Report of DTA pre-inception workshop retreat

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Executive summary

The CGIAR Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) team convened its inception workshop in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), on 18–20 March 2025. This event brought together the DTA core team, CGIAR center representatives and delegates from key CGIAR science programs, including the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Accelerator, Food Frontiers and Security, and Genebanks.

Hosted at the Advanced Technology Research Council (ATRC) and AI71, the workshop aimed to build team cohesion, align stakeholder expectations, establish new operational modalities and define next steps for delivering DTA inception goals. Team-building activities and strategy sessions were used to contextualize DTA's evolving product suite and position within CGIAR's broader digital innovation agenda.

Key thematic sessions focused on the four areas of work (AoW), unpacked through the objectives and key results (OKR) framework. These sessions highlighted the importance of improving data accessibility, embedding artificial intelligence in research and scaling digital decision-support systems. A dedicated fishbowl session helped clarify the structure and ambition of the artificial intelligence (AI) Hub, while a technical spotlight was given to a multilingual AI-powered agricultural large language model (AgriLLM) .

Strategic site visits to the Technology Innovation Institute (TII), ATRC, Aspire and the Quantum Lab provided valuable exposure to cutting-edge innovations and opened new avenues for collaboration. A significant highlight was the introduction of a new UAE-based partner, including confirmation of major financial commitments: USD 7.5 million to the CGIAR Trust Fund and USD 20 million designated for DTA over 3 years, including USD 3.3 million earmarked for the AI Hub's operationalization in Abu Dhabi.

The workshop concluded with a clear roadmap and several key decisions:

- Revisiting and refining DTA's theory of change;
- Onboarding additional CGIAR centers; and
- Establishing a program management community of practice (COP) to strengthen coordination and knowledge sharing.

The workshop marked a critical milestone in setting a unified direction for CGIAR's digital transformation, reinforcing a shared commitment to innovation, collaboration and long-term impact.

1   Introduction

The Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) is one of the 13 new science programs and accelerators (SPAs) in CGIAR's 2025–2030 research portfolio. The overarching ambition of DTA is to drive the adoption of digital and data-driven approaches across agri-food systems . DTA is envisioned to be a catalyst for co-developing inclusive and ethical digital solutions that leverage artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, big data analytics, and cloud-based technologies to enhance decision-making and influence policy at scale.

DTA operates through four interconnected areas of work (AoWs) that provide a structured approach to digital transformation:

- **Data Ecosystem (AoW 1):** Strengthening data governance and interoperability by adhering to **FAIR** (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) principles, enabling seamless data sharing and collaboration across CGIAR centers.
- **Action Lab (AoW 2):** Accelerating the development and adoption of AI-driven tools and digital innovations through participatory and human-centered design (HCD) approaches and real-world use case testing.
- **Digital Futures (AoW 3):** Conducting foresight studies to explore emerging digital technologies that have the potential to transform CGIAR's research and operational models.
- **Enabling Environment (AoW 4):** Establishing digital innovation hubs to support ethical, gender-inclusive and commercially sustainable digital transformation efforts.

By fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration and building digital infrastructure within CGIAR, DTA aims to create scalable and impactful digital solutions that empower farmers, policymakers and researchers worldwide.

1.1   Inception workshop structure and facilitation process

The three-day DTA inception workshop was facilitated by Lina Yassin, director, digital and data product management at CGIAR. It was designed as an interactive event, encouraging participation, collaboration and constructive feedback and had the following agenda: (See Annex 1 for a detailed agenda):

- Day 1: Team building, shifting to startup mode, and 'operationalizing' our theory of change
- Day 2: Areas of work deep dives and inception
- Day 3: 2025 detailed action plan, modality of work and inception report development/other deliverables

The workshop employed a mix of plenary sessions, breakout groups and interactive exercises, and feedback loops ensured that the discussions were dynamic and result-oriented. Throughout the workshop, facilitation techniques such as Miro boards, real-time polling and structured brainstorming were used to capture ideas and drive consensus (see DTA inception workshop Miro https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVLjOHSkE=/).

Khuloud Odeh (right), outgoing global director of digital and data and DTA interim director, and Ram Dhulipala, the now interim director of the Accelerator, welcome participants to the retreat (photo credit: ILRI/Wandera Ojanji).

2 Summary of day one

2.1 Opening session, introductions and check-in

Khuloud Odeh, outgoing global director of digital and data, and DTA interim director, welcomed attendees and reflected on her goal of advancing digital and data initiatives within CGIAR. She described the progress achieved, including the launch of an initiative aimed at accelerating digital transformation across CGIAR, as impressive. Highlighting the pivotal role of collaboration, Odeh credited the achievements to strong partnerships, particularly within CGIAR, and a shared dedication to driving digital innovation forward.

Ram Dhulipala, the now interim director of the Accelerator, highlighted the need for a collective, purpose-driven approach to transformation, urging participants to work towards a shared vision rather than just focusing on deliverables. He encouraged an open mindset and emphasized the opportunity for long-term impact.

As hosts for DTA inception and designated funders, the opening remarks included speakers Kristofer Hamel, Fatema AlMulla and Stephane Timpano from UAE's presidential court and the Advanced Technology Research Council (ATRC) Aspire unit.

Hamel emphasized the UAE's commitment to supporting CGIAR's mission through strategic collaboration. Built on previous efforts, the partnership reflects a shared vision of leveraging the UAE's capabilities, particularly in AI and technology, to advance CGIAR's work.

Participants were invited to explore Abu Dhabi's rapidly expanding research and innovation ecosystem, beginning with ATRC, the country's primary applied research hub. Hamel reiterated the UAE government's strong commitment to agricultural and climate innovation, reinforced by partnerships with organizations such as CGIAR and the Gates Foundation. He encouraged attendees to identify high-impact opportunities for collaboration over the course of the workshop and expressed enthusiasm for deepening the partnership to drive meaningful, long-term outcomes.

Stephane Timpano, head of Aspire, described his organization's role in managing investments and fostering international research partnerships. He provided details on technological advancements such as AI, robotics and sustainable solutions, highlighting their relevance to agricultural and food security innovation as well as their impact on the global South.

2.2 DTA as a startup

The second half of day 1 began with an interactive team exercise aimed at conceptualizing DTA as a startup. Yassin, who facilitated the session, highlighted core startups principles such as agility, accountability, disruption, creativity and entrepreneurship. She provided insights into startup operations, digital transformation and product development, emphasizing the importance of operational efficiency, market understanding and proactive alignment with customer needs.

A case study on autonomous cars was used to illustrate the importance of product market fit, showing that even if customers expressed widespread interest, companies had to launch in the right regions first. Operational model, market identification, strategy execution and daily activities aligned with business goals, the four pillars of startups, formed the basis of the session.

Lina Yassin, director, digital and data product management at CGIAR, introduces the agenda of the retreat (photo credit: ILRI/Wandera Ojanji).

The discussion also highlighted the transition from projects to products. Unlike projects, which have fixed timelines, budgets and scopes, products require continuous iteration based on user needs, business strategy and market demand. Yassin stressed the importance of understanding customer pain points, validating demand before building solutions, ensuring usability and technical feasibility, and aligning with business objectives. She outlined a step-by-step product development process:

- Identifying market opportunities and defining hypotheses;
- Conducting research to validate user problems;
- Running design sprints for rapid prototyping;
- Developing proof of concept (POC);
- Pitching for funding based on market potential; and
- Building a minimum viable product (MVP) to scale.

To enhance understanding of some of these concepts, participants were divided into five groups. Working on the Miro board tool, each team used the business model canvas to define business objectives, user needs and specific problems to solve—focusing on practical, actionable insights rather than broad concepts and selected the following focus areas:

- **Group 1 (Green Frog Candies):** Empowering farmers through carbon credits by improving data quality and connectivity
- **Group 2 (Orange Turtle Candies):** Leveraging CGIAR data for smarter decision-making and innovation
- **Group 3 (White Sheep Candies):** Creating a FAIR and responsible data ecosystem to accelerate research
- **Group 4 (Purple Penguin):** Developing AI-powered tools to close farmers' knowledge gaps, emphasizing accessibility, training and digital infrastructure
- **Group 5 (The Real Red Crab Candies):** Enhancing germplasm access and searchability to support research and breeding, focusing on sustainability and collaboration

Each team also defined their business ecosystem—setting goals, identifying users and pinpointing key problems. They mapped stakeholders, prioritized their top five needs or solutions, identified three primary risks, proposed mitigation strategies and established KPIs to measure success.

After deliberation, the teams reported back on their chosen focus areas, revealing common themes such as data quality, digital innovation and stakeholder collaboration. Their discussions tackled critical aspects of data interoperability and standardization in agriculture. Some of the key products and outputs as presented by the teams include the following.

2.2.1 DTA key products/deliverables/outputs

a. Intelligent, interoperable data systems

- FAIR, standardized, AI-ready data and protocols

- System-agnostic database with AI-readable parameters

- Tools and infrastructure for responsible data collection, storage, sharing and analysis

b. Digital tools and infrastructure

- AI-powered agro-advisory tools and platforms

- Genebank chatbot and integrated digital services

- Scalable digital infrastructure (e.g. Multidimensional Digital Inclusiveness Index (MDII)) for inclusive solutions

c. Capacity, governance and support

- Building capacity for farmers and stakeholders

- Guidelines, standards, policies, and toolkits for digital transformation

- Funding support for implementation and scale-up

2.2.2 Summary of risks and challenges

The five teams also discussed the top risks and challenges they anticipated for their business ecosystems, along with their strategies for addressing them. Table 1 gives a summary of the discussions.

Table 1. Summary of risks and mitigations

Risk area	Mitigation strategy
Tool inaccuracy and low adoption	Local research and development, user feedback and continuous support
Land and community challenges	Engage local stakeholders early
Cross-border and system sustainability	Build collaborative, long-term frameworks
Conflict and instability	Design resilient, distributed systems

2.3 Unpacking the AI hub in Abu Dhabi: fishbowl session

A key deliverable of DTA is the establishment of an AI hub in Abu Dhabi, developed in collaboration with the UAE government. Although this project is still in its early stages, a dedicated session, structured as a fishbowl discussion, was held to further explore the concept. In this format, a core group initiated the dialogue while the wider group observed, with rotating participants joining to contribute, enabling focused and inclusive discussion.

The initial panel included Odeh, Dhulipala, Hamel, AlMulla and Ahmad Al-Mously, senior manager, System Organization Digital Transformation, digital and data, who provided an overview of the Abu Dhabi hub's general functions. This set the stage for broader dialogue and clarifications around key areas:

- **Funding model clarifications:** Questions were raised about centers not receiving direct funding, and clarifications were provided on the funding structure and distribution.
- **Networks of hubs:** Discussions focused on how hubs interact and collaborate, ensuring alignment with broader goals.
- **Dual role of the Accelerator:** Odeh elaborated on the twofold role of the Accelerator:
  - **Digital transformation for science programs:** Supporting research initiatives and innovation in scientific fields; and
  - **Digital transformation for the System Organization and CGIAR centers:** Enhancing operational efficiency and connectivity across the ecosystem.

Odeh also provided an example of the tentative dual role structure, which envisioned the Accelerator as both a research enabler and an operational enhancer. For instance:

- Providing digital tools and frameworks to advance scientific research; and
- Implementing solutions to improve the internal digital infrastructure of the System Organization and its associated centres.

This session also provided crucial insights into the Abu Dhabi hub's operational framework and its strategic impact across various entities.

Fatema AlMulla from ATRC shares her insights during a dedicated fishbowl session that helped clarify the structure and ambition of the AI Hub in Abu Dhabi, UAE (photo credit: ILRI/Wandera Ojanji.)

2.4   The OKR framework: digital innovation and transformation

Following the fishbowl session, Yassin guided the group into a collaborative activity focused on the OKR (objectives and key results) framework tool that helps organizations set measurable goals and track progress. This session was tailored specifically to the context of the DTA.

Participants worked in five colour-coded teams—Turtle, Penguin, Frog, Sheep and Crab—each tasked with defining strategic objectives, success metrics and actionable initiatives. Each team focused on a distinct dimension of digital transformation within CGIAR, such as AI readiness, inclusive design, policy alignment and FAIR data adoption.

Table 2 below presents a summary of the key objectives, measurable outcomes and proposed initiatives from each team's discussion, outlining a clear roadmap for advancing the DTA's core areas of impact.

Table 2. Summary of the key objectives, measurable outcomes and proposed initiatives for areas of work

Team	Objective	Key results	Initiatives
Turtle	Establish AI-ready data ecosystems and collaborative structures	• # of AI-ready datasets • # of innovations using AI-ready data • # of centers contributing to datasets • Contribution evenness across centers	• Establish AI collaborative • Develop AI data guidelines and repository • Test AI data utility with AoW 2 • Explore tech for sharing AI-ready data (with AoW 3)
Penguin	Accelerate AI adoption for innovation and decision-making in food systems	• # of digitally enabled stakeholders • # of DTA-associated science programs • # of AI-driven solutions adopted • AI return on investment matrix	• Capacity building • Enable digital infrastructure • Test impact delivery framework • AI governance and ethics
Frog	Design inclusive and scalable AI solutions that bridge the digital divide	• 40% of women farmers using digital tools • # of tools developed with HCD • # of active users (gender disaggregated) • # of tools ranked highly by users	• Partnerships and user needs assessment • MDII evaluation • Apply HCD approach • Build accessible digital infrastructure
Sheep	Support responsible digital transformation and policy alignment across CGIAR	• # of learning/innovation networks in food, land, and water (FLW) systems • % of centers with sustainable digital infrastructure • Increased investment in digital innovation	• Co-create digital innovation hubs • Institutionalize digital core and sustainable model • Create centers of excellence
Crab	Incentivize FAIR data adoption and build digital capacity among scientists	• 3 science programs committed to FAIR • 80% of centers using federated architecture • 300 scientists capacitated • FAIR implementation across all centers	• Outreach events • FAIR data capacity building program • Policy guidelines • Stakeholder engagement • Gap analysis

2.5   DTA north star vision and statement

Yassin challenged the DTA team to develop a clear north star vision to serve as a guiding principle for DTA's strategic direction and decision-making. The result, curated during the workshop, is as follows:

'Revolutionizing agri-food systems research and innovation through AI, data and digital transformation—accelerating impact, empowering smallholder farmers, and enhancing the efficiency, inclusivity and agility of CGIAR and its partners.'

This vision articulates the ambition and purpose of the Accelerator, ensuring alignment across teams and partners.

2.6   Defining the structure and leadership roles of DTA

Participants discussed the current structure of DTA, examining roles and responsibilities to ensure clarity, accountability and alignment with broader CGIAR goals. This collaborative dialogue helped surface key areas for optimization and underscored the need for clear, coordinated leadership to drive the DTA forward. A key area of focus was the role of the director and deputy. These positions were identified as central to reporting and engaging with the Global Science Team (GST) and DTA stakeholders, leading the Program Management Unit (PMU), overseeing recruitment of AoW leads and cultivating a strong, mission-driven team. Additional responsibilities include fundraising, managing the DTA budget and representing CGIAR in global forums on digital transformation. Importantly, the director/deputy is also tasked with ensuring the DTA workplan aligns with the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) quality of science framework, reinforcing the initiative's scientific rigor and strategic direction.

Further discussion addressed the responsibilities of leads and co-leads, reporting directly to the DTA directors. Their role is pivotal in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of contributions within their designated AoW. Leads are also responsible for advancing institutional awareness and uptake of digital and data guidelines, convening AoW-specific collaboratives, and contributing to the design and strategic direction of digital hubs. Additionally, they play a key role in establishing partnerships with the tech sector and in shaping the research agenda that will drive CGIAR's digital futures.

2.6.1 The role of DTA in supporting CGIAR centres' digital core

Participants agreed that DTA's primary contribution is accelerating digital solutions for science programs, accelerators and centers though strong strategic partnerships –providing reviews, recommendations and best practices for digital products across CGIAR. In this capacity, DTA would help ensure that digital tools and platforms developed or adopted by centers meet quality, interoperability and usability standards.

The group emphasized DTA's role in facilitating access to relevant information, enabling smoother coordination and more informed decision-making. Cross-center learning, with DTA acting as a hub for sharing ideas and showcasing digital solutions that have proven successful in other centers, was also an area of focus.

It was acknowledged that the usual information and communication technology management remains with the centers, but efforts should be aligned with DTA guidance to maximize coherence and impact. Centers would benefit from sharing their challenges—such as those related to platform governance frameworks—with DTA, allowing for more tailored support.

In turn, DTA would provide access to relevant resources, including tools and staff where available, and would support verification, testing and ongoing refinement of digital products. Finally, DTA would assist in the implementation and integration of digital solutions within center operations, reinforcing its role as both a strategic advisor and an enabler of system-wide digital advancement.

2.6.2 The role of DTA as a science program representative

DTA plays a key role as a representative of the science programs (SP), serving as both a facilitator and strategic connector. Its responsibilities include consolidating SP needs in the digital space and driving consensus around shared priorities. Acting as an interlocutor between SPs, other programs and the Accelerator, DTA helps ensure alignment, fosters collaboration, and discourages siloed digital activities.

DTA also contributes specialized expertise, supports knowledge exchange and helps align SP digital actions with DTA's areas of work. In doing so, it identifies opportunities for joint innovation and resource sharing, and ensures that both priority setting and evaluation of the Accelerator are grounded in the needs and realities of SPs. Additionally, DTA supports the development of metrics tied to impact pathways and ensures dual reporting mechanisms are respected—clarifying whether engagement is through SPs or centers.

Overall, DTA acts as a bridge, ensuring coherence and impact in the digital transformation across CGIAR's scientific landscape.

3   Summary of day two

3.1   AgriLLM project introduction and alignment

The DTA team visited ATRC's offices at Yas Mall, where Mamoun Alaoui of A171 and Kristofer Hamel provided an overview of the Agricultural Large Language Model (AgriLLM) project. The objective was to align the DTA's AgriLLM initiative with broader CGIAR efforts and establish a shared vision for AI-driven agricultural transformation.

AgriLLM is an ambitious project aimed at equipping the agricultural community, including researchers, policymakers and smallholder farmers, with tailored AI tools and models. The project's objective is to fine-tune Falcon LLM language models (LLMs) for agriculture-specific use cases, thus driving innovation and accessibility in the sector.
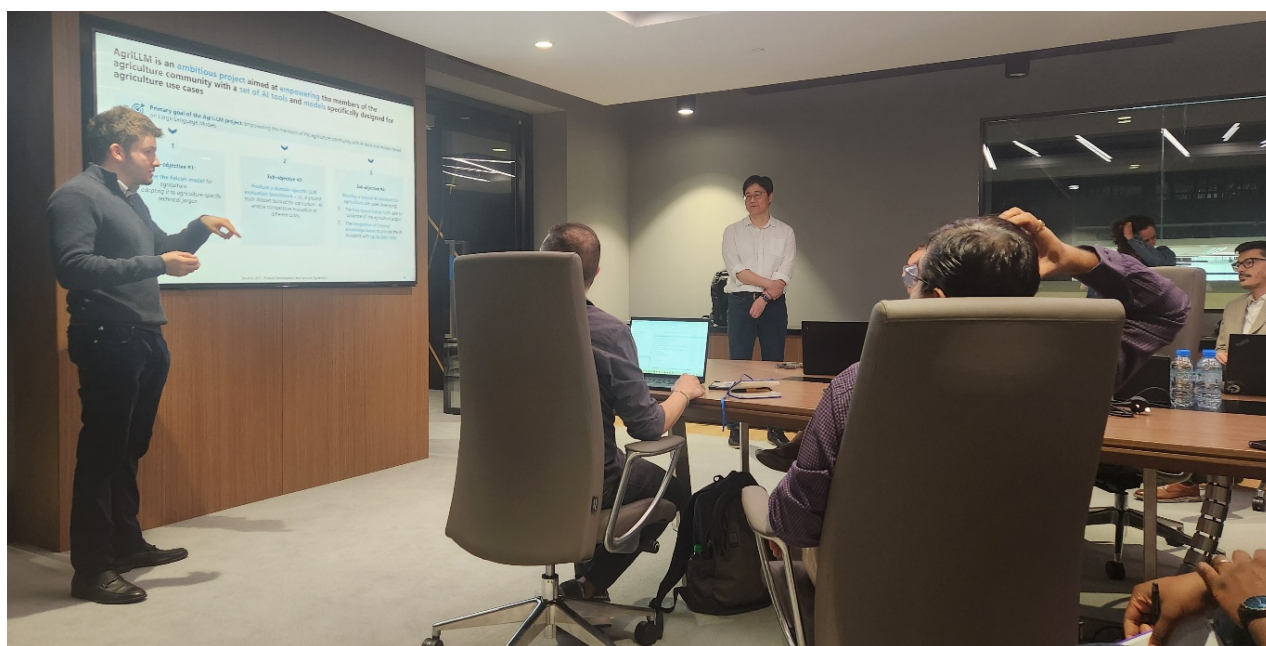
Mamoun Alaoui of A171 presents an overview of the AgriLLM project (photo credit: ILRI/Wandera Ojanji.)

3.1.1 AgriLLM project objectives

- Fine-tuning LLMs for agriculture: Adapting AI models to agricultural vocabulary and use cases.

- Creating an evaluation benchmark: Developing a domain-specific benchmark to assess AI model performance.

- Building an AI assistant: Developing a tool for various use cases, including answering questions from farmers and summarization of research articles.

- Integrating external knowledge bases: Incorporating real-time agricultural data (e.g. weather and market trends).

AgriLLM focuses on four primary deliverables:

- Adapting Falcon LLM: An open-access model fine-tuned to understand agriculture-specific technical language;

- Evaluation benchmark: A domain-specific benchmark and ground-truth dataset for comparative evaluation;

- Agricultural AI assistant: A textual chatbot powered by Falcon LLM, integrated with internal knowledge sources and real-time data; and
- External integration: Real-time access to dynamic data sources such as weather updates and market trends.

While the project is built on open-source technologies, discussions emphasized full accessibility and adaptability for various user groups.

3.1.2 Data collection and model development

AgriLLM project prioritized human-generated queries, reflecting real-world interactions between farmers and extension agents. Key features during data collection and model development include:

- A structured, AI-classified knowledge base using tools like Agriculture Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (AgriBERT);
- A 'mixture of agents' model to enable personalized AI assistants for different user personas; and
- Retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) architecture to dynamically incorporate external data sources.

3.1.3 Value proposition

Strategic discussions centered on aligning AgriLLM with CGIAR's broader objectives and securing long-term support. The team emphasized practical, demonstrable outcomes that illustrate the project's potential and scalability. Key proposals for the December 2025 showcase during the System Council meeting in UAE included:

- A **digital twin** of real agricultural landscapes (e.g. in Kenya, Ethiopia, or Peru);
- A **proof of concept** demonstrating the integration of AI, robotics or drone technologies in agriculture; and
- Use cases focused on **agricultural AI, aquatic food systems** and **breeding technologies**, highlighting CGIAR's global reach and the UAE's innovation leadership.

The emphasis was on showcasing active initiatives and early prototypes to signal progress and momentum, rather than waiting for fully completed outputs.

3.1.4 Next steps
- Identify 1–2 feasible demo concepts that can be developed within the timeline.
- Develop a structured timeline with milestones, working backward from December.
- Pursue quick-win solutions, such as incorporating existing drone research or water management pilots.
- Finalize staffing and site locations to support AI-driven research hubs.
- Refine synthetic question and answer generation for better realism and accuracy.
- Enhance multilingual and geographic support for wider accessibility.
- Improve classification performance across diverse datasets.

3.1.5 Future plans
- Develop a robust AI benchmarking framework.
- Launch expert-driven competitions to encourage data contributions.
- Publish high-impact research to advance the field.

The phased rollout includes the first fine-tuned model and user interface by April 2025, with advanced features—such as multimodal capabilities—targeted for July 2025.

3.2 Areas of work roles and responsibilities

The final team activity on the second day focused on defining the distinct yet interconnected roles and responsibilities within each area of work. Team members gathered in their respective AoWs to collaboratively outline these roles, ensuring clarity and cohesion across functions. Table 3 summarizes the specific responsibilities assigned to each AoW, supporting alignment, accountability and sustained progress toward DTA's overarching mission.

Table 3. Areas of work roles and responsibilities

Area of work	Primary role	Key responsibilities
AoW 1: Data Ecosystems	Lead development of standardized, ethical and collaborative data systems.	• Ensure CGIAR data is standardized, AI-ready and FAIR-compliant. • Build internal data capacity in center. • Integrate gender and inclusion in data practices. • Develop ethical data guidelines (privacy, trust and consent). • Launch CGIAR data collaborative. Promote data sharing and reuse. • Enable co-creation and community-led data innovation. • Identify/manage 5+ use cases. Prototype in three key thematic areas (e.g. inclusive AI). • Pilot three scalable solutions with Digital Futures.
AoW 2: Action Labs	Drive innovation via rapid prototyping and strategic use case implementation.	• Identify/manage 5+ use cases. Prototype in three key thematic areas (e.g. inclusive AI). • Pilot three scalable solutions with Digital Futures. • Develop a monitoring framework aligned with DTA's theory of change. • Track/report all Action Lab activities • Consolidate center-level innovation into one action plan. • Ensure openness and peer review. • Coordinate cross-AoW collaboration. • Align Digital Futures with CGIAR 2025–2030 strategy.
AoW 3: Digital Futures	Shape strategic vision and embed frontier digital technologies in CGIAR R&D.	• Ensure unified roadmap across AoWs. • Embed AI, robotics and data science into research. • Pilot AI co-scientist model. • Identify tech gaps and future opportunities. • Strengthen SP partnerships. • Drive product co-development. • Produce foresight and policy briefs. • Mainstream gender and inclusion. • Develop training and digital literacy programs. • Apply HCD in at least three projects. • Disseminate gender and inclusion standards.
AoW 4: Enabling Environment	Build capacity, governance, and infrastructure to support digital transformation.	• Create governance and operating models. • Align digital frameworks across AoW. • Manage shared platforms and vendor solutions. • Engage with tech partners. • Launch innovation hubs. • Provide shared services and centres of excellence.

4   Summary of day three

4.1   TII lab visit

On the third and final day of the workshop, the DTA team visited the Technology Innovation Institute (TII) laboratories in Abu Dhabi. The team at TII provided insights into AI, quantum computing, robotics, cryptography, secure communications, biotechnology, and more under the Advanced Materials Research Center (AMRC). This visit highlighted the future of farming; smart and sustainable agriculture, powered by AI-driven analytics, autonomous drones, quantum-secured data and biotechnology for climate-resilient crops.
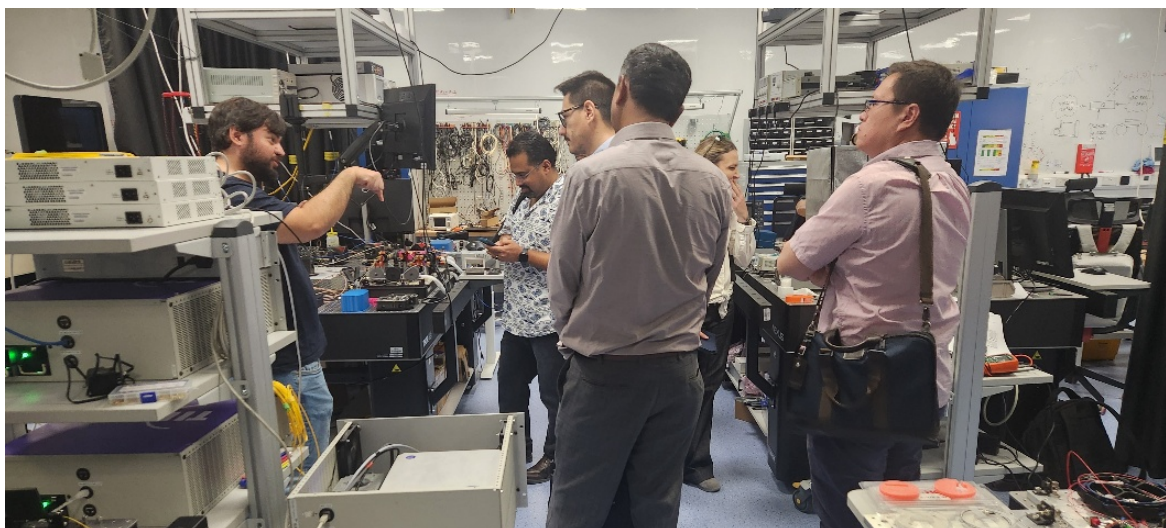
A section of the DTA team that visited the Quantum Research Center of Technology Innovation Institute in Abu Dhabi gets insights on the centre's operations (photo credit: ILRI/Wandera Ojanji).

4.2   Budget session

Later that afternoon, Dhulipala and Hamel spoke about the budget for the Accelerator, outlining key allocations and funding strategies. Hamel gave an overview of the CGIAR – UAE partnership and also explained the modalities of UAE's designated funding of USD 20 million for DTA.

A section of the DTA team that visited the Quantum Research Center of Technology Innovation Institute in Abu Dhabi gets insights on the centre's operations (photo credit: ILRI/Wandera Ojanji).

Several funding deployment options were discussed, including supporting flagship projects that benefit all CGIAR centres—such as AI-driven initiatives like LLMs—or allocating funds across centres based on specific proposals that grant them access to AI hub resources.

To refine the budget execution strategy, further discussions are planned to finalize the hub's operating model. A structured approach will be developed to ensure optimized resource allocation, enabling DTA to drive innovation effectively while maintaining financial sustainability.

4.3   Google's AI collaborative and AgPile grants

Jawoo Koo, DTA's interim deputy director, led a session outlining DTA's timeline, highlighting a pivotal milestone in which he, alongside Odeh, pitched to Google, ultimately securing CGIAR's endorsement from the Gates Foundation. This endorsement resulted in a USD 10 million grant for the Accelerator, marking a significant achievement in advancing DTA's mission.

Of the total grant, USD 7 million was dedicated specifically to crop breeding, ensuring that advancements in agricultural research could be widely implemented. Additionally, a key condition of the grant was that all products developed must involve participation from all CGIAR centres, reinforcing a collaborative and integrated approach across the network.

A major deliverable under this grant is the AgPile platform, which is designed to uphold the FAIR principles of data, ensuring that data remains structured, shareable and beneficial for the broader agricultural research community. It was also emphasized that the full disbursement of the USD 10 million grant depends on the success of the AgPile project, underscoring the need for measurable progress and impact in achieving DTA's objectives.

4.4   PMU session

Bishal Aryal, DTA transition program management focal point, presented the role of the Program Management Unit (PMU) within DTA and outlined the team's methods of ensuring operational efficiency and accountability across the initiative. The PMU oversees monitoring and evaluation processes to keep program activities on track and ensure measurable results. It is also responsible for managing budgets and allocating resources effectively, aligning financial planning with program priorities.

A key function of the PMU is resource allocation and cost tracking, which enhances transparency and supports informed decision-making. The unit also facilitates stakeholder communication, ensuring clear and consistent engagement with both internal and external partners. In addition to coordinating day-to-day operations, the PMU contributes to broader communication efforts, strengthening the visibility and coherence of DTA's messaging. Lastly, the PMU provides strategic financial planning support to help ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of DTA's work.

4.5   Final day: checking out session

Yassin facilitated the closing session, inviting team members to share their feedback on the retreat. This reflective exercise allowed participants to express their thoughts on the sessions, the collaborative atmosphere and the insights gained.

To help translate the retreat's learnings into actionable plans, and maintain the momentum generated during the workshop, participants were asked to consider what actions they would take as they returned to their respective workstations. This fostered a sense of shared purpose and commitment, with participants leaving with a clear vision of their roles and responsibilities in advancing the DTA's objectives.

5 Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda

Day 1- Tues | 14

8:30 Pick to go to the Miral HQ. ATRC Auditorium

9:00 Welcome:
-Welcome ATRC
-Welcome Partners/Customers
-Check in, Meeting agreement and Success
* 60 min Lina

10:00 Team Building
Know the team: 1 h
-What is your Persona for the next days
Lina: 60 min

11:00 Setting the stage
Digital Transformation at scale
30 min - KO/Ram

11:30 Unpacking the Hub & Spoke Framework
-Fish Bowl Model
30 min

12:00 Building DTA as a StartUP
We are all the founding team of the big idea.
Business Canvas in Breakout Rooms
Breakout rooms of 5 groups of 5
15 min reporting back

Lunch 13:-14:00

13:45 Welcome from Stephan ASPIRE's CEO

14:00 Let us spin DTA to Startup
-We are a startup Team let us work
--OKR and ToC
1h
40 min prep
5*2 Reporting back
10 QA

15:30 Health Check : how aligned are we on north star. Gradient exercise !
1 h Lina

Victims and shields 15min

16:30 Roles and Responsibility from all Team- R&R canvas

17:30 Check Out
- Commitment
- ROTI and Improvement

18:00 Check Out

Day 2-Wed | 11

9:00 AI71 PRESENTATION

10:00 Blocks based on All teams working on clusters/AoW. Lead/CL will be shadows while the other report back
The starting point is reviewing the PreInception Customer Persona
1. Clear USP
2. Engagement and Business development
2. Revised OKR/ToC

Present Persona's and Learnings from SP/AC PreInception

11:00 We are all Enabling Environment
Salt and Pepper , mixed team of 5
45 min
15 min reporting to VC AoW Team

12:00 We are all Action Lab
Salt and Pepper , mixed team of 5
45 min
15 min reporting to VC AoW Team

Lunch 13:00-14:00

14:00 We are all Digital Future
Salt and Pepper , mixed team of 5
45 min
15 min reporting to VC AoW Team

15:00 Work with AI71 on AgriLLM QA pairs
Workshop led my Ma;moun from

16:00 We are all Data Ecosystem
Salt and Pepper , mixed team of 5
45 min
15 min reporting to VC AoW Team

17:00 Team Building
Buffer: Let us be creative . AI Podcast, Interviews, ...what can we do ...

Check Out 18:00

Day 3 | 8

9:00 ATRC TOUR
TII
AMRC labs
Quantum labs

Lunch 12:30:-13:30

13:30 Reflection on the accelerator TOC
-Agree on the HLOs and high-level deliverables.
-Improvement to ToC inspired by OKR

14:15 DTA budgets, big bilateral projects & scenario planning
-Run through of Accelerator budgeting process - Ram
-Google.org & Artemis projects - Jawoo
-SO D&D – Khuloud
-Scenario planning – all
(60 mins)

15:30 Planning and launch of AI Hub in Abu Dhabi
-Milestones
-Staffing plan
-Regional hubs

16:15 Modalities of the accelerator working- Bishal
-Comms
-M&E
-Ways of working
-Collaborative tools
60 mins

17:30 Checking out and Meta RETRO

Check Out 18:00

Parking Lot | 11

Be ready, we are the disruptors making Digital central to CG

Let us have a Podcast from the workshop

Let us have a FUN team building activity with a video

Let us add all the ADP summary from Dublin

101:00 Operational model: Take 1
10:00 Agree and Compile Teams ways of working including tools,

11:00 Customer Success: How to integrate with our users SP/AC on a continuous modus and prioritisation criteria

14:00 Digital & Data Products across SP/Ac
1. Map list of products/projects
2. Create One backlog with all Digital and Data products and Use Cases

17:00 Deep Work per AoW to work Inception Deliverables
-AoW Pitch from ToC to OKR as cohesive company's pitch
1h

12:00 AoW deep dives on Inception deliverables
- Refine POWB
-Update ToC
-Update MELIA-pending

15:00 Roadmap in Notion or Miro from OKR

16:00 AoW consolidated work

Action Plan | 5

we have 5 thematic areas :
1.XX
2.XX

What does each AoW map into with value proposition

High level Timeline Main activity , owner

Decide on the tool for management, Align with Eng on Reporting center level focal point

Type something

1. **Day1 :** Team building, shifting to startup mode, and "operationalizing" our Theory of Change
2. **Day2 :** Areas of work Deep Dives and Inception
3. **Day3:** 2025 detailed action plan, modality of work and inception report development/other deliverables