

Consortium Management Response to the External Review of PIM

The Policies, Institutions and Markets CRP was approved in December 2011 and the PIM evaluation started in February 2014 and was finalized in April 2015. The review emphasizes that the evaluation is considered formative in the sense that it covered the first three years of a new program, but that it also has evaluated the legacy work on which PIM is based, primarily from IFPRI, but also the pre-existing inter-center collaborative work that preceded PIM such as the CAPRI program or the gender research work.

The overall conclusion of the evaluation team was that:

“PIM has added sufficient value to the CGIAR’s research on policies, institutions, and markets to warrant the continuation of a CRP like PIM in the second round of CRPs, starting in 2017. Engaging most of the social scientists across the CGIAR System has created an intellectual critical mass to pursue cutting-edge science.

Inter-Center collaboration is

- (a) strengthening the impact pathways of PIM research by engaging Centers that are closer to the users of the research;*
- (b) facilitating a more integrated approach to development challenges through a combination of discovery and delivery-type research;*
- (c) deepening country-level partnerships that have greater potential for more immediate development outcomes;*
- (d) enabling researchers in the commodity-based Centers to work on important socio-economic issues that are broader than the commodities covered by their Centers; and*
- (e) helping to raise the scientific quality of social science and policy research in the participating Centers.*

The evaluation also concludes that IFPRI should continue to host the PIM Management Unit. IFPRI is the only CGIAR Center that has a principal focus on social science research, the largest concentration of social scientists in the System, and the strongest research infrastructure and quality assurance systems to support high quality social science research. Many of the benefits of PIM arise from connecting the social scientists in the participating Centers to IFPRI through PIM.

However, all is not well with respect to the governance and management of PIM. In what follows, the evaluation draws conclusions and makes recommendations in a number of areas to improve PIM’s operations to become a more effective program.

Hereafter this note highlights some of the key conclusions of the review that relate particularly to the CGIAR as a whole, or to the management of the CRP that affects the Consortium's oversight role.

The CGIAR has a strong comparative advantage in conducting social science research at the intersection of food security, poverty, and sustainable agriculture. There are, for example, few organizations or institutions that have a similar combination, range, and quality of modeling systems at their disposal as IFPRI, and therefore PIM."

The evaluation reviews at length how the short term (annual allocation) of the W1-2 funding, and the lack of stability in these allocations (as well as the much lower level than foreseen in the proposals against which the CRPs were approved resulted in the following situation):

PIM has allocated its W1-2 funds, for the large part, to support new or expanded components of larger projects already being supported by W3 or bilateral funding. Principal investigators have come to view W1-2 funds as largely short-term and flexible and bilateral funds as more long-term and reliable, due to the uncertainties associated with the amount of W1-2 funding available and the annual allocation of these funds. They now tend to regard bilateral funds as forming the foundation of their research programs, and the W1-2 funds as supporting research which builds on this foundation.

The evaluation discusses the governance and management structures of PIM at some length, with an overall conclusion that the governance and management does not sufficiently involve the other CG Centers, or external partners, nor is there a steering committee that provides oversight – resulting in the risk of conflict of interest between the lead center and the other stakeholders:

PIM does not have a CRP governing body that exercises strategic direction and oversight of the program. It does have a Science and Policy Advisory Committee that has exercised some strategic direction in an advisory capacity, but little or no oversight.

On the quality of science the evaluation team concludes that:

The quality of science in PIM is highly variable. The program is doing well on the relevance of scientific topics and quality assurance mechanisms. It is doing less well in relation to minimum standards of scientific productivity and impact.

On gender research the evaluation team acknowledges the pioneering role of IFPRI scientists in this area, and the high degree to which gender-related activities are prioritized (roughly 30% of the overall budget) and the high degree of gendered data collection (an estimated 50% of all datasets), but it concludes that:

... an effective system to monitor the progress of PIM's own activities with respect to gender is still a work in progress, and the Consortium has not yet provided sufficient guidance on methodologies to capture the level of attention given to gender issues.

So while the overall conclusion of the evaluation is that PIM's work is relevant and of high quality, it makes a number of recommendations, many of which are highly relevant to the development of a PIM proposal for the CRP 2nd Call.

Of the 15 recommendations made by the evaluation team:

- 4 are governance recommendations directed to the IFPRI Board of Trustees, the Fund Council and the Consortium;
- 6 are strategic recommendations directed to the (proposed) PIM Independent Steering Committee; and
- 5 more are operational recommendations directed to PIM management.

Of the four governance recommendations, the first two recommend continuation of PIM into the CRP second stage, led by IFPRI. As part of the second recommendation, the evaluation team recommends that the IFPRI Board of Trustees should put in place a conflict of interest policy. IFPRI's management response is that it partially accepts this recommendation as it proposes that the Consortium ought to develop a system-wide conflict of interest policy which PIM would then adopt. The Consortium agrees. With the proposal made by IFPRI.

The third recommendation is that:

- *PIM should put in place an Independent Steering Committee in accordance with the recent (January 2015) agreement between the Fund Council and the Consortium regarding CRP governance structures for the next generation of CRPs. PIM should consider having representatives of the participating Centers as well as independent members on the Steering Committee that would have greater than their numerical say in the allocation of W1-2 resources. The IFPRI Board of Trustees should delegate programmatic responsibility to the Steering Committee while retaining the fiduciary responsibility for ensuring that the W1-2 funds are used for their intended purposes.*

The Consortium fully agrees with this recommendation. The Lead Center management response is that it partially agrees with this recommendation; it notes:

The evaluators recommend changes in governance, and these recommendations are welcome. Changes in governance may be warranted, and should be consistent across CRPs. The IEA should provide an overview of recommendations on governance from the different evaluations. If the IEA agrees that each CRP should have its research program managed by a Steering Committee, that committee would need to be advisory to the Lead Center's Board.

The wording of the recommendation with regard to the role of participating Centers in allocation of W1-2 resources is unclear. Management argues that participating Centers have conflict of interest in allocation of W1-2 resources. Hence Center representatives on the steering committee should be a minority, and should be recused from budget processes.

The Consortium refers to the IEA evaluation of CRP Governance and management, which led to a new model for the CRPs in the second phase, agreed between centers, Consortium and Fund Council, and summarized in the Guidance for CRP 2nd Call Pre-proposals. The new ISC, which does indeed report to the Lead center Board of Trustees, but with significant delegated authority; and it does have a majority of independent members and an independent Chair. It has representatives of both the Lead Center and Participating centers on the committee, in line with the recommendation of this review. The PIM management response does indicate that PIM will adhere to the new system wide policy on CRP governance structures.

The final governance recommendation, directed at the Fund Council and the Consortium, is that:

- *the Fund Council and the Consortium should jointly commission a study on the problems that the Centers are facing in sustaining their research infrastructures and other research support under the CGIAR Reform.*

The Consortium agrees with the context described by the evaluation in which the uncertainty in financing, particularly the fluctuating annual allocation of W1-2 levels, as well as the approval of initial contracts with budgets that were much higher than the resources that were realistically available, led to problems faced by the Centers in sustaining their research infrastructures. The Consortium considers, however, that these issues were adequately brought to light by the Mid Term Review of the Reform, and are being addressed by the subsequent governance reform now being implemented, as well as the effort to develop a Resource Mobilization Strategy for the CRP second round with the explicit objective to provide stable multi-year financing. The Consortium sees no additional value, therefore, in commissioning the recommended study at the current time and under the current circumstances.

The Evaluation team makes a number of highly relevant proposals related to PIM's strategy and operations, for example recommending a greater focus on the interface between research and policy; implementation of a more programmatic oversight as opposed to the current financial management; and a more strategic approach to collaborating with other CRPs. PIM, in its management response, fully accepts all these recommendations and the Consortium endorses these recommendations as well, and looks forward to seeing these adopted in the PIM Pre-proposal for the CRP 2nd Call.