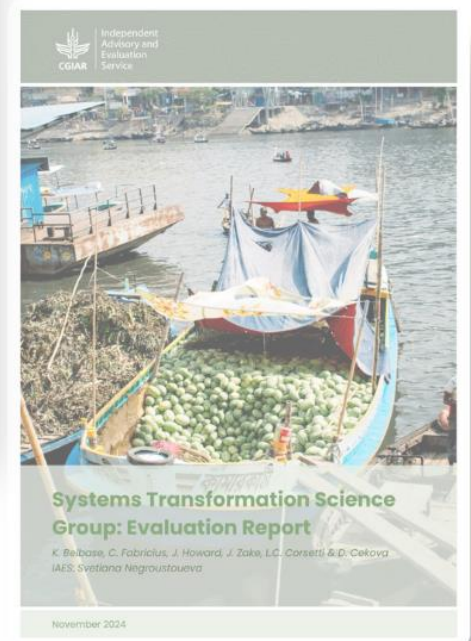
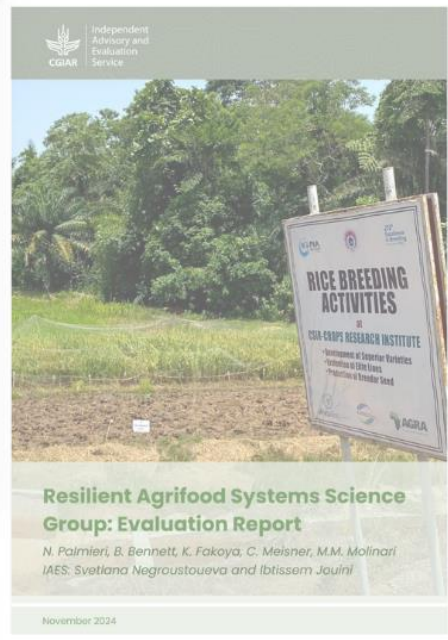
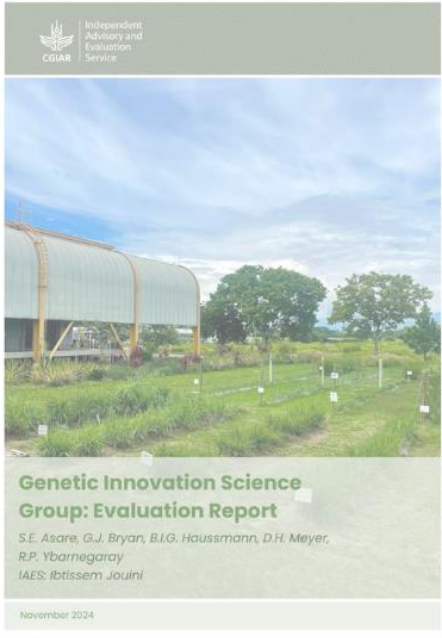




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# Evaluations of CGIAR's Science Groups: Synthesis Report

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November 2024

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Cover image: IAES – covers of the three individual Science Group evaluation reports [[portal](#)].

# **Evaluations of CGIAR's Science Groups: Synthesis Report**

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November 2024

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## Acronyms

AMD	Asian Mega-Deltas
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program
ClimBeR	Climate Resilience
CRPs	CGIAR Research Programs
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
EA	Evaluability Assessment
EiA	Excellence in Agronomy
EoI	End of Initiative
F2R-CWANA	Fragility to Resilience in Central and West Asia and North Africa
FLW	Food Loss and Waste
FRESH	Fruit and Vegetables for Sustainable Healthy Diets
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GI	Genetic Innovation
GTIs	Global Thematic Initiatives
HER+	Harnessing Equality for Resilience in the Agri-food System
IA	Internal Audits
IFA	Integration Framework Agreement
IAES	The Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service
IPGs	International Public Goods
ISDC	Independent Science for Development Council
KARLO	Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization
KM	Knowledge Management

MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MD	Managing Director
MDSR	Mechanized Direct Seeding Technology
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MELIA	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment
MFS	Mixed Farming Systems
MR	Management Response
NAP	National Action Plan
NARES	National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems
OHI	One Health Initiative
PDT	Product Design Teams
PRMF	Performance and Results Management Framework
PRMS	Performance and Results Management System
QoS	Quality of Science
QoR4D	Quality of Research for Development
R4D	Research for Development
RAFS	Resilient Agrifood Systems
RII	Regional Integrated Initiative
RCT	Randomized Control Trial
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SG	Science Group
SHIFT	Sustainable Healthy Diets Through Food System Transformation
SIMEC	Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
SMEs	Subject Matter Experts
ST	Systems Transformation
STISA	African Union's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa
TAFS-WCA	Transforming Agrifood Systems in West and Central Africa
ToC	theory of change
ToR	Term of Reference
TPP	Target Product Profile
TRICOT	Triadic Comparison of Technologies
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFSS	United Nations Food Systems Summit
WP	Work Package



## Executive Summary

Aligned to the independent [Science Group \(SG\) Evaluations Terms of Reference \(ToRs\)](#), three independent evaluations were conducted (one per SG: Systems Transformation (ST), Resilient Agrifood Systems (RAFS), and Genetic Innovation (GI) under the [2022–24 Multi-Year Workplan](#) (2021; [re-confirmed 2024](#)). The CGIAR [2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#) (CGIAR, 2021-01) sets priorities to deliver solutions for development through 33 initiatives across three interlinked action areas: Systems Transformation (ST), Resilient Agrifood Systems (RAFS), and Genetic Innovation (GI). CGIAR scientists working on these initiatives are organized into three corresponding SGs.

This synthesis highlights key findings and learnings guided by validated recommendations from the three evaluations (reports and annexes available on the [Science Group Evaluations Portal](#)). The synthesis objective is to provide evaluative evidence across the three SG evaluations by highlighting key findings, conclusions and learnings guided by recommendations to which MRs were issued.

Evaluations were commissioned by the [CGIAR System Council](#) and executed by the [CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service \(IAES\)](#), with support of external independent evaluation teams. In line with the CGIAR Evaluation [Framework](#) and [Policy](#), evaluations combined formative and summative aspects to support learning, steering and accountability and evidence-based revision of the portfolio in alignment with the [2030 Strategy](#). Evaluations covered the three SG portfolios from January 2022 to February 2024. This synthesis is based on the analysis of the three evaluation reports and also includes salient elements from the 11 case studies and deep dives, results of the [online survey](#) and the internal audit (IA) survey.<sup>1</sup> Key users are the [CGIAR System Council](#) (through support in decision-making processes), SG management (to gain evaluative evidence to reinforce the evolution of the current portfolio and the design of the new one), senior leadership team and centers for learning and steering, and external partners, e.g., funders, policymakers, national governments and Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES).

## Findings and Recommendations

Across the three evaluations, 35 evidence-based recommendations were identified for the SGs, CGIAR System, Science Program (SPs) writing teams and leadership. Recommendations focus on areas needing improvement and consequent action, based on the Management Response to each set of recommendations (see evaluation pages for [GI](#), [ST](#) and [RAFS](#) SGs). The synthesis focused on clustering of evaluative findings across the three SGs in support of the recommendations. Table 1 below maps the recommendations to the areas for improvement (see ST, RAFS, GI evaluation reports and related knowledge products for information) identified during this synthesis.

- 1. Relevance and comparative advantage:** The portfolio relevance varies, as does the level of engagement of external partners. Most initiatives from the three SGs built on decades of previous CGIAR research in crop improvement and agri-food systems, contributing to their global, regional, and national relevance complemented by broad consultative processes that facilitated external stakeholder involvement in the design phase. However, while improvements were noted in comparison to the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs),<sup>2</sup> the participatory approach was not systematically implemented and the integration of CGIAR's work into national research programs and agendas was not optimal, hampering the ability to identify and best deploy CGIAR and partners' comparative

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<sup>1</sup> Not publicly available, however designed and implemented in consultations between IAES and IA for internal coherence. More information is available in the online survey report.

<sup>2</sup> See 2021 Synthesis and 2020 CRP Reviews: <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/crp-2020-review>.

advantage. As a result, the relevance of initiatives varies across countries, primarily depending on the degree of CGIAR presence and the extent of external partner engagement.

**Table 1. Synthesis of Recommendations from the Three SG Evaluation Reports (Annex 3 for more detail)<sup>3</sup>**

Areas of Improvement	Rec n <sup>o4</sup>	Recommendations
<b>1) Quality of Science (QoS)</b>	<b>13</b>	The Chief Scientist should be responsible for measurable improvement in Quality of Science (QoS) and alignment to Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D) across all science programs.
	<b>10</b>	Expand the research focus on consumer demand, food environments, food safety, loss and waste, and connect supply to demand across value chains.
	<b>11</b>	SPs should develop joint research activities and innovations for responding to global polycrises.
	<b>5</b>	At the level of CGIAR's strategy, enhance GI's role in sustainable agri-food systems, promote a common understanding, and drive market intelligence.
	<b>7</b>	Further broaden the internal skills set to include more social scientists, gender, partnerships, and communication experts.
	<b>8.D</b>	Embrace complexity in B4T SP design and implementation and develop an overarching theory of change (ToC) with key stakeholders for shared understanding and ownership.
<b>2) Growing in-country Presence and Integration with National Research Agendas</b>	<b>4</b>	Enhance systematic inclusion of partners in portfolio design, implementation and scaling, develop country strategies for more coherent and coordinated planning, and strengthen CGIAR's country-level leadership and coordination.
	<b>2</b>	Develop country-level strategies and results frameworks aligned with national priorities and in strong connection with NARES.
	<b>3</b>	Strengthen the crucial role of country conveners by allocating adequate budget and establishing clear coordination mechanisms.
	<b>2.a</b>	Better anchor CGIAR work to national research and development agendas, including meaningful involvement of NARES in the design and implementation of CGIAR Portfolio 2025-30.
	<b>5.D</b>	Integrate genetic gains into broader contexts by strengthening geographic integration.
	<b>2</b>	Improve balance between thematic and geographic convergence.
<b>3) Enhancing Cross-Synergies and Cross-Center Cooperation</b>	<b>4</b>	Operationalize <a href="#">CGIAR's Integration Framework Agreement (2022)</a> <sup>5</sup> through financial and human resources and administrative policies to streamline and harmonize procedures.
	<b>8</b>	Improve strategic and operational guidance towards cross-center collaboration, interactions between science programs.
<b>4) Learning for Transitions, Legacy Work</b>	<b>1</b>	Where founding research has been started by RAFS initiatives, identify and complete this investment so that the results can be capitalized in the new SPs.
	<b>1</b>	Develop a transitional plan for GI SG for Q3-S4 2024 and roll-out starting in 2025.
	<b>1.B</b>	Develop system-wide transformation strategy built on learning from SG experience and consolidate work, especially in countries where various initiatives are already engaged with a ST focus.

<sup>3</sup> Table 1 and presentation in Annex 3 may contain duplicate and split recommendations to strengthen selected points. Illustration in Annex 3 maps recommendations to SGs. Management Response is available in each of the individual SG evaluation pages.

<sup>4</sup> Numbering is consistent with SG evaluation reports, to facilitate referencing. Clustering without reference to SGs in this table is intended to underscore the application beyond an individual science group to a wider portfolio.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/icrisat-signs-agreement-to-join-one-cgiar-partnership/>

Areas of Improvement	Rec n <sup>o4</sup>	Recommendations
	<b>9</b>	Transition to a new era of transformative change in GI: reflect on past efforts, implement cyclical learning.
<b>5) Strengthening Partnerships and Scaling</b>	<b>4</b>	Enhance systematic inclusion of partners in the portfolio design, implementation and scaling as per the 2024 Partnership & Advocacy Framework.
	<b>1.C</b>	Enhance breeding programs and partnerships: strengthen and increase communication between CGIAR and NARES breeding programs and facilitate public-private partnerships.
	<b>2</b>	Enhance partnership effectiveness and communication in B4T SP proposal and implementation.
	<b>9</b>	Concentrate scaling innovations and managing scaling partnerships in a single scaling program for better coordination.
<b>6) Strengthening Impact Areas</b>	<b>12</b>	Strengthen the focus on IAs in the context of medium- and long-term processes within a six-year business cycle, address the possible isolation of important sub-themes, appoint a single point of thematic leadership for issues of strategic importance, and protect gains from initiatives/SGs.
	<b>7</b>	Mainstream climate adaptation and mitigation across the entire portfolio.
	<b>9</b>	Elevate nutrition and dietary diversification across the entire SP portfolio.
	<b>15</b>	Align work on gender, equity, and social inclusion with the Gender Strategy being developed.
<b>7) Internal and External Capacity Development</b>	<b>8</b>	Invest in local capacity development for integrated systems research, and in-country research capacity to apply integrated systems approaches to research.
	<b>6</b>	Formalize and systematize the PhD student experience and enhance postgraduate researcher contributions to the delivery of the research portfolio.
	<b>2.b</b>	[B4T] Offer short, impactful training-of-trainers modules (TT) for scientists on partnership identification, creation, and management.
	<b>3.c</b>	Cultivate leadership with a seed business mindset and provide leadership training.
	<b>4.c</b>	Partner for strategic roll-out and operational excellence, and design and implement training programs.
<b>8) Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessments (MELIA)</b>	<b>5</b>	Revise PRMF and strengthen MELIA processes and capacities to ensure that they capture how ST SG existing outputs and future system transformation-related outputs link to outcomes and impact.
	<b>8.D</b>	Embrace complexity in B4T SP design/implementation and develop an overarching ToC with key stakeholders for shared understanding and ownership [also under QoS).
	<b>14</b>	SPs should systematically design and implement M&E frameworks and plans.
<b>9) Governance and Management, HR</b>	<b>3.c</b>	Cultivate leadership with a seed business mindset and develop an effective leadership team.
	<b>6</b>	Insist on a system-wide optimization mindset.
	<b>11</b>	Reassess the current expectation of convening and meeting across the science delivery structure to set governance and communication norms from the outset of implementing SPs/Accelerators.
	<b>10</b>	Develop unified guidelines and procedures on performance indicators for staff assessment and quality control mechanisms.
<b>10) Financial Transparency and Efficiency</b>	<b>5</b>	Operationalize the combination of pooled and bilateral funding by providing specific guidelines.
	<b>6</b>	Address funding shortages and inefficiencies in financial and human resource management through a regular review and feedback mechanism.
	<b>7</b>	Rationalize resource allocation, ensure financial stability to support long-term planning and continuity, and ensure transparent budget allocation.

2. **Quality of Science<sup>6</sup> and theories of change:** The analysis of QoS reveals the following strengths and weaknesses: *Design* performed well in the ST SG initiatives, which effectively addressed relevant areas like food environments. However, the RAFS SG design was overly complex. *Inputs* faced significant deficiencies in skill sets and faced challenges from funding cuts. *Processes* had successful partnerships but struggled with role clarity and coordination. *Outputs* showcased originality and credibility, yet budget cuts diminished quantity and quality. Overall, while design and outputs demonstrated promise, inputs and processes require substantial enhancement for greater impact. Lessons from all SGs concern linkages, integration, and coordination methods to improve science quality, to inform the design and structure of the 2025–30 Portfolio. The Portfolio has the potential to further enhance these linkages and significantly strengthen integration, collaboration, and engagement if related mechanisms—such as communities of practice, global theme and impact area leadership, and oversight and direction of the Chief Scientist – are given high priority. While the SG ToCs helped clarify impact pathways and link challenges and expected outcomes, they also exposed shortcomings in evidence use, assumptions, and the credibility and clarity of the envisaged impact pathways. It is also unclear whether the adoption of the ToCs translated into increased portfolio coherence, effectiveness, flexibility, and co-learning among stakeholders.
3. **Coherence:** The SG organization across initiatives enhanced research integration and cross-center collaboration, in particular, the deployment of multi-disciplinary skills throughout the CGIAR system. While success in addressing coherence in planning and design was more evident under ST and GI (in comparison with RAFS), mixed success was recorded during implementation across all three SGs. Overall, there is significant room for improvement in collaboration to enhance complementarities and synergies. CGIAR still lacks a robust mechanism to ensure coherence in its global operations. Although GI initiatives have shown greater integration with CGIAR's global work, collaboration with other SGs could also improve. Despite internal commitment to One CGIAR and its importance to partner countries, few external stakeholders are aware of it, hampering CGIAR's profile in these countries.
4. **Effectiveness:** The evidence of progress of the initiatives across the three SGs is demonstrated through the significant number of high-quality and relevant delivery of outputs, although a markedly lower number of outcomes was recorded during the evaluation period. Overall, the magnitude of achieved results was significantly reduced by frequent budget cuts, foreshortened implementation periods, disconnection between planned end-of-initiative (Eol) outcomes and the time needed to translate outputs into outcomes, and other SG-related constraints. Notably, evaluating effectiveness was challenging due to difficulties in distinguishing initiative results from CRP-era work, limited implementation periods for novel initiatives, and challenges in comparing reported outputs and outcomes with progress towards Eol-related indicators.
5. **Efficiency:** Timely and adequate availability of financial resources was a major challenge, critically affecting the efficient delivery of the 2022–24 SG Portfolio, the achievement of results, corporate trust and reputation among external stakeholders. Several operational challenges, including those linked to the implementation of initiative activities by different legally independent centers, further limited efficiency at both initiative and SG levels. Despite a significant investment of effort to design robust Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment (MELIA) frameworks, these were weakly implemented, negatively impacting result-based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), real-time learning, and adaptive management.

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<sup>6</sup> Key findings around QoS were synthesized in a stand-alone report and a brief ([link](#)).

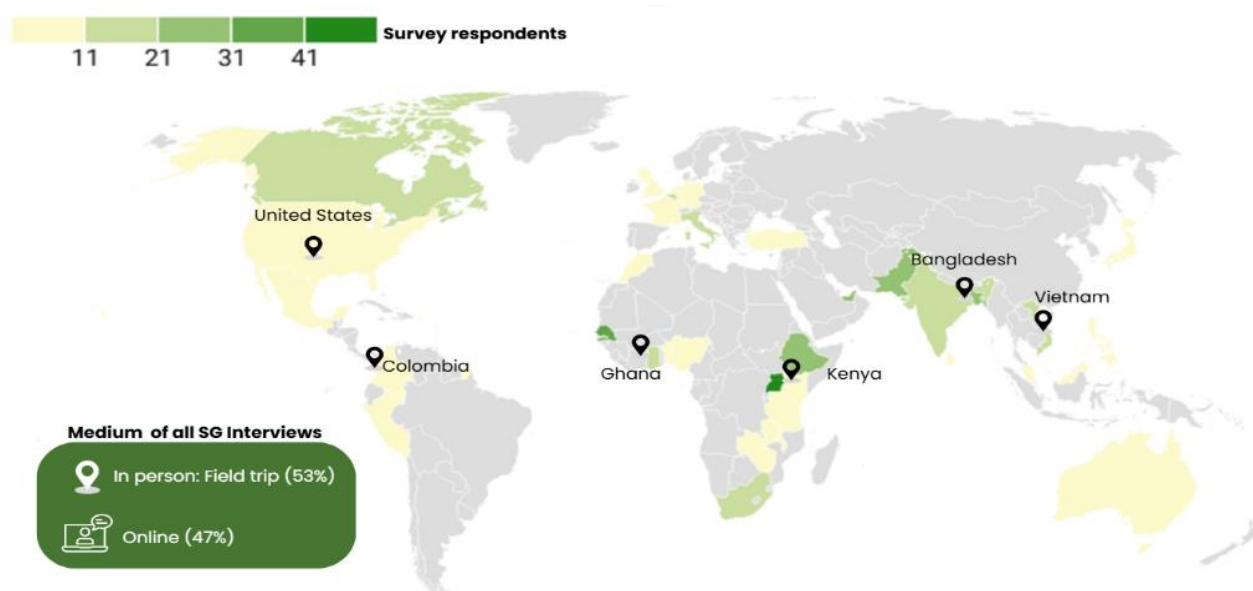
# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Evaluation Context

Aligned to the independent [Science Group \(SG\) Evaluations Terms of Reference \(ToRs\)](#), three evaluations were conducted (one per SG) under the [2022–24 Multi-Year Workplan](#) (2021; [re-confirmed 2024](#))– see Annex 2 for overview of CGIAR SGs: Systems Transformation, Genetic Innovation, and Resilient Agrifood Systems. Evaluations were commissioned by the [CGIAR System Council](#) and executed by the [CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service \(IAES\)](#), with support of external independent evaluation teams.

This synthesis highlights key findings and learnings guided by validated recommendations from the three evaluations (report and annexes available on the [Science Group Evaluations Portal](#)). Evaluations are aligned to the CGIAR Evaluation [Framework](#) and [Policy](#), and combine formative and summative aspects to support learning, steering and accountability among key users. Additionally, the evaluations were designed to support CGIAR evidence-based efforts to adapt the [2025 Portfolio](#) in order to reach the vision of the [2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#). Towards the continuous learning process, the SG evaluation teams adopted a *participatory approach* to data collection by engaging with a variety of stakeholders to identify critical issues and good practices. Aligned to the [QoS Evaluation Guidelines](#),<sup>7</sup> the QoS evaluation criterion was addressed through interviews, case studies, deep dives and a review of sample of scientific outputs.

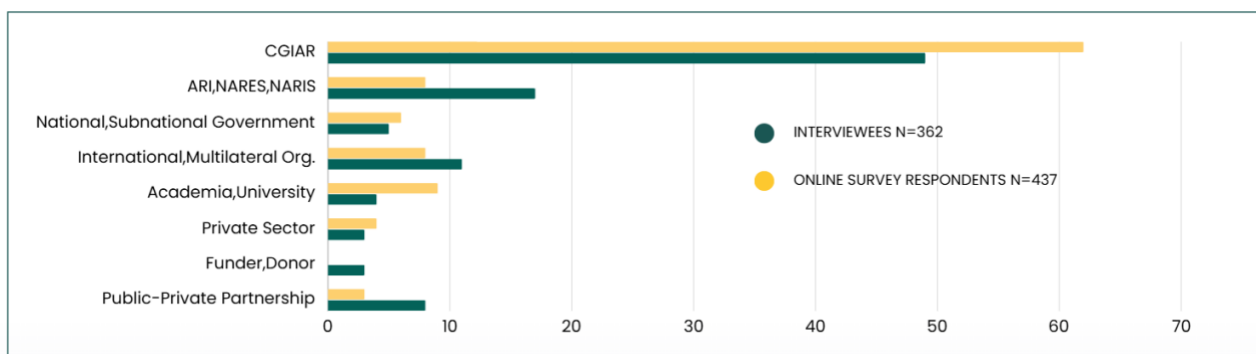
**Figure 1. Location of Internal and External Survey Respondents (N= 437) and Interviewees (N= 362)**



<sup>7</sup> Builds on the [IAES Evaluation Guidelines and Quality of Research for Development \(QoR4D\) framework](#).

The **mixed methods design** (qualitative and quantitative data collection) included: desk research; a total of 362 key informant interviews (virtual and in-person) and focus group discussions; field observations of six field visits;<sup>8</sup> participatory workshops, portfolio analysis and an [online survey](#) (Figure 2). Data were triangulated towards the development of eight case studies, three deep dives, three SG evaluation reports and over 24 knowledge products (Figure 3). For more detail, see Figure 1 for a geographic distribution of respondents to the online survey and interviewees, and Annex 1 on the purpose, scope and methodology.

**Figure 2. All SG Evaluations Interviewees/Survey Respondents by Type of Stakeholder (N= 362)**



## 1.2 Approach to Synthesis

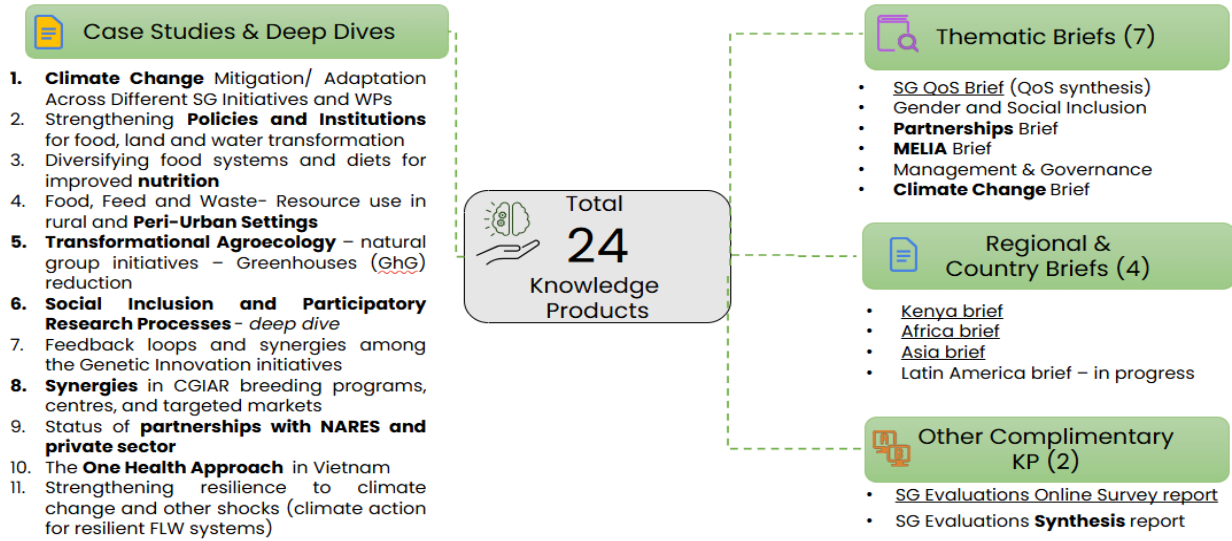
This synthesis is framed by evaluation criteria ([ToRs](#)) and key themes. For selected themes, stand-alone sub-reports were developed (see Figure 3, and the [SG Evaluations Portal](#)). This synthesis is based on the analysis of the three evaluation reports (and the case studies and deep dives behind them), the results of the [online survey](#) and the internal audit (IA) survey,<sup>9</sup> and the assessment of the status of the implementation of recommendations from the [2021 Synthesis Report \(see Management Response\)](#).

The main limitation in developing this synthesis stems from differences in the three evaluation reports. While responding to the same evaluation questions (ToRs), the GI SG evaluation report largely focused on technical and thematic aspects, while the RAFS and ST SG evaluation reports concentrated more on aspects related to partnerships, management and coordination and ownership of the initiatives. A common limitation highlighted in the three evaluation reports was related to unavailability of, or difficulty in, accessing aggregated summary data on outputs and outcomes achieved at both initiative and SG levels against the corresponding Results Frameworks, which led to relying primarily on qualitative analysis. The quality of data varied significantly by SG and initiatives.

<sup>8</sup> Field trip locations: Colombia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Kenya, Ghana, and USA.

<sup>9</sup> Not publicly available, however designed and implemented in consultations between IAES and IA for internal coherence. More information in the online survey report.

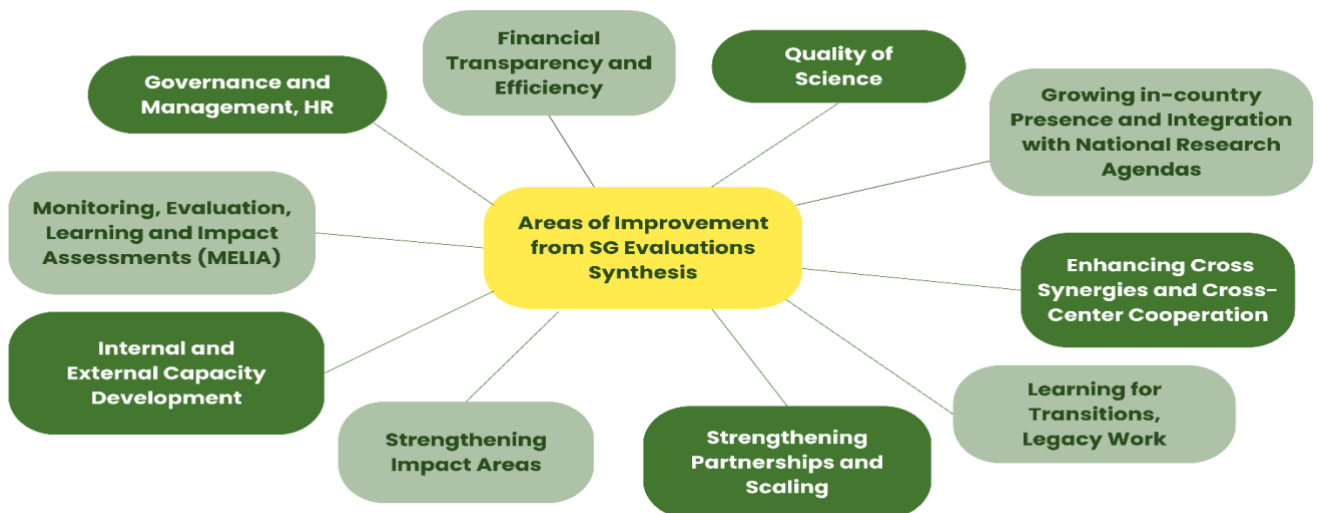
Figure 3. Knowledge Products for SG Evaluations (as of November 2024)<sup>10</sup>



## 2 Findings Underpinning the Recommendations in SG Evaluations

Across the three evaluations, 35 evidence-based recommendations addressed key user groups: the SGs, the CGIAR System, Science Program (SPs) writing teams, and SP leadership. For this synthesis, the recommendations were clustered by ten areas of improvement (Table 1, Figure 4 and Annex 3). SG evaluation reports with detailed recommendations and the related Management Response (MR) for each are available on SG-designated pages ([GI](#), [ST](#) and [RAFS](#)) with supporting knowledge products of the SG Evaluation Portal ([link](#)).

Figure 4. Areas of Improvement



<sup>10</sup> Case studies and deep dives, selected full thematic reports are available by request from [IAES-Evaluation@cgiar.org](mailto:IAES-Evaluation@cgiar.org)

This section groups key findings from the three SG evaluations.

## 2.1 Findings on Research Continuity and Comparative Advantage, Variable Relevance, and Mixed Success in Engaging External Partners

Most initiatives under the three SGs built on previous CGIAR research in crop improvement and agri-food, water and land systems during the decade of CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs),<sup>11</sup> contributing to their global, regional, and national relevance. Complementary broad consultative processes facilitated external stakeholder involvement in the SG design phase. However, while improvements were noted compared to CRPs, participatory approaches were not systematically implemented and the integration of CGIAR's work into national research programs and agendas was not optimal. As a result, the relevance of initiatives varied across countries, depending on the degree of CGIAR visibility in country, positioning of the country conveners and initiative focal points, and the extent of engagement of external partners.

***The portfolio demonstrates high relevance to global and regional priorities. However, greater alignment is required at regional level for the ST action area (and future SPs aligned to ST topics).***

Research areas within SGs appeared to be highly relevant to global concerns in the areas of food and nutrition security, crop improvement, and food, land, and water systems transformation<sup>12</sup> and were consistently aligned with the food system transformation agenda of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit.<sup>13</sup> The SG evaluation survey [results](#) confirmed a positive perception of the applicability of CGIAR's research, which contributes to its relevance in addressing global development needs. At regional level, while the relevance of the six Regional Integrated Initiatives (RIIs<sup>14</sup>) hosted under RAFS SG was confirmed, evidence from the ST evaluation called for a more targeted alignment with regional priorities, including with the [Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program](#) (CAADP), the [African Union's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa](#) (STISA), and regional commitments on climate mitigation and adaptation.

***A notable portfolio responsiveness to national priorities was observed, although there is variability across countries.***

At national level, while RAFS and GI SG evaluations showed evidence of great responsiveness to country development needs, the evidence was barely adequate in the ST SG, with variation across countries. Overall, research topics selected by SGs appeared to be largely demand-driven, stemming from continuity with previous CGIAR work in the countries concerned, and from the broad consultative processes undertaken during their design. The identification of new strategic areas of work, such as the [One Health approach](#) under

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<sup>11</sup> See 2020 reviews of 12 CRPs: <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/crp-2020-review>.

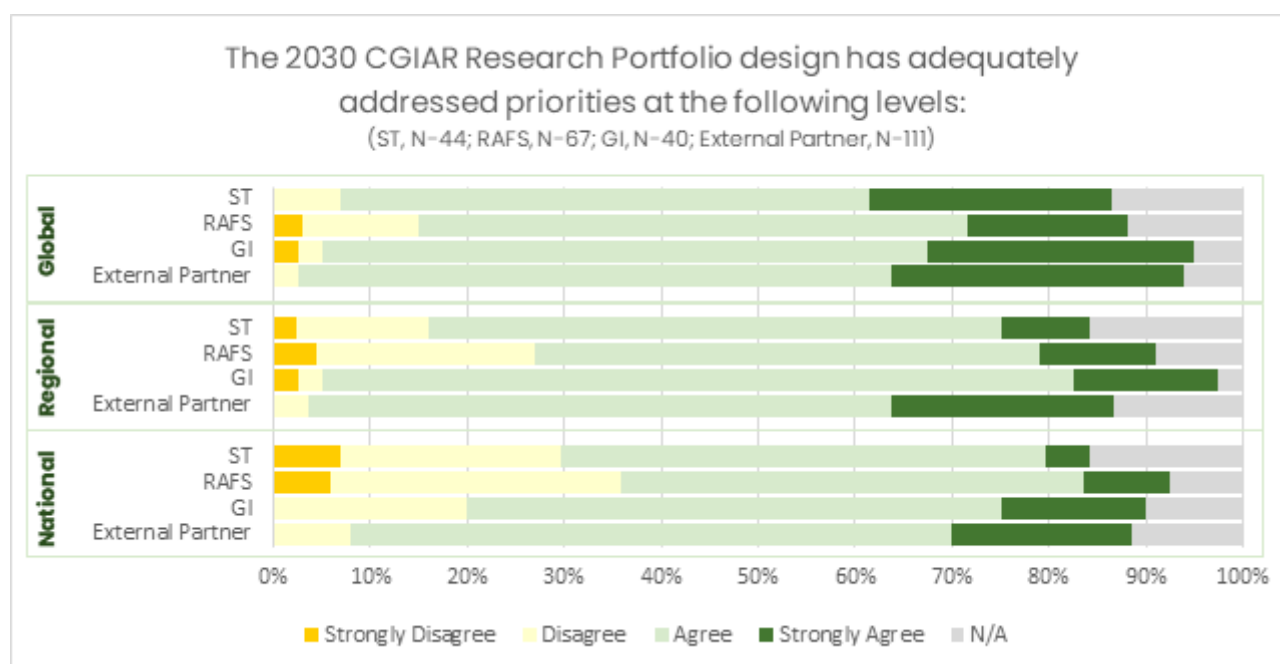
<sup>12</sup> The GI SG focuses on improving extremely diverse crop species (from staple crops to much less widely grown crops) that are crucial for agricultural productivity and food security. The RAFS SG contributes to tackling global food system issues to deliver on knowledge and solutions enhancing sustainable productivity, safe food availability, and environmental sustainability. The ST SG responds to the challenge that current food systems do not provide sustainable healthy diets for billions of people, and it made important strides in shifting CGIAR's historical focus on agricultural productivity towards a more comprehensive approach that includes transforming food, land and water.

<sup>13</sup> See the Summit's Action Tracks here: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks>.

<sup>14</sup> RIIs operate with a clear mandate to tackle specific challenges within the six CGIAR operating regions. The RIIs hosted under RAFS are AMD, Fragility to Resilience in Central and West Asia and North Africa (F2R-CWANA), Resilient Agrifood Innovation Systems Driving Food Security, Inclusive Growth, And Reduced Out-Migration in LAC region (AgriLac Resiliente), Transforming Agrifood Systems in West and Central Africa (TAFS-WCA), TAFSSA, Ukama Ustawi: Diversification for Resilient Agrifood Systems in East and Southern Africa.

the RAFS SG, further strengthened CGIAR's responsiveness to national needs and priorities.<sup>15</sup> Notably, [online survey results](#) point to a slightly different narrative. While both internal CGIAR members and external survey respondents broadly agreed that the [2030 Strategy](#) adequately addressed priorities at global, regional, and national levels, variation at national level referred particularly for the ST and RAFS SGs (Figure 5). Similarly, across the three SGs, findings point to significant room for improvement in integration with global, regional, and country-level strategies, particularly for the ST and RAFS SGs (Figure 6).

**Figure 5. CGIAR Research Portfolio Coherence with National, Regional and Global Priorities**



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

**Since 2022, significant positive strides were made in external stakeholder engagement. However, stakeholder engagement was hindered by a rushed design process.**

Evidence from the online [survey](#) and the field missions acknowledged a positive change in engaging scientists, research institutes and policy maker partners from the Global South to define CGIAR's research agenda during design of the SGs in 2022 (see Figure 7).<sup>16</sup> However, a common finding is that initiatives were not successful in meaningfully engaging key partners (e.g., country and sub-regional) during the design phase. While country consultations were often referenced, stakeholders generally perceived that the design phase was rushed, and that CGIAR had limited coordination capacity.<sup>17</sup> Consultations were not guided by a reference framework (i.e. the [CGIAR-wide Partnership and Engagement Framework](#) only finalized in 2022), which could have helped to put a greater emphasis on the role of national counterparts and systematic methods for their active involvement. A few stakeholders involved in the RAFS SG initiatives

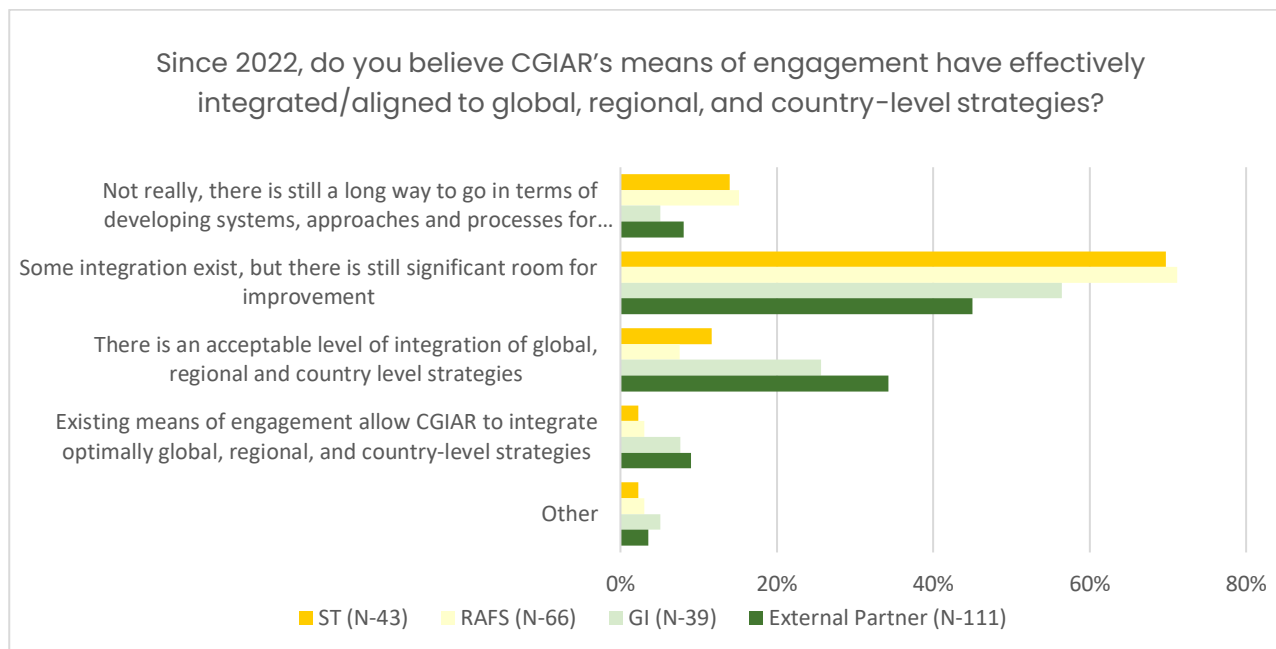
<sup>15</sup> CGIAR SG Evaluations: [Asia Brief](#), [Africa Brief](#), Kenya Country [Brief](#) and [Brief on QoS](#).

<sup>16</sup> Participants in the online survey report indicate that since 2022, there has been a positive change in engaging the global south. Similarly, NARES partners consulted during evaluation field missions in Ghana and Vietnam confirmed that the quality interactions with CGIAR had improved since pre-2022, with more meetings, trainings, workshops, and joint research activities (see Partnership Knowledge Product).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the same country partners were approached several times, in different moments, to contribute to the design of different initiatives, often without understanding the logic that linked these initiatives. The process has therefore been particularly confusing in some countries and the benefits of the participatory approach were not fully exploited.

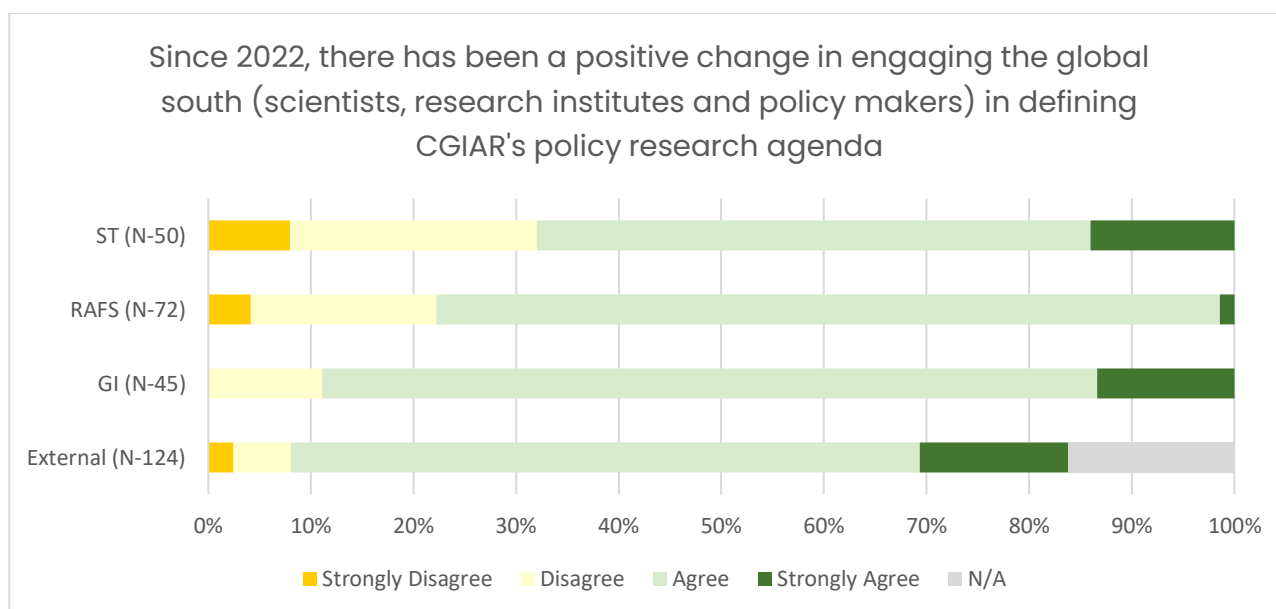
noted that large consultation meetings may not necessarily have translated to eliciting high-quality inputs. Generally steered by central management authorities, these processes may have excluded some of the partners on the ground (see Knowledge Product on Partnerships<sup>18</sup>).

**Figure 6. CGIAR Research Portfolio Effective Engagement with National, Regional and Global Strategies**



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

**Figure 7. Engaging Global South Researchers, Internal versus External Views**



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

Additionally, evidence on co-creation and co-design of research activities during the consultations was mixed. Evaluations found it challenging to assess the extent to which national actors were brought into the

<sup>18</sup> Available on SG Portal or by request, depending on the timing of finalizing this report.

design of initiative proposals and the respective theories of change (ToCs). Some evidence suggests that stakeholders contributed to shaping the initiatives.<sup>19</sup> Some initiatives, for instance, established mechanisms to strengthen their relevance to farmers, such as the Product Design Teams (PDT) within the [Market Intelligence Initiative](#) (GI SG), which were introduced in 2022 among NARES to align regional and national breeding efforts with farmer and consumer demand.<sup>20</sup> In the [Agroecology Initiative](#) (ST SG), research trials were conducted on farms, allowing communities to provide inputs during both the priority-setting process and subsequent research activities (Zake, 2024). It was noted, however, that the role of NARES was sometimes confined to specific research components, without the benefit of having an overall picture of the thrust of the entire initiative. During the field visits carried out under RAFS SG evaluation, for example, national actors did not appear aware of the ToCs related to their initiatives. Within the ST SG evaluation, some partners expressed frustration by the lack of involvement of local researchers and institutions during the design. A social inclusion and participatory research processes deep dive (under RAFS SG) and an agroecology case study (under ST SG) noted that the poorest were rarely involved in the design and implementation of research activities because of a mismatch of interests and disempowerment (e.g. poor people generally do not have land and lack access to community networks).

Against this backdrop, evidence of the **relevance of the SG Portfolio varies significantly across countries**. In Kenya, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Ghana (where CGIAR has a strong presence), the research portfolio is regarded as being highly responsive to country needs and priorities. In Vietnam, for instance, the [One Health Initiative \(OHI\)](#), hosted under the RAFS SG, is fully aligned with several strides that the government has made to implement a One Health approach since 2013.<sup>21</sup> In Ghana, the GI SG supports the rice breeding program of the [Council for Scientific and Industrial Research](#) (CSIR) to achieve the national research and development priorities (e.g., to reach self-sufficiency in rice and reduce imports from Vietnam and Thailand). In Kenya, strong partnerships with [Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization](#) (KALRO) (see Partnership Knowledge Product) contributed to enhancing the relevance of the Initiatives.<sup>22</sup> In some cases, initiatives were also influential towards national policies, such as the [Asian Mega Deltas \(AMD\) RII](#) in Vietnam and the Sustainable Healthy Diets Through Food System Transformation ([SHIFT](#)) [Initiative](#) in targeted countries.<sup>23</sup> In countries such as Bangladesh, the portfolio was less responsive to national priorities, sometimes due to limited intentional engagement of national partners (see the SG Evaluation

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, according to interviews, in the Accelerated Breeding initiative (GI SG), six of ten market segments for Eastern Africa identified by CGIAR were dropped following consultation with national partners (Bryan, 2024).

<sup>20</sup> 52 PDT meetings were held in 2023 covering 12 crops across 18 countries in Africa within the Market Intelligence Initiative (Hausmann, 2024).

<sup>21</sup> In 2013, national guidelines for coordinated prevention and control of zoonotic diseases were issued by the government, thus providing a legal basis to support the implementation of the approach through multi-sectoral programs on avian influenza, rabies, and Antimicrobial Resistance (FAO, 2021; Berthe et al, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> In the Agroecology Initiative, 1,346 food system actors were engaged in co-developing agroecological innovations.

<sup>23</sup> In Vietnam, the RII Asian Mega Deltas was highly influential in shaping the One Million Hectares Program for high-quality and low-emission rice associated with green growth in the Mekong River Delta by 2030 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Under ST SG, the SHIFT initiative is directly supporting stakeholders across targeted countries to improve the design and implementation of their national roadmaps for food systems transformation, by partnering with key national actors responsible for implementing the follow-up actions to the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) process. In Vietnam, for example, SHIFT successfully supported strategic partners in embedding the sustainable healthy diet perspective into their food ST agenda. In March 2023, the Prime Minister approved [Vietnam's National Action Plan for Transparent, Responsible, and Sustainable Food Systems Transformation \(2022–30\) \(FST-NAP\)](#). In the months leading to its approval, SHIFT provided technical support to the [MARD](#), which was responsible for drafting the FST-NAP.

[Asia Brief](#)).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in Colombia, some stakeholders reported that initiative research agendas were dominated by donor priorities.

**Consultations to design initiatives were extensive. However, the consultation process was unstructured due to lack of country or regional strategies. This led to a weak link between stakeholder priorities expressed during consultations and subsequent initiative designs.**

Evaluations highlighted that consultation efforts were largely confined to individual Initiatives, and thus lacked a comprehensive and structured approach to engagement at country and regional levels (see Strengthening Policies and Institutions for Food, Land, and Water Transformation Deep Dive). CGIAR does not have country strategies and therefore, its efforts are not configured or communicated in a way that relates its work to national and regional priorities. This resulted in stakeholders feeling that their interests can seem 'buried, almost invisible', compared to those of other development partners (Howard, 2024).

**The portfolio demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in response to emerging needs.**

Evaluations found that the SG Research Portfolio showed flexibility and adaptability to emerging needs and changing conditions. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on livestock research, that defined the period of transition from CRPs to CGIAR Initiatives, was substantial. New work on zoonotic diseases in several initiatives ([SAPLING](#) and [One Health](#)) address a global urgency to prepare for future outbreaks of animal-borne diseases (see Case Study on One Health and Asia Brief). Under the ST SG, the Climate Resilience [Initiative](#) adapted by focusing on climate-resilient agricultural ecosystem services and engaging partners to support scaling these services across different countries. To better support local partners, SHiFT adjusted to allow the WP5 team to spend more time to help in-country partners design, implement, and monitor a new training program. Under GI SG, the [Market Intelligence Initiative](#) also demonstrated flexibility, evolving from a focus on equity and impact to a transformative role aimed at informing, prioritizing, and guiding genetic innovation efforts for various market segments at national, regional, and global levels.

**Although the development of ToCs marks a significant step forward, several notable shortcomings were identified in their credibility, clarity, and use.**

While the SG ToCs helped clarify impact pathways and the link between identified challenges and expected outcomes, they exposed shortcomings in evidence use, identification of assumptions, and the credibility and clarity of the envisaged impact pathways. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the adoption of ToCs translated into increased portfolio coherence, effectiveness, flexibility, and co-learning among stakeholders.

ToCs of the three SGs marked a step forward in articulating a comprehensive framework to define CGIAR's contributions across various themes (e.g. crop improvement, climate change, nutrition, gender equality, food systems) towards CGIAR Impact Area and SDGs-level impact. The ToCs were found to be well-grounded in CGIAR's comparative advantage in the Research for Development (R4D) space (see ISDC's work on [Identifying and Using CGIAR's Comparative Advantage](#)). Furthermore, 77% of CGIAR respondents to the online survey agreed that the ToCs in which they were involved had evidence-based assumptions. However, evaluations revealed room for improvement in strengthening the clarity and credibility of ToC impact pathways. A common finding across the three evaluations is that causal assumptions, critical to defining the impact pathways, were not adequately explored, nor made explicit.<sup>25</sup> When identified, assumptions may not have been fully supported by an evidence-base. While most ST respondents to the

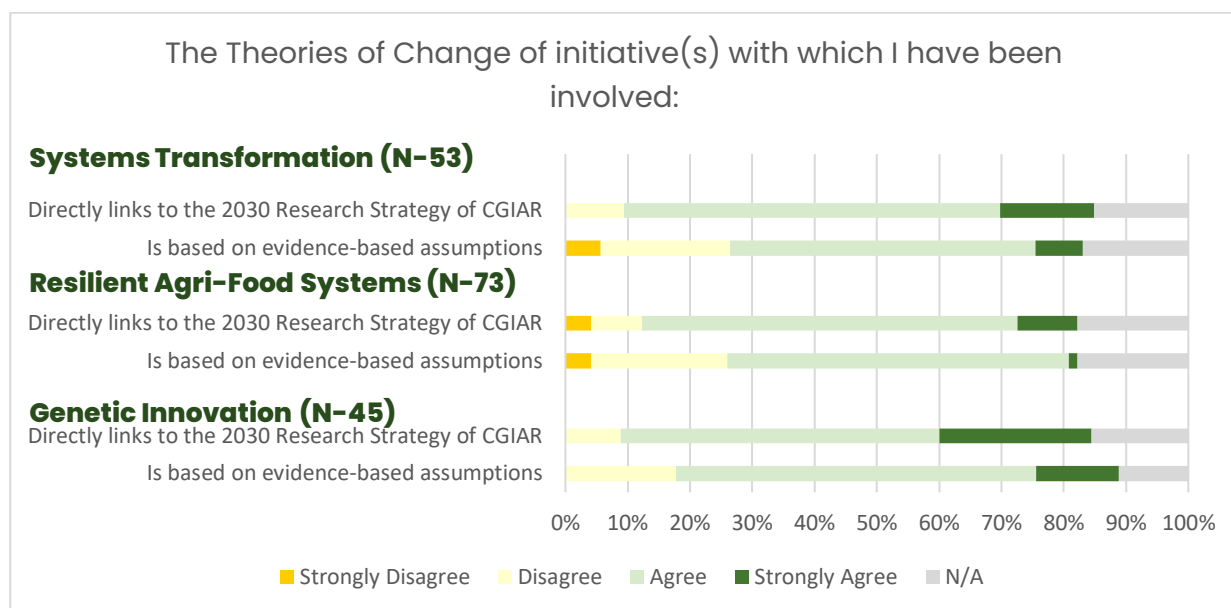
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<sup>24</sup> From the case study on agroecology, for example, some respondents indicated that there was limited time for stakeholder's consultations and that the consultation process involved a few selected stakeholders.

<sup>25</sup> Within the GI SG an example of causal assumptions not made explicit is the importance of synergies and feedback loops between GI SG initiatives, between GI SG initiatives and crop breeding programs, and between GI SG initiatives and crop breeding programs with the private sector as leverages for change.

online [survey](#) felt that the ST SG ToC is directly linked to the [CGIAR 2030 Research Strategy](#), only 57% agreed that the assumptions were evidence-based (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Coherence of Theories of Change across Science Groups**



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

For instance, the key assumption under the ToC (that national demand partners would adopt and scale CGIAR's outputs to trigger behavioral changes) was considered ambitious and unrealistic by many internal stakeholders, given the level of CGIAR's capacity and funding. For clarity, more insights would have been needed on several aspects. For example, it would have been important for the ST SG to discuss with stakeholders and illustrate how the ToC could be operationalized at country level.<sup>26</sup> For GI, the ToC could have made more explicit how all CGIAR workstreams (initiatives and bilaterally funded projects) individually and collectively contribute to overall transformation at crop breeding systems level. Under RAFS, clear output and outcome indicators, with baselines and target values, were not articulated. Additionally, the RAFS ToC diagram does not clearly depict the solution pathways to address the stated problems.<sup>27</sup> This coincides with a finding of the [Evaluability Assessment \(EA\) Synthesis Report](#) of four RIIs, which highlighted the need for further development of the ToCs to better enable the analysis of underlying assumptions. Furthermore, the spheres of control, influence and interest were not clearly articulated.<sup>28</sup> A ToC companion narrative document, which was not recorded under RAFS, would have better supported the understanding of these aspects.

<sup>26</sup> According to ST evaluation findings, food loss and waste (FLW) systems in specific country contexts should be better explored and understood and may require distinct ST strategies.

<sup>27</sup> Narrowly, initiatives are depicted as the link between the problems and the expected outcomes, without further explanations. The actions and outputs needed to achieve the results should be explained in the logical model itself, to see if linkages between problems, outputs, outcomes and impact are logical and plausible.

<sup>28</sup> Three out of six outcomes, seemingly under the sphere of influence of the SG, aim to reach out to smallholder farmers and marginalized groups. This type of outcome creates confusion about what is under the initiatives' sphere of influence, what is under CGIAR responsibility, and what external partners are expected to take on.

A common finding across RAFS and ST is the lack of a commonly accepted definition of the respective action areas.<sup>29</sup> Many stakeholders noted that the rationales of the SG and of the initiatives, do not clearly establish boundaries between research and development. Therefore, scientists find themselves working with ToCs that predict many outcomes among vulnerable populations, without knowing who is responsible for this work. This finding coincides with the [Evaluability Assessment \(EA\) Synthesis Review of four RIIs](#), which detailed the lack of coherence in the ToCs regarding the uptake of research results by partners. This also leads to the observation that the ToCs appear excessively ambitious, noted by stakeholders in both RAFS and ST SGs.

Evaluations found limited evidence of the extent of using the ToCs as dynamic tools that should be continuously checked and revised.<sup>30</sup> The RAFS rationale was re-drafted at different times (July 2023, December 2023) without being officially internally published, resulting in limited knowledge and ownership among internal stakeholders. The GI SG ToC was revised in 2023, but the evaluation report called for increased periodic reviews of critical causal assumptions and progress along impact pathways. Notably, similar findings regarding weak monitoring of assumptions and risks, as well as gaps in the evidence base for the ToCs, were recorded in previous CRPs' evaluations ([see 2021 Synthesis Report](#)).

## 2.2 Findings on Enhanced Research Integration during the Design Phase, Yielding Mixed Results During Implementation

The SG set-up enhanced research integration and cross-center collaboration. Initiatives showed examples of deploying multi-disciplinary skills from across the CGIAR system. While success in addressing coherence in planning and design was more evident under the SGs of ST and GI compared with RAFS, mixed success was recorded during implementation across all three SGs. Overall, there is significant room for improvement in collaboration to enhance synergies during implementation. CGIAR still lacks a robust mechanism for ensuring coherence in its global operations. Although GI initiatives showed greater integration with CGIAR's global work, there is room for improvement in collaboration with other SGs. Despite internal commitment to the One CGIAR and its importance to partner countries, few external stakeholders are aware of it, hampering the CGIAR profile in these countries.

***Initiative set-up made the corporate commitment to enhanced research integration and cross-center cooperation more explicit. Success was observed within the SGs of ST and GI, particularly during the phases of design and planning.***

The SG evaluations clearly demonstrate the explicit corporate commitment towards enhanced research integration and cross-center cooperation, in line with the [CGIAR Integration Framework Agreement \(IFA\)](#) (2022), which recognizes that collaboration should be 'more than the sum of its parts' and aims at 'shared ways of working' across centers and action areas (CGIAR, 2022c). However, SG-specific differences were reflected in the online [survey](#): an apparent division between ST and RAFS, and GI, the latter having much more positive view of the SGs enabling coherence (see Figure 9), are likely attributable to the closer thematic alignment and long-established research practices within GI.

ST internal stakeholders highlighted significant successes in coherence in planning and design both within and across Initiatives compared to the CRPs. Coherence across research, policy, data and foresight spheres was explored during the work package (WP) process, which allowed CGIAR skills to be purposefully

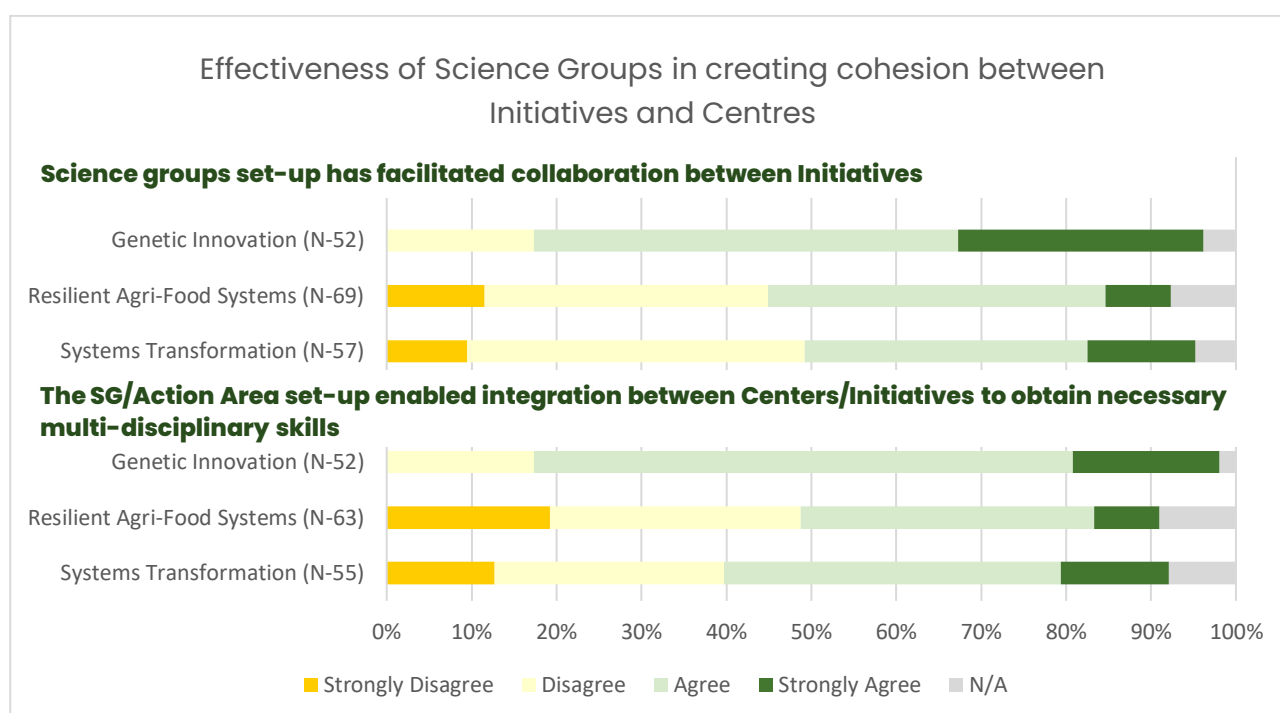
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<sup>29</sup> While the ST evaluation recorded a lack of clear understanding among internal stakeholders on how to translate research and policy work into ST results at various levels, the action area narrative for RAFS was found to be weakly articulated and did not clarify the value proposition within CGIAR.

<sup>30</sup> Echoed in the EA of RIIs-Synthesis (2024): <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/synthesis-review-evaluability-assessments-four-regional-integrated>.

combined in an integrated manner within the ST SG. GI initiatives were found to be coherent and well-integrated with the wider portfolio (bilateral, window 3-funded projects and science project funding). Their contributions at various stages of the crop-breeding process were clearly defined from the design phase. Feedback loops from the [Market Intelligence Initiative](#), for example, were designed and are effectively utilized to provide the product development team<sup>31</sup> with relevant breeding resources. RAFS SG internal stakeholders stated that research integration came quite naturally with the establishment of joint initiatives that gather scientists from different centers sharing a common, or complementary, research mandate. Additionally, many initiative leads and co-leads were proactively encouraged by the SG management to seek collaboration opportunities within and across initiatives. However, within RAFS, stakeholders had contrasting perceptions regarding the level of synergy planning from the design phase within the SG.

**Figure 9. Effectiveness of Science Groups in Creating Cohesion between Initiatives and Centers**



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

**During portfolio implementation, research integration remained strong within GI while mixed success was reported for RAFS and ST due to challenges related to coordination, operations, and finance.**

Successful examples of cross-center cooperation at initiative level were recorded under RAFS SG, particularly when synergies were planned from the design phase<sup>32</sup> with a strong common interest.<sup>33</sup> However, in practice, most stakeholders felt that collaborations between centers heavily depended on leads and co-leads and their personal relationships, thus highlighting the absence of a clear corporate mechanism for driving internal coordination. For the ST SG, nutrition-focused initiatives expanded CGIAR's

<sup>31</sup> See inside GI's process management: mapping processes to enhance breeding research services: <https://excellenceinbreeding.org/news/inside-genetic-innovation%E2%80%99s-process-management-mapping-processes-enhance-breeding-research>.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, the Nature+ Initiative is designed with interlinked WPs (Conserve, Manage, Restore, Recycle, Engage) managed by different centers and taking place simultaneously in the different countries involved.

<sup>33</sup> This is the case of the RII AMD, where delta geography represents a strong connection across the countries and involved centers.

influence in food systems but remained siloed and poorly coordinated, while in the GI SG, work seemed less initiative-driven resulting in apparently stronger intra-initiative integration compared with the other SGs.

***Despite several positive examples, synergies across initiatives at SG level and across SGs were generally limited, due to a lack of purposeful planning, time constraints, budget cuts, weak collaborative mindsets, and disempowerment of country conveners. RAFS was also affected by the delayed establishment of the SG structure.***

Further room for improvement was found regarding synergies across initiatives at SG level. Although regular meetings among ST initiative leads were intended to foster coherence, the level of interaction and commitment has varied due to time constraints and the multiple responsibilities of leads. Several ST stakeholders cited that initiatives tend to operate within thematic and geographic silos. The evaluation of the RAFS SG found that the interactions across initiatives was limited<sup>34</sup> as they were not always purposefully planned from the design phase. Budget cuts, time constraints and weak collaborative mindsets were other hindering factors.

While country conveners provided an opportunity for improving coherence across initiatives at country level, their role was unbudgeted and weakened by multiple other functions. Overall, many interviewees within both RAFS and ST felt that initiatives and SGs became siloed structures, with cross-synergies taking place without proper design (for RAFS), or strategic guidance (for both SGs). The RAFS SG evaluation identified that the SG and One CGIAR structure were not set up to provide the needed guidance on synergies when the portfolio was initiated.<sup>35</sup> Other factors were reported, namely the high turnover of SG leadership positions, infrequent meetings, lack of incentives, and the absence of clear accountability mechanisms for cross-collaborations.

Good examples of thematic and geographic *synergies across SGs* were referenced in Kenya, India, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, where some ST and RAFS initiatives (including RIIIs) worked together to combine research, policy, advocacy and capacity building interventions in a coherent manner. For example, the [Agroecology](#) and [Nature-Positive Solutions](#) Initiative (the former hosted under ST and the latter under RAFS), jointly contributed to the development of the [National Agroecology for Food System Transformation Strategy for Kenya](#).

However, cooperation between SGs was generally limited and in need of improvement. Under the GI SG, for instance, several NARES indicated limited attention from the GI SG on how the crop was going to be grown or in which type of cropping system, if any, it would be a part of—a key to success of variety adoption is to predict performance in the relevant cropping system. This reflects a significant lack of coherence between GI, RAFS and ST. The evaluations found a potential for stronger integration of GI initiatives with the [Excellence in Agronomy \(EiA\)](#) and [Plant Health](#) initiatives hosted under the RAFS SG. This highlights the need for a more systems-oriented and integrated approach, particularly in breeding.

***Although synergies with Impact Platforms were limited due to delays in the establishment of their management structures and insufficient planning, interactions with the GENDER Platform were noteworthy.***

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<sup>34</sup> According to the 2023 Technical Report, SAPLING reported a quarter of its outputs as jointly published with other initiatives and bilateral projects. The initiative is also interacting with the HER+ initiative hosted under ST SG to study the impact of gender norms on women's resilience to climate change in the livestock sector (SAPLING 2023 Technical Report).

<sup>35</sup> Evaluation found, for example, the RAFS SG management team was not fully in place until the second half of 2023.

Synergies with Impact Platforms were limited. It is worth noting that, although established in 2021 during the One CGIAR transition (except for the pre-existing Gender Platform<sup>36</sup>), platform leads were appointed later (from November 2022 to September 2023), which hampered the development of meaningful synergies. Interactions with the [GENDER Platform](#) were the most frequently reported by the three evaluations. The platform significantly engaged with, and contributed to, the ST initiatives,<sup>37</sup> and there were instances of small grants awarded to initiatives under both RAFS and ST SGs to stimulate work on gender-related topics. Aside from gender, other impact platforms initiated after the approval of initiatives had little influence on initiative strategies or proposals. For some Impact Platforms, resource limitations and a lack of experience and clarity on how to engage effectively with the SG were of concern.

***The partnership model envisioned between Global Thematic Initiatives (GTIs) and Regional Integrated Initiatives (RIIs) did not fulfil its potential to offer scaling opportunities.***

Despite some positive experiences,<sup>38</sup> the partnership model envisioned between GTIs and RIIs<sup>39</sup> did not fulfil its potential to provide scaling opportunities and improve integration between the national and regional levels. The rationale of each type of initiative, the concrete pathways for reciprocal engagement, and the modalities for interactions were never clarified. Overall, interactions between the two types of initiatives were poorly planned and lacked guidance resulting in a missed opportunity to advance internal coherence.

***Strong internal commitment and external appreciation were directed towards One CGIAR. However, affiliation to individual centers still predominates within the countries visited in the evaluation.***

Strong commitment to the One CGIAR vision amongst internal stakeholders of SGs was found in the ST and RAFS evaluations. However, a unified approach was challenged by the division of pooled and bilateral funding.<sup>40</sup> Towards institutional alignment of individual centers around the One CGIAR vision, clear guidance and incentives from the leadership were seen as necessary. A collaborative mindset was required to encourage all centers around the new funding mechanisms to achieve genuine system-wide integration.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Impact Area Platform on gender equality, youth and social inclusion took forward the agenda of the Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Research (GENDER) Platform that was approved by the CGIAR System Council in November 2019. It was evaluated in 2023, see the report [here](#).

<sup>37</sup> For instance, the provision/use of guidance in manuals and tools generated by the platform; assignment of gender focal points at initiative level; conducting awareness on gender and inclusion at community/farm level and associated targeting and involvement in research activities; providing technical advisories for the ongoing CGIAR's 2030 research strategy implementation and review meetings at SG level; and conducting gender research on specific issues to inform subsequent intervention for advancing gender and inclusion mainstreaming.

<sup>38</sup> The focus on scaling innovations, for example, was well articulated under the Ukama Ustawi Initiative, through the establishment of a Food System Accelerator Program to empower agribusinesses with climate-smart innovations and to provide technical assistance and de-risked grants to agribusinesses through competitive processes. The initiative also has an internal mechanism, the Scaling Fund, established to provide funding and technical advisory support to other CGIAR initiatives.

<sup>39</sup> RIIs have the mandate to function "as a key vehicle for the co-designing and co-delivery of innovations, for capacity development, and for policy change, with local and regional partners" (RIIs, CGIAR). While conducting applied research and responding to specific national and regional needs, RIIs leverage scaling opportunities with an intentional mandate to function as a springboard for CGIAR's innovations, including those generated under GTIs. On the other hand, through strong engagement with local and regional stakeholders, RIIs are intended to articulate demand from external partners for relevant research to be conducted by GTIs, and across SGs and Impact Platforms.

<sup>40</sup> Echoing results of EAs of RIIs: <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/synthesis-review-evaluability-assessments-four-regional-integrated>.

<sup>41</sup> For example, some internal stakeholders reported that they were using bilateral funding to fill funding gaps within initiatives, in e.g., supporting post-graduate students to complete their research.

Externally, the One CGIAR process was praised by external stakeholders and was seen as a move towards enhanced coordination between centers in some of the countries visited by evaluation teams (e.g. Vietnam and Colombia). Nevertheless, only key partners understand One CGIAR and the initiatives, namely those with a long history of cooperation and some of those based nationally. Under the RAFS and ST SGs, for example, knowledge and affiliation to individual centers prevailed for most external stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, GI SG evaluation noted that most of the external interviewees, particularly NARES representatives, struggled to differentiate and fully understand the added value of SG work as an integral part of CGIAR's efforts.

## 2.3 Findings on Steady Progress in the Initiatives with a Significant Number of Outputs Delivered

The progress of initiatives was evident across all three SGs. This is demonstrated through the significant number of high-quality and relevant outputs produced during the SG period. Markedly fewer outcomes were recorded at the time of the evaluation than expected in the ToCs outlined by SGs. Overall, the magnitude, coherence and consistency of results achieved was significantly hampered and reduced by frequent budget cuts, foreshortened implementation periods, incongruence between planned three-year EoI outcomes and the realistic time required to translate outputs into outcomes. Additionally, evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives was challenging due to difficulties in differentiating results from both initiative- and CRP-era work, limited implementation periods for novel initiatives, inconsistent understanding of outputs and outcomes, and challenges in comparing reported outputs and outcomes with progress towards EoI-related indicators.

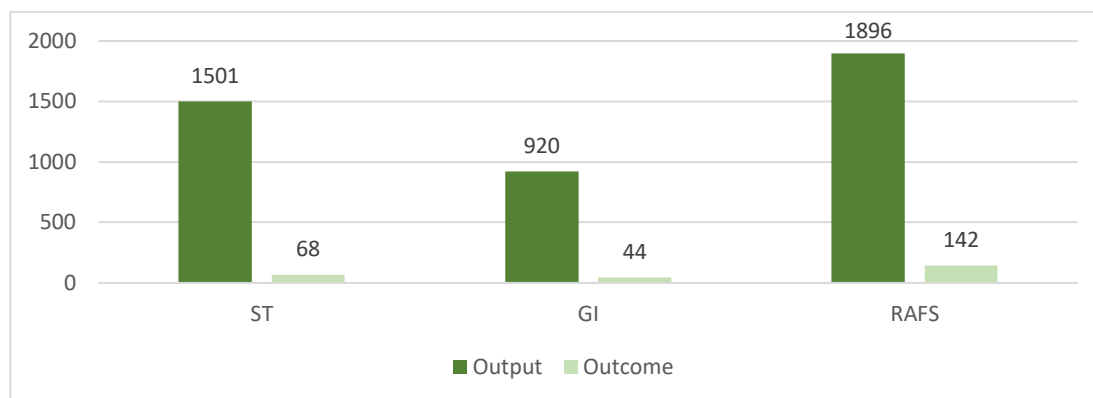
***Initiatives delivered a remarkable number of high-quality outputs, only somewhat balanced with the number of outcomes achieved; this was primarily due to the time required to translate outputs into outcomes.***

The 2022 and 2023 technical reports [Result Dashboard](#) (accessed in May 2024) show clear, steady progress of the initiatives across the three SGs. While there is evident progress at output level, with an impressive delivery of relevant and high-quality products, mixed results were recorded at the level of outcomes, as underscored by RAFS and ST evaluations and shown in Figure 10.

The lower number of outcomes requires contextualizing the results within the time needed to translate outputs into outcomes, and the project cycle of the initiatives: two years of reporting into a three-year cycle. As referenced in the [2021 Synthesis Report](#), the literature review indicates that extended periods of time, approximately 15 years, are needed for a pilot action to produce results at scale and therefore influence outcomes and impacts.<sup>42</sup> (See MELIA Brief Knowledge Product).

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<sup>42</sup> See: [Scaling—from “reaching many” to sustainable systems change at scale: A critical shift in mindset - ScienceDirect](#).

**Figure 10. Science Groups 2023 Outputs and Outcomes**

**Field visits facilitated the identification of several outcomes achieved through the initiatives. However, various obstacles limited their scope, including budget cuts, shortened implementation periods, and unrealistic expectations. Additionally, the evaluation was hindered by challenges in comparing reported outputs and outcomes with expected Eol indicators and challenges in differentiating results from initiatives and CRP-era work.**

Identifying outcomes clearly attributable to the SG initiatives was challenged by the lack of clear boundaries between CRP era and current research. Much of the work in RAFS SG, for example, is drawn from pre-RAFS research in CRPs<sup>43</sup> that continued in the current initiatives, and results emerge from long-lasting research programs, only recently embedded into the initiatives.<sup>44</sup> Regarding the new lines of research under the initiatives, most interviewees considered it premature to look at outcomes and impact after two years of implementation.<sup>45</sup> In some cases, planned end-of-initiative outcomes appeared overly ambitious for a three-year period, and the progress by 2023 was not expressed against expected achievements, at least for RAFS SG and ST SG. This has hindered the evaluators from conducting a thoughtful analysis of the effectiveness of the initiatives vis-à-vis planned End of Initiative outcomes. Despite these challenges, the evaluation team was able to identify many results through country visits and online interviews.

Reportedly, improvements in the effectiveness of GI efforts post-2022 include precision (markets and product profiles), enhancements in crop breeding systems, and reduced crop breeding processes. The increased use of Triadic Comparison of Technologies ([TRICOT](#)), with large numbers of farmers testing candidate varieties on their own farms and providing feedback was another significant improvement in terms of delivering genetic gains. The mapping of [Target Product Profile \(TPP\)](#) to breeding programs provided clear direction to breeding pipelines. Measuring genetic gain in a standardized way has shown positive results. Realized genetic gain for yield was reported for 13 crops across centers, and was assessed as positive for 87% of pipelines, with 122 out of 140 pipelines showing improvement.<sup>46</sup> The existence of a new integrated approach that looks at crop breeding systems, processes and programs as a whole was praised by stakeholders, as well as more participatory decision-making processes and improved availability of modern tools and resources, like marker-assisted or genomic selection.

<sup>43</sup> CRP Evaluative Reviews: <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/crp-2020-review>.

<sup>44</sup> The AMD rice seed work is a good example of several research programs bringing a package of innovations as a result of long-term investment in breeding, agronomy, and agricultural engineering.

<sup>45</sup> The evaluation TORs were set up recognizing this assumption without focus on outcomes and pathways to impacts.

<sup>46</sup> See: [Accelerated Breeding Initiative-2023 Annual Technical Report](#).

For the ST SG, the Climate-Smart Agriculture Framework ([Climate Resilience Initiative–Climber](#)) in Ethiopia enabled targeted planning based on regional conditions, with the potential for broader implementation. The [NEXUS Gains Initiative](#) demonstrated effective strategies for climate change adaptation, and the Climate Risk Management in Agricultural Extension curriculum aimed to build knowledge for extension workers to manage climate risk. The [FRESH initiative](#) successfully partnered with private-sector seed companies to identify promising new traits and varieties using their market intelligence and accelerated the introduction of new varieties into the private sector seed system to sustainably scale smallholder access to quality seed.

Under RAFS SG, an agri-business model for rice straw management and mushroom production was developed under the [EiA Initiative](#) in Vietnam and adopted by one cooperative visited during the field mission. The development and dissemination of Agroclimatic Bulletins in seven Vietnamese provinces, has been further scaled with a budget allocation from the national Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development which has also issued a directive letter in 2023 to implement the bulletin in all 13 provinces, reaching out to approximately 221,061 farmers. In Colombia, under the [Livestock and Climate Initiative](#), cattle-raising practices were improved and the initiative partnered with a large private seed company to sell the forage seeds produced and with a large fertilizer company to better inform ranchers on improved pasture production. In some cases, initiatives were also influential towards national policies, such as [the Asian Mega Deltas \(AMD\)](#), RII in Vietnam and the [SHIFT Initiative](#) in its targeted countries ([Asia Brief](#)).<sup>47</sup>

Alongside positive achievements, initiatives were affected by several constraints. Successive budget cuts (see summary of findings next section) represented the most important challenge across the three SGs, with significant repercussions reported by internal and external stakeholders. The negative impacts of budget cuts ranged from elimination of WPs and a reduction in the number of implementation countries, to proportionate reductions in the budgetary allocation to WPs and centers. Sometimes, budget cuts affected the quality of research processes<sup>48</sup> and, significantly, the gender components within initiatives.<sup>49</sup> A common approach to remedy the budget cuts was to reduce core CGIAR staff budget-allocated time, contributing to overwork and burnout. Some other notable practices in response to budget cuts was appropriation of staff downtime, the utilization of junior staff, and the use bilateral funds to cover gaps in activities and expenditures of initiatives. The foreshortening of project implementation was reported as another important and unpredicted outcome of budget cuts.<sup>50</sup>

Overall, mixed views were found on the likelihood of the initiatives to achieve the planned/projected EoI outcomes. While the ST evaluation highlighted that the evidence provided made it difficult to

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<sup>47</sup> In Vietnam, the RII Asian Mega Deltas was highly influential in shaping the One Million Hectares Program for high-quality and low-emission rice associated with green growth in the Mekong River Delta by 2030 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Under ST, the SHiFT initiative is directly supporting stakeholders across targeted countries to improve the design and implementation of their national roadmaps for food systems transformation, by partnering with key national actors responsible for implementing the follow-up actions to the 2021 UNFSS process. In Vietnam, for example, SHiFT successfully supported strategic partners in embedding the sustainable healthy diet perspective into their food ST agenda. In March 2023, the Prime Minister approved [Vietnam's National Action Plan for Transparent, Responsible, and Sustainable Food Systems Transformation \(2022–30\) \(FST-NAP\)](#). In the months leading to its approval, SHiFT provided technical support to the [Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development \(MARD\)](#), which was responsible for drafting the FST-NAP.

<sup>48</sup> Under One Health Initiative (RAFS), for randomized control trials (RCTs), the sample size within research activities were reduced or intermediate impact assessments between the baseline and the end-line data collection were skipped.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, under SAPLING, budget cuts have highly affected WP4 dedicated to gender, with on-the-ground interventions not having been implemented. Similarly, under OHI, gender related surveys were planned but not fully implemented due to budget cuts.

<sup>50</sup> At least under RAFS, the original initiative ToCs were designed with a nine-year period in mind.

independently assess progress towards Eol outcomes<sup>51</sup>, internal stakeholders in RAFS and GI SGs shared their negative perceptions about the capacity to attain the Eol outcomes against the results frameworks, due to budget cuts, overambitious expectations and limited time to finalize initiative workplans.

Dedicated Knowledge Products assess the extent to which the SG Portfolio mainstreamed gender, climate change, and partnerships against the [Partnerships Framework \(2022\)](#) and tagging.

## 2.4 Findings on Budget Cuts and Operational Challenges, and their Impact on Implementing the 2022–24 Portfolio

Timely and adequate availability of financial resources has been a major challenge. This critically affected the efficient delivery of the 2022–24 SG Portfolio and the achievement of results by initiatives. Budget cuts significantly undermined the corporate trust and reputation of the CGIAR among external stakeholders in unquantifiable ways, with uncertain long-term effects. Several operational challenges, including those linked to the implementation of initiatives' activities by legally independent centers, have further limited efficiency at both initiative and SG levels. Despite a significant investment of effort into the design of functional MELIA frameworks, with the budget cuts, there has been weak and partial implementation at initiative level, preventing the application and demonstration of result-based M&E, with impacts on real-time learning and adaptive management.

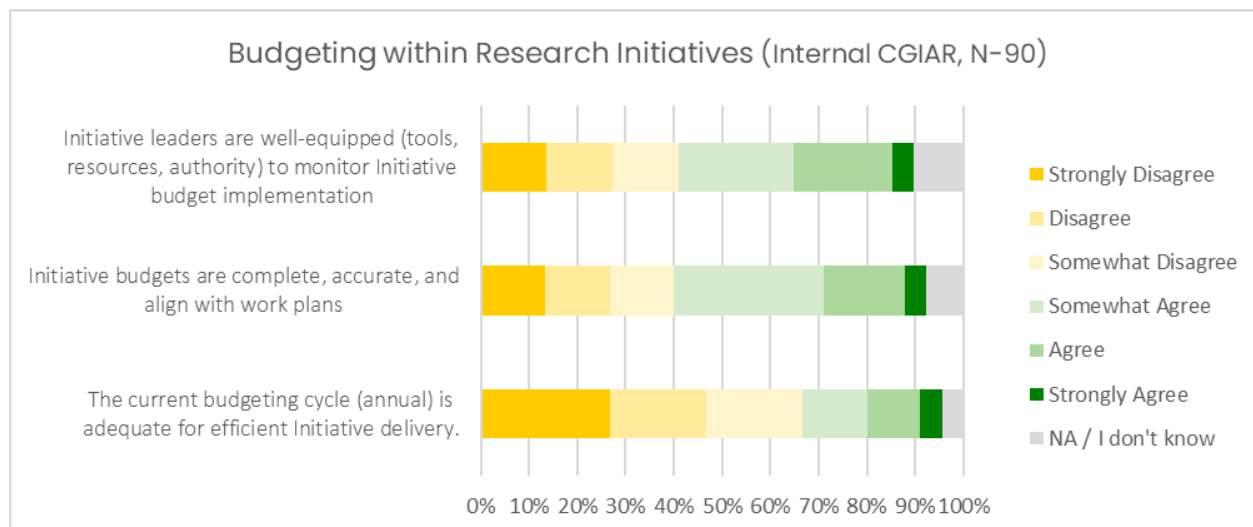
***Limited financial resources, budget cuts and the unpredictability of financial disbursements significantly affected the implementation of the SG Portfolio, with uncertain long-term implications on the implementation of the [CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#) and CGIAR's contribution to attainment of the SDGs. While bilateral and other types of funds were raised for specific activities, the evaluation team found no evidence of a structured co-funding mechanism.***

The implementation of the 2022–24 SG Portfolio was significantly hampered by budget cuts, funding uncertainties, and irregular fund disbursements. Despite the clearly stated principle of developing 'accordion proposals' in CGIAR guiding documents,<sup>52</sup> the evaluations identified gaps in communication and transparency, leaving staff with little understanding of the rationale and modalities behind budget reductions with potential impacts on staff morale. Most stakeholders reported that financial planning and budget cuts were often implemented with little or no notice, frequently announced mid-year, with severe effects implementation of the initiatives. Almost all initiatives were significantly impacted by budget cuts both at their inception and during implementation (see Figure 11, Figure 12 and [Online Survey Report](#)). A growing disparity between the ambitious budget requests in proposals and modest approved funding was recorded, suggesting challenges in the budget planning and approval processes. Notably, the results of the internal audit survey echo this finding with 60% of respondents reporting that the annual budget cycle was inadequate for efficient delivery (Figure 11, Internal Audit Survey).

<sup>51</sup> While progress reports indicate satisfactory progress towards achieving Eol outcomes, this self-reported progress could not be validated by the evaluation team.

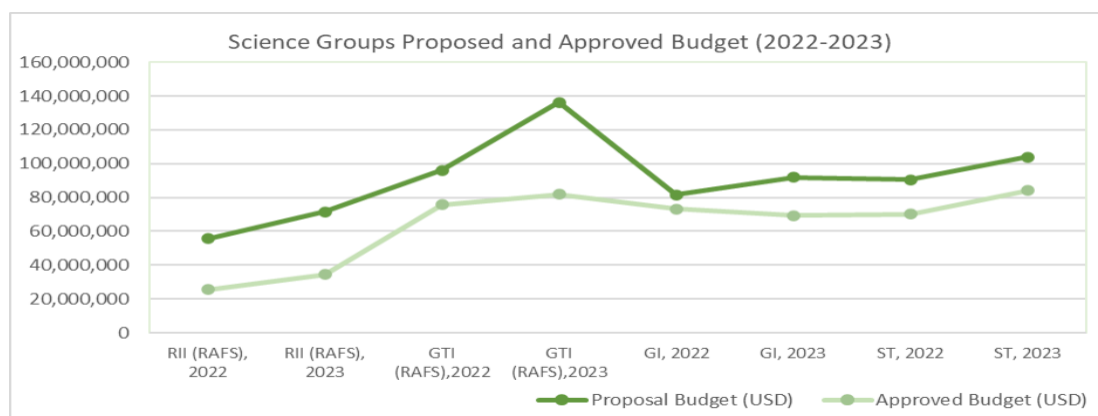
<sup>52</sup> According to the [Companion Document](#) to the [2022–24 investment Prospectus](#), the initiative design teams were asked to develop 'accordion proposals' susceptible of potential scaling up or down of financial resources, depending on the initiative potentialities and according to funding availability.

**Figure 11. Budgeting within Research Initiatives (Internal Audit Survey)**



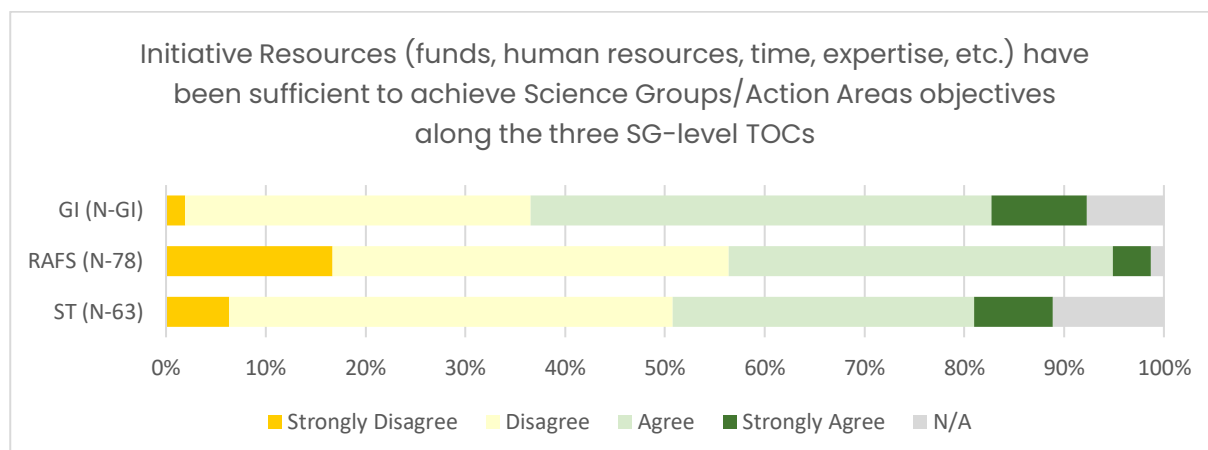
Source: Internal Audit Survey, 2024

**Figure 12. Science Groups’ Proposed and Approved Budget (2022-23)**



Source: SGs Annual Technical Reports, 2022-23

Mixed sentiments were expressed on the adequacy of resource allocation to initiatives and SGs (Figure 10). While GI SG online survey respondents regarded resource allocation positively, ST and RAFS SGs expressed concerns about the adequacy of resource allocation. Under the GI SG, many internal and external interviewees felt crop breeding programs were asked to breed for more TPPs than resources permitted. Overall, less than half of the respondents found resources sufficient to achieve SG-level objectives.

**Figure 13. Sufficiency of Resources across Science Groups**

Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

Although initiative leaders took adaptive measures to address funding uncertainties (see Effectiveness), most interviewees noted that these uncertainties undermined planning and led to haphazard changes in priorities and work plans, thereby compromising the achievement of quality and impactful results at initiative and SG level. Consequentially, budget cuts may produce negative, long lasting and unpredictable effects on staff morale and significantly undermine the CGIAR corporate trust, reputation and comparative advantage which has been built over decades of investment in quality and impactful science.

In several instances bilateral funds, or other types of funds, were raised to contribute to the continuity of implementation of specific activities within the initiatives and these efforts were complemented by actions to source and raise internal funds for the Initiatives.<sup>53</sup> Centers also made commendable efforts to supplement the funding gaps through negotiations with traditional bilateral donors to contribute to pooled funding (Window 1)<sup>54</sup>. However, these mechanisms were neither purposefully designed nor permanent, and they only partially mitigated the negative impact of the budget cuts.<sup>55</sup>

**Portfolio implementation faced coordination challenges, particularly within RAFS. The involvement of legally independent centers in the same initiatives introduced further complexities.**

There were mixed responses expressed regarding the efficiency of the core SG leadership and management across the three evaluations. Internal stakeholders of the ST SG acknowledged that the core management team largely fulfilled its coordination and management roles.<sup>56</sup> However, members of RAFS

<sup>53</sup> Nature+, under RAFS, for instance, raised additional funds from the [ASEAN-CGIAR program](https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/asean-and-cgiar-launch-joint-program-on-accelerating-innovation-in-agri-food-systems/) (<https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/asean-and-cgiar-launch-joint-program-on-accelerating-innovation-in-agri-food-systems/>).

<sup>54</sup> For instance, the following contribution agreements were reached for the period 2023–25 for three RIs:

- **AMD:** New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade USD 6.2M yearly (2023–25)
- **Ukama Ustawi:** New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade USD 24.05M (2023–25)
- **AgriLAC:** NOK 10M yearly (2023–25).

<sup>55</sup> See Synthesis of EA of RIs: <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/synthesis-review-evaluability-assessments-four-regional-integrated>.

<sup>56</sup> ST internal stakeholders noted that that the SG structure leveraged scientists and managers to work together efficiently to meet the portfolio objectives. The appointment of initiative leads and co-leads and WP leads in a short

SG were concerned by the leadership vacuum, which affected the continuity of coordination<sup>57</sup> and delayed the establishment of a RAFS SG management structure until the second half of 2023. In both SGs, coordination and communication challenges among initiatives were noted related to the large number of initiatives in the two SGs.<sup>58</sup>

Both ST and RAFS SG evaluations concluded that the multiple roles and responsibilities of initiative leads and co-leads compromised accountability and caused demotivation and confusion over lines of responsibility, ultimately leading to inadequate time devoted to the initiatives. According to the People and [Results Dashboard](#), 80% (113) of initiative leadership assignments within RAFS SG, for example, are allocated up to 50% Full Time Equivalent (FTE), with many interviewed leads reporting they had to formally allocate approximately 25% of their own time to the initiatives, often leading to overwork. The GI SG evaluation found that the practice of multiple SG contact persons liaising with NARES in target countries may have led to conflicting requests and redundancies<sup>59</sup> and this was also observed in partner interactions with other SGs in key counties of Kenya and Vietnam.

While roles and responsibilities under SGs were generally clear, several internal stakeholders in RAFS and ST SGs reported that staff were assigned new duties without adequate consultation or a formal modification of their ToRs. The survey results echo these observations, with 39% of RAFS SG respondents reporting an adjustment to their ToR following an agreement with management, 12% of respondents reporting having experienced role changes without proper documentation or consultation, and 10% of respondents unsure whether their roles changed during the transition (Figure 13). Particularly within RAFS SG, the arrangements used to formalize assignments within the initiatives created ambiguity with respect to the channels of supervision and the mechanisms of assessment of performance—the latter still rely on the centers, each of which operates with a separate and distinct human resource performance evaluation system. Since contractual terms are binding agreements, modifications to an existing contract associated with the reassignment from a center to a CGIAR initiative could create ambiguities in the lines of reporting and supervision and this is compounded when the funding sources of the center and the initiative are bilateral and overlap. Furthermore, the findings of the SG evaluations and the internal audit survey are mutually reinforcing regarding the ultimate responsibility for staff performance resting with the center and not with the initiatives. There was also a perceived lack of clarity and transparency in fundraising roles and responsibilities within the Initiatives.

***Country-level coordination requires improvements, and the diversification of the internal skill set has yet to be fully realized.***

Regarding **team composition**, RAFS SG was found to be relatively balanced in terms of gender (see Gender and Social Inclusion sub-report on the portal) and location of the assignments.<sup>60</sup> While multi-disciplinary teams were present in the three SGs, data on staff composition by nationality and area of expertise was not accessible. Evaluations of the RAFS and ST SGs revealed significantly lower engagement with social

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design time and defining/agreeing their role in coordinating the initiative's work planning and management was regarded as a very positive organizational achievement.

<sup>57</sup> In 2023 there was a significant turnover in the directorate, with 4 of 6 science directors newly appointed in mid-2023.

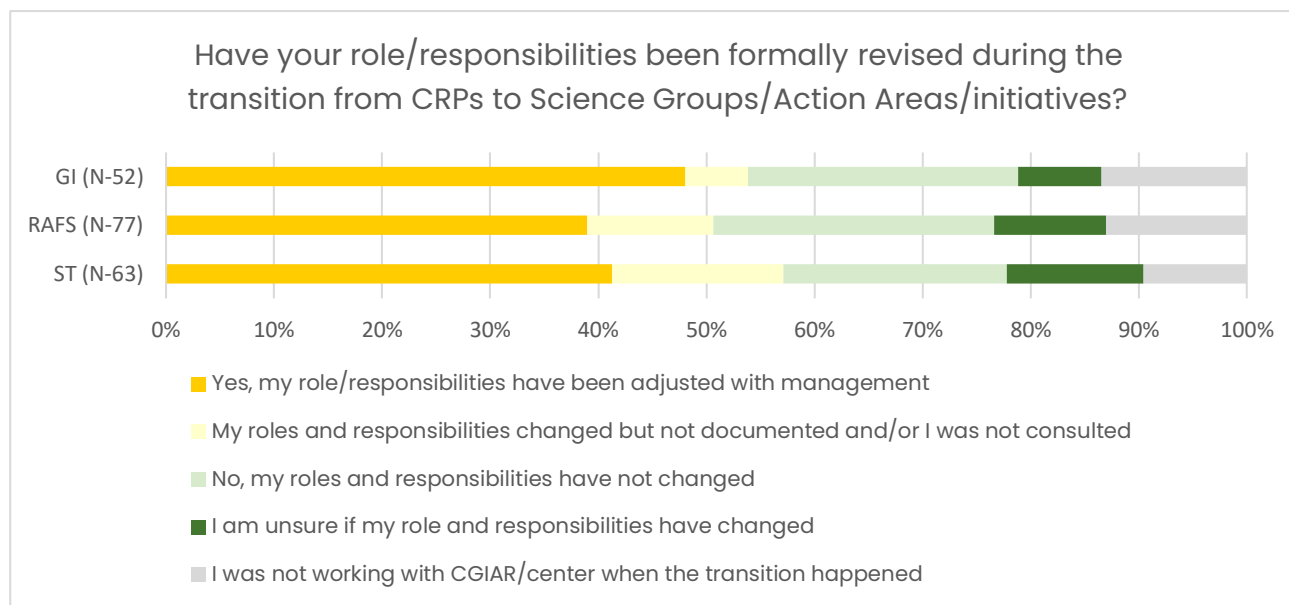
<sup>58</sup> ST hosts 12 initiatives. RAFS hosts nine GTIs and six RIs.

<sup>59</sup> The GI SG structure does not appear to have reduced the number of CGIAR contact persons compared to the previous CRP system of having contacts at each individual CGIAR center.

<sup>60</sup> Almost all (96%) of the assignments for the initiatives are in the following regions: East & Southern Africa (35%), Latin America and the Caribbean (17%), South Asia (13%), West Central Africa (13%), Southeast Asia & the Pacific (11%), and Central & West Asia & North Africa (7%). Source: People and Culture Dashboard Report provided to the evaluation team, May 2024.

scientists and support roles of partnership specialists, gender experts and communication professionals compared to the internal technical and bio-physical scientific capacity. This gap was cited to affect the CGIAR's capacity to address the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that may hinder long-term impact, as highlighted in the 2021 Synthesis Review.

**Figure 14. Change in Roles and Responsibilities in the Transition to Science Groups**



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

Examples of effective **country-level coordination** were limited. Many initiatives appointed country focal points<sup>61</sup> to drive coherence and engagement. Additionally, the One CGIAR Reform Process invested in country conveners to bolster cross-initiative coordination and foster engagement with local partners. While these roles exist, they have not been fully designed with clear ToRs and budget lines, with the consequence that there is no real incentive to perform the related tasks. At RAFS SG level, management teams and support functions were seen as under-resourced, with unrealistic staff-time allocations, and, in a few documented cases, there were no formal expectations in terms of performance due to the absence of clear ToRs.

***The limited operationalization of CGIAR IFA affected the efficiency of portfolio implementation.***

The [2022 IFA](#) illustrated CGIAR's commitment to the One CGIAR vision, under the presumption that the framework agreements would aid the smooth assignment of technical personnel from centers to initiatives. However, progress in translating this commitment into practice was slightly delayed during 2022-23 (partly because it was approved only in February 2023). With the insertion of provisions for each center to operate under its own agreements, procedures and organizational structures under a center Board, coordination and reporting mechanisms were cumbersome, with associated administrative overloads and transaction costs. Several issues arose across CGIAR centers including differences in remuneration policies and performance assessments, multiple agreements with the same partner within the same initiative (and sometimes for the same work), and variable contracting and vendor processes

<sup>61</sup> Initiative country focal points are typically funded through specific WPs within the initiative's budget. However, there is not a specific budget allocated for their cross-cutting tasks as focal points.

with external partners (including differences in overhead rates). Other issues included challenges in transferring funds across centers and a constrained capacity for management to adapt to changing circumstances.

***While efforts were made to develop effective MELIA frameworks, their weak implementation hindered result-based M&E, real-time learning, and adaptive management.***

Although results architectures supported the initiatives and the new set-up, **MELIA** plans were weakly implemented. The evaluators struggled to access a comprehensive overview of cumulative values for output and outcome indicators expressed against target values set for End of Initiative indicators. Additionally, many plans lacked baseline data, making it difficult to measure progress both at initiative and SG level<sup>62</sup>. This was a common finding in both RAFS and ST reports, although more gaps were identified at RAFS initiative level. From data collected from GI evaluation, it appears that baselines were available but monitoring tools were not effectively used in practice. Some indicators seemed overly ambitious, both within RAFS and ST, pertaining to long-term outcomes that are largely influenced by factors outside the initiatives or SG control. While the implementation of M&E benefited from budgetary provisions and dedicated human resources, they primarily focused on gathering data for the PRMS Results Dashboard and meeting technical reporting requirements. Stakeholders found the CGIAR Dashboard cumbersome and difficult to navigate, citing issues with indicator quality, an excessive focus on outputs over outcomes, and the limited capacity of some centers to contribute effectively. These shortcomings have limited use of monitoring data in result-based decisions and real-time oversight.

### 3 Lessons Learned

Across the three SG evaluations lessons learned were identified for the future. Lessons refer to insights gained from direct experience that have the potential to enhance the CGIAR's forthcoming portfolio design and implementation, and reforming organizational structures. Lessons learnt complement the 35 recommendations<sup>63</sup> were targeted to various groups (Annex 3) to steer implementing the new portfolio.

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<sup>62</sup> For instance, since the launch of the initiatives in 2022, no quantitative progress toward action area outcomes was tracked at RAFS SG level.


<sup>63</sup> Formal Management Response to each SG evaluation is available on the [SG Evaluations Portal](#).


## 7 Lessons Learned


 **Funding uncertainty and reform fatigue**

 **Ownership**

 **Cross-center collaboration**

 **Programmatic synergies**

 **Systematic and responsive partnerships**

 **Credible design logic and impact pathway**

 **Scaling for impact**

a. **Funding uncertainty and reform fatigue:** Funding uncertainty, pressures to deliver, growing administrative burdens and reform fatigue contributed in no small amount to internal demotivation and burnout. These factors hamper the overall quality of delivery of CGIAR scientific outputs and progress towards outcomes. They also undermine CGIAR's reputation and credibility with external partners and comparative advantage, which are built over years of committed investment in high impact science.

b. **Ownership:** To maximize ownership and success of interventions, adequate time should be devoted to the design phase, as a basis to ensure that the different types of stakeholders are consulted and meaningfully involved in the process. In this respect, country conveners demonstrated themselves to be effective facilitators and in-country listening sessions have launched a promising dialogue to nurture relationships with external partners. This can be maintained in the future and operationalized under the CGIAR Partnership Engagement Framework (2024). Mapping to the targeted stakeholders for recommendations by areas of improvement would help better understand the key stakeholders by groups, and their roles in implementing recommendations.

c. **Cross-center collaboration:** The delayed approval of the [2022 IFA](#) hindered progress in steering and translating commitments into practice, resulting in challenges for portfolio implementation by legally independent centers. The mechanisms to streamline cross-center cooperation should be operational and effectively communicated prior to or concurrently with the launch of interventions to facilitate implementation and enhance research integration.

d. **Programmatic synergies:** Greater synergies were achieved when systematically planned from the outset and when based on strong common interest, including common geographies, fostering integrated research with the potential for magnified impact. The provision of small grants to initiatives, such as those from CGIAR impact platforms, can play a catalytic role in research outcomes. For example, the small grants provided by the Gender Platform helped boost funding to support gender and inclusion mainstreaming across initiatives.

e. **Systematic and responsive partnerships:** Continuous and deepening engagement ensures projects adapt to stakeholder needs over time and remain relevant under ever changing circumstances. A systematic and

responsive approach to incorporating feedback from partners is key to sustaining project relevance and buy-in.

- f. **Credible design logic and impact pathway:** In several cases, initiatives faced challenges in translating outputs into outcomes, behavioral changes, and pathways to impact. It is important to develop realistic and measurable outcome indicators, clarifying the spheres of control and interest, as well as the respective responsibilities of CGIAR and external partners.
- g. **Scaling for impact:** the limited evidence about solid and contextualized scaling strategies created a significant gap in identifying outcomes and impacts from initiatives. Developing adaptable and context-specific scaling strategies as part of integrated programmatic interventions is crucial for ensuring clarity of roles with partners and consistently with CGIAR's comparative advantage

## Annexes

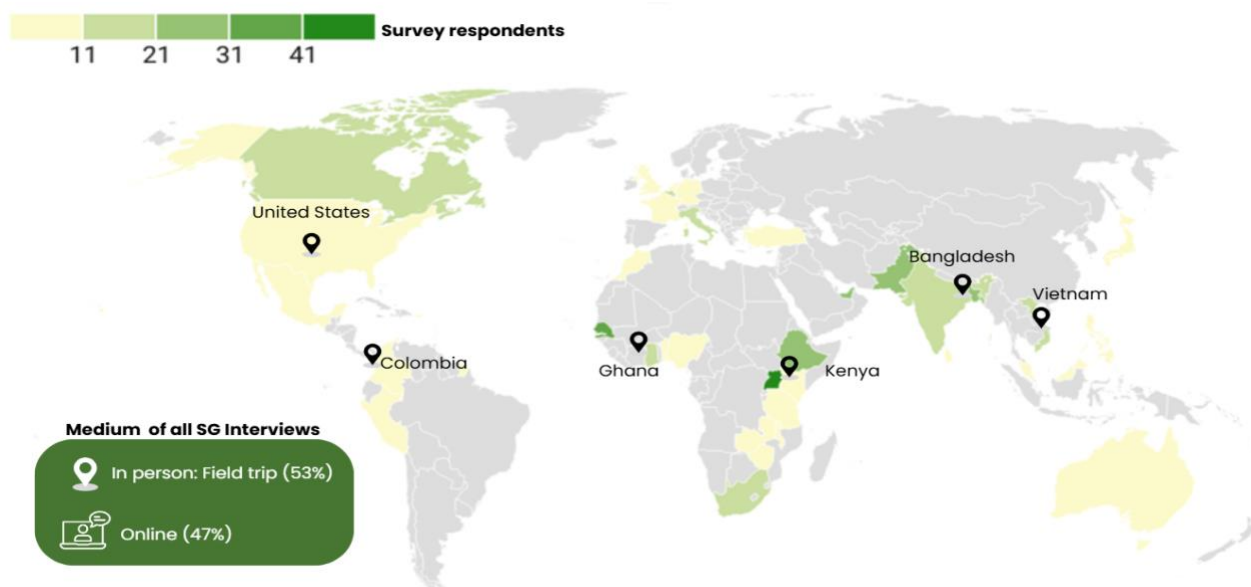
### Annex 1: Evaluations of Three Science Groups: Purpose, Scope and Methodology

In accordance with the CGIAR-wide [Evaluation Framework](#) (2022) and the [Science Group \(SG\) Evaluations Terms of Reference](#) (CGIAR, IAES, 2023), the SG evaluations provided: 1) an independent assessment of the performance of the 2022–24 SG pooled funding portfolio; and 2) recommendations to foster organizational learning and to inform and enhance the design of the next portfolio through early findings.<sup>3</sup> The list of evaluation questions can be found in the evaluation matrix ([ToR](#)) which was revised in each of the three SG inception reports.

The evaluation scope covered the SG Portfolio (and 33 initiatives) from January 2022 to February 2024. The key users for the evaluation are the [CGIAR System Council](#) (through support in decision-making processes), the SG management (which will gain evaluative evidence to reinforce the evolution of the current portfolio and the design of the new one), senior leadership team and centers for learning and steering, and external partners (such as policymakers, national governments and NARES).

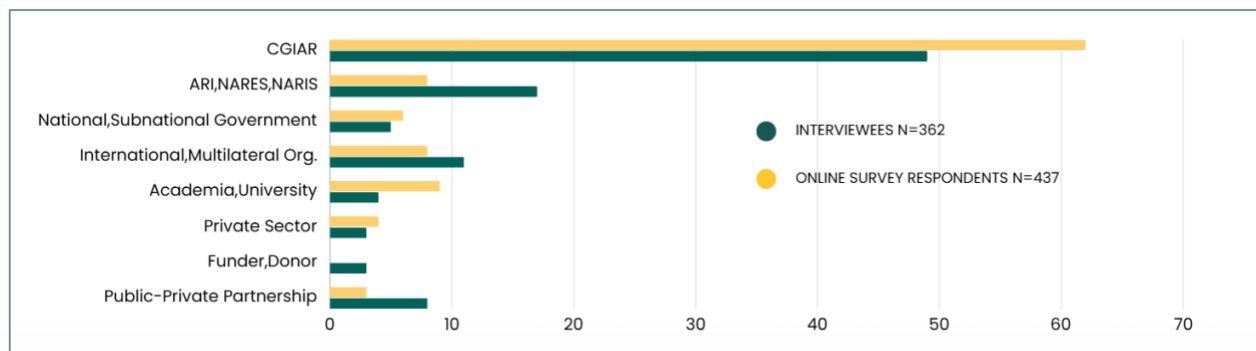
Evaluation teams acknowledged the role of evaluation exercises in supporting decision-making processes related to ongoing revisions of the portfolio future programming and, as such, as a part of a continuous learning process. A **participatory approach** was adopted during data collection by engaging with a variety of stakeholders to identify critical issues and good practices. Aligned to the Quality of Science (QoS) Evaluation Guidelines<sup>4</sup>, QoS evaluation criterion was addressed through key informant interviews, case studies, deep dives and a review of sample of scientific outputs, aligned to the [QoS Evaluation Guidelines](#).

**Figure 15. Location of Internal and External Survey Respondents (N= 437) and Interviewees (N= 362)**



The **mixed methods design** (qualitative and quantitative data collection) included: desk research; a total of 362 key informant interviews (virtual and in-person) and focus group discussions; field observations of six field visits,<sup>64</sup> participatory workshops, portfolio analysis and an [online survey](#). For more detail, see Figure 15 for geographic distribution. The profile of stakeholders consulted in interviews can be found in Figure 16.

**Figure 16. All SG Evaluations Interviewees and Online Survey Respondents by Type of Stakeholder**



## Annex 2: Overview of CGIAR's Science Groups

The CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy established priorities to deliver solutions for development through 33 initiatives across three interlinked action areas: Systems Transformation (ST), Resilient Agrifood Systems (RAFS), and Genetic Innovation (GI). CGIAR scientists working on these initiatives are organized into three corresponding Science Groups<sup>65</sup>.

The [ST SG](#) aims to transform food, land, and water systems across CGIAR's five Impact Areas,<sup>6</sup> supporting policy and decision-makers at multiple governance levels with timely policy-relevant insights. ST supports these efforts through 12 initiatives aimed to improve market systems, decarbonize food production, enhance resilience, advance water security, improve diets, address gender and social inequality across value chains, and improving data and tools to enhance foresight, measure impacts, and identify investment priorities.

The [RAFS SG](#) delivers on research priorities aimed at transforming agri-food systems to enable the most vulnerable to access affordable, sufficient, safe, and healthy diets. The RAFS SG leverages a broad range of internal expertise to address interconnected farm-level challenges affecting crop, livestock and aquatic systems. The 15 initiatives under RAFS SG have been delivering research and innovation across the following domains housing nine [Global Thematic Initiatives \(GTIs\)](#): 1) crop-based systems; 2) livestock-based systems; 3) aquatic food systems; and 4) biodiverse agroecosystems. Additionally, complex regional problems are addressed through six [Regional Integrated Initiatives \(RIIs\)](#), which are housed under RAFS and are designed to scale-up innovations in cooperation with local and regional partners.<sup>7</sup>

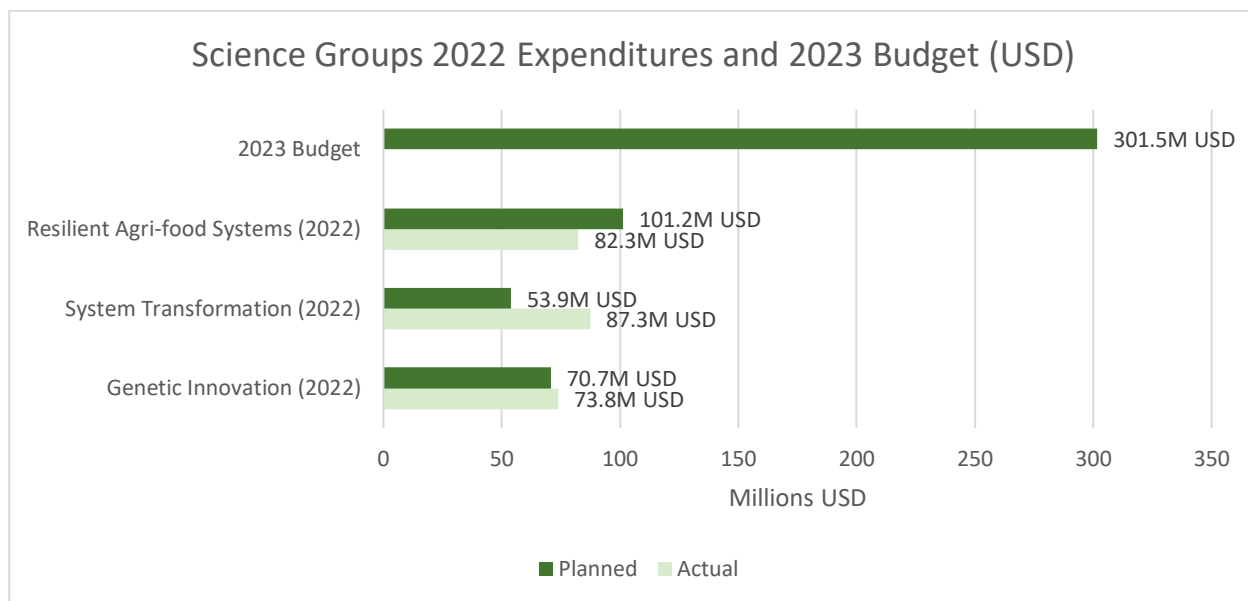
The [GI SG](#) aims to improve food and nutritional security at global, national, and household levels by developing crop varieties resilient to changing conditions and conserving genetic diversity through a global multi-partner Genebank System (see IAES [evaluation of the Genebank Platform](#)).<sup>8</sup> The GI SG focuses on place-based integration innovation, working closely with National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES) worldwide to deliver improved varieties of crops and forages to small-scale farmers in specific geographic areas.

<sup>64</sup> Field trip locations: Colombia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Kenya, Ghana, and USA.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.cgiar.org/how-we-work/strategy/>

SGs were led by managing directors who were part of CGIAR’s executive management and senior leadership teams.<sup>9</sup> During developing evaluation ToRs, the GI SG had a full-time director, while the leaders of RAFS and ST SGs held additional roles as the directors general of CGIAR centers, ILRI and IFPRI respectively. Each thematic area under the SGs is led by a senior director (five under RAFS, four under GI, four under ST) and includes several thematic units which collaborate on initiatives. Each SG has a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) focal point, however none on a full-time basis.<sup>10</sup> Figure 17 shows the 2022 budget and expenditure for each SG, as well as their 2023 planned budget.

**Figure 17. Science Groups 2022 Expenditures and 2023 Budget (USD)<sup>66</sup>**



Source: CGIAR Financing Plan Dashboard (accessed November 2023)

<sup>66</sup> Source: [CGIAR Financing Plan Dashboard](#) (accessed November 2023).

### Annex 3: Mapping of Recommendations from the Three SG Evaluation Reports

Areas of Improvement	SG	Rec n°	Addressed to	Recommendations from SG Evaluations
<b>1) Quality of Science (QoS)</b>	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>13</b>	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG & CGIAR management	The Chief Scientist should be responsible for measurable improvement in Quality of Science (QoS) and alignment to Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D) across all science programs.
	<b>ST</b>	<b>10</b>		Expand the research focus on consumer demand, food environments, food safety, loss and waste, and connect supply to demand across value chains.
	<b>ST</b>	<b>11</b>		SPs should develop joint research activities and innovations for responding to global polycrises.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>5</b>	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	At the level of CGIAR's strategy, enhance GI's role in sustainable agri-food systems, promote a common understanding, and drive market intelligence.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>7</b>		Further broaden the internal skills set to include more social scientists, gender, partnerships, and communication experts.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>8.D</b>		Embrace complexity in B4T SP design and implementation and develop an overarching theory of change (ToC) with key stakeholders for shared understanding and ownership.
<b>2) Growing in-country Presence and Integration with National Research Agendas</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>4</b>	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Enhance systematic inclusion of partners in portfolio design, implementation and scaling, develop country strategies for more coherent and coordinated planning, and strengthen CGIAR's country-level leadership and coordination.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>2</b>		Develop country-level strategies and results frameworks aligned with national priorities and in strong connection with NARES.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>3</b>		Strengthen the crucial role of country conveners by allocating adequate budget and establishing clear coordination mechanisms.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>2.a</b>		Better anchor CGIAR work to national research and development agendas, including meaningful involvement of NARES in the design and implementation of CGIAR Portfolio 2025-30.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>5.D</b>		Integrate genetic gains into broader contexts by strengthening geographic integration.

Evaluations of CGIAR's Science Groups: Synthesis Report

Areas of Improvement	SG	Rec n°	Addressed to	Recommendations from SG Evaluations
	ST	2	SP Writing Teams & Leadership / SG & CGIAR management	Improve balance between thematic and geographic convergence.
<b>3) Enhancing Cross-Synergies &amp; Cross-Center Cooperation</b>	RAFS	4	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Operationalize CGIAR's Integration Framework Agreement (2022) through financial and human resources and administrative policies to streamline and harmonize procedures.
	RAFS	8		Improve strategic and operational guidance towards cross-center collaboration, interactions between science programs.
<b>4) Learning for Transitions, Legacy Work</b>	RAFS	1	RAFS SG	Where founding research has been started by RAFS initiatives, identify and complete this investment so that the results can be capitalized in the new science programs.
	GI	1	GI SG	Develop a transitional plan for GI SG for the next six months and roll-out starting in 2025.
	ST	1.B	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG and CGIAR management	Develop system-wide transformation strategy built on learning from SG experience and consolidate work, especially in countries where various initiatives are already engaged with a ST focus.
	GI	9		Transition to a new era of transformative change in GI: reflect on past efforts, implement cyclical learning.
<b>5) Strengthening Partnerships and Scaling</b>	ST	4	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Enhance systematic inclusion of partners in the portfolio design, implementation and scaling as per the 2024 Partnership & Advocacy Framework.
	GI	1.C	GI SG	Enhance breeding programs and partnerships: strengthen and increase communication between CGIAR and NARES breeding programs and facilitate public-private partnerships.
	GI	2	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG and CGIAR management	Enhance partnership effectiveness and communication in B4T SP proposal and implementation.
	RAFS	9		Concentrate scaling innovations and managing scaling partnerships in a single scaling program for better coordination.
<b>6) Strengthening Impact Areas</b>	RAFS	12	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG and CGIAR management	Strengthen the focus on IAs in the context of medium- and long-term processes within a six-year business cycle, address the possible isolation of important sub-themes, appoint a single point of thematic leadership for issues of strategic importance, and protect gains from initiatives/SGs.
	ST	7		Mainstream climate adaptation and mitigation across the entire portfolio.
	ST	9		Elevate nutrition and dietary diversification across the entire SP portfolio.

Areas of Improvement	SG	Rec n°	Addressed to	Recommendations from SG Evaluations
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>15</b>		Align work on gender, equity, and social inclusion with the Gender Strategy being developed.
<b>7) Internal and External Capacity Development</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>8</b>	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Invest in local capacity development for integrated systems research, and in-country research capacity to apply integrated systems approaches to research.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>6</b>		Formalize and systematize the PhD student experience and enhance postgraduate researcher contributions to the delivery of the research portfolio.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>2.b</b>	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG and CGIAR management	[B4T] Offer short, impactful training-of-trainers modules (TT) for scientists on partnership identification, creation, and management.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>3.c</b>		Cultivate leadership with a seed business mindset and provide leadership training.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>4.c</b>		Partner for strategic roll-out and operational excellence, and design and implement training programs.
<b>8) Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessments (MELIA)</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>5</b>	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Revise PRMF and strengthen MELIA processes and capacities to ensure that they capture how ST SG existing outputs and future system transformation-related outputs link to outcomes and impact.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>8.D</b>		Embrace complexity in B4T SP design/implementation and develop an overarching ToC with key stakeholders for shared understanding and ownership [also under QoS).
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>14</b>	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG and CGIAR management	SPs should systematically design and implement M&E frameworks and plans.
<b>9) Governance and Management, HR</b>	<b>GI</b>	<b>3.c</b>	Science Programs Writing Teams and Leadership; SG management; CGIAR Management	Cultivate leadership with a seed business mindset and develop an effective leadership team.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>6</b>		Insist on a system-wide optimization mindset.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>11</b>		Reassess the current expectation of convening and meeting across the science delivery structure to set governance and communication norms from the outset of implementing SPs/Accelerators.
	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>10</b>	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Develop unified guidelines and procedures on performance indicators for staff assessment and quality control mechanisms.

Areas of Improvement	SG	Rec n°	Addressed to	Recommendations from SG Evaluations
<b>10) Financial Transparency and Efficiency</b>	<b>RAFS</b>	<b>5</b>	CGIAR Integrated Partnership	Operationalize the combination of pooled and bilateral funding by providing specific guidelines.
	<b>ST</b>	<b>6</b>	Science Programs Writing Teams & Leadership; SG and CGIAR management	Address funding shortages and inefficiencies in financial and human resource management through a regular review and feedback mechanism.
	<b>GI</b>	<b>7</b>		Rationalize resource allocation, ensure financial stability to support long-term planning and continuity, and ensure transparent budget allocation.



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