



## Cover Note

### ISDC 2023 Progress Update, Concept for 2023 ISDC Science Forum, and Concept for ISDC Project on Megatrends & CGIAR Research Portfolio

#### Purpose

This pre-read provides the Independent Science for Development Council's (ISDC's) 2023 progress update, concept for the 2023 ISDC Science Forum, and concept for the ISDC project on Megatrends & CGIAR Research Portfolio.

#### Action Requested

The System Council (SC) is requested to read and reflect on the documents. The information presented is intended to support System Council in making decisions and recommendations for the One CGIAR research portfolio and strategic planning. ISDC invites SC members to share their reflections both via relevant sessions at SC18 or via email at [isdc@cgiar.org](mailto:isdc@cgiar.org). Consultation instructions are explained below.

##### *Concept for 2023 ISDC Science Forum*

For reflections after SC18, please email [isdc@cgiar.org](mailto:isdc@cgiar.org) through 1 June 2023.

##### *Concept for ISDC Project on Megatrends & CGIAR Research Portfolio*

For reflections after SC18, please email to [isdc@cgiar.org](mailto:isdc@cgiar.org) through 18 May 2023.

#### **Distribution notice:**

This document may be shared without restriction.

Prepared by: ISDC with the support of CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service.

## ISDC 2023 Progress Update

This Progress Update documents key outputs and achievements of the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) from January through April 2023. The final deliverables for the 2022 workstreams can be found online: [Application of QoR4D](#), [Inclusive Innovation](#), [Comparative Advantage](#), and [Science Forum](#).

### External Review of Research Initiative Proposals

The ISDC Chair presented the review of the Fragility, Conflict, and Migration Initiative at a System Council (SC) drop-in call in February. ISDC originally submitted this review in October 2022 to the System Management Office. The review also was provided to the System Board (SB). The ISDC Vice Chair contributed to the SB discussion during its December meeting.

### Workstreams of ISDC's 2023 Workplan

ISDC has three workstreams in its [2023 workplan](#), consisting of (a) *Agricultural Systems* supplement on inclusive innovation, (b) Science Forum, and (c) Megatrends.

#### *Agricultural Systems Supplement*

Extending the 2022 workstream on Inclusive Innovation and TropAg symposium on the margins of the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of System Council (SC17), ISDC is sponsoring a special collection of articles on inclusive innovation in *Agricultural Systems* (impact factor 6.765). The supplement will bring together world class thinking on the topic of inclusive innovation from outside and within CGIAR, which may be parlayed into further advice for One CGIAR. The supplement is expected to start rolling out publications online in December 2023. The deadline for an open call for manuscript proposals was 28 March and guest editors received 66 proposals. Read the [blog](#) authored by the guest editors to learn more.

#### *2023 Science Forum*

Keeping with the theme of innovation, a concept note was developed for the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of System Council (SC18) for the Science Forum, which is provided within this pre-read. The ISDC Chair presented the Science Forum concept to the Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) during its March meeting. Feedback from this meeting has been incorporated into the concept note. Conversations are ongoing about the Science Forum's date, location, content and format with SC, SIMEC, SB, and CGIAR leaders. ISDC is exploring the theme of innovation for impact with a focus on CGIAR's Impact Area on Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion.

#### *Megatrends*

The ISDC members have met regularly to refine the purpose and scope of the ISDC commissioned synthesis on megatrends. The aim is to provide the best possible guidance to SC members to assist with adjustments and fine-tuning of the research portfolio. The ISDC Chair consulted with SIMEC on the megatrends' early conceptualization, with the feedback incorporated into the concept note provided within this pre-read.

#### *Comparative Advantage—Knowledge Products and Training Modules Publicly Released*

ISDC completed its 2022 Workstream on Comparative Advantage by producing training modules that complement ISDC's Technical Note [Identifying and Using CGIAR's Comparative Advantage](#). In a [series of three short videos and podcasts](#), Chris Barrett and Josh Zivin compelling outline how to use comparative advantage analysis in portfolio planning and analysis. These knowledge products will help to produce a more streamlined, purposive, and intentional One CGIAR research portfolio. Beyond portfolio management, pushing comparative advantage thinking can help with positioning CGIAR at the frontier of agricultural research for development (AR4D) and with the development of strategic partnerships. The videos and podcasts, in conjunction with the Technical Note, are a "must watch" for anyone invested in research for development (R4D).

### **Meetings and Communication**

The ISDC Secretariat is planning the ISDC's in-person semiannual meeting. While the ISDC usually meets in conjunction with SC meetings, this was not feasible for SC18. Hence an ISDC in-person meeting is now scheduled for either Q3 or Q4, 2023.

In February, the ISDC Chair attended the Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) Evaluating Quality of Science workshop in Rome, convened by the IAES Evaluation Function. He subsequently attended the SIMEC meeting in Paris. During the last week of March, the Chair visited IAES and met with many other One CGIAR and Alliance colleagues based in Rome. Prof Meinke also met with eight members of the Rome-based CGIAR senior leadership team. Additional meetings during his visits in February and March included the FAO Research and Extension Unit Head and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation Secretariat.

## Concept for 2023 ISDC Science Forum

The Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) organizes Science Fora to mobilize science for development through international dialogue on critical issues in agricultural research to provide external guidance to System Council (SC). ISDC renewed its commitment to these science dialogues with a focus on the role of innovation in research for development because of its prioritization in the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy. In [2022](#), ISDC held a virtual side event at FAO's Science and Innovation Forum that discussed institutional innovation and a second event as a symposium at TropAg, in the margins of the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of System Council, focused on inclusive innovation in international development. The format of smaller events online and alongside SC meetings aims to increase the timeliness and accessibility of the ISDC-convened Science Forums.

As noted in the 2023 [ISDC workplan](#), the next Science Forum is slated to be held in conjunction with SC meetings to ensure Council members and other stakeholders can attend. To ensure successful event crowding and logistics, ISDC requires a minimum of five months planning time with the date and location confirmed for the SC meeting. Additionally, ISDC strongly supports that the location be in the Global South. For 2023, ISDC proposes a half-day Science Forum with additional side activities organized by IAES and CGIAR communications following.

### Potential Theme

The topic that emerged across ISDC's 2023 [workplan](#) is **Innovation for Impact: A Focus on the CGIAR Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion Impact Area**. This topic is at the intersection of ISDC's current work with a sponsored supplement in *Agricultural Systems* on inclusive innovation and commissioned research on megatrends and their effect on CGIAR's Impact Areas.

### Plans for 2023 Science Forum

The ISDC Chair presented the 2023 Science Forum concept to Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) during its March meeting. Including this feedback from SIMEC, below provides the goals, intended audience, and suggested content. Feedback from Council members is welcome. Please email [isdsc@cgiar.org](mailto:isdsc@cgiar.org) with any input by 1 June 2023.

### Goals of Science Forum

- Ensure scientific relevance to CGIAR now and into the future
- Learn and debate science gaps in nutrition and food security by including scientific voices, perspectives, and outcomes external to CGIAR
- Offer opportunities for a broad range of stakeholders to discuss the science-policy interface and the role of CGIAR research in providing sound policy advice
- Share learnings to advance CGIAR's strategic planning and Initiatives

### Suggested Sessions with a Focus on the CGIAR Impact Area Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion

- An early look at the ISDC sponsored [supplement](#) in *Agricultural Systems* entitled "Enabling Inclusive Innovation in Agriculture and Food Systems" with two to three scientific presentations from manuscripts focused on the Impact Area
- A presentation highlighting ISDC's megatrends outcomes focusing on the Impact Area
- Panel discussions with select ISDC members, System Council and Board members, and presenters on implications for the CGIAR Initiatives

### Intended Audience

CGIAR SC members, SC18 attendees, and CGIAR leadership and staff; host country and regional government officials, NARES, and other stakeholders

## Concept for ISDC Project on Megatrends & CGIAR Research Portfolio

### Background

ISDC's terms of reference state “*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.*” **Horizon scanning of megatrends** should provide critical intelligence for the delivery of the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy.

From 2022, CGIAR has launched sequentially three-year CGIAR Research Initiatives. Initiatives align with the **2022-2024 CGIAR Investment Prospectus**, organized by Action Areas: (i) Systems Transformation; (ii) Resilient Agrifood Systems; and (iii) Genetic Innovation. CGIAR designs its work with partners to realize multiple benefits and transformative change across five Sustainable Development Goal-aligned Impact Areas: (i) Nutrition, health, and food security; (ii) Poverty reduction, livelihoods, and jobs; (iii) Gender equality, youth, and social inclusion; (iv) Climate adaptation and mitigation; and (v) Environmental health and biodiversity.

Stage-gates are applied to CGIAR Initiatives and components, and include assessments of Initiative design and implementation. They support **evidence-based reflection, learning and decision-making** to optimize resource-use efficiencies and performance across different organizational levels. It is expected gate frequency will follow **Initiatives' three-year funding cycle**, providing opportunity for course adjustments.<sup>i</sup>

Each Initiative is placed under a primary **Action Area** which corresponds to the management unit of a Science Group. Six Regional Integrated Initiatives are formulated to address specific priority regional challenges, and placed under the Resilient Agrifood Systems Science Group's management. Most Initiatives involve internal and partner capacities across more than one Action Area—and all seek to achieve results across the five **Impact Areas**.

The CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy identifies **collective global 2030 targets** for each CGIAR Impact Areas. Furthermore, it emphasizes key pathways from science and innovation generated in Action Areas to the multiple benefits across the five Impact Areas. At the CGIAR and Action Area levels, **theories of change (ToCs)** guide and communicate the major impact pathways of agricultural research for development, and position CGIAR Initiatives within the overall CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy.<sup>ii</sup> There are **critical assumptions and causal links** behind these ToCs and associated impacts, of which **megatrends are key drivers**. They should be monitored, and, if necessary, revisited in light with recent developments, surges, and interactions.

### Aim of the project

ISDC aims to use current and diverse **collective knowledge** on megatrends to provide **concrete and actionable advice** to System Council. Such insights will be needed for the 2022-2024 CGIAR Investment Prospectus' three-year stage-gating and any envisaged adjustments to the portfolio. An ISDC-commissioned project will focus on **which and how megatrends—their recent development, surges, and interactions—affect CGIAR research portfolio**, and, more specifically, **CGIAR Impact Areas and collective global 2030 targets** (e.g., *Are the targets still valid given megatrends development, surges, and interactions? Which arising megatrends would prevent CGIAR from achieving specific targets and CGIAR mission?*). This work will focus on **global** megatrends but will consider their likely manifestation at **regional** scales when generating recommendations.

Aim of the ISDC workstream is not to produce an academic output on megatrends affecting the transformation of food, land, and water systems, nor to duplicate research activities on megatrends planned in the CGIAR Initiative “Foresight and Metrics.”<sup>iii</sup> Importantly, this work will not be performed at the Initiative level but can be seen as instrumental to Initiatives’ stage-gating discussions, consistent with the Performance and Results Management System (PRMS) to support **delivery** of the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy.

## Method

This project benefited from **early-stage engagement** with the CGIAR Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC). Being fit-for-purpose and pragmatic, **consultations** with key stakeholders such as Science Group Directors, targeted Initiative Leads and Partners, System Office (Portfolio Performance unit) and external experts will help **surfacing ideas and concerns** on which and how megatrends—their recent development, surges, and interactions—affect or could potentially affect, CGIAR Impact Areas and collective global 2030 targets.

## Expected deliverables

Consistent with **stage-gate operationalization** and **decision-making mechanisms**, ISDC will generate a set of actionable recommendations for System Council to address portfolio gaps and their implications for the 2022-2024 CGIAR Investment Prospectus, through **CGIAR Impact Areas** and collective global 2030 targets. Attention will be drawn to interactions between and among megatrends (e.g., potential interventions to address one such trend might increase inequality, which is generally overlooked in economic welfare) and across Action Areas. The advisory project will further link sources of CGIAR **comparative advantage**<sup>iv</sup> to the set of recommendations.

The format of recommendations matters, and delivery of key messages is critical for their uptake. It is expected that outcomes will be enlightened by **deep dive calls** with System Council, and will benefit from creative **visualization and dissemination strategy** (e.g., infographics, evidence map, video). Final outcomes are scheduled Q4 2023/Q1 2024 and early-stage real-time advisory products will be made available during the portfolio revision to commence Q3 2023.

---

<sup>i</sup> “Stage-gating supports evidence-based reflection, learning and decision-making to optimize resource-use efficiencies and performance across different organizational levels.” ([CGIAR Performance and Results Management Framework 2022-2030](#), approved at 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of System Council).

<sup>ii</sup> Each Initiative, Regional Integrated Initiative, and sub-Initiative (work package) has its own ToC.

<sup>iii</sup> Work package 1—*Megatrends affecting food, land, and water systems at global and regional scales*—focuses on modeling aspects of megatrends, generating global and regional scenario outputs. By contrast, the independent and synthetic nature of ISDC-commissioned project is framed towards actionable advice for System Council on CGIAR research portfolio.

<sup>iv</sup> ISDC, 2022. Identifying and Using CGIAR’s Comparative Advantage. Rome: CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service. [https://iaes.cgiar.org/isdc/comparative\\_advantage](https://iaes.cgiar.org/isdc/comparative_advantage)