



Independent
Advisory and
Evaluation
Service



Culture and Engagement in CGIAR: Independent Review

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Cover image: C. de Bode/CGIAR (2018) – Hung Nguyen, ILRI food system specialist, visiting a government research facility.

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This evaluation report and its annexes were prepared by an independent evaluation team. The combined engagement, was overseen and guided by the CGIAR Independent Evaluation under the Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) and the Internal Audit Function, led respectively by Svetlana Negroustoueva and Elbert Hidding (IP Internal Audit Executive). The overall direction was provided by Allison Grove Smith, Director of IAES.

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Acronyms

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.

C&E	Culture and Engagement	MR	Management Response
DG	Director General	MYEP	Multi-Year Evaluation Plan
GDI	Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion	P&C	People and Culture
EF	Evaluation Function	PRMS	Performance and Result Management System
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group	RTE	Real-Time Evaluation
EMD	Executive Managing Director	QA	Quality Assurance
GLT	Global Leadership Team	SIMEC	Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
IA	Internal Audit	SC	System Council
IAES	Independent Advisory Evaluation Services	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ICI	Integration, Coordination, Independence	ToR	Terms of Reference
IFA	Integration Framework Agreement	UN	United Nations
IPB	Integrated Partnership Board	WoWs	Ways of Working
ISDC	Independent Science for Development Council		

Executive Summary

Under the System Council (SC)-endorsed Multi-Year Evaluation Plan (MYEP) ([2025-27 Workplan for IAES \(SC/M21/DP5\)](#)), the review of the 2020-27 [Gender, Diversity and Inclusion \(GDI\) action plans](#) and [the Action Plan for Advancing Culture and Engagement \(C&E\) in CGIAR's Workplaces](#)¹ is a joint activity between the Evaluation Function and the CGIAR Internal Audit Function. The [Terms of Reference](#) (ToR) for the review was endorsed and approved, with a requirement of recommendations being subject to a [CGIAR Management Response](#) (MR). The purpose of this review was to provide an independent and credible assessment of the [2020-27 Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(GDI\) Action Plans](#) and the [Action Plan for Advancing Culture and Engagement \(C&E\) in CGIAR's Workplaces](#). Recommendations are subject to Management Response as per CGIAR-wide evaluation policy and evaluation guidelines as the [Management Engagement and Response \(MER\)](#): Process and Performance Evaluations in CGIAR, and [CGIAR process note on MR](#).

Coherence and Compliance

To what extent does the GDI/C&E Action Plan align with the [CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#)? The GDI/C&E Action Plans strongly support CGIAR's 2030 Research Strategy, by strengthening culture, leadership, and system capabilities that enable the delivery of the Strategy's mission. However, the 2030 Research Strategy does not explicitly integrate GDI or C&E considerations, resulting in an alignment that is largely one-directional and most evident to stakeholders already prioritizing equity and inclusion.

How coherent are GDI-related results between previous and 2025-27 action plans vis-à-vis the 2020 GDI Framework? What is the coherence

between the GDI and C&E formulation and framing of the 2025-27 Plan evolution? GDI-related results from previous plans and the 2025-27 C&E Plan align closely with the 2020 GDI Framework. The 2023-24 Plan established key frameworks and tools, while the 2025-27 Plan advances both scope and maturity. While conceptual and operational consistency have been maintained, measurement remains weak. Inconsistent data, unstable metrics, and the discontinuation of the GDI Matrix limit longitudinal comparability and constrain the ability to track progress over time.

How well do the GDI Framework and Action Plans comply with both funder requirements (as a member of System Council) and legal requirements, as well as CGIAR policies?

Alignment between the GDI Framework and Action Plans translates into compliance with funder and legal requirements. Both the GDI Framework and subsequent Action Plans, therefore, meet these obligations.

Relevance and Sustainability

To what extent have GDI/C&E-related recommendations for Framework and practices to foster gender equity been mainstreamed within organizational practices for the relevance of the GDI Framework and 2025-27 Action Plan?

CGIAR's GDI Framework and Action Plans are partially aligned with earlier recommendations to advance gender equity. Implementation of GDI and C&E initiatives is ongoing but uneven across centers, with progress influenced by leadership commitment, resource availability, and organizational culture. Staff report positive changes while also noting inconsistent application. Measurable gains in gender representation and participation are evident; however, progress has not yet been consistently embedded across the system, and elements of gender equity remain in the process of institutionalization.

¹ To date, there are three action plans for advancing GDI/C&E in CGIAR's Workplaces: [2020-21](#), [2023-24](#), [2025-27](#).

How do GDI and the Workforce reporting integrate with the performance reporting of CGIAR? GDI and Workforce reporting are not integrated with performance reporting. This gap has been driven by governance and accountability barriers rather than technology limitations, resulting in a structural inability to measure how workforce composition influences CGIAR's research performance. The lack of integration limits CGIAR's capacity to understand how its people contribute to scientific performance and research outcomes.

To what extent do CGIAR's assurance mechanisms provide GDI-related information that is timely, reliable, and useful for informed decision-making, and how does this support the relevance and sustainability of the GDI agenda? CGIAR's assurance mechanisms provide only a basic and limited level of GDI-related information. While the C&E workstream has established an initial assurance environment, systemic barriers and confidentiality constraints reduce timeliness, reliability, and usability of information, creating operational and credibility risks. Consequently, these mechanisms only partially support the relevance and long-term sustainability of the GDI/C&E agenda.

Effectiveness

How effectively do governance and accountability structures support GDI implementation across CGIAR? CGIAR's governance and accountability structures provide a foundational framework for GDI but do not ensure consistent, system-wide implementation. While the overall architecture supports visibility and legitimacy, it lacks coherence, adequate resourcing, and clearly defined responsibilities, leaving progress largely dependent on individual leadership. Delays in the People Database and the C&E Index have created multi-year gaps in center-level accountability following the discontinuation of the GDI Matrix.

How effective are data controls, streamlined processes, and coordinated assurance lines in

supporting GDI systems? The C&E team has established foundational data controls and standardized processes across centers, including formal review steps and a common data language. However, structural fragmentation, inefficient workflows, and uncoordinated assurance lines limit their effectiveness, resulting in untimely, unreliable, and low-utility data. These constraints prevent the data from fully supporting informed decision-making or the long-term sustainability of the GDI agenda.

How timely, reliable, and decision-useful is GDI monitoring and reporting? CGIAR's GDI monitoring and reporting systems are increasingly valuable for transparency but remain limited by delayed reporting, fragmented HR systems, and uneven local capacity. While data reliability has improved, the existence of multiple versions of workforce data and limited dashboard use undermine credibility and decision-making, with overall effectiveness heavily dependent on leadership engagement.

Efficiency and Risks

Are roles, responsibilities, and controls clearly defined and functioning to support GDI risk management and implementation? Are oversight and management responsibilities appropriately defined, separated, and exercised in practice? Despite the Global Leadership Team (GLT)'s mandate and Board oversight, accountability for GDI implementation remains inconsistent. Centers vary in their integration of the Action Plan, and the absence of mechanisms to hold management accountable, weakens overall enforceability. GDI-related risks are largely unassessed, with reporting only indirectly referencing them under People & Culture.

How integrated and effective are CGIAR's assurance systems in supporting GDI with strong controls and processes? The GDI Action Plan 2023–24 requires independent assessment of workplace GDI by IAES and Internal Audit at least every five years, and integrating GDI considerations into annual risk-based audits. CGIAR's Evaluation Policy requires addressing GDI parameters, and the system's risk appetite

includes fostering an inclusive, dynamic workforce aligned with GDI objectives.

Recommendations: The review team provided ten recommendations by estimated responsibilities, subject to Management Response [CGIAR MR](#).

Executive Leadership and Governance:

1. Clarify Organizational Aspirations

CGIAR's programmatic strategy (currently 2030 Strategy) should articulate the type of organization it aims to be, the principles shaping its culture, and finalize its Gender Strategy.

2. Integrate and link the GDI framework and the Action Plan into the CGIAR strategy:

Ensure values such as inclusivity, integrity, and accountability translate into organizational practices.

3. Focus System Council Reporting:

Ensure information provided to the System Council aligns with its oversight role and strategic priorities. Present a concise, high-level bullet-point summary of the critical issues for decision-making, with detailed materials available separately.

4. Formalize GDI Integration with centers

guided by the Integration Framework Agreement (IFA), including:

- Formalize alignment of center strategies and Action Plans with GDI Action Plans.
- Assign GDI roles, responsibilities, and targets to align with the GDI Framework & forthcoming Gender Policy.
- Define measurable commitments and reporting frameworks.
- Identify and monitor risks to GDI Action Plan implementation.

C&E Function (data collection, accountability):

5. Improve Data Governance and Access:

- Establish secure anonymized data access mechanisms (e.g.,

CSV/JSON export) to enable quality assurance without compromising privacy.

- Accelerate consultations with P&C Leads, Data Focal Points, and technical staff for the C&E progress index of co-development.
- Resolve inconsistencies by aligning the public dashboard with the official workforce definition or formally revising the definition.

6. Enhance Dashboard Utility:

Define user archetypes (e.g., center managers, science leads) and tailor dashboards to their needs with automated governance reports, analytics, and benchmarking.

7. Track GDI Integration:

Monitor and report on the extent to which GDI Action Plans are incorporated into centers' strategies and action plans.

8. Address Data Misalignment:

Seek a GLT-supported mandate and governance framework to enable responsible integration of people data with program performance (and, where relevant, financial) data.

9. Reactivate Inactive ERGs:

Assign a specific project that all centers can learn from and provide an advocate for them.

10. Adopt System-Wide Data:

Complete adoption of the CGIAR 360 People Database: Establish a People Data Framework Agreement (modelled on Financial Framework Agreement); appoint a business champion and address capacity gaps at Center level.

The implementation of the above recommendations and actions will be monitored in the [Management Response Tracker](#) of the CGIAR's portfolio performance unit.

1. Introduction

Under the System Council (SC)–endorsed Multi-Year Evaluation Plan (MYEP) ([2025–27 Workplan for IAES \(SC/M21/DP5\)](#)), the review of the 2020–27 [Gender, Diversity and Inclusion \(GDI\) Action Plan](#) and [the Action Plan for Advancing Culture and Engagement \(C&E\) in CGIAR's Workplaces](#)² is a joint activity between the Evaluation Function and the CGIAR Internal Audit Function. The [Terms of Reference \(ToR\)](#) for the review were endorsed and approved by respective governance of assurance functions, with a requirement of for recommendations to be subject to a [CGIAR Management Response \(MR\)](#).

Under an assurance framework, the Evaluation Function (EF) and the Internal Audit (IA) Function aimed to address accountability and learning related to Culture and Engagement and GDI (CE/GDI) at CGIAR from complimentary perspectives, working together to conduct this independent review.

The 2025 GDI/C&E Review is the second evaluation conducted by GDI in the workplace; the first was the 2017 [Evaluation of the Gender at the CGIAR Workplace](#). Between this 2025 Review and the 2017 evaluation, several other evaluative activities provided recommendations related to GDI, although not explicitly focused on GDI. The 2025 GDI/C&E Review offers an opportunity to assess the status and outcomes of the 2017 recommendations as well as other related recommendations identified across relevant reports.

1.1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this advisory review is to provide an independent and credible assessment of the [2020–21](#) and [2023–24 GDI Action Plans](#), as well as the [2025–27 Action Plan for Advancing C&E in CGIAR's Workplaces](#). In support of both accountability and adaptive learning, this joint review adopts a combined summative and formative approach to examine how effectively GDI/C&E practices are integrated across governance (System Council; Integrated Partnership Board [IPB] and Center Boards), management (Executive Managing Director [EMD], Global Leadership Team [GLT], and center management), research, and organizational culture throughout the CGIAR partnership. By addressing the review questions in Table 1, this comprehensive advisory and assurance review aims to:

- **Independently assesses** the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability of results across three successive action plans (2020–27): including the supporting systems, controls, and dashboards.
- **Validates** governance roles, risk mitigation measures, and data quality parameters (completeness, accuracy, timeliness, relevance, usability, and efficiency) that underpin GDI reporting and evidence-based decision-making at both center and system levels.
- **Corroborates evidence** to advise on whether and how implementation of the 2025–27 Action Plan can be strengthened.

Furthermore, review would assess status of implementation of recommendations [the 2017 Evaluation of Gender in Research and in CGIAR Workplace](#) (see [MR](#) and status summary in Annex 8).

The review scope covers the CGIAR partnerships, including system-level entities and selected centers.

² To date, there are three action plans for advancing GDI/C&E in CGIAR's Workplaces: [2020–21](#), [2023–24](#), [2025–27](#).

Table 1. Evaluation criteria and review questions

Coherence and Compliance A 1. To what extent does the GDI/C&E Action Plan align with the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy? 2. How coherent are GDI-related results between previous and 2025–27 action plans vis-à-vis the 2020 GDI Framework? What is the coherence between the GDI and C&E formulation and framing of the 2025–27 Plan evolution? 3. How well do the GDI action plans comply with funder/legal requirements and CGIAR policies?	Effectiveness C 1. How effectively do governance and accountability structures support GDI implementation across CGIAR? 2. How effective are data controls, streamlined processes, and coordinated assurance lines in supporting GDI systems? 3. How timely, reliable, and useful is GDI monitoring and reporting?
Relevance and Sustainability B 1. To what extent have GDI/C&E-related recommendations for policies and practices to foster gender equity been mainstreamed within organizational practices for the relevance of the GDI Framework and 2025–27 Action Plan? 2. How does GDI/Workforce reporting integrate with the performance reporting of CGIAR? 3. To what extent do CGIAR's assurance mechanisms provide GDI-related information that is timely, reliable, and useful for informed decision-making, and how does this support the relevance and sustainability of the GDI agenda?	Efficiency and Risks D 1. Are roles, responsibilities, and controls clearly defined and functioning to support GDI risk management and implementation? 2. Are oversight and management responsibilities appropriately defined, separated, and exercised in practice? 3. How integrated and effective are CGIAR's assurance systems in supporting GDI with strong controls and processes?

**Evaluation
Criteria and
Review
Question**

2. Overview of C&E and GDI Context

Since 2022, implementation of [the 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#) of CGIAR has been structured around [three Science Groups \(2022–24\)](#) and a programmatic [Portfolio \(2025–30\)](#), alongside revisions to [the organizational structure](#). CGIAR portfolios have been designed to deliver impact across five Impact Areas: (1) Climate Adaptation and Mitigation; (2) Environmental, Health and Biodiversity; **(3) Gender Equality, Youth, and Social Inclusion**; (4) Nutrition, Health, and Food Security; and (5) Poverty Reduction, Livelihood and Jobs. In [the 2030 Strategy](#), CGIAR committed to seven Ways of Working (WoW)³, or implementation approaches, intended to ensure that research delivers real development solutions.

Predating the launch of the 2030 Strategy in 2022, the 2020 [Framework for GDI](#) in CGIAR's workplaces articulates that diverse and inclusive teams are better able to solve complex problems consistently, accurately and effectively than homogeneous teams. Improving workplace GDI is therefore expected to enhance the quality of decision-making, increase the relevance of advice and outputs, and boost efficiency and effectiveness, capabilities that are vital in CGIAR's work environment, where creativity, responsiveness, and collaboration underpin success. To implement the 2020 Framework, three successive action plans have since been developed and implemented:

³ The 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy [Seven WoWs](#): Embracing a systems transformation approach, seeking multiple benefits across five SDG-linked Impact Areas; leveraging ambitious partnerships for change in which CGIAR is strategically positioned; positioning regions, countries, and landscapes as central dimensions of partnership, worldview, and impact; generating scientific evidence on multiple transformation pathways; targeting risk-management and resilience as critical qualities for food, land, and water systems; harnessing innovative finance to leverage and deliver research through new investment and funding models; making the digital revolution central to our WoW. IAES Study (2025) <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/synthesis-learning-cgiars-ways-working>

- The first [Action Plan for GDI in CGIAR's Workplaces 2020–21](#) was launched alongside the Framework.
- The second action plan, [2023–24 Action Plan for advancing GDI in CGIAR's Workplaces](#) built on achievements¹ and lessons learned, incorporating evidence-based best practices.
- The third [Action Plan for Advancing C&E in CGIAR's Workplaces](#) (2025–27) renamed to advance Culture and Engagement, broadened the scope beyond GDI.

3. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

This joint advisory engagement, combining the CGIAR Internal Audit and Evaluation Functions, assessed CGIAR's progress and effectiveness in implementing its GDI Action Plans over two key periods: the completed 2020–24 Action Plans (summative) and the early implementation phase of the 2025–27 C&E Plan (formative). The following sections describe the approach and methodology used to meet the review objectives and address the questions in Table 1.

3.1 Overall Approach

Guided by the [CGIAR Evaluation Framework Policy](#) and Internal Audit methodologies, this advisory and assurance review applied a summative approach to the 2020–24 Action Plans and a formative approach to the 2025–27 Action Plan. Both approaches sought to assess the integration of GDI/C&E within CGIAR, using a common methodology jointly developed by the EF and IA. The formative component included additional lines of inquiry focused on strengthening evidence use and implementation of [the 2025–27 Action Plan for Advancing C&E in CGIAR's Workplaces](#).

The review adopted a [Real-Time Evaluation \(RTE\) approach](#), which is particularly suited to supporting adaptive management and learning in dynamic contexts. This enabled ongoing feedback and reflection during implementation. A participatory approach was applied throughout the review, fostering sustained engagement with the C&E/GDI team and enhancing the relevance, usability, and credibility of findings. The most significant added value was derived from the involvement of funder (System Council members) and the C&E/GDI team.

CGIAR governance bodies, such as the [Integrated Partnership Board \(IPB\)](#) and [SIMEC](#), along with management and representatives of the [Independent Science for Development Council \(ISDC\)](#), were invited to participate in an *ad hoc* consultative group, co-chaired by the IAES director, with the participation of the Internal Audit lead.

3.2 Joint Approach Between Evaluation and Internal Audit

Review questions (see Table 1) are guided by the mandates of the Evaluation Function and Internal Audit, along with their respective guiding documents: the [Evaluation Framework](#) and [Policy](#) (2022), and the Internal Audit Charter. For this joint activity, the evaluation criteria and thematic focus provided the framework for the key review questions, which were addressed within the respective mandates of each function. Where both functions examined the same questions, methods differed according to their areas of expertise, with complementary perspectives enhancing the depth and breadth of the analysis.

To ensure analytical coherence and review efficiency, the team jointly determined which function – Internal Audit, Evaluation Function or both – would lead on each review question (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Where interviewee lists overlapped, joint interviews were co-led by team members from both functions. This collaborative approach ensured consistency in data collection, reduced respondent burden, and strengthened the validity and shared ownership of findings.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Aligned with the Real-Time Evaluation (RTE) approach, a mixed-methods design was applied to provide both depth and breadth of analysis, emphasizing participation, co-creation, and triangulation of evidence.

- Qualitative data were collected through 46 semi-structured interviews: including key informant interviews with individual experts and leaders, and group interviews to capture shared experiences and institutional perspectives (see Annex 2 for the full list of interviewees and the interview process).
- A document review complemented the interviews, drawing on CGIAR frameworks, strategies, policies, and relevant program documentation to contextualize findings and assess alignment with organizational priorities.
- Secondary quantitative data were analyzed to validate and supplement qualitative evidence, providing an empirical basis for identifying trends and patterns over time and across units.
- A case study on data quality assurance (DQA) was developed, synthesizing findings across the evidence streams to assess the quality, reliability, and decision-usefulness of the GDI/C&E data ecosystem. This included direct testing and validation of the GDI/Workforce dashboard data and functionalities.

Criterion sampling was used to select ICARDA, ILRI, and the Bioversity-CIAT Alliance for in-depth analysis. Selection was based on gender parity, contextual diversity, and data readiness to ensure a balanced and representative system-wide perspective

3.4 Limitations and Mitigations

There were three primary limitations to the review that were mitigated to the extent possible.

- **Social desirability and response bias.** Participants may have tailored responses to align with perceived organizational expectations or to avoid criticism of leadership.

Mitigation: Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and interview data were triangulated with document reviews and anonymous survey inputs.

- **Power dynamics and trust barriers.** Hierarchical and cultural norms may have sometimes discouraged open sharing, especially on sensitive GDI issues.

Mitigation: Questions were framed around experiences rather than judgments, and participation was voluntary. Participants were informed that interviews were confidential; they could decline participation, skip any question and end the interview at any time.

- **Inconsistent interpretation of GDI concepts.** Participants at times demonstrated differing understandings of key concepts, which may have affected data consistency.

Mitigation: Follow-up probes were used during individual and group interviews to clarify meanings and ensure comparability.

4. Review Findings by Evaluation Criteria

4.1 Coherence and Compliance

EQ 1: To what extent does the GDI/C&E Action Plan align with the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy?

Evidence indicates strong alignment between the GDI/C&E Action Plans and CGIAR's 2030 Research Strategy, including the SDG5-aligned Impact Area, as the plans enable the culture, leadership, and system capabilities needed to deliver on 2030 mission. However, the Strategy itself does not explicitly acknowledge or integrate GDI or C&E within its WoWs or strategic priorities, resulting in alignment that is largely one-directional and most apparent to stakeholders already prioritize gender equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Evidence

All three Action Plans define actions, indicators, and targets intended to support multi-year cultural transformation. The CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy emphasizes systems transformation, scientific innovation, and global impact by 2030. The Gender Position Paper was reviewed to provide additional context beyond EQ 1 and subsequently informed EQ 4.

Content analysis found no explicit references to GDI or C&E within the 2030 Strategy, including its strategic rationale, ways of working (WoWs), or organizational assets. Limited implied alignment appears only through references to co-design, co-generation, and partnerships, as well as brief mentions of equity linked to nutrition and social outcomes. However, these references relate primarily to external outcomes rather than internal staffing composition or leadership diversity. While the GENDER Platform's Gender Position Paper recommends fostering inclusive internal environments and diverse research teams, these principles are not embedded into the Strategy.

Conclusion: The GDI/C&E Action Plans clearly support delivery of the CGIAR 2030 Strategy by establishing foundational conditions required to achieve its mission. However, the Strategy itself does not reflect or reinforce this alignment, beyond the SDG5-focused Impact Area. As a result, progress on GDI and C&E appears largely driven by internal champions rather than institutional prioritization, raising concerns that efforts may be performative and remain insufficiently anchored in CGIAR's strategic architecture.

EQ 2: How coherent are GDI-related results between previous and 2025–27 Action Plans vis-à-vis the 2020 GDI Framework? What is the coherence between the GDI and C&E formulation and framing of the 2025–27 Plan evolution?

GDI-related results from previous Action Plans and the 2025–27 C&E Plan align closely with the 2020 GDI Framework. The 2020–24 Action Plans established the core frameworks, policies, and tools required to put the 2020 Framework's principles into practice, providing a consistent basis for integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion across CGIAR's systems and practices. The 2025–27 Action Plan maintains this alignment while advancing the Framework's goals through a clear progression in scope and maturity. However, the relationship between GDI and C&E are not clearly articulated. Interview data suggests mixed interpretations; some stakeholders view GDI and C&E as distinct concepts, while most other data strongly suggest that C&E largely reframes GDI under a different label, potentially to align with donor expectations. Regardless of interpretation, the 2025–27 Action Plan has a conceptual and operational consistency with CGIAR's evolving organizational structure. While the formation and framing are coherent, measurement remains weak.

Two data streams: (1) Workforce Engagement Surveys 2023–25; and (2) Annual Workforce Data (collected since 2020, except 2022), demonstrate the potential to support longitudinal analysis of GDI- and C&E-related results. However, the coherence of intent is undermined by weak longitudinal comparability across key data sources. Ongoing organizational restructuring, unstable indicators, and the discontinuation of the GDI Matrix, combined with delays in its replacement, have hindered the ability to assess progress over time.

Evidence

Findings and conclusions draw on interviews and document review. Evidence is detailed in Annex 5 (comparison of 2020 Framework Principles Compared to Outcomes for 2022–24), Annex 6 (comparative

analysis of the 2020 Framework, 2023–2024 and 2025–27 Action plans in terms of results), and Annex 7 (thematic comparison of GDI/C&E Action Plan).

a) Interview data

While a substantial volume of interview data was collected (see Annex, detailing 51 interviews), the analysis provided limited evidence that renaming GDI as C&E resulted in a substantive shift in focus. Where differences were identified, C&E was described as emphasizing how people experience the workplace, including behaviors, values, leadership practices, and employee engagement that shape organizational climate and performance. GDI focuses on ensuring fair representation, participation, and opportunities across gender and other identity dimensions. However, the majority of interview evidence indicates that, in practice, C&E and GDI are addressed in largely the same way, differing primarily in terminology rather than substance (see Annexes 5–7).

b) Process review – exploring the Plans against the Framework

The 2020 GDI Framework outlined a shared vision, principles, roles, and initial objectives, supported by a two-year Action Plan for 2020–21, and established the foundation for integrating GDI into CGIAR. The 2023–24 Action Plan retained the same vision and principles while introducing more detailed activities, outputs, indicators, and targets, and expanding the focus on diversity. While the 2020 Framework established the foundation, the 2023–24 Action Plan placed greater emphasis on strengthening individual staff capabilities.

All CGIAR centers were consulted in the development of the 2023–24 and 2025–27 Action Plans, both of which were approved by the Global Leadership Teams (GLT). Comprising senior executives and center directors, the GLT provides collective strategic leadership and coordination across the CGIAR System, and plays a vital role in aligning CGIAR’s global research agenda, organizational culture, and delivery mechanisms. This consultative process indicates that CGIAR centers and the GLT consider the 2025–27 Action Plan to be consistent with the principles and intent of the 2020 GDI Framework.

c) Comparative Analysis of the Action Plans

All Action Plans maintain a consistent thematic structure, linking each principle to corresponding outcomes, and preserving core concepts, supported by measurable indicators and mixed-method data collection. Analysis of the 2023–24 and 2025–27 Action Plans demonstrates continuity, development, and coherence in the transition, from the first Action Plan and the 2020 Framework.

The 2025–27 Plan builds on earlier foundations by introducing additional system-level metrics and longer-term impact indicators. The principal shift is from establishing systems and processes (2023–24) to monitoring adoption, implementation, and behavioral outcomes (2025–27). The Plan introduces impact indicators that link staff perceptions, retention, and engagement to leadership and workplace culture outcomes. Measurement is intended to become more standardized, encouraging common frameworks and competency models across the system, with accountability extending more clearly to senior leadership and management levels to governing bodies (GLT, IPB, and System Council), through formal mechanisms for tracking progress (see findings in the next section on the implementation of tracking and assessment).

While each successive Action Plan established its own internal indicators and targets, the absence of a minimal set of common SMART metrics across all three periods has constrained longitudinal evaluability. Foundational objectives—such as pay parity and systemwide diversity demographics—are now being systematically reintegrated through the co-development of the C&E/GDI Progress Index (2025), which aims to bridge the accountability gap left by the discontinued GDI Matrix. Table 2 presents a comparison across five broad categories.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the Action Plans

Thematic Areas: 2020 Framework and Initial Action Plan	Comparison Results: 2023–24 and 2025–27 Action Plans
Inclusive Leadership	Both plans focus on building inclusive leadership through training, frameworks, and behavioral indicators. The 2023–24 Plan emphasizes awareness and expected behaviors, while the 2025–27 Plan shifts toward institutional adoption and measurable outcomes, linking competencies to HR systems, and tracking impact through engagement surveys, retention, and e-learning.
Fair, Safe, and Inclusive Workplaces	Both plans view inclusion as essential to workplace culture, supported by capacity-building resources. The 2023–24 Plan focuses on establishing structures such as ERGs, knowledge hubs, inclusive language, and wellbeing frameworks, while the 2025–27 Plan shifts to implementation and evaluation through endorsed frameworks, performance integration, and stronger engagement and retention measurement.
Raising Awareness and Reducing Bias	Both plans seek to embed GDI into recruitment, performance, and retention, with a focus on data and reducing bias. The 2023–24 Plan emphasizes mainstreaming through tools and training, while the 2025–27 Plan advances toward data-driven workforce representation, standardized collection, published dashboards, and a shared CGIAR 360 People Database with common recruitment and exit data standards.
Accountability	Both plans embed accountability through governance, evaluation, and audits. The 2023–24 Plan emphasizes reporting through the GDI Matrix and workforce dashboards, while the 2025–27 Plan strengthens system-level accountability by introducing the C&E Index, linking progress to governing bodies, allocating resources, and providing regular updates.
Progressing in Partnership	Both plans stress collaboration, coordination, and recognition. The 2023–24 Plan details coordination mechanisms, recognition programs, and procurement and internship initiatives, while the 2025–27 Plan integrates partnerships into cross-CGIAR accountability, making collaboration a mainstream objective.

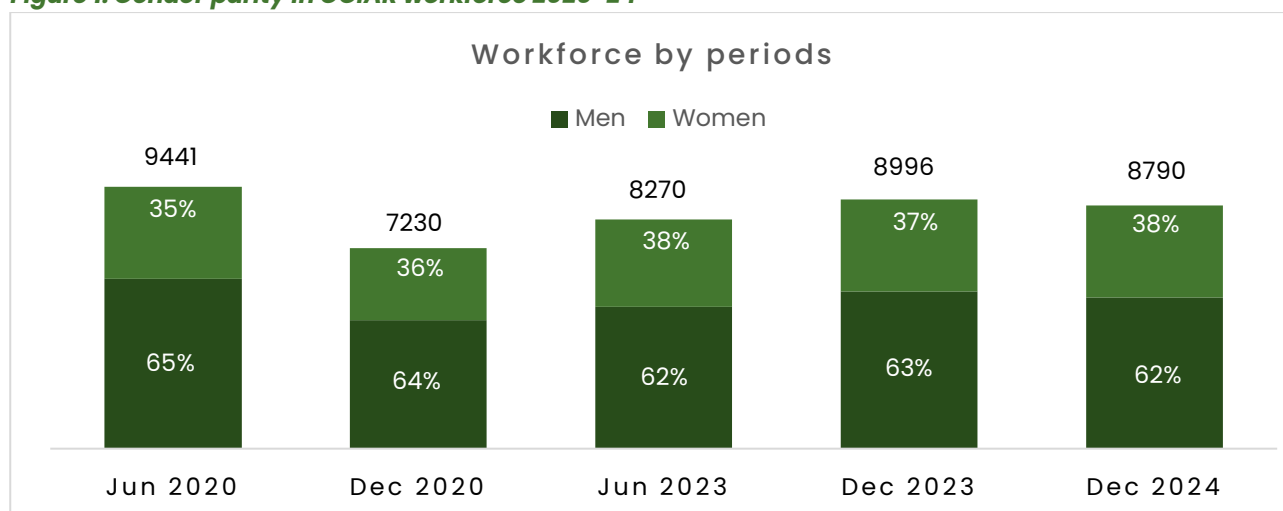
d) Measurement of Intended Results

Consistent and comparable results can gauge strategic effectiveness. While the strategic framing of the three Action Plans is coherent, the measurement of results remains notably inconsistent across two key areas.

1. *Systemic instability in organizational definitions.* Ongoing restructuring has resulted in inconsistent definitions of key population groups—such as executive leadership—undermining the reliability of longitudinal analysis of GDI results. Reported shifts in representation, including the drop from 39% to a projected 21% female representation, primarily reflect structural reclassification rather than policy performance.

2. *Discontinuity in accountability measurements for center level.* The GDI Matrix was applied once in 2020 and subsequently discontinued due to challenges in substantiating results, creating a significant measurement gap. Continued incoherence is largely attributable to delays in developing and deploying its successor, the C&E Progress Index. Despite these limitations, *two data streams show promise for improving coherence.*

Two data sources with potential for consistent, system-wide measurement nevertheless present challenges. The CGIAR-wide Workforce Engagement Survey (2023–25) offers a methodologically consistent instrument for tracking cultural perceptions, though it remains unclear which questions are repeated to ensure stable baselines for longitudinal analysis. Annual Workforce Data is collected from 2020 (excluding 2022) and provides coherent aggregate figures that support longitudinal comparison (see Figure 1). While institutional demographic and perceptual data are largely coherent, the analytical and accountability layers built on this data are not. Figure 1 illustrates an example of this disconnect.

Figure 1. Gender parity in CGIAR workforce 2020–24

Source: [Public C&E Workforce Dashboard](#), accessed 28 October 2025.

Conclusion: The evidence analyzed includes interviews and an extensive comparative document review. Results from earlier GDI Action Plans and the 2025–27 C&E Plan align closely with the 2020 GDI Framework, showing clear progression and increasing maturity over time. While distinctions between GDI and C&E are not consistently articulated, the 2025–27 Plan strengthens accountability and supports cultural and behavioral change. Interview evidence on implementation largely suggested that GDI and C&E are applied in practice as the same focus. However, inconsistent measurement, shifting indicators, and the discontinuation of the GDI Matrix undermine longitudinal comparability, weakening coherence, and limiting the ability to demonstrate sustained impact.

EQ 3: How well do the GDI Framework and Action Plans comply with funder and legal requirements and CGIAR policies?

Alignment between the GDI Framework and Action Plans ensures compliance with funder legal requirements.

Evidence

The GDI Framework provides a unified approach for fostering GDI. Across CGIAR workplaces. The GDI-related requirements are incorporated into the standard provisions of funding agreements between funders and the CGIAR System Organization for Windows 1, 2, and 3 funding. These provisions are subsequently reflected in the financial framework agreement between the System Organization and centers. The standard provisions require the System Organization and centers to:

- Comply with and report to funders, through the System Council, on progress and challenges in advancing gender and social inclusion.
- Avoid discrimination against people with disabilities.
- Conduct operations following sound social, ethical, and safety standards and practices.
- Comply with all applicable CGIAR policies and procedures.

Conclusion: The CGIAR GDI Framework sets out the requirements contained in funding agreements and serves as the core guiding document on GDI. Subsequent GDI Action Plans are directly aligned with the Framework, translating these requirements into objectives and targets for each planning period.

4.2 Relevance and Sustainability

EQ 4: To what extent have GDI/C&E-related recommendations for Framework and practices to foster gender equity been mainstreamed within organizational practices for the relevance of the GDI Framework and 2025–27 Action Plan?

CGIAR’s GDI Framework and Action Plans are partly aligned with earlier recommendations on advancing gender equity. While implementation of GDI and C&E Initiatives is active, it remains uneven across centers, with progress dependent on leadership commitment, resource availability, and organizational culture. Findings show measurable gains in gender representation and participation, however, progress is not yet fully embedded or consistent, and elements of gender equity are still in the process of institutionalization.

Evidence

To answer three review questions – alignment with past recommendations, mainstreaming into the 2025–27 Action Plan, and a specific focus on gender equity – this section presents the relevant evidence.

- *Evidence of recommendations integrated to promote gender equality policies and practices*

Analysis of nine key documents spanning 2017 to the present identifies foundational frameworks, multi-year action plans, and guidance notes that outline principles, responsibilities, and measurable actions to advance gender equality within the CGIAR. Findings indicate that all the recommendations have been at least partly addressed (see table in Annex 6).

- *Evidence of practices to embed GDI and gender equity into organizational practices*

Table 3 below provides evidence of how GDI and gender equity principles are reflected in organizational practices.

Table 3. Evidence of GDI and gender equity principles

Principle	Achievements	Challenges
GDI Framework’s Overall Vision. CGIAR workplaces are enabling and inclusive, embracing diversity in all dimensions and supporting every person to reach their full potential to advance innovation for global development.	CGIAR translates values such as respect, collaboration, and continuous learning into practice through inclusive recruitment panels, balanced shortlists, and training focused on empathy, psychological safety, and systems thinking. Regular dialogue between staff and leaders strengthens engagement and problem-solving.	Implementation is uneven. Inclusive recruitment and psychologically safe practices vary across centers, and training effectiveness depends heavily on leadership modeling CGIAR values.
Foster Diversity and Inclusion and Provide Fair, Safe, and Inclusive Workplaces	Significant advances support diverse staff needs, including childcare and caregiver policies, flexible work, and culturally responsive approaches. ERGs and awareness initiatives strengthen belonging, while grievance channels and staff councils reinforce fairness and accountability.	Application of policies is inconsistent and often dependent on individual leaders. Confidence in grievance systems varies, and gaps persist between formal commitments and lived experience.
Raise Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and Reduce Bias	Comprehensive initiatives raise awareness of bias and inequality through structured training, leadership development, and practical tools integrated into recruitment and performance management. Leadership programs reinforce collaboration and psychological safety.	Implementation varies widely. Leadership engagement is inconsistent, cultural context complicates application, and training does not always translate into behavior change.

Principle	Achievements	Challenges
Progress in Partnership	Internal partnerships support harmonized standards, shared learning, and cooperation among leadership, HR, and C&E teams. ERGs and cross-center dialogues strengthen collaboration and engagement. External partnerships offer opportunities to expand influence.	Partnerships are fragmented and rely on individual champions. Cross-center coordination is inconsistent, and external partnerships remain underutilized.
Inclusive Leadership	Leadership efforts increasingly foster open dialogue, cross-center collaboration, feedback mechanisms, and supportive spaces for diverse voices. Leadership development programs strengthen empathy and teamwork.	Experiences vary across centers and depend on individual leadership style. Follow-through on feedback is inconsistent, and participation gaps persist, particularly affecting junior and remote staff.
Workplace Culture	Many staff report feeling valued and supported, citing open communication, fair processes, and a shift toward developmental performance management.	Managerial capability is uneven, and structural barriers such as stalled promotions and unequal opportunities persist. Psychological safety varies across locations and groups.
Workforce Representation	Fairer and more transparent recruitment and promotion processes are reported, with increased representation of women and efforts to maintain gender balance during restructuring.	Informal recruitment persists, gender imbalances remain in some offices, and contract and pay disparities especially affecting local staff limit equity.
Accountability	Values are increasingly embedded into daily practice through diverse recruitment panels and reflective learning within leadership development.	Implementation varies, revealing gaps between policy and practice.

- *Evidence of Gender Equity*

Findings on gender equity within CGIAR indicate substantial progress alongside persistent structural and cultural challenges. Overall, gender equity has advanced in measurable ways, particularly in representation and leadership. Women now make up 38% of the total workforce – the highest single-year increase toward parity – and female leadership has grown substantially, including a 20% increase in women’s representation on the GLT in 2025. Several boards, including the IPB, have achieved gender parity, reflecting strong top-level commitment to equality. Targeted C&E initiatives, such as LEAD Together and the mentorship program, have strengthened women’s leadership pipelines. Retention indicators have also improved, promotions of women increased by over 40%, while resignations among women dropped significantly. Collectively, these metrics point to meaningful progress toward equitable participation and leadership visibility across CGIAR.

At the same time, findings also reveal uneven progress across centers and roles. While some centers have integrated gender equity within broader people-and-culture strategies, through inclusive recruitment, affinity groups, and active leadership engagement, others continue to face constraints related to limited resources, inconsistent leadership commitment, cultural barriers, and prevailing social norms. This unevenness results in varied experiences of gender equity across the system.

Culturally, attitudes toward gender inclusion are improving in most contexts, however, responsibility for equity has yet to be fully normalized beyond HR functions or individual champions. Respondents noted that while gender-responsive policies are largely in place, their effective implementation depends on

managerial capabilities and levels of trust. Leadership engagement consistently emerged as a decisive factor.

- *Examples of Evidence of C&E Achievements*

The C&E team has shown significant achievements and overall maturation. CGIAR has evolved GDI into C&E, reflecting a broader mandate to embed inclusion, collaboration, and trust as core organizational drivers. The EMD, executive sponsor, and the GLT endorsed the 2025–27 Action Plan, signalling commitment to cultural transformation and measurable impact. Achievements to date have focused primarily on increasing the representation of women in leadership and across the organization. According to CGIAR data, women comprised 38% of the workforce in 2024, representing the largest single-year gain toward parity to date. Female representation in the GLT increased by 20% in 2025, supported by more diverse senior-level appointments. Boards are approaching gender-balance, with the IPB achieving a 50/50 split. Progress is also evident in talent development. LEAD Together – CGIAR’s first cross-center leadership development program – was launched with 125 participants, while the mentorship program engaged over 200 staff. The Well-Being and Me initiative reached 1,450 staff members, and a mental health first aid training course was developed. Retention indicators improved modestly: women’s promotion rates increased from 43% to 47%, while female resignation rates decreased from 61% to 51%.

Conclusion: CGIAR’s GDI Framework and 2025–27 Action Plan partially align with earlier recommendations on advancing gender equity. Implementation of GDI and C&E initiatives is active but uneven across centers, shaped by leadership engagement, resource availability, and organizational culture. Measurable gains include increased gender representation, leadership participation, and retention, supported by targeted programs such as LEAD Together and mentorship programs. Boards and senior leadership show strong commitment, with some bodies reaching gender parity.

Despite this progress, challenges persist. Implementation of policies and practices varies, cultural attitudes toward inclusion differ across contexts, and accountability mechanisms are not yet fully embedded. Uneven leadership engagement and structural constraints continue to produce disparities in how gender equity is experienced across centers and roles. Overall, CGIAR has made meaningful advances in embedding gender equity and GDI principles, particularly in leadership, workforce representation, and talent development, while further institutionalization remains necessary.

EQ 5: How do GDI and the Workforce reporting integrate with the performance reporting of CGIAR?

GDI and workforce reporting are not embedded in performance reporting. The gap is driven by governance and accountability barriers rather than technology limitations, creating a structural inability to measure how workforce composition influences CGIAR’s research performance. The lack of integration limits CGIAR’s ability to demonstrate how its people contribute to scientific performance and research outcomes.

Evidence

While the C&E Action Plan (AP-25) and CGIAR’s 360 strategy articulates strategic intent for integration, this intent has not been fully realized. As explored in the DQA case study (see Annex 3 for executive summary) GDI/workforce reporting remains separate from CGIAR’s performance without evidence of horizontal or vertical integration within the data ecosystem. Horizontally, no linkage exists between PRMS reporting and workforce data.

Program leaders have been reluctant to connect GDI metrics to program performance, citing that hiring accountability resides at the center level. This reflects a governance impasse rather than a technical constraint for senior leadership to address. The C&E team itself acknowledges the need to “investigate the possible impact of the composition of teams ... on results.” In parallel, a separate data silo—the Research Initiatives People Dashboard—relies on different data sources and presents conflicting headcount figures,

preventing a unified view of the workforce. C&E attributes these discrepancies to differences in scope: its dashboards include all research-related staff, including those on bilateral projects excluded from the Initiative-focused dashboard. While both scopes are valid, they generate “multiple truths” for users without detailed knowledge of how the datasets relate.

Vertically, the People’s Database Project—intended to enable automated data flows from centers to the system level—has stalled due to governance issues. Technical leads confirm that the proof of concept is complete, with nearly half the centers participating. However, no entity has authority to mandate data sharing, and current manual processes cannot produce reliable system-wide data at scale.

Conclusion: CGIAR has feasible technical pathways and shared strategic intent to connect people data with performance and (optionally) financial data. Progress is stalled primarily by governance and mandate gaps (GLT/ICI/IRF), rather than technology. Until there is a GLT-backed mandate setting scope, authority, and minimum standards (including Unique IDs and integration timelines), people data will remain functionally siloed from PRMS and program analytics—even if dashboards remain accurate within their distinct purposes.

EQ 6: To what extent do CGIAR’s assurance mechanisms provide GDI-related information that is timely, reliable, and useful for informed decision-making, and how does this support the relevance and sustainability of the GDI agenda?

CGIAR’s assurance mechanisms offer a basic but inadequate level of GDI-related information to support informed decision-making. While the C&E workstream has established an initial assurance environment where none previously existed, systemic barriers continue to undermine the timeliness, reliability, and usefulness of the data. Current confidentiality constraints limit validation and obscure data quality issues, creating both operational and credibility risks. As a result, assurance mechanisms only partially support the relevance and long-term sustainability of the GDI/C&E agenda.

Evidence

This evaluation question examines the strength of the overall control environment and whether current systems generate data that are sufficiently robust and timely to support internal management oversight and external assurance bodies (such as Internal Audit/IAES). Effective performance in this area is essential to sustaining the relevance of the GDI agenda over time.

As detailed in the DQA case study (see Annex 3), the evidence presents a mixed picture. The establishment of baseline controls represents a significant achievement; however, structural and confidentiality constraints limit their practical use and impact. These constraints prevent validation, mask reliability issues, and introduce operational and credibility risks.

- *Achievement: Establishing Assurance Controls*

From an initial zero baseline, the C&E team created a pragmatic assurance framework. Workforce data now passes through formal approval steps, including structured data quality checklists, standardized templates, and center-level approval from P&C Leads. The five-month processing cycle allocates extensive time for review, correction, and sign-off, reinforcing ownership and accountability across the federated structure. The introduction of a common data language provides a translation layer across more than 15 center grading systems, enabling system-wide comparability.

- *The Compromise: Timeliness and Reliability Gaps*

Despite these control mechanisms, the system still falls short of modern standards for timely decision-making. The manual and lengthy review cycle results in annual outputs that provide only a “historical snapshot,” which is inadequate for operational assurance in a system experiencing 10.4% annual turnover.

This diminishes the effectiveness of the assurance ecosystem and discourages engagement with the central GDI/C&E agenda.

- *The Threat to Sustainability*

Structural constraints and governance decisions threaten ongoing assurance performance. Dashboards lack exportable datasets, limiting independent validation and forcing error-prone manual processes. Data governance choices obscure reliability issues, preventing the detection of known failures, including a documented technical error in which displayed aggregate totals contradicted underlying sums. In parallel, the stalled People Database Project indicates a governance failure that hampers future system improvements. Without resolving the strategic integration deadlock identified under EQ 5, the assurance framework cannot demonstrate relevance to research performance.

Conclusion: Current assurance mechanisms establish essential foundations but do not yet provide GDI-related information that is sufficiently timely, reliable, or useful to support informed decision-making. Governance constraints and systemic barriers weaken long-term sustainability and limit CGIAR's ability to position GDI as strategically relevant to research performance.

4.3 Effectiveness

EQ 7: How effectively do governance and accountability structures support GDI implementation across CGIAR?

CGIAR's governance and accountability structures provide a foundational framework for GDI but do not ensure consistent, system-wide implementation. While the architecture supports visibility and legitimacy, it lacks coherence, resourcing, and clear lines of responsibility. Progress therefore relies on individual leadership commitment rather than embedded institutional mechanisms. The People Database is stalled by a policy vacuum, a lack of business sponsorship, and unfunded capacity, jeopardizing the data-dependent 2025 Action Plan. Delays in co-developing the C&E Index have prolonged a multi-year gap in measurement for center-level accountability following the discontinuation of the GDI Matrix.

Evidence

Governance and accountability structures across CGIAR support GDI implementation in principle, but their effectiveness varies widely in practice. Several interconnected themes emerge, including structural misalignment during transitions, leadership commitment and visibility, inconsistent accountability mechanisms, limited resourcing and capacity, and challenges in maintaining coherence across centers. Six key themes are summarized in the table below.

Table 4. Evidence of governance and accountability structures with achievements and challenges

Theme	Achievements	Challenges
(1) Structural Instability and Fragmentation	Leadership changes and organizational restructuring presented challenges but also demonstrated resilience in maintaining GDI visibility across CGIAR. Committees include broad representation, signaling commitment to inclusive governance, and the P&C merger with People & Culture reflects an intent to embed GDI more deeply within core organizational systems rather than operating in isolation.	Shifts created instability, hindering program continuity and weakening governance effectiveness. The exit of key figures stalled coordination and delayed initiatives such as the People Database (PDB), sustaining fragmented data ecosystems and unreconciled silos. Technical leads report unclear mandates around people data governance, persistent bureaucracy, and overlapping bodies with limited impact on system-wide implementation. Without clear accountability, evolving structures have caused uncertainty and slowed progress toward coherent, unified GDI governance.

Theme	Achievements	Challenges
(2) Leadership Commitment Versus Operational Follow-Through	Leadership endorsement of GDI principles is well established, with the GLT's active engagement and approval of frameworks such as the C&E Action Plan, signaling strong institutional commitment. Consistent implementation across CGIAR.	Follow-through remains uneven and often reliant on individual leaders' priorities, exposing a persistent gap between stated commitments and consistent implementation across CGIAR.
(3) Enforcement Mechanisms Accountability	Some centers have integrated GDI metrics into performance reviews and board reporting, showing progress toward institutional accountability, and leadership accountability is widely recognized as important, even if its application varies across CGIAR.	Accountability for GDI outcomes remains uneven across CGIAR. While some centers integrate GDI metrics into performance reviews and board reporting, others lack clear grievance and retaliation policies or measurable inclusion indicators, limiting system-wide accountability. Leadership accountability is widely viewed as essential but is inconsistently applied, shaped by local governance culture and resource capacity.
(4) Resourcing, Expertise, and Capacity Deficits	Respondents recognized that meaningful GDI implementation requires sustained funding, visible leadership investment, and skilled HR professionals with strategic capacity. They emphasized that strong HR capability is essential to support transformative work and that participation in the People Database Project demonstrates the value and feasibility of integrated people data systems when adequate resources exist.	Many centers operate with limited HR capacity, resulting in reactive rather than transformative GDI practices and hindering systemic change. The limited staffing and turnover in GDI leadership exacerbate these capacity constraints and erode institutional memory. The capacity deficit also delays the People Database Project at non-participating centers, which lack technical capacity and view the integration as an unfunded burden they cannot absorb.
(5) Coordination, Alignment, and Coherence	Broad frameworks exist.	Governance effectiveness is limited by weak alignment between system-wide policies and center-level execution. Despite existence of broad frameworks, implementation remains fragmented because of differing capacities and local realities across centers. Calls for stronger follow-up mechanisms, clearer global policy guidance, and cross-center learning demonstrate that decentralized implementation needs better oversight and integration.
(6) Tools for Center-Level Accountability	A new system-level measurement tool is under development- to address the accountability gap that emerged following discontinuation of the GDI Matrix. The 2025–27 Action Plan commits to co-developing the C&E Progress Index as a mechanism to track the current state of implementation and progress across centers and the System Organization. The Action Plan also elevates the Index to a Short-Term Impact Indicator, requiring quarterly or biannual reporting.	A center-level accountability measurement gap has persisted for more than three years since the GDI Matrix was discontinued, despite earlier commitments in the 2023–24 Action Plan to create a replacement. Progress on the C&E Index remains slow, with only six centers (<50%) consulted as of November 2025. Interviewed stakeholders, including P&C Leads, Data Focal Points, and Technical Leads, report being unaware of the process and not involved. Limited co-development risks weak ownership and presents a threat to future adoption and credibility of the Index.

Conclusion: Overall, CGIAR's governance and accountability structures provide the formal scaffolding for GDI but fall short of enabling consistent, system-wide implementation. Governance complexity, leadership transitions, and fragmented accountability mechanisms have resulted in uneven progress, while limited resourcing and professional capacity constrain operational follow-through. Although leadership endorsement of GDI principles is visible, implementation remains heavily dependent on individual commitment rather than institutionalized systems, leaving critical initiatives—such as the People Database and C&E measurement tools—stalled or exposed to risk. The gaps in coherence, data infrastructure, and accountability weaken CGIAR's ability to embed GDI as a sustained organizational practice rather than an aspirational objective.

EQ 8: How effective are data controls, streamlined processes, and coordinated assurance lines in supporting GDI systems?

The C&E team successfully established foundational data controls and standardized processes, including formal review steps and a common data language across centers. However, these controls are rendered ineffective by structural fragmentation, inefficient manual workflows, and uncoordinated assurance lines, resulting in untimely, unreliable, and low-utility data. As a result, the current system does not fully support informed decision-making or long-term sustainability of the GDI agenda.

Evidence

Controls are Established but Undermined by Structural Fragmentation

The C&E team implemented essential data controls and standardized processes where none previously existed. A common data language (BG Level Equivalent) provides a manual translation layer across more than 15 center grading systems, enabling comparability and serving as a critical control point. The workflow includes formal assurance steps, such as data quality checklists, standardized templates, and a three-month review and signoff cycle by P&C leads. These controls reinforce decentralized data ownership and integrity within a federated structure. However, the broader CGIAR System structure critically weakens these controls, limiting their overall effectiveness.

Controls are Not Effective

Despite being in place, the controls do not consistently yield decision-useful data. The manual pipeline is inefficient and fragile, requiring a five-month reconciliation cycle that prevents timely data access to information. The process relies on opaque technical steps, such as non-transparent C&E-led data substitutions, making independent verification extremely difficult. At least five unreconciled people-data silos generate contradictory headcount figures, reflecting uncoordinated assurance lines and limiting the ability to link HR workforce data to performance metrics.

Failure of Coordinated Assurance Lines

Assurance mechanisms are further weakened by unresolved tensions between policy and transparency requirements. Governance decisions that prohibit exportable datasets prevent independent reliability validation and forces error-prone manual transcription. Reliability issues, such as the documented hover-error bug, can only be detected bypassing formal controls. Structural gaps, together with the stalled People Database Project, raise concerns about the sustainability of the current system, which depends heavily on manual effort and goodwill rather than scalable systemized processes.

Conclusion: Existing data controls establish an essential foundation but are not yet ineffective. Structural fragmentation, inefficient manual processes, and uncoordinated assurance lines continue to hinder the delivery of timely, reliable, and decision-useful GDI data. Consequently, the system is not positioned to fully support the relevance or long-term sustainability of CGIAR's GDI agenda.

EQ 9: How timely, reliable, and decision-useful is GDI monitoring and reporting?

CGIAR's GDI monitoring and reporting systems are becoming more reliable and increasingly valuable for transparency, but they remain constrained by limited timeliness and weak integration into decision-making processes. Prolonged reporting cycles and fragmented HR systems hinder real-time responsiveness. While data reliability has improved, inconsistencies and uneven local capacity persist. Data are most effective when actively used by leadership for planning; where reporting is treated primarily as a compliance exercise, its impact is limited. Failure to consistently apply approved workforce standards further undermines data credibility. Low usage of C&E dashboards stems from a generic design that relies on outdated annual data and fails to meet the analytics needs of diverse user groups.

Evidence

Available evidence indicates that GDI monitoring and reporting are increasingly valued across CGIAR, yet their timeliness, reliability, and usefulness for decision-making remain uneven across centers. The system offers a solid foundation for workforce transparency and benchmarking, however, challenges related to data integration, update frequency, accessibility, and local adoption continue to limit its strategic impact. Four themes emerge: (1) improving data quality and alignment; (2) addressing time lags and system inefficiencies; (3) variable use of data in decision-making; and (4) the evolving value for accountability and learning.

Data Quality and System Alignment

Several respondents noted progress in data consistency and comparability across centers. System-wide GDI reporting has become more standardized and transparent, with centers now providing regular workforce updates and leadership endorsing the framework as a "staple in terms of culture." However, structural contradictions continue to weaken the reliability of core data. One example is a 1,738-person discrepancy between public and internal dashboards, which breaches the workforce definition in the GDI-Framework and reaffirmed in all three subsequent Action Plans. These core documents define the workforce to include "holders of short-term contracts, holders of job contracts ... and third-party contractors."

Moreover, metric instability makes it challenging for external stakeholders to "*track the change over time*" and assess performance reliably. Integration challenges persist due to heterogeneous HR systems and uneven data quality across centers. Some centers rely on separate databases or manual uploads, and as one person observed, "not all systems capture education or nationality data the same way," limiting full comparability.

Time-Lags and Limited Real-Time Accuracy

Timeliness remains a consistent concern. Many participants stressed the need for more current or even real-time dashboards. While biannual or annual data cycles are useful for strategic reviews, they limit responsiveness in an organization with a 10% annual turnover. Data updates are too slow to support dynamic workforce or inclusion decisions, a limitation confirmed by centers whose local systems provide more operationally relevant data. More frequent updates are impeded by a multi-month data submission and reconciliation cycle. As one respondent noted, "waiting six months doesn't serve the purpose," while another described the current reporting as "an amazing first step" yet still aspirational compared to daily, live dashboards. Other respondents highlighted that data collection remains labor-intensive and hindered by a lack of robust HR information systems, leading to delays and occasional inconsistencies. While accuracy is generally trusted, data update cycles are too slow to support timely workforce or inclusion decision-making.

Uneven Decision-Use and Uptake

The extent to which GDI data informs decision-making varies widely across CGIAR. In some centers, it actively supports workforce planning, recruitment, and leadership balance, helping teams “understand distribution and direct processes.” Data is used to assess representation, monitor promotion and turnover, and benchmark against CGIAR-wide targets. One respondent highlighted its value in “identifying actions to improve leadership diversity,” while another stated that it “helps management take data-driven decisions.”

In other contexts, use is minimal. Several respondents reported that “no one asked me about this data,” or that reporting “goes mainly to P&C for compliance,” with limited engagement by decision-makers. Low adoption of C&E dashboard data – evidenced by only 53 internal sessions – signals weak perceived value and limited usefulness. This stems from a generic model based on outdated annual data that does not meet the analytical needs of diverse user groups. Given the low utility, an external stakeholder expressed a need for data that enable comparison of center performance against C&E Action Plans. This bottleneck is compounded by the decision to restrict analyzable data exports to protect personally identifiable information (PII), forcing error-prone manual transcription and preventing detection of reliability issues, as detailed in the DQA case study (see Annex 3). Where used, GDI data enables meaningful analysis; where it is not, it risks remaining a symbolic compliance exercise.

Accountability and Learning

Despite these gaps, GDI monitoring is increasingly recognized as important for accountability and shared learning. Dashboards and reports provide system-wide visibility, strengthen leadership accountability, and inform board-level discussions. For some stakeholders, GDI data has become a “reference point for leadership and donor reporting,” adding credibility and proof of progress. Respondents also emphasized that transparent data help “counter perceptions” of exclusion by showing progress to staff. However, the full value of data is realized only when it is paired with analysis, follow-up, and communication on how findings are acted upon. As one participant cautioned, data “is useful only if something is done with it.”

Conclusion: CGIAR’s GDI monitoring and reporting systems are improving in transparency and data reliability, but remain limited by slow update cycles, fragmented HR systems, and uneven adoption across centers. While data quality and alignment have strengthened, inconsistencies in workforce definitions and uneven data capture continue to undermine comparability. Timeliness remains a recurring challenge, as annual and biannual reporting cycles cannot support real-time decision-making. The usefulness of GDI data varies widely, proving value where leaders actively apply it to planning and accountability, but functioning primarily as a compliance exercise where engagement is low, as reflected in limited dashboard usage. Overall, the system provides a strong foundation for transparency and learning. However, its strategic impact will depend on improved timeliness in decision-making, improved system integration, and sustained leadership-driven uptake.

4.4 Efficiency and Risks

EQ 10: Are roles, responsibilities, and controls clearly defined and functioning to support GDI risk management and implementation?

EQ 11: Are oversight and management responsibilities appropriately defined, separated, and exercised in practice?

Despite GLT’s mandate to set the tone and for CGIAR and Center Boards to provide oversight, accountability is often missing. Centers are at different stages of integrating the Action Plans into their strategies and operational plans. No formal mechanism exists to hold center management accountable for implementation of the GDI Action Plan, weakening enforceability across CGIAR. In addition, risks related

to GDI are not assessed during plan development and implementation, and risk reporting references them only indirectly under broader People & Culture risks.

Evidence

Oversight and management responsibilities for C&E within CGIAR are distributed across governance and executive levels. The IPB Board establishes the framework and key performance objectives, approves the budget, and receives reports on C&E activities. The System Council and its funders provide strategic guidance and ensure multi-year budgetary and implementation support. Centre Boards set strategic direction, model inclusive culture, and promote diversity in leadership. The GLT and center management integrate these principles into organizational strategy and operations, communicate commitment, and build capacity for implementation. Center HR functions fosters collaboration and consistency, while the C&E Senior Advisor and Director of P&C offer guidance and reporting. At one sampled center, a Diversity and Inclusion Committee has—composed of staff from multiple functions—has been established to support the integration of GDI principles in the workplace. However, several gaps limit effective implementation. At some centers, P&C leads are not formally assigned GDI responsibilities through job descriptions or performance targets. In addition, some centers have not established their own GDI targets, limiting accountability and ownership at the operational level.

Responsibility for GDI is acutely vulnerable to leadership transitions. At ILRI, the departure of key directors was noted as a potential risk to the GDI program's effectiveness, as momentum can be lost before new leadership is fully established. Center P&C leads often manage GDI implementation but typically lack dedicated GDI staff and are already operating at capacity. This prevents them from adequately driving the GDI agenda. Implementation of GDI through annual plans is inconsistent. Many center staff are not aware of the system-wide Action Plan or do not use it, and local plans, such as ILRI's center-level action plan, do not consistently align with or incorporate the 2025–27 GDI Action Plan. Formal endorsement of the GDI Action Plan at the center level is therefore needed. Assigning responsibilities to P&C functions alone is insufficient without explicit endorsement by center Directors and active leadership championing.

Although a dedicated GDI risk register was developed in July 2020 during preparation of the first GDI Action Plan, there is no evidence that it has been reviewed or updated for subsequent Action Plans. The CGIAR Risk Management Report submitted to the Audit, Finance, and Risk Committee does not directly mention GDI risks. Instead, it indirectly references them under talent management, where it is noted as a related risk. In this context, risks related to challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining staff, often linked to insufficiently inclusive work environment or adherence issues to core ethical values. Similarly, most center risk reports do not explicitly identify GDI risks, even when discussing broader 'People and Talent Risk'.

Conclusion: While executive leadership holds formal responsible for embedding GDI, implementation is hindered by unclear accountability, limited resourcing, and uneven awareness across centers. Leadership transitions, the lack of dedicated staff, and insufficient integration of system-wide Action Plans into center-level planning undermine momentum and effectiveness.

EQ 12: How integrated and effective are CGIAR's assurance systems in supporting GDI with strong controls and processes?

The GDI Action Plan 2023–24 mandates that performance and GDI be independently assessed by the IAES and Internal Audit at least every five years. It further requires the integration of GDI considerations into Internal Audit's annual risk-based planning and IAES evaluation activities. The [Evaluation Policy and Framework \(2022\)](#) specify that evaluation design, implementation, and reporting must explicitly address GDI parameters. In parallel, CGIAR has defined its risk appetite for Operational/Talent Management, (i.e., the level and type of risk that CGIAR is willing to accept, mitigate or avoid in pursuit of its long-term strategic objectives), aimed to cultivate an inclusive and dynamic workforce aligned with GDI principles.

Conclusion: The 2023–24 GDI Action Plan embeds accountability by requiring independent assessment of GDI performance by IAES and Internal Audit, and by integrating GDI considerations into risk-based audit planning and evaluation activities. CGIAR's defined risk appetite further reinforces this commitment by prioritizing an inclusive, dynamic workforce as a strategic operational objective.

5. Conclusions

Addressing the 12 review questions (Table 1) provides evidence-based insights into the 2020 GDI Framework and its subsequent Action Plans, which broadly align with CGIAR's 2030 Strategy. The GDI Framework and Action Plans provide a clear enabling structure for inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplaces that support high-performing research teams. The evolution of the Action Plans demonstrates strong conceptual continuity with the 2020 GDI Framework, ensuring consistency in principles and objectives. In contrast, outcome measurement remains uneven, hindered by shifting metrics, gaps in longitudinal data, and the delays in replacing the discontinued GDI Matrix. However, the 2030 Strategy itself does not explicitly reference GDI or C&E.

Implementation across centers shows a mixed picture. While strong engagement and localized successes are evident, adoption and integration remain uneven and are largely driven by leadership commitment, resource availability, and organizational culture. Governance and accountability structures add legitimacy and visibility to GDI Initiatives, but do not consistently ensure system-wide application. Roles and responsibilities are often unclear, and accountability mechanisms are weak, especially when linking workforce data to research performance. Structural fragmentation and limited integration of monitoring and reporting systems further hamper CGIAR's ability to track, analyze, and align GDI outcomes effectively.

Assurance, risk management, and operational controls for GDI have been put in place but require further development. While the C&E function has introduced baseline data processes and standardized workflows, systemic barriers such as fragmented responsibilities, stalled initiatives including the CGIAR 360 People Database, and inconsistent measurement tools undermine effectiveness and pose a strategic risk to implementation of the C&E 2025–27 Action Plan. This risk calls for a governance-level intervention to address data governance gaps, appoint a business champion, and strengthen center-level technical capacity. Risk identification and oversight remain incomplete, leaving implementation vulnerable to leadership transitions and local variations in practice.

Overall, the GDI/C&E agenda has made significant progress in relevance, alignment, and conceptual clarity. With a sustained focus on governance, accountability, professional capacity, and robust longitudinal data systems, it is well-positioned to create sustainable, system-wide impact.

6. Good Practices and Lessons Learned

Complementing the conclusions, six good practices and lessons learned were identified:

- A. The C&E team's development of workforce data collection processes, associated metrics and a standard data language, are essential for system-wide comparability. Semantic standardization must precede technical automation in the People Database Project (PBD). This common language now serves as a foundational prototype for the future corporate system.
- B. The C&E team secured institutional recognition of its standard data language. Although the People Database Project is a corporate initiative, its Concept Note confirmed the adoption of the C&E-developed common data language, and the C&E Action Plan incorporated the successful delivery of the People Database Project's as a core Key Performance Indicator.

- C. The C&E team implemented effective data quality and assurance controls, including standardized templates, detailed checklists, and formal center-level approval steps, demonstrating that a functional control environment can be built even without full vertical integration.
- D. Operating within a federated structure and without a formal mandate, the C&E team relied on soft power and goodwill to secure compliance, an approach that largely proved effective. Key informants described the C&E team as respectful and collaborative, noting its emphasis on learning from centers rather than imposing directives.
- E. In centers where leadership actively engages in and champions GDI/C&E values, principles, and activities, evidence showed stronger engagement with GDI/C&E.
- F. Centers vary significantly in context and implementation maturity, requiring flexibility in how the C&E team interacts with each center, while maintaining minimum system-wide standards.

7. Recommendations

Box 1 below highlights the process undertaken towards developing the recommendations from the review. The ten recommendations reflect the findings and conclusions and are subject to CGIAR management response; related actions are to be entered and monitored in the [MR Tracker](#).

Box 1. Recommendation on co-development

Following standard processes, the C&E team used the UN Evaluation Group's [Improved Quality on Evaluation Recommendations Checklist](#) and following the standard IAES/EF processes, aligned to the 2025 [Review of CGIAR Management Response System to Independent Evaluations](#) [SC decision: M21-EDP9] in co-development recommendations, the following steps were taken:

- A sense-making and fact-checking exercise with the full C&E/GDI group and participation of the new CGIAR HR director in November.
- Draft report review by the full C&E/GDI group and a validation session.
- Presentation to the Consultative Group to IAES on November 26.

The recommendations are grouped by estimated responsibilities. Together, the recommendations constitute a feasible 24-month agenda for enhancing implementation of the 2025–27 C&E Action Plan, and the next steps with suggested actions.

Executive Leadership and Governance

1. **Clarify Organizational Aspirations** (EQ 1): CGIAR's programmatic strategy (2030 Strategy) should articulate the type of organization it aims to be/the principles shaping its culture and finalize Gender strategy.
2. **Integrate and link the GDI framework and the Action Plan to the CGIAR strategy**, ensuring values such as inclusivity, integrity, and accountability translate into organizational practices. (EQ 1)
3. **Focus System Council Reporting** (EQ 4): Ensure information provided to the SC, aligns with its oversight role and strategic priorities. Present a concise, high-level bullet-point summary of the critical issues for decision-making, with detailed materials available separately.
4. **Formalize GDI Integration with centers** (guided by the IFA) (EQ 11) including:
 - a. Formalize alignment of center strategies and Action Plans with GDI Action Plans.
 - b. Assign GDI roles, responsibilities, and targets to align with the GDI Framework and forthcoming Gender Policy.

- c. Define measurable commitments and reporting frameworks.
- d. Identify and monitor risks to GDI Action Plan implementation.

C&E Function (data collection and accountability)

5. **Improve Data Governance and Access** (EQ 6, EQ 7, EQ 9):
 - a. Establish secure, anonymized, data access mechanisms (e.g., CSV/JSON export) to enable quality assurance without compromising privacy.
 - b. Accelerate consultations with P&C Leads, Data Focal Points, and technical staff for the C&E progress index of co-development.
 - c. Resolve inconsistency by aligning the public dashboard with the official workforce definition or formally revising the definition.
6. **Enhance Dashboard Utility**: Define user archetypes (e.g., center managers, science leads) and tailor dashboards to their needs with automated governance reports, analytics, and benchmarking.
7. **Track GDI Integration** (EQ 11): Monitor and report on the extent to which GDI Action Plans are incorporated into centers' strategies and action plans.
8. **Address Data Misalignment** (EQ 5): Seek a GLT-supported mandate and governance framework to enable responsible integration of people data with program performance (and, where relevant, financial) data.
9. **Reactivate Inactive ERGs** (EQ 4): Assign a specific project that all centers can learn from and provide an advocate for them.
10. **System-Wide Data Adoption** (EQ 7): Complete adoption of the CGIAR 360 People Database:
 - a. Establish a People Data Framework Agreement (modelled on Financial Framework Agreement).
 - b. Appoint a business champion and address capacity gaps at center level.

Annexes. Available Online

This publication, its annexes, and the management response are available on the IAES website at the following link: <https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/culture-and-engagement-cgiar-independent-review>



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