

# **A Strategic Framework for Engagement Between the CGIAR and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) -**

## **The CGIAR Perspective**

**Prepared by the CGIAR Secretariat<sup>1</sup>  
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### **Executive summary**

Within the CGIAR membership and leadership there is wide agreement that the CGIAR has to reconsider its relationship with civil society for enhancing research effectiveness by taking into account globalization, changing trends in civic formation, a new understanding and best practices in partnering with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – meaning the non-profit sector, including NGOs, farmer organizations, advocacy groups, universities and advanced research institutions. The CGIAR NGO Committee, a mechanism used in the past for engaging with civil society on the global level, has been dormant since 2002, leaving a vacuum to be filled. At System level therefore, CGIAR-CSO linkages require review and action. This paper is meant to support that process.

The paper addresses the following questions:

- **Why should the CGIAR engage with civil society organizations?**  
The CGIAR System mobilizes agricultural science to reduce poverty, foster human well-being, promote agricultural growth and protect the environment. This effort is consistent with the goals of civil society. Thus, civil society, represented by civil society organizations, is a key stakeholder in the work of the CGIAR. The paper presents key mutual benefits that genuine civil society - CGIAR engagement can bring both partners and thereby strengthen the impact of their work for development in the south.
- **Whom do we want to engage with?**  
There is not ONE civil society or one type of CSO but many, touching on a wide range of agricultural science and global public goods issues that the CGIAR pursues under its mission. CSOs have different geographical outreach and are also diverse in their evolution, culture, interests and missions. In the context of CGIAR work, CSOs can be grouped along four key functions: representation, advocacy, technical expertise, capacity building and service delivery – recognizing that these roles are not mutually exclusive, and that some CSOs may undertake more than one function.
- **How can we engage with CSOs?**  
Instead of involving CSOs through a single linkage (such as the NGOC) as in the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was drafted by Maria Iskandarani, CGIAR Secretariat, in collaboration with the CGIAR Secretariat team. It benefited from inputs provided by the former Chair of the CGIAR NGO Committee, CGIAR members, NGO leaders and experts on CSO engagement.

past, it is suggested to *embed and mainstream* CSO engagement throughout the CGIAR agenda setting, planning, implementation and evaluation processes. In this context it is necessary to identify and develop points of involvement of CSOs along with appropriate ‘vehicles of engagement’ (e.g. fora, workshops) that become institutionalized within the System over time. Thus, the paper offers a range of mechanisms for engagement.

Building on this discussion, the paper describes a holistic framework for advancing an engagement between the CGIAR and CSOs that goes beyond past practices. The suggested framework defines the principle of engagement between the CGIAR and CSOs and identifies three overall goals:

### **Principles of engagement**

*Giving voice to civil society stakeholders within the CGIAR to strengthen mutual learning, and to enable the CGIAR to better shape its research agenda and implementation for the benefit of the poor.*

### **Overall goals of CGIAR engagement with CSOs**

- (1) to improve research effectiveness and impact for development,*
- (2) to bring innovative ideas and new perspectives to CGIAR research challenges,*
- (3) to be recognized as exemplary in meeting public accountability and transparency needs in global public programs.*

The paper also recognizes that there are already multiple activities underway that entail engagement between CGIAR and CSOs, which tend to be dispersed throughout the System and sometimes unrecognized as such. Thus, it aims at bringing together all these pieces and adding new ones to fill gaps. It describes a multi-pronged approach led by Centers and/or the System to reach the three goals by entering into targeted engagement with CSOs using a variety of instruments- including the provision of information, dialogue and/or consultation, mutual information and learning, and the establishment of partnerships. Figure 1 illustrates the holistic framework and provides an overview of the different mechanisms.

Finally, the paper offers the following **recommendations** to move forward in enhancing engagement between the CGIAR and CSOs sharing the CGIAR mission and interested in the research priority areas agreed by the CGIAR:

## **1. A more holistic approach to engagement with CSO**

As a principle, the CGIAR should follow a more holistic approach to engagement with CSOs by mainstreaming CSO engagement throughout the CGIAR agenda setting, planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

This should be done through Center and System-led engagement activities and initiatives:

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|--|-----------------------|
| 1) Consultations on thematic research area (with regional outreach) for strategic program planning | Center-led            |
| 2) Partnerships throughout project development, implementation, evaluation and impact assessment   | Center-led            |
| 3) Strategic dialogues for promoting shared visions for the future                                 | Center and System-led |
| 4) Dialogue on System priorities and policies  | System-led            |
| 5) Partnerships in Challenge Programs  | System-led            |
| 6) Mutual information and learning events  | System-led            |
| 7) Public information and dialogue for meeting accountability and transparency needs               | Center and System-led |

## **2. Establishment of a network of CSO focal points**

It is advisable to establish a network among CSO focal points (to be identified) at Centers, CGIAR Secretariat, and Science Council Secretariat as well as within interested CGIAR members and partners, which begins to operate as a community of practice. The objectives of this network would be:

- (i) to share views, experiences, lessons and good practice in engaging with civil society,
- (ii) to help institutionalize a deepened engagement with specific constituents within civil society;
- (iii) to manage knowledge on System, including CPs and SWP, and Center-related engagement activities with CSOs.

Arrangements for an effective facilitation of the network have to be decided.

## **3. Establishment of CGIAR-CSO engagement web portal**

The establishment of a web portal is recommended to facilitate information exchange and dialogue on collaboration in agricultural research for development. This will provide timely and consistent information on who is doing what with whom in the various research areas and locations, and with what results.

The survey on Center collaboration conducted by the Standing Panel on Mobilizing Science (SPMS) can serve as a starting point in this effort.

## **4. Enhance current mechanisms for engagement with CSOs**

The following mechanisms should be enhanced

### **a) Public information and dialogue**

Multiple tools for public information are already established by Centers, CPs, SC, and System Office, including websites, publications, annual reports, strategy and planning documents that are made available to the public. The use of appropriate instruments helping to enter into a dialogue should be further enhanced. This includes

- the advancement of the CGIAR, Center and CP websites with interactive features, e.g. feedback, fora, blogs, weblinks to partners;

- an increased CGIAR/Center participation in CSO organized events (e.g. lectures, speeches etc.)
- a new Media Unit within the System Office, which will strengthen system-wide and Center specific media work.

**b) AGM Stakeholder Meeting: CSO Forum and Science Forum**

A bi-annual CSO Forum should be held at AGM and first piloted at AGM 06, as discussed at AGM '04. This redesigned Stakeholder Meeting should emphasize on meaningful dialogue, debate, information sharing, and consensus building among stakeholders from civil society and the CGIAR around themes of mutual interest with the final objective to increase impact. The results from the forum should help the CGIAR to make more informed decisions at the CGIAR business meeting and other CGIAR meetings.

The **CSO Forum** would alternate with the **Science Forum**, which was first piloted at AGM 05.

## **5. Develop new mechanisms for engagement with CSOs**

The following mechanisms should be developed:

**a) Develop GFAR-CGIAR collaboration in conducting CSO consultations**

GFAR and the CGIAR should explore options for further collaboration in conducting CSO consultations on selected themes.

**b) Develop mechanisms for engagement with CSOs in impact assessment work**

Options for engaging CSOs more systematically in CGIAR impact assessment work at the Center, CP and System level should be explored. SC/SPIA could take the lead in the discussion of options.

**c) Develop regional consultations informing strategic planning – Pilot West/Central Africa and/or East Africa**

The development of a sub-regional strategic plan is one of the logical steps in the consolidation of CGIAR activities in Africa. It is expected that the strategic planning process and the development of MTPs will benefit from comprehensive consultations with CSOs. As a pilot activity a comprehensive regional consultation should be developed and carried out with different types of CSOs on regional research needs, including needs for capacity building and technology transfer mechanisms integrated into the strategic planning process.

CSO focal points at Centers in collaboration with FARA could take the lead in designing such a consultation process and an action plan.

**d) Develop a Scientific and Know-how Exchange Program (SKEP) with CSOs**

Centers and the CGIAR Secretariat in collaboration with selected CSOs should explore options for establishing a Scientific and Know-how Exchange Program

(SKEP) with civil society organizations. The main purpose of SKEP would be to promote knowledge and technology transfer in designing, implementing and applying research results through exchange of staff between civil society organizations and CGIAR Centers. Whether and how this program can be interlinked with the private sector SKEP is a question to be explored.

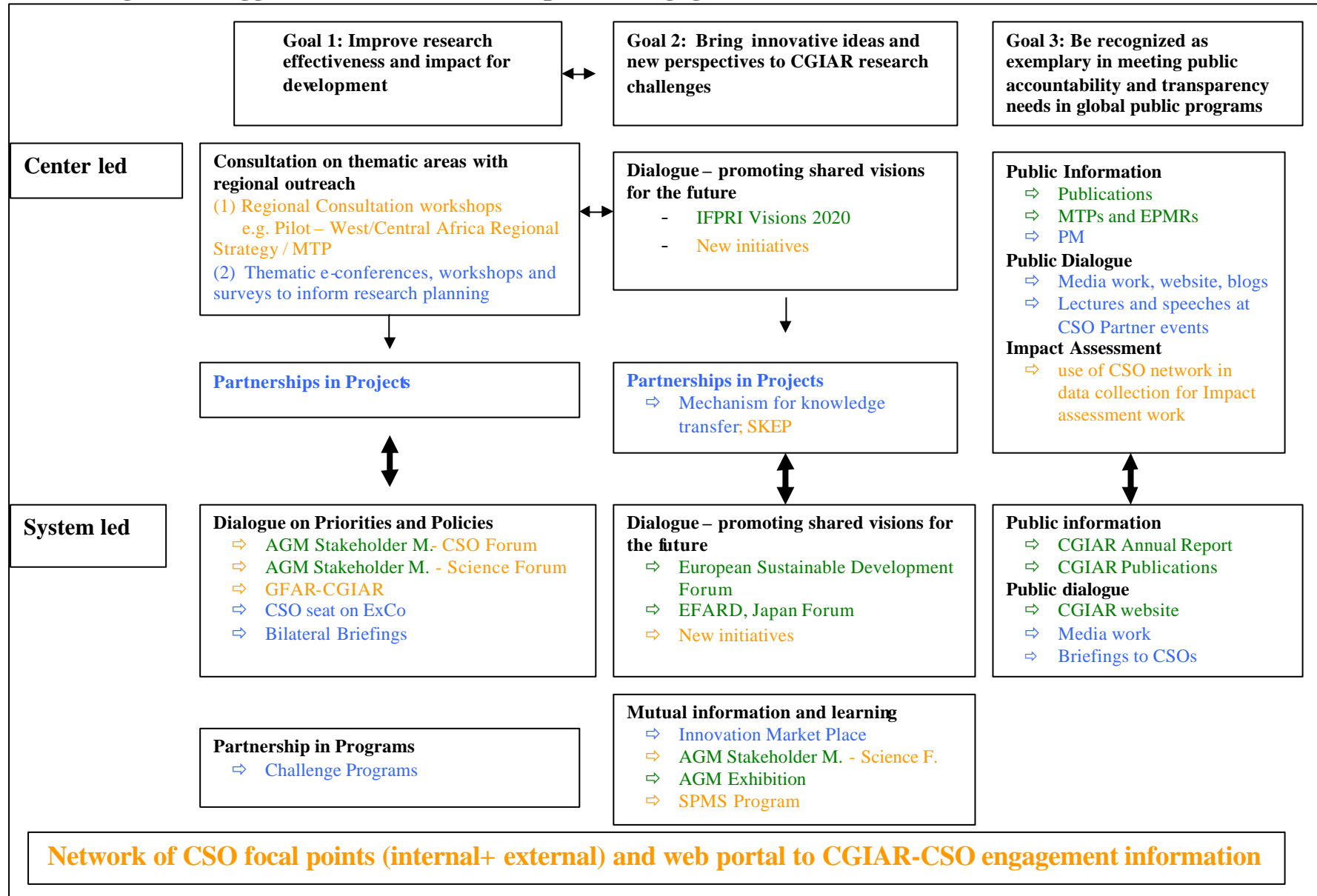
## **6. Regular assessment of progress and effectiveness of CGIAR – CSO engagement**

Every 3 years the ongoing partnership between CSOs and the CGIAR should be assessed in terms of progress and effectiveness. This assessment, to be commissioned by the CGIAR Executive Council, should give an overall picture of the merit of the various mechanisms. Detailed monitoring should be embedded in the projects at the different levels and entry points of engagement, e.g. a separate evaluation of SKEP after a certain time period, or an opinion survey after AGM/CSO Forum.

## **7. Revisit at AGM 06 a possible dissolution of the dormant CGIAR NGO Committee**

Resulting from recommendations 1-5, the CGIAR will be employing a multi-pronged approach to CSO engagement by embedding different engagement activities - information, consultations, dialogues and partnerships - throughout the CGIAR agenda setting, planning, implementation and evaluation processes at Center as well as System level (see Figure 1). In view of the new and comprehensive approach to be taken to CGIAR-CSO relations, there would seem to be little need for a separate NGO Committee. Therefore, the issue of formally dissolving of the dormant CGIAR NGO Committee should be revisited at the Business Meeting at AGM 06 following the CSO Forum.

**Figure 1: Suggested Framework for improved Engagement between CSOs and the CGIAR**



(1) Ongoing mechanisms – to be maintained - (2) ongoing mechanisms - to be enhanced -- (3) new mechanisms – to be developed ---