

CGIAR Center External Reviews: Template Terms of Reference Annex 1: Methodology and Process Note

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INDEPENDENT ADVISORY
AND EVALUATION SERVICE

INDEPENDENT SCIENCE FOR
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

CENTER
EXTERNAL
REVIEW

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This Note is generic and common to all CGIAR Center External Reviews. It is addressed to the center under review and its Board. This document explains why CERs exist, the evaluation framework, the six-stage process, high-level roles, and what to expect and when. It contains no center-specific content. Each center's own Terms of Reference outlines this. Operational detail intended for the Review Panel and IAES appears instead in the companion Guidance Note.

1. Background

1.1. Rationale of Center External Review

The External Program and Management Review (EPMR), was a CGIAR practice for more than three decades, run at five-year intervals until approximately 2010, offering what has been described as a holistic center 'health check'. EPMRs supported accountability and fostered center improvement through learning, reflection, and adaptive management. The practice lapsed around 2010 related to reforms at that moment in CGIAR's history.

The Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) of CGIAR's System Council (SC) asked the Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) to revive the external review practice, and scoping activity was incorporated into the IAES Multi-Year Evaluation Plan (MYEP). Scoping and piloting activities, supported by IAES and the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC), were conducted to define methods, tools, and collaborative processes for efficient and effective center reviews. The new design acknowledges financial constraints, favoring streamlined review processes while maintaining rigor and credibility. The result is Center External Reviews (CERs). Each CER is a structured, independent assessment of strategy, performance, governance, and organizational health over a five-year period.

A CER balances a primarily formative purpose with a proportionate summative function. It supports the center and its Board in understanding performance, context, strengths, risks and priorities for improvement, while providing assurance of accountability to the commissioning center Board. A CER is not an audit, certification or compliance review. Relevant assurance, ethics, risk and internal audit functions may contribute evidence and expertise without compromising the CER's independent, learning-oriented character.

CERs contribute to a partnership-wide assurance effort involving IAES, ISDC, as well as functions such as Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA), internal audit, Ethics and Business Conduct, and Risk Management, developed in response to CGIAR's current governance context. CERs also contribute to the system-wide strengthening of CGIAR's Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, Impact Assessment, and Foresight (MELIAF) approach. These purposes inform the governance, criteria and evidence base of each review.

Reviews are structured around recognized assessment frameworks, including the Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria, ensuring alignment with CGIAR and global standards. The Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) methodological guidance informed the overall design. Key themes include federated partnership performance and host-country relations.

The Review uses mixed methods and triangulates the center's Self-Assessment and the indexed evidence package with surveys, monitoring and bibliometric data, interviews, stakeholder consultations, site or virtual engagement, and independent expert judgment.

The center Board commissions the review. Each CER uses a fixed five-year look-back period, with center-specific priority questions agreed upon in the Terms of Reference (ToR) and the scoping agreement. The center is assessed both as an independent legal organization and as a member of the CGIAR Integrated Partnership.

1.2. The CER Assessment Statements

The process preserves Panel independence while providing structured opportunities for the center, its Board, IAES, and the Panel to align on scope and evidence needs, test emerging findings, and refine recommendations without negotiating the Panel's conclusions. Overall Quality Assurance responsibility rests with IAES, the office organizing the Review.

Every CER assesses the center against six reference statements that holistically describe a center. Each statement corresponds to one chapter of the center's Self-Assessment and one section of the Panel's Final Report.

Table 1. CER reference statements and corresponding Self-Assessment chapters

#	Statement	Corresponding Self-Assessment chapter
1	The center implements an up-to-date strategy responsive to global demands and challenges, situated within the broader priorities of	Strategy

#	Statement	Corresponding Self-Assessment chapter
	CGIAR's integrated partnership, and framing the center's comparative advantages.	
2	The center's scientific and technical outputs demonstrate high quality and high relevance, both to scientific progress and to prioritized development outcomes.	Quality and Relevance of Scientific Outputs
3	The center participates strategically and effectively in its partnership ecosystems, inside and outside CGIAR.	Partnership Ecosystems
4	The center contributes to impact, deploys its convening power, and engages evidence-driven scaling strategies in complex development systems.	Impact Pathways
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.	Good Place to Work and Good Actor
6	The center's governance, leadership, and enabling environment at global, regional, and national scales support the center's mission, now and in future.	Leadership and Governance

1.2.1 Indicators and Sub-Indicators

Each statement breaks down into several indicators, and each indicator into sub-indicators. For each sub-indicator, during the Self-Assessment, the center provides a narrative response describing its current situation, significant changes over the Review period, and actions planned or underway. Where the Self-Assessment template specifies, the narrative carries a self-assessed rating.

The six reference statements provide the common organizing framework for the entire CER, structuring the center's Self-Assessment, the Review Matrix, the Panel's analysis, and the Final Report.

2. Review Framework

2.1. The Eight Criteria

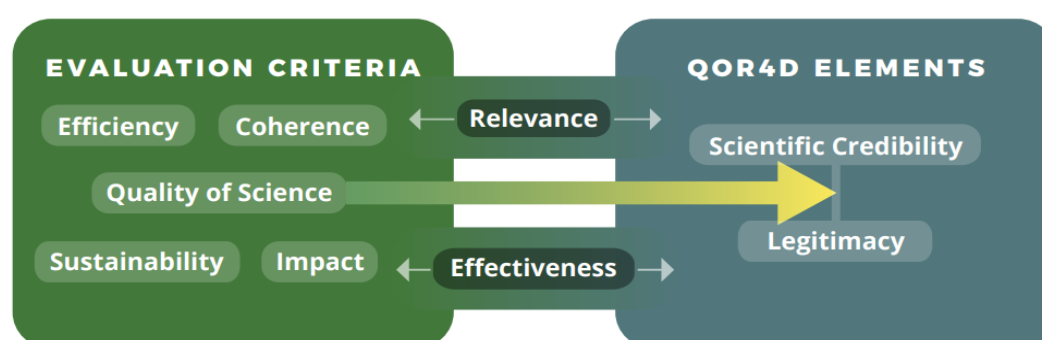
CGIAR has applied the QoR4D Framework since 2017. CERs apply QoR4D alongside OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, following IAES's 2022 guideline aligning the two into a single set. Relevance and Effectiveness appear in both frameworks and are not counted twice, giving eight distinct criteria in total: Relevance, Coherence, Legitimacy, Scientific Credibility, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, and Sustainability.

Table 2. Definition of Review criteria

Criterion	Definition
Relevance	Fit with development context priorities, such as country priorities and policies, and with the progress of science.
Coherence	Alignment with other actors within CGIAR's integrated partnership and with external networks, and application of common CGIAR rules, policies, and processes.
Legitimacy	Research and governance conducted ethically, inclusively, and accountably, with meaningful stakeholder participation and adherence to normative frameworks.

Criterion	Definition
Scientific Credibility	High scientific standards in research design, methods, and analysis, with consistent application of quality assurance mechanisms, reflected in the rigor of outputs and their contribution to scientific knowledge and practice.
Efficiency	Cost effective use of resources across all funding sources, and adjustment of strategic priorities and operational practices in response to funding fluctuations.
Effectiveness	Delivery against stated strategies, theories of change, and targets; the factors driving progress; and the readiness of relevant innovations or approaches to scale.
Impact¹	Contribution to broader, longer term social, environmental, and economic effects, including CGIAR's Impact Areas, and the contextual factors shaping results.
Sustainability²	Continuation of benefits after project or program completion, and the center's positioning, as an organization and in its research outputs, to secure a sustained and growing funding base.

Figure 1. Six CGIAR evaluation criteria with QoR4D elements



Source: [CGIAR Evaluation Framework and Policy](#) 2022

2.2. How Criteria Map to the Six Statements

To produce the Review Matrix, each statement is systematically compared against each criterion's definition to map the application of specific criteria per statement. The table below illustrates the resulting mapping. Thus, a Panel's analysis under a given statement draws on the criteria mapped to it, not all eight.

Table 3. Mapping eight evaluation criteria to six reference statements

Statements	Criteria							
	Relevance	Coherence	Legitimacy	Scientific credibility	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Impact	Sustainability
1. Strategy	X	X			X	X	X	

¹ The CER examines evidence on contribution pathways, uptake, scaling, and outcomes; it is not a comprehensive impact assessment of the center.

² The definition of sustainability varies across CGIAR's own reference sources. The CGIAR Evaluation Policy defines it as continuation of benefits, not funding. The center ToR describes it in terms of a future funding pipeline. Both aspects matter: the flow of benefits into the future and the ability to navigate an uncertain funding environment. Both aspects of sustainability are employed here.

2. Quality and relevance of scientific outputs	X		X	X		X	
3. Partnerships ecosystems	X	X	X			X	
4. Impact Pathways						X	X X
5. Good place to work and good actor			X		X		X
6. Governance and enabling environment			X			X	

Source: [CGIAR Evaluation Framework and Policy](#); [ISDC Quality of Research for Development framework](#); CGIAR CERs: CER Guidance Note.

3. The Self-Assessment: A Center-Led Process

3.1. Stand-Alone Value

The Self-Assessment is the cornerstone of the CER and a useful organizational exercise. It creates a structured opportunity for strategic reflection, preserves institutional memory, and supports internal discussion. Centers should approach it as a learning exercise, not as a compliance submission.

3.2. A Flexible Implementation Model Around a Structured Core

IAES provides the standard six-statement Self-Assessment template, agreed start and end dates with the center liaison, and a deliverable format. Each center decides how to organize its internal process. It is encouraged for the center to identify clear chapter ownership, facilitation, evidence coordination, and editorial quality control appropriate to its structure and culture.

One proven model is to assign a lead for each chapter, hold evidence-based discussions, draft after the main deliberative workshop, and use a communications editor to improve consistency without altering technical judgments. This is an example, not a prescribed development model.

A center may also use an internal coordination team or sounding group to maintain coherence and review the complete Self-Assessment before submission. Whatever model is chosen, the center records its approach, roles, timetable, and internal approval process in a short methodology note.

- The center and IAES will agree the common parameters needed for the CER, including:
- the Self-Assessment framework to be used;
- the start and completion dates;
- key coordination and readiness checkpoints;
- the expected Self-Assessment Report (SAR) structure, length and submission format;
- the format and organization of the indexed evidence annex;
- arrangements for access to evidence, confidentiality and secure information handling; and
- the designated center liaison and submission responsibilities.

Within these agreed parameters, the center determines how to organize its internal Self-Assessment process, including internal roles, facilitation arrangements, sequencing, participation, and internal review or validation procedures.

3.3. Evidence and Indexed Annex

The IAES offers a comprehensive Self-Assessment template covering all six chapters, including indicators, sub-indicators, prompt questions, and illustrative attachments for each chapter. The center uses this template as the starting point for gathering evidence. The center submits an organized, indexed evidence annex: each item is numbered, dated, linked to the relevant chapter and topic. This becomes the primary repository of evidence for the review and reduces the Panel's repeated requests to the center.

The following core documents should be available from the outset, subject to applicable confidentiality arrangements:

- All internal and external audit reports from the previous five years, with Management Responses (MRs) and follow-up.
- The most recent staff or engagement survey, its results, and any associated action plan.
- Audited financial statements and management letters from the review period.

Beyond these three, evidence expectations are indicator-specific and are set out in the Illustrative Attachments column of the Self-Assessment Template, which is provided directly to the center. Where the Panel expects the underlying policy, procedure, meeting record, or evaluation, rather than a summary or inventory, the Template states this explicitly. Where evidence touches sensitive or confidential matters, for example ethics investigations, the Panel expects the governing policy and process, not case-level confidential files, unless a specific need is identified. Routine supplementary evidence requests close ten working days before Stage 4 engagement begins. Later requests require the IAES Review Manager's approval and a clear materiality rationale.

The SAR and indexed annex are treated as privileged documentation made available to the Panel and IAES team members involved in the Review. They are not further distributed by IAES, and access is restricted.

3.4. Illustrative Guiding Principles

At the outset of the Self-Assessment process, each center is encouraged to identify guiding principles appropriate to its organizational culture, operating context, and intended use of the exercise. These principles are owned by the center and are intended to support its internal preparation of the SAR; they are not prescribed by IAES. Illustrative principles that a center may wish to consider include:

- **Transparency:** present evidence and findings honestly, including both achievements and areas requiring improvement.
- **Inclusiveness:** engage staff, partners, and stakeholders at different levels, so strategic and granular perspectives both inform the assessment.
- **Evidence-based:** substantiate findings with quantitative and qualitative data and documentation.
- **Learning-oriented:** treat the exercise as an opportunity to improve, not just to be evaluated.
- **Context-responsive:** tailor the assessment to the center's own history, geographic reach, and operational realities, rather than comparing across centers.

3.5. Duration

Centers should plan for six (to up to eight) weeks from Self-Assessment launch to submission. The exact period depends on evidence readiness, which will be discussed in scoping, and is fixed in the review schedule. Surveys, evidence preparation, and inception planning proceed concurrently

4. The Review Process: Six Stages

Activities in the early stages may overlap, but responsibilities and decision points remain distinct. During Stage 2, the center completes its Self-Assessment while IAES administers the surveys and prepares agreed-upon analytical summaries. Formal Panel inception and substantive analysis begin once IAES confirms that the principal evidence streams are sufficiently ready. This sequence ensures that the Panel's preliminary analysis draws on the Self-Assessment, survey results, and other available evidence, rather than on any single source.

4.1. STAGE 1: Preparation and Orientation

- The Board engagement mechanism established through the Scoping Agreement becomes operational, including arrangements for communication with and reporting to the Board.

- The IAES director and IAES Review Manager orient the center Board and management on the CER's purpose, six reference statements, methodology, participation expectations, intended uses, and safeguards for independence.
 - The Board, center, and IAES finalize the ToR, including scope, five-year dates, priority questions, and geographic engagement.
 - The Board, center, and IAES prepare the draft ToR, including the scope, five-year review period, priority questions, geographic engagement, governance arrangements, and indicative schedule. The Review Management and Quality Group, comprising the members available at this stage, review the draft for coherence, feasibility, clarity of roles, and consistency with the CER Methodology and Process Note. IAES records the disposition of the Group's comments before the ToR is finalized.
 - IAES appoints and contracts the Panel once the ToR and review scope are sufficiently defined. IAES also assigns analytical support and establishes the review workspace, schedule, quality arrangements, and the information-request route.
 - Before the stage 2 survey launch, the center liaison provides IAES with complete, up-to-date lists of staff and partner populations. The staff list includes names, organizational roles or units, locations, countries, time zones, and email addresses. Additionally, the center provides gender-disaggregated workforce data. The partner list includes names, organizations, countries, time zones, email addresses, and the center's existing partner classifications. Records containing names and contact information are maintained as restricted working information and are not disclosed publicly.
 - The ToR records responsibilities and deadlines for list preparation and verification, secure access, survey dissemination and reminders, and the management of any known data limitations. IAES tests access before the surveys are launched, and any unresolved limitations are recorded in the data-readiness decision and Inception Summary.
 - A joint opening meeting brings together the center, the Board engagement mechanism, IAES, and the Panel Chair to confirm a shared understanding of the purpose, roles, schedule, communication routes, and center-specific adjustments.
 - The Panel Chair engages with the Board through a brief exercise to confirm priorities.
- ⇒ **Preparation stage gate: IAES confirms that the ToR and Scoping Agreement are sufficiently defined and that review by the Review Management and Quality Group has been completed and documented. The liaison, Self-Assessment leads and Board engagement mechanism are confirmed, digital access are tested, and staff and partner population lists, evidence plan and principal scheduling constraints are confirmed.**

4.2. STAGE 2: Self-Assessment, Surveys and Evidence Preparation

- The center conducts its Self-Assessment using the IAES-provided Template as a starting point and submits the SAR and the indexed evidence annex within the agreed period.
- IAES administers the standardized staff and partner surveys, aligned with the six reference statements. Existing organizational surveys, including staff-engagement surveys, may provide supporting evidence but do not replace the CER surveys. The survey instruments are tailored to the relevant respondent population, including an appropriate questionnaire pathway or instrument for private-sector partners. Consistency in surveys supports system-wide synthesis and learning activities periodically.
- The staff and partner surveys are distributed to the complete populations provided by the center. The center supports dissemination and reminders in accordance with the responsibilities set out in the ToR (as an annex), while IAES retains responsibility for the survey instruments, administration, data management, analysis, and reporting.
- IAES analysts prepare summaries of the staff and partner surveys, and analyses of bibliometric, policy-citation, and monitoring data covering the full five-year period. These are made available to the Panel through a common evidence workspace or dashboard, where feasible.
- Once survey analysis and the applicable internal quality review are complete, IAES may provide the center with cleared, summary-level, non-identifiable staff and partner survey results. The summaries are shared for

information and organizational learning and are not published. The survey's introductory text informs respondents of these arrangements.

- ⇒ **Data-readiness gate: The IAES Review Manager determines whether the SAR, including the indexed evidence annex, staff- and partner survey coverage, analytical summaries, and core monitoring and reporting data, together with priority impact studies, are sufficiently complete for Panel inception. Limitations and agreed mitigation measures are documented.**

4.3. STAGE 3: Inception and Preliminary Analysis

- After confirming data readiness, the Panel reviews the SAR, the indexed evidence annex, the survey results, and available analytical summaries. The Panel conducts preliminary analysis, identifies evidence gaps, and refines the Review Matrix, interview plan, and geographic coverage. Preliminary virtual interviews may be conducted during this stage, as needed, to clarify factual and contextual matters and inform the center and country engagement plan.
 - The Panel Chair and the Panel member responsible for the governance and enabling environment statement to conduct a Focus Group Discussion with relevant CGIAR System Organization assurance executives, coordinated by the IAES Review Manager. The center's risk, internal audit, and ethics functions are included as required key informants, where those functions exist.
 - The Panel prepares a concise Inception Summary that records any adjustments to the Review Matrix, priority questions, evidence gaps, interview and stakeholder selection approach, geographic coverage, analytical responsibilities, milestones, and any justified deviations from the ToR, Methodology and Process Note or the Panel Guidance Note.
 - The Review Management and Quality Group reviews the Inception Summary for methodological coherence, feasibility, and alignment with the agreed scope and process. The Panel considers the Group's comments, and IAES documents their disposition.
 - On an ongoing basis, the center liaison interprets submitted materials and coordinates access. Routine requests for supplementary evidence close ten working days before Stage 4 begins. Later requests are exceptional and are routed through the IAES Review Manager.
- ⇒ **Following review by the Review Management and Quality Group and documented disposition of its comments, the IAES Review Manager confirms the Inception Summary, including the Review Matrix, evidence gap analysis, interview approach, geographic coverage, analytical responsibilities, and engagement plan. The Panel may then proceed to full inquiry and to center and country engagement.**

Box 1. Interview sampling and stakeholder-engagement planning

Drawing on the evidence-gap analysis, the Panel develops a purposive sample of interviews and focus groups. Selection considers the center's existing partner typology, stakeholder role, geography, program or research area, seniority, and the perspectives already represented in the Self-Assessment and documentary evidence. Sampling deliberately includes external and non-headquarters perspectives and avoids focusing solely on the easiest-to-reach stakeholders.

All staff and partners are invited to participate in relevant CER surveys. By contrast, interviews and focus groups involve a selected group of participants whose perspectives can address evidence gaps, provide contextual understanding, and support triangulation. For internal staff, targeted interviews and appropriately constituted focus groups will normally provide sufficient coverage rather than broad individual interviewing.

The Panel records the proposed stakeholder groups, selection principles, geographic coverage and modes of engagement in the Inception Summary. The approach is reviewed and confirmed by the IAES Review Manager. It is a purposive planning framework rather than a fixed quota.

All interviews are confidential. Participants are informed in advance about the purpose of the interview, how the information will be used, and any arrangements for recording or transcription.

Table 5 provides an indicative planning guide for stakeholder engagement. The Panel adjusts the sequencing and mode according to the Review Matrix, evidence gaps, geographic coverage, and the center's circumstances.

Table 4. Planning guide for stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder Group	Typical engagement sequencing	Typical mode
Center leadership and management	Before the visit	Virtual, with selective in-person follow-up
Research and technical staff	Mostly before the visit	Virtual, with a focus group or two during the visit
Country and regional staff	Mostly before the visit	Virtual, with selective local follow-up
Board, governance, and assurance contacts	Before the visit	Virtual
Funding and strategic partners	Before the visit	Virtual
Scientific and CGIAR partners	Before the visit	Virtual
Host-government counterparts in headquarters and other countries	Before and/or during field visit, as scoped	In person or structured virtual engagement
Implementation, scaling, and civil-society partners	During the visit where relevant	In person or structured virtual engagement
Private-sector partners	Depends on the relationship	Virtual for strategic partners, in person for operational ones (at site of field visit)
Additional informants identified from evidence gaps	Usually before the visit	Virtual unless otherwise required

4.4. STAGE 4: Center and Country Engagement

At the beginning of Stage 4, the Panel prepares a working paper and a cross-statement synthesis structure based on the available evidence. This allows interviews and center and country engagement to focus on validation, triangulation, and unresolved questions rather than on first-pass review.

The Inception Summary determines whether engagement is concentrated at headquarters, includes additional countries and how, or combines in-person and structured virtual consultation. The decision uses the following factors:

- Staff distribution across headquarters, country, and regional locations.
- Program expenditure, research activity, and outcome pathways outside headquarters.
- Number and strategic importance of country or regional offices.
- Legal, diplomatic, hosting, and operational arrangements across locations.
- Partnership footprint and dependence on government, implementation, scaling, and civil-society actors in non-headquarters locations.

When a center's profile meets these criteria, the Review Plan includes additional country engagement, either in person (including opportunistically if Panel members have other travel to that country) or through structured virtual consultation. For centers with significant non-headquarters operations, conducting the first-round interviews virtually before travel and reserving in-person time for validation and team cohesion is worth considering. This approach reduces pressure on a single, compressed visit window. The Inception Summary records the stakeholder groups, geographic coverage, and modes of engagement selected for the review.

Interviews focused on factual, institutional, strategic, or technical background are normally conducted virtually before the principal center or country engagement. In-person time is prioritized for activities where physical presence adds value, including direct

observation, host-government relationships, locally embedded implementation and scaling partnerships, sensitive discussions and contextual validation.

Government, implementation, scaling, private-sector and civil-society stakeholders may be engaged in the headquarters country and in other countries. The choice between in-person and structured virtual engagement is determined through the Inception Summary and reflects the review questions, geographic coverage, stakeholder availability and the value that physical presence adds.

The engagement schedule separates intensive evidence collection from drafting and protects daily time for Panel reflection. Depending on scope, activities during field visits may include:

- Research and strategy presentations focused on evidence relevant to the Review Matrix.
 - Meetings with staff across functions, levels, countries, and career stages.
 - Focus groups designed around identified evidence gaps and underrepresented perspectives.
 - A facilities tour including key assets, equipment, laboratories, greenhouses, genebanks, long-standing test plots, and other relevant infrastructure.
 - Discussions with government, scientific, funding, implementation, scaling, private-sector, and civil-society partners.
 - A focused site visit where direct observation adds value, normally no more than five hours including travel.
 - A closing validation workshop (half day) with management and those engaged in Self-Assessment (as determined by the Office of the Director General), with the Panel sharing preliminary observations with center leadership before departure,
 - The final working day is reserved for a Panel-only writing and synthesis session following validation, with the IAES Manager or another IAES representative present during the center visit.
- ⇒ **Inquiry and validation stage gate: Following the closing validation session and the Panel synthesis day, the Panel Chair confirms that the evidence base is sufficient to proceed to reporting and records any issues requiring limited follow-up.**

4.5. STAGE 5: Reporting, Governance Review, and Recommendation Refinement

Stages 5 and 6 are planned backwards from the Board meeting where the Final Report and MR will be considered. The timetable provides sufficient time for Panel drafting, IAES quality assurance, review by the Board engagement mechanism (focal point/task force), recommendation-refinement, preparation of the MR, and Board pre-reading. Throughout the process, the Panel retains ownership of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

- Following Stage 4 validation and writing session, the Panel prepares a cross-statement Synthesis Matrix that integrates findings across all six statements and completes the initial draft within ten working days.
- IAES conducts a quality-assurance review of the draft, assessing its methodological rigor, strength of evidence, coherence, completeness, and consistency with the ToR and the Guidance Note. The Review does not alter the Panel's responsibility for its substantive judgments.
- Following IAES quality review, the quality-reviewed Draft Report is shared simultaneously with the Review Management and Quality Group and the agreed Board engagement mechanism. The Group reviews the draft for methodological coherence, factual accuracy, clarity, and consistency with the agreed review process. The Board mechanism considers whether the report adequately addresses the Board's priorities and the agreed scope. Feedback from the Group and the Board mechanism is consolidated and documented through separate routes so that its source and disposition remain clear.
- The Board engagement mechanism typically has one week to review the quality-reviewed Draft Report. After this review period, the Panel meets with the Board engagement mechanism to discuss and clarify the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, confirm that the Board's priority questions have been addressed, and identify any factual misunderstandings or matters requiring clarification.
- The Panel subsequently holds a recommendation-refinement workshop with center management. The workshop considers the clarity, feasibility, ownership, and SMART formulation of recommendations. Management may provide factual and implementation context but does not negotiate the Panel's findings or conclusions.

- The Panel considers the feedback received from the Review Management and Quality Group, the Board engagement mechanism, and center management; documents its disposition by source, and makes any necessary revisions within five working days. IAES confirms that the feedback has been handled transparently without compromising the Panel's independence.
- ⇒ **Reporting stage gate: The Panel Chair confirms that the report is final. The IAES Review Manager confirms that IAES quality review, review by the Review Management and Quality Group, engagement with the agreed Board mechanism, recommendation refinement with center management, and documented disposition of feedback are completed. The Panel retains final authority over its findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The Panel-finalized report is then transmitted to center management for preparation of the MR and action plan.**

4.6. STAGE 6: Management Response, Board Consideration, and Dissemination

- Center management prepares a MR and action plan addressing each recommendation. The response identifies the proposed actions, responsible parties, indicative timelines, and resource implications, where relevant. A six-week preparation period is normally provided and may be extended to eight weeks, where justified by the timing of the next scheduled Board meeting.
- Where recommendations require action by CGIAR entities outside the center, IAES coordinates with the relevant entities to clarify responsibility and obtain the appropriate contribution to the MR.
- The Director General clears the MR action plan before their submission to the Board.
- The Board receives the complete report and MR as a pre-read at least two weeks before its meeting.
- The center Board discusses and accepts the Final Report, endorses the MR and authorizes their joint publication.
- Following Board acceptance, the Final Report and MR are published together on the IAES website, the center's website and the appropriate CGIAR publication repository.
- A summary of the review's outcome is sent to the SC.
- IAES offers a briefing session (drop-in call) for a broader internal CGIAR audience, including the CGIAR Council and the CGIAR Board, co-led by IAES, the center Board Chair, and the Director General.
- ⇒ **Completion stage gate: The IAES Review Manager confirms that the Board's acceptance and endorsement have been recorded, the Final Report and MR are jointly published, the required system-level communication is completed.**

5. Governance Arrangements

The formal mandates, decision authority, roles and responsibilities of the center Board, Board engagement mechanism, center management and liaison, IAES Review Manager, Review Panel, Panel Chair, and Review Management and Quality Group are defined in the CER ToR. The review-specific appointments, Board engagement mechanism, checkpoints and escalation arrangements are recorded in the Board, center and IAES Scoping Agreement. This Note does not restate or modify those responsibilities; rather, it explains how the parties interact during the Review process.

The Review Management and Quality Group is engaged at three formal checkpoints: review of the draft ToR, review of the Inception Summary, and review of the quality-reviewed Draft Report. Its comments are advisory and focus on coordination, methodological and process quality, feasibility, factual accuracy, and consistency with the agreed scope and methods. The Group does not approve or determine the Panel's findings, conclusions, or recommendations.

Following the Scoping Agreement, operational communication between the center and IAES is coordinated through the center Liaison and IAES Review Manager. The Panel Chair leads substantive communication on behalf of the Review Panel. The Board participates through the engagement mechanism and checkpoints agreed during scoping, which maintains two-way communication with the full Board.

IAES retains authority over the CER methods, process management, readiness decisions, and quality assurance. The Review Panel retains sole responsibility for evidence judgments, findings, conclusions and recommendations. Center and Board engagement provides evidence, context, and feedback.

Formal governance feedback is consolidated and submitted through the agreed Board engagement mechanism. The Panel documents how the feedback was considered and retains authority over its disposition. The detailed timing, products, participants, and decisions associated with each engagement are described under the relevant review stage and confirmed in the Scoping Agreement.

6. Planning Guidance for Centers

6.1. Liaison Workload

The center liaison role is substantial and requires adequate resourcing. Across an approximately 28–30-week review, centers should reserve about six weeks of cumulative effort, with peaks during preparation, Self-Assessment, engagement planning, and evidence requests.

Table 5. CER center liaison engagement and workload (indicative estimate)

Activity	Approximate Days
Familiarization with the CER process and materials.	3
Self-Assessment facilitation: coordinating chapter leads, workshops, documentation.	7-10 (dependent on facilitation approach and hiring of consultant professional facilitator)
Center visit planning and logistics.	5
Ongoing coordination including during visit: Panel requests, scheduling, document routing.	15

The Director General appoints the liaison. The ideal liaison works directly with the Director General, is positioned in or closely connected to the Office of the Director General and has a cross-functional remit and relationships across the center. A Chief of Staff or comparable role is often well suited because the Liaison must convene senior colleagues, resolve competing demands, and maintain continuity.

6.2. Lead Time for Centers with Recent Leadership Change

Centers with recent leadership changes, limited institutional memory, or fragmented records should begin assembling evidence up to six months before the formal kickoff. All centers should begin the Self-Assessment immediately at launch and protect the full six-week period.

6.3. Scheduling

The approved schedule should avoid known pressure points, including December–January and major Board, portfolio, audit, or reporting deadlines. Board dates are confirmed first so Stage 6 can be planned backwards.

6.4. Generic Timeline and Deliverables

A typical CER is completed over approximately 28–30 weeks, from Self-Assessment to the Board consideration of the Final Report and MR. The Preparatory work following Board commissioning is additional and is not included in this period.

Table 6. CER duration per stage

Stage / timing	Required activities and outputs
1. Preparation Before Week 1	ToR and Scoping Agreement sufficiently defined; Review Management and Quality Group review of the draft ToR completed and documented; Board mechanism and liaison confirmed; access tested; verified staff and partner populations received; Panel and analysts appointed once scope is sufficiently clear; orientation completed; preparation gate passed.
2. Self-Assessment, surveys and evidence preparation Weeks 1–8	Center completes the Self-Assessment (normally within six weeks) and indexed evidence annex. IAES administers standard surveys and prepares pre-analysis. Survey response coverage and evidence completeness; data readiness gate completed.
3. Inception and preliminary analysis Weeks 9–12	Panel reviews available evidence, identifies evidence gaps, refines the Review Matrix, interview plan and geographic coverage, undertakes preliminary interviews where necessary, and prepares the Inception Summary; Inception Summary reviewed by the Review Management and Quality Group; Working paper and synthesis structure prepared; inception gate completed.
4. Center and country engagement Weeks 13–15	In-person and/or structured virtual engagement as scoped; findings validated; Panel writing and synthesis day completed; inquiry and validation gate passed.
5. Reporting and governance review Weeks 16–22	Initial Draft completed within ten working days after the Stage 4 writing and synthesis session (week 17); IAES quality assurance completed; quality-reviewed Draft shared simultaneously with the Review Management and Quality Group and the Board engagement mechanism; approximately one week provided for review; full Panel discussion held with the Board mechanism; recommendation-refinement workshop held with center management; feedback disposition documented; report finalized within five working days and transmitted to center management.
6. MR, Board consideration and dissemination Weeks 23–30	Center MR and action plan prepared over approximately six weeks; full package provided to the Board at least two weeks before its meeting; Board acceptance and endorsement obtained; documents jointly published; required communications completed; cleared survey summaries shared privately with the center.

7. Transparency and Publications

7.1. AI-Assisted Drafting

If AI-assisted tools are used in drafting or analysis, the Panel remains accountable for every judgment, finding, conclusion, and recommendation. Use must follow applicable IAES contractual requirements and principles, protect confidential information, include meaningful human review, and be disclosed as specified in the Panel Guidance Note.

7.2. Publication Management Responses

MR are published together on the IAES website, the center's own website, and CGSpace, after Board acceptance.

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