

Partnerships: Evaluative Learning on Ways of Working in CGIAR

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Evaluation Insights on Ways of Working in CGIAR

Why Partnerships Matter — And Why Now

Launched in 2022, the [CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#) (hereafter, 2030 Strategy) emphasizes the need to strengthen and expand external partnerships, recognizing that global challenges demand collaboration beyond CGIAR. The 2030 Strategy introduced seven new implementation approaches—or ways of working (WoW)—to ensure research delivers tangible development solutions. Two WoW relate specifically to partnerships, namely:

- **WoW 3: Embedding research in alliances for transformation**
- **WoW 7: Strengthening in-country integration and alignment**

Aligned to the [2030 Strategy](#), the [CGIAR's Portfolio 2025–30](#) prioritizes partnerships as no longer considered optional — they are essential. Tackling today's complex and interconnected global challenges — from climate resilience and food system transformation to equitable access to innovation — demands stronger, more strategic collaboration than ever before.

Eight independent evaluations, including of the three Science Groups (2024), converged on one critical message: **partnerships must be embedded at the heart of CGIAR's operations**, not treated as an afterthought. Collectively, since 2021 evaluations

“While the intent to elevate partnerships is evident, the practice of embedding them as a strategic way of working is inconsistent.”

“Partnerships: Summary of evaluative learning on WoWs in CGIAR 2021–2024”

Partnerships must move from the margins to the mainstream of CGIAR's work. This means:

- **A new mindset:** partners as co-creators, not just implementers
- **A new model:** embedded at every stage — design, delivery, scaling
- **A new structure:** dedicated leadership, resourcing, and accountability

offered 28 actionable recommendations to strengthen CGIAR's partnership-related WoWs.

The evaluation insights align with [2024 Engagement Framework](#) and the [2025–2027 System Council–endorsed Multi-Year Evaluation Plan](#) (MYEP)— with a designated independent evaluation of Partnerships in 2026. Together, they signal a decisive shift: CGIAR partnerships must evolve from transactional agreements into intentional, long-term collaborations that are integral to delivering impact at scale.

What's Holding CGIAR Back?

Despite growing recognition of their importance, partnerships remain under-leveraged. Evaluations have identified persistent barriers:

- Partnerships are often seen as contracts, not strategic long-term collaborations
- National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES) are underutilized and engaged too late
- Coordination gaps, fragmented mandates, and lack of continuity weaken efforts
- Internal collaboration is hindered by staff turnover, funding silos, and competing incentives
- Limited private sector engagement due to unclear value propositions and skill gaps
- Fragmented advocacy and weak institutional memory limit CGIAR's visibility and influence

What Will Enable Strategic Partnerships?

To anchor partnerships as a core element of CGIAR's operating model, the following enablers are critical:

- **Senior-level accountability** for partnership strategy and delivery
- A formalized **System Office partnership unit** to drive coherence, learning, and institutional memory
- **Dedicated resources** for relationship-building, co-creation, and sustained engagement.

Priority Recommendations by Way of Working- Summarized from Evaluations

(Summary from Evaluations – see [Management Response Tracker](#) for details):

WoW 3: Embedding Research within Ambitious Alliances for Change to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs).

- **Consolidate** work on transformation of food, land and water systems, especially in countries with a ST focus. (Rec. 1b, ST SG Evaluation)
- **Invest** in local capacity development for integrated systems research. (Rec. 8, ST SG Evaluation)
- **Increase** breeding capacities in NARES and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for improved genetic gain in farmer-preferred varieties (ABI). (Rec. 8a, EIB Platform Evaluation)
- **Develop** incentives for interdisciplinary team collaborations across centers to effectively tackle interconnected issues under the integrated management framework. (Rec. 3, ST SG Evaluation)
- **Empower** country conveners with adequate resources, clear mandates, with clear coordination mechanisms and communication lines to CGIAR regional and program leadership. (Rec. 3, RAFS SG Eval.)
- **Align** with national R&D agendas via co-designed strategies, country level strategies and results frameworks, and NARES partnerships. (Rec. 2, RAFS SG Eval.)
- **Include** partners systematically across the design, delivery and scaling of the 2025–30 Portfolio as per the 2024 Partnership & Advocacy Framework. (Rec. 4, ST SG Eval.)

WoW 7: Growing In-country Presence and National Integration To position countries and regions as hubs for co-design and delivery.

- **Allocate** dedicated budgets to support regional, national and global collaboration. (Rec. 6c, GI SG Eval.)
- **Operationalize** CGIAR's IFA (2022) through financial and human resources and administrative policies, to streamline and harmonize procedures across centers. (Rec. 4, RAFS SG Eval.)
- **Provide** specific guidelines to streamline funding modalities (pooled and bilateral) for complementarity and coherence in implementation and reporting. (Rec.5, RAFS SG Eval.)
- **Ensure** financial stability to support long-term planning and continuity through transparent budgets with contingency funds. (Rec. 8a and 8e, GI SG Eval.)
- **Ensure** consistent leadership and team structures to foster long-term partnership success. (Rec. 1b, GI SG Eval.)

From Insight to Impact: A Call to Action

CGIAR stands at a critical crossroads. Strategic partnerships are no longer optional—they are the driving force behind transformational change. To fully realize the ambitions of its 2025–2030 Portfolio, CGIAR must embed partnerships into its DNA.

This requires moving beyond isolated projects and transactional agreements toward genuine co-creation, shared accountability, and sustained collaboration with partners across all levels. Achieving this vision calls for bold leadership, dedicated resources, and an unwavering commitment to adapt, learn, and grow together. The WoW3 and WoW7 priority recommendations outlined above offer a clear and actionable roadmap.

It is time to move from intention to action and embed partnership-related ways of working into practice. By doing so, CGIAR can enhance its impact, leverage collective strengths, and accelerate progress on transforming food, land, and water systems for millions around the world.



[Consult the full study report](#)



[CGIAR Management Response Tracker](#)



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Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT Via di San Domenico, 1 00153 Rome, Italy

IAES@cgiar.org

<https://iaes.cgiar.org/>

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