



ISDC Feedback on CGIAR Portfolio Narrative 2025-2030

Purpose

This pre-read is the report of the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) external review of the Portfolio Narrative 2025-2030. The external review of Narrative is an essential part of good governance and quality assurance, delivering benefits for the researchers, leadership, and System Council. The reviews presented in this report provide confidence to funders that their investments in CGIAR research are appropriately targeted with high chances for success.

Because of the diverse audiences that use ISDC's assessment, the feedback is structured in three sections, providing a mix of high-level considerations while also providing details and questions for future inquiries during the Portfolio Inception Phase.

- Section 1 presents ISDC commentary on codesign.
- Section 2 focuses on high-level themes of the Portfolio Narrative.
- Section 3 comments on the Annexes.

Action Requested

The System Council is requested to read and reflect on the document. The information presented is intended to support System Council in making decisions and recommendations for the CGIAR Portfolio and strategic planning.

<p>Document category: Working document of the System Council. There is no restriction on the circulation of this document</p>
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Independent
Science for
Development
Council

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Introduction

1 In November 2024 the Independent Science for Development
2 Council (ISDC) received and reviewed the *CGIAR Portfolio*
3 *Narrative 2025–2030* (Narrative). Because of the diverse
4 audiences that use ISDC’s assessment, the feedback is structured
5 in three sections, providing a mix of high-level considerations
6 while also providing details and questions for future inquiries
7 during the Portfolio Inception Phase.

ISDC is an eight-person independent science advisory council comprised of diverse experts that provides strategic advice to the funders of CGIAR.

- 8 • **Section 1** presents ISDC commentary on codesign.
- 9 • **Section 2** focuses on high-level themes of the Portfolio Narrative.
- 10 • **Section 3** comments on the Annexes.

11 ISDC used a consensus-building method to generate this assessment, developed during a three-
12 day in-person meeting of the current Council members (N=7 because of one vacancy), with
13 support from the Secretariat. All ISDC research assessments are rooted in the *Quality of Research*
14 *for Development in the CGIAR Context* ([[QoR4D](#)]ISDC, 2020) elements, which formed the basis for the
15 individual proposal reviews for the Science Programs (Programs), Accelerators, and Asset. The
16 QoR4D elements are **relevance**, **scientific credibility**, **legitimacy**, and **effectiveness**. In addition,
17 ISDC used other frameworks and resources it developed since 2022 including [Comparative](#)
18 [Advantage Analysis](#), [Inclusive Innovation](#), and [Megatrends](#) in development of comments and
19 questions for consideration.

20 ISDC understands the intent of the Narrative is deliberately high level and does not allow for details.
21 **Hence, many comments are meant as guidance and constructive feedback for the Inception**
22 **Phase**. Some probing questions are included to spark further examination through the first semester
23 of 2025.

24 Overall, the Narrative outlines the new structure compellingly with logical visuals. ISDC valued the
25 detailed and thoughtful responses to the draft Narrative [feedback](#) provided in May 2024. ISDC also
26 appreciated the use of external evaluation recommendations, addressed and highlighted at the
27 Portfolio level. This approach would have been even more valuable if these recommendations had
28 been consistently cited across all proposals.

29 The organization of CGIAR and its strategic shift from a focus on production to quality and systems
30 is compelling, and the Principles of Use for pooled funding are clear. However, the management of
31 this transition remains unresolved. Although an update of the [2030 Research and Innovation](#)
32 [Strategy](#) (Strategy) is not foreseen, current priorities do not fully align with some research topics. A
33 minor update may be needed to address this misalignment. For instance, migration and conflict are
34 not explicitly covered in the current Strategy.

35 ISDC noticed some disconnect between the Narrative and its 13 proposals, in part caused by the
 36 sequence of their releases. Some proposals are still largely rooted in a linear and technologically-
 37 focused research paradigm that belies the systems orientation CGIAR espouses in the Strategy.
 38 Moving from linearity to complexity will require a sustained, significant cultural shift within the
 39 organization, changing attitudes, behaviors, and approaches.

40 Such a cultural realignment is essential for the successful delivery of the 2025–30 Portfolio. How will
 41 CGIAR leadership drive this cultural change through the revised Portfolio?

42 ISDC looks forward to the launch of the redesigned 2025–30 Research and Innovation Portfolio.

43 **Section 1: ISDC Commentary on Codesign**

44 “At a most fundamental level, codesign is a practice where people collaborate or connect their
 45 knowledge, skills and resources in order to carry out a design task...Codesign activity produces new
 46 knowledge as people develop and experiment with (new) ideas around a matter of concern and as
 47 they engage in negotiations around the development of these ideas” ([Zamenopoulous and Alexiou, 2019](#)).

49 **CGIAR has made a broad, public, and laudable commitment to proposal codesign.** ISDC’s
 50 [Technical Note](#) on QoR4D highlights legitimacy as one of its four key elements. Among other
 51 features, legitimacy implies, “genuine involvement of partners in codesign, and recognition of
 52 partners’ contributions.” In 2022, CGIAR’s System Board tasked an independent **High-Level Advisory**
 53 **Panel** (HLAP) to “advise on fostering ownership of reforms and mechanisms for joint learning and
 54 engagement...” In its report (2023), the HLAP called for CGIAR to “elaborate, in a detailed, transparent
 55 way, the modalities and opportunities for codesign of future CGIAR Initiatives...with responsibility for
 56 designing and implementing the modalities...” CGIAR’s *Engagement Framework for Partnerships &*
 57 *Advocacy (Version 2.0 23, March 2024)* progressed HLAP’s call. The **Engagement Framework** sets out
 58 among conditions for enabling engagement, “Codesign: support of activities, processes, and plans
 59 with a range of stakeholders.” The record of CGIAR’s **Listening Sessions** articulates partners’
 60 demand for proposal codesign processes. Chief among collaboration modalities, the Listening
 61 Sessions single out a need to “Co-Design Project Proposals: Promote a collaborative approach in
 62 proposal development, ensuring projects are codesigned with inputs from all partners” ([Listening](#)
 63 [Sessions](#) as cited in Narrative).

64 **The proposals reviewed by ISDC do not meet the ambitions of the Engagement Framework or the**
 65 **demand for proposal codesign expressed in the Listening Sessions.** Although the proposals
 66 reference the Listening Sessions and mention intended codesigned solutions and specific
 67 innovations, they fail to convincingly demonstrate true proposal codesign. The sections on
 68 evidence-based and demand-led prioritization describe stakeholder consultation, the analysis of
 69 national data sources, and other evidence-based methods to assess program needs. Listening
 70 Sessions and stakeholder consultations alone do not constitute codesign of proposals. Codesign is
 71 expected to continue through the Inception Phase, but it’s crucial to consider what codesign insights
 72 were gained from the 2022–24 Portfolio. Effective codesign requires continuous, balanced
 73 participation among all stakeholders. How will partner engagement in design and adaptive
 74 management be equitably managed? Moreover, codesign with partners must extend beyond
 75 involvement to achieve true inclusivity.

76 **ISDC recommends that during Inception Phase, the commitment to advance Program and**
 77 **Accelerator codesign as an engagement enabler should be prioritized.** This approach requires
 78 sufficient resources, clear guidance, effective tools, and key performance indicators (KPIs), as well
 79 as integration of best practices and lessons from the 2022–2024 period. A starting point is a
 80 concrete, shared definition of codesign used across CGIAR. As an immediate step, ISDC suggests
 81 documenting the precise role of external partners in the prioritization analyses. This record would

82 help illustrate how dialogue with various partners has informed the prioritization of work areas and
 83 geographies. As next steps are implemented, the concrete role of partners (identifying which
 84 partners, representing which constituencies, in which geographies) in contributing to the strategic
 85 direction of the research should be elaborated.

86 Codesign implies **all types of stakeholders**. Funding partners **may** be important actors in codesign.
 87 As an example, during the design of the 2022-2024 Initiatives, a constructed process for codesign
 88 with funding partners was visible and transparently communicated: the Investment Advisory
 89 Groups. ISDC was an active observer in this codesign process between CGIAR science leadership
 90 and funders, governed by careful parameters to avoid ISDC conflicts of interest (given its eventual
 91 review of the resulting proposals). The 11th meeting of System Council [discussed this codesign](#)
 92 [process](#). CGIAR should consider if the role of funding partners in the Portfolio 2025-30 has been
 93 equally transparent, systematic, and if not, make improvements where needed.

94 **In summary, ISDC urges CGIAR to revisit its commitments to proposal codesign.**

- 95 (1) The extremely valuable practices of Listening Sessions and stakeholder consultations are
 96 not substitutes for codesign.
- 97 (2) Effective codesign includes, among other facets, an active and equal role of defined
 98 partners in analyses that inform prioritization of work and geographies, which in turn guide
 99 the strategic direction of Programs and Accelerators.
- 100 (3) Descriptions of codesign are most convincing in the reviewed proposals when years of joint
 101 work on shared research questions are discussed and reflected, as in some proposals.
- 102 (4) Partner engagement in codesign, including funding partner engagement, should be
 103 transparent and recorded.
- 104 (5) Codesign of proposals requires adequate time and resources to ensure meaningful
 105 engagement and alignment with CGIAR's and partners' strategic goals.

106 **Section 2: High-level Themes of the Portfolio Narrative**

107 **Funding the Portfolio: Pooled and Bilateral Funding**

108 The implementation of whole of CGIAR programmatic investments will be an important and positive
 109 innovation in the 2025-30 cycle. Yet, the Narrative provides little visibility on the modalities of
 110 integrating bilateral and pooled funding, a core justification for the Portfolio revision (p. 19). The
 111 integration may not be as advanced as expected. ISDC observed an inability to follow funding
 112 threads between the described work and source funds, which will inhibit Strategy implementation.
 113 The term "integrated" is used often but not defined. Future work on connecting the financial and
 114 monitoring system is imperative and should be a priority to connect inputs and outputs (p. 42).

115 CGIAR should consider developing guidelines for integration of bilateral and pooled funding to
 116 enhance synergies across Centers and Programs. A key aspect of these guidelines would be
 117 ensuring that Center scientists understand and communicate the CGIAR-level Portfolio synergies.
 118 This could also reduce any tendency for W3 and bilateral funding to implicitly expect pooled funds
 119 to underwrite overhead costs. Guidelines that emphasize full cost recovery, no matter the funding
 120 source, could eliminate cross-subsidization, ensuring both overheads and opportunity costs are
 121 fully recovered.

122 During ISDC consensus building, the following questions emerged.

- 123 • How will CGIAR manage the integration of pooled and bilateral funding for Portfolio
 124 cohesion?
- 125 • What levers will the Chief Scientist deploy in their work with Center Directors General
 126 considering the integrated partnership structure and lack of line authority?
- 127 • How will CGIAR prevent and/or manage competition among Centers for pooled funding?

- 128 • How will scientists be incentivized and motivated to work seamlessly within a pooled and
129 bilateral system?
130 • What happens if System Council (SC) approves a mechanism to earmark W2 funding to
131 Areas of Work and some Areas of Work receive relatively little funding? What was learned
132 about managing this challenge in the 2022–24 cycle?

133 As mentioned earlier, the Sankey diagram in figure 3 is useful and appreciated. Questions remain
134 regarding bilateral funding flowing into each Program and Accelerator. This can be remedied by an
135 additional figure illustrating bilateral funding flowing into the Portfolio by high-level subjects.

136 **Sequence and Rollout**

137 The proposal reviews were a six-week process that included three external subject matter experts
138 (SMEs) and one ISDC member per proposal. The proposal reviews were finalized before the Narrative
139 became available. This timing created a sequencing challenge within the review process. For
140 example, expert teams reviewed Genebanks as a distinct proposal, as supplied. Reviewers were
141 unaware that the Inception Phase is engineered to address gaps related to MELIA, risk management,
142 comparative advantage, etc.

143 Reviewers would have benefited from viewing the figures in the Narrative prior to conducting
144 proposal reviews. The figures offer a clearer understanding of the overarching CGIAR-level structure
145 that guides the pathway from science to impact. The Narrative was received only at the conclusion
146 of the ISDC external proposal review that engaged 39 experts. Therefore, it could only be assessed
147 and used during the internal ISDC consensus building. In this review, ISDC noticed some
148 incongruencies in emphases. For example, while the Environmental Health and Biodiversity Impact
149 Area emphasis is reflected in the Narrative, actions to improve the context of the Impact Area don't
150 receive much attention across proposals.

151 **Research Ethics and Risk Management**

152 A robust risk framework is essential for strong proposals and enhances their robustness and
153 credibility. Proposals must clearly outline risk mitigation to allow for the assessment of feasibility and
154 preparedness. The Narrative risk framework is a good starting point and CGIAR proposals should
155 adopt it. Currently, the proposals lack adequate risk analyses, which are apparently earmarked for
156 the Inception Phase.

157 One facet of reputational and operational risk in a research organization relates to scientific
158 integrity. Scientific integrity is crucial not only for protecting CGIAR's reputation but also for delivering
159 trustworthy insights that support global food and nutrition security, biodiversity, and sustainability.
160 CGIAR should consider developing and using clear standards for upholding scientific integrity,
161 research ethics, and accountability. This includes implementing rigorous ethical standards,
162 particularly in working with minors (<18y) and related generally to data and digital practices, for
163 instance, working with digital sequence information. Proposals should reference ethical standards,
164 with detailed outlines on how the standards will be monitored and enforced in the context of the
165 specific Program's or Accelerator's targets, locations, and participants.

166 As a global leader in agricultural research, CGIAR should also consider strengthening guidelines for
167 Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements across all Programs and Accelerators, especially in
168 collaboration with institutions that require IRB oversight. Furthermore, as CGIAR broadens its
169 partnerships, reinforcing the operationalization of ethics standards through memorandums of
170 understanding and agreements through transparent procedures is advised to ensure
171 accountability, ethical compliance, and fulfillment of partnership commitments, thereby enhancing
172 CGIAR's overall risk management and ethical practice.

173 **Social Inclusion and Capacity Sharing**

174 CGIAR could benefit from more self-reflection and learning from external organizations regarding
 175 social inclusion, not just gender, but also indigenous groups and youth. ISDC notices the Accelerator
 176 primarily focuses on gender and there are missed opportunities for social inclusion of youth and
 177 indigenous groups across the Programs. While gender appears to be CGIAR's priority, youth and
 178 indigenous groups, and social inclusion processes receive inadequate attention within the
 179 Accelerator and throughout the Portfolio. Further, ISDC wonders why gender and social inclusion
 180 research is highlighted in the Narrative (p. 24), while the other priority areas, such as climate, are
 181 not.

182 Capacity sharing is primarily externally focused, training partners and others. Will there be an
 183 internal component? While two-way learning encompassed in the capacity "sharing" positioning is
 184 noted, success relies on CGIAR learning to learn from others, which represents a deep cultural
 185 change in the organization.

186 Similarly, the decolonization of research and learning approaches represents another deep cultural
 187 transformation. The commitment to invest in a Gender and Social Inclusion Accelerator is a good
 188 start, yet these points on deep cultural shifts do not come through in the Narrative. Programs should
 189 use the tools of Scaling for Impact to assist in reaching local populations and apply social inclusion-
 190 related learning from Listening Sessions. Culture changes towards learning to learn from others and
 191 decolonization will reinforce CGIAR's efforts to realign programming from a linear and technology-
 192 driven paradigm to a systems transformation paradigm, opening space for more learning from
 193 partners and beneficiaries.

194 **Geography and Scaling**

195 The current map (figure 2, p. 17) provides the number of Programs per country, helpful to garner an
 196 initial understanding of critical mass in space. The map could be elaborated by adding a critical
 197 factor: the size and intended reach of those Programs in terms of funding and people. There are
 198 some unanswered questions as well. ISDC questioned if and how historical research from the
 199 Initiatives will adjust to align with 2025-30 geographic priorities. Are marginalized geographies, such
 200 as drought-affected areas and water-limited environments, appropriately in focus for research and
 201 scaling efforts? Section 4.1 on leveraging does not include scaling, which should be considered
 202 during the Inception Phase.

203 For future consideration, how will geographies with little Program crossover be managed across
 204 pooled and bilateral funding? As CGIAR proceeds with the Inception Phase, coordination details of
 205 collocated, integrated research at sub-national scales are needed. What will be the role of the
 206 Scaling for Impact Accelerator in the overarching structure of collocation at varying scales?

207 Scaling for Impact will need support and resources to fulfill its role across the other 11 Programs and
 208 Accelerators. Its credibility depends on resources and capacity both within and outside CGIAR. While
 209 figure 1 is very useful, a few minor adjustments would increase clarity.

210 **Interdependencies**

211 A suggestion for further development is to assess the interdependencies and tradeoffs between
 212 Programs surrounding mixed farming systems, particularly crop-livestock systems. How will multiple
 213 Programs, such as Multifunctional Landscapes, Sustainable Animal and Aquatic Food, and
 214 Sustainable Farming, under a context delineated by the Changing Climate Program interact and
 215 clear lines of responsibility identified to highlight synergies and avoid duplication? Including a figure
 216 would enhance understanding.

217 **Role of Accelerators**

218 In a business environment, the term “accelerators” primarily implies activities to fast-track the
219 growth of startups. To differentiate and ensure clarity within the Portfolio and with partners, an
220 Accelerator definition and a clear mandate in CGIAR’s context would be beneficial.

221 The Narrative describes the general purpose of an Accelerator, which can be interpreted as a type
222 of a definition. However, including a mission statement for each Accelerator in the introduction of
223 each proposal could further strengthen clarity and support cohesive implementation across the
224 Portfolio. Establishing and reinforcing two-way linkages is important, both within the Accelerators
225 and with the Programs.

226 ISDC also questioned the classification of certain proposals as Programs rather than Accelerators:
227 two examples are “Policy Innovations” and “Scaling for Impact.”

228 **Merge of Breeding for Tomorrow & Genebanks**

229 ISDC, together with the external review teams, assessed the proposals as presented during the
230 external review process. In other words: we reviewed Breeding for Tomorrow and Genebanks as two
231 distinct proposals. The Narrative supplied further information about the desire to merge Breeding for
232 Tomorrow and Genebanks. Based on the information provided, ISDC concluded that a merger of the
233 Program and the Asset is an organizational decision rather than a scientific matter.

234 ISDC reiterates that the right organizational structure and culture needs to be in place for Breeding
235 for Tomorrow to collaborate with Genebanks to access and use the diversity held in seed and
236 germplasm collections. Additionally, Breeding for Tomorrow should collaborate with Digital
237 Transformation to use contemporary informatic tools to manage the extensive volumes of data
238 generated by new methods of high throughput sequencing and phenotyping. The weaknesses in
239 the Genebanks proposal will not be solved via a merger. There is a need to critically examine the
240 role of Genebanks in terms of objectives, operational needs, germplasm overlaps (duplications) and
241 gaps, and long-term future positioning. The challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss
242 need to be more explicit. Genebanks’ assets should be included in the Portfolio of assets and
243 reviewed to assess true costs and investment in upgrades or new facilities required.

244 **Missing Sections or More Information Needed**

245 Five critical topics were not sufficiently covered by the Narrative:

246 *Value Proposition.* A value proposition is a key component of an organizational plan and essential to
247 engage new funders. However, the value proposition was cut from the May Narrative draft.

248 *Water.* Water is only part of one of the 13 proposals and does not receive the emphasis it should
249 considering its importance as implied by the CGIAR tagline of “Transforming food, land, and water
250 systems in a climate crisis” and global megatrends that have implications for the Strategy. Water is
251 an integral factor in food and nutrition security, conflict, migration, and climate change.

252 *Climate mitigation.* Mitigation overall should be stronger, especially since climate is one of the
253 emphases throughout the Portfolio. CGIAR can be an active player in climate mitigation. While
254 Sustainable Animal and Aquatic Foods and Sustainable Farming include some climate mitigation
255 research activities related to lowering emissions, little if any is related to the potentiality of
256 agriculture to provide sinks in soils. Incentives for farm-scale emission reduction and for soil organic
257 carbon enhancement could be given fuller coverage.

258 *Discontinuation of Work.* Two examples of completed work from 2022–24 are provided (p. 32). What
259 else was completed in the first three years or what lessons were learned, which eventually led to
260 discontinuation of activities? A similar comment applies to the de-prioritization, with only one
261 example from Breeding for Tomorrow provided.

262 *Implementation*. Part of the Inception Phase should include implementation plans. Innovation
 263 bundling and colocation should be an aspect of implementation plans.

264 **CGIAR's Role Among Partners**

265 Partnerships exist for a purpose. Sometimes a purpose is fulfilled or has run its course. Partnerships
 266 are also costly; they require resources and have opportunity costs. Hence, a strategy to respectfully
 267 disengage once an outcome has been achieved or the relationship is no longer functional is
 268 important. No organization can afford to add partnerships ad infinitum. ISDC welcomes CGIAR's
 269 plans to issue a revised Partnership and Engagement Strategy (Partnership Strategy) as planned for
 270 December 2024.

271 Notwithstanding the existence of an updated [Framework](#) for partnerships and advocacy, providing
 272 feedback on partnerships was difficult with no Partnership Strategy in place. The delivery of the
 273 Partnership Strategy before the preparation of proposals and the Narrative would have been a
 274 better sequenced work organization. Once the Partnership Strategy is completed, how will it inform
 275 the Narrative and proposals and when will changes be incorporated for alignment?

276 Other related ISDC questions related to CGIAR and partners.

- 277 • The Portfolio's next iteration will benefit from a statement about private sector engagement
 278 and how intellectual property will be managed, even at a high level. This was raised earlier
 279 by ISDC. ISDC has understood this will be addressed in the forthcoming Partnership Strategy.
- 280 • How will partners be vetted to ensure alignment and risk mitigation?
- 281 • The global approach driven by CGIAR planning cycles needs to be complemented by
 282 building, forging, and supporting partnerships at a more local- and Program-level scale.
 283 Enduring partnerships are based on trust that is built over years among individual scientists,
 284 research groups, and their partners. The Narrative and Partnership Strategy should
 285 recognize and celebrate the value of this bottom-up partnering approach.

286 **Comparative Advantage**

287 ISDC appreciates the comparative advantage analysis and understands it will be further developed
 288 during the Inception Phase. To enhance this analysis, CGIAR should be compared to similar
 289 organizations, particularly regarding human capital input. Additionally, the analysis should include
 290 what capital partners contribute and identify the types of partnerships needed to strengthen
 291 CGIAR's comparative advantage. More clarity is needed on the first paragraph (p. 29) and emphasis
 292 overall on targeted outputs.

293 **Theory of Change and Impact**

294 The main question from ISDC is why assumptions were not included in the Portfolio-level Theory of
 295 Change. Knowing how the Programs and Accelerators contribute to the Portfolio-level Theory of
 296 Change is useful, but this does not replace assumptions (p. 22). Assumptions are a critical
 297 component of Theories of Change. Without them the veracity of the analyses and causal linkages
 298 cannot be established. *Most proposals did include assumptions related to the outcome level.*
 299 *However, assumptions at all levels of the Theory of Change—from input to impact—will be*
 300 *important to explore, record, and monitor.*

301 The performance and results management section is ambitious and clear. The accountability
 302 mechanism that prepares for a 2028 review is noteworthy. This plan is applauded and will boost
 303 adaptability through the next six years to meet arising challenges and implement what has been
 304 learned through the practices of monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment.

305 Further commentary is needed on the 2030 Impact Targets (Section 2 related to Annex 5).

306 Are the targets obtainable with current infrastructure and funding? What if funding goals are not
 307 achieved and decreases? How and when will CGIAR leadership reconcile top-down impact numbers

308 from what was presented in proposals? Lastly, the ambitious impact for crop yields (1% increase per
 309 year directly attributable to CGIAR) needs more clarity, including what (if any) baseline was used.
 310 ISDC also does not understand the reference to the “integration of *ex-ante* insights” into the Strategy
 311 choices (section 2.3).

312 **Additional Feedback**

- 313 • Analysis of the innovation environment in which CGIAR operates would help to better
 314 understand CGIAR's global role.
- 315 • A figure mapping the network of hubs, labs, etc., discussed across all proposals would be
 316 useful, particularly areas where they can or will work in complementary or synergistic
 317 fashion.
- 318 • Despite being an Impact Area, identifiable actions for Environmental Health and Biodiversity
 319 are scarce and little attention is provided to these issues.
- 320 • An analysis of what other sectors' effective work related to megatrends could help CGIAR in
 321 identifying best practices.
- 322 • The Narrative states it is “intentionally not rigid” (p. 20), to create space for complementarity.
 323 Fostering complementarity also requires intentional planning and using inputs to progress:
 324 the how, what, and why of adaptive management.
- 325 • More information on how the senior leadership structure will work in practice is needed for
 326 efficiency and effectiveness.
- 327 • The Narrative states an overarching management structure. In subsequent steps, the
 328 management structure will need to cascade through proposals and be articulated in each
 329 Program and Accelerator. To date the management sections/plans were absent or quite
 330 light in proposals.

331 **Section 3: Comments on Annexes 3–5**

332 **Annex 3: Detailed Guidance and Templates for Writing Teams to Undertake the Program-level** 333 **Prioritization Exercise**

334 **Annex 4: Detailed Guidance and Template for Writing Teams to Undertake Program-level** 335 **Comparative Advantage Analysis**

336 Overall, the guidance provided in Annex 3 for the writing teams is helpful. However, receiving the
 337 Narrative after the review of the Programs and Accelerators was completed has led to some
 338 inconsistencies in ISDC's feedback. If reviewers had prior knowledge of these steps, it might have
 339 influenced their feedback on comparative advantage and prioritization. Making only steps 0–4
 340 mandatory for current proposals suggests that many essential steps for a coherent Portfolio will
 341 occur during the Inception Phase in 2025. Consequently, issues such as comparative advantage
 342 analysis and prioritization were only partially addressed by the writing teams, resulting in frequent
 343 critical feedback from reviewers. It remains unclear how all these activities will be completed during
 344 the Inception Phase.

345 A lack of appropriate capability will affect the prioritization of research. While some of this will
 346 emerge from a thorough comparative advantage analysis, it would be beneficial to add an explicit,
 347 additional step after Step 9 on capability. This step would help identify whether CGIAR has the
 348 existing capability for such research or if partners need to be brought in to fill the gap. Providing
 349 resources to partners should not be seen as a limitation. Instead, it could lead to more deliberate
 350 partnerships with specific expertise rather than relying solely on existing partners. Consideration
 351 should be given to whether local community expertise could fill these gaps rather than exclusively
 352 drawing on global experts.

353 Methods for the conduct of a comparative advantage analysis are well articulated. The Narrative
354 should be improved for readers who are not fully familiar with CGIAR. Once this approach is
355 standardized across the Portfolio, it will allow for comparisons across Programs and Accelerators.
356 Starting at the highest level and then cascading the analysis down to the level of Area of Work is
357 sensible and should be adopted during the Inception Phase. To avoid unintentional biases, it would
358 be useful to have this process facilitated by an external expert. This is particularly important for new
359 areas of research, which should include a clear risk assessment. There is a risk of the comparative
360 advantage analysis becoming repetitive during the Inception Phase, leading to a loss of impact.
361 Therefore, NARES and university partners need to be explicitly mentioned, rather than simply being
362 categorized generically.

363 **Annex 5. Methods for Projection of Impact Ambitions**

364 Some stronger justification for assumptions is required. For instance, the 1% productivity gain per
365 annum needs to be evidenced, while regional differences need to be accounted for. Is the 1%
366 productivity gain based on CGIAR only research or does it reflect aggregate growth rates, of which
367 CGIAR is a contributor? If the former, that is an ambitious target just from CGIAR research outcomes.
368 If the latter, then a process for attributing CGIAR's contribution needs to be developed. Benchmarks
369 for productivity growth should be provided, along with some simple sensitivity testing of the
370 assumptions.