

OVERALL SUMMARY: E-CONSULTATION ON THE CGIAR REFORM 20-22 October 2009

Electronic Platform used: Google Group at <http://groups.google.com/group/cgiar-reform>

Invited participants: CGIAR Members, Center Director Generals, Science Council, and Center Board Chairs

Background: There have been a lot of developments in the various key components of the new CGIAR, and the ExCo-17 meeting scheduled for Nov 3-4, 2009 in Rome is expected to review all the key documents for the CGIAR Reform. Given the successful experience of the recently held e-consultation of the Advisory Group on the Fund Framework Document, several Members suggested that a broader dialogue among Members, the Science Council, and the Alliance leaders would be useful on the key components of the new CGIAR as they have been developed so far, prior to the ExCo-17 meeting.

Objective: To discuss and clarify outstanding issues on the implementation of the CGIAR Reform, leading to alignment among the participants at the ExCo-17 meeting in Rome.

Process facilitation: Simone Staiger, Knowledge Sharing Specialist, CGIAR ICT-KM Program, supported by CGIAR Secretariat staff members

Number of registered participants: 83

Messages recorded: Total: 100 messages across 4 discussion topics

Breakdown by topic:

- *Consortium Development*
 - 14 respondents - 26 replies
- *Fund Development*
 - 20 respondents - 37 replies
- *Monitoring & Evaluation Framework*
 - 11 respondents - 17 replies
- *Roles and Responsibilities of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC)*
 - 14 respondents - 20 replies

Document repository, for reference: <http://www.cgiar.org/econsult102009/index.html>

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGM08	CGIAR Annual General Meeting 2008
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
EIARD	European Initiative for Agricultural Research for Development
EPMR	External Program and Management Review
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FC	Fund Council
FFD	Fund Framework Document
GCARD	Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development
IADCI	Independent Advisory Committee for Development Impact
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ISPC	Independent Science and Partnership Council
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MP	Mega Programs
NARS	National Agricultural Research Systems
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
SC	Science Council
SRF	Strategy and Results Framework
TMT	Transition Management Team
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

Framing Questions:

- What are your general reactions to the current thoughts on Consortium design, as expressed in the document prepared by BCG?
- Does this design adequately address the issues that you perceive the Consortium is being created to address?
- Is there anywhere where the emerging design seems at odds with your expectations for the Consortium? Do you have any specific concerns the Alliance should consider?
- Is there anything else you think that the Alliance should take into account at this stage in the further detailing of the Consortium design?
- Do you have any questions for us that we should address in the discussion during the Alliance-Donor meeting on 2 November?

Overall Discussion Summary:

1. Balance of Authority between Consortium Board and Center Boards

- Need for more clarification on the balance of authority between the Consortium Board and the Centers' Boards. (e.g. if there is a major problem in the Consortium or its Board, would the Fund Council step in?)
- Two people suggested using a joint venture model where the Consortium is established by the centers through delegated legal personality, rather than setting up a new organization.
- One person suggested that the Consortium could focus on big-picture strategy and recommend funding to the Fund Council which would fund directly to the centers. This avoids duplication of capacity and dysfunction between the Consortium and the Centers
- One person suggested that Center Boards should remain ultimately responsible for adherence to international accounting and financial guidelines as well as CGIAR policies.
- One person agreed with the institutional arrangements proposed for the Consortium's role

2. Consortium/Board and Constitution

- Two people mentioned concerns about the Consortium representing an added layer of bureaucracy contradicting the principle of simplified governance and clarified accountability.
- Two people mentioned that the proposed structures seem to complicate the funding, programmatic and reporting arrangements and that unrestricted funding apparently is lost and there will be a greater tendency towards more bilateral support.
- The issue of the scale at which restricted funding operates needs to be clear to make sure everyone is using the term in the same way.
- The proposed quorum for board meetings as "unless one half of all voting member are present" is too low. Instead, the minimum quorum could be of 2/3.
- Promoting ownerships implies more consultations with different partners and policy makers.
- Country with strong capabilities should have a fair representation in the new management structure. Developing countries with strong NARSSs should enjoy a more powerful representation in the composition of the Consortium Board.
- Urgent to have the legal opinion on the Constitution for an almost final draft to be discussed during the Alliance meeting.

3. Consortium Office

- Communications area needs to have more support to properly promote the work of the consortium.
- Need to keep the Consortium office as light as possible. Many competencies as financial intermediaries already exist at the Centers and these should be maintained and "shared" to the appropriate extent.

4. Performance agreements

- Having performance agreements of Mega Programs (MP) between the Fund Council and Consortium Board, and then between the Consortium Board and the Centers, is duplicative. Rather agreements could come from the Fund Council directly to the Centers leading on MPs, with Consortium Board oversight.

5. Strategy and Results Framework and Mega Programs

- One person commented that the MP Portfolio should not focus on crosscutting issues and rather focus on commodities and/ or ecosystems.
- One person commented that centers cannot afford to let bilateral restricted research projects drop in order to create MPs that in the end may only make up 20% or less of the support.
- One person commented that the MP review process described in the report does not necessarily seem more cost effective.
- A person commented that the current draft of the Strategy and Results Framework (SRF) does not make a convincing case to donors to double or triple funding. It needs to include an exercise connecting guiding principles with the SRF and from there with the MP.
- MPs need to include realistic flexibility for adjustments.
- A major concern is also how freedom is created and maintained for high-risk/high-payoff innovative blue-sky research, often the source of new paradigmatic shifts.
- Opportunities for comment on the MPs and Platforms will be provided later once Report 5 is released.

Framing Questions:

- Do you agree with the proposed roles and responsibilities of the Fund Council, Funders Forum and the Fund Office?
- Do the proposed approach and criteria for Fund Council membership ensure a balanced representation and provide adequate incentives for increasing funding?
- Do you agree with the approach for handling "institutional funding?" With the proposed closing of the institutional funding window in 2012?

Overall Discussion Summary:

1. Roles and Responsibilities of the Fund Council, Funders Forum and the Fund Office

- A concern was voiced around the "isolation of donors" from Centers, as there appears to be a trend in the change process towards increasing bureaucracy and layers of complexity. One participant saw the receipt of funds by the Consortium and onward disbursement to the Centers/mega-programs as an unnecessary intermediate step.
- It was suggested that ISPC should be responsible for approving MP proposals, in place of the Fund Council. The Facilitator responded by pointing out that this would put ISPC in a "management" role, instead of the agreed "advisory" role. Another participant suggested that there should be some role for the Centers in appointing the members of ISPC, given that ISPC would provide some advice to the Consortium.
- The issue of duplication was raised relative to the role of the Fund Office in preparing "compliance reports" as it was felt that the Fund Council should be able to work directly with the Consortium's reporting. Furthermore the term "compliance" was considered "disconcerting" and the suggestion was made to use an alternate term.
- Reaction to the proposed formula for funding the budget of the Fund Office was generally positive, but it was strongly suggested that the Funders' Forum, Science Advice, Evaluation and Impact assessment functions, and other "System costs" that go beyond the supporting Fund activities should be borne by ALL donors. A suggestion was made on how the Consortium could be funded – through a "very small levy" on ALL funding.

2. Approach and Criteria for Fund Council Membership

- Several participants advocated that the Council should have only rotating members; several others suggested the opposite.
- Several participants commented on the proposed composition of the Fund Council, some arguing for a larger (and more inclusive) council. There was one proposal for a specific Council composition, with 21 members (9 from the South, 9 from the North and 3 from International Organizations) and a suggestion that eligibility criteria should be decided by each constituency. Another participant agreed with the proposal in the document that Fund Council composition should be reviewed before the end of the term of the Inaugural Council.
- One participant supported inclusion of present co-sponsors (to be called "partner UN agencies") in the Council. Another advocated that the membership on the Fund Council by this group was secondary to the clarification of their future role in the new CGIAR, and in any case the idea of having a rotating Council seat for co-sponsors was not supported as this would run counter to the principle of having a voice on the FC commensurate with financial support.
- Two participants disagreed with the suggested financial threshold for a non-rotating Council seat (minimum US\$20 million total contribution of which at least US\$10 million unrestricted) arguing that this would exclude some important (but restricted) donors. It was argued that, at least at the outset, there should be efforts to encourage inclusivity, in order to keep these important restricted donors engaged, and keep SRF funding flowing through the Fund.

3. Institutional Funding

- There was widespread support for the view that a date should not be set for closing the Institutional Funding window.
- One participant asked why Window 3 funds are being channeled through the Consortium, instead of direct to the centers. It was clarified that under the new system architecture the Fund has no direct relationship with the Centers.
- There was discussion on the use of Window 1 (unrestricted) funds for provision of institutional funding. The facilitator commented that, as the overall objective of the Fund is to support the implementation and achievement of the SRF, if the Consortium comes with a proposal to the FC about an institutional investment or a research outside the MPs that are justified under the broad objectives of the SRF, FC could consider meeting such requests from Window 1 funds.

4. Other Comments

- Limited trusteeship by the World Bank may cause problems for some donors.
- Bilateral funding should be kept open, with donors providing at least 50% of their funding in unrestricted form.
- There is an inconsistency between the thinking on the Fund and the Consortium regarding Mega-Programs, where FC would be considering them as individual proposals, while the Consortium is considering developing a portfolio of MPs. The facilitator clarified that each MP would have a unique set of “results,” performance criteria, etc. that are different from those for other MPs, therefore requiring a separate contract.
- Concerns were raised about flowing funds directly to non-CGIAR entities as there might be limited accountability mechanisms in these organizations. Furthermore, for one donor, some of these entities already receive funding from their agency under separate authorities from CGIAR funding.
- One participant suggested that if “blue sky research” meant something that is purely curiosity driven, this should not have a place in the CGIAR. All research in the CGIAR should be motivated by its plausible potential to deliver benefits for society.

Framing Questions:

- Please share with us your questions for clarification around the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
- Keeping in mind international good practice, what are your views on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework provided regarding the objectives of:
 - a. A simple and clear monitoring and evaluation arrangement for CGIAR?
 - b. A right balance between rigor and efficiency (i.e., not over-evaluating).
 - c. Responsibilities and timing of various evaluations (e.g., overall evaluation, program, and Center evaluations, etc.).
 - d. An independent evaluation arrangement and organizational set-up?

Overall Discussion Summary:

1. “Scientific peer evaluation” vs. “compliance evaluation” (2 persons).

- The difference between “scientific peer-evaluation” comprising e.g. evaluation of scientific methodologies and the quality of consortia on one hand, and the evaluation of programs based on “contractual obligation” on the other hand was highlighted. It was pointed out that in the future CGIAR both would be necessary and that both approaches are not mutually exclusive.

2. Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU): role, staffing and the question of “limits” to independence (5 persons)

- There seems to be acknowledgment that there should be an independent evaluation unit of the CGIAR, but the question raised is why it would not be sufficiently independent if this unit was to operate under ISPC oversight. A number of arguments for a separation of the evaluation function from the future ISPC have been mentioned, including a clarification of what is typically meant by “independence” using the OECD/DAC definition. In addition, the idea of “co-location” of the various functions – science advice on quality and relevance, impact assessment and evaluation was put forward.
- It was pointed out that both the ISPC and an IEU would need a strong scientific skill base and to avoid possible duplication two alternative models were proposed (i) include the evaluation function within ISPC (one participant) or (ii) separating ISPC from Evaluation, but have one Secretariat supporting both functions. Two participants reminded the group that in Maputo the CGIAR had already agreed to separate evaluation from the roles and responsibilities of ISPC. In addition, it was pointed out that although the proposed models at first sight have merit in terms of critical mass and reduced fixed costs, the conflict of interest issue remains in model 1, and that model 2 would create confused lines of responsibility and accountability. An integrated or co-located secretariat would have three “masters” plus the host institution e.g. FAO.
- One participant made reference to a report of the Independent Advisory Committee for Development Impact (IADCI) which noted “diminishing returns setting in when evaluation independence assumes extreme forms of disengagement and distance. It would lead to isolation, a lack of leverage over operational decision making and a chilling effect on learning.” Thereby, arguing that “optimal independence could be obtained through the right governance mechanisms within for example, the ISPC.” This statement was argued with by another participant pointing out that this does not necessarily imply that the SC could or should be involved in evaluation, but that the IADCI report rather calls for a design ensuring that the independent evaluators are knowledgeable about the scientific subject matter and the current scientific debate.

- It was also clarified that the proposed model of having an independent evaluation unit hosted by one of the multilateral organizations would not mean that the evaluation function is outsourced to that organization, but rather the organization hosts a CGIAR evaluation team staffed with adequate technical expertise in both evaluation and agricultural science.

3. Concern about adding more evaluations and increasing costs to the system (3 persons)

- Two participants cautioned about what they consider an increased number of evaluations and one participant alerted the group of the need to “fade” out some of the current evaluation functions as we move into the new CGIAR structure. It was clarified that the framework proposes alignment of the TOR for the various evaluation products to avoid duplication. It was also pointed out that probably the greatest cost savings will be through the elimination of Center and donor “hidden” costs related to the commissioning donor reviews themselves - as it is expected that all donors funding the SRF will rely on this one common M&E framework.

4. Expressed support to the proposed framework (1 person)

- One participant, on behalf of the full EIARD group expressed support to the “proposed arrangements [referring to the M&E framework document], with a harmonized M&E system managed through an independent arrangement”.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INDEPENDENT SCIENCE AND PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL (ISPC)

Framing Questions:

- Please share with us your questions for clarification around the proposed roles and responsibilities of the ISPC.
- What is your perception of the proposed roles and responsibilities of the ISPC with respect to providing the Fund Council with relevant information in assessing the worthiness of the investment proposals submitted by Consortium Board?

Overall Discussion Summary:

1. On the conduct of foresight studies

- One participant expressed support for following recommended roles and responsibilities of ISPC
 - Conduct of foresight studies and provision of inputs to SRF
 - Search for new science opportunities beyond the current scope as well as exploring incentives for involvement of external partners
- Another participant is of the view that ISPC could be participants but not coordinators or conveners of foresight studies; Consortium should play those roles.

2. a. On evaluation function

- One participant also emphasized the importance of separating the evaluation function from the “funders” and the “doers”
- It was also suggested that ISPC undertake ex-ante impact assessments for CGIAR planning and assessment with link to ex-post impact assessment activities.
- One participant proposed that ISPC be established as the locus of science advice, and alongside with it are two panels: one performing independent evaluation function, and the other, impact assessment; support staff for the 3 panels are proposed to be co-located.
- One participant representing a group of donors expressed the group’s agreement that the M&E functions are better placed outside of ISPC.
- Another participant is of the view that ISPC should review impact assessment methods but Consortium should be responsible for development and improvement of practice
- A potential conflict- of- interest issue, which was pointed out in connection with the ISPC’s role in MP evaluation, was also raised by one participant with respect to the Consortium as the “manager and commissioner of the M&E reports” (evaluation of centers, consortium office and MPs)

b. Suggested role beyond evaluation function

- On the 3-step process for the review and approval of Mega Programs, one participant suggested the direct involvement of ISPC in the approval of proposals, as opposed to the FFD proposal that the Fund Council be the approving authority.
- In response to the above suggestion, one participant pointed out that the “ISPC is the principal scientific and intellectual advisory support service of the Fund Council. Hence its principal task of assessing, commissioning and overseeing evaluations of the scientific quality, relevance and development effectiveness of the investment proposals submitted by the Consortium to the Fund Council and to make recommendations accordingly. Individual investors, of course, can modify their views of this advice, depending on the extent and quality of their in-house scientific advisory support units – in some cases Funders are well equipped, in others less so. But it is anticipated that the ISPC advice would be a principal determinant in Fund Council decisions.”

3. On role of ISPC in dealing with issues of partnership

- One participant pointed out that the list of tasks of ISPC recommended by TMT does not include a “foresight function on evaluating best models of partnerships in the context of MPs and providing advice in terms of criteria and principles to further optimize effective partnerships”. This was part of the idea on the potential role of ISPC specified in the reform proposal presented at AGM08.
- Two participants expressed disagreement with ISPC’s role as adviser on partnership models, pointing out that development and improvement of such models is an important function of the Consortium.
- Another participant pointed out that the “role of ISPC on the "P" aspect is limited to a catalytic role, and to supplement the GCARD process and what the centers and the Consortium may do.”

4. On timing of finalization of ISPC TOR and/or establishment

- A suggestion that some of the details of the TOR for ISPC not be finalized until a functioning Consortium Board/Office and Fund Office are in place.
- Another participant echoed the suggestion that the TOR for ISPC be finalized at a later time, i.e. in 2010 or even in 2011. In the participant’s view, since SC is regarded as an independent body, its reform can also be handled independently of the CGIAR.