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# Final Report
# Evaluation of Results-Based Management in CGIAR

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CGIAR
Independent Evaluation Arrangement

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| A4NH | CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture, Nutrition and Health |
| AAS | CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems |
| CCAFS | CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security |
| CIAT | Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical / International Center for Tropical Agriculture |
| CIMMYT | Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo / International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center |
| CIP | Centro Internacional de la Papa / International Potato Center |
| COP | Community of Practice |
| CRP | CGIAR Research Program |
| CP | Challenge Program (CGIAR) |
| FP | Flagship Project (CGIAR) |
| FTA | CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry |
| GRiSP | CGIAR Research Program on Global Rice Science Partnership, now RICE |
| ICRAF | World Agroforestry Center |
| ICRISAT | International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics |
| IDO | Intermediate development outcome |
| IDRC | International Development Research Centre |
| IEA | Independent Evaluation Arrangement (Rome) (CGIAR) |
| IFPRI | International Food Policy Research Institute |
| IITA | International Institute for Tropical Agriculture |
| ILRI | International Livestock Research Institute |
| IRRI | International Rice Research Institute |
| ISPC | Independent Science and Partnership Council (CGIAR) |
| IWMI | International Water Management Institute |
| IP | Impact pathway |
| KI | Key informant |
| M&E | Monitoring and evaluation |
| MARLO | Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes (MIS in CGIAR) |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goals |
| MELCoP | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice (CGIAR) |
| MIS | Management information system |
| PIM | CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets |
| POWB | Program of Work and Budget (CGIAR) |
| RBM | Results-Based Management |
| RTB | CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas |
| SC | System Council (CGIAR), former Fund Council |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SIAC | Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR (project) |

| | |
|---|---|
| SLO | System-Level Outcome (CGIAR) |
| SMB | System Management Board (CGIAR), former Consortium Management Board |
| SMO | System Management Office (CGIAR), former Consortium Office |
| SPIA | Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (CGIAR) |
| SRF | Strategy and Results Framework (CGIAR) |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| WLE | CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems |
| W1 | Window 1 funding type (CGIAR) |
| W2 | Window 2 funding type (CGIAR) |

# Executive Summary

## Background and context

The CGIAR is a global agricultural research partnership that implements research through a network of research Centers and their partners. In 2009, following an independent external review, and as part of a comprehensive organization reform process, CGIAR committed to Results-Based Management (RBM), which was one of the core reform principles.

The CGIAR Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) is responsible for conducting external evaluations of CGIAR research, functions and structures. This formative evaluation of RBM in CGIAR was managed by IEA as part of its 2017 program of work, approved by the System Council. The evaluation, conducted over a 7-month period, was guided by Terms of Reference developed by IEA, and subsequently, a detailed Inception Report prepared by the independent Evaluation Team.

## Objectives and scope

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to learn lessons from the experience of CGIAR introducing and implementing different aspects of RBM. The objectives of the evaluation were two-fold: to provide evidence and lessons as an input to implementing an RBM framework during the most recent phase of CGIAR's Research Programs (CRPs); and to formulate recommendations for increasing the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of further RBM iterations.

The evaluation covers the period from initiation of the CRPs and related RBM initiatives in 2009, until end-July 2017. It examined the institutions and actors across CGIAR System for their role and involvement related to RBM. It assessed the extent to which relevant and useful lessons have been learned and invested as CGIAR has proceeded with RBM implementation across the System. The evaluation assessed the experience of CRPs, and Centers involved in them, with RBM, and especially their experience implementing RBM pilots in 2004.

## Methodology

Four key evaluation questions structured the design of the evaluation and focused on (i) the drivers and objectives of CGIAR's RBM; (ii) lessons from piloting RBM; (iii) support at System, CRP and Center level to facilitate implementation of RBM; and (iv) in light of experience optimizing RBM for CGIAR.

The evaluation adopted a consultative approach. It was desk-based and used extensive review of documents and interviews with representative group of stakeholders, including focus group discussions, for gathering evidence for qualitative analysis. Stakeholders were also engaged during the design phase and in discussions for validating the findings and conclusions. The evaluation team conducted three in-depth case studies on piloting RBM and two reference studies, one of them on a comparator organization. Meta-assessment of 15 CRP evaluations and program appraisals was conducted to consolidate information directly related to RBM implementation.

The evaluators drafted a Theory of Change for how RBM was envisaged to become a central management feature of the CGIAR System. This helped the evaluators understand and assess both how RBM has unfolded in CGIAR since 2009, and how it might have unfolded differently given other factors and management adjustments. The evaluators also developed a short-list of best practice principles for RBM. These the evaluation used as criteria to define and consistently assess the full spectrum of RBM components and practices across CGIAR.

## Main findings and conclusions

### Drivers and objectives of CGIAR's RBM approach

The motivation for and the understood purpose of RBM have been mixed across CGIAR. There have been different drivers for RBM and this has created tension rather than supporting collaboration for performance management across CGIAR. The drivers for RBM included a) a reform process that called for strategic focus and results around CRPs, b) the interest of independent Centers to do meaningful research through integrated research programs, and c) the expectation that CRPs be accountable for System-level outcomes and impact.

CGIAR has lacked shared conceptual understanding of RBM. There has been no detailed RBM-specific policy that would have underpinned common conceptualization among stakeholders; nor a change management strategy, or theory of change to explain how CGIAR's RBM approach should unfold. At System level, CGIAR saw RBM mainly in relation to the SRF and results-based reporting to donors. This perspective tended to reduce the goal of RBM to closely aligning CRP objectives, indicators and targets within a single System-level framework. This in turn reduced the learning potential of RBM, and subverted CRP and Center performance management needs to more immediate System-level demands. It also created confusion about what RBM was meant to do for CGIAR and partially undermined the original (2009) motivation for RBM. Although CGIAR's goals are about contributing to development impacts, CGIAR is a research organization with a mandate to deliver research results. This important matter was not sufficiently considered.

The evaluation found that Centres, responding to a global context in which performance management requirements were becoming more pronounced, were already engaged to varying degree in RBM prior to the 2009 CGIAR reform commitments, and continued to be so during the period covered by this evaluation. Many of the Centres, that are the foundation of the CRPs, have embraced their own RBM approaches, and some are notably providing leadership from below to System-level efforts. CRPs, supported by their lead Centres, began to work with their own logic models and monitoring frameworks, and did their best to respond to requirements for outcome-oriented data. This compliance by CRPs to System-level requirements, became a strong driver for some aspects of RBM.

### RBM at Centers and CRPs: learning from the RBM pilots

The 2014 pilots, supported by USD 4 million of specially designated funds, were an important System-funded initiative that led to significant RBM learning within the CRPs where the piloting took place. The evaluation found that, through these pilots, CRPs engaged with different RBM principles (as defined by the evaluators). The CRPs that were involved showed an interest and willingness to use the

RBM approach to enhance effectiveness during the pilot and beyond. These were valued learning opportunities and the RBM pilots were extensively documented. Learning benefitted many participating Centers and informally supported cross-CRP learning and collaboration.

Those directly involved in the pilots expected that learning from them would be collated and used to boost System-wide knowledge of RBM good practice. Unfortunately, the process of sharing lessons learned across CRPs was not systematic and the pilots did not lead to a formal consolidation of lessons learned to inform subsequent development of RBM for CGIAR. Instead, the pilots were primarily tuned to make sense and meaning from a CRP and Center perspective, and as such did not fully serve System-level learning or outcome reporting requirements. The System-level did benefit from the experience of individuals involved in the pilots, who continued to share experience, for example, through the processes to develop harmonized indicators.

Importantly, each CRP, and their leading research Centers, have taken learning journeys to adopt RBM, and there has been significant progress in developing their RBM-related processes, tools, and methods. The evaluation found that within CRPs, and some Centers, there has been a positive dynamic of trying to better understand and embrace RBM, making it work for enhanced effectiveness of agricultural research. Some Centers have made significant investment in RBM and have provided strong leadership and support for RBM within CRPs. A nascent culture shift has taken place towards performance management. Without suggesting that Centres have invested all the necessary capacity, and are fully implementing RBM, a key finding was that Centres are not blocking the full embrace of RBM by CGIAR.

**Management support for RBM**

The evaluation found that management support for RBM within CGIAR pulls in two directions: CRP-based RBM application focuses on making RBM work for the CRPs with a mixed level of support from participating Centers. At the same time, the System level strives to align indicators, targets and related reporting to serve System-level interests and funding decisions. RBM guidance from the System to the CRPs has been paper-based, limited mostly to provision of a SRF, call-for-proposal guidelines and templates for reporting. This creates tension between what the System thinks it needs from CRPs, and what CRPs consider to be realistic and meaningful given their limited spheres of control and influence. Tension is exacerbated by the System attempting to use the same outcome statements and indicators for all CRPs. It is doubtful that striving for full alignment of CRP results to System-level SRF outcomes, indicators and targets will lead to better CGIAR results reporting. Closing attribution gaps will be impossible, and comparing different types of CRPs using one set of common indicators is unlikely to satisfy any stakeholder group. Accountability as such has not been the problem, but the emphasis on control by the System and compliance by CRPs based on a standard set of indicators created tension and a heavy administrative burden on Centers implementing CRPs.

Important progress has clearly been made for adapting RBM to the unique CGIAR context. Experience, knowledge and skills have been accumulated, and an array of support to help CRPs implement RBM have been introduced. These provide experience which CGIAR can build on. However, not all this support was found to have been adequate and appropriate. For example, System-level support for development of a) IDO indicators, b) a comprehensive CGIAR monitoring and evaluation framework,

and c) an appropriate CGIAR management information system (MIS) have not been effective or sufficient. There was System-level investment, for example, on the One Corporate System, and for one year of RBM piloting, but this was to some extent detached from CRP requirements. While important steps towards developing MISs have been made by a few CRPs, the evaluators found broad agreement that MIS is presently underdeveloped both at CRP and System levels and System-level investment has been largely absent.

Full acknowledgement of the complex realities and ambitious agendas of CRP work, and using RBM to learn and innovate in an open and transparent manner demands appropriate leadership. Leadership needs to become more engaged in consciously creating an enabling environment for RBM. Successful RBM within CGIAR will require empowered RBM champions working together at different levels of CGIAR. More advocacy of RBM for sense-making, learning, and partnership building, and more credible reporting on performance and results that considers the unique context of each CRP, would aid further adoption of RBM.

Further adoption of RBM by CGIAR requires investment and capacity building for the RBM function. This so far has been insufficient, or limited resources have been used to comply with System demands for data and reporting upwards. Structures are already in place to support RBM. These include the independent advisory bodies, the communities of practice and the System Management Office. Unfortunately, these important bodies tend to work too much in silos, without an overarching capacity building and collaborative work plan to build further momentum for RBM across CGIAR.

There is a need to be accountable at System level, and to be able to produce reports that both reflect the common vision and perspective to which all CRPs contribute and highlight CRP-specific results through credible outcome and impact narratives. CRP evaluations also provide comprehensive coverage of performance issues, but to-date the System Council has not discussed or used such performance information as much as it could have. Attempts to use harmonized indicators to collect meaningful performance data from CRPs on progress in achieving System-level outcomes have been mostly unsuccessful and unhelpful. The evaluation concludes that there is a need to decouple System-level performance measurement from the performance management led by CRPs and Centers.

**RBM remains a relevant management approach for CGIAR**

Operationalizing RBM in CGIAR's complex structure and for its research mandate has been problematic. However, despite the level of confusion created, and the challenges remaining, the evaluation team concludes that RBM is a suitable management approach for CGIAR's research context and remains relevant to CGIAR and its CRPs. The extensive discussion and learning around how to measure CGIAR's outcomes will be helpful in guiding the way forward. Further innovation by CRPs and Centers can be sustained and even accelerated. To improve relevance, RBM should be conceived by CGIAR as a holistic approach that serves the CRPs and Centers and their respective mandates. A prerequisite for implementing this management approach in CGIAR is that the System's conceptualization of RBM is more effectively aligned with how the CRPs and Centers understand, experience and support it. The overall purpose of increasing CGIAR effectiveness using this approach can potentially help to unite key stakeholders in the face of unstable funding. The evaluation concludes that the call for CGIAR to embrace good-practice RBM is stronger today than it was in 2009

when the commitment to performance management became a cornerstone of its organizational reform process.

## Recommendations

Many recommendations are eluded to in the main body of this report. To assure focus on the most prominent issues, a list of 5 key practical and feasible recommendations directly linked to the findings and conclusions, are presented by the evaluation:

**Recommendation 1 – Develop system-level conceptualization and guidance for RBM**

The CGIAR System Organization should develop a conceptual paper that describes its vision, objectives expected results, and implications from using an RBM approach that embraces good practice principles. The paper should include a theory of change (considering the one developed by this evaluation) that describes how this management approach is expected to make a difference for CGIAR at System, CRP and Center levels, and what moving in that direction is anticipated to involve both in strategic and operational terms. This is not about creating a top-down reference framework to comply with, but something that can help RBM better serve CGIAR in fulfilling its mission at all levels. The SRF, in its periodic iterations, should be aligned with this RBM conceptualization and guidance paper.

In its conceptualization of RBM, the CGIAR should embrace both accountability and learning as equally important for adaptive management. Further adaptations of RBM by CGIAR should balance these two RBM competencies and champion both equally. The foundation of CGIAR's RBM should be built on capacity-based accountability; the notion that member Centers are centres of excellence, that CRPs bring together enormous organizational capacity, and that System-level structures that support RBM (SMO, IEA, ISPC/SPIA) provide investors with a foundation for due-diligence and results accountability. Accountability, should embrace not just the need to provide credible performance data, but also to support learning i.e. evidence of effective learning as an important component of accountability.

**Recommendation 2 – At System level, decouple budget allocation and performance assessment**

The System should support the development of a RBM framework that has dual functions: 1) helping CRPs (and Centers) further develop their own internal and cross-Center RBM processes, and 2) helping the CRPs report on outcomes and impacts from their research as contribution to CGIAR's collective results. This means "letting go to get more": system-level information needs should serve related but distinct purposes of prioritizing CRP research and allocating budgets, and this should be decoupled from CRP and Center efforts to manage their own results frameworks.

Allocation of budgets, and budget shortfalls, should be based holistically on an array of credible types of performance information and on considerations of research priorities for CGIAR, and not rely on reported achievements against targets for a single set of SRF outcome indicators. Annual performance assessment and performance reporting by the SMO should be based on the latest information from a constantly renewed dashboard fed by IEA evaluation reports, ISPC proposal and impact assessment work, annual CRP reports related to their own performance frameworks, and selected, valid operational indicators.

**Recommendation 3 – Invest in CRP driven, system-relevant Management Information Systems**

RBM is based on an ability to collect, analyse and use massive amounts of data that can be safely stored and easily accessed and sorted. This is doubly the case for CGIAR which works to coordinate efforts of a complex array of CRPs and a large number of implementing partners. Significant investment in MISs is a pre-requisite for CGIAR's success with the RBM approach. When building CGIAR's MIS, CRP and Center needs must come first. As such, the System should support the ongoing development of MARLO and similar initiatives in CGIAR, if seen promising, with annual core funding. The challenge is to make the systems simple enough to make RBM easier rather than more complicated.

**Recommendation 4 – Identify and empower RBM support function at System level**

Support for RBM from System level should be more conscious and coherent than in the past and the RBM function should be clearly mandated to provide practical and helpful RBM services directed to the needs of the CRPs. There should be at least one SMO-based, full-time specialist with competence in RBM and with specific terms of reference to encourage collaboration around shared MISs, shared learning, and innovation related to RBM process and tools. The schedule for external evaluations and impact assessments should be coherent and mutually supportive. The SMO should lead the development of best practice RBM that draws on relevant technical expertise from IEA and SPIA as independent advisory bodies. The goal should be to strengthen CGIAR's vision for RBM best practice, and have the System Organization more successfully conceptualize and coordinate the further adaptation and adoption of effective RBM.

**Recommendation 5 – Develop and implement annual RBM capacity building work plans**

The SMO should prepare an annual workplan for RBM capacity building and learning, and a budget should be allocated for the priority initiatives outlined in the work breakdown structure of that work plan. In 2014, RBM piloting was allocated USD 4 million for learning. This is an indication of the type and level of investment, targeted to support RBM adaptation, learning and sharing, that is needed on an annual basis. The following elements should be a central part of ongoing RBM capacity building efforts:

- A cascading range of appropriate experts should be identified as **RBM champions** from Centers, to CRPs, to System. These champions should have clear responsibilities to support RBM imbedded in their individual terms of reference and job descriptions. These RBM champions should together identify and support priority RBM capacity building initiatives and advocate collectively for donor support. The focus of this support should be on making RBM work for CRPs in enhancing and sustaining their effectiveness.
- An active **CGIAR monitoring, evaluation and learning community of practice** should continue to be supported, and be facilitated by the SMO. It should be directed by CRP priorities and consciously embrace RBM best-practice principles.
- To further boost RBM learning and expertise, CGIAR should provide **an innovation fund** that serves CRP-based learning and development of practical tools and options related to RBM.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Evaluation background

CGIAR is a global agricultural research partnership that implements research through a network of 15 research Centers and their partners. The CGIAR Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) is responsible for external evaluations of research, functions and structures of CGIAR. In the first four years of IEA's operation, evaluations of all 15 CGIAR Research Programs (CRP) were completed. Drawing on the results of these evaluations, IEA is organizing further work to contribute to broader evidence-based learning in CGIAR. The evaluation of Results-Based Management (RBM) in CGIAR, is part of IEA's 2017 work plan which was approved by the System Council.

This evaluation was guided by Terms of Reference (ToR) developed by IEA. Subsequently, a more detailed Inception Report, produced by the Evaluation Team, provided an agreed evaluation design. The Inception Report was used as a road-map for the conduct of this evaluation, for guiding the evaluation team, for informing the evaluation stakeholders, and for helping to assure evaluation quality.

## 1.2. Evaluation purpose, objectives and target audience

Results-based management (RBM) was a new approach to management committed to by CGIAR following its independent review in 2008. The **primary purpose** of this evaluation was to learn lessons from the experience of CGIAR introducing and implementing different aspects of RBM. In fulfilling its purpose, the evaluation explored:

- the main drivers, and approaches taken by CGIAR in moving towards RBM;
- the constraints that have been experienced or perceived; and
- what has been achieved so far in conceiving and implementing aspects of RBM in CGIAR's research context.

The **objectives** of the evaluation were to provide evidence and lessons as an input to implementing an RBM framework during Phase II of the CRPs; and to formulate recommendations to CRPs and their respective research Centers, and to the System governing bodies for increasing the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of further RBM iterations. The main stakeholders of the evaluation are[1]:

- **CGIAR System Council** - for decision making on strategic direction;
- **CGIAR System Organization** - for guidance to CRPs when developing the RBM framework in the current year and beyond, and stewardship on accountability and strategic decision making on RBM at the System level;
- **Center and CRP management and staff** - for lessons learned to increase the effectiveness of and incentives deriving from RBM;
- **CGIAR Centers' Boards and CRP oversight bodies** - for lessons learned related to oversight

[1] Here and throughout the evaluation report, we use mostly the updated definitions (CGIAR System Council, System Organization, etc.) as presented in the Charter of the CGIAR System Organization, June 16, 2016

on RBM;

- **CGIAR research partners** - for lessons learned for accommodating RBM in partnerships; and
- **Independent Science and Partnership Council** (ISPC) - for lessons learned regarding strategic issues on RBM at CRP and System level.

## 1.3. Evaluation scope and key questions

The evaluation covered the time span from the initiation of the CRPs and related RBM initiatives in 2009 until end-July 2017 when the main data collection phase of the evaluation ended. It examined the CGIAR System: Centers, CRPs, Funders, System Organization, and advisory bodies such as the ISPC and the IEA. It assessed the extent to which lessons have been learned and invested as CGIAR has proceeded with RBM implementation across the System. In more depth, the evaluation assessed the experience of CRPs with RBM, and especially their experience implementing RBM pilots in 2004. While CRPs encompass CGIAR's programmatic approach, and are therefore of primary interest, the evaluation also explored the experience of Centers that have embraced the RBM approach as they participated in CRPs. Given that RBM is a holistic approach to management, it was beyond the evaluation's remit to comprehensively assess the extent to which each Center and CRP has started to implement aspects of RBM. Regarding elements such as developing Theories of Change and setting up monitoring and evaluation plans and practices in CRPs, the evaluation relied on existing assessments and other evaluative evidence, but did not conduct an audit of current practices.

In summary, the scope of this evaluation included:

- early system drivers, design and adaptation of RBM for CGIAR's unique research context;
- lessons learned from piloting the RBM approach by CRPs and related research Centers;
- management initiatives that supported RBM application; and
- looking forward, recommended refinements for successful application of the RBM approach.

Specific aspects of implementing RBM that the evaluation covered are explained by the evaluation questions, sub-questions, and indicators detailed in the Evaluation Matrix (see ANNEX A). The **four key evaluation questions** that structure the evaluation are taken from the approved Inception Report, and are as follows:

1. What were the drivers and objectives of CGIAR's RBM approach(es) and do they align with a) the needs and priorities of the CGIAR System, b) the working conditions of CGIAR staff and partners; and c) current global approaches and policies?
2. Did the CPR pilots of RBM implementation provide relevant learning for the CRPs themselves and for CGIAR?
3. Did support at System, CRP and Center management levels facilitate successful implementation of RBM?
4. Reflecting on the experience of introducing and mainstreaming RBM so far, how can this approach optimally be used to help CGIAR contribute to its research mandate and expected system level outcomes?

Details of the evaluation design, approach and methodology are given in Annex 1 to this report, including changes from the Inception Report and limitations to the evaluation. Throughout the report reference is made to case studies on three of the CRPs that formally piloted RBM in 2014.

# 2. Background on RBM in CGIAR

## 2.1. Organization review that lead to RBM

In 2008, an independent external review of CGIAR emphasized that CGIAR needed to "adopt modern results management techniques," among other essential changes[2]. The review report recommended that a Managing for Development Results (MfDR)[3] approach be adopted by CGIAR, which would in turn have the following task implications for CGIAR:

1. establish a system-wide strategic management for results framework (page 13);
2. better assess impact of research, and improve understanding of the contribution of research activities to the delivery of specific strategic objectives (page 14);
3. establish an independent evaluation unit to conduct reviews and evaluate program progress (page 15);
4. develop a new performance measurement system, with a minimum number of indicators, to "supply higher order performance information" (page 320);
5. develop a "one entry multiple use information system" to support performance management needs and underpin aggregation to high-level results (page 321);
6. roll up of a few vital indicators to report on progress towards cross-cutting CGIAR strategic objectives (page 321);
7. assist donors in aligning their funding and programs toward shared desired outcomes (page 321); and
8. use a result focus to motivate staff and attract partners (page 332).

Following that external review, as part of a comprehensive organization reform process, RBM was embraced by CGIAR. In an aspirational statement of resolve, managing for results was **one of the four core reform principles** committed to by the System in late 2009[4], and embracing RBM principles became a "flagship initiative" of CGIAR's top management[5]. As part of this commitment, CGIAR members resolved to share responsibility for managing results, and to collaboratively monitor and evaluate progress in achieving measurable outcomes. Among the essential principles most directly related to RBM which CGIAR committed to act on were the following[6]:

- Principle 1.1 – A common strategy and results framework
- Principle 1.2 – A common framework for processes, reporting, monitoring and evaluation
- Principle 2.1 – Shared responsibility for managing toward outcomes
- Principle 2.2 – The System Organization, Centers and donors are mutually accountable for CRP outputs funded by CGIAR

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[2] *Bringing together the best of science and the best of development*. Chapter 12, Managing for Results, CGIAR Independent Review of the CGIAR System Technical Report, November 2008, page 326

[3] The evaluators use the term "results-based management" (RBM) throughout this report and consider it synonymous with "managing for development results" (MfDR) which is used in the review report cited above, and with the term Performance-based Management recently adopted in CGIAR.

[4] Voices of Change, The new CGIAR, 2009, page 7

[5] From interviews with senior System managers during the inception phase of this evaluation

[6] Voices of Change, page 7.

- Principle 2.3 – A harmonized monitoring system under the Strategy and Results Framework that provides real-time information about program outputs and outcomes;
- Principle 2.4 – An evaluation system that provides periodic objective assessments of performance against stated objectives; and
- Principle 4.4 – A series of periodic and regular interactions among participants and other stakeholders to inform CGIAR operations.

In mid-2013, CGIAR commissioned a mid-term review (MTR). The review led to additional organizational changes which were implemented in 2016. One of the MTR recommendation that was most directly relevant to RBM was that CGIAR should revise its Strategy and Results Framework (SRF) and "take as much time as required to get it right"[7].

For a timeline of RBM related events, from 2008 to the time of this evaluation, please see Annex 3 to this report.

## 2.2. Defining Results-Based Management

### A brief history of management approaches[8]

Public concern of national account deficits, skepticism of political leadership, and the call for transparent and accountable governance contributed to the emergence of RBM in the public and international development sectors. While historically governments focused on human, technical, and financial resources provided as inputs for their programs, modern management insists that programs define expected results, focus attention on result achievement, measure performance regularly and objectively, learn from performance information, and adjust to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Public sector management has evolved since the 1960's with its emphasis on financial planning and cost accounting. Then the management of human resources, and operating and capital costs were the focus of management control. New public management approaches in the 1980s led to efforts to become more client and service-oriented, spawning the development of quality service standards. Concurrently, a renewed interest in performance indicators arose to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery, increase government control over quality, enhance accountability and improve client services.

In summary, over three decades, there has been a shift in the focus of public sector management approaches from budgets, to activities, process controls, to objectives and now results. Ongoing developments in information and communications technology have made integrated management information systems possible, opening the door to capturing and processing large amounts of quantitative financial and output data, while analysing it in relationship to qualitative outcome data. **RBM is clearly an evolution in management and not a revolution**, with origins firmly rooted in the management sciences.

[7] Final Report from the Mid-Term Review Panel of the CGIAR Reform, 2014

[8] This section has relied heavily on *Results-Based Management: Towards a Common Understanding among Development Cooperation Agencies*, Discussion Paper, Ver. 5.0., Chapter 2. Werner Meier, Results-Based Management Group, 2003.

Research organizations involved in CGIAR have been directly influenced by these trends. As RBM became more central in program administration across development initiatives, and as RBM was embraced by donor governments, NGOs and philanthropic organizations, this management approach automatically spilled over into the agriculture research sphere.

## Definition and principles of RBM

The definition of RBM, and the technical terms associated with this approach (outputs, outcomes, performance measurements, etc.), are normally aligned with guidance work coming from the OECD.[9] These global definitions and the overall RBM approach implied have been widely embraced by development donors. This has provided a consistent management language. And yet each program and organization must adapt the RBM approach to its own context and needs. For example, RBM in CGIAR's agriculture research context involves research questions, learning, testing and innovative technologies that may take 20 years to unfold and contribute to sustained impact. Therefore, the "results" that inform management decisions need to be sufficiently near to program implementation (outputs and progress towards research outcomes) even if CGIAR is also expected to track and document its contribution to development outcomes and impact.

What is labelled as RBM, and recommended best practice, continues to evolve. While performance measurement of progress toward achievement of expected results remains the core of RBM, complexity acceptance and systems thinking are more in vogue than ever. For this evaluation, it is necessary to define good-practice principles of RBM to aid consistent evaluative inquiry. Below the evaluators provide a comprehensive definition of RBM by identifying 10 principles of good practice[10]. The assertion is that if all or most of these principles are being embraced by the CGIAR System Organization, the CRPs, the Centers that partner through the CRPs, and by CGIAR donors, then this approach is likely to be consistent with established good-practice, help to support program effectiveness, and ultimately, be valued as a management approach by CGIAR's stakeholders.

**Ten Principles of RBM Best Practice**

1. **Results focus** – A focus on being accountable for achieving results (for CGIAR, at a level that is realistic and feasible in the research context), linked to a compelling vision and strategic framework is the central preoccupation of RBM. This calls for adjusted tools, methods, and incentives: strategic results frameworks, logic models with measurable results, theories of change, performance measurement plans, outcome-oriented reports, and responsive workplans, and adaptive fund allocation.

2. **Consistent leadership** – System-level, senior leadership is necessary to promote full engagement in RBM. There must also be identified champions at the CRP and Center levels who have the capacity to advocate the use of performance information for internal management accountability, learning and decision-making, and for external reporting to stakeholders.

3. **Commitment to measurement** – Performance monitoring, focused on measurement using

[9] See OECD/DAC glossary of RBM terms at https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2754804.pdf

[10] These principles have been influenced by many writers. See for example: Best Practices in Results-Based Management: A Review of Experience. A Report for the UN Secretariat, Volume 1, Mayne, J., 2007.

indicators, is at the heart of RBM and requires incentives: investment in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, a practical approach to qualitative and quantitative indicators, baselines and targets, and sensible measurement of progress towards results achievement and contribution.

4. **Change in organizational culture** – An RBM culture is consciously defined, promoted and supported as a unique way of doing work which requires a willingness to be transparent, to share, to learn and to invest in performance metrics, and participatory review and reporting.

5. **Systems thinking** – Constant scanning of the implementation environment, clarifying and testing assumptions, finding connections and synergy across Centers and CRPs and pathways of change, and navigating towards outcomes amidst complexity are hallmarks of RBM.

6. **Investment in learning** – Results information supports learning, efficient and effective management, and credible reporting. RBM is an adaptive management approach that builds in regular review and update of performance, assumptions and risk, and expectations, and then invests lessons learned through evolving workplans and adaptive use of resources.

7. **Practical understanding of accountability** – The traditional notion of top-down authority is reshaped by an obligation to credibly demonstrate that what is being achieved is significant and valuable. This accountability requires that results and service-oriented individuals, teams and organizations are empowered to influence outcomes, and receive incentives to do so.

8. **Wide participation** – Pushing ownership and decision-making to the frontlines, empowering staff by having them design monitoring systems that are practical, and providing sufficient opportunities and support for participation in program design and in performance review and adaptation.

9. **Integration of monitoring and evaluation** – To provide complementary performance information that is not available from monitoring systems alone, a professional and independent evaluation function is part of an RBM approach.

10. **Investment in information systems** – RBM is data-heavy and requires ongoing development and modernization of electronic management information systems: user-friendly interfaces, and direct alignment with monitoring and evaluation plans, plus training, to support reliability, easy access and efficient utilization.

# 3. Drivers and objectives of CGIAR'S RBM approach

**What were the drivers and objectives of CGIAR's RBM approach(es) and do they align with a) current global approaches and policies, b) the needs and priorities of the CGIAR System, and c) the working conditions of CGIAR staff and partners?** The evaluation examined this key question through sub-questions[11] which are discussed below.

## 3.1. What was the motivation to introduce RBM?

### What was the motivation ("the drivers") to introduce RBM in CGIAR, and do these drivers remain relevant today or have they changed?

**Finding 1 – At system-level, a key driver for RBM was the reform process initiated in 2008, which affirmed the need to improve CGIAR effectiveness and strategic focus. It was perceived that RBM would improve effectiveness through better system-level planning, and by providing credible, indicator-based performance data.**

A review of RBM in CGIAR needs to acknowledge that management innovation towards a more focused outcomes orientation had a long history. As one key informant (KI) with long corporate memory recounted, there has been "home-grown" good practice to support RBM for several decades. To support this sense of precedent, several milestones were given as illustrative examples to the evaluators:

- 1999 - RBM began to take shape in CGIAR with a publication arguing for greater use of program evaluation in CGIAR to support learning and change[12].
- 2002 - 2005 - IITA and CIAT worked on impact pathways analysis as a theory-driven approach to fostering and evaluating impact[13].

2007 the Science Council required Centers to include impact pathways in their medium-term plans, and in 2008, a Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA)-endorsed paper on strategic guidance for impact assessment discusses impact pathways[14].

The motivation to embrace RBM was significantly accelerated by the 2008 CGIAR reform, a detailed reform proposal[15], and a joint reform declaration[16]. The reform of CGIAR was deemed to be essential to deal with threats to CGIAR's effectiveness which included: mission creep, increasing complexity and

[11] See the Inception Report for full wording of the sub-questions http://iea.cgiar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Inception-Report-RBM-Evaluation_FINAL-1.pdf
[12] Horton, Mackay, Anderson and Dupleich. Evaluating capacity development in planning, monitoring, and evaluation: A case from agriculture research, ISNRA Research Report No. 17. The Hague, 2000
[13] Douthwaite, B., Kuby, T., van de Fliert, E., & Schulz, S. (2003). Impact pathway evaluation: an approach for achieving and attributing impact in complex systems. Agricultural Systems, 78(2), 243–265.
[14] Walker, T. T. (2008). Strategic guidance for ex-post impact assessment of agricultural research. CGIAR/SPIA
[15] A Revitalized CGIAR – A New Way Forward: The Integrated Reform Proposal. The Change Steering Team. November 2008
[16] Voices of Change, The new CGIAR, 2009

overlaps in mandates, stagnating resources and lack of donor coordination, and a changing landscape of agriculture research[17]. It was perceived that the reform process would improve effectiveness through better planning, and the use of indicator-based performance data:

'*The CGIAR will move from increasingly fragmented and restricted project and Center-based programming and funding, to funding against major program areas which draw on the competencies of the relevant Centers and partners to achieve results*.'[18]

Better system-level planning would be supported by the introduction of an SRF, a portfolio of 10 to 15 "mega-programs", and indicator-based program performance contracts.

**Finding 2 – Centers were already interested in results and engaged to varying degree in RBM prior to the 2009 CGIAR reform commitments. The Centers themselves were responding to a global context in which performance management requirements were becoming more pronounced.**

Centers also drove CGIAR's embrace of RBM. Both interviews with Center managers, and document review, suggest that by 2009, Centers were generally aware of the RBM approach, and most were becoming more results-oriented. The global context in which CGIAR worked, encouraged the Centers to adopt RBM. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 and the follow-up Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, the Millennium Development Goals, evolving global approaches to food security, and increasing support for environmental sustainability and climate change response all included targeted, measurement-based performance commitments. At the same time, many stakeholders were calling for strengthened management links between agriculture research and social development objectives (research for development) as part of an evolving vision for achieving global social development goals.

**Finding 3 – CRPs, supported by their lead Centers, began to work with their own logic models and monitoring framework, and did their best to respond to requirements for outcome-oriented data. This compliance by CRPs to System-level requirements, became a strong driver for some aspects of RBM.**

The 2009 reform commitments were followed by the creation of a CGIAR "consortium" of 15 research Centers, a first System-level Strategy and Results Framework, and the development and approval of CGIAR's first iteration of CRPs. Proposal development for the CRPs, guided by a call-for-proposal document and templates, assured that minimum RBM standards were built into program designs. To take one example, the 5-year CRP on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) proposal approved in 2011 included a description of impact pathways; a logframe with a hierarchy of objectives, outcomes, and outputs; identification of assumptions and risks; more than 180 performance indicators; output targets; and a skeletal monitoring framework[19].

[17] A Revitalized CGIAR – A New Way Forward: The Integrated Reform Proposal. The Change Steering Team. November 2008, page 2, Box 1

[18] Ibid, page 4

[19] Proposal for CGIAR Research Program 7: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), January 2011. This CRP was led by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT).

This call for CRPs to embrace RBM, continued through the 2-year extension of CRP I and into CRP II. The commitment to RBM was confirmed in the second SRF (2015)[20], and System-level guidance for the CRP II call for proposal included a detailed and ambitious section devoted to RBM. It made RBM compliance a central consideration[21].

*'The SRF describes the CGIAR approach to RBM that is to be fully implemented in the CRP2 Portfolio starting from 2017. CRPs are expected to propose a RBM framework which is described as a management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impact. This framework should describe how CGIAR's approach to RBM is conceptualized and will be operationalized…'*[22]

With CRP II, value-for-money considerations, and direct linkage of budget allocations for Window 1 and 2 (W1/2) funds become explicitly linked to "associated outcomes". In this way, RBM compliance became directly tied to quality assessment and approval of CRP proposals. One of the six proposal assessment criteria for full proposals was:

'*The extent to which the resources requested, relative to the expected outcomes, represent an attractive and appropriate investment for donors, that is, is the proposal* ***good value for money***' [emphasis as quoted][23].

A reading of the CRP II call-for-proposal guidance makes it clear that performance measurement, results-based budgeting, and value-for-money are aspects of RBM that were especially emphasised by the System Management Office (SMO). Most interviewees, internal and external to the CRPs, explained that complying with these aspects of RBM became a central driver for CRPs.

The motivation for embracing RBM continues to have three key drivers: a) the necessity of CRPs to meet demands from the System Organization for outcome-oriented performance data, reflecting pressure from the System Council and individual donors, b) the ongoing efforts of Centers to be more results oriented, and c) internal efforts of CRPs to be relevant, effective and funded. All CRPs were requested to show efforts to become RBM complaint in their CRPII proposals. The evaluators noted that some Centers could describe detailed organization change plans that have been put in place consistent with RBM practice. Although this evaluation did not complete a definitive audit across all CRPs and Centers, the data collected suggests that many Centers and all CRPs have launched management efforts to become more RBM compliant.

**Finding 4 – Donors are not a homogeneous stakeholder group and they do not approach and think of RBM in the same way. They have different visions, operating principles, and objectives and as such, their motivation for driving RBM varies.**

Interviews with representatives from six major CGIAR donors confirm that the need to improve the results-orientation of CGIAR, and the value-proposition of CRPs, is still felt to be relevant for donors. Among donors, the strongest and most persistent driver mentioned was the need to be accountable

[20] CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030, page 26.

[21] 2017-2022 CGIAR Research Program Portfolio (CRP2) - Final guidance for Full Proposals, December 19, 2015

[22] Ibid, page 27

[23] Ibid, page 45

for measurable results. This was emphasized by influential funders who explained to the evaluators that they need to make clear cases for CGIAR funding within their own management and governance systems, and to do this effectively, they felt they needed credible performance data on the value-added of investments being made.

That said, donors are not of one mind. There was agreement among several large donors that accountability should be the focus of RBM at system level. This perspective emphasises that CRPs need to be held accountable for achieving measurable outcomes based on contracted targets. Performance contracts, standardization of measurement, and annual review of achievement is central to this perspective. Others donor representatives believe that a focus of RBM on measuring high-level consolidated outcomes that have long attribution chains and where contribution is difficult to establish, is inappropriate. For these donor representatives, RBM can serve as a disincentive to efficiency and innovation when the emphasis is accountability rather than learning. No donor is opposed to RBM, but all question how RBM is presently being applied by CGIAR. The donor representatives interviewed, had widely different visions and objectives of how CGIAR should be supported by the funds that they controlled.

## 3.2. Was there a shared vision and conceptualization for RBM?

**Was the purpose for introducing the RBM approach(es), and the operational way in which this was done, part of a shared vision, values, understanding, and efforts among key stakeholders?**

**How was the RBM approach(es) conceptualized by the System Organization for the unique research context in which CGIAR works?**

**Finding 5 – There was broad agreement around the original vision for introducing RBM. There has been less consensus on how to do it operationally.**

Generally, the **original** vision of adopting a RBM approach was shared by Centers and CGIAR partners. Interviews and document review reveal how expectations for RBM at various levels of CGIAR grew during the 2008-2010 reform process[24]. However, in 2011, when the first round of CRP proposals was put together, the implications of accountability for measurable outcomes started to become more apparent. Researchers worried that the exploratory part of their work would be limited, and that too much of their time would be "wasted measuring contributions along complex attribution chains". This led to significant push back from Centers, a "counter-revolution" in the words of one interviewee, and paraphrased by others. An overview of CRP evaluation reports by this evaluation confirms suggest that CRP staff were pressured to be accountable to development outcomes using a standard set of System-level outcome indicators.

Over the period relevant to this evaluation, Centers and CRPs actively started to buy into a broad vision of RBM[25]. The first round of CRP proposals started integrating outcome-oriented performance

[24] CGIAR Annual Report 2010, Science for a food secure future, Towards a Reformed CGIAR, CGIAR Consortium, undated

[25] For the evaluators, a "broad vision of RBM" means comprehensive embrace of all ten principles of RBM best practice as summarized in Section 2.2. of this report.

monitoring into research plans. The SRF led CGIAR's RBM guidance, and with CRP II, the use of Theories of Change (ToC), impact pathways (IP), and performance indicators became mainstream. However, the introduction of RBM, and its initial piloting, coincided with major changes, including: significant governance changes starting in 2010 and continuing into 2016, a complete revision of the CRP portfolio, and significant and unexpected cuts in 2015-16 W1/2 funding. All this created sustained uncertainty and confusion, and accentuated tension around the perceived priorities for RBM; RBM, as directed by the Consortium Office and SMO lost support.

Interviewees were of one mind that there is still no agreement across CGIAR regarding the appropriate approach to RBM. During the main data collection phase of this evaluation, several interviewees spoke forcefully that the SMO focus remains on developing System-level indicators in response to insistence from several large donor representatives.

**Finding 6 – The narrow focus of RBM on accountability, and its use to collect invalid performance measures to justify budget allocation from CGIAR to individual CRPs, was incongruent with best practice.**

A consistent issue mentioned by CRP and Center interviewees was not accountability *per se*, but the type of accountability and measurement focus perceived to have dominated the System-level embrace of RBM. The 2015-16 cuts in W1/W2 forced thinking at System level about performance and the relevance of individual CRPs: how to apply the cuts and where? As described by one KI, "this was an example of prioritizing cuts rather than prioritizing research on basis of its importance".

RBM was seen by the System Organization as the way to assess CRP performance, and which projects, flagships, and clusters were best contributing. This exacerbated the perception of CRPs and Centers that RBM was almost exclusively performance and resource-allocation focused. The idea of ''payment for results" and prioritization of CRPs based on unscientific performance measures well outside the sphere of control of the CRP, and even of the Centers, was considered problematic and even harmful. Some informants mentioned that it was easier for some CRPs to present data related to targets and indicators than for others because of the nature of the research being done. This then led to unfair advantages.

As explained by many of those interviewed, the approach to CGIAR portfolio investment by the System governance brought with it a kind of cynical competition between CRPs rather than a collaborative culture. The conflicting motivation at System versus CRP and Center levels created confusion and mistrust around the purpose of RBM in CGIAR. RBM became perceived in CRPs and Centers as an unfair "stick", used for compliance enforcement, with higher funding allocations being offered as the "carrot". Trying to establish accountability through long casual chains "proven" by indicator-based data links was considered by many to distort the realities of on-the-ground efforts and high-level objectives. Nor were these measurement expectations by the System governance in line with what could be realistically done in terms of data gathering without overburdening CRPs.

A high-level of mistrust and frustration from Centers towards the System was shared with the evaluators. The focus on collecting standardized indicator-based data for outcomes across CRPs, and then using this data to compare the performance of each CRP as part of an overall prioritization effort, diminished enthusiasm for CGIAR's RBM approach. The unpredictability of core funding from one year to the next, and the increasing use of bilateral, directed funding, has damped expectations for CGIAR

among Center and CRP staff. The evaluators noted during interviews with Centers and CRP managers, and from some of the CRP evaluations, that there is resistance to planning and reporting requirements coming from the SMO and the value-added of CGIAR itself is being openly questioned.

**Finding 7 – CRPs responded to System-directives for outcome-data collection and reporting. However, much of this effort was seen by CRPs and participating Centers as costly compliance with questionable valued-added. CRPs (and Centers) struggle with technical aspects of monitoring and reporting that assumes control beyond their spheres of influence.**

A major complaint voiced to the evaluators by Center and CRP representatives is that annual reporting of results by Centers to CRPs, and from CRPs to the SMO, using standard indicators, some of them at outcome level, is onerous and adds limited value. A random examination of CRP annual reports from 2014 and 2015 by the evaluators revealed how each typically presents progress using a standard set of 34 indicators. Most of those interviewed felt that data for these indicators, and the underlying assumptions of attributability, were not scientifically valid, given that these measured results typically lie beyond the CRP's sphere of control.

The evaluators found that data collated by the System from standardized CRP-level outcome indicators were of little use as lines of evidence in the CRP evaluations. For example, the challenge of performance measurement using Intermediate Development Outcome (IDO) indicators is explained in the report of the 2014 Forest, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) CRP evaluation:

'*Based on currently available methodology, it is unrealistic that actual contributions FTA research make to IDOs – as currently defined – can be monitored and aggregated quantitatively to yield FTA or CGIAR-level outcome measures. If forced, program staff is likely to creatively produce and report figures that will however be based on such uncertain critical assumptions that they are unlikely to reflect reality.*'[26]

That evaluation report described the conundrum whereby M&E experts at CRP and Center level were investing valuable staff time to collect and present outcome-level performance data simply to comply with contractual obligations and System-level needs.

**Finding 8 – The post-reform CGIAR conceptual guidance for RBM was primarily presented in two iterations of the SRF and the related calls-for-proposals. This guidance was limited in explaining the full scope of RBM and what was expected in CGIAR's unique research context. For example, a ToC for RBM, an RBM policy paper, a related change management strategy, and adaption to CGIAR's research context were missing.**

There are many interpretations of RBM and how it should be adopted. Each organization, and CGIAR is no exception, must find its own way through investment and trial and error; a customized results-based management regime is critical:

'*Though it may be tempting to simply adopt a RBM system deemed successful in another jurisdiction or organization, this practice has proven to be very ineffective. It is important that the system be*

[26] Evaluation of the CGIAR Research Program "Forest, Trees and Agroforestry" (FTA), Volume 1, Evaluation Report, June 2014

*developed according to the needs and situation of the users. No single system will be appropriate for every organization.'* [27]

The evaluators found limited System-level policy or reference documents to guide a customized RBM evolution *across* CGIAR. To take one revealing example, the initial SRF and the related call-for-proposal guidelines, included limited guidance on CGIAR's vision for RBM as a different management approach, and how this new approach was to be implemented. It used less than a page to describe CGIAR's monitoring and evaluation strategy[28]. Some interviewees cited the 2012 ISPC "white papers" as attempts to provide RBM guidance [29]. The evaluators found these two documents to be important reflections of thinking within CGIAR, but there was limited indication that these papers were used to underpin overall RBM guidance. In addition, ISPC introduced the concept of IDOs, which was then adopted by CGIAR.

For the period 2013 and 2014, the evaluators found extensive e-mail exchanges, working group minutes and draft recommendations related to the challenges of performance measurement. In March 2013, an "IDO Working Group and Design Team" representing most CRPs, met for four days in Cali [30], and in April, this working group produced the "Guide for Developing CRP IDOs". In August, it was reported that these guidelines were "used to varying degrees by the CRPs" [31] and progress reports dated that month indicate that work was still underway on a "final set of common IDOs". A two-day workshop in Frankfurt in October 2014 involved three CRPs that discussed "a common framework for measuring adaptive capacity IDOs" [32]. **This flurry of activity was not focused on the broad principles of RBM**. Its purpose is made clear by a Consortium Office paper that was prepared for an April 2013 Fund Council meeting:

'*The CRP IDOs must enable the Programs [CRPs] to report impact in the context of the Consortium-wide System Level Outcomes (SLOs). The goal in 2013 is to develop the system so that results and future funding are linked and funders can relate their investments to outcomes. Volunteer CRPs will pilot the new system in 2014*.' [33]

For CRP II, the revised SRF and guidelines for developing full proposals (December 2015), can be considered the most detailed conceptualization of RBM by the System Organization up to that date. The guidelines state that "the SRF describes the CGIAR approach to RBM that is to be fully implemented in the CRP II Portfolio starting from 2017". However, when asked about the SRF as an RBM guidance document, informants agreed widely that it was inadequate. Interviewees from CRPs and Centers stated that there had been no attempt to build consensus around a ToC for introducing and promoting RBM, and that an RBM policy paper could have helped explain the principles of RBM

[27] Implementing RBM: Lessons from the Literature. Posted on the website of the Office of the Auditor General, Government of Canada. Undated. Search http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca

[28] A Strategy and Results Framework for the CGIAR – For Submission to the CGIAR Funders Forum, February 20, 2011

[29] Strategic overview of GIAR Research programs. Part I. ToC and Impact Pathways, December 2012, commissioned by the ISPC and; Strengthening Strategy and Results Framework through prioritization, June 2012, prepared by the ISPC

[30] A set of slides from this workshop entitled "progress with CRP IDOs" show an ongoing workplan to revise IDOs into 2014.

[31] August 2013 Addendum to Guidelines for Developing IDOs, Draft for Discussion. 15 August 2013

[32] Measuring progress towards adaptive capacity IDOs through a common framework for WLE, FTA and CCAFS: key issues and recommendations from the [October 22-23] workshop. Undated

[33] CGIAR Priority-Setting Process, Developing IDOs for CRP, Version 2: April 2013. Prepared for Fund Council 9 meeting.

and how they could be applied in CRP practice. Some suggested that a related change management strategy was required to show a way forward.

KIs found that CGIAR's RBM focus remained almost exclusively on System-level needs to report annually on a limited set of development outcomes. This is consistent with key messages that were being released by the former Consortium starting in 2012, including a letter from the Chief Executive Officer:

'*I made the development of a "performance management system" for the CGIAR Consortium a top priority. Now, a year later [June 2013], I can report that we have taken some big strides in that direction… What we are talking about here are clear development outcomes that have been reached by consensus. The [CRPs], together with their partners, can be held accountable for delivering these outcomes. Program level outcomes tied to outcomes at CGIAR System Level… are in turn linked to the new SDGs. Together with solid monitoring and reporting, these outcomes constitute the foundation, the building blocks, for CGIAR's results-based performance management system*.'[34]

The development of the SRF, the IDO and sub-IDOs, and RBM piloting in CRPs, took place without the overall approach to RBM being adequately explained or understood. Interviewees recounted that there was insufficient understanding at System level about how RBM related to wider organizational development, consistent leadership, systems thinking, investment in learning, and practical understanding of accountability.

In late 2016, as part of the latest iteration of governance reform, and renewed vigor to embrace performance management, a new document was prepared by the SMO with contributions from ISPC and IEA that provided an overview of how a performance-based management system should be created for CGIAR research[35]. That document, building on work by the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice (MELCoP)[36], and influenced by earlier work done by IDRC[37], presented a "foundation for RBM", essentially a diagram that makes a distinction between three spheres of stakeholder engagement and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). A burst of related work is presently underway, led by the SMO and involving MELCoP, and is evidence that the conceptualization of RBM by the CGIAR Organization is ongoing[38]. For example, as instructed by the new Charter of the

[34] RBM for the CGIAR Research Program Portfolio. Quotation by CGIAR's then CEO within a press release. News from CGIAR System Organization, June 17, 2013.

[35] Towards a Performance-based Management System for CGIAR Research, Issued 17 November 2016, SC#-03, presented at the 3rd CGIAR System Council meeting. As confirmed by several interviewees, this document was "unanimously supported by donors".

[36] MELCoP defines its focus as strengthening the ability of the CGIAR and CRPs to generate, capture and disseminate knowledge from CRP monitoring and evaluation in order to contribute to better results and to build an evidence base for decision making and learning.

[37] For background to the concept of spheres of influence, see reference study of RBM in IDRC completed by the evaluation team and included as ANNEX F in Volume II of this evaluation report.

[38] Changes since July 2017 have been rapid, and include, for example, new guidance on "Performance Based Management" and a new list of 9 indicators for System-level reporting. These most recent real-time changes were beyond the scope of this evaluation to fully examine and assess.

CGIAR System Organization[39], the SMO, in coordination with other system entities, is presently developing an integrated framework for CGIAR's performance management system[40].

**Finding 9 - Centers, many of whom are on their own RBM journey, are typically more focused on their own project and program implementation priorities rather than system-level accountability.**

Given the dramatic fall in unrestricted funding, and in the face of onerous tasks preparing CRP proposals and meeting monitoring and reporting demands, Centers lost some of their enthusiasm for the CGIAR reform vision. Today, Centers are typically more focused on their own project and program implementation priorities rather than system-level CGIAR accountability.

How do CGIAR staff understand RBM? The evaluators noted that some KIs at Centers associate RBM almost exclusively with efforts to align indicators and targets from projects that their partners implement, all the way up to SLOs. Upon further probing, these same KIs, are clearly involved in broader aspects of RBM, for example, active capacity building within project clusters to collaboratively achieve identified outcomes. People across CGIAR associate RBM with their individual experiences and this, of course, leads to different interpretations of what RBM entails.

Typically, KIs could explain RBM and the learning-to-accountability continuum that it encompasses when interviewed. Many informants could present a compelling and detailed case for RBM that covered most of the 10 principles of RBM best practice (see Section 2.2). The case studies also revealed this in-house knowledge. Certainly, most Centers and CRPs interviewed seemed to have a sophisticated understanding of RBM, the challenges involved in moving further towards a results orientation, and what RBM could offer to CGIAR. Unfortunately, as summarized by several senior CRP managers interviewed, this "in-house" knowledge was not collated into a System-level approach. Instead, at the System level, there was an overemphasis on accountability frameworks, IDO targets, and processes related to proposal preparation, approval and reporting.

## 3.3. Was RBM adapted to assure relevance?

**Has the CGIAR System's concept of RBM been adequately adapted for its unique type of business, aligned with the needs and priorities of the Centers and CRPs?**

**Looking across all data collected by the evaluators, which System-level led innovations, directly related to RBM, were the most significant and notable?**

Here the evaluators took a System-level look at the relevance of RBM. More specifically, with these evaluation sub-questions, the evaluators assessed the extent to which there was room for adaptation of RBM. Were practical and accepted adaptations to the RBM approach encouraged by the System to assure RBM's relevance to CGIAR's unique research mandate?

[39] Charter of the CGIAR System Organization, June 16, 2016, Article 11, page 18.

[40] CGIAR (2017), SC4-09B, Presentation on Performance Management. An early and still incomplete draft "CGIAR RBM Framework" (document plus additional explanatory slides) was shared by the SMO with the evaluation team

**Finding 10 – There was room for adaptations of the RBM approach within CRPs and member Centers. However, CGIAR's concept of RBM remained rooted in development programming approaches, in which fixed IDOs, and a related set of performance targets, were to be regularly measured and reported on.**

As expressed by several interviewees, one fundamental concern regarding RBM, was its questionable relevance to the research mandate of CGIAR. More specifically, from this viewpoint, CGIAR should not be managed and assessed as a development organization. As explained by different KIs, causal chains in development programming are typically shorter-term and easier to define, and therefore progress is easier to measure on an annual basis. This concern is echoed in a recent review:

'*The CGIAR should not be managed and assessed as a development organisation, and requires a longer-term horizon in its funding and governance arrangements… The CGIAR donor community applies a flawed meta-theory when assuming a straight line between research and development impact. Ongoing reforms have resulted in a situation where the CGIAR is assessed as if it were a development organisation. This leads the CGIAR to raise unrealistic expectations regarding the development impacts of the science conducted, resulting in ever growing distrust between the Centers and the donor community*.'[41]

Several KIs suggested that this tension between research and development goals has not been adequately addressed by the System and some researchers remain unclear how CGIAR can ensure that quality of research will not suffer under an RBM approach. Most of this concern revolves around performance measurement and the conviction that research success must be measured quite differently from development gains.

To help broker the research versus development conundrum, there were early efforts by the CRP-led IDO Working Group. However, following agreement on a common set of IDOs in 2013, a problem arose when this group was mandated to take the next step and identify indicators for these IDOs:

"*The default for CRPs was to fear that only what can be measured will be valued so every CRP wanted to have its own indicators, even if tracking all of them would have been impractical. The [Consortium] Office wanted a small set of indicators that could aggregate CRP performance and be used for priority setting, so there was a mismatch*." [42]

As explained by several KIs, some felt that the IDOs developed by the IDO Working Group, served to justify the first round of approved CRPs. During an October 2014 workshop organized with donor participation in Washington DC, a revised SRF was drafted, together with a new set of IDOs, and a new process was launched to develop indicators for these revised SRF outcomes. In this process, the donors became actively involved in setting the IDOs, while the CRPs' propositions were reflected in the new level of results, the sub-IDOs.

[41] Reforming the research policy and impact culture in the CGIAR: Integrating science and systemic capacity development. Global Food Security, Leeuwis, Klerkx, Schut, Elseevier. Knowledge, Technology and Innovation Group, Wageningen University, June 2, 2017.

[42] The details of this work were confirmed through KIs and then an e-mail exchange with a key participant in that process. This quote is from that e-mail exchange.

Another adaptation noted by the evaluators was the introduction of sub-IDOs in the 2015 second iteration of the SRF. This innovation was meant to help structure program design and related ToCs. This adaptation acknowledged the long impact pathways from activities to ultimate results within CRPs and the difficulty of monitoring contributions, let alone causal attribution, to CGIAR impact.

'*Below [IDOs] are Sub-Intermediate Development Outcome (sub-IDOs), which represent research outcomes adopted by immediate users… The IDOs and sub-IDOs will be adopted or adjusted by each CGIAR research program, according to program and peer-reviewed assessments of priorities and what can be delivered*.'[43]

As explained to the evaluators by several KIs, these sub-IDOs (46 were identified)[44], can help CRPs identify impact pathways that more clearly link activity clusters, and related Flagships, to priority CRP IDOs, and in this way, better link research to development results. However, the evaluators noted that the same guidelines that state sub-IDOs will be adopted or adjusted by each CRP, also make clear that targets needed to be set *before* each program was approved:

'*Targets at the sub-IDO level will be determined and validated at the pre-proposal phase to ensure alignment with the Results Framework, with the qualitative prioritization exercise to be undertaken by ISPC prior to the approval of pre-proposals. This process will bring rigor to the selection of pre-proposals prior to advancement to the full proposal stage*.'[45]

In addition to the older work of the IDO Working Group, there were extensive technical discussions within MELCoP, including various virtual and face-to-face meetings from 2015 onward, most recently, organized around the development of a draft RBM framework for CGIAR. The evaluators were also given details of work led the Task Force on Indicators (TFI) in which Centers and CRPs were directly involved. The evaluators noted that most of this work focused almost exclusively on the development of a single set of indicators for System-level performance assessment and reporting.

**Finding 11 – A range of System-led RBM adaptations have been introduced since the 2009 reform commitment to RBM. These provide experience which CGIAR can build on as it moves forward.**

There has been extensive RBM-related adaptation, led by the System[46]. Most of these involved direct, and in some cases extensive, consultations with CRP and Center stakeholders. The adaptations that the evaluators found most notable and directly related to RBM are highlighted below. The list is a combination of processes and specific products.

- A second iteration of the SRF, which is more compelling than the first;
- RBM pilots supported by a $4 million budget in five CRPs (which in varying degrees spilled over into Centers);

[43] Towards a Performance-based Management System for CGIAR Research, Issued 17 November 2016, SC#-03, presented at the 3rd CGIAR System Council meeting, page 5. See also CGIAR SRF 2016-2030, Refining How CGIAR Does Business Until 2030, page 14 and 15

[44] Ibid, pages 15 and 43

[45] Ibid, page 15

[46] By "adaptation" we mean attempts to make sense of and practice an RBM approach that is tailor-fit for CGIAR's unique research context and realities.

- introduction of sub-IDOs to elaborate on IDOs as an effort to scope expected CRP outcomes within a more reasonable sphere of influence and better connect research and development;
- extensive CRP II guidelines, still wanting but noticeably improved over CRP I;
- improved alignment of CRP II proposals with SRF IDOs and sub-IDOs;
- full portfolio review in Phase II;
- annual CRP Portfolio Reports e.g. traffic light presentations starting in 2013 and using same criteria for 2014 and 2015;
- Evaluation Community of Practice (ECoP) set up in 2013 and coordinated by the IEA;
- MELCoP launched in 2015;
- TFI initiated in mid-2016 to develop an RBM framework for the System;
- establishment of the System Council's Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee in mid-2016;
- support for use of ToC and IPs and mainstreaming use of these techniques within CRPs;
- range of IEA evaluations that have been completed including all CRPs;
- work of ISPC, SPIA and its Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR (SIAC) project; and
- recent developments (2017) concerning the further development of an RBM framework.

There was no consensus among KIs that these innovations were all fully appropriate or effective. For example, different interviewees provided critiques of MELCoP and TFI initiatives, with one interviewee suggesting that their work has "not led to much except forcing indicator development". The evaluators expected to find evidence of MELCoP systematically involved in taking stock of CGIAR practices in M&E and results-related learning across member Centers and CRPs. This would have been aligned with its mandate and helped CGIAR identify RBM gaps and initiate related capacity building. In fact, the evaluation did not identify this type of assessment work by MELCoP.

Other interviewees recounted in detail the importance of ongoing MELCoP involvement. Several interviewees questioned the value of IEA-commissioned evaluations given perceived lack of effective follow-up on recommendations found in those reports. Still others found the work of the IEA to be exemplary.

Clearly, progress was made in innovating and adapting RBM for CGIAR's unique research context, with the immediate pressing goal of stabilizing funding always in mind. Case studies (see section 4) revealed that when CRPs were left to design their unique RBM approaches, they did so, consciously thinking about the research and development dimensions of their work. At the same time, System-led performance measurement efforts, with the focus on achieving a set of performance targets, became divisive. Recent work by the TFI still seems to be focused largely on SLO and IDO indicators, without fully considering the costs and other challenges associated with gathering this type of high-level indicator data.

The evaluators understood that discussion and learning around how to measure CGIAR's outcomes has been helpful, despite the level of confusion that remains, including in the most recent work examined. The reporting requirements coming from the System level generated frustration, particularly in the face of diminishing core funding: the amount of effort required by Centers and CRPs is too great, the incentives to actively participate are not sufficient, the lack of utility and scientific merit of standardized System-level outcome indicators undermines practice, and the growth of

bilateral funding diverts attention from collaboration to competition. A range of KIs, including some donor representatives, pointed out that donors, and some Centers, as openly questioning the value-added of CGIAR.

RBM adaptation by the System clearly remains a work in progress. However, to the evaluators, the adaptations listed above were strong evidence that there have indeed been significant efforts by the System to adapt for RBM, and that this experience provides knowledge and skills that can be built on. Most interviewees felt that more progress could have been made if there had been a shared RBM reference framework for CGIAR. A few interviewees identified the recent System Council endorsed document, *Towards a Performance- based Management System for CGIAR Research*, as taking steps in this direction[47].

In addition to System-level efforts and adaptation, there has also been extensive learning and adaptation at CRP level, and within Centers, where M&E staff have typically been the champions of RBM innovations. This is described in Section 4, when researching case studies of CGIAR's RBM pilots. The evaluators found that further innovation by CRPs and Centers is likely, and can be sustained and even accelerated due to the RBM drivers discussed earlier. The prerequisite for this is that the disconnection between the System's conceptualization of RBM, and how the CRP and Center levels understand, experience and support RBM is effectively addressed.

[47] Ibid

# 4. Learning from the RBM pilots

**Did the CRP pilots of RBM implementation provide relevant learning for the CRPs themselves and for CGIAR?** The evaluation examined this key question through sub-questions which are discussed below.

## 4.1. Were RBM pilots representative?

### Do the CRPs that piloted RBM provide a representative cross-section of CGIAR research and therefore a valid and relevant "experiment" in the application and adaptation of RBM in the CGIAR context?

**Finding 12 – The 5 pilots were purposively selected by Consortium Office from a larger number of proposals. Representativeness of all CRPs was not a selection criterion used. There was no expectation that lessons learned from these pilots would be applied equally across other CRPs.**

To further encourage and support the RBM approach, in 2014, following a competitive call, five CRPs were selected to pilot aspects of RBM implementation. The following CRPs, CCAFS, Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP), Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB), Humidtropics and Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS), all received a supplementary W1 allocation approved by the Consortium and the Fund Council to implement their proposed pilot RBM projects[48]. These pilots were selected based on detailed proposals assessed for the quality of their RBM implementation plan and the extent to which outcomes of the piloting were to be measured[49].

Each CRP piloted RBM in its own way. The Consortium Office did not provide a learning agenda or pre-judge what learning the RBM pilots were meant to generate. Nor was an action plan provided on how learning from each pilot was to be shared across the system and beyond the CRPs directly involved in the piloting. The evaluators heard from some KIs that this reduced the potential for using the pilots for cross-CGIAR learning. A stated purpose of the pilots was to experiment in different contexts, with sets of diverse partners, and to support CRPs and Centers as they worked to align their programming with the IDOs stated in the SRF. Although each pilot was intended to provide learning and lessons regarding implementation of the RBM approach in a research context, each was different. The evaluators noted that in parallel with the formal pilots, other CRPs also planned and implemented elements of an RBM approach without support from System level[50].

While the CRPs that were supported for RBM pilots were not selected because they represented all CRPs, the issue of representativeness may also be considered from an internal CRP perspective. The

[48] CGIAR Research Program Portfolio Report for Year 2014, CGIAR Consortium Office, October 9, 2015. Page 22

[49] A full report from the evaluation case studies of RBM piloting is annexed as ANNEX D, published in Volume II of this evaluation report. That separate case study report provides more detail and footnoted references. Those references are not repeated in this section of the main report.

[50] One of these (CIFOR) is examined as a separate reference study as part of this evaluation. A summary of that reference study is included as ANNEX E in Volume II of this main final evaluation report.

RBM pilots took place only in certain parts of each CRP, and involved only certain dimensions of RBM as described in the approved proposals for each of the pilots. Furthermore, the evaluation considers that three of the five CRPs that remain in Phase II, and were chosen as case studies, did represent at least some of the diversity found across the full typology of CRPs (see Table 2)[51]. As such, the pilots provide valid and relevant experiments in the application of RBM in the CGIAR context. Other data streams, including a review of RBM-related work within FTA (CIFOR), helped to provide the evaluation team with a more fully representative picture.

**Table 1 – Representativeness of Pilots by Type of CRP**

| CRP Implementing the Pilot | Type of CRP | Description of Types 1 to 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP) | Type 1 | Built on research base initiated decades ago by 2 or 3 Centers. Each of these CRPs focuses on a single crop. |
| Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB) | Type 2 | Have a more fragmented historical basis. Scientific integration is imperative to meet objectives. |
| Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) | Type 3 | Demand new research methods for complex systems issues, such as the climate change challenge. |

**Finding 13 – In addition to the USD 4 million made available for RBM piloting, significant additional funds, plus human resource investments, were made by Centers and CRPs during and beyond the pilot, showing an internal commitment to RBM.**

In total, the Consortium Office made USD 4 million available for this piloting from W1. This was complimented by additional resources coming from the CRP and participating Centers. This evaluation did not include an audit of all expenditures related to the pilots, but interviews with many of those directly involved suggest that additional investment "from below" was significant. For example, CCAFS received USD 1.5 million from the Consortium Office while its approved proposal for the pilot suggests another USD 6.5 million came from other resources, including also CRP core funding[52]. GRiSP received USD 0.6 million for its pilot and committed USD 2.1 million from other resources. Details of how these budgets were spent is presented in the full case studies (see Volume II of this report).

Evidence is clear that CRPs complemented the System funds so that they could put a sizeable effort into their RBM piloting. The CRPs acknowledged the System-level funding as important for initiating formal pilots. They, however, reminded the evaluators that "a lot of our human resource time was invested in addition to the money from the pilot budgets" representing indirect costs that Centers and CRPs invested from their own budgets.

[51] This typology is taken from page 1 of, *CGIAR Research Program Portfolio Report for Year 2014*, October 2015.

[52] As detailed in the CCAFS proposal: the total annual budget for the CCAFS RBM pilot was estimated to be USD 8 million (of which USD 3.7 million was Windows 1-2). Of the Windows 1-2 funds, USD 1.5 million was requested from funds earmarked for the RBM trial, while the remaining USD 2.2 million was to be found by cutting a calculated percentage of all CCAFS cost Centers for 2014.

In several cases, the pilots complemented RBM work that was already in progress and the System funds enabled topping up and expanding RBM-related efforts. In that sense, some interviewees felt that "piloting" was a misnomer because funds from the Consortium Office abruptly dried up after one year (due to cuts in W1 funding) and it was not possible to continue working on the same basis or at the same intensity after that.

**Finding 14 – Through the pilots, the CRPs, when taken together, had a chance to engage with many RBM principles. This suggests the pilots provided an opportunity for important learning across the full spectrum of RBM.**

The case studies show that the pilots were significant initiatives in practising RBM although each pilot was different and unique. For example, where the RBM pilot within GRiSP focused on M&E and management information system (MIS) capacity, the RTB pilot paid more attention to embedding RBM in partnership processes. An overview of the pilots suggests that principles of good RBM practice were generally understood and embraced by the key CRP staff managing these pilots[53]. Some illustrative examples are summarized below.

- **Results focus** – Working to improve the outcomes focus of a CRP, its participating Centers, Flagships and activity clusters, was central to each of the pilots. For example, in the RBM pilot led by RTB, workshops were used to enhance stakeholder engagement around common outcomes using IPs and other tools for collaboration.

- **Consistent leadership** –Innovation and leadership were displayed in the CRPs. For example, in CCAFS, leadership in embracing a results orientation and performance management started before the pilot and continues today. For CCAFS's RBM pilot, 12 different Centers were involved with CCAFS providing leadership and guidance during the piloting process.

- **Commitment to measurement** – As part of a results-focus, improved metrics was central to each of the pilots. For example, in GRiSP, the RBM pilot project was referred to as the *Metrics and Indicators for Tracking in GRiSP* (MISTIG) project. It worked mainly to finalize a set of indicators that the CRP would use to monitor IDOs.

- **Change in organizational culture** – The pilots were aware that cultural shift was necessary for successful embrace of RBM. For example, during the RBM pilot led by RTB, the CRP's Project Management Unit purposively provided intensive support to the four research Centers involved. This included mobilizing supplementary funds for the pilot, and organized trainings and workshops to build consensus around M&E frameworks. An awareness that culture change (from a research output to a development outcome orientation) would be a required part of the RBM approach was clearly apparent from the document review that was part of the RTB case study[54]. The move towards an outcome-oriented culture was also specifically noted in the CCAFS case study.

[53] See summary of these principles in Section 3.2

[54] See, for example, these 3 RTB papers: a) Piloting Results Based Management in RTB, 31 October 2013; b) Planning for greater impact: current thinking, 15 October 2013; and, c) Results-based monitoring and evaluation system: Defining the global concept, 23 January 2015.

- **Systems thinking** – CRPs are by their nature examples of systems thinking. The RBM pilots pushed this further by encouraging collaboration around measurable results, and performance monitoring systems. For example, in the RTB pilot, RBM within the banana wilt disease sub-pilot worked to connect researchers, farmers, farm organizations, extension staff, local governments and the media as an integrated system needing to engage collaboratively to achieve results. RTB paid attention to embedding RBM in partnership processes, as did IRRI in the GRiSP pilot.

- **Investment in learning** – Although there wasn't a formal learning process across the RBM pilots, each pilot provided an opportunity to learn more about RBM practice. CRPs and participating Centers invested additional time and budget to increase the scope and depth of learning. Through MELCoP and the TFI, several representatives from the CRPs involved in the RBM pilots have had the opportunity to invest and share relevant learning across CGIAR. The pilots themselves produced learning materials, e.g. numerous detailed "learning briefs" published by CCAFS. Also, the intention to learn was a key part of the design of the CCAFS pilot right from the start.

- **Wide participation** – The pilots provided new opportunities to expand consultations and encourage participation of stakeholders in the design of programs, Flagships and related monitoring systems. The pilots supported cross-fertilization between CRPs and Centers on design and measurement issues. For example, within the GRiSP pilot, AfricaRice, in collaboration with the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD), organized a workshop in which 24 African countries participated. The objective was to form partnerships and work collaboratively in rice-hub areas to achieve results. The RTB BXW sub-pilot[55] also went far in practicing RBM as a participatory approach which focused on working and learning interactively with stakeholders.

- **Investment in information systems** – An early Planning and Reporting Platform (PRP) had already been developed and put in place by CCAFS before the RBM pilot started. During the pilot, a conceptual model for a newer version of the PRP was developed to reflect a shift towards an "outcome-focused research program for development". The newer version was implemented in the CRP Extension Phase (2015-2016) and now exists as the further adapted Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes (MARLO) platform that currently eight CRPs participate in[56].

## 4.2. Did the pilots provide valuable learning?

### Did managers of these pilots feel that the pilots provided valuable learning on RBM?

**Finding 15 – The pilots were valued learning opportunities. CRP managers felt that processes that were part of the piloted RBM approach helped to improve the outcome focus of CRP partners during planning and review initiatives.**

Although envisaged as two-year projects, because of budget shortfalls, the RBM pilots were implemented for one year and resulted in a final report after that duration. Because of the short timeline, it was difficult for those involved to attribute higher-level results such as attitude and behavior change exclusively to the RBM pilots. The pilots tended to build on initiatives that were

[55] RTB's Banana Xanthomonas Wilt Disease Control project
[56] https://marlo.cgiar.org/

already under way, and work supported by the pilots continued well after 2014. That said, interviews conducted as part of the case studies confirmed that there had been a shift - still evolving - towards more thinking about outcomes and impact within planning and review processes.

Interviewees spoke of how pilots played a crucial role in preparing for CRP II, notably for the Flagship clusters participating in the piloting. For example, in the RTB pilot, resources were used to build more active partnerships at Flagship level, and these enhanced the readiness of those stakeholders to contribute more effectively within the framework of the CRP. In another example, RBM piloting significantly informed the development of the online MEL platform for RICE, the successor of GRiSP, which continues to strengthen its RBM practice, mainly in M&E, but also strengthening strategic learning and adaptive management.

This positive view of RBM was confirmed by a CCAFS online survey of pilot participants[57]. They confirmed their satisfaction with RBM and noted that their initial hesitation was related to the level of technical capacity as well as the time needed for RBM, especially in the beginning. CCAFS saw the pilot as an opportunity to learn before rolling RBM out across its whole portfolio. A wikispace was set up and information about the pilot was shared and six separate and detailed learning briefs were produced. The effort made to reflect on and document the RBM piloting process helped CCAFS adjust and fed into a variety of valued RBM tools: MARLO, CCAFS' M&E strategy, and a Theory of Change guide for partners.

Overall, most interviewees felt that the pilots had been valuable learning experiences. The extensive documentation provided by CRP staff to report on the processes supported during the pilots, the challenges faced, and the lessons learned, is also a good indicator that this learning was valued.

## 4.3. Were key lessons from the pilots disseminated?

### Were key lessons learned from the CRP pilots on how best to implement an RBM approach, shared and disseminated?

**Finding 16 – The pilots generated some consistent lessons for the CRPs related to the RBM approach**.

As detailed in the previous section, most interviewees involved in the pilots felt that they had been valuable learning experiences. On basis of the case studies of RBM pilots the evaluators collated the ten lessons most clearly articulated by interviewees and related reports. These are summarized in Table 2 below.

[57] Lessons and Insights from CCAFS Results-Based Management Trail, CCSL Learning Brief No. 12, Schuetz, Forch, Shubert, and Cramer. December 2014, CCAFS

**Table 2: Summary of Lessons Learned from RBM Piloting**

| | Lesson Learned | Summarized Explanation of the Lesson |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Acceptance of RBM requires a holistic, integrated approach | RBM requires a holistic approach to cover planning, use of ToCs, monitoring outcomes, evaluating progress, an online reporting platform, appropriate incentives for good performance among researchers and teams, etc. The RBM strategy must be linked with support, and be influenced by a priority research agenda to ensure that scientists perceive RBM as an opportunity for learning and improvement and not as an administrative and bureaucratic instrument. |
| 2. | Cultural change is required and must be supported | RBM is not just a matter of imposing processes on teams. It is about shifting the mindset of people and introducing a new way of business. This requires committed leadership, consistent messages, patience and capacity building (workshops, technical support, etc.). A change process needs to be managed and supported. Rather than attempting to quickly expand RBM across the whole CRP portfolio, it is worth considering a staggered approach across Flagships and clusters. |
| 3. | The diversity of Centers needs to be acknowledged | CGIAR's complex organizational structure makes implementation of RBM across the full CRP portfolio difficult. Some Centers have embraced RBM, others less so. The performance assessment systems used by the Centers are not always aligned to the kind of targets that CRPs set, and instead are often based on scientific research outputs. The commitment of Centers to CRPs varies. The Type 1 single-crop CRPs have a relatively simple supply-demand process model that makes it easier to select indicators and targets. For other CRPs, this can be much more challenging. |
| 4. | A learning environment must be actively created and supported | Effective learning requires a safe, supported environment. Not enough attention to this was given by the former Consortium Office: "what seemed to matter more was figures and success stories". After developing ToCs and IPs and related systems, time needs to be set aside to review how assumed change pathways work. This must lead to adjusted plans so that RBM supports adaptive management. This applies to CRP-, flagship- and cluster-levels. Time needs to be invested in ongoing sense-making. There is a need to facilitate learning and support among cluster teams. The "L" in MEL reminds us that effective learning conditions need to be purposefully planned. |
| 5. | An RBM approach comes with significant costs | RBM is an intensive, long-term process that takes time, and requires human and financial investment. To reduce costs, work from what is already in place and anchor RBM processes locally. Be modest in what can be done. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6. | RBM requires capacity building and an enabling environment | The focus of the pilots was on developing structures and less on supporting a conducive environment for a results orientation. RBM requires a realistic time frame for making this transition. If RBM becomes mainly an incentive mechanism to reward those who meet targets and punish those who do not, this will limit its potential. RBM must "stay connected to stakeholders; in the end, that is where the change happens". After working together developing ToC, etc. such connection needs to be maintained.<br>RBM champions who can integrate both accountability and learning, and help mentor and coach CRPs, are needed: people who can handle the conceptual side of RBM and bridge this with practical implementation. Not everything can be done through paper instructions and frameworks – the human factor is needed to bring RBM to life. Training is important for new skills: networking, facilitation, stakeholder collaboration and interaction, building partnerships. |
| 7. | Selecting and using indicators can be a significant challenge | RBM requires a robust monitoring system fully integrated with the planning and implementation of CRP activities. This, in turn requires appropriate senior-level expertise and leadership, training for non-specialists, and appropriate budget and staff. Indicators must be kept practical, useful, and measurable and serve needs of management who can interpret and act on the information it receives from the indicators. Informants considered that indicators were overambitious in relation to monitoring frameworks. |
| 8. | Sufficient MIS capacity is a pre-requisite | Information management system must be in place to support technical, operational and financial information to easily circulate within CRPs and across the full CGIAR program. The MIS must be able to cope with big data and open access. User-friendly interfaces and inter-operability across CRPs is a pre-requisite for success. |
| 9. | Participation | To make RBM happen at CRP level, the focus must be on projects and clusters, and these continually be linked to Flagship and ultimately, to CRP-outcomes. This requires regular interaction, exchange of learning, and fine-tuning Flagship-level ToCs and IPs. Obtaining funds and support for this level of ongoing participation of stakeholders deserves attention. |
| 10. | Role of the ToC | It is critical to work with a sound ToC to identify and validate expected research outputs and to identify shared responsibilities and synergies with partners for achieving outcomes. Some have raised concerns about too simplistic ToCs. This suggests the need to actively work with a ToC and update and improve it over years rather than working with it as a fixed point of reference. |

**Finding 17 – The RBM pilots managed by the CRPs were extensively documented as part of internal learning efforts, reporting obligations for resources received, and in a bid to share experiences. The process of sharing lessons learned across CRPs was less systematic. Those directly involved expected that learning from the pilots would be collated and used to boost system-wide knowledge of RBM good practice.**

The pilots produced many documents to help CRPs share and disseminate experiences. For example, for RTB, the RBM pilot produced workshop and progress reports, which are readily available. A report

on the entire pilot was submitted at the end of the piloting. To illustrate, the RTB's BXW project generated the following in terms of documentation:

- 2 stakeholder workshop reports (September 2014, November 2016);
- 12 monthly reports (July 2014 to December 2015);
- 2 country-specific baseline reports;
- 2 annual reports (one for the period July-December 2014, and one for 2015); and
- 1 consolidated final end-of-project report.

Similarly, CCAFS, in which all Centers participate, produced communications and outreach material related to its RBM piloting including an extensive set of detailed learning briefs[58]. The evaluators noted that the cross-institutional learning opportunity is more significant for a CRP in which all Centers participate (CCAFS) than in a CRP in which fewer Centers are active, for example, GRiSP. The GRiSP RBM pilot produced ToC workshop reports, an overview report on the RBM piloting process, and a range of technical reports. For GRiSP, learning beyond its own CRP was mainly through limited informal involvement in MELCoP, and through contributions to the TFI. Overall, the evaluators noted that there is no lack of documentation on the RBM piloting in RTB, CCAFS and GRiSP, and that the learning in those CRPs from the 2014 piloting continued well beyond the one-year timeline of the pilots.

Interviewees explained that exchange between the five CRPs that implemented the RBM pilots to systematically compare experiences was limited. One interviewee recounted how MELCoP organized one of its sessions to review the experience of RBM pilots. Another KI recounted how a report on the GRiSP RBM pilot was submitted to the Consortium Office, and it in turn informed a section in the 2014 CGIAR portfolio report. In fact, the 2014 portfolio report by the Consortium Office provides a full-page summarizing the lessons learned from all five RBM pilot projects.[59] Although prepared primarily for donors and focused on achievement and advocacy, the 2014 portfolio report suggests that lessons learned from the RBM pilots were, at least to some degree, reviewed at System level. More prominent was the sharing of learning between selected CRPs and Centers who were already working together. For example, RTB co-led the creation of MELspace, a repository of MEL-related reports and learning, which was started by the Dryland Systems CRP.

One prominent System-led initiative to tap into learning from the pilots was the creation of MELCoP:

'*The setting -up of a voluntary Community of Practice on monitoring and learning [MELCoP] in 2015 is expected to support the momentum acquired through these pilots and facilitate the design of RBM frameworks in all CRPs. It will bring together M&E specialists with multidisciplinary backgrounds and interests in MEL from the CRPs, Centers, Consortium Office and very probably IEA and ISPC.*'[60]

Interviewees confirmed that experience and knowledge has been spread to some degree through MELCoP by ongoing participation of staff who were involved in the RBM pilots. On the other hand,

[58] See Learning Briefs produced by CCAFS, numbers 6, 8, 9, 11, and 12 released in 2014, and numbers 15 and 15 released in 2015.

[59] CGIAR Research Program Portfolio Report for Year 2014, CGIAR Consortium Office, October 9, 2015

[60] Ibid. Page 23

several who had been directly involved in MELCoP, also expressed a concern that this "community of practice" has primarily been a structure created by the Consortium Office (now System Management Office) to assist with priority System-level tasks, most singularly, the alignment of CRPs with the SRF using a standard set of outcome indicators. One interviewee felt that the work of MELCoP to date has "focused very much on pleasing selected donors" rather than strengthening M&E and learning in Centers and CRPs. The evaluation notes that communities of practice are most effective when these knowledge-based social structures cultivate voluntary engagement of their members rather than working on a given agenda and list of tasks to complete[61].

For KIs interviewed, what undermined the learning that came from the piloting, and the voluntary work of the MELCoP, was System-level insistence on high-level aggregated data aligned with IDOs and SLOs. What was often missing from MELCoP efforts was the learning side of RBM, namely the use of collected data through analysis and reflection, for sense-making and informed decision making. Many interviewees were upset that MELCoP was reducing RBM to a lopsided version which emphasized what can be put on paper (results frameworks, ToCs, IPs, targets, indicators and matching monitoring plans). Embedding this in new staff competencies and quality of stakeholder interactions was largely missing despite the piloting process emphasizing the importance of these principles of RBM good practice. Reflecting across the KIs, the evaluators found that, in any case, RBM learning should have extended well beyond the mandate and activities of a single community of practice.

Overall, a conscious, formal collation, reflection on, and exchange of lessons learned across CGIAR from the RBM pilots has been limited. This is probably because no clear dissemination requirements were defined from the outset, except the request for a report at the end of each pilot. As learned from several interviewees, these reports were sent, "but nothing was heard from system level after that". Perhaps the limited collation and dissemination of lesson learned from the pilots can also be explained as part of the larger issue, already identified, that an overall ToC and change management strategy for introducing and promoting RBM was missing. Many of those interviewed felt that the significant RBM-related work done by the pilots led to rich experience in RBM practice, which, if consolidated and translated for wider CGIAR application, could help inform ongoing efforts.

[61] A Guide to Managing Knowledge: Cultivating Communities of Practise. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, Harvard Business Press, 2002, Chapter 3

# 5. Management support for RBM

In Section 3, the evaluators describe that they found a compelling case for how CGIAR's RBM approach would strengthen quality of research was missing (see especially Findings 5 and 7 in that section). The evaluators found that guidance from the System was limited in explaining the full scope of RBM and what was expected in CGIAR's unique research context. In Section 4 we looked at how RBM was formally piloted by CGIAR, and the lessons learned and shared from that experience. Here we turn from the assessment criteria of relevance, and how RBM has been conceptualized by the System, to efficiency and effectiveness. **Did support at CRP and Center management levels facilitate successful implementation of RBM?** The evaluation examined this key question through sub-questions which are discussed below.

## 5.1. Helpful and constraining factors?

**Which support and systems that have been put in place, most helped or constrained CRPs and their related Centers to implement RBM?**

To examine this question, the evaluators collated the most frequently cited examples of support (or lack thereof) that were helpful or constraining. The evaluators also looked at documentary evidence of changes in key areas of RBM where progress should be expected from CRP I to CRP II, for example, development of ToC and M&E systems. In some cases, support was found by interviewees to be insufficient or inappropriate and therefore constraining. The examination of helpful and constraining factors is further organized as follows (the sequence does not imply order of importance):

1) System-level functions;
2) improved strategic planning;
3) improved use of ToCs;
4) support for performance measurement and monitoring;
5) support to improve management information systems; and
6) resources and funding for RBM.

**Finding 18 – An array of support and systems to help CRPs implement RBM have been put in place. While important progress has clearly been made, not all this support has been adequate nor appropriate.**

### *5.1.1 System-level functions*

The organizational reform process, started in 2009, and continued in 2016 following the mid-term review of the reform, was acknowledged by many as critical for helping CGIAR become more committed to an RBM approach. The shift to programmatic implementation of research through aligned research programs, the CRPs, was a central feature of this reform (see section 2.1). The synthesis report of all CRP I evaluations stated:

'*The CRPs were designed to integrate virtually the entire research portfolio of all Centers around one strategic framework that articulated the CGIAR's overarching goals… The creation of CRPs was*

*probably the most far-reaching and ambitious reform effort undertaken since the establishment of the CGIAR*.'[62]

Many KIs expressed renewed enthusiasm for System-level organizational reform following the latest structural changes as defined in the 2016 CGIAR System Framework and its Charter which replaced the previous constitution of the CGIAR Consortium. The evaluators also heard evidence of organizational reform, coupled with a stronger results-orientation, at Center-level. Many felt that this was at least partially influenced and encouraged by the System-level reforms.

The reform resulted in changes in centralized System-level functions that have a critical role in RBM, most significantly, program appraisal, evaluation and impact assessment. These are discussed in turn below.

**Program appraisal**

The evaluators found that the appraisal process, led by ISPC as part of its mandate, is well-defined for vetting CRP proposals and assuring that their quality merits inclusion in the System's portfolio. The process is a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, including anonymous contributions by external expert reviewers, and it seemed to be applied transparently and exhaustively by the ISPC as one of its main roles. These reviews have provided *ex ante* analyses of relevance, scientific credibility, legitimacy and potential effectiveness of the proposed research[63] as feed-back to the CRPs at pre-proposal and full-proposal stage. At the end of revision cycles, they have informed the System Council's decisions on approval and funding of the CRPs[64].

Although a quality assessment or due-diligence vetting process clearly supports an RBM approach, many interviewees had critiques of how this quality assessment process has worked. Criticisms included the extraordinary effort required, which was exhausting and costly for many Center-based managers and researchers. Others believed that comparing the quality of CRPs was counterproductive because each was unique and valuable. Instead of comparing, these interviewees suggested, the goal should have been to build capacities where gaps were identified. Another critique, this one coming from several donor representatives, was that the assessment was not sufficiently based on measurable performance criteria. Others felt that the assessment process was ultimately undermined by intangible political priorities that each donor brought to the decision table. Still others expressed the opinion that the *ex ante* quality assessment of CRP proposals, led by ISPC, was inappropriately mixing together and confusing performance assessment (evidence of progress in achieving expected outcomes), and research prioritization (based on a complex mix of donor and other stakeholder concerns plus a constantly evolving implementation environment).

[62] Synthesis Review of Lessons Learned from 15 CRP Evaluations, Birner and Byerlee, IEA/CGIAR, 2016, Page ix.
[63] From ISPC website
[64] In CRP II, the ISPC process was complemented by assessment done by the Fund Council's Funding Effectiveness Working Group that focused particularly on development effectiveness.

### Evaluation

The CGIAR organizational reform committed to strengthening an independent evaluation function, a cornerstone of a comprehensive RBM approach. In 2012, the *CGIAR Policy for Independent External Evaluation*[65] was approved and the Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) was created thereby separating evaluation from scientific advice by ISPC. The mission of the IEA is "to promote accountability, knowledge-sharing, learning and a culture of evaluation across CGIAR"[66], all of which are aligned with established principles of RBM good practice.

Evaluations commissioned and managed by the IEA cover all parts of the reformed CGIAR system, including CRPs and other support institutions. CGIAR's evaluation policy lays out a system of multi-level evaluations designed to provide guidance and information to improve the performance of the CRPs and of CGIAR. It also commits to a system-wide evaluation to take place every ten years. In addition, IEA is mandated to provide leadership on evaluation management, supported by the ECoP it convenes, and to establish evaluation standards and guidelines across CGIAR.

Many KIs felt that the independent evaluation function was "absolutely critical" for CGIAR's RBM approach. On the other hand, a few interviewees were worried that the evaluation reports being produced, while generally of high quality, were not sufficiently communicated, and that recommendations being made in these reports were not always utilized, or adequately followed up by management. The ISPC appraisal of CRP II proposals noted that in many cases IEA evaluations of CRPs, and evaluations commissioned by CRPs themselves, had influenced proposal development. The evaluators learned, however, that the System Council did not formally discuss evaluations during the first Phase of CRPs. Consequently, the comprehensive performance assessments and recommendations for improving performance that were part of these evaluations, were not adequately shared or sufficiently influence decision-making. Some interviewees, a donor representative and several CRP and Center managers, worried that IEA's mandate would soon be narrowed due to budget constraints and the perception that its work was not of sufficient value.

### Impact assessment

Another function of ISPC, through its Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA), has been to help assess how effective CGIAR's research has been, and how its impact can be measured and understood. Interviewees consistently confirmed that the work of SPIA supports high-quality impact assessment, coordinated across the System. Ongoing activities include impact assessments of major CGIAR efforts, as well as methodological innovations and capacity strengthening within the CGIAR system.

SPIA currently manages the Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR (SIAC) project that supports methods development, impact assessments, capacity strengthening, and a community of practice of impact assessment specialists in CGIAR[67]. As summarized by the ISPC website, SPIA's mandate is to:

[65] CGIAR (2012): Policy for Independent External Evaluation: http://iea.cgiar.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/CGIAR-Evaluation-Policy-Final-approved-document-effective-February-2012.pdf

[66] IEA website

[67] See SIAC Program Progress Report Prepared by SPIA for the meetings at IFPRI, Washington DC, March 2016

- provide CGIAR with information on system-level impacts of past CGIAR investments and outputs in terms of the SLOs;
- provide support to and complement the CGIAR Centers in their *ex post* impact assessment activities; and
- provide feedback to CGIAR priority setting by linking *ex ante* assessment and overall planning, monitoring and evaluation functions in CGIAR.

On one hand, SPIA's work clearly supports RBM in that it helps empower CGIAR to understand, plan for, and provide evidence of the ultimate results that its CRPs individually and collectively contribute to. On the other hand, there are concerns, confirmed by the CRP evaluations, that impact assessment has been too *ad hoc* and that it has provided only partial and sporadic coverage of CRP activities:

*'…the development of a systematic approach to IA is still a work in progress. IA should be an ongoing activity that provides broad coverage of the major CRP research products and their impact on SLOs through IDOs at regular intervals of 5-10 years, supported by the allocation of a certain percentage of funds to IA.'*[68]

In this context, the 2016 evaluation of SIAC recommended that a more systematic process for selection of impact assessment topics and specific studies undertaken by SIAC be put in place[69]. This is especially important given the cost of collecting credible outcome and impact data and conducting rigorous studies, as was pointed out to the evaluation.

### *5.1.2 Improved strategic planning*

Participatory strategic planning is a pre-requisite for effective RBM. Since 2010, through three iterations, CGIAR's System-level strategy, formulated in the SRF, has been used to guide the design, appraisal and approval of CRPs[70]. The SRF 2016-2030 stated explicitly that its purpose was to "enable researchers to think through the contexts in which their outputs might contribute to development outcomes"[71].

A recent meta-evaluation of 15 CRP evaluations concluded that the CRPs "align well with the CGIAR SLOs"[72]. Yet, interviewees were mixed in their views regarding the SRF and its SLOs and IDOs. On the positive side, the consensus is that an SRF, with CRPs aligned to it, helps "orient research in CGIAR towards a set of development outcomes that the system as a whole attempts to achieve"[73]. This top-down planning and priority setting structure for CRPs and their donors was a central driver for CGIAR reform and remains fully endorsed by those interviewed. That said, many are concerned that this support for RBM has been undermined by efforts at System level to go further and quantitatively apportion the contributions of each CRP to overall IDO and SLO achievements (see section 3). This is

[68] Synthesis Review of Lessons Learned from 15 CRP Evaluations, Birner and Byerlee, IEA/CGIAR, 2016, Page xiv.
[69] CGIAR-IEA (2016), Evaluation of the "Strengthening Impact Assessment in CGIAR" (SIAC), Project Phase 1, 2013-16. Rome, Italy: Independent Evaluation Arrangement (IEA) of CGIAR.
[70] Original proposals in 2010-2012, extension proposals for 2015-2016, and the 2nd cycle of CRPs in 2016 for 2017-2022.
[71] CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030, Version 18 May 2015, page 21.
[72] Synthesis Review of Lessons Learned from 15 CRP Evaluations, Birner and Byerlee, IEA/CGIAR, 2016. Page x.
[73] This quote is taken from Evaluation of the CGIAR Research Program "Forest, Trees and Agroforestry" (FTA), Volume 1, Evaluation Report, June 2014, page 138. However, it was echoed by many interviewees.

likely exacerbated by the lack of a compelling explanation and strategy for how CGIAR sees promotion of RBM in a research context. The evaluators heard that the case being made for how RBM can strengthen quality of research in CGIAR, rather than jeopardizing it, remains unconvincing to many researchers.

### *5.1.3 Improved use of Theories of Change*

While interest by CGIAR in using ToCs and IPs pre-date the reform (see Section 3.1), this has become more mainstream as part of the broader commitment to RBM in 2009. The ISPC 2012 "white paper" provided an explanation of Theories of Change and Impact Pathways[74]. While the main purpose of the ISPC paper was to help facilitate a qualitative appraisal of CRP proposals, it also assessed the adequacy by which the CRPs, in the original proposals, presented the assumptions that underlie impact pathways from research to development outcomes and impact. The assessors found that, overall, the CRPs remained at very early stages of theoretically linking their research to development results. They found the proposals lacking in three main areas: acknowledging non-linearity, presenting evidence for how change happens for making impact pathways realistic; and identifying constraints and facilitating factors for change.

Many KIs mentioned an emerging confidence in using ToC as a planning and management tool. This is supported by document review, for example, the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) CRP invested significantly in developing and using ToCs with the help of an experienced external consultant[75]. The sophistication of how these models were being used is evident:

'*When considering the ToC for a complex, multifaceted, long-term intervention, there is often a need for a series of nested ToCs or theories of reach (i.e. separate ToCs to capture how the interventions are expected to work at different levels or stages of the process). Nested ToCs facilitate prioritization and sequencing of work on ToC development and validation*.' [76]

The KNOWFOR partnership, which is the subject of the CIFOR reference study (see ANNEX F for further information), put emphasis on stakeholder-Centerd ToC and monitoring planning at the activity design stage of its project. It was found that this tool was found useful by many people within the partner organizations.

Inclusion of ToC diagrams and explanations became a pre-requisite for CRP II proposals. The ISPC in its recent assessment of CRP II proposals, highlighted great improvement in the overall quality of CRP ToCs. However, it also identified shortcomings in terms of the utility of the ToC to the CRP, and variability in, for example, connecting outputs to outcomes and information on assumptions[77].

[74] Strategic overview of CGIAR Research programs, Part I ToC and Impact Pathways, Annex 1, *ToC and IP – Cross-Cutting Analysis of the 15 CGIAR Research Programs*, Batchelor and Goodman, September 24, 2012

[75] Mayne and Johnson. Using theories of change in the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health. Evaluation, 21(4), 407–428. 2015

[76] Ibid, page 412

[77] ISPC 2017. Cross-CRP analysis of theories of change in the 2017-2022 CGIAR Research Program Portfolio (CRP2). ISPC Brief # 58.

Some KIs were concerned that ToC concepts currently in use at CRP and Flagship-levels, though continually improving, remain too simplistic, or in other cases, are too abstract and conceptual. Interviewees explained that current ToCs and impact pathways are often characterized by sophisticated diagrams but limited narrative to describe how these are supposed to be used by the CRPs. This concern is echoed in a recent meta-assessment of CRP evaluations:

'*Requesting each CRP to develop a ToC has forced program teams to consider more carefully the processes for achieving impacts and resulted in a stronger impact orientation. However, the evaluations indicate that the direct translation of ToC – a tool developed for development projects – to the CRPs, needs much more thought.'* [78]

In early 2017, IEA organized a workshop involving nine CRPs to stimulate system-level reflection on the collective experience gained over the past five years in designing and using ToC in CGIAR research[79]. The report reflects overall positive experiences from the design and use of ToCs, and notes a culture shift among the CRPs that participated in the workshop in that researchers are better able to see where their work fits, filling in the "missing middle" in transition from research to development.

**Finding 19 – RBM supports processes that build consensus around measurable results. When participatory processes have been a key part of ToC and IP development, this has helped create enthusiasm for RBM. Encouraging participatory decision making is one of the principles of RBM and fundamental for achieving results at Flagship and CRP levels.**

Participatory work around the development of ToCs can stimulate CRP Flagships to work more effectively across research groups, government, private sector, and other civil society partners. Through involvement in interactive partnership processes, some became RBM champions. The evaluators heard that regular interaction and consultation between partners in multi-stakeholder processes has in many cases become the key motivation for RBM and an important driver for further RBM development. Consistent use of a ToC during planning and review was cited by many as particularly effective for helping to structure multi-stakeholder innovation platforms, transdisciplinary research, and scaling processes.

Some KIs were concerned that motivation for applying RBM could diminish if interactive work with partners, structured by shared ToCs and IPs at the Flagship level, is not mainstreamed in RBM practice and appropriately resourced by the System and within CRP budgets. This was confirmed by the IEA ToC workshop participants who noted that participatory processes to develop, use, review and update ToCs require resources and time.

For the most part, developing and effectively using a ToC has been left to learn-by-doing at CRP and Flagship-level and below: a "bottoms-up" approach. Direct support from the System Organization (training, guidance material, coaching, facilitation services, etc.) has been limited. Interviewees explained how several CRPs and Centers arranged for their own support - mostly using external

[78] Synthesis Review of Lessons Learned from 15 CRP Evaluations, Birner and Byerlee, IEA/CGIAR, 2016. Page xiii.
[79] IEA Workshop on Development, Use and Assessment of ToC in CGIAR Research, Report, Rome. 12-13 January 2017.

consultants - to develop good theories of change. Some of this learning was translated into explicit guidance documents, for example the CCAFS Theory of Change Facilitation Guides[80].

### *5.1.4 Support for performance monitoring*

**Finding 20 – System-level support for development of a) IDO indicators, b) a comprehensive CGIAR M&E framework, and c) an appropriate CGIAR management information system has not been sufficient or effective.**

Strategic alignment has been established between CGIAR's overall SLOs and the intermediate-level results expectations of approved CRPs, the IDOs. It has been more difficult to translate this into measurable results indicators and targets. This is because, while the SLOs and IDOs create a plausible alignment of results frameworks across the CRP portfolio, indicators and targets are challenged by the diverse realities in which CRPs operate. The priority and challenge of selecting a standard set of System-level indicators was described by ISPC in 2014:

*The need for a set of standard metrics [is] a priority in the new performance management system being developed by the Consortium for CRP monitoring and evaluation and for impact assessment. CGIAR needs to undertake appropriate target setting and develop the means to monitor progress towards the achievement of IDOs and the overall CGIAR impacts... Although there is agreement among CGIAR partners and stakeholders about the need for new metrics… there is still debate about what to measure, how, where and by whom.*'[81]

At about the same time, the challenges CGIAR had previously faced in measuring its performance using harmonized indicators, and reporting this to donors, were documented[82]. The roots of CGIAR's performance measurement approach in 2000s were linked to World Bank efforts to use performance metrics to determine fund allocations. Already in 2003, the World Bank allocated 12.5 percent of its CGIAR funding based on a temporary set of indicators it had negotiated with Center directors[83]. Key challenges to design indicators of research outcomes and impacts identified in the analysis of CGIAR's earlier performance reporting experiment included the following:

- many events and actors, including extensive partnering outside CGIAR, make contribution difficult to ascertain;
- Centers have limited control over the longer-term results of their research;
- donor expectations of annually updated value-for-money metrics are unreasonable;
- politized implementation context creates bias in how performance data is used;
- goal displacement is an issue (shift of attention towards what is most easily measured);
- Centers felt setup as competitors for limited funds thus dampening Center collaboration;

[80] Schuetz, Förch, and Thornton. Revised CCAFS Theory of Change Facilitation Guide. Copenhagen, Denmark: CRP on CCAFS, December 2014. Also, Jost, Alvarez, and Schuetz. CCAFS Theory of Change Facilitation Guide. Copenhagen, Denmark: CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, CCAFS, June 2014.
[81] Data, metrics and monitoring in CGIAR – a strategic study, December 2014, ISPC, CGIAR. Page 3
[82] Using performance measurement to assess research: Lessons learned from the international agricultural research centres. Immonen and Cooksy, Evaluation 2014, Vol. 20 (1), pages 96-114, SAGE (this work was independent from CGIAR and did not represent the views of either ISPC or IEA).
[83] Ibid, page 100

- set performance targets were inhibiting risk taking and innovation;
- cynicism was created by data collection that had no obvious utility; and
- the narrow focus of measurement was missing the nuance of CGIAR's accomplishments.

Unfortunately, it seems from listening to KIs that these limitations are still being felt by Center and CRP managers. This was confirmed by case studies for which little evidence was found of System-level support (beyond the initial funding) and interviewees almost exclusively pointed out that this was a process driven by the CRPs.

The goal of measuring CGIAR's performance through standard indicators on development across CRPs drove indicator work for CRP II. The aspirational development targets in the SRF 2016-2030, for application across CGIAR and its partners,[84] triggered System-level efforts through the TFI to develop a common set of harmonized indicators both for the 10 SLOs and for the IDOs[85]. The evaluators noted that these have limited validity as measures of how well Centers were developing research-based solutions to agricultural development problems.

The evaluators heard from most interviewees versions of the same frustration after nearly a decade into reform: the development of standardized IDO indicators across the System has been problematic, time consuming, and ultimately of limited value to the CRPs or Centers.

One unresolved question expressed by KIs is how many System-level indicators used in 2017 are appropriate, and how precise connections between indicators and targets at System-level and those at CRP level need to be. Another controversial question is whether SLO-level targets are aspirational, and as such, should be used to create a sense of direction to which CRPs contribute, or whether these require measurement based on extensive and expensive data collection. While this is a challenging area, it was noted by some interviewees, and confirmed by the CRP evaluations, that related discussions have been useful for learning about the kind of objectives and measurable outcomes that CGIAR can reasonably aspire and contribute to.

During 2016 and 2017, the TFI continued its work on an RMB Framework to decide on appropriate indicators, sensible connecting of targets at different levels, and requirements for annual reporting. Tentative choices of indicators and targets have continued to create controversy, particularly concerning the high level of outcome and impact results over which CRPs have no control or influence (see discussion in section 2.2 about defining a feasible level for results expectations in research context). Many informants doubted that the approach pursued to selecting indicators and targets would lead to a satisfactory solution. Rather, they argued, efforts should be less ambitious and more meaningful by reducing the overall number of indicators and by reducing attempts to create strict alignment between SLOs, IDOs and the outcomes that CRPs can control and influence. Others emphasized that whatever is done, somehow common indicators across CRPs are needed to help present an integrated story about the difference that CGIAR is making through the contributions of its approved CRPs.

[84] CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030, Table I

[85] CGIAR. (2017). SC4-09B, Presentation on Performance Management.

At the time that this evaluation completed its inquiry phase, the System Organization was focusing on the development of a System-level results reporting plan as its priority, separately from its work on a broader RBM Framework. The evaluation team has not assessed work-in-progress. Suffice it to say, improved reporting on results is an RBM principle of best practice. As already discussed in this report, there is clearly room for improved results reporting and effective communications on what CGIAR is achieving. Also, as noted in findings above (see especially findings 8, 12, 15, and 18), there is ample room for further conceptual guidance, additional innovations and adaptation to support RBM including guidance and support for practical and useful approached to outcome measurement.

**Finding 21 – Centers can put together CRP proposals that pass existing assessment and approval processes. The challenge is to then to implement the performance monitoring commitments made in the CRPs once approved, especially given budget instability.**

Defining expected outcomes and identifying achievement targets has shaped the design of monitoring and evaluation systems at CRP level. A CRP's "RBM framework" is used to describe how it conceptualizes CGIAR's approach to RBM, and how it will operationalize RBM in its own context[86]. For CRP II, all programs were expected to develop their own RBM approach, aligned with guidance provided as part of the call for proposals. Among other things, the guidance calls CRPs to[87]:

- describe ToCs and IPs for the CRP, and in greater detail, for Flagship components;
- develop a Performance Indicator Matrix that summarizes and budgets outcomes the CRP proposes to deliver as the basis for assessing a CRP's value for money;
- describe expected outputs and link them clearly to anticipated outcomes;
- detail approaches and means to monitor relevant standardized SLO indictors and targets defined in the SRF;
- describe key assumptions and a risk mitigation plan related to the ToCs;
- prepare a M&E plan focused on outcomes and including internal and external evaluation, *ex ante* and *ex post* impact assessment; and,
- describe how the CRP will meet requirements for an Information Communication Technology (ICT) online platform to support planning, adaptive management and reporting.

When CRP managers were asked if CRP II guidelines on how to draft research program proposals were sufficient, they recounted that the process had been complex, fragmented, and time consuming for participating Centers. That said, ultimately Centers and other stakeholders involved in developing the proposals successfully passed through lengthy appraisal and approval processes, CRP II proposals were finalized and approved, and related budgets were activated. The more difficult part now, KIs explained, is to follow through on monitoring and evaluation commitments made in these proposals.

These ambitious RBM frameworks put CRPs on uncharted ground. The ISPC in its appraisals of the CRP proposals acknowledged good M&E planning in many CRPs, although some CRPs' M&E plans, including resourcing, were found less satisfactory[88]. The score-based assessment of the Fund Effectiveness

[86] 2017-2022 CGIAR Research Program Portfolio (CRP 2), Final Guidance for Full Proposals, 19, December 2105, CGIAR Consortium, page 26
[87] Ibid, Section 3.7.
[88] ISPC appraisal of original CRP II full proposals, June, 2016, made available to the evaluation by IEA.

Working Group was generally more critical[89]. There was large variance in scoring among M&E plans in the CRP proposals, and in many cases, the credibility of the indicators or gap in linking research output to development outcomes was noted. Also, the CRP evaluations plus the latest CGIAR portfolio report available to the evaluators noted insufficient M&E systems in some CRPs as one of the principal risks facing CGIAR:

*'External evaluations of a number of CRPs have stressed that weak M&E systems carry a strong risk, since they do not allow meaningful tracking of outcomes and progress toward impact. This undermines the very core of the research undertaken by these CRPs.'*[90]

As mitigation of this risk, the portfolio report calls for recruitment of MEL specialists and support for the MELCoP. In this evaluation's view, these suggestions are sensible. Clearly MELCoP has an interest and mandate to support the strengthening of M&E systems in Centers and CRPs. The evaluators heard from KIs that budget cuts have made it difficult to keep M&E specialists within CRPs.

Time, resources and more innovation and learning is needed for CRPs to further develop the monitoring systems identified at proposal stage. A major challenge is to aggregate and disaggregate monitoring data from activity clusters, to Flagships, to CRP level. This requires working with a wide range of partners including many that are outside CGIAR. Interviewees have found that the operationalization of CRP RBM frameworks are especially challenging in the face of unpredictable funding where resource to support effective M&E is shrinking rather than growing.

While overall M&E requirements are outlined at System level, especially through the CRP II proposal guidance, CRPs and Centers do most of this work on their own, often engaging appropriate expertise (sometimes consultants, but usually CRP and Center staff) to help. Practical guidance on how to link CRP frameworks to the SRF is limited. One of the most difficult challenges for CRPs as identified by interviewees, is working with different M&E levels: alignment in relation to the CGIAR SRF, while also remaining aligned with approved projects, Flagships, and bilateral donor demands.

### *5.1.5 Support to improve management information systems*

**Finding 22 – The System has not significantly invested in a MIS for CGIAR. Some CRPs have invested in this and development work is in progress. There is broad agreement that appropriate MISs are necessary and presently underdeveloped at CRP and System levels.**

A global research organization such as CGIAR has an important role in assembling, managing, analyzing and transmitting data and information concerned with agriculture research and development. This ability to efficiently manage vast amounts of data is a prerequisite of RBM, and is required to support the internal RBM systems envisaged by CGIAR. And yet document review confirms that data management has been underdeveloped within CGIAR, even well before the reform process initiated in 2008:

[89] Fund Council's Fund Effectiveness Working Group assessment report of CRP II full proposals was made available to the evaluation by IEA.
[90] CGIAR Research Program Portfolio Report for Year 2015. CGIAR System Organization, September 7, 2016. Page 21.

'*Although there are several positive exceptions, CGIAR has a weak overall record on long-term data management. Data from some past research efforts are difficult or impossible to access, and in some cases, the data are of poor quality or inadequately described and curated. Data sources are distributed throughout the CGIAR Centers and CRPs, and there are no uniform standards or archiving protocols*.'[91]

The SMO hosts the One Corporate System (OCS) that was initiated at the start of the reform. The OCS was created for better coordination, management, sharing and compliance within CGIAR. It focuses on basic administrative process, finance, and, to a limited degree, output information. Most Centers are members[92]. No KI spoke highly or enthusiastically of this system. It is not considered to be effective in supporting management decision making. There was consensus across KIs that appropriate MISs are underdeveloped within CGIAR, **both at CRP and System levels**. This was also highlighted by CRP evaluations. In response, there have been different attempts at CRP and Center level to develop online data and management information systems to serve CRP needs. MARLO has been the most notable. This online platform is designed to assist CRPs and Centers in planning and reporting research projects, and in learning and sharing. Reports generated by MARLO "support outcome-focused programmatic reporting with additional synthesis at the flagship and cross-cutting levels".[93]

Those directly involved in MIS development, recounted that while comparatively easy to develop database software, the related processes are more challenging, for example, conceptualizing needs and potential data flows, obtaining and processing the appropriate data, and training those involved in data gathering and inputting to assure quality and reliability. One of the technical challenges of building a MIS across CGIAR, is how to assure that while serving consolidation and System-level analytical and reporting needs, the MIS can first and foremost empower researchers, Centers and CRPs to access relevant information that helps them make informed decisions. Unless managers' information needs direct the development of MIS from below, investment in advanced capabilities could become unwieldy. Some KIs pointed out that while CRPs and Centers can and should take the lead on CRP-level development of MISs, there is also an obvious role at System-level to provide normative guidance, to assure coherence across CGIAR, and to provide financial and technical support.

Some KIs expressed concern that too much time would be required to feed and maintain such MISs, taking away time from actual research and face-to-face interactive work with partners and stakeholders. A few KIs remain convinced that simple, spreadsheet-based information systems, curated by individual CRPs, remain the most efficient approach to information management. The evaluators heard that some CRPs experienced serious challenges putting in place an appropriate MIS because it was too big and complex to handle given the limited resources available to a single CRP. For some, return to sophisticated use of spreadsheets made more sense as an immediate solution to information management needs. Many KIs suggested that the challenge for CGIAR now is to start with what already exists, and develop further iterations of smart and simple systems with powerful user interfaces and capacity for inter-operability across CRPs and Centers.

[91] Data, metrics and monitoring in CGIAR – a strategic study, December 2014, ISPC, CGIAR. Page 14
[92] OCS News, Vol 1 Issue 1 June 2015
[93] Google the MARLO website for more information https://marlo.cgiar.org/

### *5.1.6 Resources and funding for RBM*

**Finding 23 – CRPs consistently report feeling under resourced to adopt the basics of RBM (including participatory events) at the Flagship and CRP level. In addition, too many of the limited resources that are available for RBM are used to comply with system demands for data and reporting upwards.**

There was a consensus across KIs that a major challenge for adoption of RBM has been the significant change in funding. For example, the evaluators noted that for the case studies of RBM pilots, a major constraint was the abrupt and unexpected funding cut: the budget was limited to one year with the second year of promised funding not materializing and forcing awkward adjustments to initially approved implementation plans.

Current CGIAR funding projections show that W1/2 "core" funding to CRPs is only about 18 percent of total and most funding comes to Centers and CRPs from bilateral sources. Several interviewees noted this funding "crisis" as the most serious impediment to RBM. Also, ISPC in its CRP appraisals, considered that limited resourcing of MEL in CRPs may undermine commitment to RBM.

Reporting burden has been a recurring complaint within CGIAR with the pressure coming from both the System and from bilateral donors who each have their own reporting requirements, including in some cases, their own set of results and indicators that need to be monitored. With this in mind, the Consortium Board undertook to "work with the Fund Council to establish common standards for reporting on Mega Program and Member Center performance, in order to reduce the overall reporting burden on Member Centers"[94]. The evaluators collected no evidence of progress on this front.

Financial instability, the "elephant in the room" as it was described by one concerned CRP manager, has been confirmed as one of the 3 "principal risks" faced by the CRP portfolio since 2014[95]. It is worth quoting at length from the 2015 CRP portfolio report to sense the full gravity of this risk:

'*The capacity to plan research ahead in an adequate fashion, together with multiple partners, is a* sine qua non *condition of success… This capacity can only be maintained over time with a minimum of financial sustainability. The amplitude of the cuts in W1/2 funds, and the retroactive nature of some of them, make research planning for the medium term (essential to multi-year global programs with multiple partners) costly and often fruitless, since planning has to be revisited with every new announcement of cuts, even when funds have already been committed. Planning ahead subsequently becomes nigh impossible, due to the instability and uncertainly of trends in W1/2 funds.'*[96]

The 2015 SRF likewise acknowledges that "stable and predictable funding contributes to maximizing impact and results" and that "discontinuities caused by abrupt funding cuts" undermines CGIAR's results-orientation[97]. The frustrating and "fruitless" nature of planning in the face of unpredictable budget cuts was recounted but many KIs. The ongoing insistence of data collection for SLOs and IDOs

[94] Voices of Change, The new CGIAR, 2009, page 19.

[95] CGIAR Research Program Portfolio Report for Year 2015. CGIAR System Organization, September 7, 2016. Page 21.

[96] CGIAR Research Program Portfolio Report for Year 2015. CGIAR System Organization, September 7, 2016. Page 18. A similar risk assessment is found in the earlier 2014 portfolio report dated October 9, 2015.

[97] CGIAR System Framework, June 17, 2016, page 19

by the System was especially galling to the CRP and Center managers interviewed who were committed to RBM but felt they were not being adequately resourced with core funding to support a performance management orientation.

Restricted bilateral funding is subject to various contractual obligations imposed by individual donors. This makes it more difficult for CGIAR to coordinate and manage performance around a single set of research objectives and strategic result. The increased focus on bilateral funding complicates RBM in the sense that planning projects are not necessarily aligned with CRPs and their Flagships and those related ToCs and IPs. This creates two RBM streams: one linked to donor requirements providing bilateral funding, and one linked to the CRP's results framework, in effect, double reporting streams and higher associated management costs.

Related to the fall in core funding, there is a gap in funding specifically for RBM-related expenses. The case studies completed by this evaluation of RBM pilots, emphasis the importance of funding to support planning, review, and monitoring activities. Various KIs spoke of limited financial investment by the System to help CGIAR staff and partners understand RBM and its implication for their work, and to help institutionalize standard RBM practices. Lack of budget for interactive processes with partners was cited by many as emblematic of how RBM is being limited to paper exercises. The overall financial instability also had other day-to-day implications as explained by KIs, and as summarized in an independent evaluation of one of the CRPs:

*'A lack of stable funding means that most researchers, and especially research managers, have to be very entrepreneurial. The need to constantly look for new project funds, and juggle contracts to keep researchers' time fully funded, is not only time-consuming but can lead to less-than-strategic decisions about what research to undertake*.'[98]

KIs that represented Centers explained that funding dynamics in CGIAR are important to consider in relation to the system changes that are a necessary part of RBM. Much of the CRP work related to planning needs to be pre-financed by Centers. By the time "final" budgets are approved, planned amounts may not materialize. By then it is much more difficult to adjust spending. Uncertain funding conflicts with the setting of targets and expecting commitments to achieve them. The effect on RBM at Centers and CRPs of unstable, unpredictable funding is further evident from a 2015 evaluation of a CRP, which experienced a 20 percent budget cut in W1/2 funding in the first quarter of 2015[99]. Among the many effects listed that directly compromise RBM, two stood out most prominently: staff recruitment was delayed or cutback, leaving M&E staffing gaps; and Centers and staff lost trust in W1/2 monies and increased their focus on securing bilateral funding.

[98] Independent CRP-Commissioned External Evaluation of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH), Volume 1: Main Report, September 2015, CGIAR. Page 41.
[99] Ibid, page 41

# 6. Optimal use of RBM in CGIAR

**Reflecting on the experience of introducing and mainstreaming RBM so far, how can this approach optimally be used to help CGIAR contribute to its research mandate and expected system-level outcomes?** The evaluation team approached this final key question as a meta-analysis, having completed a thorough inquiry related to the first three key questions structuring this evaluation design. In other words, this section of the report draws from across the analysis summarized in Sections 3 to 5 above. The evaluation team on this final key question through consideration of two forward-looking sub-questions which are discussed in turn below.

## 6.1. Is the current approach to RBM working?

### Is the RBM approach, as presently conceptualized and implemented, likely to contribute to CGIAR's delivery of results from research towards CGIAR's SLOs?

**Finding 24 – Many of the Centers, that are the foundation of the CRPs, have embraced their own RBM approaches, and some are notably providing leadership from below to System-level efforts.**

The evaluators identified that there are shortcomings in how RBM is currently conceptualized and implemented at System level, and that this in turn limits the extent to which the RBM approach can work within CGIAR. The findings from KIs and as described in documents are mixed. The evaluation found that there has been a clear progression in the adoption of RBM principles when comparing the first iteration of CRP, and the more recent CRP II iteration. In section 3.3 of this report, adaptations by the System to enhance relevance of RBM to CGIAR are outlined. In section 4.3, the lessons that have been learned from piloting RBM suggest additional adaptations that could help make RBM approaches effective. Major innovations and ongoing efforts to help, plus factors that continue to constrain the embrace of RBM, are discussed in section 5.

To assess if RBM is "working", it is appropriate to start with Centers, given that they are the foundation of the CRPs. The evaluators heard that many Centers have started to embrace their own RBM approaches. In the case of CIFOR, for example, RBM has been supported through a DFID funded project called KNOWFOR, which aims at moving into design, monitoring, evaluation and learning to better understand research change processes (see ANNEX F for further information). Use of ToC and IPs are now routine. Representatives of Centers that were interviewed, plus CRP managers, confirm that some Centers are notably providing leadership from below to System and CRP-level efforts. Some interviewees were optimistic that the latest organization changes and creation of a System Management Board – the new "governing body of the System Organization"[100][101] – would help make

[100] CGIAR System Framework, June 17, 2016, page 3,

[101] On the System Management Board, the Centers now occupy seven of the nine voting members and will be primary drivers of CGIAR's future RBM direction

Centers even more committed to RBM, and would likely bring a more holistic perspective of RBM to CGIAR[102].

The evaluators found that quite a few CRPs are clearly making progress with their internal RBM processes. Another positive indication is that for CRPs, and for most Centers, the need for learning and a results-orientation is high on management agendas. New learning and adaptive management capacity, supported by improved strategic planning, priority setting and M&E is likely to support contribution to the SLOs. Many informants (especially in the RBM pilots) have reported a marked change towards thinking of research as contributing to development objectives, and they had positive impressions about how this would enhance CGIAR's strategic positioning. This is also suggested by the KNOWFOR partnership, implemented by CIFOR (see reference study in ANNEX F), which focuses on contribution rather than proving attribution.

Also on the positive side, the evaluation found that enabling factors supported focus on IDOs. The increased interaction among CGIAR Centers and between partners and stakeholders to develop meaningful ToCs, IPs, and M&E frameworks bodes well. Since 2010, CGIAR is working more interactively with partners and stakeholders than before. This is an enabling factor for effectiveness, and therefore we may assume that in this regard, RBM has been good for CGIAR.

**Finding 25 – There is widespread concern about the feasibility and appropriateness of the present System approach to RBM contributing to the delivery of CGIAR's IDOs and SLOs**

Others were less optimistic about the current approach, and pointed out that Centers are more likely to pursue bilateral opportunities rather than invest too much of their time and resources in a CGIAR where W1/2 funding has become less and less significant. Not all interlocuters were positive that Centers had the resources, long-term motivation, and capacity to build and contribute to M&E systems across CRPs. This comment echoes the evaluators' findings on the challenges concerning M&E systems discussed in sections 5.1.4 and 5.1.5. At least one Center-based KI openly questioned the rationale for CGIAR and its costly architecture in the face of donors who were "voting with their feet" and moving to bilateral relationships.

In different ways, various KIs explained that there has been too much focus on getting RBM to work on paper, e.g. in terms of the CRP II proposals and the related ToCs and IPs, SLO, IDOs and sub-IDOs, etc. Not enough attention has been on creating enabling environments for RBM in CRPs or Centers where results-oriented practice needs to be mainstreamed. As discussed in detail in section 3, most interviewees expressed frustration and concern about how RBM is conceptualized at System level and the resulting type of support which is geared more towards compliance than to creating capacity. One interlocuter suggested that the System's focus has been on "reporting on the delivery of results, and that is not necessarily the same as achieving results". There is the concern that learning "is not really flourishing" under RBM, and that this will negatively affect delivery of results over time.

[102] Holistic in the sense of embracing all 10 principles of RBM rather than focusing mostly on aggregated performance measurement aligned with SLOs.

In summary, there are various ways in which to interpret how RBM is working for CGIAR: in some ways, there has been progress, in other ways there are still serious constraints, which, if not dealt with, will limit the scope of what RBM can do for CGIAR.

## 6.2. How can the RBM approach be optimized?

**Considering CGIAR experiences, plus relevant RBM experiences elsewhere, how can RBM optimally help CGIAR contribute to its identified system level outcomes?**

To use RBM optimally to help contribute to its research mandate and expected System-level outcomes, CGIAR must first appropriately conceptualize RBM and identify which principles of RBM are most important in its CRP context. Considering CGIAR experiences as recounted and discussed in this report, and the principles of RBM outlined in Section 2.2 of this report, the evaluators provide the following long-list of findings regarding possibilities for optimizing RBM in CGIAR. These are "findings" collated directly from data streams that are part of this evaluation: interview notes, document review, focus groups, case studies, etc.

1. **Leadership** – Consistent System-level senior leadership to promote full engagement in RBM is required. There must also be dedicated champions at the CRP and Center levels: people who can handle the conceptual side of RBM and bridge this with practical implementation.
2. **Learning** – A learning environment must be actively created and supported. Effective learning requires a safe, supported environment. Time needs to be set aside to review how assumed change pathways work. This must lead to adjusted plans so that RBM does not restrict adaptive management. There is a need to facilitate learning and support among cluster teams.
3. **Culture** – An RBM culture must be consciously defined, promoted and supported. An adaptive management approach is built through regular review of performance, assumptions and risk, and an informed update of expectations. RBM is not just a matter of imposing processes. It is about shifting mindsets and introducing a new way of business. This requires consistent messages, patience and capacity building.
4. **Enabling environment** – If RBM becomes mainly an incentive mechanism to rewards those who meet targets and punish those who do not, this will limit its potential. The RBM strategy must be linked with support, and ensure that scientists perceive RBM as an opportunity for learning and improvement and not as an administrative and bureaucratic instrument.
5. **Tools** – New or adapted tools and methods are required: strategic results frameworks; logic models with measurable results; ToCs; M&E frameworks, performance measurement plans, outcome-oriented reports, etc. For example, it is critical to work with a sound ToC and update and improve it over years rather than using it as a fixed point of reference. Staff need to be supported with helpful tools which make it easier to grasp the essence of RBM practice rather than another set of compliance-oriented processes. The goal is to support people understanding RBM principles, rather than becoming tool-focused.
6. **Guidance** – To support RBM across the CGIAR portfolio, guidance on policy, expectations, and tools to be used should be provided. For example, use an RBM policy paper and related change management strategy, and detailed CRP proposal document to help explain the principles and how-to of RBM.

7. **Indicators** – Investment is performance measurement using indicators and a practical approach to indicators, baselines and targets is required. Indicators should be kept practical, useful, and measurable acknowledging that their most immediate need and utility is at the Center and program management level. The long-term processes that characterize much of CGIAR's work requires sensible use of indicators where collection of credible data is feasible both in terms of methodology and cost.
8. **Participation** – Empowering staff by having them design monitoring systems that are practical, and providing sufficient opportunities and support for participation in program design and in performance review and adaptation is key. To make RBM happen at CRP level, the focus must be on projects and clusters, and these continually linked to Flagship and ultimately, to CRP-outcomes. This requires regular interaction and exchange, not only internally and with key partners, but also consultations with external partners.
9. **Evaluation** – To provide holistic and complementary performance information and effectiveness assessment that is not exclusively measurement and indicator driven and available from monitoring systems alone, a professional and independent evaluation function needs to be part of CGIAR's RBM approach. Impact assessment is a key part of an evaluation function to provide feedback on contribution to ultimate program results.
10. **MIS** – RBM is data-heavy and requires ongoing development and modernization of electronic management information systems: user-friendly interfaces, and direct alignment with monitoring and evaluation plans, plus training, to support reliability, easy access and efficient utilization. Investment in sufficient MIS capacity is a pre-requisite for RBM. The key challenge is to create effective user interfaces and interoperability among different systems being developed in CGIAR. Avoid information systems that become too complex to be sustained.
11. **Balance** – CGIAR's RBM focus needs to balance the requirement of Centers and CRPs to build meaningful M&E systems that support the work by Flagships and clusters, and System-level needs to report annually on a limited set of development outcomes.
12. **Piloting** – Rather than attempting to quickly expand RBM across the whole CRP portfolio, it is worth considering a staggered approach across Flagships and clusters. RBM requires a realistic time frame for making a transition to full results orientation and step-by-step piloting can support this. The piloting already done is a good start.
13. **Investment** – An RBM approach comes with significant costs. RBM processes are intensive, take time, and require human and financial investment. Dedicated budgets for RBM support will help to facilitate this type of investment.
14. **Funding** – Stable, predictable funding for CGIAR, with sufficient unrestricted W1/2 commitments, is a pre-requisite for effective RBM. Without this foundation, the System cannot support strategic planning and realistic performance targets for its portfolio of CRPs. Without W1/2, the vision of a consortium and partnership for global agriculture research under CGIAR ends.
15. **Frameworks** – A compelling CGIAR RBM framework that explains and costs priority M&E and learning tasks is required. Acceptance of RBM requires a holistic, integrated approach to cover planning, using ToC, monitoring outcomes, evaluating progress, an online reporting platform, appropriate incentives and reward mechanisms, etc. RBM requires a robust monitoring system fully integrated with the planning and implementation of CRP activities.

16. **Capacity development** – This relates to the need for a supportive environment for capacity development. Part of that would be done through training new skills: networking, facilitation, stakeholder collaboration and interaction, building partnerships. RBM requires an enabling environment that encourages capacity development.
17. **Training** – Optimizing RBM in CGIAR, presumes access to various types of effective training for staff and partners related. For example, training for leaders and champions to further build skills in networking, facilitation, and stakeholder collaboration and interaction. Competency issues need to be identified and appropriate training used to build capacity.

# 7. Conclusions

Reflecting once again on the key evaluation questions and sub-questions posed by this evaluation, and now drawing from the various streams of evidence and related data collected, plus the analysis conducted by the evaluation, and the validation of findings by CGIAR stakeholders, the following overall conclusions are offered. For each conclusion, the most obvious findings that led to the conclusion are indicated in square brackets.

**Conclusion 1 – The motivation for and the understood purpose of RBM have been mixed across CGIAR**

[Findings 1 – 4, 6] There have been different drivers for RBM and this has created tension rather than supporting collaboration for performance management across CGIAR. The drivers for RBM included a) a reform process that called for strategic focus and results around CRPs, b) the interest of independent Centers to do meaningful research though integrated research programs, and c) the expectation that CRPs be accountable for System-level outcomes and impact. For System-level managers, RBM tended to focus more narrowly on CRP accountability reporting, and the perceived need to align performance monitoring of CRPs to SRF outcomes. Accountability as such was not the problem, but the emphasis on control by the System and compliance by CRPs based on a standard set of indicators created tension and a heavy administrative burden on Centers implementing CRPs.

**Conclusion 2 – CRPs and Centers have generally tried to understand and embrace RBM**

[Findings 2 and 3] Within CRPs, and many Centers, there has been a positive dynamic of trying to better understand and embrace RBM, making it work for enhanced effectiveness of agricultural research. Centers were already interested in results and engaged to varying degree in RBM prior to the 2009 CGIAR reform commitments. The Centers themselves were responding to a global context in which performance management requirements were becoming more pronounced.

**Conclusion 3 – The conceptual understanding of RBM varied among key stakeholders**

[Finding 6 and 8] CGIAR has lacked shared conceptual understanding of RBM. There has been no detailed RBM-specific policy paper, change management strategy, or theory of change to explain how CGIAR's results-based management approach should unfold. RBM guidance from the System to the CRPs has been limited mostly to provision of a SRF, a short-list of harmonized indicators to be reported at System level, and a template for constructing research proposals. At System level, CGIAR saw RBM mainly in relation to the SRF and results-based reporting to donors. This perspective tended to reduce the goal of RBM to closely aligning CRP objectives, indicators and targets within a single system-level framework. This in turn reduced the learning potential of RBM, and subverted CRP and Center performance management needs to more immediate System-level demands. It also created confusion about what RBM was meant to do for CGIAR and partially undermined the original motivation for RBM. Although CGIAR's highest-level goals are in fact development impacts, CGIAR is a research organization with a mandate to deliver research results. This important nuance was not sufficiently considered.

**Conclusion 4 – RBM is suitable for CGIAR's context and remains relevant to CGIAR and its CRPs**

[Findings 1 – 12] RBM and its various drivers remain relevant to CGIAR, and the overall purpose of increasing CGIAR effectiveness using this approach can potentially help to unite key stakeholders in the face of unstable funding. The call for CGIAR to embrace good-practice RBM is stronger today than it was in 2009 when the commitment to performance management became a cornerstone of its organizational reform process. However, operationalizing RBM in CGIAR's complex structure and for its research mandate has been problematic. Despite the level of confusion created, and the challenges remaining, the evaluators concluded that the extensive discussion and learning around how to measure CGIAR's outcomes will be helpful in guiding the way forward. To improve relevance, RBM should be conceived by CGIAR as a holistic approach that serves the CRPs and Centers and their respective mandates.

**Conclusion 5 – The RBM pilots provided important learning for CRPs and Centers**

[Findings 11, 13 – 17] The pilots were an important System-funded initiative that led to significant RBM learning within the CRPs where the piloting took place. Involved CRPs showed an interest and willingness to use the RBM approach to enhance effectiveness, during the pilot and beyond. Learning benefitted many participating Centers and informally supported cross-CRP learning and collaboration. Unfortunately, the pilots did not lead to a formal consolidation of lessons learned to inform subsequent development of RBM for CGIAR. Instead, the pilots were primarily tuned to make sense and meaning from a CRP and Center perspective, and as such did not fully serve System-level learning or outcome reporting requirements. The System-level did benefit from the experience of individuals involved in the pilots, who continued to share experience, for example, through the MELCoP and TFI.

**Conclusion 6 – Important progress has been made to adapt RBM for CGIAR's unique context**

[Findings 10, 11 and 18] For adapting RBM to the unique CGIAR context, considerable progress has been made by CGIAR, and a range of important RBM innovations and adaptations have been introduced. These provide experience, knowledge and skills which CGIAR can build on as it moves forward. Importantly, each CRP, and their leading research Centers, have taken learning journeys to adopt RBM, and there has been significant progress in developing their RBM-related processes, tools, and methods. Some Centers have made significant investment in RBM, have been early adapters, and have provided strong leadership and support for RBM within CRPs. Overall, there has been significant progress to adopt and adapt RBM across CGIAR, including a nascent culture shift towards performance management. That said, RBM adaptation by the System clearly remains a work in progress. Further innovation by CRPs and Centers can be sustained and even accelerated. The prerequisite is that the System's conceptualization of RBM, and how the CRPs and Centers understand, experience and support RBM is more effectively aligned.

**Conclusion 7 – RBM is presently pulled in two directions within CGIAR which unnecessarily creates tension**

[Findings 19 – 21] Management support for RBM within CGIAR pulls in two directions: CRP-based RBM application focuses on making RBM work for the CRPs with a mixed level of support from participating Centers. At the same time, the System-level strives to align indicators, targets and related reporting to serve System-level interests and funding decisions. This creates tension between what the System

thinks it needs from CRPs, and what CRPs consider to be realistic and meaningful given their limited spheres of control and influence. Tension is acerbated by the System attempting to use the same outcome statements and indicators for all CRPs. It is doubtful that striving for full alignment of CRP results to System-level SRF outcomes, indicators and targets will lead to better CGIAR results reporting. Closing attribution gaps will be impossible, and comparing different types of CRPs using one set of common indicators is unlikely to satisfy any stakeholder group. There is a need to be accountable at System level, and to be able to produce reports that both reflect the common vision and perspective to which all CRPs contribute, and at the same time highlight CRP-specific results through credible outcome and impact narratives. Attempts to use harmonized indicators to collect meaningful performance data from CRPs on progress in achieving System-level outcomes have been mostly unsuccessful and unhelpful. Credible narrative reporting on CRP-specific results need to be improved. There is a need to decouple System-level performance measurement from the performance management led by CRPs and Centers.

**Conclusion 8 – Leadership needs to become more engaged in consciously creating an enabling environment for RBM**

[Findings 11, 18 – 21] The focus of RBM development from a System-level perspective has been to put in place paper-based guidance, most notable the SRF, call-for-proposal guidelines, and related standardized SLO and IDO indicators and targets. Full acknowledgement of the complex realities and ambitious agendas of CRP work, and using RBM to learn and innovate in an open and transparent manner demands appropriate leadership. Successful RBM within CGIAR will require empowered RBM Champions working together at different levels of CGIAR. More advocacy of RBM for sense-making, learning, and partnership building, and more credible reporting on performance and results that considers the unique context of each CRP, would aid further adoption of RBM.

**Conclusion 9 – The present investment in the RBM function at different levels of CGIAR is insufficient**

[Findings 22 – 25] Further adoption of RBM by CGIAR requires investment and capacity building for the RBM function. There was System-level investment e.g. on the One Corporate System, and for one year of RBM piloting, but this was to some extent detached from CRP requirements. Important steps towards developing a MIS have been made by a few CRPs, yet System-level investment has been largely absent. Current structures are already in place (e.g. ISPC, IEA, SMO and MELCoP) to support RBM. Unfortunately, these Centers of excellence tend to work too much in silos, without an overarching capacity building and collaborative work plan to build further momentum for RBM across CGIAR. Additional investment needs to address the various areas which have been identified by this evaluation as requiring support, rather than merely bumping up System-level accountability efforts.

# 8. Recommendations

Many recommendations have been eluded to in the body of this report. A list of key practical and feasible recommendations directly linked to the findings and conclusions and the four main questions addressed by this evaluation, are presented below:

Rec 1. **Develop system-level conceptualization and guidance for RBM** – The CGIAR System Organization should develop a conceptual paper that describes its vision, objectives expected results, and implications from using an RBM approach that embraces good practice principles. The paper should include a theory of change (considering the one developed by this evaluation) that describes how this management approach is expected to make a difference for CGIAR at System, CRP and Center levels, and what moving in that direction is anticipated to involve both in strategic and operational terms. This is not about creating a top-down reference framework to comply with, but something that can help RBM better serve CGIAR in fulfilling its mission at all levels. The SRF, in its periodic iterations, should be aligned with this RBM conceptualization and guidance paper.

In its conceptualization of RBM, the CGIAR should embrace both accountability and learning as equally important for adaptive management. Further adaptations of RBM by CGIAR should balance these two RBM competencies and champion both equally. The foundation of CGIAR's RBM should be built on capacity-based accountability; the notion that member Centers are centres of excellence, that CRPs bring together enormous organizational capacity, and that System-level structures that support RBM (SMO, IEA, ISPC/SPIA) provide investors with a foundation for due-diligence and results accountability. Accountability, should embrace not just the need to provide credible performance data, but also to support learning i.e. evidence of effective learning as an important component of accountability.

Rec 2. **At System level, decouple budget allocation and performance assessment** – The System should support the development of a RBM framework that has dual functions: 1) helping CRPs (and Centers) further develop their own internal and cross-Center RBM processes, and 2) helping the CRPs report on outcomes and impacts from their research as contribution to CGIAR's collective results. This means "letting go to get more": system-level information needs should serve related but distinct purposes of prioritizing CRP research and allocating budgets, and this should be decoupled from CRP and Center efforts to manage their own results frameworks.

Allocation of budgets, and budget shortfalls, should be based holistically on an array of credible types of performance information and on considerations of research priorities for CGIAR, and not rely on reported achievements against targets for a single set of SRF outcome indicators. Annual performance assessment and performance reporting by the SMO should be based on the latest information from a constantly renewed dashboard fed by IEA evaluation reports, ISPC proposal and impact assessment work, annual CRP reports related to their own performance frameworks, and selected, valid operational indicators.

Rec 3. **Invest in a CRP driven, system-relevant Management Information Systems** – RBM is based on an ability to collect, analyse and use massive amounts of data that can be safely stored and easily accessed and sorted. This is doubly the case for CGIAR which works to coordinate efforts of a complex array of CRPs and a large number of implementing partners. Significant investment in MISs is a pre-requisite for CGIAR's success with the RBM approach. When building CGIAR's MIS, CRP and Center needs must come first. As such, the System should support the ongoing development of MARLO and similar initiatives in CGIAR, if seen promising, with annual core

funding. The challenge is to make the systems simple enough to make RBM easier rather than more complicated.

Rec 4. **Identify and empower RBM support function at System level** – Support for RBM from System level should be more conscious and coherent than in the past and the RBM function should be clearly mandated to provide practical and helpful RBM services directed to the needs of the CRPs. There should be at least one SMO-based, full-time specialist with competence in RBM and with specific terms of reference to encourage collaboration around shared MISs, shared learning, and innovation related to RBM process and tools. The schedule for external evaluations and impact assessments should be coherent and mutually supportive. The SMO should lead the development of best practice RBM that draws on relevant technical expertise from IEA and SPIA as independent advisory bodies. The goal should be to strengthen CGIAR's vision for RBM best practice, and have the System Organization more successfully conceptualize and coordinate the further adaptation and adoption of effective RBM.

Rec 5. **Develop and implement annual RBM capacity building work plans** –The SMO should prepare an annual workplan for RBM capacity building and learning, and a budget should be allocated for the priority initiatives outlined in the work breakdown structure of that work plan. In 2014, RBM piloting was allocated USD 4 million for learning. This is an indication of the type and level of investment, targeted to support RBM adaptation, learning and sharing, that is needed on an annual basis. The following elements should be a central part of ongoing RBM capacity building efforts:

- A cascading range of appropriate experts should be identified as **RBM champions** from Centers, to CRPs, to System. These champions should have clear responsibilities to support RBM imbedded in their individual terms of reference and job descriptions. These RBM champions should together identify and support priority RBM capacity building initiatives and advocate collectively for donor support. The focus of this support should be on making RBM work for CRPs in enhancing and sustaining their effectiveness.
- An active **CGIAR monitoring, evaluation and learning community of practice** should continue to be supported, and be facilitated by the SMO. It should be directed by CRP priorities and consciously embrace RBM best-practice principles.
- To further boost RBM learning and expertise, CGIAR should provide **an innovation fund** that serves CRP-based learning and development of practical tools and options related to RBM.

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Mackay, R. and Horton, D. (eds.) (2007) (2nd Edition) Institutional Learning and Change in the CGIAR: Summary record of the workshop held at IFPRI, Washington, DC, February 4-6, 2003. ILAC Working Paper 1, Rome, Institutional Learning and Change Initiative.

## CRP and Center level:

***General document review:***

- CRP Proposal Documents for Phase I, Extension Phase and Phase II
- CRP Annual Reports
- IEA CRP evaluations and CRP commissioned evaluations
- ISPC commentaries on full CRP Proposals for Phase II, June, 2016

***Specific:***

*A4NH:*

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*CCAFS:*

CCAFS Learning briefs:

| | |
|---|---|
| Lessons in theory of change: experiences from CCAFS. Learning Brief No. 6. | 2014 |
| Lessons in theory of change: CCAFS Southeast Asia Research for Development Workshop. CCSL Learning Brief No. 8. CCAFS, Copenhagen, Denmark. | 2014 |
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| Lessons in Theory of Change from a Series of Regional Planning Workshops. Learning Brief No. 11. | 2014 |
| Lessons and Insights from CCAFS Results-Based Management Trail, CCSL Learning Brief No. 12, | 2014 |

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*RTB:*

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# Annex 1 – Evaluation Methodology

## 1. Evaluation approach

The approach for this evaluation was **non-experimental** and relied on **mixed methods**. The approach included **participatory** characteristics. Although led and facilitated by an external evaluator, a) interviews with an appropriate reference group during the inception phase, b) several focus group discussions, c) validation discussions using Webinars, and d) direct involvement by IEA as manager of the evaluation, assured that representative groups of stakeholders were directly involved. This participatory approach was supported by the range of data collection methods chosen, informal feedback loops from CRP representatives to the evaluation team (return Skype calls and e-mail exchanges for further exchange of information), and direct input from a range of key informants (KI) involved in implementing CRPs.

The evaluation approach was also **utilization focused** in that there was clarity from the onset as to who the evaluation was for and how it will be disseminated and used. Key decision makers – including the SMO – were involved in the evaluation process during design and implementation. They also provided early feedback on emerging findings and recommendations. The evaluation process itself was understood by key stakeholders as a learning process.

The evaluation is **formative** in approach in that the evaluation's findings, conclusions and recommendations are expected to help guide CGIAR and its members as they, together, continue to conceptualize, experiment, adopt and adapt RBM across the CGIAR System.

## 2. Data collection methods used

The research methods applied were primarily **qualitative**. Data collection for the evaluation was **desk-based** and no CRP research sites were visited. The evaluation followed the approved methodology detailed in the Inception Report. Data collection approaches, and the evaluation team's detailed workplan were informed by the Evaluation Matrix presented in that report.

For each sub-question in the evaluation, the Evaluation Matrix identified indicators to be used as core measurement criteria to assure that the related inquiry was relevant and focused. In the last two columns of the Evaluation Matrix, sources of data from which the inquiry drew, and the method of data collection, are detailed. The methods of data collection for each evaluation sub-question were determined during the inception phase through discussion within the evaluation team. Methods selected were based on practical considerations: time and budget available, need to triangulate data, information sources and availability, and the type of question being asked. The **data collection methods** that were used by the evaluation are summarized below.

### Document review

During the inception phase, CGIAR internal plus other external documents were identified, located, and filed electronically for the evaluation team's use. A systematic review of these documents by the evaluators provided background information on the history of RBM in CGIAR, and information on

CGIAR structure and organizational culture relevant to RBM. Document review provided an understanding of context and implementation activities completed to date, and provided evidence of progress made towards expected changes, plus the challenges faced and lessons learned. A review of external documents allowed the evaluators to draw on experience from elsewhere, and offered technical guidance related to RBM implementation across other complex organizations. In total, well over 100 documents were referred to and some of these (listed in Reference list at the end of the report) became core reference documents.

### Key informant interviews

Interviews with identified KIs allowed evidence to be collected across the CGIAR System to assess how RBM has been adopted to date, and what has been learned. Questions were designed to both elicit information that is not available from published documents, and to triangulate or clarify information from published documents. Interviews with key KIs were primarily Skype-based accept in the few cases where the logistics of face-to-face interaction was possible. Also, in several interview cases, more than one interviewee was present, typically to make sure that a full range of experience was available and that the interviewer's questions could be adequately covered.

KI interviews targeted individuals deemed best placed to be able to reflect knowledgably on RBM implementation progress to date: staff within the System including CRP and Center management and researchers, donors and external stakeholders and experts. A complete list of those interviewed is included in ANNEX B. **To protect confidentiality, views expressed by those interviewed are purposefully not attributed to individuals within this evaluation report**. Interview guides were used to prepare for the interviews with KIs. Notes from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for ease of reference to the evaluation questions.

### Focus group discussions

Two focus group discussions on specific evaluation questions and issues related to these questions were organized. These were scheduled to be longer in duration than individual interviews (90 instead of 60 minutes), and were designed to complement interviews with KIs. The focus group discussions gave the evaluation team a chance to encourage debate, record different points of view, and to assess the extent of consensus (or lack thereof) around key issues. The first focus group concentrated on evaluation questions 1 and 4, while the second focus group concentrated primarily on evaluation questions 3 and 4. The groups included a mix of staff from CRPs and Centers composed to accommodate different time zones.

### Case studies

As detailed in the Table below, three of the five CRPs that were supported financially to pilot RBM, were selected as in-depth RBM implementation case studies for this evaluation.

**Table A3 – Details of Case Studies for this Evaluation**

| CRP Selected as Case Study | Lead Center for the CRP | Other Details |
|---|---|---|
| Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) | The International Center of Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) | Still active as one of the global integrating programs. CIAT participates in 10 other CRPs, and CCAFS itself has participation from all 15 Centers. |
| Roots Tubers and Bananas (RTB) | The International Potato Center (CIP) | Still active as one of the agri-food systems programs. CIAT, IITA and Bioversity International are also directly involved. |
| Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP) | International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) | Still active as RICE CRP (one of the agri-food systems program). AfricaRice and CIAT are also directly involved. |

The case studies included a detailed review of RBM implementation experience within these CRPs, comparing processes used in each case. They also explored the experience of RBM from the perspective of participating Centers. The evaluators used a template to structure these case studies and the 3 individual case study reports were then used for a meta-analysis to identify common observations across the cases, explain patterns and exceptions, and in this way, draw overall findings.

### Reference studies

Two reference studies provided additional data. Unlike the three case studies of RBM piloting, which involved detailed inquiry, these two external reference studies were more brief, primarily desk-based, and involved fewer interviews.

One reference study examined the **International Forestry Knowledge** (KNOWFOR) program. This program is a DFID funded partnership between the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Bank Program of Forests (PROFOR). The program budget included dedicated resources for RBM. The KNOWFOR partnership was not a CGIAR-initiated RBM pilot, but provides relevant learning related to adoption of RBM. It is published as ANNEX E of Volume II of this report.

The second reference study examined the **International Development Research Center** (IDRC). It was selected as an external, non-CGIAR research Center because it has spent several decades developing its own approach to RBM. It is published as ANNEX F of Volume II of this report.

### Meta-assessment of RBM lessons learned

The implementation of RBM has not been fully evaluated by already conducted evaluations of individual CRPs. Instead, dimensions of RBM were discussed in separate sections of these CRP evaluation reports, often related to portfolio management and the struggle of CRPs to manage strategically. As part of data collection for this evaluation, the evaluation team looked at 15 CRP evaluations, of which 10 were commissioned by the IEA and 5 by the CRPs themselves. The evaluations were conducted between 2013 and 2016. Three evaluations had distinct sections on RBM, while the remainders discussed RBM aspects in other sections related to governance, management

effectiveness, M&E, and impact assessment. The meta-assessment of CRP evaluation reports using a RBM focus led to a consolidation of data which the evaluation team could draw from.

### Validation process

Once preliminary findings, conclusions and recommendations had been outlined in a zero draft of the evaluation report, several meetings were organized where these were presented for discussion, validation, and adjustment. These meetings included one with the SMO, and another with a reference group of eight M&E experts from within the System Organization. This initially validated first draft was then circulated for further comments, suggestions, and discussion using two broader web-facilitated consultations (webinars), one to accommodate western time zones and another to accommodate eastern time zones. Participation in these webinars was open-ended.

## 3. Data analysis

To assure valid and reliable data, sources of evidence were triangulated; various data sources were used to assure independent lines of evidence which could be compared. More than one data collection method was used to each sub-question in the Evaluation Matrix, and testimony was obtained from more than one source on each topic. In addition to internal review and discussion, the evaluation team drew from experiences outside CGIAR, relying on literature, as well as the team members' own experience and that of external experts to further test validity of findings and recommendations.

### Use of a conceptual model to help structure analysis

The evaluators used document review, consultation, peer review and personal experience to draft a Theory of Change (ToC), a conceptual model, of how the RBM approach was envisaged to become a central management feature of the post-2008 CGIAR System (see Annex C). It was developed in parallel with data collection and early analysis to help the evaluation team understand and assess both how RBM has unfolded in CGIAR since 2009, and how it might have unfolded differently given other factors and management adjustments. The ToC helped relate the drivers for change that were the foundation of RBM's introduction, and expected management outcomes.

### Use of RBM good-practice principles to structure analysis

The evaluators outlined a draft short-list of good practice principles for RBM during the inception phase. These principles were further elaborated and expanded during the inquiry phase of the evaluation as are presented in final form in Section 3.2 below. These principles were used as criteria to define and consistently assess RBM, and to assure that inquiries by the evaluation team looked at the full spectrum of RBM based on internationally recognized good practice.

## 4. Quality assurance and limitations

For quality assurance, the role of IEA and the Evaluation Manager were critical. The IEA provides guiding documents that outline: standards for independent external evaluations; guidance on how to develop evaluation terms of reference, inception reports, and evaluation reports; and an appropriate

process for finalization, feedback and response. The Evaluation Manager worked to assure these quality assurance guidelines were met by the evaluation team[103].

The core of the evaluation team was external, and the Team Leader and Senior Evaluator were hired through a competitive process and were independent of IEA and CGIAR. The Team Leader is a Credentialed Evaluator with the Canadian Evaluation Society and as such subscribes to that society's *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct*. The quality of the ToR, Inception report and evaluation report were further assured through consultations, and inviting input from key stakeholder representatives at critical milestones of the evaluation process.

The limitations outlined in the Inception Report remained valid and were mitigated as planned. The evaluation team was aware that the RBM approach had only been introduced by the CGIAR System in 2009, and full implementation had not yet been achieved. As such, the Evaluation Matrix avoided higher-order effectiveness and impact questions. Notably, the inquiry did not seek to determine if RBM approaches adopted by the CGIAR System had helped achieve research and development outcomes. Instead, the emphasis was on early learning at the interphase of eight years of preparatory orientation and intended full roll out of RBM in 2018 and beyond.

Assessment of the extent of implementation of RBM or the sufficiency of its elements, such as adequate M&E systems, in all Centers and CRPs was not feasible or within the remit of this evaluation. Therefore the evaluation's findings and conclusions are based on case studies and a representative sample of KIs across Centers and CRPs. The evaluation did not study RBM within System-level platforms.

There was sufficient documentation and well-informed interviewees to facilitate case studies of RBM piloting in three CRPs. This was determined by the evaluators to be a sufficient sample to provide valid and reliable evidence. Learning from the case studies was further boosted by two reference studies and by a range of KIs.

Where the evaluators found a lack of consensus, the evaluators purposefully consulted and probed across different stakeholder groups. The extent of consensus related to the questions found in the Evaluation Matrix is noted as part of the evaluation findings. Where there is a lack of consensus, the evaluators identify the most credible and prominent positions articulated by groups of stakeholders. The evaluators consulted a wide range of sources and technical guidance.

[103] The risk of any potential bias resulting from IEA overseeing this evaluation was mitigated. The team leader and the senior evaluator were both external, completely independent, and have no institutional link to IEA or CGIAR. The Inception Report for the evaluation was created by the evaluation team, not by IEA. A draft of the Inception Report was shared by a credible reference group. The team leader is credentialed with the Canadian Evaluation Society and his work as team leader is bound by a professional ethics code. The evaluation had a further level of quality control in that all products were overseen by a designated Partner from Goss Gilroy Inc., Management Consultants, as neutral, external, evaluation design expert. Within the evaluation report, the team was careful to triangulate its lines of evidence and assure that findings and related conclusions and recommendations were valid.

## 5. Organization and timing

The core evaluation team included two independent external evaluators and an evaluation analyst. Team member profiles and responsibilities are included in the Inception Report and their contributions summarized in the Acknowledgements section of this report. This evaluation unfolded over 8 months in 2016, from initial preparation in February to final reporting in September. The workplan for implementing the evaluation followed the schedule agreed during the inception phase. Deliverables (with timing shown):

- Approved terms of reference – April
- Approved inception report – June
- Interview and focus group notes – May to July
- Case studies and reference study reports – July
- Extended outline of findings, conclusions and recommendation areas – August
- Webinar presentation and further validation – September
- Final draft evaluation report – end of September

An extended outline of this report, including preliminary findings, conclusions and tentative recommendations, was shared with the SMO. Further validation of evaluation report content was facilitated through two Webinars with targeted stakeholders. Based on this report, the IEA will interact with the System Management Board and Office for development of a response to the evaluation. The response will include an action plan for addressing recommendations targeted to specific bodies of the CGIAR System. The evaluation report and the response will be public documents made available to the System Council.

## 6. Changes from Inception Report

During the inquiry, and the analysis and validation phases of the evaluation, the evaluation team realized that there was unnecessary overlap across the sub-questions and indicators found in the original Evaluation Matrix[104]. During a 3-day working session, at the end of the analysis and validation phase, without changing the 4 key evaluation questions, the team revised the matrix, removing one sub-question, and rewording several of the remaining 11 sub-questions. The related indicators were also reworked so that they remained specific and appropriate for each of the sub-questions. These revisions were taken to improve clarity and avoid redundant lines of inquiry. The revised Evaluation Matrix was shared with the Evaluation Manager, discussed, and approved, and is included as ANNEX A in this report. No other significant changes were made to the Inception Report which remained as the approved work plan for this evaluation.

[104] Evaluation of RBM in CGIAR - Inception Report, IEA of CGIAR, 2017. See page 18 for explanation of evaluation phases, and see ANNEX C of the inception report to see the original Evaluation Matrix.

# Annex 2 – CGIAR's RBM adaptation Theory of Change

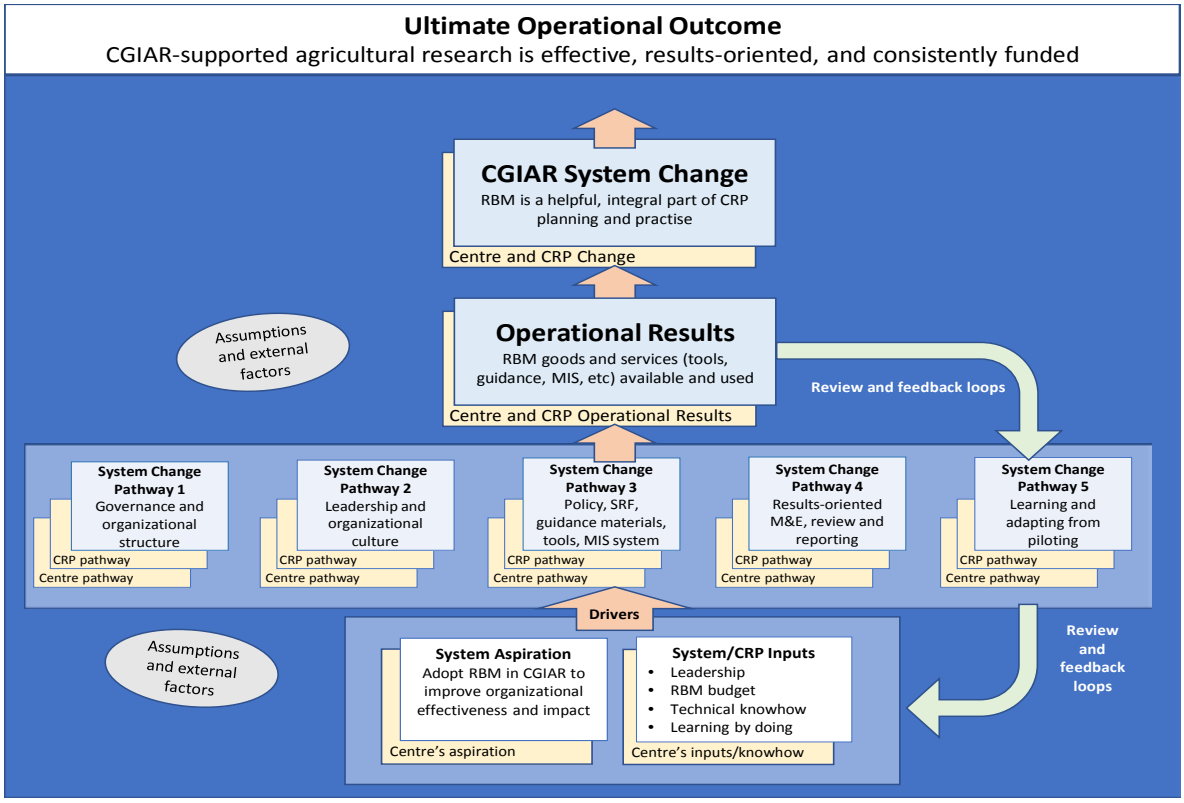
For a full ToC including detailed descriptions of change pathways and assumptions, please see ANNEX C, published in Volume II of the report.

The evaluation team noted that the introduction and promotion of RBM in CGIAR has not been guided by a comprehensive policy document or action plan, nor has it been explained by an explicit Theory of Change (ToC). We offer a plausible ToC for RBM. It has been developed parallel to the inquires that were part of this formative evaluation

CGIAR is a set of outcome-oriented programs, implemented by Centers. In Figure 1, the Centers, the CGIAR's independent research Center signatories, appear prominently at each level of the ToC. They help push and energize the overall drive for system-level change, and have their own unique RBM causal pathways and operational outcomes.

In this ToC, we have identified 5 distinct pathways of change. Each has its own unique set of activities and expected RBM-related products and services as outputs. Although each pathway of change is distinct, overlap and synergy across all 5 is expected: each only becomes fully realized and effective when they are worked at together. An underlying assumption of the evaluators is that though CGIAR has its own characteristics, evolution towards RBM is likely to correspond roughly with this set of universally applicable pathways.

*Figure 1 – Theory of Change for making RBM work within CGIAR, CRPs and Centers*



# Annex 3 – Timeline of RBM related events

| Event | Year | Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| Independent review of CGIAR System – initiation of reform process | 2008 | External review team recommend CGIAR adopt RBM |
| CGIAR Annual General meeting | 2008 | Approval of reform |
| CGIAR Executive Council meeting | 2009 | Results-based management introduced as one of 4 core CGIAR reform principles |
| "New CGIAR" defined | 2010 | *Voices of Change* include Joint Declaration and new M&E framework |
| 1st Strategy and Results Framework | 2011 | Directive on CRPs for implementing the SRF |
| ISPC white paper on prioritization | 2012 | Introduction of IDOs |
| CRP I: 15 CRPs approved | 2011-2013 | |
| Consortium Office initiatives begin | 2012 | CEO's open letters about RBM, indicator development, SRF Action Plan, SLO-working group |
| ISPC white paper on ToCs | 2012 | Strategic overview of CRP ToCs |
| CRP initiatives begin | 2012 | CGIAR science leaders initiate IDOs Working Group and CRP IDO Design Team ; work on Theories of Change and IDOs; consultation with Consortium Office, System level and stakeholders<br>First CRP impact pathways shared with ISPC |
| Evaluation function put in place | 2012 | IEA established, CGIAR Evaluation Policy approved |
| ISPC/CRP workshop on IDOs in Cali | Mar 2013 | Developing IDOs at the CRP level, including a set of common and discreet IDOs |
| IDOs working group | Apr 2013 | *Guide for developing CRP Intermediate Development Outcomes* (IDOs)<br>Submission of the set of IDOs to Consortium Office |
| CRP Engagement with Donors and External Stakeholders , Montpellier | Jun 2013 | Discuss Targets, Theory of Change, Impact Pathways and Indicators for Definition and Prioritization of CRP-level IDOs |
| SLO working group | 2013 | Development of SLO-level indicators |
| ECoP 1st meeting | 2013 | ECoP is coordinated by IEA<br>Items: key elements of CGIAR evaluation guidance, sharing M&E approaches and methods |
| RBM piloting initiated | 2013 | RBM pilot proposals submitted to Consortium Office and five pilots selected |
| RBM piloting | 2014 | Implementation of 5 RBM pilots |
| ECoP 2nd meeting | 2014 | Items: developing M&E systems in Centers and CRPs; improving evaluation, training |
| Donor meeting in Washington | 2014 | For CGIAR donor community, through representatives Fund Council, and supported by ISPC, to take more |

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|---|---|---|
| | | explicit role in the articulation of donor expectations through the Results Framework for the 2nd SRF. |
| CRP initiative | 2014 | Two-day workshop in Frankfurt for 3 CRPs to discuss common framework for measuring achievement in IDO on adaptive capacity |
| Draft RBM Framework, developed by John Mayne | Nov 2014 | Draft which builds on work of the IDO working group and outlines scope and elements of RBM for CRPs |
| Mid-Term Review | 2014 | One of the MTR recommendation was that CGIAR should revise its SRF |
| CRP extension phase | 2015-16 | More focus on IPs, ToCs and IDO targets |
| 1st Strategy and Results Framework | 2015 | SRF 2016-2030, CGIAR vision, mission and goals; framework with SLO, IDOs and sub-IDOs and for cross cutting issues; targets 2022, 2030 |
| Cross-CRP ME&L workshop | 2015 | Items: IDOs for planning and reporting; RBM expectations from Consortium; results strategy and ToCs; evaluation strategy; MEL platforms |
| ECoP 3rd meeting | 2015 | Items: learning from evaluations; decentralized evaluation system; monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment (*MEIA in CGIAR*) |
| MELCoP 1st meeting (back-to-back with ECoP) | 2015 | MELCoP is co-chaired by Consortium Office representative and a MELCoP member<br>Items: RBM framework for CRP II; indicators for sub-IDOs; POWB, annual reporting structure and indicator; harmonized MEL platforms |
| Guidance for CRP II full proposals | 2015 | Guidance document<br>Detail on RBM, M&E, impact assessment and reporting |
| Task Force on Indicators (TFI) – virtual and face-to-face meetings | 2016 | Leadership by MELCoP co-chairs<br>For the selection of harmonized indicators and the establishment of an associated monitoring plan |
| CGIAR governance transition | 2016 | System Council, SBM with majority of Center representation, SMO serving both SC and SMB<br>*CGIAR Framework*<br>*CGIAR Charter* |
| ECoP 4th meeting | 2016 | Items: evaluation training; evaluating Quality of Science; coordinating evaluation |
| MELCoP 2nd meeting (back-to-back with ECoP) | 2016 | Items: templates for POWB, annual reports, portfolio report; a common set of system indicators (with inputs from TFI); MEL platforms |
| CRP II: 11 CRPs and 3 Platforms approved | 2016 | Implementation begins in 2017 |
| 3rd System Council meeting | 2016 | *Towards a Performance-Based Management System at CGIAR* |
| IEA workshop: Development, Use, | Jan | Items: Learning from CRP evaluations, lessons from IPSC |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| and Assessment of ToC in CGIAR Research | 2017 | Phase II Proposal assessments, experience of CRPs developing and using ToC, ToC in the context of agricultural research for development |
| TFI-led workshop | March 2017 | Validation of harmonized indicators |
| Template development | 2017 | New template for CRP Plan of Work and Budget; template for 2016 annual and portfolio report |
| RBM framework | June 2017 | draft |
| System-level results reporting | July 2017 | Work under Senior Consultant to SMO |