

Advocating for Effective Policy Coherence



INITIATIVE ON
National Policies
and Strategies

Reflections for CGIAR and Beyond

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International Water Management Institute

December 2024

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Acronyms

CGIAR	Global Research Partnership for a Food-secure Future
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPS	National Policy and Strategies

Introduction: General aspects of policy coherence advocacy

Effective advocacy for policy coherence is essential for the contemporary governance of natural resources, which includes issues such as water scarcity, food security, climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development. At its core, policy coherence advocacy aims to align policies across different sectors and levels of governance to maximize their combined impact on achieving development goals.

The interconnected nature of natural resource systems highlights the importance of achieving policy coherence, which requires multifaceted and often multi-level solutions. This brief note explores the fundamental concepts behind policy coherence advocacy and its application within CGIAR initiatives. It examines lessons learned from the Indian context and proposes actionable strategies to enhance coherence among CGIAR centers and beyond. The goal is to promote a more unified and effective approach to research and advocacy in international development, both within and adjacent to the CGIAR system.

Defining Policy Coherence Advocacy

Policy coherence involves the deliberate alignment of policies across sectors and governance levels to achieve mutually reinforcing outcomes. This concept is central to tackling interconnected challenges that require multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder interventions. As Blackstock et al. (2023) emphasize, achieving policy coherence requires navigating the intricate interplay of organizational constraints, funding limitations, and governance systems.

Recognizing that policy coherence needs action, Principle 3 of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Water Governance Initiative (WGI) seeks to strengthen the alignment of water-related policies across the agriculture, energy, and urban development sectors to support sustainable and resilient development goals (OECD, 2015). This is an example of coherent policymaking seeking to foster cross-sectoral collaboration to reduce policy conflicts, mitigate trade-offs, and build synergies that can address interconnected challenges. These include progress towards climate adaptation, strengthening water availability and accessibility in water-stressed environments, and achieving food security in uncertain climate and market conditions. For example, integrating food systems and water policies can enhance water-use efficiency and agricultural productivity while balancing competing water demands from other sectors.

While policy coherence is defined as the systematic alignment of objectives and policy instruments across sectors and governance levels, the advocacy element fosters policy change that promotes, facilitates, and nurtures policy alignment and integration.

Key Elements of Policy Coherence Advocacy

Effective policy coherence advocacy is one of the key challenges in seeking to support policymaking development, implementation, and evaluation. This process usually is non-linear involving diverse internal and external actors, especially for low and middle-income countries. In many cases, coherence-building is steered by external factors, such as the African Development Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). These actors instigate the process by providing funds, facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms, and hiring legal advisors to check all existing policies and their alignment.

Besides, this policy note outlines six core elements for effective policy coherence advocacy: 1) organizational culture and capacity building, 2) building partnerships and coalitions, 3) producing evidence-based research, 4) long-term monitoring and evaluation, 5) communication strategies, and 6) engaging decision makers (Fig. 1).

1. Organizational Culture and Capacity Building

Chiu et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of fostering a culture of advocacy and building the capacity of staff within advocacy organizations. Organizational culture is defined as an organization's systems and processes that

outline roles and responsibilities, hierarchy and workflow, and values and norms. In relation to policy coherence-building, this requires a) the recognition that incoherence is an issue that can hamper the delivery of more cost-effective and valuable research for development, b) that there are ways and means of improving the situation that should be adopted and followed, and c) this requires awareness and close collaboration of the key stakeholder (internal and external) driving any new policy development or alignment process.

2. Building Partnerships and Coalitions

Coalitions serve as powerful tools for amplifying advocacy efforts. Aydarova et al., (2022) and Stachowiak (2013) defined them as collaborative groups that share similar policy goals and beliefs, including a problem's seriousness, its causes, and promising solutions. Research by Aamodt & Stensdal (2017) demonstrates how coalitions pool resources, share expertise, and work together to influence policy outcomes in each political context. Roth et al. (2018) highlight how coalition-building enables organizations to advance shared objectives while navigating politically sensitive environments. Within the CGIAR, [initial steps in coalition-building](#) around policy coherence have been taken in recent years (Nicol et al., 2023). The key is to continue building on these and to emphasize both internally and externally how partnership-building is central to achieving policy coherence.

Figure 1: Elements of Policy Coherence Advocacy



Source: created by authors

3. Producing Evidence-Based Research

Data and research include systematic investigation, framing a problem, and identifying possible solutions. They occur through the provision of research briefs or technical reports to inform policymakers of the existing empirical evidence on deliberation. Malipula (2020) underscores the value of research findings in informing policy decisions on evidence-based interventions to address complex challenges. These include supporting countries in moving

from more incoherent and fragmented to more coherent and integrated policy environments, notwithstanding the reality that political-economic factors hinder change, especially where there are powerful vested interests in the status quo.

4. Long-Term Monitoring and Evaluation

Advocating for coherent policies requires sustained and robust long-term monitoring systems. Incremental progress, as highlighted by Koch (2017), can generate substantial outcomes over time when policies are consistently evaluated, aligned, and adapted to evolving contexts. Robust quantitative and qualitative monitoring frameworks assessing cross-sectoral impacts (synergies or trade-offs) are essential for evaluating policy alignment and understanding their cumulative effects on achieving policy goals.

5. Communication strategies

Effective research communication is vital for translating research findings into actionable policy recommendations. Rosencranz (2023) advocates for targeted communication strategies that resonate with policymakers and stakeholders.

6. Engaging Decision Makers

Fostering cross-sectoral or inter-country committees has been highlighted, by Chandra and Idrisova (2011), as an effective tool for building relationships, and overcoming institutional silos and sectoral fragmentation at the national or basin levels, both of which can provide the foundations for policy incoherence and fragmentation. Chan et al. (2020) advocate for vertical alignment between national and sub-national governments and private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Science-policy interfaces, as discussed by Zougmore et al. (2019), are critical for connecting researchers and policymakers, enabling the co-development of evidence-based solutions that are both practical and aligned with locally and nationally expressed needs, action plans, and strategies. In short, a more proximate relationship between research communities and policy communities to co-produce actionable recommendations helps to enhance coherence but also provides a clear and direct pathway for implementation.

Section 1: Policy Coherence

Advocacy and the CGIAR

The [CGIAR](#) centers contribute to transforming global food, land, and water systems through science and research for development. Leveraging their scientific expertise, CGIAR's research centers support coherent policy development, implementation, and evaluation across sectors and geographies to address pressing challenges of water scarcity, food insecurity, and immediate or slow onset climate extremes. Under the National Policy and Strategies (NPS) Initiative, the CGIAR explored how policy coherence can be effectively pursued to manage the complex interconnections between food, land and water systems in a climate crisis.

Lessons Learned from CGIAR

This note compiles lessons learned from the reviewed 183 policies under NPS between 2022 and 2024. and aims to provide a roadmap for ongoing efforts to align policies and practices under national and international agrifood systems. The overarching goals are to achieve sustainable and resilient policy coherence across diverse political and socio-economic contexts. CGIAR policy coherence advocacy strategies are broken down into the six elements identified above.

1. Organizational Culture and Capacity Building

CGIAR research centers must prioritize capacity building, equipping staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to translate scientific insights into actionable policy recommendations and ensuring that policy engagement and internal and external support are linked to strong narratives of coherence and integration. Embedding advocacy into the core operational frameworks of CGIAR centers ensures that policy engagement is systematic and aligned with institutional objectives. This alignment enhances internal coherence and strengthens the impact of external advocacy initiatives, enabling CGIAR to position itself as one credible voice in policy discussions.

2. Building Partnerships and Coalitions

For CGIAR centers, partnerships with national governments, civil society organizations, and international donors provide critical pathways for enhancing policy impact. As they operate in diverse political contexts, coalitions offer a pragmatic approach to aligning advocacy goals with local and national priorities. Furthermore, [one CGIAR](#) is a coalition of research centers collaborating to foster synergies between research on food, land, and water systems aligned with evolving political and socio-economic contexts (CGIAR, n.d.). One CGIAR integrated capacities, knowledge, assets, people, and global presence can help shape relevant and cohesive science. In Egypt, the NPS initiative witnessed the collaboration of CGIAR centers in multi-stakeholder events included at Cairo Water Week(s) [2023](#) and [2024](#), when IWMI collaborated with WorldFish and International Food Policy Research Institute to co-host sessions on building policy coherence between food, land, and water systems, combining knowledge on power dynamics and influence on water productivity decision-making, with policies on social protection, and, finally, the interconnections of aquaculture with water quality and food security ("Climate-Adaptive Water Productivity," 2023; "The Launch of Food-Land-Water Policies Coherence in Egypt," 2024; Eldabbagh & Brouziyne, 2024).

3. Evidence-Based Research

The integration of scientific evidence into policy frameworks is a hallmark of CGIAR's advocacy approach. CGIAR's extensive body of research on climate-smart agriculture, water resource management, and biodiversity conservation provides a robust foundation for evidence-based advocacy. IWMI's efforts to integrate scientific insights into national water policies, particularly through its work in drought and flood management, exemplify how such interfaces can translate theoretical frameworks into actionable strategies, thereby enhancing the credibility and impact of policy interventions. Under NPS, CGIAR centres, including IWMI, ILRI, and Alliance Bioversity Ciat, have produced flagship reports and policy briefs on enhancing policy coherence in six countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Moreover, CGIAR researchers in India have produced several evidence-based reports on enhancing policy

coherence at the federal level, followed by more specific studies at the state level, including Odisha's [case study](#) to complement the national-level analysis and work on vertical policy coherence in Rajasthan (Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) & International Water Management Institute (IWMI), 2024).

4. Long-term Monitoring and Evaluation

Ringler et al. (2013) have emphasized the need for multi-sectoral impact assessments in agricultural policies to ensure coherence with water and food security goals. Similarly, the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM) demonstrated how sustained monitoring can identify gaps and inform adaptive measures, fostering long-term policy alignment. These examples underscore the importance of embedding dynamic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within policy frameworks to ensure sustained progress toward coherence across interconnected sectors. These monitoring and evaluation frameworks could be leveraged through the Ministry of Planning or for the planning department under each ministry and through national statistics organizations to promote tracking synergetic and conflictual actions. CGIAR centers must remain agile, continuously adapting their strategies to align with shifting policy narratives and relevant ministries and public agencies' priorities.

5. Communication strategies

The CGIAR Test Framework for Policy Coherence was developed in the form of a prototype dashboard to address the need for enhanced alignment in CGIAR's research and policy advocacy efforts (this dashboard which will be tackled in detail in chapter 3), especially at the national level. Communicating the objectives of policy-related research and the mechanisms and methods by which the CGIAR seeks to achieve policy support in different contexts is essential to successfully build policy partnerships.

6. Engaging Decision-Makers

CGIAR centers engage with policymakers at multiple levels—local, national, and international—to address diverse challenges and priorities. In Laos, the NPS team collaborated with the Policy Think Tank (PTT) and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). This collaboration led to the co-hosting of a [regional workshop on agribusiness public-private partnerships](#) which was instrumental in aligning national priorities in three countries with global 2030 sustainability goals, fostering a shared vision among stakeholders, and overcoming political and institutional challenges (Phounvisouk et al., 2024). In addition, the NPS initiative organized the [1st Kenya Food Systems Conference](#) in Nairobi in April 2024, marking successful science-policy collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD) (Pye-Smith, 2023). This conference had two key goals: making recommendations for transforming agrifood system policies and enhancing collaboration between scientists and policymakers. These and other initiatives both enhanced the credibility of CGIAR policy engagement, whilst also ensuring that policy recommendations remained locally relevant and actionable. This underscores the vital role of partnerships in CGIAR's advocacy efforts, particularly in navigating complex policy environments and achieving sustainable outcomes, but also the levels of commitment and engagement that partnership-building requires, often over substantial periods of time.

Section 2: The CGIAR Test Framework for Policy Coherence

Defining the Test Model

The CGIAR Test Framework for Policy Coherence was developed in the form of a prototype dashboard that serves the goal of policy coherence advocacy across different countries.

The creation of this dashboard served as a strategic resource, providing clarity and accessibility to CGIAR's policy engagements in the six NPS Initiative countries (Colombia, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, India, and Laos). The model sought to enhance transparency, avoid duplication of efforts, and ensure more coordinated action in delivering impactful research and policy outcomes.

Results and Achievements

The CGIAR Test Framework for Policy Coherence was able to align CGIAR's initiatives with national and regional policy goals. It served as a useful guide to CGIAR's System Office and the different CG Centre's involved in CG Initiatives to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Expanding on the Role of the CGIAR Advocacy Framework for Policy Coherence in Enhanced Decision-Making

The Framework was able to address complex challenges faced by CGIAR initiatives at both global and national levels. By providing an analytical foundation, this framework supports strategic decision-making processes across the CGIAR network, enabling leaders and stakeholders to optimize resource allocation, prioritize initiatives, and foster collaboration across centers and programs.

The dashboard and analytics embedded within the advocacy framework are central to its functionality. By offering data, which was reported through the different initiatives, the tool enabled CGIAR leadership to assess the outcomes of various policy and investment activities. This is particularly critical in aligning the organization's activities with national and regional priorities while ensuring that resources are deployed in the most effective manner possible. For instance, the Test Framework, with the right data, was able in some of the NPS countries (eg. Kenya) to identify gaps in policy implementation, track progress in cross-initiative collaboration, and anticipate challenges that may arise from policy misalignments.

In addition, the framework's primary contributions and aim was always to strengthen policy coherence at the national level. Policy coherence is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and addressing complex issues such as climate change, food security, and water resource management, which often require multi-sectoral coordination. The CGIAR Advocacy Framework facilitated the identification of synergies and trade-offs between policies in sectors such as agriculture, water, energy, and biodiversity. For example, a national government might aim to increase agricultural productivity while simultaneously conserving water resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The framework helps policymakers visualize how these objectives intersect, enabling them to design policies that maximize co-benefits while minimizing negative impacts.

2. Fostering Stakeholder Collaboration and Strategic Alignment

Building policy coherence often requires aligning the interests and actions of diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, private sector actors, international organizations, and of course, CGIAR Centres. The framework's ability to provide evidence-based recommendations fosters trust and collaboration among stakeholders, ensuring that all parties are working toward shared goals.

The CGIAR Test Framework is equally instrumental in fostering coherence across CGIAR centers and programs. With its focus on integrating data, priorities, and interventions, the framework encourages a more unified approach to addressing global challenges. By consolidating data from various centers and programs, the framework helps align their strategic priorities, reducing redundancy and ensuring that efforts are complementary rather than duplicative. For example, a CGIAR center focused on crop improvement might coordinate its activities with a center specializing in water management to develop integrated solutions for water-efficient agriculture. The framework facilitates collaboration across CGIAR initiatives by highlighting opportunities for joint interventions and shared learning. This collaborative approach not only maximizes the impact of individual initiatives but also strengthens the overall effectiveness of the CGIAR system.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

The CGIAR Test Framework for Policy Coherence pointed the way towards more efficient policy coherence advocacy in international food systems research. It underscores the importance of leveraging technology, data analytics, and stakeholder engagement to address the complex domain of policy coherence. The iterative testing and validation processes were key to the dashboard's development. Stakeholder feedback from the ONE CGIAR was instrumental in refining the tool, ensuring that it met the diverse needs of CGIAR's global audience. As CGIAR prepares to expand its work on policy and governance, the lessons learned from the test model could guide future efforts to achieve greater coherence, transparency, and impact in policy advocacy. The test model could be scaled to encompass additional countries, themes, and CGIAR initiatives (now Scientific Programmes and bilateral projects). Its scalability ensures that it can evolve into a comprehensive governance tool for all CGIAR-related policy work.

Section 3: Experiences from India

India encompasses 13 CGIAR initiatives which are actively working to influence an estimated 657 policies through collaboration with 2,030 partners. As a result, it is very challenging to understand which CGIAR centers and individuals are engaging with which partners. This makes it difficult to avoid redundancies, mitigate stakeholder fatigue, and overcome the common shortcomings of policy coherence advocacy.

Methodological Approach

To approach this issue, the NPS initiative in India employed a mixed methods approach to assess policy coherence. The team leveraged secondary data collection from existing datasets with CGIAR's Technical Support Team and the Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia (TAFSSA) regional initiative, providing a foundational understanding of the policy landscape. This was complemented by primary data collection through structured questionnaires targeting initiative leaders and stakeholders (Fig. 2). The analysis focused on mapping impact areas, evaluating policy and CGIAR initiatives linkages, and identifying partnerships and institutional collaborations.

Figure 2: Initiative representatives discussing the planned/ongoing activities in India



Photo: Tanmoy Bhaduri/ IWMI

Key Findings and Insights

Policy Alignment and Synergies

The analysis revealed strong alignments between CGIAR initiatives and key national policies, including Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana- Per Drop More Crop (RKVY-PDMC) (Bhattacharjee et al., 2023). These policies address critical areas of rural development, water management, and agricultural sustainability, aligning closely with CGIAR's research priorities. Odisha emerged as a focal state for CGIAR initiatives, with significant engagement in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh as well. Despite these successes, challenges remain. Geographic disparities and fragmented efforts highlight the need for strengthening partnerships with state governments and local institutions to reach underserved regions.

Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building

Stakeholder consultations emphasized the importance of building awareness of CGIAR's unified approach among government officials and policymakers. Recommendations included appointing state-level coordinators to facilitate engagement and formalizing relationships through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). These strategies are critical for fostering trust and collaboration between CGIAR centers and local stakeholders. Participants also highlighted the need for capacity-building initiatives to equip local institutions with the tools and knowledge required for effective policy implementation. Co-developing innovations with stakeholders ensures scalability and ownership, enhancing the sustainability of interventions. For further information, see [Catalyzing Coherence: CGIAR Initiatives in India - CGIAR](#)

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

India's experience under the NPS initiative underscores the importance of data-driven decision-making, collaborative platforms, and iterative processes for achieving policy coherence. Insights from the data were synthesized into a dashboard that visualizes inter-initiative alignments – including with SDG indicators – and highlights gaps, enabling stakeholders to prioritize actions and allocate resources effectively. Looking ahead, expanding the dashboard's scope to include real-time data and analytics is a key priority. Strengthening institutional collaborations and promoting knowledge sharing will further enhance the impact of CGIAR initiatives.

Section 4: Practical Steps to Enhance Policy Coherence Advocacy

Addressing the challenge of fragmented efforts among CGIAR centers is critical for achieving more coherent and impactful outcomes. Practical steps that CGIAR can take include:

1. Establish a Unified Collaborative Framework

Creating a unified framework for collaboration among CGIAR centers is essential. A co-design approach ensures that all voices are included in planning and decision-making processes. This framework can facilitate dialogue among researchers and policymakers, identifying synergies and reducing duplication. It should be bottom-up, starting at sub-national levels (where appropriate, e.g. in India) and working through national, regional, and international levels.

2. Joint Research Initiatives

Promoting joint research initiatives across CGIAR centers and pooling expertise and resources to address complex challenges. Collaborative projects and programmes demonstrate the benefits of collective action in achieving shared goals. These initiatives should complement different center areas of expertise and geographical presence (especially the presence of strong policy partnerships).

3. Knowledge-Sharing Platforms

Establishing a country-focused hub of knowledge-sharing platforms enhances coordination and learning. Specialized literature emphasizes the importance of dialogue platforms that allow researchers to share methodologies, findings, and best practices from universities, farmers, and governmental initiatives. These platforms can also facilitate training and capacity-building initiatives.

4. Coordinated Advocacy Strategies

Developing coordinated advocacy strategies and aligning governmental partnerships ensures consistency in messaging and enhances credibility. Regular meetings and workshops among CGIAR centers can align objectives and present a unified front in policy discussions. There is a compelling argument for annual national policy positioning conferences between national agencies and CGIAR centers working in specific national contexts to ensure synergies and complementarities are maximised and duplications and overlaps minimized.

5. Leverage Communication Technology for Collaboration

Technological tools such as project management software and real-time communication platforms improve efficiency and transparency in collaborative efforts. These tools enable seamless information sharing and progress tracking across centers. Stronger use of technologies to support policy coherence and alignment within the CGIAR portfolio is critical, especially when the broader objectives of research are to encourage and support national agency policy coherence.

6. Strengthening Policy-Makers Engagement

Engaging with local communities and governments ensures that research is relevant and aligned with local priorities. Regular consultations and participatory approaches can foster ownership and trust among stakeholders. This can include some version of a Country Policy Engagement Plan agreed by the CGIAR with key national ministries on an annual basis.

7. Strengthening Partnerships and Coalition

Building partnerships with NGOs, research organizations, and think tanks leverages existing networks and resources. These partnerships ensure that CGIAR's efforts are grounded in local realities and facilitate policy uptake.

Partnerships with government should be complemented by work with non-governmental and private sector organisations.

8. Foster a Culture of Collaboration (Norms and Values)

Leadership initiatives that promote teamwork, knowledge sharing, and mutual support are essential. A culture of collaboration enhances internal coherence and ensures that CGIAR centers work effectively towards shared goals. This should include greater transparency and effective forward planning on the basis of collegiality and co-development of work at national and other levels.

Conclusion

Policy coherence advocacy promotes and facilitates coherent policy development and implementation across sectors and governance levels. Effective CGIAR policy coherence advocacy entails key elements: evidence-based research, building coalitions and partnerships, monitoring and evaluating policy advocacy practices, and organizational culture and capacity building. One of the communication tools used for policy advocacy included the policy coherence dashboard, which visually represents national policy interconnections and CGIAR initiatives linkages and gaps across different geographies and themes. This paper proposed eight steps to enhance CGIAR's policy coherence advocacy through the unified collaborating framework, joint research initiatives, knowledge-sharing platforms, coordinated advocacy strategies, leveraging communication technology, strengthening stakeholder engagement and institutional partnerships, and fostering norms founded on teamwork.

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This publication has been prepared as an output of the CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies and has not been independently peer-reviewed. Responsibility for editing, proofreading, and layout, opinions expressed, and any possible errors lies with the authors and not the institutions involved. This work was carried out under the CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies, which is grateful for the support of CGIAR Trust Fund contributors (www.cgiar.org/funders)

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Suggested Citation

Sanchez Ramirez, J. C.; Nicol, A.; Eldabbagh, F. 2024. *Advocating for effective policy coherence: reflections for CGIAR and beyond*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Water Management Institute (IWMI). CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies. 18p.

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