

Response to the Governance and Management Review (2013) of the CGIAR Research Program Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS)

17th July 2013

Introduction

A centre-commissioned external evaluation of the CCAFS governance and management system was conducted in the first quarter of 2013 by reviewers Maureen K. Robinson and Brian P. Flood. Their final report was submitted May 1, 2013 for discussion at the CIAT Board Meeting in Nairobi 13-15th May 2013.

The reviewers made ten recommendations, which form the basis for the bulk of this response.

General comments

In setting the context for their work, the evaluators note that although there are drawbacks to the complexity in which the program now operates, the benefits—to the achievement of CCAFS' core mission and to the CGIAR's larger mission as a result of these changes—are likely to be substantial.

1. Programmatic Structure

The evaluators state that the CCAFS Program Management Committee (PMC) and the Independent Science Panel (ISP) have developed effective mechanisms and practices for strategic decision making. They also note that the ISP and CIAT board have clarified the role of the ISP in CCAFS governance, and they are positive regarding the transparency of the ISP decision making. The evaluators record that the CCAFS management team has pursued a strategy in its relationship with participating centers and partners that emphasizes broad consultation, good communication, and transparency about the basis for decision-making. They point to the on-going need for CCAFS, Centers and the Consortium to play a role in recognizing and resolving overlaps amongst CRPs.

2. Governance and Management Structure

The evaluators remark that the CIAT board is attentive to its duties and prerogatives as the governing body for CIAT and as the fiduciary for the CRP. The appropriate boundaries and interaction between the CIAT board and ISP are noted, and the evaluators remark positively on the quality and independence of the ISP members. The evaluators question the need for a CIAT board observer on the ISP (recommendation 1). The evaluators also call for a slightly smaller ISP (recommendation 2), with minimum attendance requirements (recommendation 3) and succession planning for the ISP Chair (recommendation 4).

The evaluators are positive regarding CCAFS unique level of independence of the governance and management structures when compared to other CRPs (the review looked at GRiSP and CRP5: Water, Land, and Ecosystems). They note that CIAT has established good mechanisms for fulfilling its duties with respect to the CRP but has a lighter hand than other lead centers in inserting its presence into the CRP.

The evaluators record that there are high expectations for management performance and good mechanisms for evaluation and on-going staff development. They also discuss the crucial role of Center contact points, and suggest a more formal evaluation of their performance (recommendation 5). They point to the need to build capacity in the regions to deliver outcomes, given the difficulty and complexity of the regional mandates (recommendation 6).

While the evaluators note that the budgeting and financial management of CCAFS is excellent, it is difficult for the CIAT board to go into the details given their work is dependent on the underlying quality and accuracy of the Centers' financial systems, which vary.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Evaluators record that CCAFS has established good mechanisms at the programmatic and management level to assess the relevance and quality of research, and identify indicators that would facilitate monitoring and evaluation. They remark positively on the organizational culture in which reflection and learning are the norm. They also complimentary about the strategy for knowledge sharing and communications.

4. Assurance and Financial Management

The evaluators conclude that the processes for CCAFS budgeting, financial management and reporting demonstrate the quality and professionalism of the financial staff at CIAT and CCAFS. They do note the need for a common, system-wide platform for maintaining financial and management information (recommendation 7). The evaluators note that the present Center-focused internal audit practices do not address the needs of cross-Center activities (recommendations 8-10).

Response to specific recommendations

1. CIAT representation on the CCAFS Independent Science Panel (ISP)

Recommendation: *"The CIAT board should revisit its representation on the ISP when the position is up for renewal."*¹

Given the size of the CCAFS program of work and budget, and thus the considerable risk this entails for CIAT, the CIAT Board wishes to maintain the current arrangement where one CIAT board members is an *ex officio* member of the ISP. This CIAT Board member attends all sessions of both the ISP and CIAT board so is in a good position to fully understand CCAFS and to bring this understanding into all aspects of the discussion at the CIAT board meeting. The current CIAT Board member to take up this position has only attended one meeting, so is only at the start of his three year term. The value of the position will be evaluated when it comes up for renewal, but the current perspective is that this CIAT board member plays a very important role for the CIAT Board.

¹ All sentences in quotation marks are taken from the evaluation report

2. Size of the ISP

Recommendation: *“The board should review the size of the ISP and consider reducing voting members from nine to seven.”*

The CIAT Board accepts the recommendation to reduce the size of the ISP from nine to seven voting members. This is planned in two stages; a reduction from 9 to 8 by the end of 2013, and from 8 to 7 by the end of 2014. A staggered reduction is proposed in order to cater for known departures at the end of 2013 and 2014, and the need to fill gaps in crucial science areas and to identify a chair well before the current chair completes his term.

3. ISP attendance

Recommendation: *“The ISP should institute minimum attendance or participation requirements”*

The evaluators note that while attendance is relatively good, each meeting has involved the absence of two to four members, which could affect performance. Dates for ISP meetings are agreed more than a year in advance, but ISP members may still have to miss meetings, a reflection of the busy schedules of members. A recent example occurred where a crucial Inter-Governmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) meeting was scheduled in the same week as the ISP meeting, and given the active role of ISP members in international fora, two ISP members were required to go to the IPCC meeting. The CIAT Board accepts the recommendation and will institute a minimum attendance requirement for members. In exceptional circumstances, it is understood that scheduling may preclude some members from attending a specific meeting, but in these cases members should normally miss at the most one meeting in a two year period.

4. Succession planning for the ISP Chair

Recommendation: *“The ISP needs to begin succession planning for the position of chair”.*

Given the demanding nature of being the ISP Chair, and the substantial commitment that this position entails, it is recognised that succession planning is crucial. In the case of the current Chair the succession planning has begun and a candidate for the Chair’s position will be in place one year before taking on the substantive role. Thus the CIAT Board fully endorses this recommendation.

5. Evaluating performance of Centre Contact Points

Recommendation: *“CCAFS Program Director should assess the benefits of a more formal performance evaluation process for Center contact points to determine if such a process would add value to program management”.*

The evaluators identified Center contact points as playing an important role in supporting the effectiveness and productivity of participating centers. They also noted that the current assessment process is informal. The Program Director will make a proposal for a more formal evaluation procedure and discuss this with the Program Management Committee and Centre Contact Points.

6. Capacity strengthening of Regional Program Leaders

Recommendation: *“CCAFS Program Management Committee (PMC) needs to focus on building the capacity of the regional directors and the regional programs to assure that this part of the program and management structure functions effectively in its front-line role.”*

The evaluators noted that the role of Regional Program Leaders (RPLs) and the regional programs is a crucial one for CCAFS, and record this role as “an enormous assignment”. The PMC likewise recognises that the RPLs have a particularly important role in delivering outcomes for CCAFS, while also facilitating synergies among themes, ensuring multiple activities from field to regional level, and fostering work across Centers and multiple partners. They are also expected to implement effective communication and media strategies. The PMC will undertake a review of the roles and tasks of the PMC and the RPLs, with a view to ensuring that the regional programs have the capacity to deliver on their tasks. In addition, in 2013 there will be an externally commissioned evaluation of the theme by region matrix management and how it delivers on outcomes.

7. Cloud-based planning and forecasting tool

Recommendation: *“Given the limitations and inefficiencies of using Excel, CCAFS should implement a cloud-based planning and forecasting tool, using the Agresso module if possible but other software if not.”*

Plenty of the current planning and reporting is done on Excel, which has served well, largely because there are no common systems amongst participating centres. While CCAFS recognises the limits of the current approach, the hope is that the CGIAR “One Common System” (OCS) will bring the Centers closer together in terms of using common tools. OCS is due to be rolled out amongst 9 Centres (and the Consortium) in late 2013 and 2014. CIAT board recommends that the current system be maintained until more appropriate tools shared amongst the Centers are in place. This will minimise the chance that a Center specific system is established only to be replaced by another common shared system shortly thereafter.

8. Centralised internal audit

Recommendation: *“CIAT should support the effort to bring all internal audits of the CRPs into a central Consortium unit, reporting to the CGIAR Director of Internal Audit.”*

The evaluators note that in making the proposed shift, the CIAT board should retain a reporting relationship for this function that includes the chair of the Audit Committee. They also note that centralizing CRP internal audits will help prevent duplication of work and standardize audit procedures. It also represents an opportunity to reduce the costs of internal audits. The CIAT Board fully endorses this recommendation, and will take the matter up with the Consortium.

9. New approach to internal audit.

Recommendation: *“The CIAT Board and management should encourage a new approach to commissioning and scheduling internal audits that focuses initially on assessments of CRP and Center risks as the basis for selection of specific centers and CRPs, and uses that assessment to prepare a tailored audit work program designed to address those risks.”*

The CIAT Board accepts this recommendation.

10. Internal controls and risk management

Recommendation: *“CCAFS should adopt the frameworks and guidance on internal controls, risk management and fraud deterrence the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) will release May 2013.”*

The evaluators note that the current CG audit guidelines reflect earlier standards developed by COSO, and thus the need to adopt more recent guidelines. The CIAT Board accepts the spirit of this recommendation, but cannot adopt the above-mentioned frameworks unilaterally. CIAT will work with the Consortium to update the current CG guidelines, so that the new standards are reflected throughout the CG.

Conclusions

The CIAT Board is highly appreciative of the review undertaken. The board is heartened by the evaluator's comments on the strengths of the current governance and management system. Of the 10 specific recommendations, the CIAT Board has accepted seven of them, and will work towards achieving recommendation 10 through the consortium. On recommendation 7 it agrees that a new planning and forecasting tool is needed but believes this has to be a consortium-wide initiative. The CIAT board only objects to one of the recommendations, preferring to keep a CIAT board member as an ex officio on the ISP.