consistency in the advice.