Photo credit: Keith Lobo, ILRI.

CGIAR Science Groups Evaluations: Africa Brief

Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service

CGIAR, the world's largest agricultural innovation network, operates as a global partnership that provides evidence for policymakers, innovations for partners, and tools to harness agriculture's economic, environmental, and nutritional benefits. This brief presents Africa-related insights, lessons, and recommendations from three evaluations of CGIAR Science Groups (SGs), aligned with the evaluation Terms of Reference. The findings are intended to guide the implementation of CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy and provide learning to CGIAR stakeholders.

Africa at a Glance: CGIAR

CGIAR delivers its portfolio in collaboration with partners across six global regions. The African region is divided into three geographic areas:

- Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA) region, the most water-stressed in the world which faces severe climatic risks to water availability.
- West and Central Africa (WCA) region with ecological zones, from the dry Guinea and Sudan savannas in the north to the rainy southern humid forests.
- East and Southern Africa (ESA) region encompasses 19 countries from South Africa to Ethiopia.

Four CGIAR centers have HQs in Africa**:**

1. Africa Rice Center (West Africa Rice Development Association, WARDA), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
2. International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, Nigeria
3. International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Co-hosted by Kenya and Ethiopia
4. World Agroforestry (International Centre for Research in Agroforestry, ICRAF), Nairobi, Kenya.

3 of the 5 directors of CGIAR Impact Area Platforms are based in Kenya (Climate Change, Environment, Gender)

Evidence Behind the Africa Brief Included:

- Synthesis of evidence from three SG evaluation reports
- 80+ interviews in Africa/with Africa-based respondents
- 131 respondents to the SG online surveys
- Portfolio analysis of performance monitoring data
- Evidence from five (of 11) case studies and deep dives:
    - Strengthening Resilience to Climate Change; Strengthening policies and institutions for food, land, and water transformation (ST SG)
    - Status of partnerships with National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES) and private sector; Synergies in CGIAR breeding programs, centers, and targeted markets; Feedback loops and synergies among the Genetic Innovation initiatives (GI SG)
    - Social Inclusion and Participatory Research Processes (RAFS SG Deep Dive)

Evaluative Findings[1]

Partnerships and Engagement

- **Initiatives like SHiFT and FRESH** demonstrated successful collaboration by actively engaging non-CGIAR partners, including local universities and national research institutions, in both design and implementation phases.
- **In Ghana, the partnership between GI SG and stakeholders effectively** transformed NARES' approach to breeding. Continuous training and feedback loops between **GI SG** and NARES' successfully shifted NARES' mindset, particularly in Ghana, toward the continuous improvement of the breeding pipeline**.**
- **The ReFOCUS work package within the Accelerated Breeding Initiative highlights successful collaboration** between CGIAR and NARES in defining and validating sub-regional market segment data, and strengthening breeding partnerships.
- **In Uganda and Kenya, equal partnerships within the CGIAR-NARES** breeding networks emerged.
- Concerns remain about CGIAR's collaboration with NARES in Africa, particularly in capacity sharing and enabling NARES to lead research.

Quality of Science and Research (see Guide and related brief)[2]

Design

- **The SG research portfolio is largely aligned with national and regional priorities and development goals in target countries**. 70% of surveyed external partners in Africa reported positive progress in CGIAR's engagement with the Global South since 2022.
- **Co-design with stakeholders was generally satisfactory but rushed in some cases.** There was a tendency to rely on established partnerships and on-going research.

Input

- **All SGs reported skill gaps affecting their research portfolios.** GI SG faced overstretched breeding efforts, RAFS SG lacked social scientists and communication experts, and ST SG required expertise in areas like cross-sector modeling, policy analysis, and nutrition.
- The ability to generate high-quality science by all SGs was significantly affected by funding cuts/uncertainty and irregularity of disbursements.

QoS Processes

- **CGIAR's gender integration strategies are responsive and effective,** with recent inclusion of youth and social approaches.
- **The initiatives are internally coherent, leveraging strong partnerships with public and private sectors.** However, budget constraints and short project cycles limit the full potential of these initiatives.
- **Concerns were raised about role clarity and inconsistent engagement** of leaders and co-leaders across initiatives. The multiple roles and responsibilities of leaders led to confusion, particularly regarding supervision and performance assessment, (e.g., in the more complex SGs of RAFS and ST). In contrast, respondents from the less-complex GISG indicated that the SG setup had improved coordination and management.

Outputs

- **Strong scientific credibility** was demonstrated through publication of substantiated, verifiable results in highly cited papers in peer-reviewed journals across disciplines.
- **The magnitude and quality of outputs was reduced** by frequent and unexpected budget cuts.

Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

- The development of Climate Integrated Assessment Models (CIAMs) for African-focused countries, lead to new research and training collaborations in Malawi on climate risks and agrifood systems.
- The CGIAR Initiative on Foresight 2024 effectively assessed critical issues, including the Sudan conflict's impact on poverty and food security, Kenya's tax reforms on agrifood systems, and national investment plans in Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Tanzania.
- The implementation of early warning systems for drought, supported by advanced monitoring and forecasting technologies, was highly effective in strengthening adaptive decision-making in climate-vulnerable regions such as southern Africa.
- Interdisciplinary approaches significantly enhanced the impact of research by introducing new conceptual frameworks for climate research, particularly those that integrated social and biophysical factors.
- The ST SG achieved progress in climate resilience through partnerships and capacity building, however, its overall effectiveness was hindered by challenges in cross-disciplinary integration, governance inefficiencies, and resource allocation; and with cross-disciplinary integration, particularly in aligning

[1] on selected themes and criteria.

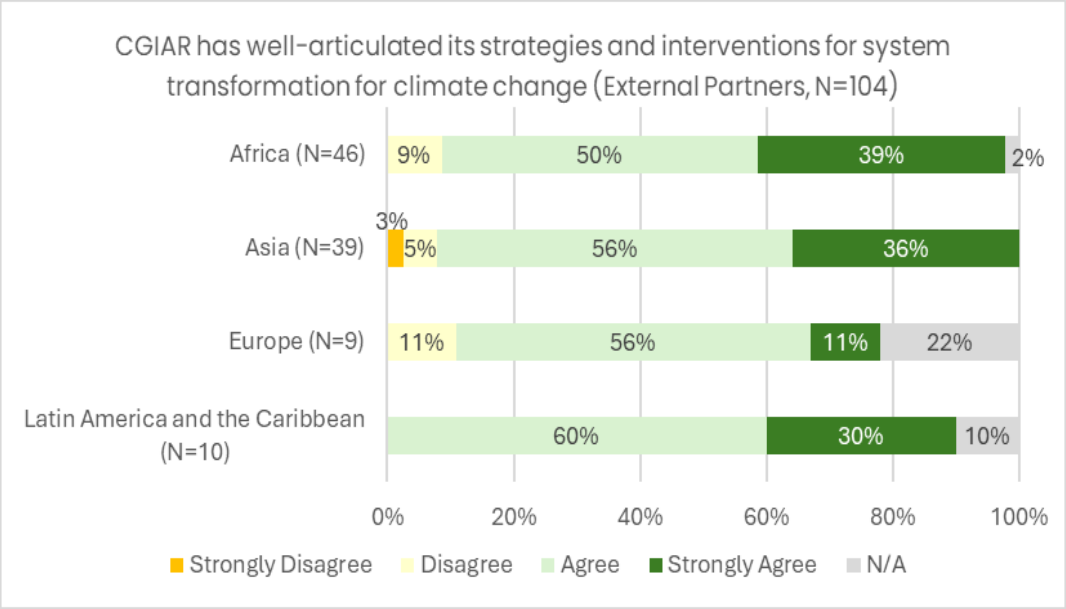
[2] by dimension of evaluating QoS.

biophysical, social, and economic sciences across value chains.

In the bilateral portfolio, the Accelerating Impacts of CGIAR Climate Research for Africa (AICCRA) initiative demonstrated effectiveness in scaling climate resilience efforts across Africa.

The 2024 Online Survey showed overall agreement that CGIAR has well-articulated strategies and interventions for climate change; in Africa, similar to Asia: nearly 90% of external stakeholders held this view (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Survey result by region



Source: *2024 IAES Online Survey*.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons from the SG evaluations include the following:

- Supporting strong NARES in taking on leadership roles would be another form of integrating perspectives and feedback from the NARES.
- Supporting national partners in expanding their breeding activities strengthens local capacity and fosters local ownership. This allows CGIAR to focus on advanced research and regional priorities.
- Enhancing the roles of national partners in a systematic manner ensures that regional breeding initiatives are aligned with national needs, while continuously supporting local breeding.
- CGIAR's success relies on fostering learning and adaptability, with initiatives like the Low-Emission Food Systems and Climate Resilience effectively using real-time data to refine strategies amid changing conditions.
- Regional and country convener roles are crucial for promoting collaboration and integration across different CGIAR entities. They can enhance coherence and efficiency by leveraging collective expertise and resources to maximize impact.
- Effective collaboration with stakeholders such as local NGOs and universities for practical implementation was key to the success of initiatives. Projects that successfully engaged partner organizations often excelled in localized impact, although they may have, in some cases, struggled with broader dissemination or integration into national policy frameworks.
- An organizational design is not enough to accomplish its vision. Effective leadership is needed to understand the seed business, along with operational excellence and purposeful effort to nurture intrinsic motivation within the organization and its partners.
- Trying to change everything everywhere all at once causes much disruption. There are good examples of pilot programs where concepts were tested, lessons learned, and then scaled up.

Recommendations and Recommended Activities

Key recommendations are intended to foster operational and organizational learning to advance SDGs through delivering legitimate science in partnerships, to inform and enhance country and regional level engagements and contribute to the design of the next CGIAR portfolio. The SG-level recommendations subject to Management responses to be available here.

1. **Enhance stakeholder feedback mechanisms:** Develop processes to document and monitor stakeholder feedback about climate resilience policies and practices' influence on long-term food security and livelihoods.
2. **Improve interdisciplinary collaboration:** Incentives for interdisciplinary collaboration in climate resilience research will promote more holistic, systems approach to reducing the vulnerability of food systems to climate change.

3. **Build on CGIAR's comparative advantages in climate resilience research.**
4. **Develop commonly understood Theories of Change,** to clearly differentiate between the goals of climate change adaptation, avoided maladaptation, mitigation, transformative responses**,** and long-term impacts vs short-term outcomes in climate resilience research, with clearly stated indicators of success.
5. **Enhance and streamline data sharing and integration:** to facilitate translation of climate resilience research into practice, using standardized, accessible data-sharing platforms that link climate data to food systems.
6. **Build local capacity for integrated systems research**: Enhance in-country research capacity to apply integrated systems approaches to climate research, at the interface of people, land, water, and food systems ensuring their sustainable governance.
7. **Promote transformative innovations in incremental steps:** assess the transformative potential of innovations in reducing vulnerability to climate change. Then, test their efficacy in collaboration with local communities to ensure technical soundness and social acceptance before scaling them for wider impact.
8. **The 2025-30 CGIAR portfolio design should strive to make informed adjustments** of the portfolio with minimal disruption to already established partnerships.
9. **Operationalize the Partnerships Framework (2024) to form new and strengthen existing partnerships**, for scaling with strategic actors with deep contextual knowledge. For effective scaling of research outputs, consider everyone's comparative advantage. Develop related tools on partner selection and monitoring engagements.
10. **Identify non-market interventions such as social safety nets to empower vulnerable groups,** especially youths, to meet the minimum asset thresholds for inclusive participation in value-chain developments.
11. **Define socio-economic indicators and conduct a vulnerability mapping assessment** to identify and classify vulnerable groups.

EALUATIONS BRIEFS

- **KENYA COUNTRY BRIEF**
- **BRIEF ON QUALITY OF SCIENCE**
- Blogs from Kenya and Ghana

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SG EVALUATIONS, VISIT THE SCIENCE GROUP EVALUATIONS PORTAL AND QUALITY OF SCIENCE RESOURCE HUB

Figure 2: GI SG evaluation team visit at Crop Research Institute, Kumasi, Ghana. Photo credit: IAES.

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Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service
Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT Via di San Domenico, 1 00153 Rome, Italy
IAES@cgiar.org
https://iaes.cgiar.org/