

**Australia Comments on A Strategy and Results Framework for the CGIAR:  
For submission to the CGIAR Funders Forum. February 20, 2011**

*Overview*

Contrary to claims in the Foreword, the SRF does not present either a framework to track measurable development targets, or guidance for Consortium Board (CB) decision making on priorities within and among CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs). The March 2010 draft should be revisited in this context, as it was well on the way to providing these essential ingredients for a SRF.

There is some confusion and contradictions about research and development outcomes and impacts, which need to be clarified along with a change in nomenclature more consistent with accepted norms. This will also help in clarifying roles and responsibilities in generating development outcomes and impacts. The suggested shift in this draft to demonstration of the potential for new technology, policy and institutional options at pilot benchmark experimental sites, *in lieu* of measurable development outcomes and impacts at scale as the appropriate evaluation approach for the CGIAR, would seem questionable. These are complements, not substitutes, with the former a part of monitoring and the latter part of evaluation. In this context performance contracts should also include at a minimum research and development outcomes and not just research outputs, as proposed in this draft. It is difficult to envisage how the CGIAR is to effectively change to management by results when results apparently only include research outputs and not research for development outcomes and impacts.

The proposed re-emphasis on production systems research in the CG is apparently to service the move towards more emphasis on benchmark pilot sites to integrate CRPs and centres and to demonstrate the potential of new technology, policy and institutional options that will lead to SLOs. It is not clear whether this approach will deliver the international public goods required to achieve the SLOs at scale, or that it is a desirable alternative to the traditional approach to *ex post* impact assessment as the draft proposes.

Chapter 3 is a good articulation of the options for achieving the four System Level Outcomes (SLOs) but it lacks definition. Here again the March 2010 draft should be revisited as it had begun to specify target domains for the then eight mega programs, how each met the SLOs and the expected impacts on them, often in empirical and verifiable terms. It is not clear what the CB means by the CRPs going back over their plans with a renewed SLO orientation, if it's not what was being developed in the March 2010 version.

The document makes it clear that centres can conduct research outside of the CRPs, as long as a “major proportion” of the agenda is integrated into the CRPs. While this is perhaps appropriate in a transition phase because of existing contracts, it is not a desirable feature in the longer term if mission creep is to be avoided. The Foreword noted some misalignment between this version of the SRF and the emerging portfolio of CRPs. It would be useful to have more detail about how the current CRPs fare after applying the “principles and criteria set forth in the SRF”. Which ones are a good fit and which ones are not, and why? Such guidance could assist in the ongoing rationalisation of current programs and projects. We should not have to wait another six years for the second suite of CRPs.

*Specific Comments (in no particular priority order)*

P.14: Performance contracts between centres and the CB for each CRP include only milestones and outputs. Outcomes are excluded. This has been a contentious issue all through the SRF process. It is difficult to envisage how the CGIAR is to effectively change to management by results when results apparently only include research outputs and not research for development outcomes and impacts.

P.18: It is pleasing to see there is explicit recognition that urbanization and growing urban poverty is an issue and that the CGIAR poverty purview will not be restricted to rural poverty, although this needs to be made clearer as there are few other references to urban poverty in the document.

P.32/ paragraphs 50, 51: There is to be a new emphasis on strengthening weak national partners and on mutual learning and knowledge management that promotes change.

PP. 33-34: The strategic core functions of the CGIAR have a new emphasis on synthesis of knowledge to solve development problems, filling gaps, catalysing others and mobilising funding for them. This seems to suggest that the CGIAR will become primarily a research cum development network facilitator/mobilizer/catalyst rather than an entity that emphasizes “high-quality international agricultural research, partnership and leadership” as approved in the new Vision statement. This would appear to represent a major change in emphasis in the current SRF draft from previous ones and deserves a thorough discussion at the Funders Forum meeting. The staffing profiles required for a network role would be quite different to that of a high-quality international agricultural research organization.

P.35/para 58: There are welcome statements about integration of centre efforts within the CRP framework throughout the document but with little detail about how this will be achieved. For example here it is said that there will be “...a tighter alignment of activities across centres around these development outcomes...”.

P.37 Table 2.1: This suggests that the CGIAR and its partners have no role in ensuring or engineering development impacts whereas on p.35/para 59 it is stated that managing for results includes impact indicators. Additionally, the four System Level Outcomes (SLOs) on p.12 do not coincide with the six SLOs listed in Table 2.1. This is indicative of the confusion

in this draft about what are outputs, outcomes and impacts and who is accountable and/or responsible for them. I regard the four SLOs on p.12 as development impacts rather than system level outcomes and suggest the terminology throughout the document be changed to reflect this. The CGIAR has for some time accepted this and the following array of definitions related to it, as well as earlier SRF drafts (see for example P.15 of the March 2010 draft of the SRF). The following terminology is suggested:

*Research outputs (e.g. new varieties) → Research outcomes (e.g. varietal release and extension of same) → Development outcomes (e.g. adoption and resultant productivity gains at scale) → Development impacts (e.g. improved food security, incomes and nutrition of poor at scale).*

This would facilitate understanding, allow better clarification of roles and responsibilities of the CGIAR and its R4D partners and simplify the delineation of results indicators.

P.39/paras 66, 67: It would be helpful to have an elaboration of differential R4D strategies in the three types of agriculture. The smallholder emphasis in agrarian economies and integration of lagging rural areas in transitional economies seem appropriate. However limiting the CGIAR to work on safety nets in urbanizing economies would seem to minimize the powerful influence (past and future) of research on resulting food staple productivity gains (and farm cost reductions) thus placing downward pressure on food prices and hence especially on the growing numbers of urban poor and rural landless.

P.47/para 91: A major shift in strategy is implied here that requires clarification and discussion. It seems there is to be a change from *ex post* assessment of the impact of technologies the CGIAR has been jointly involved in developing on the incomes of the poor, to understanding the complex of factors required to reduce significantly rural poverty rates on some level. The latter phrase implies using research on understanding pathways out of poverty via panel surveys and outcomes at benchmark pilot sites instead of *ex post* impact assessment as a part of M & E. Rather than being considered as alternatives, it would seem such approaches are complementary. Measuring and documenting development impacts of CGIAR joint research at scale should remain an important component of a results-oriented system. The CGIAR cannot avoid this and indeed it is one of the primary functions of the revamped ISPC.

Chapter 3: The strategic options to achieve the four SLOs elaborated here are well crafted. Each of the four has sections on problem definition, target areas, strategic approach, institutional arrangement, impact targets and measures. All are appropriate in an SRF document but more definition is required in the form of an operational strategy. The suggestions as to how commodity research might be grouped to achieve research efficiency gains, organising social science research around the SLOs and integration of NRM research are good starts, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Additionally, it is not clear precisely how the centres will revisit the already crafted CRPs to better reflect an SLO orientation. Indeed the March 2010 SRF draft had begun to specify target domains for the then eight mega programs, how each met the SLOs and the expected impacts on them, often

in empirical and verifiable terms. Indeed in Table A.3 from p.99 of the current draft it appears many of the CRPs have already included much the same information as was in the March 2010 draft SRF. Hence it is not clear what more will be achieved by revisiting the CRPs in the context of the SLO orientation.

P.55: The draft sees a need to better integrate CGIAR natural resource management (NRM) research and that on climate change (CC). In doing so it recognises that the issue of balance among scales arises (e.g. production system versus landscape) as well as the complexities in conducting impact assessment of NRM/CC research.

P.64-65: Three new core competencies are proposed to be developed. The one on production systems research deserves further justification and deliberation. The draft suggests this competency has eroded in the CGIAR. However it fails to appreciate that one of the primary reasons was such research was seen to be very location-specific and hence without overriding international public good attributes which would justify CGIAR involvement. It was not seen as an area of CGIAR comparative advantage vis-à-vis the NARS. The proposed re-emphasis on production systems research in the CG is apparently to service the move towards more emphasis on benchmark pilot sites to integrate CRPs and centres and to demonstrate the potential of new technology, policy and institutional options that will lead to SLOs. It is not clear whether this approach will deliver the international public goods required to achieve the SLOs at scale, or that it is a desirable alternative to the traditional approach to *ex post* impact assessment as the draft proposes.

P.67: Gender considerations are now to be embedded in each CRP rather than as a platform, which seems a desirable change.

P.68: Similarly there is a good rationale provided for embedding capacity strengthening, learning and knowledge sharing within the CRPs and to have them integral to building partnerships. The network on capacity strengthening seems a useful device also and all of this preferable to the previous proposal to have these as a platform.

PP68-69: The increased recognition and emphasis on research methods and comparable data as IPGs with standards and open availability is attractive, as is the proposal for the Consortium Board to have responsibility for ensuring these.

P.71/155: “Spatial alignment” will be used to integrate CRP research in particular sites/regions to ensure SLOs are achieved. While this may have some attractions from the point of view of research coherence, coordination and efficiency, for the reasons outlined above related to p.64, it is doubtful if this will have the impacts expected.

P.71/157: The draft raises doubts about the ability to assess priorities across the portfolio. It also incorrectly says the CG has not assessed priorities in the past across commodities and NRM. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the CG in the 80s and 90s did attempt this, with inputs from Ryan and Davis of ACIAR, admittedly with mixed success. The task is a heroic one, but the Consortium cannot avoid addressing this. In this respect it is notable that the current SRF draft virtually ignored the earlier March 2010 draft’s attempt to assess

priorities using an analytical hierarchy framework, and while it required further articulation and development, it did offer a mechanism to link priorities with indicative resource allocations, which this draft offers no guidance on. This is a major deficiency.

P.76/170: There is a reiteration that performance contracts will only include milestones and outputs and not outcomes. At a minimum research outcomes as described above re Table 2.1 on p. 37 should be a part of the performance contracts and over time development outcomes should be included also. Assessing development impacts *ex post*, as approved in the reforms, should be the purview of ISPC.

P.76/172: Lead centres are to have fiduciary responsibilities. What will be the role of the Consortium in this respect? Does this free the Consortium of ultimate fiduciary accountability or is centre fiduciary responsibility a part of it?

P.78/174: The six criteria for choosing priorities among CRPs are of a qualitative nature and are really necessary conditions before a CRP should be approved. The criteria are not of themselves able to discriminate among CRPs in terms of a priority ranking. As indicated above regarding p.71, the Consortium needs to deliberate more on how it proposes to set priorities and resource allocations. There has been little mention of *ex ante* impact assessment in this draft and its potential role in this respect.

P.80/179: It is suggested a core contribution to centres from window 1 will be made each year for capital. Will this be based on new capital expenditure requests or on accumulated depreciation accounting figures? How will such capital expenditures be treated in computing full cost recovery overheads for windows 2 and 3? There are risks of double dipping/accounting unless this is clarified.

P.80/180: Here it is made clear that centres can undertake non-CRP work. Later on p.90/para 218e it is reinforced by the statement that a “major proportion” of the CG research agenda must be integrated into CRPs.

P.88: Centres are to now adjust already developed CRPs to the SRF by revisiting the SLOs and working backwards along impact pathways. It is not clear what the value-added will be in this as mentioned earlier, in view of the fact that the March 2010 SRF was well on the way to doing just this (see Table 2.6 on pp.31-32). Additionally, if centres are no longer to be evaluated on their actual contributions to development impacts at scale (currently called SLOs), how will donors be assured that they made a difference beyond the proposed pilot benchmark sites?

P.90/para 221: This is not the case. TAC and the Science Council (SC) had strategic capacity and responsibility to undertake priority and strategy exercises and did so. The move to the ISPC and changes to its roles and responsibilities compared to TAC and the SC risks erosion of capacity in the system unless effectively addressed elsewhere.

P.97: It would be useful to have examples of “outcome-led research” and “more effective partnerships”, compared to current approaches in the CG to be able to assess what is missing. It should be noted that for at least the past six years the system emphasized outcome

orientation in the new performance measurement system (PMS) and in the logframes of the Medium Term Plans, so this aspect is not new.

P.99 Table A.3: This table has used the March 2010 SRF draft to flesh out prospective development impacts. If further elaboration of these is what the drafters mean by “outcome-led research” then there is no disagreement. However the table does still mix outcomes (e.g. increased productivity) and impacts (e.g. numbers of poor reduced by 15%) and this highlights the earlier comment that there is a need for a rationalisation of nomenclature. In contrast to the apparent move to use pilot sites to demonstrate potential outcomes and impacts, Table A.3 uses impact indicators at scale so there is a need for clarity and consistency here. If, as is desirable, the realised *ex post* outcomes and impacts are to be of a scale rather than of a pilot nature full of promise, then issues raised in comments on earlier drafts remain related to the need to identify verifiable indicators, baselines, counterfactuals and address attribution concerns.