

System Management Board Commentary on the Evaluation of Capacity Development Activities of CGIAR ¹

A. Overall Commentary

1. The Board realizes the essential importance of capacity development activities in supporting a shared research agenda and the achievement of key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and recognizes the long history of CGIAR's capacity development activities. This has most strongly been seen through the training of students at multiple levels internally and externally oriented training programs but increasingly now also through more innovative concepts and methods aimed at institutional capacity strengthening.
2. The Board therefore welcomes the Evaluation of Capacity Development Activities of CGIAR which sought to explore *"the contribution that capacity development has made, and can make in the future, to reaching CGIAR's aims and help CGIAR Centers, CRPs and the CGIAR System to improve relevance, comparative advantage, effectiveness of capacity development activities and sustainability of results"* (page viii). The findings, conclusions and seven recommendations provide valuable lessons, insights and guidance for strengthening this area.
3. In addition to areas for improvement that have been suggested by the evaluation, the Board was particularly pleased to read about some examples which could be further built on to achieve successful capacity development by CGIAR, including:
 - a. **With respect to capacity development at institutional level:** The documented plans by some CRPs and Centers to engage in innovation platforms, as a more recent approach to institutional capacity development, to bring together various stakeholders to not only exchange information but also to develop capacity.
 - b. **With respect to collaborative programs:** The fact that several CRPs and Platforms have included capacity development at different levels as integral components of their mandate, with examples of successful strengthening of capacity in particular approaches, with key stakeholder groups particularly at country level.

¹ This commentary is prepared pursuant to Article 8.1(tt) of the *Charter of the CGIAR System Organization (June 2016)*, which provides that the System Management Board's role is to 'review IEA evaluations of the CGIAR Portfolio, functions and structures and provide comments to the System Council for its consideration'.

- c. **With respect to Center efforts:** Most Centers maintain comprehensive and up-to-date records and registers of professional training activities and academic education support in the form of interns, students and postgraduate researchers, including information on training content, modalities, attendance and gender.
- 4. Particularly in the context of the new governance system of CGIAR, the Board agrees with the evaluation report's suggestion that *"Centers are in the best position to manage capacity development, including its quality, integrating capacity development with project management cycles"* (page ix). This aligns well with guiding principle 12 of the CGIAR System Framework which states: *"The principle of subsidiarity should guide policies and implementation, and overreach must be avoided. The Centers should be responsible for system functions that can be more efficiently and effectively executed by them and by CGIAR research programs and for the use of funds provided to them. Center Boards have legal, governance and fiduciary responsibilities of their own, and these must be fully recognized and respected"* (page 17).
- 5. The Board notes that the recommendations are quite broad in tone, allowing the Board to operate in a supportive way, as Centers and CRPs develop clear and context-specific follow-up actions to ensure successful implementation.
- 6. There are various modalities for implementation to be successful and the Board is open to exploring cost-efficient, cross-System efforts that can help parts of the System learn from each other and for CGIAR as a whole to achieve strategic, relevant and coherent capacity development.

B. Specific comments on recommendations

- 7. The evaluation provided seven (7) recommendations which the Board has considered and provides comments on, below each one, and where appropriate indicates any current or planned activities towards what has been recommended.

Recommendation 1.

Under the leadership of the System Management Board, CGIAR should develop and commit to a comprehensive CD agenda, in line with the needs and approaches of its research and development partners.

The agenda should be based on an analysis of regional and national capacity needs for agricultural research and development. This agenda should:

- a. Clarify CGIAR's mandate for CD, differentiating between development of partner capacities and support for technology adoption and use;***
- b. Guide CGIAR's approach to CD and technology delivery under different scenarios depending on the strength of national research and extension systems required for scaling of outcomes and impact;***

c. Develop a typology for CD that would clarify elements of informal or synergistic CD through research collaboration, networking and other activities that are primarily geared towards research and delivery.

8. The System Management Board partially agrees with this recommendation. It is noted that a Capacity Development framework has already been developed by the cross-Center and CRP Community of Practice of Capacity Development specialists, which aims to capture a broader definition of capacity development and outlining the key types of capacity development for CGIAR. This formed an important part of the guidance for the elements proposed as part of the 2017-2022 Portfolio and continues to represent a valuable resource to the System, Centers, and CRPs.
9. Given the importance of capacity development, as one of the four cross-cutting areas in the Strategy and Results Framework (SRF), the Board will continue to think strategically about the role of capacity development activities in achieving the mission and objectives set for CGIAR.
10. As suggested in other recommendations in the evaluation, the CGIAR Country Collaboration initiative, currently being further refined and strengthened by the Board, offers an additional opportunity for Centers and CRPs to collaborate on capacity development activities that particularly respond to national and regional priorities and needs.

Recommendation 2.

Centers and CRPs should base their medium-term CD plans on clear CD strategies and incorporate CD more consistently into their theories of change.

The strategic planning of CD should be based on CD needs assessments done jointly with research and development partners, especially with internal CGIAR partners. This should take into account alternative providers of CD and CGIAR's comparative advantage in different situations, particularly for developing capacities for research and strengthening sustainable capacity for scaling of results.

Furthermore, Centers and CRPs should assess the relative cost-effectiveness of their CD activities vis-à-vis other CD providers to better determine in which areas their CD activities add most value.

11. The Board agrees with the recommendation. In this respect, the Board notes that CRPs were asked to develop Capacity Development strategies at the time of the call for proposals for the 2017-2022 Portfolio and there will be opportunities for further sharing of plans and achievements in the current business cycle through annual planning and reporting templates. Future guidance may be given when designing successive calls for proposals.
12. The Board recognizes the key relationship needed between Centers and CRPs in planning and undertaking effective capacity development activities. It will therefore

strongly encourage that the Capacity Development strategies of Centers and CRPs are complimentary as they evolve over time.

Recommendation 3.

In its CD activities, CGIAR should aim at taking full advantage of the experience and facilities of the Centers, particularly with regard to their scientific staff and amenities, and training of local end users and communities should be de-emphasized or channeled through more appropriate CD providers to ensure better relevance and focus and greater cost-effectiveness of CGIAR's efforts.

13. The Board supports this recommendation, particularly the need to ensure better relevance and focus and greater cost-effectiveness of CGIAR's capacity development activities.
14. It also agrees there is a need for better sharing and learning to support strategic discussions and decisions and means of delivery of capacity development across the System. Centers may be best placed to decide on the optimal options for capacity development providers.

Recommendation 4.

Centers and CRPs should build on successful partnership approaches, such as the facilitation of collaborative multi-stakeholder networks and multi-donor programs and platforms, to ensure that CD has the required long-term perspective and is relevant to and owned by the stakeholders and entities that strengthen their capacities.

Careful preparation, management and transition support is required when CGIAR or key donors end their support to programs. The CGIAR country coordination efforts provide an opportunity for CGIAR Centers and CRPs to work more collaboratively on needs and priority assessments in these countries where CGIAR is particularly active.

15. The Board agrees with this recommendation. It recognizes that CGIAR Country Collaboration offers a good opportunity for Centers and CRPs to collaborate on capacity development activities within specific country contexts.

Recommendation 5.

CGIAR should systematically review the existing experience on innovation platforms to establish how effective they are as a means for CGIAR to make CD interventions for enabling large-scale adoption of CGIAR's research products. From experience, CGIAR should assume an optimal role, on the basis of its comparative advantage and that of national/regional organizations and development agencies, in channeling capacity support to innovation platform participants.

16. The Board partially agrees with this recommendation. Considering that the field of agricultural innovation systems is constantly changing and each innovation platform is linked to its specific context, purpose and participants, a thorough review (which infers a significant use of financial and human resources to deliver) may still only generate very generic findings and recommendations. Previous experience shows that Centers and CRPs are well placed to assess and share experiences on these to the benefit of the whole System.
17. The Board considers that a good approach would be for Centers to share experiences on innovation platforms and how effective they are for capacity development interventions, through appropriate cross-Center/CRP mechanisms, such as communities of practice, to engage collectively on this topic, including the CGIAR Science Leaders.

Recommendation 6

CGIAR Centers should, in collaboration with CRP management and through facilitation by the CapDev CoP, integrate adequate CD support into their management systems and approaches for ensuring that their CD activities are planned, implemented and followed-up in accordance with good CD practices and in alignment with CGIAR's Capacity Development Framework.

18. Recognizing that this recommendation is aimed at the CGIAR Centers directly, the Board supports the suggestion that adequate capacity development support is integrated into management systems and approaches be based on good practice.
19. The Board also recognizes that the CapDev Community of Practice has been a valuable cross-center and CRP mechanism that has facilitated sharing of practices and development of useful frameworks and tools to support the System. How such a Community of Practice can be most effectively supported by the Centers moving forward is a topic the Board intends to take up in the coming months.

Recommendation 7.

The System Management Office should revise CD-related reporting requirements and put emphasis on reporting against strategic and annual planning in a manner that reflects intended purpose, type and modality of CD, specifying stakeholder groups targeted.

Reporting and indicators should better serve management purposes. The challenge will be to define a reasonable and harmonized number of CD indicators that can work also at project level and that can be consolidated and meaningful.

In their planning of CD activities Centers and CRPs should also plan for follow-up on the beneficiaries so as to provide information that will enable monitoring of progress and results, and improvement in implementation of CD activities. Alternative approaches to monitoring, such as long-term tracer studies targeting particular CD interventions and outcome case studies, should be explored by Centers and CRPs for management and

reporting. Developing a CD typology (Recommendation 1.c) would help harmonize CD data and information collection and documentation across the CGIAR.

20. The Board notes that as part of its oversight of the successful introduction in 2018 of a new performance-based management system, the following are being developed:
 - a. Results reporting is being collaboratively re-designed with Centers, Programs and Funders and will offer opportunities for reporting on capacity development activities and achievements through one of the nine common indicators which represent a valuable level of aggregation;
 - b. Re-designed templates for CRP and Platform planning and reporting which will allow for more extensive description of capacity development activities; and
 - c. An Annual Performance Report which will be a consolidation of CGIAR products where stories of capacity development activities and achievements can be featured.

21. Similar to the focus of the Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR (SIAC) initiative to increase impact assessment capacity within the Programs, the Board supports that Centers/CRPs should explore the inclusion of studies and development of their capacity to provide evidence of impact of capacity development activities.