An e-Forum on the CGIAR's Revised Strategy and Results Framework (SRF)
Summarized Comments on Six Discussion Topics

Topic 1: Strategic Choices

Day One (March 16, 2011)

- The CGIAR has various means of making decisions about research priorities, and the CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) will include other such mechanisms. But once these programs are set in motion, cautions the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, changing course will not be easy.

Day Two (March 17, 2011)

- The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) supports the strategic objectives of the CGIAR as set out in the SRF but would like to see more clarity about the role of the CGIAR in relation to national research systems and specifically in its support of institutional development. This is important for enabling partners to engage effectively with a reformed CGIAR.
- The document appropriately recognizes the need to prioritize South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the poor are concentrated, but it needs more specificity about how the strategy will address the needs of smallholder farmers, pastoralists and others.
- Other issues raised at the first Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD) could be emphasized more, such as blending traditional knowledge with modern science and involving producer organizations in monitoring and evaluation.
- USAID suggests that it would be helpful if the Consortium would provide a document laying out how the new SRF responds to comments made at the 2010 Funders Forum.

Topic 2: Consistency between SRF and CRPs

Day One (March 16, 2011)

- The revised SRF is necessarily silent about the research outputs of the CRPs, but its general statements about outputs align well with the System Level Outcomes (SLOs). Less clear are the connections between individual CRPs and SLOs, which could give rise to overlap and confusion, according to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Particularly with respect to agricultural systems, the CGIAR should be cautious about making a large commitment to research in an area where success has so far proved elusive.
- Continuing revision of CRPs before their approval by the Fund Council is important for ensuring greater consistency between these programs and the SRF.
- Measurable outputs and their links to the SLOs should be fleshed out more fully in each CRP and in the monitoring system to be put in place.

Day Two (March 17, 2011)

- The System Level Objectives are well defined, and GFAR particularly welcomes the addition of one on human nutrition and health. To meet these objectives requires that the CGIAR work

closely with national governments as well as GFAR and its regional fora while also reaching out to affiliated international agricultural research centers.
- From a civil society perspective, the SLOs reflect the right priorities. But rather than focus so much on the major commodities of interest to agribusiness, research for development should concentrate more on enabling smallholders to establish successful, locally adapted agricultural systems that better satisfy the needs of their communities through the integration of cereals, legumes, fruits, vegetables and so forth.

Topic 3: Impact Pathways

Day One (March 16, 2011)

- The approaches for achieving impact are clearly outlined in general terms, but one or two detailed examples would help, suggests the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Day Two (March 17, 2011)

- GFAR suggests that the SRF state more clearly how the international community will allocate resources to national partners involved in international research. This is especially important for integrating national organizations more fully into research on natural resource management and on climate change prediction, adaptation and mitigation.
- From a civil society perspective, the SRF must express more commitment to inclusive and equitable partnerships, as emphasized at the first GCARD. The idea was for partners to jointly set research agendas, share resources, create new knowledge and scale up results. The mechanisms for this need to be stated clearly. The CGIAR must open up the CRPs more to involve community-based organizations.

Topic 4: Gender and Capacity Strengthening

Day One (March 16, 2011)

- While acknowledging the importance of women and children in development, the document does not describe explicitly how gender concerns will be addressed but rather leaves this to the CRPs, notes the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- It will be hard to assess the SRF's statements on this issue until the Consortium's scoping study on gender is available.
- The proposal to create an ad hoc network on capacity strengthening – involving CGIAR Centers and other organizations – is welcome.

Day Two (March 17, 2011)

- The revised SRF deals better with gender concerns than the previous version, particularly in its proposal to work with GFAR in addressing these concerns beyond CGIAR research. But by limiting the scope of its capacity strengthening to a support function for the CRPs, the SRF may be missing an important opportunity for enhancing research impact.
- There needs to be a clear plan, suggests USAID, for gender inclusion in the CRPs over the next 6 months and resources for developing a cross-cutting facility on gender in the Consortium Office.

Topic 5: Framework for Addressing Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs)

Day One (March 16, 2011)

- Though there is no common framework for addressing IPRs in the CGIAR, the SRF asserts that the principles for this are being established but does not describe the process, notes the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Greater clarity about IPRs is critical for enabling the public and private sectors to work side-by-side to develop new crop varieties that meet the food security challenge. In the event of a food crisis, however, people's right to food must take precedence over IPRs, suggests France's Ministry of Higher Education and Research.
- It will be hard to assess the SRF's treatment of this issue before the document setting out CGIAR-wide principles on IPRs is available.

Day Two (March 17, 2011)

- The lack of a consistent IPR policy across the CGIAR Consortium raises concerns about adequate protection of the genetic resources held in trust by Centers as public goods and about sharing of benefits from their commercial development, according to GFAR.
- A serious effort is under way to develop an IPR policy for the CGIAR, notes USAID.

Topic 6: Overall Comments

Day One (March 16, 2011)

The European Commission (EC) and the CGIAR's Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC) provided quite detailed overall comments, which are summarized below, followed by comments from other participants.

ISPC:

- While recognizing the urgency of finalizing this key document, the ISPC concludes that there is a basic inconsistency between the strategic and operational components of the SRF – a view that reflects fundamental disagreements about what constitutes a good Strategy and Results Framework.
- The SRF contains many good elements (particularly on the CGIAR's overall objectives and its new institutional context) but lacks several critical components in the view of the ISPC, including:
  - An explicit and quantitative description of where the CGIAR is heading from its current position in terms of objectives and expenditures, with well-identified milestones.
  - A clear indication of the CGIAR's comparative advantages in relation to partners (How far can it go, for example, to embrace development activities?)
  - An approximation of the resources (financial, human and physical) that the CGIAR will need to reach its objectives.
- The ISPC offers suggestions for correcting what it refers to as misalignments between the SRF and CRPs. It would be helpful to identify these and to indicate which of the CRPs show a good fit and which do not, so that adjustments can be made as soon as possible.

- The potential overlap between SLOs (which the ISPC suggests be referred to as impacts rather than outcomes) requires closer scrutiny to provide a better basis for establishing priorities among these. Priority setting methods presented in the previous SRF are absent from this version, creating a gap in understanding between research outcomes and the SLOs. Given that the SLOs are quite broad, it is necessary to identify the priority issues that will serve as a basis for defining more specific outcomes and formulating a research agenda.
- The SRF's discussion of human nutrition, for example, could include geographical analysis to indicate how research can best be targeted. The document also acknowledges the need to further prioritize research on natural resource management but doesn't suggest how this can be done.
- By not addressing these questions, the SRF leaves critical decisions about priorities to individual Centers and CRPs. This, in turn, creates the risk that all CRPs will be treated as equal, offering little clarity about priorities for program development and donor investment. The result would be a broad and diffuse research agenda rather than the more focused and streamlined CGIAR that reforms were supposed to produce.
- Well-defined quantitative measures of food security and poverty, which the previous draft of the SRF included, are missing from the revised version. These are essential for enabling the CRPs to assess progress toward strategic objectives. They should not be left to the CRPs to determine for their own monitoring and evaluation but rather should be defined in the SRF for application across the entire CGIAR research portfolio.

EC:

- While not perfect, the revised SRF is satisfactory for approval at the upcoming Funders Forum. It provides a clear framework for CGIAR Centers and partners to deliver outputs through CRPs that contribute to four System Level Outcomes.
- Rather than define CRPs according to a global analysis of development challenges, the SRF incorporates those programs already defined (through a process of negotiation between the Consortium and Centers) into its framework, which should provide guidance for the development of future programs.
- Given the clear tension between commodity- and production systems-based approaches, it is preferable, as the SRF suggests, to place more emphasis on the latter.
- The strategy for improving food security is unclear, and its emphasis on "breadbasket" areas is unconvincing. More thought must be given to the trade-off between providing cheaper food for consumers from the breadbasket areas versus reducing rural poverty through productivity increases in other environments.
- In describing areas of science in which the CGIAR needs stronger capacity, the SRF should state explicitly that new partnerships are a key means of acquiring such capacity.
- While listing criteria for establishing relative priorities between CRPs and their components, the SRF does not indicate how these criteria will be used to make decisions.
- The SRF's justification for increased funding to the CGIAR requires elaboration. Donors need stronger evidence on which to base choices between supporting strong national institutions, for example, and the CGIAR.
- The CGIAR clearly needs a stronger capacity for foresight but runs the risk of duplicating efforts unless it clarifies the roles of the Consortium, ISPC and Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).

Other comments:

- The SRF should give more emphasis to agricultural biodiversity and to the need for increased rice production in sub-Saharan Africa.
- While addressing some concerns raised at the last Funders Forum, the revised SRF does not achieve significantly greater clarity, according to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a shortcoming that is aggravated by the way the document is written. It describes reasonably well what the CGIAR will do but not what it will leave to others.
- The SRF should concentrate its remarks about partnerships into a single chapter and clarify the role of the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development, particularly distinguishing its "foresight" role from that of the ISPC.

Day Two (March 17, 2011)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), GFAR, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Irish Aid and US Agency for International Development (USAID) provided extensive overall comments, which are summarized below.

ADB:

- It is urgent to reach agreement on the SRF even if it is still considered a work in progress. The current draft provides an adequate basis for CGIAR reforms and for its role in providing international public goods, containing all the necessary elements of a results-based approach. It would be helpful, however, to have a shorter version that explains these elements clearly.
- ADB provided a long list of specific comments, some concerning internal inconsistencies within the revised SRF and between this version and the previous one: e.g., between the previous strategic objectives ("Food for People," etc.) and the current SLOs.
- ADB also calls for more clarity about the time frame of the CRPs in relation to that of the MDGs and about the future status of the CGIAR Challenge Programs. It further urges that, given the fast pace of changes impacting the global food system, the SRF should be flexible and dynamic rather than just focus on its long-term objectives. In addition, it encourages a strong communications strategy and novel partnerships with agribusiness and civil society.

SDC:

- SDC welcomes the revised SRF, commenting that it is on the "right path" toward providing the CGIAR with a strategic framework.
- In the spirit of facilitating further improvement, it offers a number of specific comments, noting, for example, that the SRF explains what the CGIAR will do but not what it will refrain from doing. Further, it is still not entirely clear how the CRPs will implement the strategy and whether the SRF will adequately serve the Consortium as a basis for setting priorities within and between CRPs.
- Other specific comments call for further explanation of new approaches to partnership, the handling of IPRs and the time frames of CRPs, among others.

GFAR:

- A main agenda item for GCARD 2012 will be to assess progress with the SRF in relation to commitments made at GCARD 2010 and in the GCARD Road Map.

FAO:

- The revised document, while providing a good blueprint for the design of a strategy and results framework, still does not address adequately the recommendations of the 2010 Funders Forum. As a result, it lacks instruments that the Consortium Board will need to guide the CGIAR toward greater coherence, efficiency and effectiveness.
- While establishing a sound context for CGIAR research, the SRF does not explain adequately the linkages between the CRPs and SLOs.
- Nor does it state clearly at what level CGIAR researchers will be accountable for impacts; the general indicators discussed pertain to impacts that cannot be easily attributed to the CGIAR.
- The SRF's scenarios for reaching SLOs are strategic but don't clearly link SLOs with resource allocations. It is also not clear how relative priorities between CRPs will be established or how partnerships will be leveraged for development.
- FAO conditions its approval of the current SRF on the resubmission within 1 year of another revised version that addresses the comments above.

Irish Aid:

- Irish Aid recognizes the important progress made in the revised SRF and believes it should be approved at the upcoming Fund Council Meeting to allow the reform process to advance.
- It also strongly welcomes the identification of four pro-poor SLOs, particularly the prominence given to human nutrition and health, as well as the SRF's emphasis on linking research results to these outcomes.
- Irish Aid considers, however, that the current document is too long and detailed. It would welcome a shorter working document that is clearer and more succinct in laying out the four SLOs, the six core competencies, the cross-cutting themes, the partnerships required to make research more efficient and to achieve development impact that benefits smallholder farmers, and the transitional steps needed to get the reformed CGIAR up and running.
- Irish Aid suggests that a dedicated team remain focused on revising the SRF as the CRPs are rolled out. Only then will it be possible to clarify questions such as the interaction between CRPs and their exact correspondence to the SRF.
- While acknowledging the huge effort that has gone into the CRPs, Irish Aid urges that no program be approved that does not fit clearly with the SLOs or that duplicates the work of other CRPs.

USAID:

- USAID appreciates the call for new competencies to be developed in the CGIAR along with new cross-cutting support functions concerning gender, capacity strengthening and data as an international public good.
- More careful definitions of the SLOs are required, which must then be used by all CRPs as a basis for determining indicators to measure progress toward these outcomes.
- The language of the revised SRF (e.g., SLOs, outputs, etc.) should be aligned with the strategic objectives and related statements already agreed to in legal documents to ensure that funds can flow smoothly once the SRF has final approval.