

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
SCIENCE COUNCIL AND CGIAR SECRETARIAT

Monitoring and Evaluation System for the CGIAR Centers

SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

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Background

A system of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has been evolving since the inception of the CGIAR System.¹ The range of review mechanisms includes:

- CGIAR System Reviews undertaken periodically (three since 1971) to evaluate the overall performance of the CGIAR System;
- External Program and Management Reviews of Centers (EPMRs) commissioned by the Science Council (SC) and jointly organized by the SC Secretariat and the CGIAR Secretariat every five years to evaluate respective Centers' programs, governance and management;
- Center Board Commissioned External Reviews (CCERs) commissioned and managed by the Centers, as in-depth evaluations of relevance and quality of science in specific research programs or assessments of specific areas of operations and management;
- Inter-Center Thematic (Stripe) Reviews, commissioned by the SC to evaluate specific priority themes which cut across more than one Center;
- External Reviews of Systemwide and Challenge Programs commissioned by the SC;
- Project reviews commissioned and/or conducted by donors at specific intervals (typically at the end of the project) or on a periodic basis;
- Center managed reviews, i.e., internal mechanisms to ensure science and management quality control (audits, internal project evaluations, annual work-planning meetings, staff performance assessments, etc.).

The scope of analysis of each type of review or evaluation depends on the specific purpose. Some reviews are designed to be inputs into the evaluation process of others (for example CCERs become inputs into EPMRs).

The EPMRs are the CGIAR principal instrument for assessment of a Center's overall institutional performance and serve, as a minimum, five critical functions: (i) to assess relevance and quality of research; (ii) to assess governance; (iii) to provide accountability to the investors (CGIAR Members and others) and other stakeholders of the CGIAR System; (iv) to recommend research and research-related program and

¹ Review, evaluation and assessment are often used interchangeably. The term 'review' is sometimes used when emphasizing the activity itself rather than the output from the activity, for which the term 'evaluation' is frequently referred. Hence, the expression 'the CGIAR is over-reviewed, but under-evaluated'. This distinction is not always observed here, i.e., reviews and evaluations are sometimes used interchangeably in this document. A more subtle distinction is made between review/evaluation and 'assessment', with the latter denoting an analysis which takes on both an *ex post* and *ex ante* character, whereas evaluation emphasizes more the former.

management adjustments; and (v) to provide guidance for strategic and operational planning.

The EPMR model has significant merit and has served the System reasonably well. Nevertheless, the Third System Review (1998) recommended that the review processes should be streamlined. As a consequence, in 2000 the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the CGIAR, initiated the process, in cooperation with the CGIAR Secretariat, to review and revise the M&E system in the CGIAR. Extensive consultation with the CGIAR Centers and stakeholders led to the conclusion that a revision of the M&E processes is needed to: (i) harmonize the different external review types to make them synergistic and complementary to improve efficiency; and (ii) reduce the need of review of specific projects by individual investors and increase the use by all stakeholders of a common review system.

The SC and the CG Secretariat have taken the earlier work of TAC and developed a number of ideas to generate change in the M&E system of the CGIAR. Many of the ideas which follow benefited from suggestions at the initial stages of the process from a structured sample of CGIAR stakeholders, including representatives from the Center Directors Committee (CDC), Committee of Board Chairs (CBC), CGIAR Members, and partners. The objective is to identify the major pillars needed for the strengthening of M&E to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing evaluation processes, and integrate it with the emerging Performance Management (PM) system. One hoped-for outcome is that the proposed system will satisfy Members' requirements and those of other stakeholders and permit a reduction in the special project reviews and the consequent duplication of effort.

The new approach to M&E outlined here relies heavily on peer reviews, self-assessment, and on oversight by the Board of Trustees, thus fitting with the approaches followed by most research organizations around the world. It is aligned with the PM System being developed by the CGIAR and with the use of the Medium-Term Plans (MTP) of the Centers to evaluate the relevance of the Centers' research agenda.

Main Deficiencies in the Present M&E System

The weaknesses of the current M&E system include:

Length of the entire review process. It takes over two years from the time a Center begins to prepare for an EPMR to the time the CGIAR considers the review. This places undue strains on the working of a Center. In addition, quinquennial reviews may not be frequent enough for monitoring a Center's evolution over time, nor for purposes of detecting and resolving problems at an early enough stage. Furthermore, Centers have in the last decade been reviewed at 6-7 years intervals on average. It is

desirable to have a more systematic and continuous process involving self and external assessment.

Long periods for implementation of EPMRs. Even with the reduced time spent at the Center in the current EPMR process, up to four weeks of intensive effort by panel members is required to conduct the initial and main phases of the review, and significant additional time may be required for background reading and draft preparation. This long time commitment reduces the pool of world-class experts available to serve on panels, thus potentially compromising the quality of the review. Furthermore, EPMR costs can be high relative to their value to Centers and Members. In particular, opportunity costs for Center staff and management are high.

Multiple reviews by the System and by investors. While attempts have been made to improve the coordination between EPMRs, CCERs, and other Reviews, some Centers continue to have parts of their agenda reviewed for different purposes by different panels in quick succession. EPMRs were to provide independent evaluation of the Centers' research which would satisfy individual Members and make it unnecessary for them to conduct their own reviews. This objective has not been met in many cases. The portion of the Centers' program funded by special projects has increased and so too have specific reviews. As a result, concerns are expressed frequently indicating that the System is over-reviewed relative to other R&D organizations.

Reliance solely on a one-time peer review. EPMRs by their nature remain subjective assessments by individual panels, even if a uniform set of criteria is applied in each review. In addition, there may be a potential bias of EPMRs to assist the Center rather than critically assess it. EPMR reports often aim at helping the Center to improve its performance and subsequently may provide less of an assessment of Center weaknesses.

Ineffective use of CCERs. The introduction of CCERs in the 1990's was expected to lead to a reduction in the size of the EPMR panels and time spent on the main review. To date, there has been limited success. This is because of the variable quality and timing of CCERs and other self-assessment mechanisms and lack of deliberate effort to accept CCERs as valid component products for M&E.

Follow up on recommendations. The recommendations of the EPMR and the agreed action by the Centers in response to the recommendations have not been systematically monitored by the CGIAR until the next EPMR which is usually 5 years after the event. Thus the real impact of the EPMR on the overall business of the Center has not been clear. Some steps have recently been taken by the CGIAR ExCo to address this issue. ExCo has requested the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat to follow up and monitor more closely.

A Framework for Improved Monitoring and Evaluation of Centers

As part of the process of accounting to investors for resources used in the System, as well as planning for the future program of the CGIAR, there is need for *independent* assessment and evaluation of CGIAR processes, activities, outputs, impacts, and accomplishments. The key to an independent assessment is that it be transparent, objective, and unbiased in terms of selection of subject (programs and projects) and in process. Consequently, even when major proportions of the Centers' portfolios are made up of special projects reviewed directly by Members, there is a need for independent evaluation by external reviewers who do not have a vested interest in the activity being evaluated.

The framework proposed here for the CGIAR Center review and evaluation process is based on the following premises:

The Board of Trustees (BOT) is the entity responsible for each Center. The BOT's responsibility is to set policy and oversee all aspects of policy implementation by management, including the self-assessments and evaluation of outputs and impacts.

The BOT is accountable to the CGIAR. Although each is an independent legal entity, Centers within the CGIAR System are accountable to the CGIAR, which, collectively, finances their entire (or close to it) operation. Although this is not a *de jure* requirement, the CGIAR expects each Center to act, *de facto*, as if it is accountable to the CGIAR.

The CGIAR System requires independent assurance of the BOT's performance. The CGIAR System, especially CGIAR Members, require independent assurance that Center Boards have appropriate mechanisms in place and fulfill their governance and oversight functions.

The Center MTP is the basic document for planning and monitoring. Center program performance is evaluated against well-outlined MTPs that define and monitor scientific outcomes and outputs and show how these contribute to the priorities and the goals of the CGIAR system.

Based on such premises, the new M&E process will place more emphasis on continuous self-assessment by the Board and the Management of the Centers. This would include:

- Strengthened Center research planning through Board-endorsed MTPs that indicate clearly defined goals, outcomes, outputs, timelines, and targets for Center projects towards achieving the System priorities through Centers'

priorities. This will strengthen the relevance and quality of science, and facilitate project/program output monitoring against agreed priorities at Center and CGIAR level.

- MTPs will constitute the basic documents against which Center programmatic performance is evaluated. They will highlight the changes that have taken place in response to the recommendation of previous CCERs and EPMRs.
- SC review of Strategic Plans and MTPs to address the agreed priority goals of the Center and the CGIAR System priorities.
- Research performance measured on the basis of achievement of output and outcome targets and, ultimately, impact on CGIAR goals.
- Center self-assessments and reporting, including annual performance reports and internally commissioned external reviews on programs and on certain aspects of management; based on well-defined targets and indicators adopted by each Center.
- Periodic independent peer reviews of individual programs (CCERs), specific subject areas and areas of management and finances commissioned by each Center's Board. As the proposed new M&E system relies more heavily on the CCER, there is a need for stricter compliance by the Board of the Centers in the conducting of CCERs.
- Every 5 years an EPMR, commissioned by the SC and jointly organized by the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat, that audits the Center's self-assessment processes and provides a synthesis of the Center's evidence of the quality and relevance of its science, its contributions to the CGIAR goals, and the effectiveness of its governance and management. The EPMRs would have a strong focus on strategy as well as evaluate the Board governance function in all areas of policy and oversight.
- Increasing input of *ex ante* review to formulation of new research proposals including the assessment of proposed output and outcome targets.

The CGIAR-wide PM indicator system currently being developed will provide annual reports on the research outputs and outcomes, as well as a number of elements that influence research performance and institutional health. This annual mechanism would provide up-to-date data on performance (including of Board and management), supplementing and providing information for the more detailed qualitative peer evaluations provided by the EPMRs.

In shifting the focus towards CGIAR outputs, outcomes and impacts, special care needs to be taken to ensure balance between research that generates short to mid term outcomes and that is needed to ensure the flow of future outputs and impacts. A prerequisite for all monitoring and evaluation, including the annual PM being developed, is that a harmonized information system is created for easy and accurate recording of Centers' performance information.

In summary the M&E process of the Centers would evolve from the present heavy reliance on periodical external peer reviews of entire Center programs to a set of on-going coordinated activities including:

- The System develops an 'evaluation and impact' culture, one with greater flexibility for adaptation to change through a continuous M&E process.
- Well-developed MTP (Centers, CP, SWP) with appropriate outputs and targets for monitoring progress in CGIAR priority areas of research by the SC.
- Annual reporting and monitoring by the Centers on the CGIAR PM indicators of progress to targets outlined in the MTP.
- Board commissioned CCERs;
- EPMR of Board and Center performance building on Center's self-assessment processes, i.e. "audit of audits"; and strategies for future research; and
- Centers indicate in MTPs how they have responded to the recommendations of CCER and EPMR.


Table 1 and Figure 1 summarize these elements and their interdependence and time frames.

The M&E of inter-Center programs (Systemwide, Ecoregional and Challenge Programs) will be developed on the basis of a similar process as described above. These reviews will complement Center reviews for monitoring the continuum of modalities for implementing CGIAR's research agenda. The SC will continue to commission *ex post* and *ex ante* assessments of themes relevant for strategic planning at the System level. SC and CGIAR Secretariat will also provide synthesis and subsequent analysis of systemwide issues emerging from the Center evaluations, program reviews, and *ex post* and *ex ante* assessments that impact on CGIAR System performance.

Table 1 – M&E Processes According to Area of Center Activity

Area	Self Assessment process	Independent External Evaluation Processes
Governance <i>(Policy and oversight by the Board)</i>	Performance measurement CCERs	Assessed periodically through the EPMR process
Management <i>(Institutional and research)</i>	Performance measurement Audits CCERs	EPMR process
Relevance of Science <i>(Ex ante, ex post impact assessment)</i> Quality of Science <i>(Quality/quantity of scientific outputs; timely achievement of project targets)</i>	Purposeful Medium Term Plans Center coordinated <i>ex ante</i> assessments in determining new research directions CCERs of ongoing projects/ programs Recording of achievement of the MTP targets Performance measurement	MTPs assessed annually by SC for relevance and progress Monitoring of progress in achieving targets by SC EPMR

Figure 1. Framework and Timeline of the M&E System

YEAR				
0	EPMR			
1	Ongoing Board Self-Assessment	MTP Review	Annual Performance Measures	Center Board Commissioned External Reviews 
2		MTP Review	Annual Performance Measures	
3		MTP Review	Annual Performance Measures	
4		MTP Review	Annual Performance Measures	
5		MTP Review	Annual Performance Measures	

Action Plan

The transition from the current EPMR process to one based more heavily on self-assessments, will take time and require planning. It will need a sustained effort by the BOTs and involve, initially, more work by the Centers. There will need to be a coordinated effort between the Center Boards, Center Management, SC, and the CGIAR Secretariat to phase in the new system to minimize overlaps. This is likely to require development of a capacity in self-assessment.

The new M&E system would be gradually implemented to be fully effective in 2007. By then it is expected that the PM system will be fully operational based on indicators relevant to the new MTPs. Also it is expected that Centers will gradually improve the quality of CCERs which are essential for the new evaluation system. EPMRs based on internal self-assessment procedures (CCER) must also follow established guidelines. This will give the Centers clear self-assessment responsibility and benefit management, and the continuous monitoring should facilitate timely action. The SC and CGIAR Secretariat will monitor the implementation of all components of the M&E system to provide lessons to the Group after three years of full implementation.

Table 2 provides the tentative schedule for EPMRs over the next 3 years. Centers to be reviewed starting in 2007 and beyond are expected to have in place a sufficient self-assessment process (including CCERs) to allow full implementation of the new evaluation process.

Table 2 – Schedule for Initiating (9) Center EPMRs, 2005-2007

Center	2005	2006	2007
CIAT			EPMR 6
CIFOR	EPMR 2		
ICARDA		EPMR 5	
IITA			EPMR 6
ILRI		EPMR 2	
IWMI		EPMR 3	
WARDA			EPMR 5
World Agroforestry Center	EPMR 3		
WorldFish Center	EPMR 3		

The following action is proposed:

- This document (*New Monitoring and Evaluation System for the CGIAR Centers*) and the Terms of Reference for EPMRs (already approved by the CGIAR in 1997 and provided in Annex I) will be endorsed by ExCo in May 2005 and approved by CGIAR (virtually on a no-objection basis) soon thereafter.
- New *Guidelines for EPMRs* will be developed jointly by the SC and CGIAR Secretariat, and they will include, as an annex, Guidelines for CCERs developed in consultation with the CDC and CBC. The Guidelines will be sent to ExCo for information by mid 2005.
- All Center Boards are encouraged to develop their plans for CCERs and share them with the SC and the CGIAR Secretariat by end of 2005, particularly with the view of facilitating new EPMRs. The plans should cover both governance and management and programs, including CPs and SWPs.

ANNEX 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXTERNAL PROGRAM AND MANAGEMENT REVIEWS (EPMRs) OF CGIAR CENTERS

[This document has been approved by the CGIAR in 1997]

1. Objectives and Scope

EPMRs seek to inform CGIAR Members that their investment is sound, or recommend measures to make it so. Members of the CGIAR and other stakeholders can be informed whether the Center is doing its work effectively and efficiently. EPMRs are both retrospective and prospective; and help ensure the Centers' excellence, relevance and continued viability, and the CGIAR System's coherence. Each review is expected to be strategic in orientation and as comprehensive as the situation warrants.

The broad objectives of EPMRs are to: a) provide CGIAR Members with an independent and rigorous assessment of the institutional health and contribution of a Center they are supporting; and b) to provide the Center and its collaborators with assessment information that complements or validates their own evaluation efforts, including the CCERs.

The EPMR panel is specifically charged to assess the following:

- a) The Center's mission, strategy and priorities in the context of the CGIAR's priorities and strategies;
- b) The quality and relevance of the science undertaken, including the effectiveness and potential impact of the Center's completed and ongoing research;
- c) The effectiveness and efficiency of management, including the mechanisms and processes for ensuring quality; and
- d) The accomplishments and impact of the Center's research and related activities.

2. Topics to be Covered

A. Mission, Strategy and Priorities

- The continuing appropriateness of the Center's mission in light of important changes in the Center and its external environment since the previous external review.
- The policies, strategies, and priorities of the Center, their coherence with the CGIAR's goals (of poverty alleviation, natural resources management, and sustainable food security), and relevance to beneficiaries, especially rural women.
- The appropriateness of the roles of relevant partners in the formulation and implementation of the Center's strategy and priorities, considering alternative sources of supply and the benefits of partnerships with others.

B. Quality and Relevance

- The quality and relevance of the science practiced at the Center.
- The effectiveness of the Center's processes for planning, priority setting, quality management (e.g., CCERs, peer reviews and other quality and relevance assurance mechanisms), and impact assessment.

C. Effectiveness and Efficiency of Management

- The performance of the Center's Board in governing the Center, the effectiveness of leadership throughout the Center, and the suitability of the organization's culture to its mission.
- The adequacy of the Center's organizational structure and the mechanisms in place to manage, coordinate and ensure the excellence of the research programs and related activities.
- The adequacy of resources (financial, human, physical and information) available and the effectiveness and efficiency of their management.
- The effectiveness of the Center's relationships with relevant research partners and other stakeholders of the CGIAR System.

D. Accomplishments and Impact

- Recent achievements of the Center in research and other areas.
- The effectiveness of the Center's programs in terms of their impact and contribution to the achievement of the mission and goals of the CGIAR.