

CGIAR Center External Reviews: International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Review Report

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JUNE 2026



INDEPENDENT ADVISORY
AND EVALUATION SERVICE

INDEPENDENT SCIENCE FOR
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

CENTER
EXTERNAL
REVIEW

Citation: CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES). 2026. CGIAR Center
External Reviews: International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Review Report. Rome: IAES.
<https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications>

Photo credits: Ariyal Beel, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Shutterstock). Ariyal Beel is the largest remaining wetland close to Dhaka, Bangladesh. It is home to many flora and fauna. Locals seen here collecting Nymphaeaceae flower.

A note about this report: IWMI's external review

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first in a series of CGIAR Center External Reviews.

In a newly instituted evaluation and assurance activity, CGIAR's System Council is funding the Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) to make available external reviews to all CGIAR Centers. IAES selects independent and external review panels from its roster of experts to perform such Center External Reviews (CERs), according to a standardized approach, to allow system-wide synthesis of major lessons. The reviews have a strong learning orientation and are intended to be conducted periodically as a support to center boards, management, staff, and partners.

The Board of Governors of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) commissioned an external review of IWMI, the first in this series.

The IWMI Review was a milestone for CGIAR. It was the first CER in a newly instituted series of such reviews. It was a testing ground to find the correct balance between a standardized suite of indicators and a contextualized understanding of the unique characteristics of the Center. The review piloted approaches to gather data and bring these data together to support external evaluation, such as the self-assessment stage. It experimented with the correct analytical approach for the external panel to address a Review Framework that includes six reference statements – what does a healthy CGIAR Center look like? – and eight evaluative criteria.

The evaluative criteria draw heavily upon the CGIAR Evaluation Policy and the CGIAR Quality of Research for Development Frame of Reference. Hence, for CGIAR's Advisory Bodies, CERs are also an opportunity to draw upon Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) thought-leadership and engage in cross-functional evaluative and review approaches between the IAES Evaluation Function and ISDC.

IWMI thus has been the subject of the review, the evaluand, and IWMI was also a partner in piloting the process. Being the first, a range of approaches and methods to conduct the review have been tested with IWMI. The process *per se* required a learning orientation and an appetite for partnership, and IWMI has demonstrated these attributes in full. The Director General and IWMI's liaison have been engaged in numerous reflection discussions with IAES. The IWMI Board assembled a task force to engage in key moments of the CER. Likewise, the first review panel has been engaged not only in delivering the external review, but testing the most efficient and effective ways to address the Review Framework. What has been learned in this first CER will benefit all subsequent Reviews across the integrated partnership.

It is opportune in this letter for us to thank IWMI management and board for their engagement, and, likewise, the panel of experts who delivered this Review. We have embarked on a journey together.

We have made a [video \(check out the link\)](#) about this process with IWMI and the Review Panel, that is available on the CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service YouTube channel.

Yours sincerely,



Allison Grove Smith
IAES Director



Professor Üner
IWMI External Review Panel Chair

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Acknowledgments

This Center External Review report of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) was prepared by an external Review Panel chaired by Professor Olcay Ünver, under the guidance and management of Allison Grove Smith, director of CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES). The Panel comprises five subject-matter experts: Olcay Ünver (chair), Deborah Templeton (report lead author), Olatundun Janet Adelegan, George de Gooijer, and John Chesshire, supported by Marta Maria Molinari (evaluation analyst).

IAES and the Review Panel sincerely appreciate the active engagement of IWMI staff and partners, who contributed through preparation of the IWMI self-assessment, focus group discussions, interviews, surveys, document reviews, technical exchanges, and participation in the Colombo visit and validation meeting. The Review would have been impossible without the engagement and leadership of Mark Smith, IWMI director general, and the IWMI liaison for the Review, Lili Delwaide (advisor, director general). The Review commissioner, IWMI Board of Governors, appointed a review task force that included the IWMI Board Chair Henk Ovink, as well as Board members David Molden, Imtiaz Khan, and Richard Golding, that served as a sounding board at key moments of the Review. Their time, inputs, and candid reflections were instrumental in shaping the Review.

A steering forum of Magali Garcia (Independent Science for Development Council, ISDC), technical staff in the IAES team (Amy Ruth Beaudreault, ISDC Secretariat lead, and Ibtissem Jouini, Evaluation Function senior manager), as well as the Review chair, the IWMI liaison, and the IAES director, strengthened both the technical and operational implementation.

CGIAR's System Council funds Center External Reviews. The overall process benefits from an *ad hoc* consultative group comprising (during the period this review was implemented): the chair of the Integrated Partnership Board (through 12 June 2026), the System Council's Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) members Ruben Echeverría and Thomas Miethbauer, the CGIAR's Executive Managing director on behalf of its Global Leadership Team, members of the IAES Evaluation Reference Group, the CGIAR Partnership Internal Audit executive, and the chair of the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC).

In addition to the analyst appointed to the Panel, IAES analysts Samriti Maharjan, George Theuri, and Gaia Gullotta worked on the project. Thanks for their tireless support to the data collection and analytical work, in teamwork with Marta Maria Molinari. IAES and the Review Panel also acknowledge Matt Armstrong for his early contributions to the design of the CER and guidelines, and for supporting the onboarding of the Panel. One rich data source was the IWMI bibliometrics data set supplied by Science-Metrix, an Elsevier company. Federica Bottamedi, Ines de Suso Gonzalez Iraola, and Kelly Blank were fundamental in communications, visualizations, layout, and editing for the CER and associated knowledge products.

Finally, the Review Panel acknowledges the logistical, administrative, and organizational support to the Review. Special thanks is extended to Agnes Fojta for her dedicated support throughout the process, and Nilupuli Pethiyagoda and logistics support team at IWMI in Colombo for their kindness and professionalism during the headquarters visit.

Summary and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is on a positive transformational trajectory. The Review reveals an institute with strong strategic foundations, a distinctive water-security mandate, a substantial and diversified output base, broad policy-facing engagement, extensive partnerships, growing operational reach, and an expanded resource pool.

The Review Panel's overall assessment is positive. IWMI remains highly relevant in a changing global landscape where water is increasingly central to climate, food systems, biodiversity, disaster-risk reduction, public health, and sustainable development agendas. Its role as CGIAR's water-focused center gives it a clear organizational value proposition within the CGIAR Integrated Partnership. The Review also finds broad effectiveness in IWMI's strategic alignment, delivery capacity, output production, partnerships, and policy-facing work, alongside selected evidence of uptake and operational use. Efficiency is assessed positively, but conditionally: IWMI has adapted actively to rapid growth, funding volatility, and changing CGIAR arrangements. The Panel recognizes that workload and absorptive-capacity pressures reflected several interacting factors, including IWMI's own growth aligned to its Organizational Growth Strategy, evolving delivery arrangements, and the wider CGIAR portfolio and governance transition, changing reporting and portfolio-development requirements, and shifting center/[CGIAR] system roles. These pressures make workload, absorptive capacity, risk management, assurance, operating-model clarity and systems maturity important issues for sustaining performance at larger scale. It is evident that IWMI's work is used and valued in multiple contexts. IWMI's next hurdle is to systematically track and communicate its impact.

The Review does not call for strategic re-direction or organizational re-design. It concludes that IWMI's next phase depends on organizational maturation: strengthening evidence and learning for sustained contribution; tuning systems, operating arrangements, and capacity to the scale of growth; and making fuller strategic use of partnerships, outputs, and positioning. These priorities are forward-looking and strengths-based. They are intended to help IWMI translate its relevance, mandate, and organizational assets into visible thought leadership, credible contribution evidence, and sustained development value.

Box 1. Review conclusions about IWMI

The Review concludes that IWMI is:

- **Highly relevant**, because its water-security mandate is increasingly important in the global agenda and within CGIAR's food, land, water, and climate systems work.
- **Broadly effective**, with strong strategic alignment, delivery capacity, output production, partnerships, policy-facing engagement, and selected evidence of uptake and operational use.
- **Actively adaptive**, having managed rapid growth, funding volatility, and CGIAR transition through evolving systems, partnerships, shared services, and operating arrangements.
- **In need of organizational maturation**, not re-direction: its next phase depends on evidence, learning, systems, capacity, quality governance, partnership architecture, and stewardship keeping pace with growth and diversification.
- **Well-positioned** to strengthen its value proposition, by making its water-related science, tools, partnerships, policy engagement, and contribution pathways more visible and better evidenced.

Synthesized Findings

The Review drew on a mixed-method evidence base, including documents, surveys, interviews, site-visit, program monitoring data, and bibliometric analyses collected during the Center External Review (CER) process. This evidence was assessed through **six reference statements** and then synthesized across statements into **seven cross-statement findings**. The synthesis was conducted by comparing the findings that emerged under each statement, identifying recurring patterns across statements, and distinguishing organization-wide issues from statement-specific observations.

Institute-wide issues became the organizing principle for the Panel to group related findings around common organizational themes. Findings were checked against the evidence base and review criteria and only those that were sufficiently supported across the review material retained. These cross-statement synthesized findings inform the Panel's overall conclusions on IWMI's current position and evolving trajectory, highlighting areas of strength alongside areas where further organizational development is important (Box 1). They are to be read as an interconnected and multifaceted assessment of IWMI's trajectory.

Based on the evidence, the Panel views IWMI's expanded visibility, portfolio, partnerships, operational reach, and resource base as major strengths. Yet these same strengths also increase the demands placed on governance, partnership management, quality assurance, evidence and learning systems, and operating arrangements. The review is forward-looking in this sense: it considers IWMI's current strengths and performance alongside whether its organizational systems and operating capacities are maturing at a pace commensurate with IWMI's expanded portfolio, partnerships, and operational footprint.

- 1. Strategy and strategic learning.** The review found strong evidence that IWMI has a clear strategic direction and substantial delivery capacity, supported by the 2024–30 Strategy, aligned with CGIAR and broader water-security priorities, extensive output production, policy-facing engagement, operational partnerships, and an expanding organizational footprint. The systems needed to use this strategic framework consistently for learning, progress measurement, contribution tracking, and adaptive management are maturing.
- 2. Outputs, use, and impact.** The review found strong evidence that IWMI has built a substantial and diverse output base—including publications, datasets, and digital tools—alongside active policy engagement and operational collaboration. Evidence is less systematic after delivery, particularly on uptake, reuse, sustained use, organizational adoption, beneficiary reach, downstream outcomes, and longer-term contribution.
- 3. Systems and practices.** IWMI has many effective practices and established systems in place, including strategy development, publication processes, Open Access, fiduciary controls, and regional responsiveness, which provide an important foundation for the institute's performance. However, the Review revealed that while some systems are mature and well-documented, others are recent or partially embedded, resulting in variable application across functions, countries, and output types.
- 4. Absorptive capacity and quality control.** IWMI's recent growth successfully expanded its visibility, portfolio diversity, and global footprint, supported by a leadership team highly willing to adapt to external shifts. This expansion strengthened the institute's regional presence and allowed for broader engagement with funders and partners. It also altered the nature of IWMI, placing pressure on staff capacity, bandwidth management, and internal workloads. Because this rapid portfolio growth directly coincides with multiple concurrent internal¹ transitions—such as evolving knowledge platforms, operating-model adjustments, and a heavier reliance on partners for project implementation—the review notes signs that

¹ This report references contextual drivers for internal changes. As a member of CGIAR's Integrated Partnership, certain internal transitions are a direct reflection of rapid Partnership-wide change.

absorptive capacity, workload, and quality-control arrangements require close attention as IWMI continues to grow.

5. **The Matrix Model.** IWMI's Matrix Model successfully supports flexibility, responsiveness, and cross-boundary expertise mobilization, matching the complexity of work that requires technical, geographic, partnership, and implementation perspectives to come together.² When roles, reporting lines, authority, priorities, workload, non-project time, and accountability lack clarity, the model generates operational strain. Resolving these structural pressures is increasingly critical, as the institute navigates a period of rapid growth, changing funding conditions, and expanding reliance on implementing partners.
6. **Partnership architecture and evolution.** Partnerships represent one of IWMI's most visible strengths, supported by extensive collaborations with governments, research institutions, regional organizations, funders, and other CGIAR centers. Anchored by place-based relationships and deep organizational social capital, these networks directly enhance IWMI's contextual relevance, technical delivery, scaling capabilities, and policy-facing engagement. However, as the institute's portfolio grows and increasingly relies on larger, partner-dependent delivery models, the overarching partnership framework must adapt to successfully manage this transition and mitigate partner-related risks, particularly those that may be more likely to occur when relying on external implementing partners.
7. **Quality, digital, data, and lifecycle systems.** In keeping with delivery of its mission, IWMI's output portfolio diversified significantly beyond traditional publications to include a wide array of datasets, digital tools, dashboards, and AI-enabled products, allowing the institute to reach diverse users and support practical development outcomes. Quality control, data, and lifecycle systems have not matured at the same pace or uniformity across these varied output types. While arrangements for publications, repositories, and Open Access are comparatively well-established, other emerging output types—such as digital tools, models, and dashboards—face uneven frameworks for quality assurance, validation, maintenance, and long-term continuation beyond the project lifecycle.

Recommendations

The Panel's **eight recommendations** are consolidated and strategic, focusing on the capabilities and conditions requiring attention. They are designed to support IWMI's transformational trajectory, but do not constitute an implementation plan. The emerging recommendation areas were brought to the Validation Workshop, and the IWMI Board Task Force engaged in a round of draft recommendation discussion. Chapter 6 explains how each recommendation is grounded in statement-level assessment, synthesized findings, and related implications. The detailed statement-level assessments and implications of this report provide a more specific context for internal follow-up. These **high-level recommendations** focus on: (1) evidence, learning and contribution; (2) organizational systems, operating capacity, and growth; and (3) partnerships, outputs, and positioning.

- **Recommendation 1.** Build on IWMI's strong alignment foundations to strengthen strategic learning and adaptive management across the institute.
- **Recommendation 2.** Strengthen IWMI's evidence base for sustained contribution and impact through proportionate follow-up beyond delivery.
- **Recommendation 3.** Consolidate IWMI's existing and emerging organizational systems without losing local adaptability.

² Matrix management is a management concept, and the [Project Management Institute](#) provides a useful summary. IWMI operates under a Matrix organizational structure. Research Group Leaders report to Strategic Program Directors, while Country Representatives report to the Regional Directors for Impact (Asia and Africa). Local Country Office staff report directly to their respective Country Representative.

- **Recommendation 4.** Strengthen IWMI's capacity to sustain growth and manage transformation risks.
- **Recommendation 5.** Make IWMI's operating model fit for the next phase of growth and impact by strengthening clarity, accountability, and continuity.
- **Recommendation 6.** Position IWMI's partnerships as a strategic architecture for impact, learning, and accountability.
- **Recommendation 7.** Build on IWMI's strong publication, repository, and Open Access systems to strengthen proportionate quality and lifecycle governance for its diversified output portfolio.
- **Recommendation 8.** Reinforce IWMI's global thought leadership and distinctive value proposition.

Details of the report underpin the eight recommendations. To obtain a specific and granular view, recommendations should be read together with later chapters of the report. Chapter 3 explains the synthesized cross-statement findings that led to the recommendations. Chapter 4 provides the detailed statement-level assessment and evidence reasoning. Chapter 6 explains how each recommendation is grounded in that assessment. Annex 1 retains the more detailed statement-level findings, implications, signals, and implementation context that may help IWMI consider follow-up in specific areas.

The report structure is intended to make recommendations both strategic and usable. Recommendations identify the consolidated directions that the Panel considers most important for IWMI's next phase, while the statement-level implications and signals provide more granular material for internal consideration by IWMI leadership, research leaders, functional leads, regional and country teams, and administrative managers. The implications and signals should not be read as additional findings or recommendations; rather, they help IWMI translate the report's conclusions into possible follow-up actions, sequencing choices, ownership discussions, resourcing considerations, and monitoring arrangements.



1. Introduction

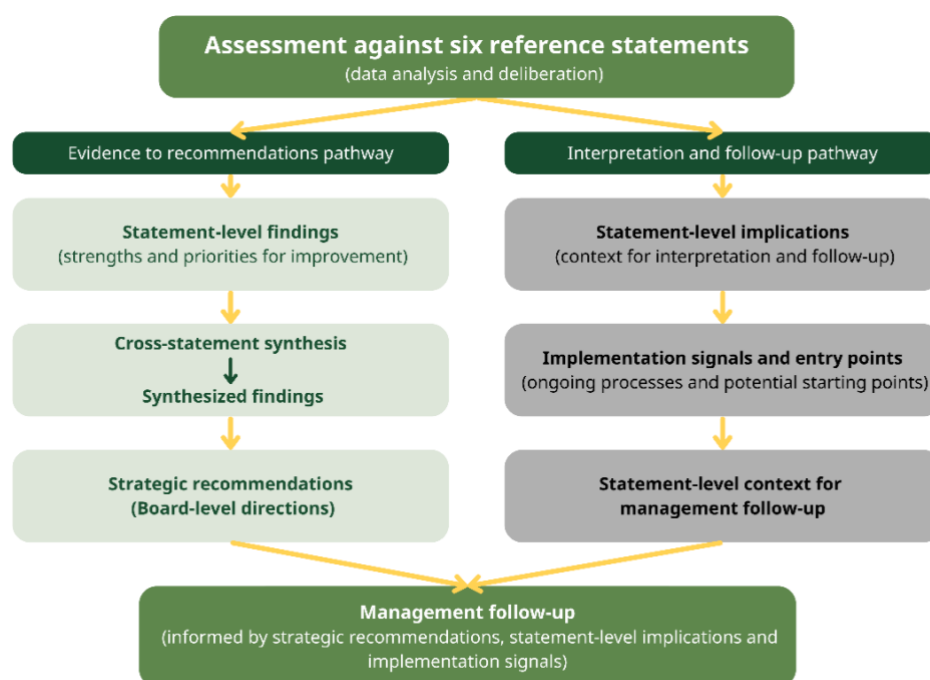
1.1. Report Structure

The report presents the external Review Panel's assessment of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and intends to support recommendation implementation. It brings together several related but distinct elements. This report includes the following chapters:

1. **Introduction:** Orientation explaining the Center External Review (CER) purpose and scope, IWMI background, IWMI's review period and boundaries, and CER structure.
2. **Basis of Assessment and Evidence Approach:** Methodology detailing the evidence base, reference statements and criteria, data quality, remote interviews, site visits, and assessment limitations.
3. **Overall Assessment and Cross-Statement Synthesis:** Main synthesis presenting the panel's overall organizational assessment, the synthesized cross-statement findings, and the links between those findings and the strategic recommendations in Chapter 6.
4. **Assessment Against the Six CER Statements and Criteria:** Detailed subsections for each statement and criteria.
5. **Conclusions and Way Forward:** Integrative closing focusing on forward direction, organizational implications, and management attention.
6. **Recommendations:** Sets out the consolidated, eight Board-facing recommendations emerging from the review. These recommendations are pitched at a strategic, holistic level.
7. **Annexes:** Supporting documentation, available on a separate document.

Report components are intended to be read together, while maintaining a clear distinction among them to serve the needs of different types of readers. The strategic recommendations represent the Panel's consolidated advice. The cross-statement findings explain the organizational reasoning behind those recommendations. The statement-level implications (Annex 1) are not recommendations but retain more detailed material that may inform possible specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound actions within specific organizational areas. The signals and implementation context are neither findings nor recommendations; they indicate recent or ongoing developments that may help IWMI connect future actions to existing efforts, and identify where further attention may be needed.

Figure 1. The journey from evidence to recommendation



Note: Synthesized findings provide the evidence basis for strategic recommendations. Statement-level implications and implementation signals provide additional context for interpretation and follow-up.

1.2. CER Purpose, Objectives, Scope, Commissioner and Users

CERs are designed to provide holistic, independent assessments of CGIAR centers. Building on the legacy of the External Program and Management Reviews (EPMRs), the renewed approach responds to present-day demands for research quality and impact, coherence, accountability, and strategic alignment across CGIAR's integrated partnership, as well as the use of a center-specific lens to delve deeply into each organization. CERs represent a new assurance mechanism in CGIAR to complement other third-line, independent assurance activities.

In line with the mixed methods approach to evaluation, the external Review Panel systematically triangulated evidence from different sources to identify consistent patterns, complementary insights, and areas of differing perspective. This approach supported a balanced assessment by bringing together documentary evidence, stakeholder perspectives, and observed practices.

Supported by the CGIAR System Council, which dictates and finances the overall workplan of IAES, the IWMI Board of Governors commissioned CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) to engage an external Review Panel to conduct the IWMI CER.³ The IWMI review carried out the following:

- Considered the center's activities and evidence for a six-year period.
- Focused on IWMI's research for development delivery through the lens of systems, structures and strategy, and operational support, management and governance: all business units/divisions, offices, and also the center board are included in the review.
- Used IWMI's self-assessment against six standard reference statements supplied by IAES that define key attributes for a well-functioning CGIAR center delivering research for development.
- Maintained a strong formative emphasis to support future IWMI efforts, with a summative element to support accountability.

The conceptual framework for the IWMI review rested on the application of eight evaluation criteria to six standard reference statements. Evaluation criteria were rooted in CGIAR's [Evaluation Framework and Policy \(2022\)](#), which itself draws on standard Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria and the [Independent Science for Development Council \(ISDC\) Technical Note \(2020\)](#) defining Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D).

The overarching objective of the CER was to support organizational learning and accountability for the IWMI Board of Governors and management, and CGIAR partners.

1.3. Operating Environment

Over the 2020-25 period, IWMI experienced significant operational pressures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with economic and political volatility in Sri Lanka and other host countries. Moreover, the operating environment was marked by structural change and realignment within CGIAR, alongside a rapidly shifting global landscape.

1.3.1. Structural Change and Realignment within CGIAR

IWMI is a member of the [CGIAR Integrated Partnership](#) and contributes to CGIAR's mission of delivering science and innovation that advances the transformation of food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis ([CGIAR System Organization, 2021](#)). The period in scope (2020-25) for the IWMI external Review was marked by significant portfolio and governance changes within CGIAR, building on previous decades of CGIAR evolution ([Lynam et al., 2024](#); [Meinke et al., 2023](#)).

There were three distinct CGIAR research portfolio arrangements during the review period. The year 2021 marked the final year of the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs), which concluded one year earlier than originally envisaged in their approved proposals ([WLE, 2016](#)). IWMI served as the lead center for the CRP on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE), which was independently evaluated at its conclusion ([WLE, 2020](#)). Following the launch of the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy ([CGIAR System Organization, 2021](#)), CGIAR introduced more than 30 research Initiatives grouped under three broad Action Areas. IWMI participated in 22 of the 32 Initiatives, with leadership roles in NEXUS Gains ([Uhlenbrook and Ringler, 2021](#)) and the [Regional Initiative Ukama Ustawi](#). In contrast to the CRP model, CGIAR Initiatives were established as individual projects within the broader One CGIAR

³ Being undertaken by an unbiased external Panel engaged and overseen by independent CGIAR advisory bodies, allows the review to provide independent observations, including about the functioning of the Board.

Research Portfolio and Management Framework. The CGIAR Research Portfolio 2025–30 represents the most recent portfolio arrangement ([CGIAR, 2024](#)). IWMI engaged in seven of the eight Science Programs, three of the four Accelerators, and Scaling for Impact Program, all of which touch on the topic of water systems.

CGIAR illustrated in its Portfolio Narrative (2024) how previous Initiatives map to the current portfolio.⁴

Alongside changes in the organization of research, CGIAR also introduced several revisions to its governance and leadership architecture ([CGIAR System Council Chair's Summary, 9th Meeting, 2019](#)). A major development affecting CGIAR centers was the announcement of One CGIAR, which advanced ambitions for governance and management unification. During this period, many staff assumed responsibilities spanning both center and CGIAR-wide functions, and in some cases multiple organizational roles. A subsequent governance development was the Integrated Framework Agreement ([CGIAR System Management Office, 2023](#)), which formalized again revised governance and operating arrangements within CGIAR and has been described as reflecting a federated model of collaboration among centers and system entities.

Each portfolio and governance arrangement was associated with adjustments to systems, structures, staffing, program design, reporting requirements, governance processes, and center-level and partnership-level board composition. These changes shaped how IWMI engaged within CGIAR over the review period. IWMI also entered a tripartite shared services arrangement with [WorldFish](#) and the [International Rice Research Institute](#), two other Asia-based CGIAR centers, during the years under review.

1.3.2. Rapidly Shifting Global Landscape

Water became more prominently placed in the global landscape during the review period, because of its systemic role in climate change, biodiversity, food security, disaster-risk reduction, public health, and sustainable development agendas. Many major global risks are increasingly experienced and managed through water, even when they are discussed under other policy labels. This has increased expectations for practical solutions, stronger institutions, and more effective translation of knowledge into action.

The UN 2023 Water Conference marked a visible increase in global attention to water and water-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation. At the same time, its follow-up architecture remained centered on voluntary coordination and implementation, rather than on binding commitments or organizational arrangements. This points to a continuing reliance on existing actors and partnerships to support countries moving towards practical results.

Climate change, biodiversity, and food security continue to dominate the global agenda, and water is the linking element between them. Both are affected by major uncertainties arising from disruptive changes in physical conditions, demography, technology, economics, and politics. These shifts are changing the context in which water risks are understood, financed, governed, and managed.

The combined uncertainties make the water domain increasingly research- and knowledge-intensive. Research and knowledge are needed to inform decisions on water-resource management, flood protection, drought management, innovation, allocation, infrastructure, and governance. Despite the enormous significance of transboundary water resources, many of these decisions remain centered at the national level, where countries decide how water is allocated, how governance is organized, what legal and institutional mandates apply, and how costs and responsibilities are distributed.

The capacity to advise governments, conduct research, and formulate policy also changed over the course of IWMI's existence. Many countries now have institutions, data systems, and research capacity related to water but still lack the necessary national context and capacity. What may also still be missing, in different combinations across countries, are clear legal mandates, policy frameworks, technical infrastructure, financing architecture, scientific networks, and a clear understanding of basin- and regional-level needs.

The funding landscape is also shifting. Traditional funders are changing their level or form of engagement, while climate-related finance, state-based funders, foundations, companies, and other actors are creating a more complex financing environment. This increases the importance of diversified financing strategies, credible country-level propositions, and the enabling conditions needed to turn finance into implementable water-management pathways.

This evolving context strengthens the relevance of IWMI's mandate and experience. IWMI is well established in country-level practice and has developed expertise across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa

⁴ See Figure 3 on page 17 of the [CGIAR Portfolio Narrative 2025-30](#).

(MENA) region. More notably, IWMI has a comparative advantage in combining research, policy engagement, data, and partnerships across all scales—local, country, basin, regional, and global. Its value proposition can be strengthened further by remaining responsive to the changing requirements of water management at the specific levels where many critical decisions are made.

1.4. IWMI Background and Strategic Context

IWMI is a CGIAR research center dedicated to advancing water security through research-for-development. IWMI's [2024-30 Strategy](#), launched during its 40th anniversary, sets an ambitious agenda under the motto "Driving Action. Propelling Change." The Strategy emphasizes the importance of responsive, interdisciplinary and systems-oriented research for development (R4D) through diverse collective action partnerships to address global water insecurity. The Organizational Growth Strategy 2024–30 complements this strategic agenda by setting out the organizational growth pathway needed to support delivery at greater scale, including resource mobilization, partnerships, systems, workforce capability, country and regional presence, and organizational performance.

At the center of IWMI's research and innovation efforts are **three Strategic Focus Areas**:

- Mitigating Water Risks: Enhancing resilience to climate and hydrological shocks.
- Overcoming Global Inequalities: Promoting gender equality, youth engagement, and inclusive water access.
- Managing Water Sustainably: Scaling solutions to meet growing and competing demands for freshwater.

These are enabled by **four Transformational Levers**:

- Water Data Science.
- Water Governance.
- Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion (GESI).
- Scaling, Finance and Investment.

The Strategic Focus Areas and Transformational Levers use inputs from across IWMI's four Strategic Programs to avoid programmatic silos.⁵ In addition, between 2024 and 2025, Regional Impact Directors for Africa and Asia were appointed to provide strategic oversight to the Country Representatives and Country Managers, and a Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Impact Assessment (MELIA) Hub was established to enable systemic and robust capture of progress toward strategic outcomes and impact across IWMI's portfolio, complementing the existing integrated CGIAR monitoring platform with center-level granularity.

IWMI receives funding through the CGIAR Trust Fund (W1, W2 and W3) and bilaterally. Over the six years ending in 2025, IWMI's total funding more than doubled from USD 19 million to USD 48.5 million.⁶ Bilateral funding saw the largest percentage increase (138%) with W1/W2 funding increasing by 68%. While the relative proportion of funding from the different funding sources fluctuated over the six-year period, overall, bilateral funds delivered more than half of IWMI's total funding. Notably, the proportion of W1/W2 funds fell significantly from 50% in 2024 to 32% in 2025, with bilateral funds offsetting the decline (Table 1).

⁵ The **four strategic programs** are: (1) Water, Food and Ecosystems; (2) Water, Climate Change and Resilience; (3) Water, Growth and Inclusion; and (4) Water Data Science.

⁶ Financial data sourced from IWMI's financial statements and that contained in the [CGIAR Financial Report Dashboard/Center Analysis](#) are not always consistent. As IWMI is the focus of this CER, IWMI's audited [IWMI Financial Statements 2020-24](#) were the primary source for financial data.

Table 1. IWMI grant revenue by source of funding: 2020-25

Year	USD million					% of total Grant Revenue			
	CGIAR Trust Fund (TF)			Bilateral	Total Grant Revenue	CGIAR Trust Fund (TF)			Bilateral
	W1/W2	W3	Total TF			W1/W2	W3	Total TF	
2020	4.8	1.7	6.5	12.5	19.0	25.3	8.9	34.2	65.8
2021	6.3	0.9	7.2	14.1	21.3	29.6	4.2	33.8	66.2
2022	10.5	1.0	11.5	16.3	27.8	37.8	3.6	41.4	58.6
2023	18.8	2.9	21.7	16.9	38.6	48.7	7.5	56.2	43.8
2024	24.1	2.3	26.4	21.5	47.9	50.3	4.8	55.1	44.9
2025	15.3	3.4	18.7	29.7	48.4	31.6	7.0	38.6	61.4
Total	79.8	12.2	92.0	111.0	203.0	39.3	6.0	45.3	54.7

Source: [IWMI Financial Statements 2020-25](#).

IWMI's top funders for the six years ending in 2025 include the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), US Agency for International Development (USAID), Helmsley Charitable Trust, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Bank, and European Commission.⁷ Moving forward, IWMI's Organizational Growth Strategy 2024–30 sets an organizational target of USD 100 million annual expenditure by 2030 through increased funder diversification, while reducing W1/W2 funding to 20% of total secured funding.⁸

Over the period 2020-25, IWMI led WLE and played a supporting role in five other CRPs (2020-21),⁹ participated in 22 of the 32 CGIAR Initiatives (2022-24),¹⁰ and is active in seven of the eight current CGIAR Science Programs, three of the four Accelerators, and the Scaling for Impact Program (2025-30).¹¹

1.5. IWMI's Review Period and Boundaries

Moving forward, CERs will consider a center's activities and evidence over a five-year period. However, due to the lag between initial planning and implementation, the IWMI Review covers a six-year period from 2020-25. While IWMI's self-assessment aligns with this 2020–25 timeframe, the center also provided supplementary 2026 data. Post-2025 observations and evidence are retained for traceability and follow-up, but they are excluded from the formal findings and recommendations.

2. Basis of Assessment and Evidence Approach

2.1. IWMI Self-Assessment

A core element of this review is the center self-assessment against six pre-defined and standard reference statements. IAES designed the self-assessment framework to enable IWMI to systematically address 21 indicators and 66 sub-indicators, spanning the six focus areas.¹² Table 2 lists the six statements and the 21 aligned indicators.

⁷ IWMI Self-assessment Report (2025) (Internal unpublished report, p.4).

⁸ Ibid. (Internal unpublished report, p.41).

⁹ [CGIAR Financial Report Dashboard/Center Analysis](#) (Center: IWMI; Reporting year: 2021)

¹⁰ [CGIAR Financial Report Dashboard/Center Analysis](#) (Center: IWMI; Reporting year: 2024)

¹¹ [CGIAR Trust Fund Dashboard/Trust Fund Disbursements](#) (Center: IWMI; 2025-2030 Research Portfolio)

¹² The Self-Assessment Report did not provide a narrative nor a self-assessment score for the sub-indicator: Adherence to research ethics frameworks applicable for CGIAR, center and national operations.

Table 2. Six assessment statements and related indicators

Assessment statement	Indicators
Strategy Statement 1. The center implements an up-to-date strategy responsive to global demands and challenges, situated within the broader priorities of CGIAR Integrated Partnership, and that frames the center's comparative advantages.	1. Strategic Planning and Alignment 2. Strategic Leadership and Theory of Change (ToC) 3. Strategic Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Impact Assessment and Foresight (MELIAF), Data Availability and Use
Quality and relevance of scientific outcomes Statement 2. The center's scientific and technical outputs demonstrate high quality and high relevance both to scientific progress and prioritized development outcomes.	4. Producing Research Outputs 5. Using Research Outputs
Partnerships ecosystems Statement 3. The center participates strategically and effectively in its partnership ecosystems, inside and out of CGIAR.	6. Partnerships and Strategy 7. Attracting and Retaining Funding Partners 8. Partnership Operations and Agility 9. Coordination and Information Sharing
Impact Statement 4. The center contributes to impact, deploys its convening power, and engages with evidence-driven scaling strategies in complex development systems.	10. Impact Pathway and Evidence 11. Policy Influence and Scaling 12. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication 13. Performance and Targets
Good place to work and good actor Statement 5. The center is a good place to work and a good actor: it is an efficient and ethical steward of human, natural and financial resources.	14. Infrastructure and Resources 15. Financial Accountability 16. Workforce and Management 17. Capacity and Compliance 18. Normative Framework Alignment
Leadership and governance Statement 6. The center's governance and leadership, and enabling environment at global, regional and national scales, foster the center to pursue its mission, now and in the future.	19. Governance and Leadership 20. Policy and Oversight Environment 21. Culture and Change Management

Source: Detailed Assessment Matrix (internal document developed for center self-assessments)

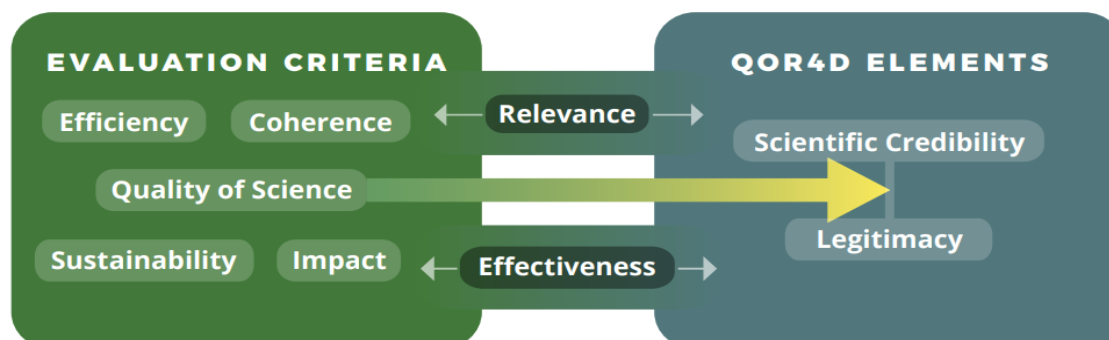
2.2. Review Framework: Weaves Together Six Statements of Center Health with Evaluation Criteria

The CER makes use of the existing Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D) framework developed originally by the ISDC with CGIAR scientific leadership. The CGIAR Evaluation Policy employs QoR4D elements, and the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria as Figure 1 illustrates.¹³ CGIAR's QoR4D framework recognizes that good science is necessary but not sufficient to achieve transformational change. The application of the QoR4D-based criteria in

¹³ More details can be found in the [CGIAR Evaluation Framework and Policy](#) and the [ISDC QoR4D](#).

this review considers multiple dimensions of research performance, including the effectiveness of internal mechanisms, the robustness of research processes, and the quality and contribution of outputs, supporting a comprehensive assessment of how research is designed, implemented, and translated into scientific and practical value.

Figure 2. CGIAR evaluation criteria and QoR4D elements



Source: [CGIAR Evaluation Framework and Policy](#)

In this CER, the conceptual framework relies on data, analysis and findings, aggregated and structured around the statements reflecting IWMI's organizational health, and assessed against the **eight evaluative criteria**: (1) Relevance; (2) Coherence; (3) Legitimacy; (4) Scientific Credibility; (5) Efficiency; (6) Effectiveness; (7) Impact; and (8) Sustainability.

Mapping each of the statements against the criteria was undertaken by systematically comparing each of the statements with each of the criteria narratives to determine alignment. Table 3 presents the results of that systematic process.

Table 3. Mapping six reference statements against eight evaluation criteria

Criteria	Statements					
	1. Strategy	2. Quality and relevance of scientific outcomes	3. Partnerships ecosystems	4. Impact	5. Good place to work and good actor	6. Leadership and governance
Relevance	X	X	X			
Coherence	X		X			
Legitimacy		X	X		X	X
Scientific credibility		X				
Efficiency	X				X	
Effectiveness	X	X	X	X		X
Impact	X			X		
Sustainability				X		X

Source: [CGIAR Evaluation Framework and Policy](#); [ISDC Quality of Research for Development Framework](#); CGIAR CERs: Terms of Reference for IWMI

2.3. Review Questions for IWMI

Review questions that define the focus of this CER, aligned with the criteria, are presented in Table 4. The statement-level sub-questions and their associated findings are presented in Annex 3.

Table 4. Key review questions

Criteria	Key review question
1. Relevance	Q1a. How does the center ensure that its research contributes to the advancement of science? Q1b. How does the center align its priorities to the practical needs of the development sector?
2. Coherence	Q2a. How does the center align programmatically with other organizations and actors within CGIAR partnership? Q2b. How does the center align with networks outside of CGIAR in the sector(s) pertinent to the center strategy?
3. Legitimacy	Q3. To what extent does the center conduct its research and governance in an ethical, inclusive, and accountable manner, consistent with relevant normative frameworks?
4. Scientific credibility	Q4a. What is the quality of internal mechanisms to assure high scientific standards? Q4b. To what extent were the internal mechanisms consistently applied? Q4c. How is this reflected in the rigor of outputs and their contribution to advancing scientific knowledge and informing practice?
5. Efficiency	Q5. How has the center adjusted its strategic priorities and operational practices in response to fluctuations in funding availability over the past five years?
6. Effectiveness	Q6a. What factors contributed to the center's relative progress in its strategic areas over the past five years? Q6b. Which specific strategy domains have seen the most significant advancements, relative to other domains and (any) established targets?
7. Impact	Q7a. What evidence exists of the center's impact on social, environmental and economic outcomes (published over the past five years)? Q7b. What are the key historical and contextual factors that have shaped these results? Q7c. What evidence exists that the center has contributed to the five Impact Areas in the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy?
8. Sustainability	Q8a. To what extent is the center positioning, both as an organization and in its research outputs of the past six years, to provide lasting benefits? Q8b. What strategies has the center adopted to improve its market positioning and increase its chances of securing sustained and increased funding for its research?

2.4. Limitations and Mitigation Measures

The review was based on a mixed-method evidence base, including IWMI's self-assessment and supporting documentation, staff, partner and SME/private-sector surveys, interviews, discussion and listening sessions, site-visit observation, bibliometric and policy-citation analysis, and monitoring data. The limitations identified below were mitigated through triangulation across evidence sources, methods, and Panel deliberation.

Stakeholder evidence collected through three surveys, more than 50 interviews, a focus group meeting, and several discussions reflected the views and experiences of respondents. Responses may have been affected by social desirability, bias, perceived organizational expectations, power dynamics, trust barriers, or differing interpretations of key concepts. These risks were mitigated through confidentiality arrangements, voluntary participation, shared interview protocols, experience-based questioning, follow-up probing where clarification was needed, and triangulation with documentary evidence, organizational data, and other sources. The SME/private-sector survey generated a limited number of responses and was therefore treated only as supplementary contextual input.

Direct observation was limited by the review timeframe. Five members of the Panel visited IWMI headquarters, a project site, and selected Sri Lanka-based partners but could not directly observe IWMI's other country or regional operations. This was mitigated by drawing on documentary evidence, interviews, surveys, and

organizational data covering wider IWMI activities. The Panel member who was unable to participate in the site visit was subsequently briefed on the visit observations and related evidence through debriefs.

Bibliometric and monitoring data provided valuable additional evidence but had some limitations. Data sources covered different time periods and used different classifications, making full reconciliation across sources impractical. In addition, data discontinuities across the six-year review period in the CGIAR monitoring system limited the extent to which some indicators could be assessed as continuous trends. Some indicators were useful for describing output volume, visibility, collaboration, or policy-citation patterns, but could not by themselves support evaluative judgements in the absence of stable time series, comparable baselines, or appropriate organizational benchmarks. These data were therefore interpreted cautiously and triangulated with other evidence sources.

Finally, the review covered the period 2020–2025. More recent developments were considered only as signals of direction of travel, implementation context, or possible entry points for follow-up, and were not used as formal review-period findings.

2.5. Triangulation, Data Sources and Analysis

Triangulation was addressed in three ways. The panel systematically triangulated analyzed evidence from different data sources to identify consistent patterns, complementary insights, areas where perspectives differ, and to strengthen confidence in findings. The three key types of triangulation used to increase the validity and reliability of the findings were:

- **Methodological triangulation.** In line with the mixed methods approach to evaluation, different data collection methods were used to obtain qualitative data (e.g., document review, focus group discussions, and key-informant interviews) and quantitative data (e.g., online staff and stakeholder survey and CGIAR monitoring dashboards; bibliometric and policy citation data).
- **Data triangulation.** Data were collected using the same method but from different sources (e.g., interviews with IWMI leadership, local and national research staff including early career staff, partners, and field site visit; surveys with partners and staff).
- **Investigator triangulation.** A panel member was responsible for reviewing one or more of the six assessment statements for which they were not the lead reviewer. In the case of Statement 6: Leadership and Governance, there were two lead reviewers and as such, no “triangulating” reviewer.

This approach supported a balanced assessment by bringing together documentary evidence, stakeholder perspectives, and observed practices. The key data sources, methods, and data analysis are:

- **Self-assessment report and annexed documents.** The IWMI self-assessment provides a structured, evidence-based reflection of the center’s performance and progress, serving as the primary entry point for review. It covers **six core areas**: (1) Strategy; (2) Scientific Outcomes; (3) Partnerships; (4) Impact; (5) Good Place to Work and Good Actor; and (6) Leadership and Governance. The Panel conducted an expert desk review of the report and its 255 annexed documents to critically evaluate findings across six reference statements, identifying areas where available evidence could be strengthened.
- **Online staff, partner and private sector/small-medium enterprises (SME) surveys.** Online surveys were sent to all IWMI staff, 62 verified partners,¹⁴ and seven verified private sector/SME stakeholders.¹⁵ These surveys were purposively designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data to better understand staff and stakeholder experiences, perspectives, and ideas across the six normative statements. Response rates reached approximately 71% for staff, 52% for partners, and 71% for private sector/SME stakeholders. Methods used to analyze this data included descriptive analysis, ordered logistic regression, correlation and regression, trend analysis, cross-organizational benchmarking, and qualitative analysis.
- **Bibliometric Analysis Data.** The CER used independent bibliometric analysis data to assess IWMI’s publication outputs from 2020–25. Quantitative analysis was used to evaluate research performance, positioning, and influence against established indicators such as research output volume, thematic distribution, and normalized citation impact. To provide insight into IWMI’s contribution to knowledge

¹⁴ The survey was sent on 9 March 2026 to an initial sample of 65 stakeholders from organizations engaged with IWMI. Three emails were undelivered, resulting in a verified sample of 62.

¹⁵ The survey was sent on 9 March 2026 to an initial sample of nine stakeholders from organizations engaged with IWMI. Two emails were undelivered, resulting in a verified sample of seven.

and policy engagement, the analysis also examined collaboration patterns, geographic reach, authorship characteristics, and references within policy-related documents.

- **Semi-structured interviews.** The review panel conducted 52 online, semi-structured interviews using a paired-interviewer format. To ensure targeted data collection, the panel used customized question sets tailored to specific stakeholder types while maintaining strict confidentiality. To accelerate qualitative analysis and enable rapid evidence triangulation, the interview data was extracted, standardized, and coded in alignment with the six normative statements, cross-referenced with the review sub-questions and thereby aligned with eight evaluative criteria.
- **Center and research site visit.** Triangulation of the data was strengthened through observation and 24 discussion opportunities during the site visit. This visit allowed the Panel to inspect IWMI's headquarters, hold formal and informal conversations with staff, interview local partners, and visit the Colombo wetlands.

Generative AI tools were used in a limited support role during preparation of selected synthesis, drafting, and presentation materials for the review. Their use was confined to organizing material, comparing wording options, checking internal consistency, and improving clarity of presentation. All analyses, interpretations, assessments, conclusions, and recommendations were produced, reviewed, validated, and finalized by the Panel.

2.6. Quality Assurance

CER steering forum. The IAES established a steering forum to ensure the IWMI Review conforms to CGIAR's Evaluation Standards, uses QoR4D as a frame of reference, and aligns with the Terms of Reference (ToR) and CER guidance note requirements. The steering forum comprised the CER Panel Chair, the IAES Director (serving as CER manager due to the pilot nature of the project), the IWMI Director General's liaison, an ISDC member, and technical staff from both the IAES/Evaluation Function and the ISDC Secretariat. The aim of the forum was to bolster quality assurance by offering ongoing strategic and methodological advice; improving access to data, documents, and informants; and commenting on the clarity, validity, and usefulness of the Inception Note, survey questions and draft report. Communications between the Panel and the IAES were handled through periodic steering forum meetings and bilaterally between the Chair and the IAES Director. To safeguard objectivity, the steering forum did not make final decisions on scope, findings, or recommendations, approve or reject reports, interfere with evaluator independence, or act as a project management or contract authority.

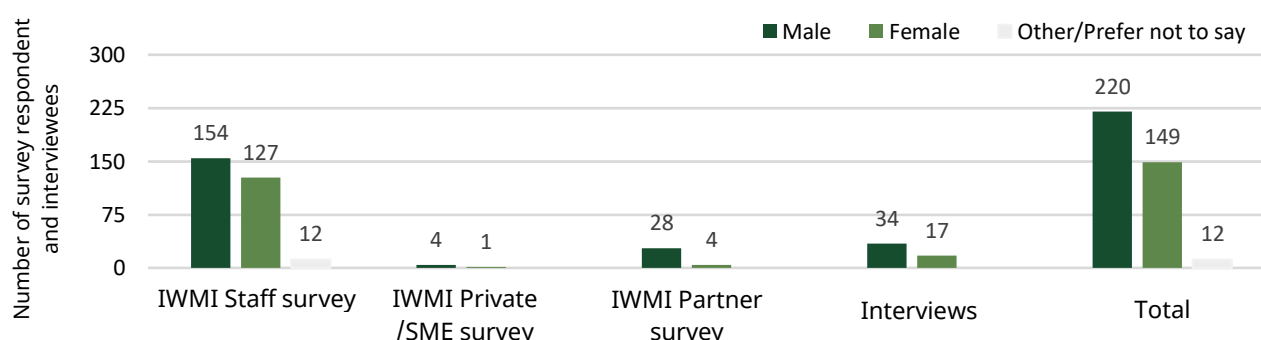
Validation meetings. Two validation meetings were held: one with IWMI management and staff, and another with the CER Board task force. The purpose of these meetings was to share the Panel's emerging findings and invite strategic reflection, helping to inform the refinement of the recommendation areas in preparation for report completion.

2.7. Inclusion Practices of the Review

The review adopted a participatory approach to stakeholder engagement and evidence collection, combining online surveys, key informant interviews, consultations, and field-based activities. Survey respondents and interviewees represented a broad spectrum of stakeholders with diverse roles and functions, including IWMI staff, board members, CGIAR entities, external groups, and partners including funder and private/SME collaborators. Furthermore, the review captured a wide range of organizational memory, drawing insights from both newly appointed collaborators and long-standing partners.

Gender-disaggregated data reveals that male respondents represented most participants in the partner and private sector/SME surveys. Conversely, the staff survey and key informant interviews reflected a comparatively more balanced gender distribution (See Figure 4).

Figure 3. Gender disaggregation of survey respondents and interviewees



3. Cross-Statement Synthesis

This chapter draws the statement-level evidence together to show what the review reveals about IWMI.

The cross-statement synthesis is not a separate evidence stream or an additional assessment framework. It is the Panel's organizational reading of patterns that recur across the six statements. It brings together strengths, qualifications, and direction of travel, and priorities for organizational maturation. This synthesis provides the analytical bridge between the detailed statement-level assessment in Chapter 4 and the strategic recommendations in Chapter 6.

3.1. Overall Assessment

Viewed across the six statements and the eight evaluative criteria, the Panel's assessment addresses the central CER question of **organizational health**: the extent to which IWMI demonstrates the attributes of a well-functioning CGIAR center delivering research for development. Evidence supports a positive judgement. IWMI is a sound organization, strategically relevant, and strongly positioned as CGIAR's water-focused R4D center. Its mandate, scientific and technical capabilities, country presence, policy-facing work, partnerships, governance arrangements, and diversified output base provide a strong foundation for continued relevance and contribution.

The review also points to broad effectiveness. IWMI has maintained a clear strategic direction, expanded its operational reach, produced a substantial and diverse portfolio of scientific, technical, policy-facing, data, digital, and capacity-sharing outputs, and sustained extensive engagement with governments, funders, partners, CGIAR actors, and users of its work. The evidence shows strong delivery capacity and active policy and partnership engagement, alongside selected evidence of uptake and operational use. The efficiency picture is also broadly positive, but more conditional. IWMI has adapted to rapid growth, funding volatility, and CGIAR System transition. At the same time, the review found that growth and diversification are testing staff capacity, management bandwidth, workload, risk management, quality assurance, operating-model clarity, and absorptive capacity. The Panel therefore does not treat efficiency as a simple claim that all arrangements are optimal; rather, it finds that IWMI has adapted actively and constructively, while needing stronger organizational systems to sustain efficiency and effectiveness at larger scale.

The synthesized findings are not a list of isolated weaknesses; rather, they show how IWMI's strengths, growth, water-security mandate, and CGIAR role bring into focus the need for organizational maturation in three connected foci:

- Evidence, learning, and contribution.
- Organizational systems, operating capacity, and growth.
- Strategic use of partnerships, outputs, and positioning.

These foci help demonstrate how the synthesized findings, statement-level implications, and strategic recommendations connect, and how the findings point to organizational maturation, rather than strategic re-direction.

3.2. Synthesized Findings Emerging Across the Six Statements

The cross-statement synthesis was derived by analyzing commonalities across the six CER statements (see Annex 1 for detailed statement-level findings, implications, and signals). This synthesis identified where related strengths, qualifications, and priorities for improvement intersected across multiple statements to reveal a broader pattern. The synthesized findings carry the Panel's cross-statement organizational judgement: what IWMI's strengths add up to, where its direction of travel is positive or still maturing, and which organizational conditions are most important for sustaining relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and contribution in the next phase.

Statement-level implications played a distinct role in this process, ensuring traceability and anchoring the follow-up actions within their specific operational contexts. The final recommendations in Chapter 6 are built directly upon the synthesized findings. This structure allows the Panel to keep the core recommendations consolidated and strategic, while preserving the detailed statement-level material for reference, implementation planning, and internal follow-up. The report therefore separates **four related functions**: (1) the statement-level assessments in Chapter 4 provide the detailed evidence base and reasoning; (2) the synthesized findings in this chapter provide the Panel's cross-statement organizational judgement; (3) the recommendations in Chapter 6 translate that judgement into consolidated strategic advice; and (4) the statement-level implications in Annex 1 preserve more

detailed follow-up material for specific organizational areas without becoming additional recommendations. The signals and implementation context identify recent or ongoing developments that may be relevant for follow-up, without being treated as formal findings unless supported by review-period evidence.

The synthesized findings form an interconnected picture: strategy and delivery are the foundational elements; outputs, growth and partnerships show a continuing evolution and expansion; while evidence systems, organizational consistency, operating-model clarity, and lifecycle governance point to the conditions needed to sustain momentum and contribution over time. The remainder of this section describes the cross-statement findings, while the next section demonstrates how these synthesized findings led to the corresponding strategic recommendations.

3.2.1. Strategy and Strategic Learning

Across the six statements, the Panel found strong evidence that IWMI possesses a clear strategic direction and substantial delivery capacity. The 2024–30 Strategy provides a robust organizational framework for growth, positioning, and alignment with CGIAR and broader water-security priorities. The review also highlighted:

- **Extensive output production.** An analysis of bibliometric data for the 2021–25 period yielded 970 full-count¹⁶ and 292 fractional-count¹⁷ publications. These works accumulated 12,437 citations, resulting in an average relative citation¹⁸ score of 1.44 on a full-count basis and 1.11 on a fractional-count basis. Notably, 11.8% of these publications ranked within the top 10% of the most-cited papers globally,¹⁹ while the field-weighted CiteScore maintained a baseline of approximately 1.1.²⁰ Additionally, examination of the CGIAR Results Dashboard (2022–25) revealed evidence of 1,423 knowledge products attributable to IWMI.
- **Active policy-facing engagement.** The CGIAR Results Dashboard (2022–25) listed 88 unique policy-change records.²¹ Moreover, IWMI publications were cited by numerous prominent policy sources, including FAO (59) and other United Nations entities (68), the World Bank (28), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) (23), the Joint Research Centre (9), the Institute of Development Studies (8), the Asian Development Bank (8), the Stockholm Environment Institute (8), and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (7).²²
- **Operational partnerships.** The CGIAR Results Dashboard (2022–25) provided 5,530 partnership records and an analysis of IWMI’s Collaboration profile revealed 78.8% international co-publications, 10.9% domestic inter-organizational co-publications, 6.3% public-private co-publications, 6.4% NGO co-publications, and 8.5% IWMI-only publications.
- **Expanding organizational footprint.** Growth is directly reflected in IWMI’s elevated engagement across premier global platforms. Key examples include active participation in the UN-Water Conferences, the UNFCCC COP processes, and successive World Water Forums.

These findings support the Panel’s assessment that IWMI remains highly relevant. That relevance is anchored in its water-security mandate, its role within CGIAR, and its ability to connect science, policy, partnerships, and country- and regional-level engagement around water-related development challenges.

The next-stage priority is the practical application of this strategy as an instrument for learning and adaptive management. While ToCs, Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Impact Assessment (MELIA) evidence, indicators, contribution tracking, and learning loops are being developed to support IWMI’s management and reporting, their implementation is still maturing. The evidence suggests that IWMI’s overarching strategic framework is currently stronger than the CGIAR systems used by IWMI and the internal systems available to measure progress, learn from implementation, assess contribution, and adjust priorities consistently across the institute.

Consequently, the assessment distinguishes between the strength of IWMI’s strategic design and alignment and the still-developing evidence base on how consistently the strategy translates into implementation, measurable

¹⁶ Whole publication count credited to the center in the corresponding grouping (period, classification category). ScienceMetrix IWMI dataset, internal document May 2026

¹⁷ Fractional publication count that evenly shares credit across contributors. Ibid.

¹⁸ Average of Relative Citations based on full publication counting. Proxy for scientific impact/influence. Ibid.

¹⁹ Values above 10% indicate above-expected (world) impact. Values below one indicate the opposite. Ibid.

²⁰ Citation impact indicator capturing the impact of the publication venues in which an entity published its outputs (full counting). Proxy for scientific prestige. Values above 1 indicate above-expected (world) citation impact. Values below one indicate the opposite. Ibid.

²¹ There was a total of 93 policy-change records, but five of these were duplicates. Ibid.

²² Ibid.

progress and sustained contribution. The immediate priority is to build on the existing strategy by strengthening learning, monitoring, feedback and contribution-tracking systems so IWMI can test, adapt and demonstrate progress as its portfolio grows.

3.2.2. Outputs, Use and Impact

The review found robust evidence that IWMI produces a broad and diverse set of water-related scientific, technical, policy-facing, data, digital, capacity-sharing, and operational outputs. This output base is central to IWMI's value proposition, demonstrating that the institute's science is expressed not only through publications, but also through applied knowledge assets, tools, platforms, and policy and capacity-sharing products intended for use by stakeholders. Statement-level evidence also confirms active policy-facing engagement, strong collaboration, and selected examples of uptake and operational use. Together, these elements support the Panel's positive assessment of IWMI's scientific credibility and delivery effectiveness.

At the same time, evidence becomes less systematic after production and dissemination. Across several statements, the Panel found more limited organizational tracking of output reuse, adaptation, sustained use, organizational adoption, beneficiary reach, downstream outcomes, and longer-term contribution. This qualification does not diminish the value of IWMI's output base; it clarifies the evidence needed to understand how far that value continues beyond delivery and how it contributes over time.

For IWMI's next phase, the organizational priority is therefore proportionate follow-up of selected outputs, interventions, tools, policy engagements, and partnerships where sustained use, learning value, strategic importance, or risk justify further tracking. Stronger follow-up would support organizational learning, accountability, resource mobilization, and more credible communication of IWMI's water-related contribution.

3.2.3. Practices and Systems

The Panel found that IWMI has many effective practices and systems in place. These include strategy development, publication workflows, Open Access, fiduciary controls, risk and ethics architecture, partner engagement, project-level delivery, regional responsiveness, and emerging arrangements for knowledge management, MELIA, and quality support. These practices help explain how IWMI maintained delivery, expanded its portfolio, and operated across diverse water-related contexts during a period of organizational growth and external change. These systems and practices underpin IWMI's effectiveness and efficiency by enabling delivery across a growing and increasingly complex portfolio.

The cross-statement issue is not the absence of systems, but uneven maturity, integration, and use. Some arrangements are well documented and comparatively mature, while others are recent, partially embedded, or applied differently across functions, countries, output types, partnerships, and organizational processes. In several areas, the review found that policies or procedures exist, but practical uptake, platform integration, consistent application, and organizational learning remain less developed.

This finding points to consolidation rather than a complete re-design. IWMI has been strengthening its systems while managing rapid growth, external funding pressures, changing CGIAR arrangements, expanded partnerships, and a more diversified portfolio. Moving forward, IWMI should continue to consolidate the frameworks and systems that enable sustained growth, quality, and impact—as reflected in the Organizational Growth Strategy (2024–30)—while preserving the local adaptability that underpins its country and regional relevance.

3.2.4. Absorptive Capacity and Quality Control

IWMI's recent growth is an important part of its positive trajectory. It has expanded IWMI's reach, visibility, portfolio diversity, and operational possibilities, and reflects demand for IWMI's work in a period when water-related risks are becoming more prominent in development, climate, and food-systems agendas. It also created broader opportunities for engagement with funders, partners, and country and regional actors.

As highlighted in the Organizational Growth Strategy (2024–30), the same growth changed what IWMI needs from its internal capacities. A larger, more diverse, and more partner-dependent portfolio requires more staff capacity, management bandwidth, systems integration, quality control, risk management, assurance, partner oversight, internal communication, and workload management. These pressures arose during a period in which IWMI's growth and internal transitions were taking place alongside wider CGIAR portfolio and governance changes.²³

²³ Such as evolving reporting and portfolio-development requirements, shifting center/system roles, new policies, changing knowledge-management platforms, operating-model adjustments, and greater reliance on implementing partners.

The finding is therefore not a caution against growth. It is a judgement about the conditions for sustaining growth. IWMI has adapted, but sustaining its trajectory will require attention to sequencing, resource realism, absorptive capacity, and quality assurance arrangements that protect staff capacity, manage risk, and preserve organizational credibility during expansion.

3.2.5. Matrix Model

IWMI's Matrix Model reflects the nature of its work. The institute operates across research domains, countries, regions, projects, partnerships, and strategic programs, and many water-related challenges require technical, geographic, policy, partnership, and implementation perspectives to be brought together. The review found that the Matrix Model can support flexibility, responsiveness, and cross-boundary mobilization of expertise.

The same features also make the model demanding to manage. The evidence points to strain where roles, reporting lines, decision authority, priorities, workload expectations, non-project time, and accountability are unclear. These pressures are especially important as IWMI grows, works through more partner-dependent delivery models, and operates in a changing CGIAR and funding environment.

For IWMI's next phase, the issue is not whether flexibility is needed, but how the Matrix can remain workable at a larger scale. Its value will depend on clearer roles, realistic workload expectations, decision rules, continuity, and management arrangements that support delivery, staff wellbeing, quality, and accountability.

3.2.6. Partnership Architecture and Evolution

Partnerships are one of IWMI's most important strengths and a central part of how the institute works. The review found extensive collaboration with governments, research institutes, funders, CGIAR actors, regional bodies, implementing partners, local organizations, and other stakeholders. These relationships support country relevance, technical delivery, policy engagement, scaling, and access to users and decision-makers. IWMI's place-based relationships and long-term social capital are important assets for a water-focused institute whose work depends on practical engagement with institutions, communities, and policy processes.

The review also found that IWMI's partnership model is evolving. Growth, larger projects, and increasing delivery through implementing partners have expanded the importance of partnership management. This points to a need for clearer partnership architecture, that supports impact, learning and accountability, and strengthens role clarity, oversight and partner-related risk management.

As these roles expand, partnerships become more than a route to delivery. Partnerships are part of how IWMI sustains country relevance, learns from implementation, manages shared accountability, and connects water-related research to adoption and longer-term use. Clearer partnership architecture would help the institute preserve the strengths of its place-based relationships while making their contribution to impact pathways more visible and better managed.

3.2.7. Quality, Digital, Data, and Lifecycle Systems

IWMI's output portfolio has diversified well beyond traditional publications. Alongside scientific papers, the institute now produces datasets, digital tools, dashboards, models, AI-enabled products, early-warning systems, operational platforms, training materials, policy products, technical briefs, capacity-sharing products, and partner-facing knowledge outputs. This diversity strengthens IWMI's value proposition because it allows water-related science and analysis to reach different users through different pathways.

The systems around these outputs have not matured at the same pace. Publication, repository, dissemination, and Open Access arrangements are comparatively well established. For several other output types, the review found more uneven arrangements for quality assurance, validation, documentation, versioning, usability, maintenance, handover, data protection, intellectual asset management, and post-project continuation. These issues are especially important where outputs remain in use beyond the project period or support decisions by governments, partners, communities, or operational actors.

Diversified outputs create diversified responsibilities. IWMI's scientific credibility and practical contribution depend not only on producing knowledge assets, but also on maintaining confidence in their quality, accessibility, stewardship, and continued value. Stronger, proportionate lifecycle governance across output types would help protect the value of this expanding portfolio without imposing a uniform or burdensome model.

3.3. From Synthesized Findings to Strategic Recommendations

The synthesized findings provide the basis for the strategic recommendations presented in Chapter 6. Some recommendations respond to more than one finding, and some findings inform more than one recommendation. This reflects the organizational nature of the review.

The recommendations in Chapter 6 consolidate the directions that follow from the Panel's assessment of IWMI's trajectory as a water-focused R4D institute: stronger evidence and learning, more consistent systems and operating capacity, more strategic use of partnerships and outputs, and clearer positioning of IWMI's distinctive contribution. The statement-level implications and signals retained in Annex 1 provide additional traceability and context for IWMI's possible follow-up, without becoming additional recommendations.

4. Assessment Against the Six CER Statements

Chapter 4 presents the statement-level assessment that underpins the cross-statement synthesis and strategic recommendations. In Section 4.1, each of the six CER statements is treated in turn, with a concise synthesis of the Panel's judgement followed by a comparison with IWMI's self-assessment and self-score pattern. The statement narratives draw on the detailed indicators and sub-indicators addressed in the self-assessment but present a synthesized form, rather than reproducing each indicator and sub-indicator mechanically. The more detailed statement-level findings, implications, and signals are retained in Annex 1 for traceability and follow-up.

The chapter also reads the assessment through the eight evaluation criteria. Section 4.2 provides a synthesized criteria-level reading. Fuller criteria- and sub-question-aligned detail is retained in Annex 3.

Where relevant, the statement narratives also refer to recent or ongoing organizational developments as signals and implementation context. These are used to show direction of travel and possible follow-up relevance, but they do not change the Panel's scoring and are not treated as formal review-period findings unless supported by evidence from the review period.

4.1. Synthesis of Statement Assessment

4.1.1. *Statement 1. The center implements an up-to-date strategy responsive to global demands and challenges, situated within the broader priorities of CGIAR integrated partnership, and that frames the center's comparative advantages.*

Synthesis of the Panel's judgement

Substantial evidence confirms that IWMI demonstrates strong strategic planning, organizational alignment, and communication, alongside a distinct comparative advantage in water-based science within CGIAR and beyond. Building on the foundations of its 2019–23 Strategy, the current 2024–30 Strategy places water security at its core, positioning it at the nexus of food security, climate resilience, and inclusive growth. This internal framework is aligned with the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy and the five CGIAR Impact Areas, ensuring that IWMI's research agenda directly advances global development priorities. Furthermore, IWMI's comparative advantage within the CGIAR Integrated Partnership is evidenced by spearheading the [CGIAR Water Systems Integration Roadmap 2024–30](#)—a landmark partnership framework that aligns water-related science across CGIAR centers. The institute's strategic vision is operationally anchored by the 2024–30 Organizational Growth Strategy, which defines clear pathways for resource mobilization targets and systemic upgrades. Under this growth plan, IWMI's goal is to secure and implement a USD 100 million per year R4D portfolio by 2030. While IWMI assessed this target to be achievable—representing just 0.2% of current official development assistance funding—management recognized the operational shifts required. Achieving this growth will necessitate scaling up from smaller projects to larger Initiatives, deepening and diversifying funding mechanisms, expanding geographical reach, and strengthening organizational capacity to sustain long-term expansion.

Over the review period, IWMI gained increased visibility in the development arena. For example, IWMI was actively engaged in the UN 2023 Water Conference, the UN 2021 Food Systems Summit, and UNFCCC COP processes. The institute also routinely participates in high-level forums and commissions, such as the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) consultations for the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy Dialogues and hosts the Global Commission on the Economics of Water secretariat. By leveraging its robust global footprint and direct local stakeholder networks, the institute drives a systems-oriented approach that effectively caters to national, regional, and global needs and priorities, inclusiveness, and climate risks. Nevertheless, some interview feedback suggests that IWMI could be more consistently visible in major external water and agriculture reports,

sector platforms, and agenda-setting publications. Strengthening this visibility would support IWMI's distinctive positioning and global thought-leadership role, including through selected flagship products and clearer external narratives around areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) for water.

The partner survey (N=31) closed-ended responses were strongest on the alignment between IWMI's strategy and that of partner organizations (100%). Likewise, staff survey results provide evidence of positive perceptions of IWMI's strategic alignment with CGIAR and global goals (more than 95%). Staff survey responses were less strong on the use of foresight alongside monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) in decision-making (less than 70%). This is consistent with the Panel's finding that IWMI's strategic framework is stronger than the systems currently available to use strategy for learning, contribution tracking, and adaptive management.

While IWMI's Strategy was broadly praised by interviewees for its collaborative development and regional adaptability, some stakeholders emphasized the need for sharper strategic focus, better alignment between structure and strategy, and increased agility in the face of rapid shifts in geopolitical and funding conditions. Furthermore, an external interviewee questioned whether other CGIAR centers sufficiently leverage IWMI's unique comparative advantage, noting that some centers still independently undertake water-related research, where IWMI has a comparative advantage. The review suggests that IWMI should continue to project itself as a premium thought leader targeting high-impact water management research and innovation.

There is also limited strategic-level evidence regarding the utility and application of IWMI's organizational-level ToC and MELIA framework, systems, and data. Interview data confirms that the institute's ToC was developed after the 2024–30 Strategy was finalized. While the development of the institute's ToC and the Strategic Program contribution matrices were valuable for diagrammatically linking core activities to high-level outcomes (HLOs) and the five CGIAR Impact Areas, the practical utility of the ToC remains limited for the following reasons:

- **Lack of causal narrative:** The ToC lacks explanatory narratives and rigorous evidence to confirm that the causal logic is realistic or achievable within the Strategy's timeframe and budget.
- **Omission of complexity:** There is no explicit acknowledgment of complex change processes, such as nonlinearity, emergence, adaptation, and feedback loops.
- **Hidden assumptions:** Critical assumptions essential to the ToC's functionality remain implicit rather than clearly defined.
- **Lack of contribution tracking:** The framework does not account for the involvement of collaborators, nor does it define their roles in achieving shared programmatic interventions and HLOs.

Notably, IWMI's Country Strategic Roadmaps address most of these issues by explicitly providing clear causal narratives. These roadmaps include comprehensive descriptions of country-level (1) development challenges; (2) strategic priorities for 2024–30; (3) target populations and geographic focus; (4) key partners, including funders; and (5) key interventions, expected outcomes, delivery method and timelines.²⁴

Historically, MELIA functions were driven by individual projects or CGIAR programs, resulting in limited tracking of long-term outcomes through centralized CGIAR systems. Interview feedback attributes these gaps to the fact that CGIAR Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes (MARLO) and Performance and Results Management System (PRMS) indicators and targets do not fully capture IWMI's specific needs, nor has CGIAR sustained these systems consistently over time. Consequently, IWMI invested in strengthening its own performance framework complementary to CGIAR standards, to enhance organizational accountability and provide a more robust evidence base for impact. Although the MELIA team began populating this new platform to track progress across 12 outcome-level and 16 impact-level indicators, the framework is not yet fully operational, and specific targets for these metrics remain undefined.

Review of self-assessment and self-score pattern

The Panel confirms the self-assessment findings that the IWMI's Strategy has evolved to align with CGIAR reforms and CGIAR Impact Areas. It is grounded in multi-level situational analyses that ensure deep alignment with national, regional, and global stakeholder priorities. However, evidence remains limited on how ToC frameworks and MELIA systems guide priority setting and adaptive management, though IWMI is actively strengthening these mechanisms.

Regarding Statement 1, the self-assessment provides self-scores across three indicators and nine sub-indicators. Assessment of the self-score pattern revealed that there was complete alignment between the self-score and the

²⁴ While the Country Strategic Roadmaps were published in 2026—outside the review scope—the preparatory activities occurred during the review period, and a brief review of these Roadmaps is included here.

Panel score (Table 5). IWMI was asked to provide a score for each of the sub-indicators in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR).

For all indicators across all reference statements, the scale ranged from 1-5; see Figure 5. In almost all instances, across all indicators, the self-assessment and panel assessment produced identical scores.

Figure 5. Scale for the Self-Assessment Report



Table 5. Assessment of self-score: Statement 1

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Score (1-5)
Strategic Planning & Alignment	Strategic plan exists and in use	2
	Global commitments	2
	Needs alignment and responsive design, context analysis	2
Strategic Leadership and Theory of Change (ToC)	ToC sets background	3
	Evidence-based targets	3
	Strategic communications	2
Strategic MELIAF Data Availability and Use	MELIAF function(s) in place	3
	Strategic MELIAF use and learning	3
	Data accessible to staff and stakeholders	3

**Self and panel scores were aligned across all sub-indicators*

4.1.2. **Statement 2. The center's scientific and technical outputs demonstrate high quality and high relevance both to scientific progress and prioritized development outcomes.**

Synthesis of the Panel's judgement

The evidence supports a positive overall assessment of Statement 2. IWMI demonstrates a strong and diverse scientific and technical output portfolio, including peer-reviewed publications, reports, policy briefs, capacity-sharing materials, datasets, decision-support tools, dashboards, forecasting applications, and analytical software. This expanded evidence base confirms that output production, dissemination, repository systems, Open Access infrastructure, and policy engagement are among the strongest pillars of the Statement 2 assessment.

The most robust evidence remains concentrated around production and dissemination. Organizational dashboards record a broad range of knowledge products, innovation metrics, policy changes, and partnership milestones. Furthermore, Science-Metrix bibliometric data strengthens confidence in publication volume, scientific visibility, thematic concentration, and cross-institutional collaboration.

Table 6. IWMI-bibliometric analysis summary, 2021-25

Indicator	Value
PUBLICATION VOLUME; SCIENTIFIC & POLICY VISIBILITY	
Publications, full & fractional count	970 and 292
CAGR*, full & fractional count	8.70% and 8.30%
Citations	12,437
ARC, full & fractional count	1.44 and 1.11
Top 10% highly cited publications	11.80%
Field-weighted CiteScore	1.1
Policy-document citations	Cited by FAO (59), UNESCO (45), World Bank (28), IPBES (23), UN (14), JRC (9), UNEP (9), ADB (8)

THEMATIC CONCENTRATION	
Dominant Domain	Applied Sciences (523 publications, 53.9% of output)
Top field	Engineering (298 publications, 30.7%)
2nd field	Earth & Environmental Sciences (266 publications, 27.4%)
3rd field	Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry (144 publications, 14.8%)
Top Topic Cluster	Water Resource Management and Agricultural Sustainability (149 publications, 15.4% of output)
Top Topic of Prominence	Soil Conservation and Land Use Dynamics in Ethiopia (27 publications)
2nd Topic of Prominence	Interconnected Dynamics of Water, Energy, and Food (25 publications)
3rd Topic of Prominence	Irrigation Systems and Smallholder Development in Africa (24 publications)
CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION	
International co-publication share	78.8%
IWMI-only publication share	8.5%
CGIAR co-publication partners	CIMMYT, IFPRI, ILRI, Bioversity, ICARDA, ICRISAT
CGIAR co-publication volume	140 co-authored publications (14.4% of IWMI full-count publications)

*Abbreviations in the table: ADB: Asian Development Bank, ARC: Average of Relative Citations, CAGR: Compound Annual Growth Rate, IPBES: Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, JRC: Joint Research Centre, European Commission

The bibliometric evidence also demonstrates policy visibility and collaborative production patterns, with IWMI publications cited by major international policy organizations and a large majority of publications produced through institutional collaboration rather than IWMI-only authorship.

Staff survey results provide additional evidence supporting the positive assessment of IWMI's research quality, relevance, and collaboration. A large majority of respondents agreed that team collaboration enhances research quality (96.9%), that cross-team collaboration improves publications, and that within-team collaboration enhances research publication (88.3%). Respondents also gave strongly positive ratings to the relevance and perceived impact of IWMI's research. Survey analysis of factors influencing research outputs that support capacity building and policy also points to the importance of internal research practices, particularly clarity of knowledge management, collaboration, and science quality. This suggests that clear and well-communicated knowledge-management systems, effective collaboration, and attention to science quality are perceived by staff as important conditions for research outputs to support capacity building and policy influence. At the same time, the survey evidence points to a somewhat uneven pattern: IWMI is perceived as strong in scientific collaboration, research quality, and relevance, while publishing culture and data practices emerge as comparatively weaker areas. This is consistent with the panel's finding that IWMI has a strong scientific and technical output base, while data management, uptake evidence, and sustained-use tracking remain areas for further organizational strengthening.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion evidence confirms that selected outputs are actively taken up, used, and valued by governments, operational actors, and localized partners. Crucially, these sources also sharpen the primary qualifications: quality, approval, and stewardship arrangements remain highly differentiated by output type. While publication-related quality/review pathways are clearly defined, non-publication outputs—such as digital tools, datasets, and operational dashboards—raise critical operational questions regarding validation, long-term maintenance, organizational capture, handover, and post-project financial sustainability.

Overall, the statement is positively supported. IWMI possesses a robust output base and highly visible applied relevance. The primary areas for future organizational attention are not centered on whether outputs are being generated, but rather on ensuring consistency across different output types, capturing systematic evidence on uptake, mapping downstream outcomes for beneficiaries, and formalizing stewardship and governance systems for non-publication assets.

A larger body of bibliometric and policy-citation data was reviewed, and a selected subset has been included here in support of the Statement 2 assessment. The selected indicators provide useful descriptive evidence on IWMI's

publication volume, scientific and policy visibility, thematic concentration, and collaboration patterns. Some indicators are easier to interpret than others in the absence of a longer time series or comparator group of similar organizations. The value of this evidence will therefore increase in future reviews, when the current data can serve as a baseline for assessing change over time.

Review of self-assessment and self-score pattern

The Panel confirms the self-assessment finding that IWMI has a substantial, diverse, and strong output record. Capacity sharing, technology outputs, uptake tracking, beneficiary mapping, and stewardship of some non-publication outputs remain less consistently established.

A review of the self-score pattern revealed that there was complete alignment between the self-score and the Panel score across the two indicators and seven sub-indicators for Statement 2 (Table 7).

Table 7. Assessment of self-score: Statement 2

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Score (1-5)
Producing research outputs	Publications record	2
	Capacity sharing outputs	3
	Other technical and policy innovations: Policy influence	2
	Other technical and policy innovations: Technology	3
	Collaborator involvement	2
Using research outputs	Approach to knowledge management and governance of strategies	2
	Open Data/Open Access	2

**Self and panel scores were aligned across all sub-indicators*

4.1.3. Statement 3. The center participates strategically and effectively in its partnership ecosystems, inside and outside of CGIAR.

Synthesis of the Panel's judgement

IWMI operates within a diverse partnership ecosystem. According to its Strategy 2024–30, IWMI's mission focuses on research and innovation in partnerships for collective action to transform water systems for sustainable, just, and climate-resilient development. Rather than maintaining conventional external relationships, IWMI embeds partners directly at the core of its operations, treating these networks as dynamic 'partner fields'. Evaluating IWMI's partnership ecosystems requires examining layered networks, organizational experiences, and host-country social capital. The country level serves as the primary arena where high-level principles translate into laws, policies, budgets, and operational institutions, and where localized data and capacity are explicitly required. IWMI has built strong relationships across its operational footprint. This finding was corroborated by the Panel's field site visit to IWMI's headquarters in Sri Lanka, which provided the Panel with a firsthand opportunity to witness how the organization operationalizes its mandates at national level.

A survey of 31 partners showed 90% agreed that IWMI engages with partners in a clear, transparent, and mutually beneficial manner, while 94% of respondents gave positive ratings on effective collaboration, research quality and rigour, output relevance, partnership leverage, and adaptive management. Staff surveys similarly highlighted effective collaboration with CGIAR centres and external partners (96.5%), and coordinating effectively with partners to achieve shared project objectives (95.9%). While staff viewed project-level MEL coordination positively (90.6%), partner responses indicated limited access to IWMI MELIAF data, with only 15.6% rating it positively. Additionally, open-ended responses spoke to opportunities for strengthening communication and dissemination. This supports the Panel's finding that IWMI has a strong and active partnership base, while resource alignment, private-sector engagement, partnership learning, and strategic partnership management remain areas for further attention.

The evaluation found that local-level partnerships function effectively, with the operational focus often leaning more toward development than research. Connections with the Government of Sri Lanka and local communities were reported as being impressive, and local NGOs commented on IWMI's strong links with the government of Sri Lanka noting that the institute serves as a valuable conduit for them to gain government access. Furthermore, decades of capacity development are yielding clear results as local expertise matures, aided by increased access to satellite monitoring and AI tools. However, these country-level partnerships currently do not consistently include goals, defined milestones, or formal exit strategies.

As IWMI expands its footprint and works increasingly through local implementing partners, funding growth may become less directly tied to internal staff expansion. This model can offer economies of scale and speed because local implementers may be cost-effective, rapidly deployable, and retain capacity within the host country. However, managing content, finances, and ethical standards indirectly through external entities introduces compliance and quality control issues. This shifting risk landscape, driven by funding models that channel resources directly to external partners, necessitates a more proactive risk-mitigation framework and a systematic monitoring system.

IWMI contributed to cross-CGIAR alignment through the CGIAR Water Systems Integration Roadmap 2024–30 and participates across CGIAR portfolio arrangements where water is relevant to food, land, climate, resilience, and environmental systems. Operationally, IWMI also participates in shared-service arrangements with WorldFish and IRRI. Bibliometric evidence provides a further publication-level collaboration signal: six CGIAR centers appear among IWMI’s top 25 organizational co-publication partners for 2021–25, together accounting for 140 co-authored publications. This supports the finding that IWMI is scientifically connected within CGIAR, albeit as a limited proxy. Partner survey evidence reinforces the broader partnership-strength finding, with positive ratings on strategic alignment, research collaboration, partnership leverage, and convening capacity.

At the same time, evidence suggests making IWMI’s internal CGIAR partnership role more visible and systematic, including how other centers draw on its water-related expertise and how water-related work across CGIAR is coordinated. Moving forward, IWMI’s Organizational Growth Strategy 2024–30 is to double total funding by 2030 through increased funder diversification, while reducing W1/W2 funding to 20% of total secured funding due to high transaction costs and funding uncertainties.

While donor relationships have generally become more fruitful, high vulnerability to donor volatility remains when funding and interests misalign, as demonstrated when USAID abruptly withdrew from the funding scenery. This dynamic also impacts funding pathways. IWMI could assess suitable access routes for larger-scale propositions to major finance mechanisms—such as center-specific accreditation, including the Green Climate Fund—or deeper engagement with existing and emerging funding sources.

Review of self-assessment and self-score pattern

The Panel confirms the self-assessment finding that IWMI’s score strength lies in its extensive collaborations, particularly with national partners and regional bodies. However, there is room for improvement in systematically embedding co-design methodologies and strengthening centralized partner coordination across the institute.

IWMI self-scores across five indicators and 15 sub-indicators revealed that there was complete alignment between the self-score and the Panel score (Table 8).

Table 8. Assessment of self-score: Statement 3

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Scores * (1-5)
Partnerships & Strategy	Partnership Strategy and typologies	2
	Innovative scaling partnerships	3
	Development, leadership, or management of partnerships	2
	Involvement of partners in design and implementation	3
	Role of partners in host countries	2
Attracting and Retaining Funding Partners	Approach to fundraising/pipeline management	2
	Adequacy of resources and Growth Plans	2
	Matching efforts with mandate and priorities	2
	Innovative finance experimentation (private sector, IFIs & Climate Funds)	3
Partnership Operations & Agility	Partnership development processes	2
	Engaging in deliberate processes with partners to define comparative advantage	3
	Commitment to bottom-up/South-South cooperation	3
	Identifying synergies to leverage resources, avoid fragmentation and share resources with partners according to comparative advantage	2
Coordination & Information Sharing	Coordinated business practices & approach to co-design with partners	3
	Ongoing information sharing	3

**Self and panel scores were aligned across all sub-indicators*

4.1.4. Statement 4. The center contributes to impact, deploys its convening power, and engages with evidence-driven scaling strategies in complex development systems.

Synthesis of the Panel's judgement

During the review period, IWMI evolved its processes to meet the ambitions of Statement 4 through four key mechanisms:

- **Developing ToCs** at organizational, programmatic, and country levels to map daily workstreams to intermediate and strategic outcomes.
- **Shifting to impact-oriented projects** by engaging early with end-users, co-innovators, and partners, while improving methods to identify and broker strategic scaling partnerships.
- **Leveraging knowledge products and modelling tools** extensively to drive national, regional, and global policy dialogues.
- **Designing MELIA frameworks** to consolidate output, outcome, and impact evidence across all projects for use at organizational level.

Staff survey respondents gave positive ratings to partner engagement and communication, including engagement with research partners to communicate results for impact (96.5%), project co-creation (94.7%), use of IWMI knowledge in policy dialogue (95.6%), communication of results to stakeholders (93.8%), and communication to end users (89.4%). Staff also viewed impact as well integrated into project planning, with 92% agreeing that designing for impact is a top priority. Responses were more moderate on tracking progress toward impact (79.6%) and evidence generation through impact systems (80.5%). This supports the Panel's positive assessment of IWMI's policy-facing and impact-oriented work, while reinforcing the finding that systems for tracking, measuring, and evidencing longer-term impact remain less mature.

Interview feedback confirms that IWMI is undergoing an organizational shift from an output-focused to an impact-oriented culture. Researchers are increasingly expected to design Initiatives with impact in mind from the very beginning. These project design processes are viewed as structurally strong because key end-users are actively included from initial project planning through to development, implementation, and dissemination. This transition is strongly validated by stakeholder data: approximately 95% of survey respondents stated that projects actively engage partners in co-design, while 92% affirmed that designing for impact is IWMI's highest priority with project designs consistently articulating a credible, collaborative, and context-specific pathway to impact.

Beyond project design, IWMI also acts as a neutral platform, facilitating critical policy dialogues and building consensus on contested water governance issues. This positioning is supported by internal data, with 96% of staff survey respondents confirming that the institute generates relevant knowledge that effectively informs policy discussions. Furthermore, numerous partner survey respondents cited policy dialogues as a primary example of how IWMI's work drives real-world impact in their specific areas of focus. This qualitative feedback is corroborated by empirical evidence from the CGIAR Results Dashboard (2022–25), which documents 66 distinct cases where IWMI's policy-oriented research was successfully adopted by next-users, alongside 22 instances where a policy was formally enacted because of that research.

Dashboard data also confirms that all IWMI's results for 2023 and 2024 are fully tagged to at least one of CGIAR's five Impact Areas. While 9% of IWMI's 2025 results currently remain untagged, this minor gap most likely reflects processing delays in finalizing recent data rather than strategic misalignment.

Nevertheless, IWMI currently lacks a robust body of organizational-level impact assessment results. A significant disconnect remains between strategic intent and documented evidence of long-term impact, with evidence of change still primarily drawn from short-term pilots, controlled farm trials, end-of-project evaluations, adoption studies, and qualitative assessments. Staff surveys, interviews, and field site visits corroborate these tracking gaps, underscoring that the institute must move beyond simple project reporting toward aggregated data collection across all Initiative sizes. This aggregation is required to provide concrete proof of impact at scale. This tracking deficit is exemplified by long-term policy shifts, which remain uncaptured due to rigid project-level reporting timelines. Furthermore, data from the CGIAR Results Dashboard covering 2017–21 and 2022–25 confirm that IWMI's history of reporting evidence at the outcome and impact levels was limited over the review period.

The institute explicitly acknowledges a shortage of large-scale, program-level impact assessments that track cumulative, long-term investments. Interview feedback confirms that systematic tracking of post-project benefits is currently absent due to high costs, inherent complexity, resource constraints, and a structural mismatch between the time required to scale impacts and standard research lifespans. To remedy this, IWMI is actively

seeking to build a credible body of empirical impact assessments to guide strategic management and organizational learning. However, the panel recognizes that securing financial support for *ex post* adoption and impact studies remains a significant challenge; for instance, a planned collaboration with the CGIAR Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) was cancelled due to budget cuts. To partially address these funding gaps, some interviewees indicated that IWMI is increasingly embedding end-line evaluations directly within new project proposals.

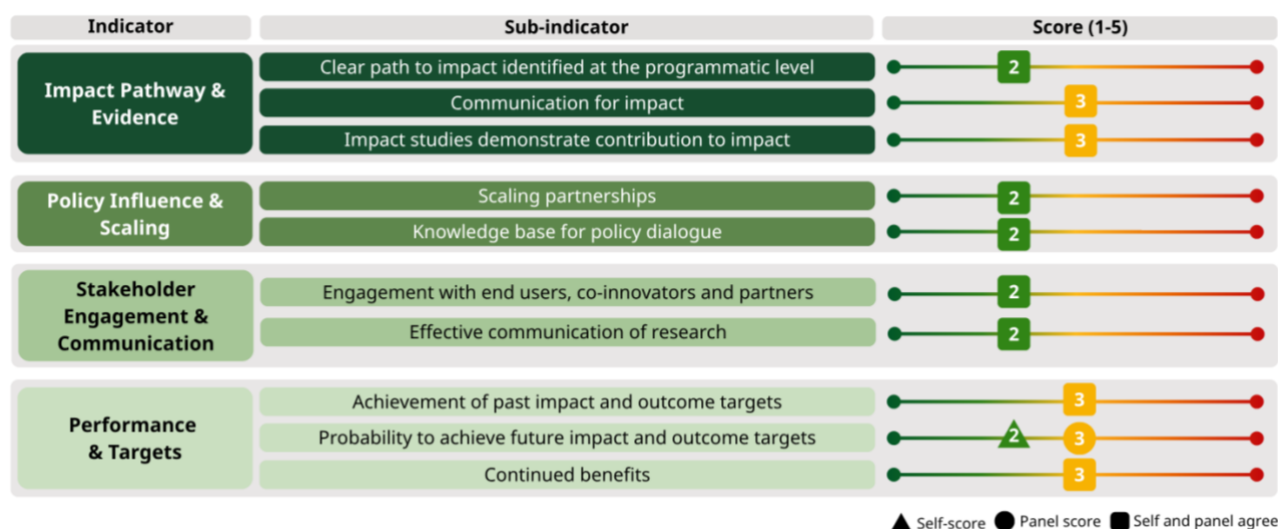
Given the scarcity of flexible funding through CGIAR streams, IWMI could proactively secure dedicated impact assessment financing from donors, specifically targeting legacy projects that show strong potential for long-term, post-project uptake. Depending on the target audience, these large-scale evaluations could be conducted either by IWMI's Economics and Impact Assessment research group or by an external specialist.

Review of self-assessment and self-score pattern

The Panel largely agrees with the self-assessment findings regarding the link between Strategic Programs (SP) activities and intermediate and strategic outcomes. To deepen this integration, the institute is developing standard operating procedures to embed **impact thinking** directly into the proposal stage, complemented by the finalization of country and regional roadmaps to guide local execution. Furthermore, IWMI is strengthening its approach to communications to make it more outcome- and impact-oriented. Finally, the Panel recognizes the systemic factors that limited IWMI's ability to track the cumulative effects of long-term investments post-project closure.

IWMI's self-scores across four indicators and ten sub-indicators revealed a strong alignment with the Panel's evaluation for nine of the ten sub-indicators. However, regarding the sub-indicator 'Probability to achieve future impact and outcome targets', the Panel determined that a score of three is more appropriate. This score signifies that the organization has identified this as an area for improvement and is actively working to upgrade internal systems to effectively meet the sub-indicator's intent. The Panel notes that this score is justified because specific outcome and impact targets are yet to be fully defined, although the Resource Mobilization Pivot Action Plan is in place to support adaptive management for future realities (Table 9).

Table 9. Assessment of self-score: Statement 4



4.1.5. Statement 5. The center is a good place to work and a good actor: it is an efficient and ethical steward of human, natural and financial resources.

Synthesis of the Panel's judgement

Over the review period, IWMI's staff increased by 114%, and its budget increased by 140%, necessitating a significant organizational and systemic response. Staff widely appreciate IWMI as a good place to work, a sentiment consistently reflected in interviews, the Panel survey, and internal survey documents from 2024 and 2025.

A notable shift in staff composition has occurred, with a considerable number of social and political scientists joining the institute. This has altered the nature of the organization, shifting the data landscape from predominantly quantitative analysis to an increasing integration of qualitative data.

Staff survey results provide additional evidence of positive staff perceptions of IWMI's workplace culture, management, and enabling systems. Respondents gave strong ratings to identification with IWMI's mission (96.6%), willingness to recommend IWMI as a good place to work (95.1%), sense of belonging (91.7%), support for gender equality and inclusion of underrepresented groups (93.9%), respect for human rights (93.2%), and environmental sustainability practices (91.7%). Staff also rated managers positively on integrity (93.2%), support to staff (92.8%), and openness to ideas (91.7%), and gave positive ratings to digital infrastructure (92.8%), physical infrastructure (92.0%), and knowledge-management architecture (90.5%). Responses were somewhat more moderate on willingness to stay if offered a similar role elsewhere (84.5%), comfort giving feedback (85.2%), leadership understanding of staff views (86.0%), action on survey results (86.7%), and transparency about resources (87.5%). This also points to continued attention to retention, feedback, transparency, and staff engagement during organizational change.

Additionally, the Matrix-management system introduced just before the review period has become fully operational in recent years, following severe COVID-19 related disruptions between 2020 and 2022. While hailed as an enabling mechanism for managing IWMI's complex portfolio, the Matrix is also criticized for introducing hierarchical complexities, complicating capacity planning, and causing stress for some staff members. This points to the need for clearer role definition, decision authority, accountability, workload expectations, and continuity within the Matrix Model as IWMI continues to grow.

The institute remains strongly well-connected in its operating countries, leveraging this social capital to maintain strong convening power and strategic influence. Concurrently, an increasing volume of work is being routed through implementing partners to expand organizational capacity. The institute plans to scale this model further, both to build local capacity and to reduce delivery costs to remain highly competitive. However, the Panel notes that this model introduces clear risks as partners maintain independent interests and varying access to information. Managing this self-imposed shift requires attention to staff roles, delegation, supervision, and active implementation oversight.

Furthermore, relying on partners creates a greater distance from direct fieldwork. New personnel are increasingly selected for a 'broad', rather than 'deep' technical profile to suit this evolving dynamic, while existing staff must adapt to a more indirect, managerial way of working. This transition could negatively impact staff satisfaction and personal scientific ambitions if research is perceived as being replaced by management and supervision.

Operationally, IWMI shares administrative and infrastructure capacity with WorldFish and IRRI via a tripartite agreement, which secures a higher quality of service than the institute could independently afford. This tripartite structure provides a robust fiduciary service with both proactive and reactive capabilities. By hiring the expert who previously designed the One CGIAR system, the tripartite partners benefit from mature procedures, rapid-response services, and local language capabilities.

To support these structures, the institute's virtual and electronic operating systems are undergoing a comprehensive overhaul across administration, financial management, and knowledge management. Recent upgrades to the financial and administrative systems aim to ease the administrative burden on staff by streamlining resource access once fully operational. Similarly, the knowledge management systems are being updated, though this caused some temporary practical limitations during the review period.

Given this concentration of operational updates, the current systemic overhaul, while strategically sound, may generate organizational stress and frustration if staff are not meaningfully included in the transition.

As IWMI grows, diversifies its portfolio, and works increasingly through delegated delivery arrangements, more consistent and proportionate quality-management and assurance practices will become progressively important across organizational functions. The Panel observed that a comprehensive policy overhaul took place in the latter part of the review period to build a coherent organizational framework, updating and aligning internal policies after the disruption and delays caused by the discontinued One CGIAR reforms. IWMI's reported movement toward stronger organization-wide quality-management arrangements, including possible reference to ISO 9000-type standards, provides a useful directional signal for this area of follow-up. Another such signal is the ongoing effort to limit IWMI's environmental footprint, maintaining a dedicated policy, and tracking its performance through validated external analyses.

Review of self-assessment and self-score pattern

The self-assessment summarizes this statement by reporting strong resource stewardship, significant investment in infrastructure and systems, and a highly diverse, multidisciplinary, and international workforce. According to the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), primary areas for improvement include the fragmentation of ICT infrastructure

and digital systems, the transition of knowledge management systems, and existing policy gaps. As these targeted improvement areas are being actively addressed, the Panel believes that the self-assessment may undervalue the true quality of IWMI's effort. The ongoing, comprehensive overhaul of all systems represents an impressive investment that aligns with the institute's ambitions for future budget increases and its transition to an operating model centered around implementing partners. Recognizing the emergent systems nature, the Panel score matches at 3, while noting the impressive effort underway. A review of the self-scores across five indicators and 15 sub-indicators revealed that there was alignment between the self-score and the Panel score (Table 10).

Table 10. Assessment of self-score: Statement 5

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Scores * (1-5)
Infrastructure & Resources	Physical infrastructure	2
	Digital infrastructure	3
	Knowledge management & access	3
Financial Accountability & Risk	Culture of stewardship	2
	Transparent resource allocation	2
Workforce & Management	Workforce composition and what is valued	2
	Staff performance management and continuous learning and development	3
Capacity & Compliance	Culture of excellence	3
	Clarity of and compliance with policies	3
	Communication and information sharing	3
	Culture of promoting efficiency	3
	Positive daily relations aligned to center mission	3
Normative Framework Alignment	Gender equality and women's empowerment	2
	Environmental sustainability and climate change	2
	Human rights and vulnerable groups	2

*Self and panel scores were aligned across all sub-indicators

4.1.6. *Statement 6. The center's governance and leadership, and enabling environment at global, regional and national scales, foster the center to pursue its mission, now and in the future.*

Synthesis of the Panel's judgement

The overarching governance framework, structures, meetings, oversight, sub-committees, senior roles, responsibilities, and reporting arrangements align with recognized international practice. The framework is maturing, and there is a clear separation of governance and management roles. Governance structures are well-grounded in legal instruments, specifically the IIMI Act and the IWMI Charter. An engaged and functional board with diversified skill sets, led by a well-connected Board Chair, provides appropriate oversight. The management team is recognized by key stakeholders as dedicated and capable, while survey results suggest that leadership is effective in managing change. The synergies of IWMI leadership (guided and strengthened IWMI's performance and governance, and they are well-placed to continue to do so in the future. At headquarters level, highly capable portfolio managers work closely with project leaders—especially new project leaders—to build their capacity to run projects effectively. During the interviews with non-IWMI staff within the CGIAR integrated partnership, some informants described IWMI as an exemplary performer within CGIAR.

Risk governance and leadership are supported by strong ethical frameworks and effective change management. Management, ethics oversight, and internal audit functions were reinforced, including through tripartite arrangements. Survey results and interviews were positive regarding IWMI's ethics and values framework that also supports research, together with policies that enable diversity and inclusion. An established risk management framework exists and aligns with international good practice, receiving strong recognition in the survey results. An Internal Audit Function is valued and delivers an effective service.

The recent appointment of an Ethics Director and a shared Ethics and Business Conduct Function is viewed positively by key stakeholders. Under this function, policy documents were developed and packaged for proactive training, while robust mechanisms are in place for reactive compliance. Key policies and procedures were reviewed and are currently in the process of being finalized and approved.

Interviews suggest that IWMI is making significant progress from a gender perspective. The organization does not merely look at baseline workforce gender representation across the center, but also actively works to ensure a strong female contingent at higher levels of the institute.

Staff survey results provide additional evidence of positive perceptions of IWMI's governance, leadership, ethics, and risk arrangements. Respondents gave strong ratings to IWMI's ethics framework supporting research (93.1%), policies enabling diversity and inclusion (93.1%), leadership communication with staff (93.1%), leadership effectiveness in managing change (89.3%), and the effectiveness of the risk-management framework in identifying and mitigating risks (87.0%). Responses were more moderate on staff engagement in change management (81.6%), leadership responsiveness to public accountability (78.5%), fair mechanisms for evaluating staff against performance agreements (79.7%), representation of administrative staff (71.6%) and researchers (72.0%) in governance structures, and external stakeholder representation (58.2%). These results support the Panel's positive assessment of IWMI's ethics, risk, leadership, and change-management foundations, while reinforcing that stakeholder representation, internal representation, accountability, and feedback arrangements remain areas for continued attention.

Recurring interview themes also highlight that staff-time allocation, workload concentration, and employee well-being as issues require attention. These pressures occurred during a review period also marked by the CGIAR Portfolio and center/System-role changes, reinforcing the need to secure sufficient organizational capacity to deliver the Organizational Growth Strategy 2024–30.

Second- and third-line assurance mechanisms require further development to fully cascade and embed risk management alongside supporting software. Simultaneously, the internal audit function is overdue for a mandatory external quality assessment in line with the Global Internal Audit Standards™. To strengthen internal audit capabilities, a new Director of Audit was recently appointed for Audit Asia with covers the tripartite plus WorldVeg, and plans are underway for an external validation in 2027. Until this validation occurs, the service will not technically conform with the standards. Additionally, staff are over-stretched by time-consuming multiple donor audits that offer low added value; some informants suggest that donors could potentially unify their audit and assurance requirements by commissioning a single, shared auditor.

As more funding flows through partners, risk management and assurance will need to remain aligned with where exposure sits. This points to the value of embedding the enhanced partner monitoring and partner-assurance arrangements implemented in 2025, while also supporting partner capacity in ethical and fiduciary functions. Such a mechanism will directly address increasing donor expectations surrounding compliance, while simultaneously building partner capacity in core ethical and fiduciary functions.

The Matrix Model is primarily an operating-model issue, but it also has governance and leadership implications where dual reporting lines affect role clarity, decision authority, accountability, and continuity. For Statement 6, the relevant point is therefore narrower: continued Board and leadership attention will therefore be important.

Partners survey results indicate generally positive perceptions of IWMI, with 93.8% to 100% of respondents providing positive ratings on strategy alignment, collaboration, research quality, and output relevance. Ratings on financial stewardship and financial oversight were broadly favorable, though the number of responses were limited. While open-ended feedback highlighted the institute as credible and technically strong, stakeholders identified opportunities for improvement in scaling research, communication, and operational processes.

As IWMI continues to adapt its strategy and operating model toward research for impact, Board and senior leadership oversight will remain important in ensuring that the center protects its core mission and research quality while maintaining attention to funding diversification, financial resilience, and prudent use of reserves.

During the review period, IWMI's external enabling environment also changed substantially. CGIAR partnership arrangements and reforms, host-country relationships, and country-level conditions created both opportunities and challenges for the institute. Interview evidence indicates that responding to and absorbing these changes required management attention and contributed to a changing risk profile. This context reinforces the importance of continued Board and leadership attention to how IWMI navigates its external operating environment while pursuing its mission.

Review of self-assessment and self-score pattern

The Panel agrees with the self-assessment scoring across the organization. Specifically, the governance structure, assurance mechanisms, ethics and risk management, accountability as a publicly R4D organization, external and internal audits/reviews, clarity of leadership guidance, staff consultation and critical reflection, and quality assurance mechanisms were all assessed as areas that have functional policies and processes in place, which IWMI is actively working to improve.

Conversely, the self-assessment highlights an explicit need for improvement within the management structure and center organigram, the overall effectiveness of the legal/policy framework, and the general capacity to manage change. While governance and leadership show clear Initiative, they currently lack strategic alignment, as basic policy frameworks and oversight mechanisms are still emerging, after the One CGIAR reforms were discontinued.

IWMI self-scores across three indicators and ten sub-indicators revealed that there was complete alignment between the self-score and the Panel score (Table 11).

Table 11. Assessment of self-score: Statement 6

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Scores * (1-5)
Governance & Leadership	Management structure and center organigram	3
	Governance structure	2
	Assurance, ethics and risk	2
Policy & Oversight Environment	Effectiveness of legal/policy framework	3
	Accountability as publicly funded R4D	2
	External and internal audits/reviews	2
Culture & Change Management	Clarity of leadership guidance	2
	Staff consultation and critical reflection	2
	Capacity to manage change	3
	Quality assurance mechanisms	2

**Self and panel scores were aligned across all sub-indicators*

4.2. Evaluation Criteria Lens

As stated in Chapter 2, while the conceptual framework relies on data, analysis and findings, aggregated and structured around the statements reflecting IWMI's organizational health, IWMI is also assessed against the eight evaluative criteria. The six CER statements provide the primary structure for the assessment, while the eight evaluation criteria provide an additional lens for reading the evidence. This section therefore looks across the statement assessments from the perspective of these criteria. It does not introduce a separate set of findings or recommendations. Rather, it shows how the statement-level assessment also speaks to the evaluation criteria that underpin the review framework. Table 11 provides a synthesized criteria-level reading, while Annex 3 retains the more detailed criteria-aligned material.

Table 12. Synthesized assessment by evaluation criterion

Criteria	Findings
1. Relevance. In terms of being aligned with development priorities, the advancement of specific scientific domains, and the implementation of strategic partnerships.	IWMI's 2024–30 Strategy aligns its portfolio with national, regional, and global stakeholder needs, focusing on mitigating water risks and promoting sustainable management. Science-based outputs are tailored to specific development needs and policy priorities. Through applied tools and direct government involvement, these outputs are tailored to specific geographic, organizational, and thematic contexts. Furthermore, partnerships are increasingly co-designed to fill critical research and delivery gaps.
2. Coherence Coherence with other institutes/actors in the same sector or context, both in terms of the CGIAR-wide strategy and across different organizations.	IWMI maintains coherence in its strategic portfolio with actors across the water management sector and within the CGIAR Integrated Partnership, though structural gaps exist in its monitoring and evaluation framework and performance tracking. The Institute also maintains strategic coherence with external organizations through a structured, two-stage proposal approval workflow designed to evaluate partner capacity and resolve conflicting priorities.

Criteria	Findings
3. Legitimacy Research is conducted ethically, with active participation from relevant stakeholders and adherence to established normative frameworks.	IWMI maintains strong, ethically grounded research, extensive partnerships, and proactive management, though improvements are needed in consistent application across outputs, partner inclusivity, and accountability. Key strengths include robust ethical, publication, and collaboration systems, along with effective Board-management cooperation. Areas for development include improving data stewardship, ensuring consistent partner recognition, increasing stakeholder representation, and enhancing internal feedback mechanisms.
4. Scientific credibility High scientific standards in research design, methods, and analysis, and high-quality outputs.	IWMI maintains strong, mature publication pathways with rigorous internal and external reviews for research papers, alongside a high-quality, scientifically credible portfolio validated by bibliometric evidence. While publication quality is consistent, quality assurance for non-publication outputs—including datasets, digital tools, and operational products—remains uneven and in need of more consistent, organizational validation and lifecycle management. The assessment indicates that while practice-oriented contributions are evident, further evidence is required regarding their long-term, sustained adoption, and downstream impact.
5. Efficiency The center achieves its objectives in the most cost-effective manner, using resources wisely. It pursues areas of its greatest comparative advantage.	IWMI demonstrates strong operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness by pursuing its comparative advantages, optimizing resource use, and proactively adjusting its delivery model to handle financial volatility. Key strengths include securing and implementing a two-fold increase in funding, implementing smart cost-optimization strategies like sharing administrative and fiduciary staff with WorldFish and IRRI and lowering dependence on CGIAR Trust Funds. Transitioning its delivery model to local implementing partners effectively reduces operational costs, while ongoing investments in updated IT systems can directly boost staff productivity. However, resource allocation remains highly project-based and funder-driven, limiting the degree to which IWMI can directly allocate funds to specific strategic programs. In some instances, operational efficiency was hindered by workplace pressures resulting from recent funding withdrawals, with some staff reporting increased workloads, heightened workplace tension, lower morale, and accelerated staff turnover.
6. Effectiveness In the sense of both delivery against stated organizational strategies effective in the five years covered, ToC, set of targets (center and CGIAR targets to which the center is ascribed), as well as demonstration of the potential of research to achieve intended outcomes and impacts, i.e., readiness to scale.	The potential of IWMI's research to contribute to development outcomes is supported by its strong strategic alignment, operational delivery, output generation, and policy engagement, complemented by verified cases of uptake and application. There is clear evidence of mature, organized systems for reviewing publication outputs. The institute also demonstrated a marked organizational shift toward an impact-oriented culture, backed by an international best-practice governance framework, and a proactive Partnership and Funder Engagement Policy. However, tracking progress against organizational and programmatic ToC metrics is in its early stages. Formal outcome and impact performance targets have not yet been developed, and empirical evidence of delivery against its strategic priority areas is limited. IWMI requires stronger evidence systems to systematically track adoption, sustained use, and downstream contributions across the portfolio.
7. Impact Benefits of the center's work will continue after the funding or support ends, due to actions of scaling up and scaling out. The center is contributing to broader, longer-term (positive)	Evidence from policy-change records, selected uptake examples, innovation-use records, interviews, and survey results indicates that IWMI's work is used and valued in several contexts. These examples sit alongside IWMI's impact-oriented project design processes, early engagement with end users and partners, policy-facing work, scaling efforts, and contribution to CGIAR Impact Areas. IWMI demonstrates a strong commitment to long-term impact through its impact-oriented project design processes, though its capacity to systematically prove post-project impact at scale is constrained by tracking and

Criteria	Findings
effects on the target population/environment.	measurement gaps. Rigorous organizational impact assessments are hindered by the high cost of large-scale evaluations, standard project cycles that fall short of long-term impact horizons, and a lack of flexible funding to assess outcomes and impact after project completion.
8. Sustainability The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue. This criterion also focuses on continuation of benefits and highlights the multidimensional nature of sustainability.	The long-term sustainability and scale of IWMI's research benefits cannot be fully assessed due to a lack of rigorous post-project data. Nevertheless, IWMI maintains a strong reputational and strategic market position that supports operational resilience. Globally and within CGIAR, addressing water scarcity is recognized as an urgent prerequisite to achieving the broader priorities of the CGIAR Integrated Partnership and the SDGs. Following rapid financial growth from 2020 to 2023, IWMI launched the Organizational Growth Strategy (2024–30) as an internal roadmap to detail resource mobilization targets and required system upgrades. In response to recent shifts in the global Official Development Assistance landscape—specifically the withdrawal of USAID support—IWMI developed a Resource Mobilization Pivot Action Plan to secure diverse, strategy-aligned partnerships. To sustain this broader donor support, IWMI will need to continue strengthening funding diversification, evidence of sustained contribution, and visibility across relevant global water and agriculture platforms.

5. Conclusions and Ways Forward

5.1. Overall Conclusion

The overall assessment of the external Review is that IWMI is on a positive transformational trajectory. The Panel concludes that IWMI demonstrates many of the key attributes of a well-functioning CGIAR center delivering research for development, as described in the six reference statements. IWMI has strong foundations: a distinctive water-security mandate, substantial and diversified outputs, broad policy-facing engagement, extensive partnerships, growing operational reach and an expanded resource base. Recent implementation signals also show that IWMI is already moving in directions consistent with several areas identified for continued organizational strengthening.

This positive assessment reflects the pattern of evidence across the six CER statements and the eight evaluative criteria. IWMI's relevance is strongly supported by the growing centrality of water in the global agenda, its mandate within CGIAR, country presence, and its ability to connect science, policy, partnerships, and practical water-related development challenges. Its effectiveness is reflected in strategic alignment, delivery capacity, output production, policy-facing work, partnerships, and selected evidence of uptake and operational use. Its efficiency is assessed positively but conditionally: IWMI has adapted to rapid growth, funding volatility, and changing CGIAR arrangements, while workload, absorptive capacity, risk management, assurance, operating-model clarity, and systems maturity remain important conditions for sustaining that performance.

IWMI's next phase depends on aligning its capabilities with the scale and complexity of what it is now seeking to do. The ambition reflected in IWMI's 2024–30 Strategy, expanded portfolio, broader partnerships, growing operational footprint, and larger resource base is not only a matter of strategy or resources. It also depends on the institute's ability to learn from implementation, use evidence consistently, manage growth and risk, assure quality across a diversified output portfolio, steward knowledge assets, and communicate its water-related contribution credibly.

The conclusion is therefore not a call for strategic redirection or organizational redesign. IWMI's direction is broadly sound, and its mandate is increasingly relevant. The next section summarizes the organizational maturation needs that follow this conclusion.

5.2. Organizational Maturation Needs

The overall conclusion in 5.1 points to **organizational maturation** as the main requirement for IWMI's next phase. This maturation builds on IWMI's strategy, mandate, and positioning, which provide a strong basis for

continued relevance. The priority is to ensure that learning systems, evidence practices, quality and stewardship arrangements, partnership architecture, operating-model clarity, risk and assurance systems, and staff capacity are sufficiently developed to support IWMI's expanded portfolio, partnerships, operational footprint, and resource base.

Growth and diversification make this especially important. A larger and more operationally diverse IWMI will need stronger evidence of sustained contribution, clearer accountability, more consistent use of systems, and better mechanisms for learning and adaptation. Without these, strong delivery and expansion may not translate fully into sustained contribution, visible organizational learning, or manageable workload and risk.

The review therefore emphasizes maturation not as a change of direction, but as the condition for sustaining IWMI's trajectory. The institute's next phase is likely to depend on how well it builds the capabilities that allow it to sustain ambition, protect quality, use evidence, learn from implementation, manage growth, and communicate its distinctive contribution.

The review's conclusions point to three connected maturation needs:

- IWMI needs to strengthen evidence, learning, and contribution practices. Its strategic alignment, delivery record, and output base provide a strong foundation. The next step is to more consistently use ToCs, targets, MELIA evidence, contribution tracking, and follow-up beyond delivery for learning, accountability, strategic adjustment, resource mobilization, and credible communication of results.
- IWMI needs organizational systems, operating capacity, and growth management that match its scale and complexity. The institute has many effective practices and systems in place, but their maturity and consistency vary across functions, locations, partnerships, output types, and governance areas. As IWMI grows, systems and operating arrangements will need to support quality, risk management, assurance, stewardship, accountability, continuity, staff capacity, and workload management, while retaining the adaptability needed for country, regional, and partnership-based work.
- IWMI needs to make more strategic use of partnerships, outputs, and positioning. Partnerships matter for learning, scaling, accountability, and sustained use. A diversified output portfolio requires proportionate attention to quality, stewardship, lifecycle governance, and continued value. IWMI's mandate, scientific and technical capabilities, country presence, and policy-facing work provide a basis for reinforcing its global thought leadership and distinctive value proposition.

These maturation needs summarize what the review means for IWMI's next phase. The Panel's recommendations in Chapter 6 translate this conclusion into strategic directions for strengthening the organizational conditions needed to sustain IWMI's relevance, performance, credibility, and contribution over time.

6. Recommendations

This chapter presents the Panel's strategic recommendations for IWMI's next phase. This chapter builds on the statement-level assessments in Chapter 4, the results of the cross-statement synthesis in Chapter 3, and the conclusions on IWMI's trajectory and next-phase needs in Chapter 5.

The recommendations are intended to support IWMI's positive transformational trajectory by identifying the organizational capabilities that need to mature further if the center is to sustain growth, maintain quality and credibility at greater scale, and translate its strong water-security mandate, partnerships, and output base into demonstrable contribution over time. The recommendations should therefore be read as directions for strengthening the systems, evidence practices, operating arrangements, partnerships, and governance functions needed to sustain and reinforce IWMI's relevance, influence, and contribution in a rapidly evolving global context, while maintaining continuity with the center's overall direction.

In moving from the assessments and the synthesis to the recommendations, the Panel used a structured conversion process. The synthesized findings were grouped into strategic recommendations, each linked back to the relevant CER statements, statement-level findings, implications, and contextual signals. The wording of the recommendations, including the action verbs used in the titles, was developed with attention to specificity, IWMI's organizational journey, proportionality, resource realism, and usefulness for organizational use and follow-up.

The statement-level implications provide a more detailed context on what the findings could mean for specific parts of IWMI's work. They help connect the strategic recommendations to the evidence in each statement area and can guide follow-up planning without becoming **additional** recommendations. Directional observations and

implementation-context signals point to recent or ongoing developments that may offer useful entry points for follow-up, while remaining distinct from formal findings unless supported by review-period evidence.

6.1. How to Read the Recommendations

The recommendations should be read as a coherent set that addresses different organizational capabilities, but they are connected by a common purpose: **supporting IWMI's next phase of growth, contribution, and organizational maturity**. Taken together, they focus on the conditions that will help IWMI sustain its positive trajectory, learn and adapt, demonstrate water-related contribution, manage growth, govern quality, and express its distinctive value proposition.

The recommendations should also be read as strengths-based. The recommendations build on IWMI's strategic alignment, output base, partnerships, growth, publication and repository systems, and water-focused mandate. Where the review identifies areas for improvement, these are framed as priorities for organizational strengthening, while preserving continuity with IWMI's overall direction.

The recommendations call for proportionate and targeted strengthening in areas where better evidence, systems, stewardship, or follow-up would most directly support learning, accountability, risk management, quality, sustained use, and organizational decision-making.

The recommendations are intended to be useful at the organizational level without becoming an implementation plan. They name the capabilities and conditions requiring attention. The detailed statement-level assessments and implications provide more specific context for internal follow-up.

6.2. The Panel's Strategic Recommendations

The Panel provides the following eight strategic recommendations (Table 13).

Table 13. Strategic recommendations

No.	Strategic recommendations	Main synthesized finding(s) addressed
1	Build on IWMI's strong alignment foundations to strengthen strategic learning and adaptive management across the institute.	Findings 1 and 2
2	Strengthen IWMI's evidence base for sustained contribution and impact through proportionate follow-up beyond delivery.	Finding 2
3	Consolidate IWMI's existing and emerging organizational systems without losing local adaptability.	Finding 3
4	Strengthen IWMI's capacity to sustain growth and manage transformation risks.	Finding 4
5	Make IWMI's operating model fit for the next phase of growth and impact by strengthening clarity, accountability, and continuity.	Finding 5
6	Position IWMI's partnerships as a strategic architecture for impact, learning, and accountability.	Finding 6
7	Build on IWMI's strong publication, repository, and Open Access systems to strengthen proportionate quality and lifecycle governance for its diversified output portfolio.	Finding 7
8	Reinforce IWMI's global thought leadership and distinctive value proposition.	Findings 1, 6, and 7

Six of the eight strategic recommendations link most directly to a single synthesized finding. Recommendations 1 and 8 are broader because they address cross-cutting issues. Recommendation 1 builds on IWMI's strong strategic foundations while also responding to the need for stronger evidence of sustained contribution and impact; strategic learning depends on understanding whether outputs and interventions generate value beyond delivery. Recommendation 8 reinforces IWMI's global thought leadership and distinctive value proposition, drawing simultaneously on strategic positioning, partnership evolution, operating-model clarity, and the quality and visibility of IWMI's diversified output portfolio.

Box 2. How the strategic recommendations work together

Organizational focus	Strategic recommendations
Evidence, learning, and contribution	(1) Build on IWMI's strong alignment foundations to strengthen strategic learning and adaptive management across the institute. (2) Strengthen IWMI's evidence base for sustained contribution and impact through proportionate follow-up beyond delivery.
Organizational systems, operating capacity, and growth	(3) Consolidate IWMI's existing and emerging organizational systems without losing local adaptability. (4) Strengthen IWMI's capacity to sustain growth and manage transformation risks. (5) Make IWMI's operating model fit for the next phase of growth and impact by strengthening clarity, accountability, and continuity.
Partnerships, outputs, and positioning	(6) Position IWMI's partnerships as a strategic architecture for impact, learning, and accountability. (7) Build on IWMI's strong publication, repository, and Open Access systems to strengthen proportionate quality and lifecycle governance for its diversified output portfolio. (8) Reinforce IWMI's global thought leadership and distinctive value proposition.

The recommendations show **three connected dimensions** of organizational strengthening: (1) improving evidence and learning for sustained contribution; (2) consolidating the systems and operating capacity needed to support growth; and (3) making fuller strategic use of IWMI's partnerships, outputs, and positioning. The explanations below show how each recommendation is grounded in the statement-level assessment and related implications, while keeping the recommendations themselves consolidated and strategic.

6.3. Explanation of the Recommendations

6.3.1. Recommendation 1. Build on IWMI's strong alignment foundations to strengthen strategic learning and adaptive management across the institute.

IWMI's strategic foundations are strong, and the evidence reviewed shows that the institute is well positioned in relation to both CGIAR and the wider global water and development agenda. Within CGIAR, the IWMI Strategy 2024–30 and the CGIAR Water Systems Integration Roadmap 2024–30 provide a shared water-systems framework for aligning water-related research and innovation across CGIAR programs and centers. Externally, IWMI's positioning is reflected in engagement with UN Water Conferences, UNFCCC COP processes, World Water Forums, Ramsar, the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, and the Transformative Futures for Water Security process. The recommendation builds on the strength of these alignments, focusing on making that direction more consistently useful for learning, adaptation, contribution tracking, and organizational decision-making.

IWMI's strategy is being pursued through a larger and more diverse mix of research, policy engagement, partnerships, tools, data, and implementation-facing work. As the institute's role expands, strategy needs to operate not only as a statement of direction, but also as a practical learning framework: helping IWMI understand where its work is contributing, where evidence is accumulating, where assumptions need testing, and where priorities may need adjustment. Stronger practical use of ToCs, targets, MELIA evidence, contribution tracking, and learning loops would help IWMI sustain strategic relevance while adapting to changing water, development, and CGIAR contexts, as well as the exponential growth in the application of digital technologies such as AI.

The statement-level basis for this recommendation is set out mainly under Statement 1 in Chapter 4, with related implications in Annex 1; supporting links also appear in the Statement 4 discussion of contribution evidence and the Statement 6 discussion of progress tracking, adaptive feedback, and accountability. These materials point to areas where the recommendation could become more concrete without turning it into a project-management requirement: clearer narrative use of institute-wide and programmatic ToCs; more selective and decision-useful outcome and impact indicators; regular use of MELIA and contribution evidence to inform strategic adjustment, learning, and resource choices; and feedback loops that help IWMI test assumptions across research, policy engagement, partnerships, and implementation-facing work. The emphasis is on making strategic evidence useful for organizational learning and adaptation, rather than adding uniform reporting demands across the portfolio.

6.3.2. Recommendation 2. Strengthen IWMI's evidence base for sustained contribution and impact through proportionate follow-up beyond delivery.

Review evidence shows that IWMI's output base is substantial, diverse, and applied. Alongside peer-reviewed and policy publications, SAR evidence identifies decision-support and operational tools/digital and analytical products. SAR also reports 276 capacity-sharing results with 486 partners and 40,036 trainees during 2022–24, and 57 CGIAR-reported policy-change results over the same period. Bibliometric evidence adds publication-level visibility, with 970 IWMI publications and 12,437 citations between 2021–25. This is a concrete expression of IWMI's water-related comparative advantage: its science reaches users through tools, policy processes, capacity strengthening, partnerships, and open knowledge products, not publications alone.

Because many of these outputs and engagements are intended to inform water-related decisions and organizational practice, sustained follow-up beyond delivery is strategically important. IWMI would benefit from stronger evidence on whether outputs are reused, adapted, systematized, maintained, or continue to inform decisions after project delivery. The issue is not whether IWMI produces relevant work; it is whether the institute can evidence continued use and contribution in the parts of its portfolio where sustained value is most important.

The recommendation is therefore deliberately proportionate, pointing to stronger post-delivery evidence where sustained use, learning value, strategic importance, risk, or expected contribution justify the effort. Such evidence would support learning, accountability, resource mobilization, and more credible communication of IWMI's contribution to funders, partners, users, and CGIAR actors.

This recommendation is informed by Statement 2 in Chapter 4, with related implications in Annex 1; supporting links also appear in the Statement 4 discussion of sustained benefits and impact evidence, and in the Statement 1 discussion of MELIA, targets, and contribution tracking. These materials point to selected areas for follow-up rather than a uniform tracking requirement: major outputs and tools, policy engagements, operational products, partnerships, and interventions where continued use, organizational adoption, beneficiary reach, downstream outcomes, learning value, or strategic importance justify further evidence-gathering.

6.3.3. Recommendation 3. Consolidate IWMI's existing and emerging organizational systems without losing local adaptability.

Effective practices and systems are visible across IWMI, including quality, stewardship, partner management, risk, assurance, policies, IT, and knowledge management. These arrangements helped the institute support delivery across an expanding portfolio and diverse country, regional, and partnership-based work.

System maturity and use vary across functions, locations, output types, partnerships, and governance areas. Some arrangements are well established; others are newer, less consistently applied, or not yet fully integrated into day-to-day practice and organizational learning.

The emphasis is consolidation with adaptability. IWMI's work depends on contextual flexibility, especially where water-related research, policy engagement, and implementation support are shaped by country, regional, and partner conditions. That flexibility should be preserved. At the same time, a larger and more diversified institute needs enough consistency in core systems to support quality, assurance, learning, accountability, stewardship, risk management, and organizational coherence.

The statements forming the basis for this recommendation are in Chapter 4, with related implications in Annex 1: Statement 2 on quality and stewardship across diversified outputs; Statement 3 on partner management systems and learning from partnerships; Statement 5 on policies, IT, knowledge management, and quality-management arrangements; and Statement 6 on risk, assurance, accountability, and governance systems. These materials point to consolidation in areas where systems already exist but need more consistent use, integration, or organizational uptake, rather than a single uniform model across all IWMI contexts.

6.3.4. Recommendation 4. Strengthen IWMI's capacity to sustain growth and manage transformation risks.

IWMI's growth is a positive element of the review. It reflects demand for the institute's work, expanded reach, a broader resource base, and greater opportunity to contribute to water-related development challenges. The recommendation recognizes that growth has increased IWMI's reach and possibilities, while also changing what is required to sustain them.

A larger and more diverse portfolio places different demands on the institute than a smaller one. Staff capacity, management bandwidth, systems integration, risk management, assurance, quality control, partner oversight, and workload management all become more consequential as the scale and complexity of the portfolio increase.

These pressures are amplified where growth coincides with system modernization, evolving CGIAR arrangements, more partner-dependent delivery, and higher expectations for evidence of contribution.

The recommendation therefore treats growth as an organizational transformation issue. The relevant question is how IWMI sustains the benefits of expansion while keeping capacity, sequencing, resource realism, risk management, quality assurance, and staff workload in balance.

The statement-level basis is concentrated mainly in Statement 5 on management, resources, and stewardship, and Statement 6 on governance, risk, assurance, and enabling conditions, with supporting links to partnership-based delivery under Statement 3. These materials point to the need for proportionate attention to absorptive capacity and transformation risk, without prescribing to a specific staffing model or organizational design.

6.3.5. Recommendation 5. Make IWMI's operating model fit for the next phase of growth and impact by strengthening clarity, accountability, and continuity.

IWMI's operating model has evolved to support a complex portfolio across strategic programs, regions, countries, projects, partnerships, and organizational functions. The Matrix Model can support flexibility, responsiveness, and cross-boundary mobilization of expertise, which are important for working across technical, geographic, policy, partnership, and implementation contexts.

The review also found that the model becomes harder to manage where roles, reporting lines, decision authority, workload expectations, non-project time, continuity, and accountability are not sufficiently clear. These pressures matter more as IWMI grows, works through larger and more partner-dependent delivery arrangements, and operates in a changing CGIAR and funding environment.

This recommendation is therefore about making the operating model clearer and more workable on a larger scale. Stronger role clarity, decision rules, continuity arrangements, workload realism, and accountability would help the Matrix Model support delivery, staff wellbeing, quality, and organizational effectiveness.

The statement-level basis is concentrated mainly in Statement 5 on workforce, management, stewardship, and operating capacity, with supporting links to Statement 6 on governance, leadership, accountability, and risk, and to Statement 3 where partner-dependent delivery affects the way IWMI operates.

6.3.6. Recommendation 6. Position IWMI's partnerships as a strategic architecture for impact, learning, and accountability.

Partnerships are one of IWMI's most important organizational assets. The review found extensive collaboration with governments, research organizations, funders, CGIAR actors, regional bodies, implementing partners, local organizations, and other stakeholders. These relationships support relevance, technical delivery, policy engagement, scaling, and access to users and decision-makers. They are especially important for IWMI because water-related work depends on country and regional relationships, public-sector engagement, applied research partnerships, and practical links to institutions that use or implement knowledge. Within CGIAR, this architecture also includes IWMI's water-systems role in helping align water-related science across centers, including through the CGIAR Water Systems Integration Roadmap 2024–30 and participation in portfolio arrangements where water is relevant to food, land, climate, resilience, and environmental systems.

As IWMI's delivery model evolves, the strategic value of partnerships will depend not only on their breadth, but also on how clearly they support contribution over time. The statement-level basis is concentrated mainly in Statement 3 on partnership ecosystems, with related implications in Annex 1; supporting links also appear in Statement 4 on scaling and sustained contribution, Statement 5 on partner-related management and stewardship, and Statement 6 where accountability, risk, and enabling conditions affect partnership-based work.

Those materials point to clearer attention to partner roles, complementarity, feedback and learning from partners, transition pathways, scaling functions, and partner-related risk and accountability. Managing partnerships as an architecture for sustained contribution would help IWMI connect partnership breadth with impact pathways, organizational adoption, learning, and accountability, while preserving the local responsiveness that underpins much of the institute's water-related work.

6.3.7. Recommendation 7. Build on IWMI's strong publication, repository, and Open Access systems to strengthen proportionate quality and lifecycle governance for its diversified output portfolio.

Publication, repository, and Open Access arrangements are among IWMI's more established systems. At the same time, IWMI's output portfolio now extends well beyond publications, including datasets, dashboards, models, digital tools, AI-enabled products, training materials, policy products, technical briefs, operational

platforms, and other applied knowledge outputs. This broader portfolio increases the value and reach of IWMI's water-related work, while also increasing its stewardship responsibilities.

Different output types require different arrangements for quality assurance, validation, documentation, usability, maintenance, handover, data protection, and post-project continuation. Proportionate quality and lifecycle governance would help protect the value of this diversified portfolio while avoiding a uniform or overly burdensome model.

The statement-level basis is concentrated mainly in Statement 2 on scientific and technical outputs, with related implications in Annex 1; supporting links also appear in Statement 5 on stewardship, systems, IT, and knowledge management, and in Statement 6 where governance, risk, assurance, and accountability affect organizational handling of knowledge assets. These materials point to differentiated follow-up for major output types where continued use, institutional capture, user confidence, maintenance, or post-project responsibility matter most.

6.3.8. Recommendation 8. Reinforce IWMI's global thought leadership and distinctive value proposition.

IWMI's strongest platform for global thought leadership is applied water-systems science for sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient development. This platform is visible in its water-security mandate, policy-facing work, country and regional partnerships, global engagement, and diversified output base. It is also reflected in applied knowledge assets such as policy products, datasets, digital and analytical tools, forecasting applications, water accounting, groundwater and irrigation work, water-quality and water-reuse analysis, and other products that support water-related decision-making and practice.

The recommendation concerns how IWMI draws together its science, tools, policy engagement, convening role, country experience, and partnerships into clearer synthesis and a more distinctive organizational value proposition. Stronger synthesis would help IWMI show how its water-related evidence and applied knowledge contribute to policy influence, institutional adoption, learning across contexts, and CGIAR's wider food, land, water, and climate systems agenda.

The statement-level basis is in Chapter 4, with related implications in Annex 1: Statement 1 on strategic positioning and alignment; Statement 2 on scientific, technical, policy-facing, data, digital, and capacity-sharing outputs; Statement 3 on partnerships and value proposition; Statement 4 on convening power, scaling, and contribution; and Statement 6 where leadership and enabling conditions affect organizational positioning. These materials point especially to sharper synthesis, flagship knowledge products, strategic communication, and evidence-grounded positioning that make IWMI's distinctive value proposition clearer and more visible.

6.4. From Recommendations to Follow-up

The recommendations provide a strategic frame for IWMI's organizational follow-up to the CER. They focus attention on the capabilities most important for the institute's **next phase**: evidence and learning, organizational systems, operating arrangements, partnerships, quality governance, growth management, and global positioning.

For the Board, the recommendations offer a basis for oversight of the organizational conditions needed to sustain IWMI's contribution over time. For IWMI leadership, they provide a basis for prioritizing responses, assessing feasibility and cost, aligning with ongoing initiatives, and determining sequencing, ownership, resourcing, and monitoring arrangements.

The statement-level implications remain an important companion to the recommendations. They provide more granular context for research leaders, functional leads, regional and country teams, and administrative managers as they consider how the strategic directions connect to the six CER statements and to specific areas of organizational practice. The signals and implementation context point to recent or ongoing developments that may help IWMI connect follow-up to existing efforts and identify where further attention may be needed.

The implications and signals should not be read as additional recommendations. Used together, the recommendations, implications, and signals create a bridge between the report's consolidated conclusions and the practical follow-up that IWMI may choose to develop, while preserving the strategic character of the Panel's recommendations.

Appendix 1. Table of Abbreviations

CGIAR in the past stood for Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research, but now is a name in its own right, and not an acronym. Today, CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future, dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis, operating as a global network of 13 research centers, often referred to as the CGIAR Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers.

ARC	Average of Relative Citations
CAGR	Compound Annual Growth Rate
CER	Center External Review
CRP	CGIAR Research Program
CRP	Customer/constituent relationship management
EPMR	External Program and Management Review
EQA	External Quality Assessment
GAC	General Assembly of Center
HLO	High-level outcome
IAES	CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service
IFA	Integration Framework Agreement
ISDC	Independent Science for Development Council
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
KM	Knowledge Management
MELIA	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Impact Assessment
MELIAF	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Impact Assessment and Foresight
MOPAN	Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network
OGS	Organizational Growth Strategy
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
QoR4D	Quality of Research for Development
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIMEC	Strategic Impact Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
SMART	Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound
SME	Small-medium enterprises
SP	Strategic Program
ToC	Theory of change
ToR	Terms of Reference



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