

Systems Transformation & Multiple Pathways: Learning on CGIAR's Ways of Working

December 2025

Brief

Background

The [CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#) sets the stage for doing business differently to ensure that research provides real solutions for development. To support these changes, CGIAR is committed to following seven new implementation approaches, or Ways of Working (WoWs).

This brief distils key learnings, strategic insights, programming and investment implications, and evidence gaps related to the Systems Transformation and Multiple Pathways WoWs (see Box 1 and 2). It is part of a broader series of WoWs summaries (see [Synthesis](#)) that draw on evaluative and assurance evidence to assess challenges and identify opportunities for improving implementation of the 2030 Strategy, and to provide evidence-based learning to inform the strategic decisions of the [System Council](#), [CGIAR Integrated Partnership Board](#) (IPB), and CGIAR leadership more broadly.

Methodology

This summary is based primarily on a structured desk review of internal and external evidence, including IAES-led evaluations; [Independent Science for Development Council](#) (ISDC) and [Standing Panel on Impact Assessment](#) (SPIA) reviews, center- and Board-led evaluations, inception reports from the [2025–30 CGIAR Research and Innovation Portfolio](#), and relevant external literature.

Key Findings

Overall, CGIAR is moving toward a more integrated, locally responsive, and evidence-based approach. Success will hinge on stronger institutional alignment, investment in people and partnerships, and a clear strategy that bridges scaling with Systems Transformation.

- **Evolving systems agenda:** CGIAR expanded systems research, but clarity in concepts, consistent operationalization, and reliable funding for Systems Transformation remain lacking.
- **Interdisciplinary capacity:** Recent initiatives such as [SHiFT](#) and [Agroecology](#) combined biophysical, social, and policy dimensions. However, sustained transdisciplinary capacity—particularly in social sciences and stakeholder engagement—remains a gap.
- **Fragmented integration:** Climate and nutrition are better integrated across programs, while equity, biodiversity, water, and livelihoods continue to be inconsistently addressed.
- **Country and regional engagement:** Engagement with national partners is essential but uneven. While conveners helped connect CGIAR with country stakeholders and Initiatives provided strong models, coordination was constrained by unclear

mandates, limited resources, and weak mechanisms.

- **Foresight and trade-off tools:** Tools such as [IMPACT](#), [FARRMS](#), and scenario analysis were increasingly used to guide decision-making, but need stronger integration into program design, broader accessibility, and technical reinforcement.

Strategic Takeaways

- Scaling and Systems Transformation must be seen as complementary.
- Sustainable transformation requires stable resources, incentives, and diverse skills.
- Locally grounded models demonstrate the importance of ownership and enabling environments for sustainable outcomes.

Implications for Investment

- Greater coherence and alignment are needed across CGIAR programs, including bilaterally funded Initiatives, and with national, regional, and donor priorities.
- Sustained funding and incentives are critical to strengthen systems work, build transdisciplinary expertise, and support innovation at scale.
- Improved use of foresight and trade-off tools can better inform program design and enhance relevance for national decision-makers.
- Embedding co-design processes with country and regional stakeholders will ensure innovations respond to context-specific opportunities and constraints.

Evidence Gaps and Looking Forward

- Define and operationalize a shared framework for Systems Transformation.
- Strengthen transdisciplinary and social science capacity across Initiatives.
- Enhance programmatic and institutional coordination with partners, donors, and international financial institutions.
- Secure long-term commitment and investment for systems research.

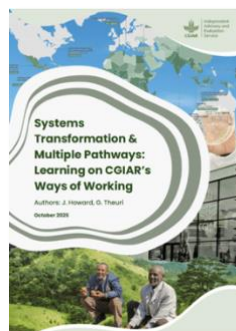
- Ground scaling strategies in country priorities and systemic constraints.
- Strengthen theories of change and Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment (MELIA) systems to better plan, monitor, and measure systems change.

Box 1. Systems Transformation WoW description

CGIAR will embrace a **Systems Transformation approach** for food, land, and water systems, seeking multiple benefits across five Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-focused Impact Areas. CGIAR has a strong track record of impact through plant and animal sciences, particularly breeding and health. Now it is time for CGIAR to strive for a similar level of impact through integrated systems research. The pursuit of impacts across environment, livelihoods, equality, nutrition, and climate collectively rather than on separate tracks will often require more interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. Such work will inevitably take us beyond the farm gate into broader landscapes and food systems.

Box 2. Multiple Transformation Pathways WoW description

CGIAR will **generate scientific evidence on Multiple Transformation Pathways** that are appropriate to different contexts. Both sustainable intensification and agro-ecological approaches will help identify such pathways adapted to the huge diversity of agriculture, land, water, and food systems. As no one size fits all, the challenge is to help stakeholders make decisions and manage trade-offs in different contexts. CGIAR will contribute to current and future debates with scientific knowledge on different options for change – and will aim to be a balanced and trusted research for development organization that provides evidence for the optimization of choices regarding food, land and water systems.



Learn more, visit the **CGIAR Ways of Working Resource page**



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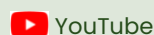
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