29 March 2016  
DIR-016-16

To Whom It May Concern

Data has become a valuable global commodity. But it is much more than simply information: in expert hands, it is intelligence. Already it is helping accelerate the development of robust responses to some of the most pressing challenges of our time: climate change, food insecurity and malnutrition, and environmental degradation. It is transforming the world of genomics and crop breeding and revolutionizing disciplines from climate modelling to agronomy. It is helping refine policies and improve lives. The smart use of data will be one of the most important tools for achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

Therefore, on behalf of CIAT and IFPRI, I am proud to present our proposal for a Platform on Big Data in Agriculture for the CGIAR Second Phase. We strongly believe that the CGIAR must invest in big data to maintain relevance in the 21st Century. On the one hand, the CGIAR needs to ensure delivery of open access and open data as international public goods, and this proposal under Module 1 contains a roadmap for ensuring that every last bit of data is expertly managed and made available to the agricultural community. On the other hand, big data offers an unprecedented opportunity for the CGIAR to be at the vanguard of new technological innovations that can drive agricultural development. Just as CGIAR successfully played a central role in genetic and agronomic revolutions over the past 50 years, CGIAR can position itself to be a central player in contributing to information and data revolutions in farming over the coming decades. Through Module 2 and 3 of this proposal we include a roadmap for the next six years that puts agricultural development firmly into the realm of big data.

Central to the strategy are partnerships. This proposal is presented on behalf of 47 external partners of CGIAR who share the commitment to realize the potential of big data in agricultural development by contributing to this Platform. Partners include globally recognized brands like Google, Amazon and IBM, through to academic institutions and researchers at the forefront of big data science like University of Florida, Michigan State University, King’s College London, and down to big data entrepreneurial initiatives such as the Datapop Alliance and Bayes Impact. Through these kinds of partnerships, CGIAR will broaden its expertise on big data, and the big data world will broaden its understanding of agricultural development.

The proposal has been developed jointly by CIAT and IFPRI, and contains strong elements from both these organisations’ A-rated Expressions of Interest. ISPC comments have been addressed in the full proposal, and all CRPs and Centers have been engaged in one way or another in the development of this platform proposal. The Platform is focused on creating the enabling environment for innovative big data research and application. By creating the collaborative spaces and the correct incentives for CGIAR and the vast array of partners on this proposal to actively engage and work collaboratively, we will achieve the ambitious goal of the platform to harness the capabilities of Big Data to accelerate and enhance the impact of international agricultural research for development.

We believe the proposal to be ambitious, concrete and exciting, and hope that you feel the same.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Ruben Echeverria  
Director General