Review Panel of the Centre Commissioned External Review (CCER)   
on Social, Economic and Policy Research across the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)

Center Response

Draft

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| **Panel Recommendations** | **Center Response** |
| 7.1 Vision and mission | |
| 1. The panel thinks that it will be to ICARDA’s benefit if SEPRP articulate a vision and uses it to plan and evaluate its activities, along with vision of the center’s CRPs. SEPRP must clearly identify where it sees itself within ICARDA and with the global development research community**.** This would strengthen SEPRP’s service function with the Center and help make it a high level policy research group especially for the Arab region recognized by NARS ARIs and international organizations in development assistance without jeopardizing ICARDA’s global mandate. | **Partially accepted**  ICARDA recognizes the panel’s observation of making SEPRP a high level policy research group especially for the Arab region, but also values the group’s role as part of the center’s integrated research in dryland systems at the global level. Although challenging, ICARDA believes the two objectives (at the global level and at the regional level) can be simultaneously achieved; specific efforts will be made to articulate the vision and mission of the SEPRP that will enable the team to carry out strategic social, economic and policy research which is beyond the scope of work done by SEPRP team under the technology led projects. In the future, ICARDA will make concerted effort to raise funds for such strategic policy research that would make SEPRP a center of excellence for regional and global policy research thus giving the group the visibility in the discipline as recommended by the panel. |
| 7.2 Science quality | |
| 1. The panel recommends re-initiating the in-house seminar program in order to achieve cutting edge socioeconomic research especially in terms of methodological rigor and research strategy. SEPRP should invite mentors and reviewers to these seminars to act as commentator and provide constructive criticisms to the papers presented. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts to re-initiate the in-house seminars program in Amman and scholarly mentors and specialists in different subjects will be invited to these seminars; to provide feedback in terms of methodological rigor and research strategy. One seminar per year per scientist is the target in the presence of a prominent scientist in that field. |
| 1. SEPRP should engage more completely with ARIs and SPIA with the aim to especially increase the rigor and science quality of impact assessments. Particular issues to be addressed are establishment of control and treatment group and investments in data collection and data management. Complement impact assessment of complex integrated technologies, with baseline assessment of the norms and values. Communicate the results of impact assessment especially social and gender-related research more effectively to policy makers and wider development partners. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel this recommendation and thus SEPRP will increase its engagement with ARIs and with SPIA through participation in calls for impact studies, graduate studies and post-doctoral fellows and through joint research projects; this will include more systematic impact assessments, establishment of control groups and collection of baseline and panel data; inclusion of social aspects such as norms and values in data collection; and effective communication of research results to policy makers and development partners. |
| 1. In order to obtain critical mass of socioeconomics research staff the panel recommends that SEPRP focus its research in fewer areas along with an adequate staff hiring policy. For example an applied econometrician with interests in natural resource economics could support impact assessment, policy work, and many of the other areas. | **Partially Accepted**  ICARDA partially accepts the panel recommendation. ICARDA has, over years, worked on a set of priorities on social, economic and policy research activities which are essential in integrated dryland systems research; these include adoption and impact assessment, market research, NRM research, policy and gender research. These research areas still remain important. However, ICARDA accepts panel’s recommendation of increasing the capacity of social, economic and policy research through the recruitment of additional resources; particularly staff with strong econometric skills. However, this will depend on funding availability. |
| 1. The review panel recommends that ICARDA consider setting up more policy studies particularly in countries where political markets are becoming more open. Such studies will provide a wealth of information on the impact pathway and how it is affected by political change. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and will enhance its agricultural policy research particularly those related to food security, resilience of dry land farming, sustainable intensification of production systems, natural resources management and social and gender equity, particularly in relation to the on-going changes in the MENA region. |
| 1. The recruitment of the senior social analysis/gender specialist should be pursued as a matter of urgency. Recruitment of a further social scientist with gender expertise should be seriously considered if the ICARDA programs have resources to allocate to social and gender research within their portfolios. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation. ICARDA has been pursuing the recruitment of the senior social analysis/gender specialist and will continue this effort as a matter of urgency; however challenges remain in filling this position given the very small pool of qualified personnel. ICARDA will continue this pursuit until a suitable candidate is found. In addition, ICARDA will consider the recruitment of social scientists with gender expertise that will support ICARDA research programs on social and gender analysis needed as part of the research portfolio. |
| 1. Focus on sharpening theory in gender related research, in particular to understanding the social constructions of social and gender norms and the conditions for their transformation. The social construction of masculinity and examination of the social norms influencing men’s behavior are important areas for inclusion and link gender research more explicitly to broader application of methods of social analysis. These include the examination of other potential forms of social differentiation which can influence outcomes from poverty oriented agricultural and rural development, for example age, language, culture, religion etc. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and will sharpen the theory in gender research to better understand social constructions and gender norms and the conditions of their transformation including examination of forms of social differentiation which influence outcomes from agricultural research and rural development. ICARDA will also elaborate in its gender work the methods needed to analyze the social construction of masculinity which influence men’s behavior and attitudes towards gender equity. ICARDA is working with the CGIAR gender network, in collaboration with ARIs, where a global gender research, with strong theory foundation on social norms, is currently underway. |
| 7.3 International cooperation |  |
| 1. The review panel strongly feels that ICARDA should take efforts to increase the strength and breadth of its linkages on social, economic and policy issues to ARIs, including identifying ARI mentoring partners especially for junior research staff. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts panel recommendation and will further strengthen the linkages of its social, economic and policy research with ARIs including mentoring junior staff. The actions to this recommendation will be covered as indicated in item no. 7.2 (a) above under science quality. |
| 1. The panel urges SEPRP to provide access to ICARDA data sets to stimulate research partnerships. ICARDA conducts its research in a developing area that is of high interest to policy makers worldwide; more widespread use of its data would benefit the institution by raising its profile and could stimulate production of global public goods. | **Accepted**  SEPRP will make its data sets available following the data open access policy of the center and the Consortium of the CGIAR. These data sets will need to be processed in a way that can be understood by all users; thus some resources will be allocated to process and organize the data for this purpose. |
| 1. ICARDA/SEPRP should also enable and promote sabbatical leave programs with ARIs. Similarly, sabbatical leaves for SEPRP staff at ARIs should be supported by ICARDA in order to achieve longer-term and more substantive research interactions. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and will implement mini-sabbatical leaves that allow SEPRP staff to visit ARIs for specific periods of time, for example several weeks, or months, with the focus of advancing the knowledge on specific subjects. Similarly, ICARDA will also encourage university faculty to spend sabbatical leaves at ICARDA to conduct research and interact with staff. ICARDA fully recognizes the value of sabbaticals and will seek funding for accomplishing this important instrument for advancing science. |
| 1. Increased advertising for opportunities at ICARDA and engage international researchers in searches for candidates, familiarity with and visibility of the institution are enhanced. Part of the sense that SEPRP staff is “stretched too thin” is evident in the breadth of its partnerships. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and will expand the search for candidates of positions to wider international researcher networks, including the International Association of Agricultural Economists, and Applied Agricultural Economics Association, and universities. ICARDA agrees that this will enhance the center’s familiarity and visibility. |
| 1. The panel recommends that long-term panel data be collected for household vulnerability assessment given the interest in the region on household vulnerability and adaptation to climate-related shocks. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and SEPRP will increase its intensity in the collection of long-term panel (what is panel data?) data that will enable to understand household vulnerability assessment; this will be part of the CRP Dryland systems research agenda and the integrated research approach given the fact that systems analysis is a major theme in the dryland systems research. |
| 7.4 Resources | |
| 1. In view of the challenges ahead and based on the assessment of SEPRP’s human resources the panel strongly recommends the appointment of additional research staff in SEPR with the following priorities: (1) Econometrician who can especially help to improve the work in adoption and impact assessment but also in natural resource economics; (2) Policy research, in order for ICARDA to capitalize on the ongoing changes in agricultural policy especially in the Arab countries to become a Center of Excellence for Agricultural Policy in the region; (3) resource and environmental economics to enhance SEPRP’s capacity in environmental policy. | **Accepted**  ICARDA welcomes the panel recommendation and understands the value of increasing the capacity of the social, economic and policy research. Thus, resources permitting, ICARDA will acquire staff with strong econometric skills (econometrician) as a priority. The other two proposed positions (policy research and resource and environmental economics) have skills which may be combined in a single position. |
| 1. The panel strongly encourages ICARDA to seek additional funding outside the CRPs in order to establish a SEPRP-specific research program on agricultural policy analysis and capacity building in its partner countries. Effective collaboration with IFPRI and/or appropriate ARIs will be crucial to implement such strategy. | **Partially accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and will seek additional funding from bilateral sources to support strategic social, economic and policy research activities and capacity development, which may not be sufficiently funded through the CRP, and strengthen the collaboration with advanced research ARIs and IFPRI. Well founded social, economic and policy research proposals will be sent to specific donors including IFAD, Arab Fund, EU and others. |
| 1. The panel recommends strengthening SEPRP’s NRM research in Morocco, e.g. with focus on climate change and NRM activities to support both the Morocco country program and to strengthen the global responsibility of ICARDA’s Research Platform in Morocco. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation and will strengthen SEPRP’s NRM research in Morocco, including climate change, particularly under the Dryland systems CRP where Morocco is a major research site; current research in this site includes bio-economic modeling which aims at analyzing the sustainability of the production system by making simulations under different climate change scenarios and measuring the effects on the quality and quantity of resources and ultimately on agricultural production and farm income. |
| 1. The Review Panel supports ICARDA’s strategy of placing or identifying a national expert in each Ministry of Agriculture of cooperating national programs to be selected from the cooperating socioeconomic units of NRIs. | **Partially Accepted**  ICARDA recognizes the importance of this recommendation and will further evaluate the feasibility and value of the idea of identifying and placing national socioeconomic expert at ministries of agriculture to provide detailed understanding of policy-making process and priorities, and increasing the chances of taking up policy research outputs. |
| 7.5 Research development continuum | |
| 1. Engagement at the developmental end of the continuum is important to maximize the relevance and impact of SEPRP’s research, but the review panel advises against SEPRP directly implementing development programs, despite encouragement from donors because of ICARDA’s regional presence and administrative capacity. | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panel recommendation that S, E & P research will not directly implement development programs, but rather will conduct development policy research that evaluates how and why different interventions work or not to achieve the CGIAR goals and improve on their efficiency; these may include ways to enhance market value chains, better agricultural advisory services, gender empowerment interventions, etc. In this regard, SEPRP will design and implement research to measure efficacy. Moreover, SEPRP will also conduct *ex post* impact assessment of interventions already rolled out by development agencies and partners to better understand research and policy impacts. |
| 1. The panel recommends SEPRP to clarify its use of the terms ‘Learning Alliance’ and ‘Innovation Platforms’ to avoid confusion as to their purpose, targeted stakeholders and scale of interaction and influence. This will enable SEPRP’s output in this area to contribute to the growing body of knowledge and experience in these areas, bringing the particular perspectives of introducing such approaches into formerly highly centralized government controlled systems | **Accepted**  ICARDA accepts the panels’ recommendation that SEPRP clarifies the use of the terms ‘Learning Alliance’ and ‘Innovation Platforms’ to avoid confusion. ICARDA already initiated action on this recommendation with a workshop for all partner countries in the dryland systems research program where the definitions and applications of these terms were discussed. Draft papers are now being developed to address this point; this involves a literature survey and compilation of current practices and will lead to the publication of an ISI journal article as well as general publications. |