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*ISPC commentary on the extension proposal
for CRP 2, Policies, Institutions and Markets
(PIM) in 2015-2016.*

Submitted by:
*Independent Science and
Partnership Council*



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Summary:

The CRP for Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM) is progressing well in terms of deliverables from earlier work and in program re-structuring. During the first three years, the CRP has generated an impressive body of analysis covering a vast range of topics (e.g., plausible futures for food security, value chains, safety nets, gender inequities, land and water management, agricultural biodiversity, etc.) and achieved some key outcomes (related to farmer training methods, the biofuels debate, etc.). The Annual Report 2013 lists many examples of PIM's progress (pp4-7), again covering an impressive array of topics and issues. Other areas of progress include: effectively integrating gender into its strategies and workplans; establishing a wide range of partnerships and considering their roles and values via surveys; and conceptualizing and articulating program-level IDOs, ToC and impact pathways, and beginning to define IDO indicators – all based on a realistic and thoughtful approach.

With the information available in the Extension Proposal, it is still not possible to identify any progress in trying to assess the relative importance (even qualitatively) of policies vs. markets vs. institutions in impeding agricultural growth – one of several key points raised by the ISPC in its earlier commentary. PIM has developed a strategic framework to address what it considers are the most pressing threats of policy and institutional origin to achieving the CGIAR's SLOs, but it is not clear that the activities in which they are currently engaged flow necessarily from a systematic consideration of the highest pay-offs given PIM's unique comparative advantage.

The ISPC identified the following 4 points as areas in need of improvement. They are highlighted below and elaborated on in the detailed commentary:

1. More strategic effort is required for establishing priorities and achieving focus, including (i) assessing the relative importance (even qualitatively) of policies vs. markets vs. institutions in impeding agricultural growth; (ii) thinking carefully about the comparative advantages of the CGIAR and which things belong inside PIM; and (iii) selection of partners and defining optimal linkages across and within FPs.

2. There could be greater movement towards ending some activities (legacy projects) and further consolidation.
3. There is still a need to articulate better the theories of change (ToC) at the program and FP levels, and to map impact pathways to the IDOs, describing assumptions underlying the ToC and the assumptions and risks within each impact pathway.
4. The division of labour between how PIM works with CGIAR Centers and links with other CRPs should be made clearer, defining PIM's linkages with other CRPs, as distinct from its partnerships with other CGIAR Centers within PIM, through impact pathway schematics.

Evolution of the CRP: The Extension Proposal presents a continuation of on-going work refreshed through a restructuring of the original program architecture, with the addition of some new topics, namely: employment opportunities for young people in agriculture, policy dimensions of food waste and loss, structural change in late-transforming countries, and social protection in urban areas.

PIM has been funded for three years and shows progress. This CRP had the disadvantage of starting from a situation in which it had an unwieldy collection of different social science research activities and an incoherent portfolio. The change in program design continues the process initiated in Phase 1 aimed at increasing coherence and focusing on impact. The current extension proposal shows both the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain. The portfolio still seems quite expansive. Most, if not all, pre-CRP era activities are still there, despite being better managed within the new management structure. A call for being more strategic on establishing priorities and partners (see earlier ISPC commentary, November 2011) still seems to be valid, although some initiatives are on their way to make this happen (e.g., foresight conferences, surveys). **It would be desirable to see some movement towards ending some activities and thinking more carefully and rigorously about the comparative advantages of the CGIAR and which things belong inside PIM.**

1. Intermediate Development Outcomes, Theories of Change and Impact Pathways

1.1 Plausibility of ToC: PIM works with partners (research, implementation, and outreach partners) to deliver outcomes and contribute to impact by assisting primary decision agents in effecting change by providing relevant knowledge and enhancing their capacity. The Extension Proposal explains how the CRP has developed IDOs, based on the "most pressing threats" of policy or institutional origin (6 bullets on p2). In the context of challenges and PIM's stated objective, the summary of the ToC for this program is given in its description of impact pathways to deliver four types of impact (Figure 1). Various elements of the ToC are scattered in proposals and publications but are not pulled together into a coherent ToC (based on the documents examined). Although the extension proposal provides some examples to illustrate previous successes in policy work, it does not attempt to map impact pathways to the FPs or the IDOs, and hence ToCs are not articulated well enough in the proposal. It might be helpful to have more discussion of how the theories of change link to the specific set of activities. It seems that almost any policy-oriented research, and possibly any social science research, could be justified under the theories of change and impact pathways that are described. What (if anything) limits the scope for CGIAR

involvement? Are there examples of social science research on development that the CRP would define as outside its purview?

1.2 Feasibility of impact pathways: The overarching description of impact pathways in Figure 1 is simple, logical and plausible, but fairly generic and rather all-encompassing. More detailed pathways are reported to have been developed within the individual FPs, but none could be located on the program website. PIM encourages its researchers to clarify impact pathways early in the design phase using a common framework that covers four key questions: (i) Which policy measure, institutional arrangement or market characteristic is acting against the interest of poor producer/ consumers and how important is it? (ii) What is the process to effect change and how likely is it to succeed? (iii) Who has agency over the change? And, (iv) Do the agents need additional information to choose a course of action or to confirm their preferred course. What information, when and how will it be used? This provides an excellent framework and set of questions for articulating specific ToC for the FP and activity-level impact pathways – and would appear to be work in progress. In addition, PIM asks researchers to document the contribution of their work to change. This is a very **practical approach to M&E**. This simplicity and clarity of this impact framework to guide research at all stages might be a good model for all CRPs.

At least three assumptions are implicit in the description of impact pathways and the organization of the FPs: 1) it is possible through research to identify policies that will contribute to CGIAR SLOs; 2) the CGIAR is able to influence the choice of policies adopted through its work with governments and influencing partners; 3) the CGIAR is able to influence the institutions in which policies are implemented so that they can work effectively. The first has been discussed in the formulation of the FPs. The second and third are implied but not actually discussed in the funding proposal or the extension proposal. It is simply stated that the pathways proposed for delivering four different types of impact are grounded in experience. This means that there is no basis on which to assess whether the approaches taken to develop partnerships for influencing policy and institutions – a fundamental part of the work of this program – are the most effective ones to achieve impact.

The definition of impacts for this CRP is a work in progress. Global targets are set out in the funding proposal. The extension proposal has partially defined targets for the IDOs. Some are quantitative and others are qualitative. Some will be very challenging to measure and the research team has taken the unusual and useful step of including an assessment of the difficulty of measuring each indicator. Thus, there is still work to be done in completing the definition of impacts. The cautious and thorough approach demonstrated by the research team suggests that, once defined, the targets will be realistic and the challenge of measuring them explained well.

1.3 Contribution to common IDOs and SLOs: The program has defined seven IDOS each with a corresponding gender IDO, but the extension proposal does not map them to SLOs. For the IDOs it has begun defining quantitative or qualitative time-bound indicators, and is the only CRP to link IDOs to counterfactuals and highlight problems of measurement. This is an example of good practice which could perhaps serve as a model for other CRPs.

Evidence of impact is gathered by documenting change and soliciting feedback regarding the relevance of research to the outcome. Although PIM asks researchers to document the contribution of their work to change, either accomplished or in the case of potential policy, reversals avoided, PIM does not claim attribution for change, which is commendable. Although the impact pathways are feasible, the lack of attribution, however, may lead to reduced or lack of measurement of impact for PIM.

2. Flagship projects

Alignment of FPs with main objective of the CRP: During 2015-2016, PIM will merge the former FPs 1, 2 and 3 into FP1 – Technology innovation and sustainable intensification. **Simply pooling work does not automatically achieve focus** though it may aid reporting. On the down-side, by merging the three former FPs, a true flagship program of the CGIAR, i.e., **foresight modeling, is now submerged**. The CRP is clearly seeking a more streamlined project structure. It is important to recall that its original proposal had 3 Themes and 10 Subthemes, then moved into 7 FPs, and is now being re-structured into 5 FPs during the extension period. This should allow for better alignment with CRP IDOs and, hopefully, for a better and more cost-effective coordination/governance model.

The other FPs are related to Agricultural growth and transformation (FP2), Value chains (FP3), Social protection (FP4), and Property rights (FP5). Each FP has several clusters. The FPs are supplemented by cross-cutting work on gender, M&E and capacity building and partnerships. At a general level, the FP portfolio is well-aligned with PIM's main objective to support research to strengthen the policy and institutional foundations of a food secure future. However, the FPs are still very broad and somewhat untargeted. For example, "agricultural growth and transformation at the national level" is a vast subject, hardly fitting the definition of a project. Arguably, four of the five FPs could really be CRPs in themselves. The different FPs should be more coherently linked together.

Contribution of FPs to the CRP IDOs: Table 2 demonstrates clearly how activities planned for 2015-2016 realize outputs and contribute to outcomes and the IDOs for each FP. The contribution to common IDOs is also analyzed, including Gender IDOs, with indicators, targets and risks. Gender research and activities are aligned and embedded yet highlighted in FPs and clusters. Table 2 is a useful table that could be adopted by other CRPs as part of measuring progress towards achieving outcomes¹ and IDOs.

3. Gender

It is clear from the proposal that the CRP's leaders seriously examined how gender research could be strengthened at the program, FP and correspondent cluster level. Although it remains to be seen how these aspects will truly impact future working plans, gender is now firmly embedded in this CRP. The program has a gender strategy and seven gender IDOs, one corresponding to each program IDO. Table 3 lists how the PIM FPs and Clusters are expected to contribute to the gender IDOs. The M&E system is reported to include a protocol – mainly via self-assessment – for research teams to track progress on integration of gender. The program has also published several research reports that address gender issues, including a baseline study report on women's empowerment in agriculture. Work is still continuing to ensure that gender is fully integrated into each flagship program.

¹ Although several of the outcomes listed there are more properly research outputs.

PIM considers that approximately 15% of research resources are devoted to gender analysis, but when including joint gender analysis with other topics, such as social protection, the figure may be closer to 25%.

4. Partnerships

It is evident from the program's management and strategy documents that PIM regards partnerships as critically important and is spending time in establishing them and operating through them. The proposal acknowledges the importance of partnerships in delivering impact, by partnering with development practitioners and policymakers, who translate research findings into delivery. National governments in developing countries are the main implementation agents for policy reforms and strong partnerships are being nurtured. During 2015-2016, closer links will be built with NGOs, including expanding existing partnerships on collective action for property rights and gender and asset accumulation. Partnerships also offer good vehicles for capacity building.

PIM has identified a large set of potential partners. But it is so diffuse and covers so many different types of organizations that it is difficult to know how to evaluate the partnership arrangements. Some of the partnerships that PIM plans to strengthen during 2015-2016 are listed (pp13,14). However, **there is no discussion or justification for PIM's comparative advantage in working in this domain of policies, institutions and markets viz-a-viz PIM's key partners (an issue raised earlier by the ISPC)**. It would be particularly valuable to have PIM's leadership reflect more clearly on where the CGIAR (and PIM) have a comparative advantage with respect to their partners - and then to follow the implications in terms of research planning and prioritization. Which partners can actually take the lead in certain areas? Which activities can be left altogether to them?

Partly to address these strategic questions and partly to try to manage partners more effectively, PIM recently asked its researchers to name and describe the nature of three key partners, i.e., whether research or outreach or implementation or funding partners. Of the 157 identified, most were research partners, followed by partners for implementation (e.g., IFAD, World Bank). Judging from many of the research partners listed in the proposal, it appears the quality of scientific activities is high. On the other hand, the number of policies targeted by the CRP is also quite high (at 66). This raises questions about whether more focus on fewer issues/policies might not be more effective in terms of maximizing ultimate influence and impact (e.g. in areas of highest need to the CGIAR portfolio, see below). In its earlier commentaries, **the ISPC highlighted the need for the CRP to undertake an analysis of the institutional and policy forces currently impacting on small holder agriculture development – as a basis for identifying key priority areas and strategic aspects of policy development**. It seems that this is underway, although it is not altogether clear from the Extension Proposal (more evident in the 2013 annual report).

PIM is a CGIAR partnership CRP for policies, institutions and markets. It currently works in partnership with 14 CGIAR Centers and with at least 8 CRPs (e.g., CCAFS, RTB, Dryland Systems, Dryland Cereals, Grain Legumes, Maize, Wheat, and WLE). The Extension Proposal includes a number of activities where PIM will work with other CRPs but detailed activities with specific CRPs are not given. While this mode of working clearly integrates policy, institution and market activities across the CGIAR, **the division of labour between how PIM works with CGIAR Centers and links with other CRPs is not clear**. It is

critical that PIM clearly defines its linkages with other CRPs as distinct from its partnerships with other CGIAR Centers within PIM through impact pathway schematics. Currently, contributions from the different sources are somewhat blurred and lack of clarity in apportioning impact/CRP may cause conflicts. Related to this issue, the ISPC had earlier sought clarification of the **value addition of PIM from both partnering with other CGIAR Centers and linking with other CRPs**. During Phase 1, PIM has identified in the proposal several ways in which it adds value to working with other CGIAR Centers and CRPs. A good example being acting as a mechanism for Centers to combine forces on a common research effort (e.g., work on foresight modeling, value chains, methods and tools for gender analysis).

5. Regional Collaborations

The proposal did not address this issue adequately. The only reference to regional partners was that PIM works with sub-regional organizations in Africa, on adoption of technology: the geospatial mapping of agricultural technology and adoption will be pursued in collaboration with CORAF and ASARECA during 2015-2016. This requires some further thinking.

6. Phased workplan covering the 2 year extension period until 2016

The re-structuring of the projects during 2015-16 (from 7 to 5 FPs) has already been alluded to. The extension request is to support mainly ongoing work and undertake new areas of research such as: employment opportunities for young people in agriculture, policy dimensions of food waste and loss, structural change in late-transforming countries, and **social protection in urban areas. The justification for moving into the latter area will need elaboration.** PIM also plans to add a “hub” for PIM’s Value Chain Tool to increase collaboration with other CRPs. The ISPC has noted elsewhere the possible advantages of bringing work on value chain approaches together across CRPs in a more concrete fashion. The Workplan for 2015-2016 is integrated with the FPs and given by cluster (pp5-8). Table 2 lists outputs and outcomes for the extension period for each cluster and FP as well as the IDOs to which they contribute. Much of the work initiated in the first phase of implementation of the PIM program will continue.

The CRP is moving in the right direction, but as already mentioned there is much more to do in terms of focusing PIM on a smaller and more coherent set of activities. It is not yet clear which components, if any, of the original CRP have been ended or downsized.

7. Budget

7.1 Coherence with original proposal and distribution among the FPs: The distribution of the budget amongst FPs shows that most funding is directed at FP1 and FP2 (in alignment with the kind of research activities involved). The value chain FP3 is well-supported. The budgets proposed for both 2015 and 2016 are coherent with the original proposed budget both for W1/W2 and W3/Bilateral funding (and pp 14-15 give more details). That said, the budgets presented here are very high: **it is hard to look at PIM without noting the price tag.** This raises issues of "value for money" and underscores the importance of having a clearer picture about PIM’s comparative advantage to assess whether there are other lower-cost providers of the same research, e.g., **can university-based researchers or other entities deliver the same kind of information?**