

Options to Streamline CGIAR Handling of Center EPMRs

CGIAR Secretariat

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Background

1. At ExCo 10 (May 2006), ExCo requested the Science Council (SC) and the CGIAR Secretariat to undertake a meta-analysis of recently conducted external program and management reviews (EPMRs) to derive lessons learned. During discussion of the item at AGM06, the CGIAR concluded that options to streamline the process of handling EPMR discussion at meetings of SC, ExCo, and AGM should also be considered.
2. The Meta-evaluation of CGIAR EPMRs was discussed at ExCo 13 (October 2007). In its commentary on the meta-evaluation, the CGIAR Secretariat presented options on streamlining the EPMR process for ExCo's consideration. ExCo recommended a modified Option 2 in the CGIAR Secretariat's commentary on the process of CGIAR handling of EPMR reports. The CGIAR Secretariat was requested to revise the option to include ExCo's additions for discussion at AGM07. Option 2 in this paper has been modified to include these additions.

Some Issues Highlighted in the Meta-Evaluation of CGIAR EPMRs

3. The Meta-evaluation of CGIAR EPMRs noted that "evaluation and accountability mechanisms have been refined providing greater clarity of results and enabling comparisons in performance across Centers and programs." In its key findings, the strategic function of EPMRs was highlighted, and the review noted the increasing importance of the EPMR process as the anchor of an emerging integrated system of evaluation in an increasingly complex operating environment. Challenge Programs external reviews also started in 2007.
4. The Meta-evaluation also emphasized that EPMRs in recent years have focused more rigorously on governance, management, and finance issues as part of an overall effort to highlight the importance of these issues at the Center and System levels. EPMRs highlight best practices, identify weaknesses, and make recommendations for improvement in all of these areas. ExCo and the CGIAR have used these recommendations in a continuing effort to detect trends and issues that may have Systemwide implications.

Issues on the EPMR Process for Consideration

5. Given the importance and value of the EPMR process to the System, the length of time it takes from the start of an EPMR until discussion at AGM has become an issue in recent years.

6. In the table below, a quick review of the 11 EPMRs examined in the meta-evaluation shows that the entire EPMR process took 8-20 months to complete, with an average of approximately 15 months. Although not reflected in the table, some EPMRs (e.g. CIMMYT, ICRAF) took even longer to complete due to follow-up actions requested by ExCo.
7. The table also shows that the EPMR process consists of two parts: 1) conduct of the review by the EPMR Panel, and 2) CGIAR handling of the EPMR after submission of the report. On average, the 11 EPMRs in the meta-evaluation took 6-7 months to conduct and another 6-7 months for CGIAR handling. There was also an average two-month time lag between submission of the report and discussion by Science Council.

Center	EPMR Panel		CGIAR handling			Months to complete process
	EPMR Start Date	EPMR Submission Date	Science Council Discussion	ExCo Discussion	AGM Discussion	
IPGRI	September 2002	March 2003	June 2003 (iSC)	September 2003	October 2003	14
ICRISAT (EMR/EPR)	March 2002	August 2003	August 2003 (iSC)	September 2003	October 2003	20
IRRI	September 2003	March 2004	May 2004	September 2004	October 2004	14
IFPRI	October 2004	February 2005	April 2005	May 2005	December 2005	14
CIMMYT	October 2004	March 2005	April 2005	May 2005	December 2005	14
CIFOR	November 2005	March 2006	April 2006	May 2006	December 2006	13
WorldFish	September 2005	February 2006	April 2006	May 2006	December 2006	15
ICRAF	November 2005	March 2006	April 2006	May 2006	December 2006	13
ICARDA	April 2006	July 2006	September 2006	October 2006	December 2006	8
ILRI	April 2006	October 2006	March 2007	May 2007	December 2007	19
IWMI	March 2006	December 2006	March 2007	May 2007	December 2007	21
Average number of months to complete EPMR process:						15

8. In its key findings, the Panel noted the difficulty this time lag poses to the System, "...the current chain of review in the System with its attendant time lags from Science Council to ExCo to AGM yields decreasing value to the Centers and the System on the heels of the SC review. Increasingly, Centers actively seek a return on their investment by acting on panel recommendations that have meaning and utility as quickly as possible."
9. The Panel concludes the above finding with the recommendation that the "CGIAR System must do likewise or cede the responsibility for meaningful

assessment of the EPMRs to the body that gets to the review first.” The report reasons that ExCo and AGM lose the ability to add value and highlight issues of importance following discussion by the Science Council. It also argues that if donor support is influenced by the EPMR, it would happen shortly after the report is submitted.

10. When considering any changes to the current process, it is important to keep in mind the purpose of EPMRs and the roles of the various players in the process:
 - EPMRs assess the effectiveness of Center research programs, governance, management and financial health issues of the Centers.
 - ExCo is a subsidiary body of the CGIAR, and acts on behalf of the Group between AGMs and on matters delegated to it by the Group.¹ It is tasked with oversight and follow-up of evaluation and impact assessment in the CGIAR System.
 - Science Council is the science-advisory organ of the CGIAR² and provides advice to ExCo on science and programmatic issues.
 - CGIAR Secretariat provides advice and comments to ExCo on governance, management, and financial issues.

11. The Meta-evaluation panel’s observed that EPMR reports tend to have a very short “half-life” in the System following submission of the report. However, ExCo plays a very critical role in the CGIAR as the body that ensures accountability in the System. As noted above, it is specifically tasked with oversight and follow-up of evaluation and impact assessment in the CGIAR. This oversight function carries with it the responsibility of stewardship, including reporting back to CGIAR Members on use of funds, effectiveness and impact of research, etc. The importance of this role, and value it provides to the CGIAR, must not be minimized. ExCo should remain integral to handling EPMRs on behalf of the CGIAR.

12. EPMRs are discussed publicly for the first time at Science Council meetings, however, commentaries on programmatic issues (from SC) and on governance/management/finance issues (from CGIAR Secretariat) are first publicly issued at the subsequent ExCo meeting and provide the CGIAR, through ExCo, it’s first full look at the EPMR package. ExCo meetings are now purposely aligned to follow Science Council meetings by 4-6 weeks to give the Science Council and CGIAR Secretariat sufficient time to finish their respective commentaries on EPMRs.

13. In order to fulfill ExCo’s oversight responsibilities, reduce the time needed to complete the EPMR process, and also realize the full value and impact of review recommendations, the CGIAR could delegate to ExCo decision making responsibility on Center and Challenge Program external reviews. ExCo recommendations to the CGIAR have generally been well accepted by the

¹ CGIAR Charter, March 2007.

² Ibid.

CGIAR, and have suffered minor changes, if any, in the years of ExCo operation—over 90 percent of ExCo recommendations have been endorsed fully, and the remainder endorsed with slight modifications. This would also reduce the burden on the CGIAR at AGM (e.g. at AGM07, 6 EPMRs and 2 CPERs are scheduled for discussion), enabling the CGIAR to spend more time on strategic issues.

14. In most cases, the EPMR process would effectively end following discussion by ExCo. Any issue requiring, in ExCo’s judgment, full discussion by CGIAR Members could be brought to the CGIAR for further discussion and decision. In some cases, a conflict of interest could emerge and need to be addressed.

15. EPMRs could also be scheduled so that the report is submitted shortly before Science Council meetings in late March/early April or late August/early September. As shown in the table above, this could further shorten the overall time needed to complete the EPMR process and avoid situations where the report is submitted several months before a SC meeting (e.g. ILRI, IWMI), resulting in an additional time lag. As noted above, on average the 11 EPMRs reviewed by the Panel took 6-7 months to complete. If work by EPMR panels begins around September and March, reports would be ready for submission just before the subsequent SC meeting. In the event an EPMR report is not submitted until shortly after a SC meeting, the possibility of virtual handling by SC and ExCo could also be considered.

16. By delegating decision making responsibility to ExCo, CGIAR handling of EPMRs would be reduced to approximately two months. Scheduling EPMRs to be submitted shortly before SC meetings would reduce the time lag following submission of the report. These changes would results in two EPMR cycles per year (September-May and February-October) and the overall EPMR process would be reduced to an average of approximately nine months, six months shorter than the current 15:

September-May:

EPMR Start	EPMR Submission	SC	ExCo	Transmit decisions
September	early/mid -March	late March/ early April	Mid-May	late May/ early June

February-October:

EPMR Start	EPMR Submission	SC	ExCo	Transmit decisions
February	early/mid -August	late August/ early September	Mid-October	late October/ early November

Options for Streamlining

17. In view of the Meta-evaluation findings and above analysis, the following three options to adjust the EPMR process could be considered:

- Option 1: No change to current process
(Discussions of EPMR by SC, ExCo, AGM)
- Option 2: Discussion of EPMR by SC and ExCo
(CGIAR delegation of decision making to ExCo and the above scheduling changes—see details below)
- Option 3: Discussion of EPMR only by SC
(Meta-evaluation of CGIAR EPMR Panel suggestion)

ExCo Recommendation to the CGIAR for approval:

18. ExCo has recommended Option 2 (Discussion of EPMR by SC and ExCo) above, which includes:

- a. CGIAR would delegate to ExCo decision making responsibility on Center and Challenge Program external reviews;
- b. Those EPMRs (and/or CPERs) that require, in ExCo's judgment, full discussion by the CGIAR would be brought to AGM;
- c. All EPMR reports should be sent to CGIAR Membership including those not requiring full discussion at AGM as determined by ExCo;
- d. ExCo should recommend discussion of a particular EPMR at AGM, if ExCo feels the EPMR contains either positive or negative lessons for the System;
- e. Centers should also be given the option to request an EPMR report be discussed at AGM;
- f. ExCo's decisions would be transmitted to the CGIAR following discussion at ExCo meetings;
- g. EPMRs would be scheduled so that submission of the report would coincide with SC meetings.

19. Any changes approved on this matter would be reflected in the CGIAR Charter.