

Development of a framework for consideration of the relative priorities across sub- IDOs for CGIAR funding

Objective: To develop a framework, independent of Centers' own initiative, for qualitatively assessing relative priorities across sub-IDOs which the ISPC can use at the System-level alongside its assessment of the quality of the individual CRP pre-proposals to be submitted in mid-August 2015. This framework will also serve as a 'tool' for dialogue between the different parts of the CGIAR System on both the key criteria for a more considered prioritisation process in the future and on the mix of methods which might be used to evaluate priorities.

Background

At the 12th Fund Council meeting (FC12) held in Brussels in November 2014, the ISPC was tasked with taking the lead on prioritisation of CGIAR research topics, an activity which had previously been the remit of the Consortium Office and Board, as part of the delivery of a Strategy and Results Framework (SRF). The ISPC was also tasked with facilitating discussions between Fund Council members, Centres and the Consortium on finalisation of the SRF. Emphasis in the 5 months post FC12 was focused on this task, while at the 13th Fund Council meeting in Bogor (FC13) the donors only agreed to endorse the SRF for approval by the Funders Forum, provided the ISPC agreed to commission an independent prioritisation of the sub-IDOs, prior to their assessment of the CGIAR Research Programme (CRP) pre-proposals. The ISPC Chair agreed to a 'qualitative prioritisation' of the sub-IDOs (rather than of research) and this proposal sets out how that is envisaged.

The CGIAR (TAC and Science Council) has traditionally used three criteria for system level priority considerations:

- (i) Expected impact of the research on the major CGIAR goals of poverty reduction, food security and nutrition, and sustainable management of natural resources, taking into account the expected probability of research success;
- (ii) Production of international public goods;
- (iii) Alternative sources of supply and CGIAR comparative advantage in the conduct of the research.

In 2012, the ISPC developed a 'White paper' entitled '*Strengthening Strategy and Results Framework through Prioritization*'. The paper introduced the concept of 'Intermediate Development Outcomes', or IDOs, to the CGIAR discussion and talked about prioritization at 2 levels: the System level and the level of the CRPs. At the System level, the paper recommended consideration of the following criteria in developing priorities:

- Severity of key agricultural problems
- Ability to address them through agricultural research
- CGIAR competences and feasibility to expand them
- Comparative advantage and likely changes in it
- Relevance to SLOs
- Opportunities in eco-regional or geographic targeting
- Complementary and competing priorities of stakeholders
- Existence of alternative suppliers of research

It also cautioned, however, that:

‘it is unlikely that one priority setting approach could be used to rank across all areas of research using a fixed set of criteria or a normative method’.

What is being done?

In order to gain a better understanding of relative importance of the sub-IDOs to donors, ISPC has sent out a survey to more than 70 donors and stakeholders asking them to assign 1-5 star ratings to each of the 45 sub-IDOs according, where a 5 is deemed of high importance and a 1 of low importance.

ISPC has also commissioned a number of independent experts to provide star ratings and commentaries against five specific criteria (columns) that influence the relative priorities of the sub-IDOs, (see attached Annex).

What will be done with the results?

ISPC will compare the results obtained from the above sub-IDO star rating processes with the frequency with which sub-IDOs are targeted in the pre-proposals, alongside its assessments of the quality of each pre-proposal as per the criteria already published. This qualitative prioritisation matrix will be just one of the inputs to ISPC’s feedback on the pre-proposals and the overall portfolio. It will help in prioritising gaps in the portfolio and to identify any potential duplication.

ISPC does not view this as an end-result of the work on prioritisation but rather as a ‘tool’ to use in dialogue with Centers and CRP leaders at the ISPC open meeting from 14th to 16th September in Rome and at FC14 in Washington for a dialogue with FC members if given the opportunity.

Further work, including how to incorporate the IFPRI-led 15-Center Global Futures initiative on quantitative modelling will be planned after initial feedback.