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Issue Brief

Plan for CRP-commissioned external reviews

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CGIAR is a global partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for a food secure future. The CGIAR Research Program on Livestock and Fish aims to increase the productivity of small-scale livestock and fish systems in sustainable ways, making meat, milk and fish more available and affordable across the developing world. The Program brings together four CGIAR Centers: the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) with a mandate on livestock; the WorldFish Center with a mandate on aquaculture; the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), which works on forages; and the International Center for Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), which works on small ruminants.

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The issue

We have been requested by the Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) to submit our plan for CRP-commissioned external reviews. These reviews are considered part of the CG evaluation architecture as described in the CGIAR Policy for Independent External Evaluation (January 2012): the relevant section is copied in annex.

In the past, Center-commissioned external reviews (CCERs) were used to conduct strategic reviews of specific areas of the Center's research program, e.g. ILRI undertook CCERs on:

- Sustainable intensification of crop-livestock systems (2009)
- Pastoral systems (2010)
- Impact assessment (2009)
- Partnership strategy (2006-7)
- ILRI's vaccine research (circa 2001)

The spirit of these reviews were largely to review the focus of a center's research agenda given the progress being made and the changing global context to advise whether the research agenda should be adjusted accordingly, and what that might look like. The CCERs rarely dug in very deep to assess the quality or efficiency of a center's research as such; they did little retrospective analysis and generally kept their focus forward-looking.

The text below gives a sense that the IEA envisages the new breed of CCERs (now CRP-commissioned external reviews) to be more in the retrospective vein, assessing whether the CRP has been performing to satisfaction in a given area of its research agenda or achieving the expected impact (e.g. the mention of evaluation base data; monitoring system, etc.). There is a separate category in the policy for impact assessment (e.g. RCTs), so the CCERs are apparently not meant to duplicate assessment of specific technologies, but rather focus on evaluation of program components.

Priority subjects

We need to identify our initial priorities for CCERs that would contribute to improving our management and implementation of the CRP and strengthen key aspects in anticipation of its next funding cycle. Each CRP3.7 Theme would make an obvious unit of analysis, in which the review would dig in to review the coherence of the logframe, review the quality and relevance of the outputs being achieved, and assess efficiency, e.g. rational use of available human resources, partnerships, value for money. Ranked in order of priority, candidate CCER topics are:

1. The CRP3.7 Learning agenda and Results Strategy Framework and its implementation (i.e. whether we have the M&E right and we are deploying it appropriately)
2. The CRP3.7 Value Chain Development approach as embodied in its VC Development Theme and selected value chains
3. The animal health research agenda
4. The animal genetics research agenda

5. The Targeting Theme agenda, its role for improving the relevance and efficiency of the CRP work, and addressing the environment agenda
6. The CRP gender strategy and its implementation

Priority is given to the Results Strategy Framework and the value chain approach since these are two new elements of the centers' research agenda; the technical agendas have a longer history and generally have benefited from earlier CCERs. The gender strategy is given lower priority only because it is expected to be the subject of system-wide reviews given the high degree of donor interest.

We would propose to initiate the first one this year, if budgetary resources allow, and a second next year.

This ranking is offered for decision, for recommendation to the ILRI DG.

Note: It has not yet been determined whether the choice and timing of CCERs also needs to be reviewed and approved by the ILRI Board of Trustees.

Annex: Extract from the CGIAR Policy for Independent External Evaluation

4.3 Evaluation Within CRPs – the Building Blocks for Overall CRP Evaluation

31. The overall independent external evaluation of CRPs on a three to five year cycle is based to the maximum extent possible on a meta-analysis of independently verified evaluative evidence from the CRPs, including annual monitoring measures of CRPs. It should be noted however, that internal CGIAR evaluation in the past has been found by many observers, including the recent system wide review³, to be of mixed quality and not always extensively used:

- a) Making maximum possible use of other evaluative, peer review, monitoring and audit information, etc. which has been generated for the CRP, independent evaluations of the CRP commissioned by CRP management will provide the base for the evaluation of the CRP as a whole. The coverage of these evaluations will be agreed between the CRP management and the IEA Head as part of the evaluation planning process and the evaluations included in the CGIAR consolidated evaluation workplan. The CRP dialogue with the IEA Head will also help to ensure that the timing and coverage of individual evaluations best serve the decision making and lesson learning needs at the level of researchers, research managers and partners. All CRP led evaluations should follow CGIAR Evaluation Standards as a means for quality management. The evaluations should also meet the needs of any donors who continue to require evaluation information on their specific project contributions. The work plan of independent external evaluations may be adjusted during implementation, in the light of developments and needs.
- b) The evaluations will be expected to employ representative quantitative and qualitative sampling, ensuring adequate independent evaluation base data for the evaluation of the totality of the CRP as a whole (see IEA Evaluation Standards). The criteria for coverage of

individual evaluations could include, for example: objective, geographical area, type of technology.

- c) A reliable CRP monitoring system will be critical for measuring CRP progress towards the achievement of planned outputs and outcomes, thereby serve as a vital data base for any evaluation.
 - d) Management: The evaluations are commissioned by CRP management/Lead Center and designed in conformity with CGIAR Evaluation Standards. The evaluation teams have full and final responsibility for their evaluation reports.
 - e) The management response to each evaluation is the responsibility of the CRP management/lead Center and is considered by the relevant Lead Center Board or external CRP Committee as appropriate.
32. Evaluation Community of Practice: The establishment of an evaluation community of practice will assist capacity building for evaluation in the CRPs and Centers and facilitate mutual support (see paragraph 15).