

# CGIAR Research Programs Intermediate Development Outcome Meetings Montpellier 17-28 June 2013

## *Main messages*

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### Introduction

The following is a summary of the main messages that I heard during the course of the CRP IDO sessions in Montpellier 17-28 June. Each CRP has also captured the individual messages from their own discussion, and the Consortium Office will be preparing summaries of the discussions using the notes taken by the meeting rapporteur.

No doubt my hearing is imperfect, so I've focused on those messages (strategic and research) that were strong recurring themes during most (and in many cases all) of the sixteen sessions. Whilst every session was different, and the donors and partners changed from session to session and week to week, I was struck by the consistency of the main strategic themes running through the conversation, and I've tried to reflect that here. Many of these are pretty obvious and not new, although the forum and context in which they were delivered is, and it is pretty clear that the donors and partners expect us to act on them.

### Strategic Messages

#### **Focus on results = development outcomes**

A central theme in each session was the strong results focus of the donors and partners. They constantly reiterated their interest in research that leads to development outcomes (rather than simply interesting research outputs), the importance of having a clear set of indicators and specific measurable targets for each of these, and the growing importance of having a credible means of measuring progress towards these targets. In other words the donors and partners are saying that we need to do a high quality job of linking our research to tangible, measurable development outcomes, but that we also need to be able to argue convincingly how we are going to measure progress towards achieving these outcomes – and change tack as needed. At the same time there is clear recognition of the difficulties with attribution and a consistent acceptance of our focus on contribution. We were however requested to push this as far as we can and focus on credible evidence for our contribution. Running through these comments there is a perceptible sense of urgency i.e. we need to move ahead as quickly as possible to

develop indicators and metrics, start to use these and learn from them. There's a clear danger that delay in doing this will be interpreted as a lack of commitment or ability to do so.

### **Scaling**

As part of the outcome focus, the donors and partners are also focused on scale. They are looking for credible pathways to outcomes for each CRP that will improve the lives of millions of people. They want us to invest the effort required to come up with these credible numbers (with the error margins we think are necessary) and a clear sense of the scaling pathways we will use to reach these. At the same time there is recognition that achieving these outcomes at scale is hard and so there is an accompanying interest in the science of scaling.

As part of this discussion of scaling, several donors and partners stressed the importance of quality of outcomes – not just quantity. They are clearly looking for evidence that agricultural research can contribute to large and sustained progress towards lifting people out of poverty, not just minor incremental shifts.

### **Development Partners**

There's an equally strong recognition of the importance of effective partnership as a means to achieving outcomes and to ensuring long-term sustainability of our achievements. In this context the centrality of building effective partnerships with development partners was a constant refrain, including national governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and NGOs. As part of this conversation the meetings stressed the importance of early engagement with partners, and working through the specific value-exchange propositions of each partnership. In general the donors and partners seemed to be politely skeptical of our claims to building development partnerships, unless these were accompanied by specifics of who these partners are and what they do in each CRP. Some noted how we can best work through development partners to achieve impact at scale is a research question that we can pursue through the CRPs.

### **Research partners**

Similarly there was a lot of discussion of the importance of developing “true” partnerships with national and regional agricultural research systems and networks, and with advanced research institutes. As for our development partners, our donors and partners are looking for specifics and substance on our research partnerships and question the feasibility and sustainability of our IDOs without this. They want to know what role they are playing in the program, including whether they are leading specific components. The more we can show this, the more convincing our commitment to partners appears. Linked to this there appears to be some skepticism around the budget figures being allocated to partners. The harder we can make these numbers and tie them to specific areas of work carried out by each partner, the more convincing our message.

## Capacity development

In discussing partnerships the donors and partners also discussed capacity development and specifically the investments that the CRPs would make to build capacity amongst partners so that they can engage effectively in the CRPs. The sense of these conversations is that the donors and partners will be looking for a clear sense of what we will do in this area in the next round of proposals, and evidence that this commitment is genuine.

## Gender

Some CRPs highlighted gender, including in their “delegations” and this was generally commented on favorably by the donors and partners. However while several donors referred to their own gender strategies and what they were looking for on gender in the CRPs, these comments did not lead to substantive discussions on gender, nor on why gender was relatively weak in some presentations. Despite this relatively low profile of gender in the discussions my sense is that we shouldn’t interpret this as meaning we got a pass on gender. Rather I suspect that if we’d had a different donor group we would have received much stronger messages about the need to strengthen the gender dimensions of the CRPs.

## Integration of IDOs and CRPs

Given the very clear multiple relationships between IDOs --donors and partners are looking for a convincing explanation of how the CRPs, and the IDOs pursued under each, form a coherent whole. Donors and partners distinguished cases where the contributions of different CRPs could be additive, and others where the contributions could have a synergistic effect and multiply the impact. It would help to identify these opportunities. This also applies within CRPs, i.e. are there different target groups for different IDOs – or are there synergies that will increase the impact on the same target groups?

## Collaboration between CRPs

Related to the above there’s a strong perception that the CRPs are not talking to each other as much as necessary if we are to have an effectively integrated and efficient set of CRPs and IDOs. The main areas of synergy that were discussed were geographical and methodological, with a respective focus on common sites and methods. Some donors and partners were vocal in arguing that the system CRPs provided a logical mechanism for bringing together much of the site based work of other CRPs, and encouraged evolution towards this as new sites are developed.

## Flagships and strategic focus

Several CRPs used the term flagship to refer to their main strategic organizing blocks, and by the end of the two weeks there seemed to be a growing sense that “flagships” was as good a term as any to describe the main strategic blocks around which each CRP is organizing its work in pursuit of the IDOs. More substantively the donors and partners are looking for a clear strategic rationale for these flagships, one that looks forward to the main emerging development challenges in the field of each CRP, and provides a basis for arguing why we are focusing on the issues we focus upon. This will need to be

linked to the emerging Sustainable Development Goals through the IDOs. As part of this discussion there was a strong plea that this strategic foresight be solutions oriented and focused on the poorest.

### **Building on what's come before**

There was a sense of frustration at times that not all CRPs demonstrated clearly how they were building on previous CGIAR research – either within individual Centers, or in cross Center programs. That led on several occasions for specific requests that we show clearly how our CRPs are building on what we've done before, and on what we've learned, as well as on how we can leverage existing research to show what the CRPs can achieve. In this context several donors and partners emphasized the importance of gathering evidence as quickly as possible as a means to develop the case for sustained and increased investment where necessary, including the investment required for scaling out promising technologies and approaches.

### **Game changers**

Several CRPs believe that progress in selected areas can bring about transformative change. The donors and partners encouraged us to consider where such “game changers” may exist in each CRP and focus on making significant progress in these areas as a means to showing what the CRPs can deliver. Some of the options mentioned during the discussion were, water recycling, zoonotic diseases, and bio-fortified crops.

### **Place-based research**

Many of the discussions reflected the tension between taking a strong place-based focus in order to understand the complexities of rural environments (including the inter-relationships between the farm and non-farm sectors), and the need to develop international public goods that can have wider value. While some donors and partners argued strongly for the place-based approach others cautioned that this needed to be accompanied by high quality research design and effective systems for learning across sites.

### **Environment**

Some of the more environmentally focused participants commented that the CRPs and IDOs were relatively weak on environment, suggesting that the “environment” IDO be reworded to go beyond simply minimizing negative environmental effects and include restoration of degraded landscapes. Others stressed the complex environmental trade-offs in agricultural development and urged that we address these explicitly.

### **Management and capacity**

The CRPs were recognized as major undertakings, with varying degrees of significant complexity. Some donors and partners questioned the management capacity of Centers and highlighted the importance of investing to ensure this capacity is in place, while adapting the pace of implementation of each CRP to one that is realistic given the management demands and need to grow staff capacity.

## Language of development versus language of research

It was noted that the focus on development outcomes may shift our lexicon to one that focuses on development rather than research. We were encouraged to take care to avoid language becoming practice with a consequent dilution of our research focus. For example as we pursue innovation in value chains and scaling out, we need to develop good quality research designs that will allow us to test key hypotheses on value chains and scaling, and gather the evidence needed to foster their wider adoption.

## Value proposition

Not all CRPs raised the issue of the cost of delivering against specific targets. However, the value proposition of our research is clearly an important sub-text for all donors, and very high on the agenda for some of them. At the same time there is good recognition that cross-CRP comparisons are difficult to do with useful precision. Nevertheless the bottom line is that we will need to develop the value proposition as convincingly as possible as we move towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the CRPs. This will need to consider both quality and quantity of what we deliver, and demonstrate our high quality value added at best possible price.

## More specific comments on key areas of research focus

### Research pipeline

There is good understanding of the need for investment in the research pipeline and support for investing in this. Donors and partners asked for clear indicators of progress in the pipeline, notably change in genetic gain. CRPs were encouraged to make the case for this work as part of the CRP and provide output level indicators for tracking progress.

### Value chains

These were a common feature of most CRPs, and the donors and partners asked a range of questions about how we are working together to develop greater consistency and learning on value chains across the CRPs. Related to this conversation the donors and partners clearly see value chains as a necessary means through which to deliver specific areas of technological innovation, if we are to achieve larger strategic outcomes. Using flagship terminology - they're seen as means to deliver the flagships toward our outcomes.

### Innovation platforms

There was similar discussion of the widespread use of innovation platforms across the CRPs, but apparent lack of discussion and coherence in our use of the innovation platform approach. Participants questioned what exactly they consist of in each case, and how they will function. We didn't always have good answers. Other argued that there was a dearth of good evidence on how they work and what are the best approaches, and therefore a good opportunity for the CRPs to research this.

### **Measuring progress towards IDOs**

There is good donor acceptance that we should generally be measuring our contribution to achieving IDOs, and not attribution. However in order for this contribution to be accepted we need to have transparent and rigorous evaluation methodologies, including agreement on how and when we will determine the baselines. Equally it was recognized that measurement for some IDOs requires more innovation than for others. Resilience, capacity to innovate, and capacity to adapt were all noted as being particularly hard to measure and the CRPs were encouraged to develop credible metrics and measurement approaches for each of these.

### **Policy research**

It's recognized that there is a policy research agenda for all CRPs. This needs to be pursued in a way that links effectively with [PIM](#) and that the appropriate policy research is pursued under each CRP.

### **Data - Open access**

This wasn't discussed much but when it was it got strong endorsement from the donors and partners.