

Policy Innovations Science Program

Inception Report

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Acronyms

FLW	Food, Land, and Water
MELIA	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment
HLO	High-Level Output
W3	Window 3 (bilateral funding)
WEFE	Water-Energy-Food-Environment
NEXUS	Used in the context of integrated systems (e.g., NEXUS Gains Initiative)
NPS	National Policies and Strategies
AoW	Area of Work
ToC	Theory of Change
GEI	Gender Equality and Inclusion (Accelerator)
RIAPA	Rural Investment and Policy Analysis (model)
CIAM	Country Integrated Assessment Modeling
PAID	Policy Alignment and Implementation Diagnostic
PPVC	Policy Prioritization and Value Chain (initiative)
TOT	Training of Trainers

Executive summary

The CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program (Policy Program) addresses government demands for evidence to inform policies and strategy implementation for complex food system challenges. It co-develops research innovations via three pillars: Agenda Setting, Rapid Response, and Capacity & Tools. Built on significant 2022-2024 achievements under the CGIAR Initiatives, the program employs innovative, systems-oriented, and demand-led research. It offers a unique platform for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to co-create and co-implement transformative food, land, and water (FLW) policies, driving inclusive and sustainable development outcomes globally, regionally and at country levels.

The Program prioritizes ground-up co-design at the country-level Theories of Change (ToCs), as piloted in Kenya, Malawi and Pakistan. Rolling out across all country policy hubs, this ensures relevant research, fosters stakeholder engagement, and facilitates co-creation/co-implementation of impactful policy work. A robust Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment (MELIA) framework tracks progress of outputs and intermediary outcomes via indicators, ensuring continuous learning and validated impact pillars towards 2030 Outcomes.

CGIAR's unique policy research advantage stems from world-class science, deep policy networks, and embedded country presence with multidisciplinary expertise. It uniquely links food systems and political realities, excelling in policy analysis and capacity sharing. The comparative advantage analysis finds that no other organization can undertake 50% of its core work, as other organizations either lack country grounding through offices and partnerships, global presence, or trans-disciplinarity. For the other 50% of the work, the Policy Program will rely on smart collaborations to maximize its impact.

The Policy Program's two-phase prioritization is aligned with policy dynamics and budget. Research focused on key regions and key high-impact areas (Nutrition, Health & Food Security; Poverty Reduction, Livelihoods and Jobs; Gender Equality, Youth & Social Inclusion; Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation; and Environmental Health and Biodiversity). As a result of budget cuts, activities under High-Level Output (HLO) were further prioritized, whilst retaining research focal areas to ensure maximum impact. Moreover, 41 bilateral (W3) projects valued at \$21.6M were strategically aligned to the different AoWs to leverage program investment. This fosters synergies across countries/topics, ensuring efficiencies, coordination, and joint fundraising.

The Plan of Results and Budget strategically allocates funding across six AoWs, aligning with the Policy Program's ToC. It leverages CGIAR Centres' strengths, prioritizing key HLOs. Several cross-AoW initiatives ensure thematic coherence and address intersectional challenges, maximizing program impact. The Policy Program, furthermore, collaborates with other Programs and Accelerators, for example the Scaling for Impact Program on country demand signally and enabling policy environments; with Multifunctional Landscapes Program on institutions and policies; and the program's collaboration with the GEI accelerator supports inclusive policy analysis with a focus on youth and distributional impacts. These partnerships enhance policy relevance, scientific quality and outcome feasibility for diverse groups. The Policy Program also ensures robust geographic coordination via AoW5-housed country policy hubs. These hubs align research, facilitate joint policy engagement, and strengthen local capacities. This strategic coordination maximizes efficiency, avoids duplication, and amplifies CGIAR's impact.

Finally, the Policy Program actively manages key risks: limited innovation uptake, policy misalignment, data/institutional/capacity constraints, and funding uncertainty. Mitigation actions include co-creation and co-implementation, adaptive research, data sharing, capacity strengthening, and increased fundraising. These proactive controls ensure robust program delivery.

1. Program overview

1.1 High-level Vision

The CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program is designed to address critical food systems challenges and to meet the growing demand from governments and other development partners to support evidence-based policymaking with credible and timely advice. The Program provides a comprehensive response to the need for transformative action and a growing number of food systems shocks, alongside demands for support to develop innovative solutions, examine trade-offs across food, land, and water systems, address underperforming markets, and reform poor governance systems and weak institutions.¹

To address these challenges, the program co-develops and co-implements research-based innovations and recommendations with partners using three main pillars:

1. **Agenda Setting:** Developing outlooks for food, land and water systems, implementing policy and investment analyses, and fostering global, regional, and country engagement.
2. **Rapid Response and Policy Guidance:** Providing research-based policy advice and crisis response options consistent with fiscal capacities at different time scales ranging from rapid response to longer-term strategic investment plans.
3. **Capacity & Tools:** Developing analytical tools and expertise, while improving institutional capacity and functioning.

These efforts are underpinned by six interlinked areas of work (AoWs): Foresight & prioritization, Market-led transformation, WEFE nexus policies, Governance & political economy, Country & regional strategy and engagement and Poverty and jobs.

Ultimately, the program aims to achieve broad-based impact by advancing science-based policy decisions, investments, and institutional change as well as institutional capacity sharing for sustained impact at global, regional, and country levels. The desired outcomes include effective policies, markets, and institutions, ultimately improving livelihoods across all five CGIAR impact dimensions in collaboration with other CGIAR science programs and accelerators. This holistic approach bridges critical concerns with actionable research to drive meaningful change.

1.2 Achievements from 2022—2024

The CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program is built upon the significant achievements of four key CGIAR initiatives that operated during 2022-2024.

NEXUS Gains pioneered integrated water, energy, food, and environment (WEFE) solutions in eight countries. It developed and applied [decision-support tools](#) that improved [cross-sector](#) planning, policies, institutions and investments and identified trade-offs and synergies across resource systems. This initiative also strengthened stakeholder capacity for nexus [governance](#), leading to improved inter-ministerial collaboration. Its outcomes directly inform the new program's ambition

¹ The Policy Program has a strong focus on governments and public sector partners. This is a strategic decision and part of the prioritization exercise. The program will also engage with other partners such as civil society and the private sector through policy dialogue series and other communication activities.

to scale climate-resilient and resource-efficient systems by embedding WEFE Nexus innovations in [national](#) and regional development planning.

The Foresight initiative produced influential [global and regional foresight assessments](#) that guided research prioritization and investment. It supported governments and CGIAR centers with [scenario-based tools](#) for anticipating and managing systemic shocks, including climate change and food crises, and created capacities in over 20 countries through training and dialogues, often in collaboration with the NPS initiative. Foresight has now become a core capability for the new program, informing evidence-based strategic planning and providing [frameworks](#) central to building adaptive, future-fit [food systems](#).

National Policies and Strategies (NPS) has significantly contributed to over 50 policy processes across 8 countries. Together with other initiatives, such as Foresight, NPS informed national responses to major crises like the [Ukraine-Russia war](#) fallout and [cost-of-living crisis](#) (2022-2023) and policies ranging from agricultural, fiscal and [subsidy policies](#) to [social protection](#), post-conflict recovery and [gender](#) policies. NPS supported value-chain strategies, including [potato/sweet potato](#) in Ethiopia/Nigeria, [livestock](#) in Rwanda, and [fisheries in Nigeria](#). The Initiative shared capacity with over 1,000 policymakers and researchers, establishing a strong foundation for evidence-based policymaking and institutional capacity strengthening.

Rethinking Food Markets (RFM) piloted innovations in agrifood value chains across six countries, benefiting over 100,000 households through improved market access, quality, and [logistics](#). It developed and tested inclusive business models and [digital platforms](#), with a focus on women and youth inclusion. A shared digital infrastructure that was developed under the program to help Honduran coffee farmers meet sustainability requirement for exporting their coffee was used to make the first EUDR compliant shipment of Honduran coffee to European markets in May 2025. RFM provides a tested portfolio of scalable market innovations and policy tools to enhance employment, equity, and environmental [sustainability](#) in food systems.

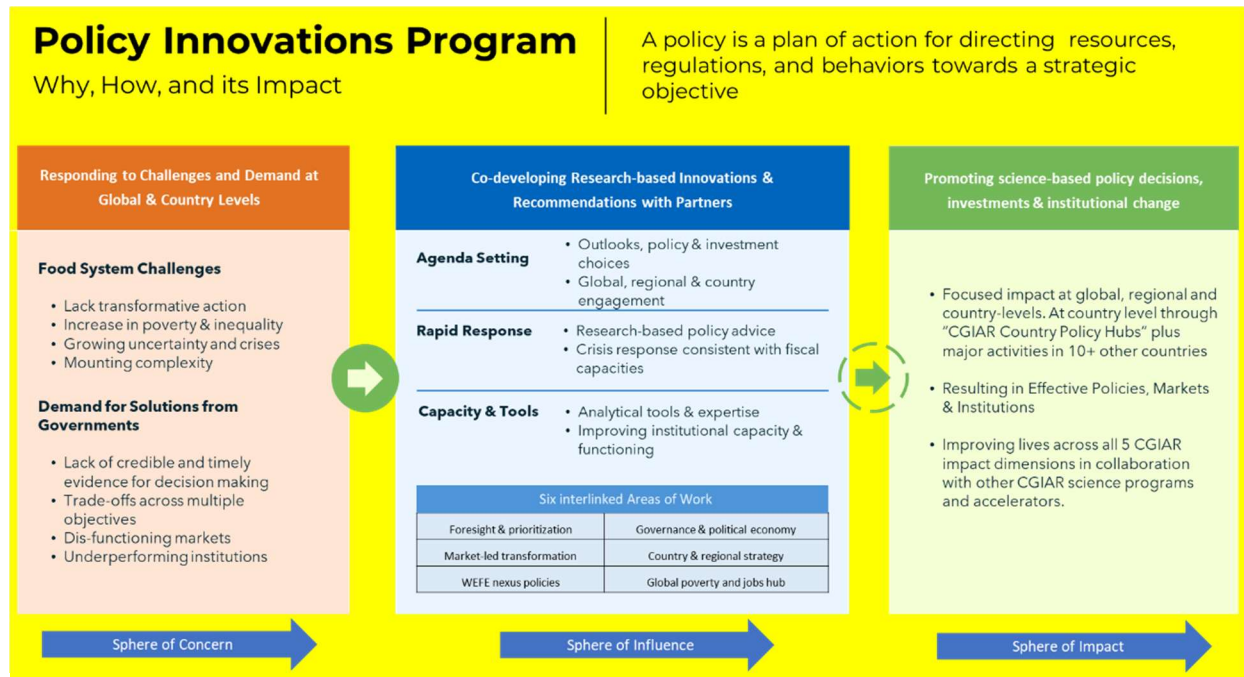
Collectively, these achievements provide a robust foundation of proven approaches, co-created innovative tools, and established impact partnerships, crucial for strengthening evidence-informed policymaking and accelerating food transformation within the new CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program and 2025-2030 Portfolio.

1.3 Description of intended research

Value proposition: The Policy Program offers governments, civil society, and private sector actors in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) a unique, evidence-driven platform to co-create and implement transformative policies for food, land, and water (FLW) systems. By integrating cutting-edge foresight, governance, and market analytics, the Program enables actors to respond to emerging megatrends with agility, design context-appropriate solutions, and drive inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. The program therefore addresses two main issues: external food systems challenges that affect most LMICs government and actors, and the specific national government demand for policy solutions. CGIAR's strong analytical track record, embedded partnerships, and unmatched country presence distinguish this Program as the premier partner for policy innovation at the nexus of FLW systems. This is reflected in the Program high level Description (Figure 1) that summarises the AoWs activities along three pillars, namely agenda setting (pillar A), rapid response and policy guidance (pillar B); and capacity and tools (pillar C),² with examples of pillars being provided in the description of the AoWs.

² "Impact pathways" and "Pillars" are used interchangeably here.

Figure 1: Elevator Pitch Slide



Foresight and Prioritization (AoW1) focuses on providing tools, data and evidence to inform the design of agrifood system strategies and policies at various levels, including policy reforms and responses to crises. This is achieved through strengthening the capacity of partners like national think tanks (Pillar C), in developing and applying modelling and data systems. This will result in the co-creation of policy reports analysing food crisis’ impact on agrifood systems and food security, as well as policy evaluation and policy prioritization reports. Another set of outputs in this AoW relates to annual outlook reports, providing information on macroeconomic and food systems trends of relevance to national and regional decision makers (Pillar A). The long-term, systems-level approach moves beyond sectoral silos to assess the trade-offs and synergies between food security and nutrition, water security, climate resilience, environmental sustainability, equity, and livelihoods. The foresight analysis uses scenario modeling, ex ante impact assessments, and risk profiling. These methods enable policymakers to answer: “What if...?” and “How ...? questions, supporting adaptive decision-making in the face of climate, demographic, and geopolitical shifts.

Market-led Food Systems Transformation (AoW2) works with FLW system actors and decision makers, including market actors, on best-fit policies, technologies and institutions to sustainably transform food systems. This is achieved by designing and implementing with partners ‘on the ground’ interventions on policy and institutional innovations to incentivize uptake of farm level and market innovations (Pillar B). The AoW also includes the body of work on social protection and livelihood interventions, as these affect FLW system transformation processes.

Governance and Political Economy (AoW3) supports the uptake of politically feasible and coherent policies, working with global, national, and subnational partners and their constituencies on utilizing politically-informed analytical tools (Pillar C), and identifying institutional modalities that enhance policy implementation through inclusive modes of engagement and capacity sharing. This

AoW is motivated by the recognition that understanding what policies feasible given local contexts are is as important as knowing what should be done. This AoW therefore focuses on policy feasibility, including analyses on institutional capacity, political economy dynamics, and stakeholder coalitions. These studies use mixed-methods approaches—such as institutional diagnostics, stakeholder mapping, econometrics, and qualitative political analysis—to identify entry points for policy reform and to align incentives across actors for food, land and water systems. This is achieved through generation of evidence on specific governance and institutional innovations that result in improved FLW policy coordination, including incentives and opportunities for reform, and engagement mechanisms between decision makers and other stakeholders to enhance evidence-based policy design and implementation (Pillar B).

Water-Energy-Food-Environment (WEFE) Nexus Policy (AoW4) addresses the systemic challenges affecting climate-resilient, sustainable development of FLW systems (Pillar A). WEFE Nexus Policy, working with partners and other AoWs to co-develop trade-off analyses, pilots WEFE nexus solutions, builds capacity on integrated systems analysis, and supports governance and institutional analyses that ensure that natural resource systems that support food, water and energy security are effectively managed under growing climate change and other crises. (Pillar B).

Country Strategy and Engagement (AoW5) coordinates the country and regional engagement efforts of the Policy Program. A key function of this AoW is to articulate the national and regional priorities, by continuously engaging with policy and other decision-making partners throughout the policy cycle. This is achieved through close collaboration with national and regional think tanks and other government institutions, on generating policy documents and capacity strengthening (Pillars B and C). Building on the momentum from four high-performing CGIAR Initiatives, especially the National Policies and Strategies Initiative, the Program through this AoW tailors its research to the needs of governments and partners in over 35 countries, including a deeper focus in 10 priority countries. In these contexts, the Program deploys co-designed studies in collaboration with national institutions, ensuring relevance and ownership. Tools include policy hubs, science-policy interfaces, cost-benefit analysis of policy options, macro- and micro-level impact assessments, and cross-country learning. This work is anchored in principles of co-creation, co-implementation, capacity strengthening, and iterative learning, and relies on in-country networks and policy champions.

Policy Knowledge Brokering Hub (AoW6) places emphasis on poverty, inequality, and decent employment for improved livelihoods, by assembling cross-country studies on topical issues in close collaboration with AoW5, synthesizing the evidence of CGIAR research on these topics, from the Policy Program as well as other Programs and Accelerators. This is achieved through the development of synthesis studies and capacity strengthening to collect, analyse and use relevant data, targeted at CGIAR researchers and partners (Pillars B and C).

2. Codesign and partnerships

Co-Designing at the Country Level

Emphasizing a bottom-up approach, the Policy Program has a focus on fostering collaboration at country level. Through Country and Regional Strategy, Area of Work 5 (AoW5), we convene partners and stakeholders to co-develop country-specific ToCs, aligned with the overall Policy ToC. In the Inception Phase, country-level ToCs were developed for Kenya, Malawi, and Pakistan with other countries to follow over the coming months. This process not only defined and strengthened partnerships but also facilitated the co-design of activities to be implemented over the next five years as a mechanism to monitor and reach measurable outcomes and impact.

Co-creating Policy Innovations in Kenya

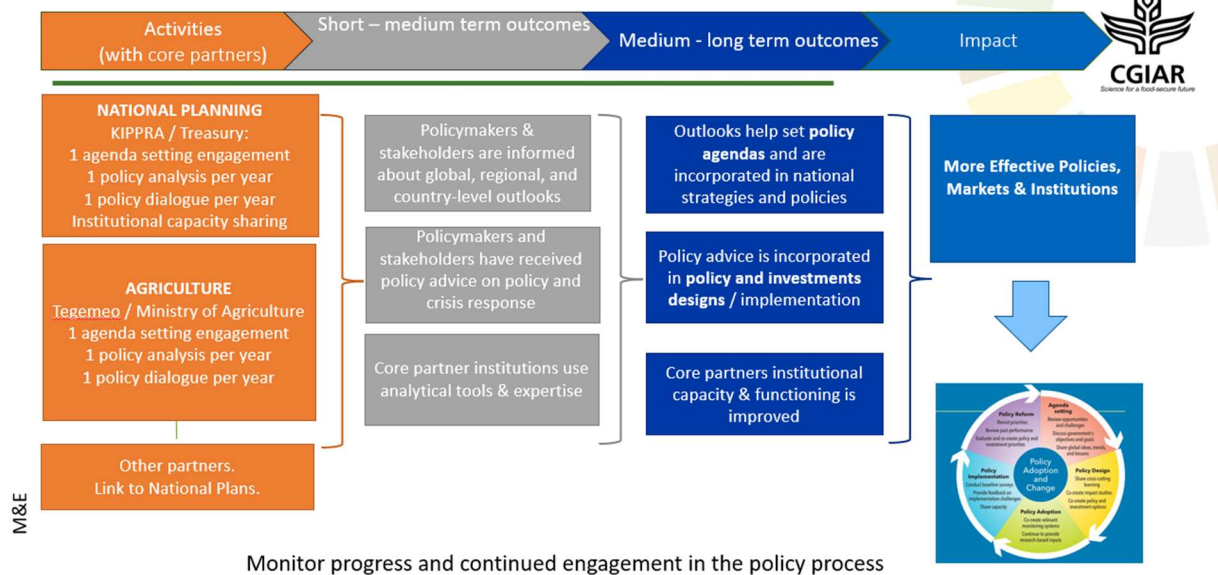
In Kenya, the CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program has forged a truly co-creative partnership with national stakeholders, better aligning its research and engagement strategy for the 2025-2030 period. Our deep presence in Kenya, a key focus country for CGIAR, has enabled continuous dialogue that goes beyond consultation to genuine programmatic co-design. This strategic alignment began with a series of foundational engagements, including dedicated CGIAR P25 Listening Sessions and multiple policy dialogues around enhancing the science-policy interface (e.g., "[Transforming Kenya's Food Systems](#)"). Crucially, joint studies with policymakers, such as the qualitative research on bridging the gap between science and policy ([Keenan et al., 2024](#)), provided invaluable insights directly from policymakers, researchers, and private sector actors. Further [interactive sessions](#) during the CGIAR Science Week in Kenya and strategic partnerships with institutions like the Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) at their 8th Annual Conference in May 2025, provided direct feedback from critical partners including the Kenya Private Sector Alliance, Agricultural Sector Network, President's Economic Transformation Secretariat, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development.

These intensive, iterative engagements were not mere information-gathering exercises; they were pivotal in the co-creation of the Policy Program's strategic direction for 2025-2030. The insights gathered directly informed and sharpened our Theory of Change (ToC) and Outcomes. Specifically, we have reoriented the country ToC around the Policy Program's pillars, actively reorienting our outputs and outcomes to align with these priorities. This collaborative process ensured the Policy Program would:

- Precisely target policy demand: Delivering knowledge products directly relevant to Kenya's evolving policy agenda.
- Enhance national capabilities: Building capacity to utilize advanced policy analysis tools and translate research into impactful policy decisions.
- Facilitate cross-country learning: Ensuring Kenya's experiences contribute to broader regional and global policy innovation.

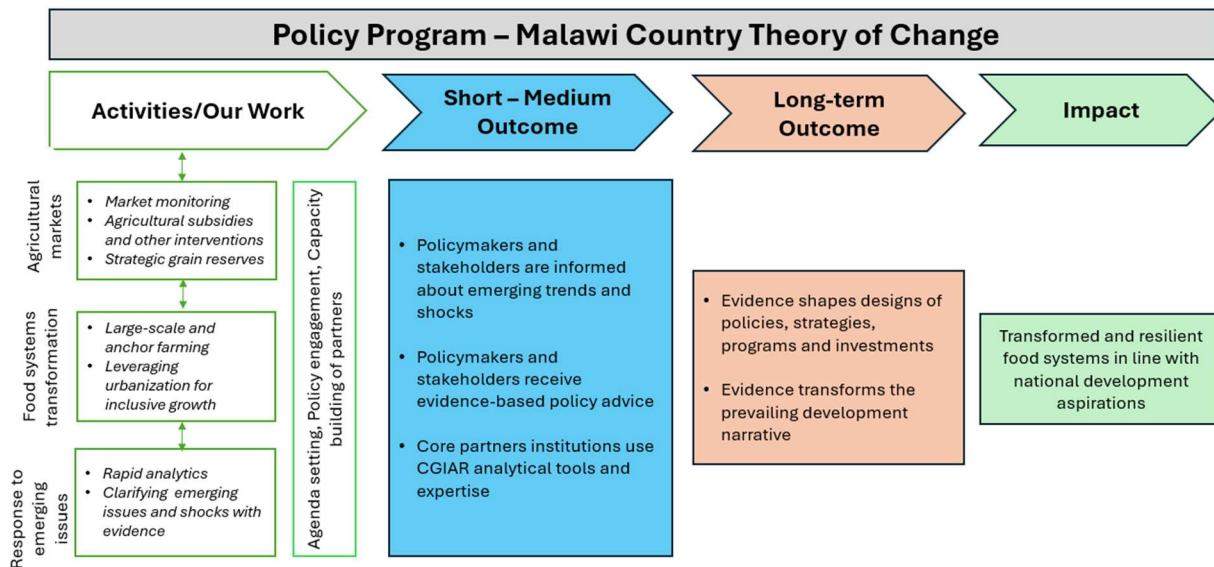
The commitment to this shared vision is formalized through signed partnership agreements or letters of collaboration with key policy partners including the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, KIPPRA, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, and the University of Nairobi. This robust framework of partnership and continuous feedback underscores how the Policy Program is not just implementing research *in* Kenya but truly co-creating and reshaping its policy research and engagement *with* Kenya, for a stronger, more impactful future. The Kenya case exemplifies our overall strategy of pursuing targeted country-level engagements to inform the ToC for our various Areas of Work (AoWs) and guide our programmatic direction moving forward.

Example ToC: Policy Program in Kenya (2025)



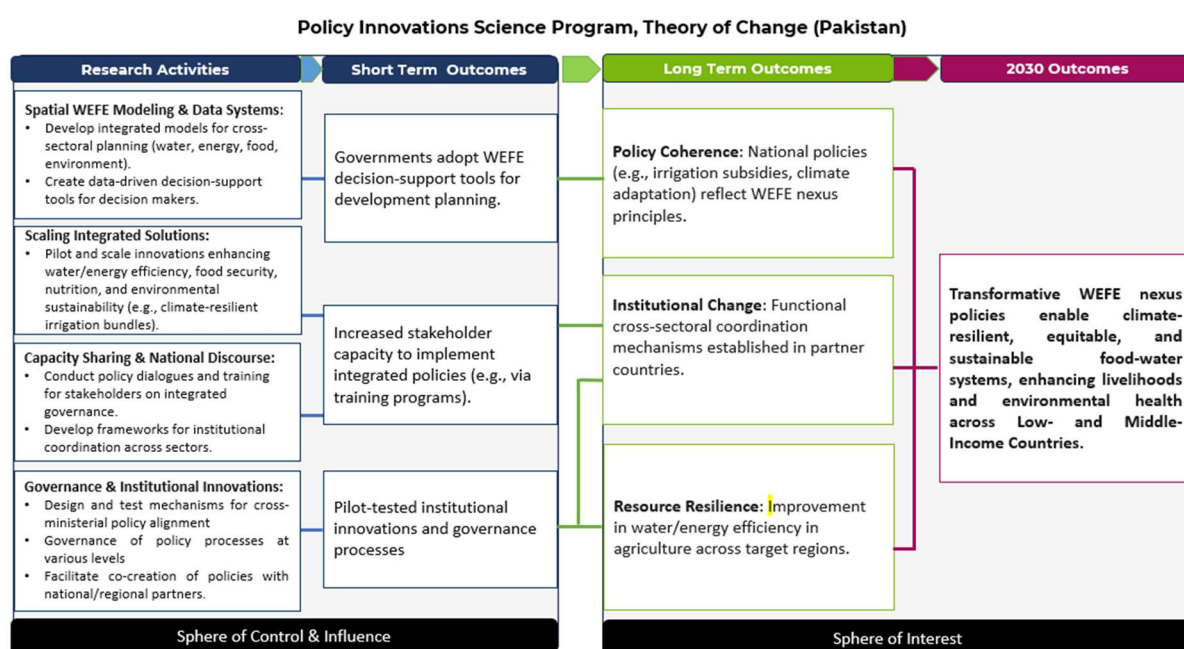
Co-creating Policy Innovations in Malawi

The process of creating the Malawi ToC and activity plan with key stakeholders derives from 15 years of continuous engagement and co-designing with partners, in addition to a Policy Program specific event in early 2025. The ToC is not viewed as a static representation, but rather a way to update and refine joint work with partners at every interaction. For example, at the last interaction with National Planning Commission, it was decided that the Malawi Policy team will support national partners in modelling scenarios for the Malawi 2063 accelerator program (2025-2030). This reflects the Program’s commitment to ensure that there is capacity within the national ministries and departments to use, and uptake modelling and simulation tools developed by AoWs. This complements the research of the program and encourages adoption of the research findings into policy.



Co-creating Policy Innovations in Pakistan

Building on long-term CGIAR research and collaboration and in-depth engagement and partnership development under the CGIAR Initiative on NEXUS Gains, the Pakistan country policy team co-designed a ToC with envisioned 2030 outcomes of transformative WEFE nexus policies that enable climate-resilient, equitable, and sustainable FLW systems. This will be achieved through deep collaboration spanning over 40 years with key partners from government, in particular, the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, the Ministry of National Food Security & Research and the Ministry of Water Resources, as well as province-level bodies, in particular, Punjab Irrigation Department, and university partners, such as Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & Information Technology (KFUEIT). ToC implementation will build on key achievements under NEXUS Gains, such as a dashboard on water and food futures for strategic planning, new methodologies on water management adopted by provincial and federal governments, and capacity sharing initiatives for government and university partners engaged in FLW systems.



These country-level Theories of Change serve as the primary mechanism for fostering genuine stakeholder engagement and driving shared ownership, aligning the different AoW activities to the needs of the country. They ensure our research is highly relevant and tailored through rigorous co-creation processes with national partners. Crucially, these ToCs also lay the groundwork for effective co-implementation, translating evidence into tangible policy and programmatic action on the ground. This systematic approach is now being rigorously rolled out across all the AW5 countries, cementing a collaborative and impactful foundation for our policy work.

3. Theory of change and MELIA

3.1 *Theory of change*

The Policy Program posits that evidence-based decisions coupled with strong engagement with decision makers will lead to superior outcomes in this complex context. In collaboration with other Programs and Accelerators, it seeks to identify sound policies, investments, and innovations targeting all five CGIAR impact areas.

Based on the ISDC comments- in particular the limited coordination and collaboration across AoWs- and internal discussions, the Program is now organised along three pillars used by all AoWs: agenda setting, rapid response and policy guidance, and developing analytical tools and expertise while improving institutional capacity (see Figure1)

The Program's Theory of Change works through six interconnected Areas of Work (AoWs), their High-level Outputs (HLOs), leading to Intermediate Outcomes and finally to three 2030 Outcomes, that correspond broadly to the three pillars. The first 2030 outcome focuses on Pillar C on capacity sharing; the 2nd outcome corresponds to Pillar B while the 3rd one addresses Pillar A.

- 2030 Outcome 1: National think tanks analytical and institutional capacity strengthened to guide policy and investment decisions considering trade-offs between SDGs,
- 2030 Outcome 2: Global, regional institutions and governments use knowledge products on foresight, impact assessment and governance to guide pro-poor, gender-inclusive and climate smart policies and investments
- 2030 Outcome 3: Governments and partners adopt policy responses to address local, national, regional and global challenges and shocks, contributing to more coherent and sustainable development processes that deliver positive outcomes across a range of SDG targets.

The progress towards the 2030 Outcomes is operationalized via six AoWs, contributing to 11 Intermediate outcomes which consolidates outputs from the 20 High-level outputs of the Policy Program. Multiple Intermediate Outcomes contribute towards the 2030 Outcomes. For example, Intermediate outcomes 1.2.1 (Partners use outlook reports to inform and enhance design of their strategies and policies), 4.2.1 (Partners achieve a shared understanding of emerging challenges in WEFE systems and foresight data, tools and analysis), 5.2.1 (Countries co-create national strategies and policies) and 6.2.2 (CGIAR researchers and partners have enhanced capacity) all address the capacity challenge and contribute to the impact pillar achieving 2030 Outcome 1. Intermediate Outcomes 1.2.2 (Partners use foresight analysis to enhance investment decisions, prioritize policy reform and respond to crisis), 2.2.1 (FLW system actors get guidance to sustainable transform food systems), 3.2.1 (Partners and key constituencies adopt tools and modalities for uptake of politically feasible and coherent policies), 4.2.2 (Systems-level interactions in FLW systems are better understood and addressed), 4.2.3 (Decision makers support advancing women's empowerment and gender equality), and 5.2.2 (Policymakers have access to and adopt evidence-based policy solutions) contribute towards achieving 2030 Outcome 2 on providing rapid response and policy guidance. Similarly, and not surprisingly, the agenda setting work of the Policy Program is mostly coming from AoWs like AoW 4 and 5 which work at the national and regional level with national governments and regional institutions, supported by AoW2 and 3 with their global research portfolio. The cross-cutting work across these pillars is embedded in AoW 6 for poverty reduction and jobs but also have presence in the work of AoW4 and AoW5. Intermediate outcome 4.2.1: Partners achieve a shared understanding of emerging challenges in WEFE systems and foresight data, tools and analysis and 5.2.2: Policymakers have access to and adopt evidence-

based policy solutions both highlight how tools and analysis done within AoWs 1, 2 and 3 are being used to drive evidence-based policies at the country level.

Assumptions drive the Intermediate and 2030 Outcomes. The key assumptions for the Policy Program are: 1) Partners are willing to use Program data and tools; 2) Partners' priorities are relatively constant (data and tools remain relevant to partners; 3) Trade-offs are sufficiently acknowledged by partners; 4) Ability and willingness to engage; and 5) political willingness to use a system approach. Together they define the premise on the success of the program.

The Theory of Change was substantially adjusted during the inception period. Focused discussions within and across AoWs were organized to create clarity on how the Policy Program seeks to deliver impact across scale. Concurrently, AoW-level ToCs were revised to streamline and consolidate High-Level Outputs (HLOs), and their intermediate outcomes. This refinement was facilitated by identifying and consolidating overlapping activities and HLOs, enabling a more cohesive approach. Several AoWs reduced the number of HLOs and intermediate outcomes by identifying such overlap and redundancies. The impact pillars of HLOs to Intermediate Outcomes and then to the 2030 Outcomes were clarified responding to ISDC comments. Similarly, the cross-cutting work was firmed up to show synergy across AoW HLOs.

During the Inception phase, key exercises such as co-design, partnerships, and prioritization underscored the demand-driven nature of the policy program. Research agendas are co-developed at the country-level with national policy institutions and governments, ensuring alignment with country priorities and enhancing capacity for research uptake. This country-level codesign process enabled developing of a country-level TOC detailing how their work aligns and supports the 3pillars of the Policy Program. The country ToC development process is elaborated in the section on Co-design and partnerships. During the Inception period, country-specific ToCs and activity plans were co-developed for Malawi, Kenya and Pakistan. while consultations are ongoing in Nigeria and other focal countries. This approach is supported by the global focus of Areas of Work (AoWs), which addressed issues like market dynamics, governance, and political economy, transcending national boundaries.

[Link to ToC](#)

3.2 Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment (MELIA)

For tracking progress, the high-level outputs (HLOs) and intermediate outcomes, are each supported by specific activities detailed in the Program of Work and Budget (POWB). This framework serves as the foundation for monitoring progress, ensuring not only the implementation of activities but also the validation of underlying assumptions to achieve the anticipated changes. Targets were developed consultatively within the AoWs but also corroborated at the Program level since this determines the overall targets committed for the 2030 Outcomes. The Results Framework details the HLOs, Intermediate Outcomes and 2030 Outcomes they contribute to for each AoW.

The PRMS systems will be used to monitor the HLOs and Intermediate Outcomes and manage reporting for the Program. The POWB will monitor the HLOs and ensure that targets are met by the deadline. Most of the HLO indicators are quantitative and will be collected at the AoW level by the AoW MEL team. Attainment of higher-level outcomes like policy change or adoption of best practices will be monitored both at the AoW as well as the Program level and has mostly qualitative indicators to best understand the process. Quantitative indicators are also assigned to Intermediate outcomes, so that information can be better triangulated. For the Policy Program a

host of methods will be used for collecting data. However, Altmetrics, reports and Website statistics seem to be the most frequently used for collecting data on HLOs. Focus groups seem to be a recurring method used by most AoWs to collect data around adoption and policy engagement concurring with the greater qualitative nature of such information. A lot of data also comes from regular meetings with partners and thus will be gathered continuously, but the annual cycle will be followed for most other data collection.

Data collected also needs to be verified to maintain quality control and referenced to relevant documentation for evidence. The PRMS system will be used currently to store and maintain the data collected. Reported HLOs and Intermediate Outcomes from AoWs will be quality checked through the internal review process within AoWs before reporting to the PRMS system. Data repositories will be created and maintained at the AoW level to ensure evidence preservation.

Data and reporting on HLOs from bilaterals will be checked by Center delegates for the Program for quality assurance. Data will be cross-checked and validated at the Program level during reporting period. The Program MELIA lead will work closely with the AoW MEL focal points and the AoW leads to monitor progress, verify data and compiling information for reporting. Each result will be evidenced with supporting documentation and justifications. It will also be cross checked to ensure accuracy.

Learning is integral to the Policy Program and also supports adaptive management within the Policy Program. Encouraging learning within and across AoWs and across Programs/Areas (P/As) is a priority. Face-to-face interactions with partners, and stakeholders provide great opportunities for learning as does workshops which present research findings to stakeholders. In the Results Framework, simulation and econometric analysis are also listed as some of the methods used for learning that will address adaptive management.

A comprehensive list of Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment (MELIA) studies has been developed to validate assumptions within the AoWs. Two studies initiated just prior to the Inception phase—the Gendered Soil Health Assessment in Uganda and the Uzbekistan Irrigation Technology Subsidy Assessment—will be completed by 2027. The Uganda study will inform the 2030 Outcome related to the impact of capacity strengthening on national policies, while the Uzbekistan study will assess the intermediate outcome of AoW4 concerning the Food, Land, and Water systems nexus. Other MELIA studies are scheduled for the latter part of the program as implementation progresses, and evidence becomes more accessible.

Several impact assessment studies are also planned. These include evaluations testing assumptions between intermediate outcomes and 2030 Outcomes, as well as studies examining the impact of CGIAR evidence on policy decisions at national, regional, and international levels. Assessments of institutional capacity sharing and trade-offs across impact areas are cross-cutting themes that span multiple AoWs and P/As, necessitating coordination at the CGIAR level to assess impact. Discussions are ongoing to finalize studies based on research questions that will demonstrate the Policy Program's impact.

Refer to the MELIA Plan and Results Framework attachments for additional details.

4. Comparative advantage analysis

The Comparative Advantage analysis conducted by AoW leads and co-leads with their teams confirmed that CGIAR holds a strong leadership position in delivering High-Level Outputs (HLOs) related to diagnostics, tool development, and evidence synthesis. CGIAR's unique value lies in bridging global science with local policy uptake, while partners play complementary roles in scaling, institutionalization, and delivery.

CGIAR holds a unique comparative advantage in policy research and engagement due to its unparalleled combination of strengths. Firstly, our foundation in world-class science ensures that policy recommendations are rooted in rigorous, evidence-based research across diverse disciplines, from biological and agronomic to applied social sciences. Secondly, CGIAR benefits from extensive and deep policy networks, fostering trust and direct engagement with national governments, regional bodies, and international organizations. This allows our research to directly inform critical policy processes. Thirdly, our presence in many countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America provides an invaluable on-the-ground understanding of local contexts, institutional landscapes, and political economy dynamics. This deep contextual knowledge ensures our policy advice is relevant and actionable.

For example, CGIAR is uniquely positioned for political economy and governance research in agrifood systems. No other organization can link technical food systems dynamics (from farm to consumer) with political systems and institutional structures across scales. CGIAR possesses robust expertise in applied political economy, addressing government demands on issues like devolution impacts (Ghana, Zambia, Nepal), groundwater governance (South Asia) and scaling nutrition interventions (Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Senegal). Its established tools, like the Kaleidoscope Model, are widely used for holistic policy analysis on topics from fertilizer subsidies to land tenure. CGIAR also holds a significant comparative advantage in global and national economy-wide modeling, uniquely assessing broad policy and shock impacts. Models like RIAPA and IMPACT are central, integrating economic, biophysical, and social dimensions. This allows comprehensive analysis across all five CGIAR impact areas: Poverty Reduction, Livelihoods & Jobs; Nutrition, Health & Food Security; Climate Adaptation & Mitigation; Environmental Health & Biodiversity; and Gender Equality, Youth & Social Inclusion. Our modeling is highly collaborative, involving CGIAR Centers, Programs, Accelerators, and dozens of national/international partners, e.g.: World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Resources Institute (WRI), African Development Bank (AfDB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Punjab Irrigation Department (Pakistan), Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) Pakistan, Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), India, Universities in Central Asia, South Asia (various), River Basin Commissions in Asia and Africa, and National universities and research institutions in Ethiopia, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Central Asia. This multidisciplinary, partnership-driven approach ensures robust, holistic insights crucial for strategic decision-making in complex food, land, and water systems.

This holistic approach enables us to address complex food, land, and water system challenges comprehensively, ensuring solutions are not only scientifically sound but also politically feasible and socially equitable. Together, these elements position CGIAR as a leading partner for transformative policy change.

Refer to the Comparative Advantage attachment for additional detail.

5. Prioritization

5.1 Knowledge-driven priorities

Alignment with Policy Processes

The prioritization process for the Policy Program has been intentionally aligned with the inherent nature of policy-making processes. Such processes are typically characterized by extended periods of policy evolution within a prevailing paradigm, interspersed with discrete paradigm shifts that often bring about rapid changes in policy orientation.

Two-Phase Prioritization Exercise.

The prioritization exercise was conducted in two phases:

Phase 1: Each Area of Work (AoW) independently engaged with their research teams and partners to prioritize High-Level Outputs (HLOs) across each impact area and determine the regions where focus should be maximized. This phase was particularly crucial given the current budget constraints, necessitating the prioritization of HLOs and activities to align with available funding.

Phase 2: The outcomes from Phase 1 were compiled to provide an overarching view of the policy program. The resulting picture reinforced the regions and impact areas where the program aims to achieve the maximum effect.

Regional Focus and Variations

The majority of the research under the Policy Program's Innovation AoWs concentrates on achieving impact at scale through Food Security, Poverty Reduction, and Social Inclusion in regions such as East and Southern Africa, South Asia, and West and Central Africa. There are variations among the AoWs. For example, AoW4 has limited activities in Latin America, West and Central Africa, and Southeast Asia. AoW5 country presence is focused in Africa and Asia.

Scoring and Thresholds

Upon compiling scores across HLOs and AoWs, it was observed that the overall scores for Food Security and Poverty Reduction in West and Central Africa, East and Southern Africa, and South Asia surpassed the maximum allowable score. East and Southern Africa and South Asia exceeded the maximum score in the area of Social Inclusion. East and Southern Africa also surpassed the threshold score for Climate Adaptation. These results are consistent with the nature of the work undertaken by AoWs. For example, AoW4: has a strong focus on climate action and AoW1 utilizes global-level foresight modeling. Consequently, the combined presence of AoWs 1, 2, 3, and 4 in East and Southern Africa, along with the environmental focus of their work, contributed to pushing the score for this region above the threshold. Environmental health is significantly influenced by policies, and the policy program directly contributes to this impact area; while the effects on this impact area are substantial, they remain within the established threshold limits.

5.2 Final decisions on the Program's direction and design

Prioritization Across Impact Areas: There was consensus that the majority of activities within the policy program and their corresponding impact pillars align with the core impact areas of food security, poverty reduction, and social inclusion. The team also recognized that the global scope of AoWs 1, 2, 3, and 6 warrants consideration of additional impact areas, notably climate adaptation and environmental health. Policies and tools developed by AoWs have implications for these areas, prompting a reassessment and adjustment of scores for High-Level Outputs (HLOs) within these domains.

Allocating Minimum Scores to HLOs in Regions with Minimal Presence: It was agreed that all AoWs would give a minimum score of 1 even to those regions where there is no substantial activities. Zero/blank HLOs/regions from Phase 1 were given a score of 1. Assigning a baseline score reflects the global reach of research. After analysis of overall scores from the prioritization exercise and PORB, the Policy Program management team decided that these prioritized scores by region matched the 10 focus countries of the Program. Moreover, the areas of work (AoWs) felt that the scores justified their focus and planned activities in the near term. It seemed to also corroborate the CA scores. Hence the regions and HLOs where the AoW and the Program has most concentration in and the countries/regions where future work is planned was quite aligned. The only issue faced by the Program was that the maximum scores for these focus regions exceeded the maximum allowable score as per the methodology of the exercise. Hence it was decided that an across-the-board downward shift of the scores will ensure that relative advantages were preserved, while bringing down the regions where scores exceeded the maximum allowable number. This was done for four of the five impact areas: Food security, poverty reduction, social inclusion, and climate adaptation. Since Climate adaptation scores did not hit the maximum allowable limit, it was not revised.

Refer to the Prioritization attachment for more information.

6. Alignment of W3 and bilaterally funded work

Strategic Alignment of Bilateral (W3) Funding with the Policy Program

This mapping marks a pivotal step in systematically aligning bilateral (W3) funding with the Policy Program's strategic objectives. We have completed a comprehensive mapping of 36 active W3 and bilateral projects, representing approximately \$18.1 million USD in 2025, across all our Areas of Work (AoWs). This mapping provides critical insights into policy-relevant research already underway at center-level.

Our core objective is to actively explore and foster synergies across multiple dimensions: countries, specific topics, within and between AoWs, and for broader cross-country learning. This involves leveraging policy insights from W3 projects to inform AoW agendas and connecting specialized W3 research with our overarching policy themes. For example, IFPRI's country strategy support programs are mapped to the Policy Program. They are designed to respond to demand for food policy research and deliver holistic support for country-led development, therefore strongly complementing especially AoW5 on country strategy and engagement. In addition, the alignment of funds provides new opportunities for co-creation of research, sharing tools and approaches, and allows for wider dissemination of research outputs. These provides strong incentives for collaboration.

While this deliberate alignment is expected to yield substantial benefits, it will also lead to greater efficiencies by minimizing duplication and maximizing resource utilization. It will foster better coordination through integrated planning and shared policy engagement strategies and create compelling opportunities for joint fundraising. These are all additional and important incentives for alignment, especially in an increasingly complex funding environment. While the initial mapping is on-going, the exact operational mechanisms for managing this integrated W3 alignment will be developed throughout the remainder of 2025, ensuring practical and impactful collaborations that elevate the Policy Program's contribution to CGIAR's mission.

7. Plan of Results and Budget

Pooled resources and bilateral funding for the Program totalled US\$ 32.2 million with bilateral funding exceeding the value of pooled resources by US\$ 4.1 million in 2025. Available funding is composed of Window 1 US\$ 6.7 million (23% of total available funding), Window 2 US\$ 7.3 million (21%), and bilateral funding US\$ 18.1 million (56%).

The Program received 68.5% (US\$14 million) of the initial baseline scenario budget of US\$20.5 million in pooled funding. From the US\$ 12.1 million set aside for the AoWs, AoW1 Foresight and Prioritization receives the largest share of W1/2 pooled funds (33.5%), followed by AoW4 WEFE Nexus Policy (26.0%). AoW5 Country Strategy and Engagement (14.7%) and Market-led Food Systems Transformation (13.3%) are also prioritized. Funded at a lower level under current W1/2 allocations are AoW3 Political Economy and Governance (9.3%) and AoW6 Policy Knowledge Brokering Hub (3.2%).

The reduced funding affected both the management budget and the research activities in the AoWs. As per guidance from the CGIAR Global Leadership Team, costs for management leadership were reduced for the second half of 2025 to consider cost of an average of 0.5 FTE per active Area of Work, affecting AoW3 and AoW5. Cognizant of the results of prioritization and comparative advantage exercises, AoWs made changes to their budgets.

At the time of writing of this inception report, ICARDA and IITA have not formally agreed to the reduced budget allocation.

Area of Work 1. Foresight and Prioritization (US\$ 4,047,686). Participating centers: Bioversity, CIAT, CIMMYT, CIP, ICARDA*, ICRISAT, IFPRI, IITA*, ILRI, IRRI, IWMI, WorldFish)

The allocation of funding across deliverables and CGIAR Centers aligns with the four high-level outputs (HLOs) of the Area of Work (AoW), each of which are designed to advance critical strategic goals along the Policy Program's Theory of Change. The distribution also highlights the differentiated roles of Centers based on their thematic and geographic strengths. Cross-AoW initiatives remain modest in funding but are strategically positioned to address important intersectional challenges.

HLO 1 and 2 account for 20% and 17 %, respectively, of the total budget assigned to the AoW1 (US\$4 million). Both HLOs leverage IFPRI's expertise in foresight modelling, while also drawing on the technical capacities of other Centers to capture regional, crop or thematic expertise. Deliverables listed under each HLO clearly aggregate cross-Center knowledge to inform global policy questions.

HLO 3 accounts for 22% of our total budget and underscores the need that AoW1 has to focus on crisis-related modelling and policy responses. This HLO is highly reactive or demand-driven and is strategically positioned to inform governments during intensive or unanticipated periods of policy planning or during instability and global crises/disruptions.

HLO 4 is the most heavily funded output (33%), reflecting the long-term strategic value of data-driven decision-making tools for the CGIAR and its partners. Investments in capacity-strengthening account for more than half of HLO4's budget. This aligns with the AoW's goal of transferring the CGIAR's modeling assets and expertise to national partners and ensure sustainability.

The three cross-AoW1 outputs are low-cost, high-impact activities that encourage thematic coherence across the Science Program's research. Funding is concentrated to a few centers reflecting their topical specialization.

Area of Work 2. Policy, Institutional and Technological Innovations for Market-led Food System Transformation (US\$ 1,618,584). Participating centers: AfricaRice, CIAT, CIMMYT, ICARDA*, ICRISAT, IFPRI, IITA*. The PORB for Area of Work 2 on market-led transformation is focused on policy reforms and innovations that help food producers and businesses overcome barriers to inclusive, sustainable and resilient income growth. The budget for AoW2 (US\$1.6 million) is distributed somewhat equally across the first three HLOs, which each focus on a different set of barriers to progress. A smaller budget for methodological innovations in HLO4 supports this work.

HLO 1 (31%) focuses on generating evidence on policies and institutional innovations that encourage farm-level technology change. This is a new area of work, and work undertaken here realigns ongoing work to better address this HLO. This HLO is also where a cross-cutting activity on innovative subsidies sits. This cross-cutting activity will bring together work on subsidies across the Program and deliver agenda-setting pieces to build a stronger program of work on this going forward.

HLO 2 (39%) emphasizes the availability of knowledge on how markets perform and respond to policies and institutional reforms aimed at improving quality, safety, efficiency, and resilience. Funding is concentrated on a few centers, reflecting their specialized expertise in addressing critical market-led transformation challenges, but building in scope for work by other centers in the future. It builds on the most innovative and impactful work coming out of previous programs.

HLO 3 (24%) addresses the need for evidence on social protection and livelihood interventions that support farm-level workforce (FLW) transformation. This output is demand-driven and strategically positioned to inform governments and stakeholders during periods of social and economic instability. Funding is currently concentrated in one center with expertise in this area.

HLO 4 (6%) prioritizes methodological innovations for policy guidance, focusing on the cost-effective and accurate evaluation of technologies, policies, and institutions. Investments in this area aim to develop cost-effective tools for generating and using evidence. Given its supportive role for the rest of the work, it receives a small budget.

Area of Work 3. Political Economy and Governance (US\$ 1,126,520). Participating centers: CIAT, ICRISAT, IFPRI, ILRI, IRRI, WorldFish.

Area of Work 3 (AoW3) on Political Economy and Governance is focused on identifying the modalities for institutional coordination and implementation across complex food system policies, opportunities to enhance cross-sector and multi-sectoral policy coherence, political economy dynamics that shape decisions around distortionary policies (e.g. subsidies), and viable applied political economy tools for anticipating opponents and champions for needed food, land, and water reforms. Therefore, the PORB is designed to help deliver on those overall objectives and involves the main Centers that have demonstrated consistent experience and leadership with political

economy and/or governance analysis (e.g. IFPRI, IWMI, and CIAT) while supporting efforts by other Centers to begin gaining this expertise (e.g. ILRI, WorldFish, and ICRISAT).

A key aim of AoW3 is to foster integration with other AoWs within the Policy Program. To this end, several of the intended deliverables draw on the foresight modelling from AoW1 as well as the deep understanding of policy landscapes supported by country engagement under AoW5. Moreover, through work on subsidy reforms (HLO 3.2), AoW3 will be collaborating with all of the Policy Program AoWs, with an explicit emphasis on the policy characteristics and strategies that make uptake of fertilizer, fish, and animal input subsidy reforms most feasible.

HLO3.1 accounts for a majority (55%) of the AoW's total budget of \$1,126,520 because it includes work on policy coherence that was part of the continuity from CGIAR initiatives, especially National Policies and Strategies. HLO 3.2 and 3.3 are almost completely new and account for 21.4% and 22.6%, respectively, of the AoW's budget. In subsequent years, the balance of funding across the three HLOs should be right sized to help scale up these new HLOs and activities. Planned deliverables under these HLOs reflect the changing landscape for food systems reforms.

Specifically, analysis under HLO3.2 reflects that in countries facing debt distress and resource scarcity, identifying politically palatable ways to cut back and better target expensive subsidy programs and other distortionary policies is of paramount importance.

HLO 3.3 will be specifically focused on expanding tools and knowledge on implementation constraints and better identifying how policy decisions are in fact influenced by rigorous evidence, including from the CGIAR, and what political economy and governance barriers may prevent this from occurring. Collectively, scaling up and out of deliverables under these HLOs will provide a more holistic approach to the policy process across diverse regional, national, and subnational settings.

Area of Work 4. WEFE Nexus Policy (US\$ 3,154,209). Participating centers: Bioversity, CIAT, ICARDA*, ICRISAT, IFPRI, ILRI, IRRI, IWMI.

The allocation of funding across deliverables and CGIAR Centers aligns with the four high-level outputs (HLOs) of Area of Work 4, which are strategically designed to enhance integrated policy design for the WEFE nexus. Each HLO supports the Policy Program's Theory of Change by generating evidence, tools, and institutional innovations to support inclusive, climate-resilient, and coherent cross-sectoral policies and governance. The distribution of funding also reflects the differentiated roles and comparative advantages of implementing Centers in delivering thematic and regional contributions.

HLO 4.1 and HLO 4.2 receive 35% and 30%, respectively, of the AoW4 budget. HLO 4.1 focuses on developing spatial WEFE models and data systems to inform cross-sectoral planning. This reflects strong demand from governments and partners for evidence-based decision-making while HLO 4.2 aims to scale integrated solutions that enhance water, energy, and food security, environmental sustainability and social equity across regions. HLO 4.3 and HLO 4.4 account for 15% and 20%, respectively, of the total AoW4 budget. HLO 4.3 drives the discourse on nexus governance and supports capacity sharing for integrated policies and institutions. HLO 4.4 focuses on institutional innovations for effective governance and cross-sectoral coordination, working closely with regional and national partners to address fragmentation and align policy efforts across the WEFE nexus.

AoW4 deliverables also contribute to multiple Impact Areas and intersect with other Policy Innovation Areas: modeling in HLO 4.1 complements AoW1 (Foresight), socio-technical bundles under HLO 4.2 align with AoW2 (Market-led Transformation), and governance innovations under HLO 4.4 link closely with AoW3 (Political Economy). These cross-AoW linkages are modest in funding but important in strengthening thematic coherence across the Science Program. Geographically, AoW4 focuses on key transboundary and national river basins, including the Aral Sea, Ganges, Indus, Limpopo, Nile, and Incomati, with potential to expand as resources allow. The AoW seeks to accelerate the adoption of integrated, inclusive, and climate-resilient WEFE policies through applied research, partnership building, and capacity strengthening at all levels.

IWMI under this Area of Work also leads on country engagements in Pakistan (linked to areas AoW5/AoW6).

Area of Work 5. Country Strategy and Engagement (US\$ 1,769,294). Participating centers: CIAT, CIP, ICRISAT, IFPRI, IITA*, ILRI.

The Plan of Results and Budget (PORB) for the Policy Program (AoW5) outlines a strategic resource allocation across its three High-Level Outcomes (HLOs), aiming to foster impactful policy change from 2025 onwards. Funding distribution across participating Centers leverages their comparative advantages to directly support these HLOs.

HLO 5.1 accounts for 64%. For HLO 5.1 (Knowledge products for decision-makers), resources are prioritized for research synthesis, policy brief development, and innovative communication/events, ensuring evidence informs policy choices. HLO 5.2 (Enhanced capabilities for institutions) at 18% sees dedicated investments in capacity strengthening through joint research, training of trainer approaches (TOT), and peer-to-peer learning, embedding CGIAR tools and methods within partner institutions. To achieve. HLO 5.3 (Policy engagement and cross-country learning), the PORB allocates funds (18%) for sustained engagement platforms, multi-stakeholder dialogues, and regional learning events. Bilateral (W3) funds significantly complement these core activities, directly bolstering HLO delivery. These funds provide critical, context-specific evidence and insights into diverse areas like climate change and food systems transformation, further informing policy choices (HLO 5.1). W3 investments are also pivotal in enhancing national institutional capabilities (HLO 5.2) and enabling deeper, targeted policy engagement and dialogues within specific countries and regions (HLO 5.3). This dual funding stream ensures the AoW's broad strategic coherence while facilitating nuanced, localized policy innovation and more impactful partnerships nationally and regionally.

Area of Work 6. Policy Knowledge Brokering Hub for Pro-Poor FLW Systems (US\$ 387,230). Participating centers: CIP, ICRISAT, IFPRI, IRRI.

Area of Work 6 (AoW6) has two high-level outputs (HLOs), each designed to contribute and advance the Theory of Change of the Policy Program. The distribution of the total pooled funding allocated across centers considers the comparative advantage of the different centers involved as well as their geographic presence in various regions. As AoW6 hosts and coordinates the cross-cutting activities focusing on youth across the program, some of the activities under these two HLOs will be coordinated with related activities in other areas of work.

HLO6.1, which focuses on generating cross-cutting and cross-country lessons to inform inclusion and youth policies, accounts about **46%** of the total budget assigned to the AoW6. These resources

will be deployed to mobilize and implement cross-country studies focusing on youth inclusion in agrifood systems. On the other hand, HLO-2, which aims to enhance CGIAR's repository of suitable and innovative models, methods, and tools for addressing poverty, inequality, and decent employment, captures the remaining **54%** of the overall budget of AoW6.

HLO6.2 leverages the different center's analytical capabilities and assets to inform poverty, inclusion and livelihood policies. Some of the activities included under HLO-2 build on previous efforts by the CGIAR platform on poverty and livelihoods. Both HLOs leverage the centers' comparative advantage as well as synergistic opportunities and activities across other areas of work and programs and accelerators.

Please refer to the PORB attachment.

8. Cross-Portfolio linkages and geographic coordination

The policy program will work closely with many programs and accelerators as part of the portfolio. In this section we are providing examples for two cross-portfolio linkages and geographic collaboration in 2025.

8.1 Cross-portfolio linkages

1. Linkage with the Scaling for Impact Program: A key strategic linkage for the Policy Program is with the Scaling for Impact Program. This collaboration is grounded in the shared objective of achieving demand-led, large-scale adoption of innovations with measurable development outcomes and improvements in enabling environments. The Policy Program contributes by providing “big picture” country, regional and global outlooks of policy development and outlooks, complemented by economy-wide studies to estimate the returns to scaling investments. Such outlooks and cost-benefit analyses are the starting point for more in-depth, innovation specific enabling environments assessments by the Scaling Program to support the specific design of socio-technical innovation bundles and packages most likely to succeed in specific contexts. In addition, the Policy and Scaling Programs will work closely together through its country and regional “hubs”. The presence of scaling and policy hubs will facilitate joint “demand signalling” political economy and enabling environment assessments, joint policy dialogues, and joint policy engagement. This collaboration is expected to not only enhance the uptake of CGIAR innovations, but also the impact of these innovations in an inclusive way and aligned with countries’ priorities.

2. Linkage with the Gender Equality and Inclusion Accelerator (GEI): The Policy Program maintains an active and evolving partnership with the GEI to ensure that inclusivity and equity are central to policy analysis and recommendations. This linkage is operationalized through both analytical collaboration and co-hosted engagement platforms. The Policy Program draws on GEI expertise to design inclusive policy modeling, particularly focusing on distributional impacts by gender, age, and other social dimensions. A pipeline of joint activities and engagements reinforces this linkage. For example, the Policy Program recently collaborated with GEI to contribute to the Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) Youth Conference and the two programs are currently planning an event on “The Future of Youth Jobs in Agrifood Systems in Africa”, to disseminate existing research and to co-create a new research agenda with African partner institutions. These and other planned events not only disseminate research findings but also provide spaces for dialogue with national stakeholders and youth-led organizations, enhancing the relevance and impact of the Program’s policy work. This linkage helps ensure that proposed policy options are responsive to the needs of marginalized and underrepresented groups, including youth and women.

8.2 Geographic coordination

CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program: Strategic Coordination for Efficiency and Impact

The success of the Policy Program critically depends on robust coordination mechanisms, ensuring effective alignments (geographic and thematic) and maximizing existing capacities across the CGIAR system. This is primarily achieved through Area of Work 5 (AoW5), focused on country and regional engagement.

AoW5 establishes dedicated policy program hubs in key countries (including Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, Pakistan, among others) that serve as vital nodes for collaborative research, policy engagement, and capacity strengthening. These hubs are designed to ensure that policy

innovations are contextually relevant and directly responsive to specific national and regional challenges as expressed in national and regional plans (See also section 2 on Codesign and partnerships).

Through these hubs, the Program aims to:

- **Align policy research agendas across SPs/As, with an initial focus on the Scaling Program:** Ensuring policy research directly addresses national priorities and complements efforts of other CGIAR Programs in those regions.
- **Facilitate joint policy engagement:** Coordinating efforts with in-country partners and government stakeholders to maximize influence and uptake, including joint Policy Dialogues.
- **Strengthen local capacities:** Contributing to national policy research ecosystems through coordinated capacity sharing activities.

A prime example of this effective coordination and the efficiencies it generates is the policy program hub in Kenya. This hub actively coordinates with other CGIAR Programs, Accelerators, and individual CGIAR Centers building on efforts that the CGIAR country convener for Kenya had started. It therefore also provides an integration mechanism with W3/bilateral projects. Coordination is fundamental for avoiding duplication of efforts: They serve as a critical platform to share research plans, identify synergies, and proactively prevent overlapping activities, thereby ensuring a highly efficient deployment of collective resources across various CGIAR programs in Kenya.

Beyond internal CGIAR coordination, the Kenya hub takes a leading role in planning joint policy dialogue series, country policy notes, bringing diverse stakeholders together for impactful co-design and co-implementation. It consistently represents CGIAR in important national policy forums, such as the Agricultural and Rural Development Partners Group (ARDPG), ensuring a unified CGIAR voice in key policy discussions with donors and government. Furthermore, the hub regularly convenes meetings with major government partners (including relevant ministries and agencies) to present consolidated research findings. This holistic engagement amplifies the collective impact of CGIAR's work and guarantees direct responsiveness to the priorities of national partners and stakeholders.

This structured approach, driven by AoW5's policy program hubs and exemplified by the Kenya hub, ensures that the Policy Program contributes to a more efficient, cohesive, and impactful approach to CGIAR policy engagement. By coordinating research agendas, leveraging shared resources, and unifying engagement with partners, the Program is a prime driver of evidence-informed policy change where it is most needed, while simultaneously enhancing the overall value proposition of CGIAR's presence in country.

These country hubs will work closely with CGIAR country convenors and Scaling hubs (where applicable), and they are becoming our main mechanism for fostering stakeholder engagement, co-creation, and co-implementation of relevant policy solutions. This approach is now being systematically rolled out across all AoW5 countries to ensure highly impactful and locally owned policy work.

9. Risk management

Please refer to the following [link](#) with the Program/Accelerator's full risk register. This link is open to ISDC colleagues and others will be granted access, on request.

#	Category	Title	Description	Current Risk Level	Target Risk Level	Actions /Controls to manage risks
1	Partners and Partnerships	Limited uptake of scientific and policy innovations	Limited uptake of scientific and policy innovations: Focus on creating a shared information base to inform decision-making at multiple levels.	12	8	(1) Select countries based on history and likelihood of policy uptake; (2) Co-creation with partners of research and policy recommendations resulting in stronger buy-in; (3) Communicate successes of engagement resulting in higher demand by partners
2	Partners and Partnerships	Misalignment with policy demands and cycles	Misalignment with policy demands and cycles: political changes affecting uptake of policy recommendations. Unexpected change in government partner due to political instability could result into change in priorities.	9	6	(1) Co-create workplans with Technical Working Groups and Policy Advisory Groups to improve alignment; (2) Adaptive research and response to policy cycles and demand
3	Data	Data limitations hinder accuracy and accessibility	Data limitations: Limited access to official data and difficulties, and funding challenges to collect data	6	4	(1) Increase data sharing agreements and improve relationships with data custodians; (2) Increase efficiencies for data collection and additional fundraising
4	Research innovation	Capacity constraints reduce policy utilization	Capacity constraints in using, analyzing and interpreting research results	9	4	(1) Provide access to CGIAR policy repository and capacity sharing activities to enhance capacity and utilization (synthesis, briefs, methods, data, tools); (2) Collaborate with relevant cross-country capacity building network
5	Funding	Funding uncertainty	Funding uncertainty makes planning and implementation challenging, resulting in lower engagement with partners, staff involvement and impact	12	6	(1) Increase funding efforts; (2) Increase efficiency and synergies within the program as well as other programs and partners

10. Addressing feedback on select topics.

Concise summary of feedback	Details on how the Program has addressed or will address this feedback (in the Inception Phase or beyond)
There is a lack of information on how water systems are covered in the Portfolio.	AoW4 of the Policy Program has a strong focus on water. See AoW 4 description. The AoW ambition is to become the “go to place” for water in the CGIAR’s portfolio with a focus on water policies, institutions and investments. The AoW collaborates with other programs and accelerators to enhance integrated policy design for the Water- Energy-Food-Environment (WEFE) nexus and directly works with Ministries of water, irrigation, climate change, environment and agriculture to co-design more resilient water and food futures across countries in South and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and globally.
There is a lack of information on how climate mitigation is covered in the Portfolio.	The contribution to this important portfolio-wide issue from the policy program is mainly from AoW1 that includes CO2 emissions as one of the main indicators for measuring mitigating in several of its products, including the RIAPA modeling framework. AoW4 also covers the effects of climate change on food systems and includes solar-irrigation and other water-related mitigation action in its nexus solution portfolio.
There is a lack of information on how tradeoffs and synergies in mixed systems are covered in the Portfolio.	Analyzing trade-offs and synergies and deriving related prioritization and policy recommendations is at the heart of what the policy program does. It includes other programs in these analyses, for example through their involvement in annual outlook reports and policy engagements. AoW 4 specifically focuses on reducing the costs of tradeoffs across water-energy-food-environment systems.
There is a lack of information on how environmental health and biodiversity is covered in the Portfolio.	AoW specifically focuses on reducing the costs of tradeoffs across water-energy-food-environment systems. Examples of nexus solutions include geographically targeted interventions to improve water productivity in rainfed and irrigated systems, and groundwater governance to address water depletion and pollution.
There is a lack of information on how orphan and opportunity crops and pulses are covered in the Portfolio.	Orphan and opportunity crops will be integrated in national ToCs based on stakeholder demand.
There is a lack of information on how youth and social inclusion (that does not relate to gender) is covered in the Portfolio.	Youth and social inclusion are key topic with high priority in the policy program. Social policies and social protection are housed in AoW2 of the policy program with a focus on cash transfers and graduation programs. Together with the GEI accelerator, the policy program is spearheading the topic of “youth and jobs” as a major cross-country topic in 2025, involving other interest programs as appropriate.

Concise summary of feedback	Details on how the Program has addressed or will address this feedback (in the Inception Phase or beyond)
<p>There is a lack of information on how capacity sharing (as it relates to internal learning and decolonization of research) is covered in the Portfolio.</p>	<p>The Policy Program will make major contributions, especially through its public goods and training materials related to economic modeling, causal impact evaluations, political economy analysis as well as work on capacity sharing on the water-energy-food-environment nexus, as well as on policy analysis. This is achieved through the program’s strong country presence (AoW5), close collaboration with national partners, and co-creation of research and policy documents.</p>

Appendix 1: Addressing specific feedback

Concise summary of feedback	Details on how the Program has or will address this feedback (in the Inception Phase or beyond)
Comparative advantage is “superficial” (p. 30, 31)	Please see the section on comparative advantage
Coordination and collaboration across AoW (p.31, 32)	The revised design includes enhanced coordination and collaboration across all Areas of Work (AoWs) through multi-level engagement mechanisms. We are now integrating our efforts explicitly through cross-AoW and program-wide topics, including innovative subsidy policies, innovative youth and jobs policies, and innovative water policies (focused on water productivity in 2025).
AoW specific feedback (p.31-33)	We acknowledge your “small” concern that “codesign is not discussed as an approach for modeling” related to AoW1. This is an oversight in the original proposal and does not reflect the level of co-design that has gone into model development and model-based studies as conducted under Foresight, NEXUS Gains, and NPS initiatives, and that will continue in this Program. AoW2 now directly links investment decision-making to political economy analysis under AoW3 and generates new adoption and impact parameters for modeling economy-wide outcomes under AoW1 and AoW4. AoW2 also directly supports investment prioritizations and rapid response analysis by providing value chain-specific “deep dive” assessments. AoW2 will also conduct rigorous impact assessments using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, addressing market failures and social policies. The methods section for AoW4 has been significantly elaborated during the inception phase, providing detailed descriptions of its methodologies, tools, and approaches. This includes a clearer delineation of intermediate outcomes, explicitly identifying those unique to AoW4 versus those stemming from collaborative efforts across AoWs, thereby clarifying its contributions and synergies. In AoW6 we put a stronger emphasis on the cross-country-learning component with a focus on the cross-AoW and program-wide topic of “Youth and jobs”. The deliberate focus on cross-country learning will help coordination and collaboration across AoWs and with other science programs, the scaling program and accelerators.
Gates Foundation In relation to the capacity sharing pathway, we would like to understand how this pathway will interact with the capacity sharing accelerator as it is not clear in the proposal. The same goes for the policy change pathway and the Policy Science Program.	The Program's capacity sharing pathway is designed for strong synergy with the CGIAR Capacity Sharing Accelerator. Going forward this will involve closely aligning efforts across countries and specific institutions, for example co-developing specific institutional capacity sharing strategies. While strategic coordination is likely to be straightforward, we are actively exploring potential modalities for technical collaboration, such as leveraging our specific institutional capacity sharing expertise in tools like RIAPA, the food security simulator, and political economy analysis. This

	<p>would further enhance a portfolio-wide cohesive and impactful approach to strengthening national capabilities.</p>
<p>Some areas need further development, especially as they relate to partnering with other Science Programs. For example, on line 224 they mention leveraging foresight and tradeoff analysis; what specific aspects does the Program intend to address vs where there is intention to leverage the results from the Policy Program in a collaborative manner. The entire Program would benefit from a clearer characterization of the touchpoints with other programs. We suspect this is the case with every program description at this point.</p>	<p>We acknowledge the critical importance of fostering robust collaboration and clear touchpoints with other CGIAR Science Programs to maximize collective impact. We are actively prioritizing and have already initiated this collaboration across four distinct levels:</p> <p>a) At the thematic level, the Policy Program is deeply integrating its work with other Programs on specific topics. For instance, we are collaborating extensively with the Gender Equality, Youth and Inclusion (GEI) Accelerator on research and policy engagement related to youth and jobs. Similarly, we are partnering with the Sustainable Farming Systems Program to analyze and inform critical fertilizer and soil health policies, leveraging their technical expertise for integrated policy solutions.</p> <p>b) At the country level, our Policy Program country hubs and country leads are coordinating closely with the Scaling for Impact Program coordinators. This collaboration focuses on demand signaling from national partners and joint policy engagement, ensuring that scalable innovations are underpinned by robust policy frameworks and effective uptake strategies.</p> <p>c) At the global level, the Policy Program actively engages other CGIAR Programs to ensure a unified and coherent voice on major international platforms. A key example is our ongoing collaboration with various Programs for the upcoming Investment for Development conference in Seville, where we are collectively shaping narratives and evidence for global policy discussions.</p> <p>d) Through annual foresight reports, led by our AoW, we engage all other CGIAR Programs and Centers. This systematic involvement ensures that future-oriented analysis and identification of emerging policy challenges and opportunities are comprehensively informed by diverse scientific perspectives across CGIAR.</p>
<p>Model deployment and government engagement. We wish to see an increased emphasis on model deployment and government engagement under the Policy Innovations SP. The Foresight Initiative has made good progress in recent years in further developing the capability of the RIAPA model and the wider Country Integrated Assessment Modeling (CIAM) framework, and in engaging USAID and the UAE in supporting model deployment across several countries (see below). These developments combined with the reframing of the old National Policies & Strategies Initiative as the Country Strategy & Engagement AoW present an opportunity to further refine CGIAR’s ex-ante modeling service offering to LIC/LMIC governments, particularly in countries with strong IFPRI offices managed by Country Strategy & Engagement.</p>	<p>In response to this query, we have developed a separate concept note shared with GF to explain how AoW1 and AoW5 will work together in specific countries and with specific institutions. We have also added AoW3 (political economy) to the integrated approach given its importance for policy take-up and implementation. In summary, the approach provides a holistic analytical package that informs policy trade-offs and identifies levers for transformation that align with country contexts, respond to existing government priorities, anticipate future challenges, and strengthen the local think tank ecosystem. Specifically, the Foresight AoW’s flagship outputs include Policy Prioritization analyses and Inclusive Agricultural Transformation (IAT) outlooks that jointly help governments and other partners identify which value chains and broader sets of rural investments provide the highest returns for achieving specific development outcomes. Both sets of outputs depend on continuous maintenance of various economic models. The Political Economy & Governance AoW complements the Foresight work by ensuring that analyses about best returns on investment are also politically feasible through the Political Economy of Rural Investment (PERI) analyses. In turn, AoW3 works with both the Foresight and Country Engagement AoWs to inform</p>

<p>However, it will be important for the Policy Innovations SP to clearly articulate the role and comparative advantage of the Country Strategy & Engagement AoW in model deployment and government engagement, relative to local think tanks, AGRA, FAO and other partners in the policy ecosystem.</p>	<p>Policy Alignment and Implementation Diagnostics (PAID), including whether country decisions are aligned with evidence-based priority settings (modeling results) and how implementation is impacted by country-specific factors. Political Risk outlooks identify ways in which political developments might derail momentum on policy issues or create new windows of opportunity for change. The Country Engagement AoW is fundamental for ensuring that the analyses in the other two AoWs are grounded in demands from country partners and mobilizes the modeling and political economy tools for capacity sharing efforts with local economic, agriculture, and public policy think tanks. Through Policy Hubs and Policy Dialogues, AoW5 also fosters trust and builds credibility with governments and other local partners over time. All three AoWs collectively can support rapid responses to both short-term crises and medium-term investment and development planning needs of partner governments.</p>
<p>Climate. The Foresight Initiative’s work on the Ethiopia and Malawi ‘climate use cases’ was compelling and appreciated, but we would like to see that new climate modeling capability replicated and deployed in a more structured and systematic manner at country-level under the Policy Innovations SP. The UAE investment is a key opportunity for the CGIAR to demonstrate this new capability and service offering to governments, and it is essential that the modelers deliver against UAE’s COP30 timeline. We would like to see the other AGRA countries added to the 15 Policy Innovations SP priority countries, but not necessarily in time for COP30 if doing so compromises the quality of analysis of the current 15. We encourage the continuation of the Foresight Initiative’s work with the USAID country missions under the Policy Innovations SP, but we wish to see RIAPA’s/CIAM’s new climate signal/capability quickly become a standard feature of the RIAPA policy stacks and wider CIAM analyses.</p>	<p>We appreciate the positive feedback on the Foresight Initiative’s work on the Ethiopia and Malawi ‘climate use cases’. Given the importance of climate challenges facing countries, we plan to develop and deploy that new climate modeling capability more systematically under the Policy Program. A lesson learned under the Foresight Initiative is that developing country governments are often most concerned about the immediate climate and other risks confronting decision-making today. As such, we will build on our recent-developed approaches to jointly evaluate the implications of both climate and world market risks for policy and investment choices. The UAE investment is providing an opportunity to do this in more countries, including other selected AGRA countries. This effort began in early 2025 and will continue into 2026 and beyond. It ensures that climate risks are a standard feature of the work we do with national partners as we evaluate policies and identify investment priorities.</p>
<p>Implementation tracking. We have discussed this topic at various points over the last year, but there remains a need for the Policy Innovations SP to more clearly articulate its role in tracking government implementation of its model-informed policy and public investment recommendations. We anticipate that there will be increasing interest from donors,</p>	<p>We agree that implementation tracking is both essential to help inform whether, when, and why CGIAR tools and analysis are actually adopted by governments and that the Policy Program has a unique comparative advantage in doing this. Importantly, while the referenced PPVC initiative focuses on the implementation of value chain advice and several other current initiatives track budget expenditures, there is no effort to our knowledge that aims to track a vast set of agricultural</p>

<p>climate finance providers and national governments in implementation tracking in the coming years as the natural follow-on to generating of model-informed policy and investment recommendations, will likely be the tracking of government implementation of those recommendations. BFAP/ANAPRI's PPVC initiative has shown that it can track government implementation of PPVC reforms and economic benefits along the value chain by looking at private sector market responses – there is a need for the Policy Innovations SP to establish a similarly innovative approach to tracking government implementation and outcomes of recommendations informed by RIAPA and the wider CIAM framework. Similarly, tracking public budgets and expenditures against modeled 'optimal' allocations is one conceptually straightforward approach for assessing government implementation, but there are likely to be opportunities to harness private sector input, remote sensing and digitally collected data from smallholders to inform implementation tracking, potentially in partnership with Policy Innovation AoWs 3 and 5.</p>	<p>policy interventions beyond just value chains or budgets. For instance, policies include not only investments but also tax, regulatory, and institutional reforms that go beyond value chains.</p> <p>As such, the Policies SP will pilot the Policy Alignment and Implementation Diagnostic (PAID), which will be led by AoW3 and be supported by AoW1 and AoW5. Through its RIAPA modelling, AoW1 considers the ways in which decisionmakers anticipate, evaluate, and select policy priorities according to costs and benefits relative to meeting key development objectives. AoW5 complements these efforts by bringing in-depth country knowledge and longstanding engagement with national policymakers. Through PAID, AoW3 will help build on these strengths by identifying whether priorities highlighted by RIAPA and other research actually align with decision makers' incentives and the broader bureaucratic and private sector environment in key countries where AoW5 will be focused. The outcome of PAID will be to identify whether the right evidence is being supplied, in an effective way, or if other confounding political economy and institutional factors deter implementation. In the latter case, PAID will offer recommendations accordingly to enhance political feasibility.</p> <p>The methodology of PAID has been elaborated in more detail in a separate concept note shared with GF.</p>
<p>AI. There is only one mention of AI in the Policy Innovations SP design document (in the section on gender). We briefly discussed AI with the Foresight and National Policies & Strategies Initiatives in 2023, but we would like to see the Policy Innovations SP embrace AI as an opportunity to (for example) improve the timeliness/responsiveness of SAM building and the delivery of modeling analysis to governments and other partners. It would be useful for the Policy Innovations SP to articulate an "AI roadmap" setting out a basic analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with foresight modeling and machine learning, LLMs and other forms of AI to help ensure that the CGIAR establishes itself as a leader in adapting to and harnessing the potential of AI to improve economic and other foresight modeling analytics for informing food system policy.</p>	<p>AoW1 will explore how artificial intelligence (AI) might (1) enhance the quality and speed of its foresight and modeling analysis; and (2) lower the barriers for partners to use model-based analysis for their own research and to inform policy. AoW1's current AI strategy adopts a 3-step sequenced approach. First, an existing modeling system is used as a foundation model to generate an emulator derived using machine learning techniques. The emulator will allow for more rapid analysis of shocks and policies and make it possible for partners to conduct model-based analysis. Second, a data-to-text algorithm converts results from the emulator into a written description of the foundation model's results and can be used to interpret results from both the foundation model and the emulator. This algorithm can be used by AoW1 researchers and their partners to better understand the key factors causing changes in the model, and to better articulate these to non-modelers, including decisionmakers. Third, and finally, an AI language model is trained on the large text database generated by the emulator and algorithm. This could result in a ChatGPT-like query system in which the user describes a shock and is provided with a verbal description of the expected impacts for a country. This is new exploratory work and may not be possible to achieve or worthwhile in its entirety. Nevertheless, each of the above three components would be valuable</p>

	<p>advances on their own and would enhance the quality of modeling and/or lower the barriers to entry for partners interested in modeling or model-based analysis. AoW4 regularly uses large language models.</p>
<p>Local partner capacity building. The Foresight Initiative has built up an impressive network of local partner institutes in Africa and Asia that value their participation in the Foresight Partnership Forum and wider network activities. We wish to see these capacity building services and partnerships continue under the Policy Innovations SP but with an increased emphasis on clearer documentation and articulation of model specifications to enable local partners to work increasingly independently from the core CGIAR modeling teams.</p>	<p>The Foresight work on capacity building work will continue under AoW1 in close partnership with AoW5. A Training Program will accompany modelling studies with national partners to build the long-term capacity of the targeted think tanks and key government ministries to conduct foresight and modeling analysis (preferably with the goal of establishing a dedicated modeling unit). This will be supplemented with “on the job” training activities, co-organized with AoW5. Annual regional training programs will provide on-boarding opportunities for new staff in partner governments and think tanks. The overarching objective of Phase 2 is to confirm the interest and commitment of governments for investment prioritization activities and model-based policy analysis.</p>
<p>FCDO The theory of change sets out clear, results-oriented research questions and relevant outcomes. The link between outputs such as toolkits and datasets and outcomes could be further clarified. AoW5 will be critical to support pathways to impact for selected research; what is the pathway to impact for research outside primary focus countries?</p>	<p>We have developed an updated theory of change to more clearly link outputs to outcomes. As part of AoW5 we have also started to co-create country-level theory of changes starting with Malawi, Kenya and Pakistan to also include specific institutions as critical players for achieving impact. For research conducted outside primary focus countries, the pathway to impact centers on “agenda setting” activities facilitating broader knowledge diffusion. We achieve this through cross-country learning activities and policy dialogues, distilling global insights and best practices relevant to diverse policy contexts as part of the rapid response.</p>
<p>This programme’s contribution to the poverty reduction and inclusive growth agenda, particularly in Africa, could come through more clearly.</p>	<p>Africa has been identified as a high-priority region as part of the prioritization exercises, reflecting its critical importance to global development goals. The Policy Program is deeply committed to this agenda, ensuring its research and engagement directly contribute to poverty reduction and inclusive growth across the continent. All AoWs within the program explicitly integrate poverty as a key outcome and policy indicator, guiding their research questions and impact pathways. This deliberate focus ensures that the program's efforts translate into tangible benefits for vulnerable populations and foster equitable development in African contexts.</p>
<p>How will leadership in the programme drive and support One CG results on poverty reduction, livelihoods and jobs?</p>	<p>Leadership is deeply committed to driving OneCGIAR results on poverty reduction, livelihoods, and jobs, which remain are key focus across all our AoWs. Recent funding adjustments necessitate a stronger focus in 2025 on specific topics, particularly around youth and jobs, recognizing its critical role in inclusive growth. This sharpened focus will be complemented by an intensified drive for cross-country learning, leveraging insights from diverse contexts to inform policy solutions.</p>