



ISPC Commentary on the Capacity Development (CapDev) Expressions of Interest (EoI)

Summary

The ISPC recognises the centrality of CapDev to the CGIAR's SRF, but does not consider that a free-standing platform is justified. Rather, the ISPC considers that it might be counter-productive - separating 'researchers' from 'trainers', and obscuring the need for research on capacity and its strengthening to be mainstreamed through the CRPs. Moreover, within the System's current interpretation, the benefits of CapDev are probably best realized in a decentralized manner (beyond, possibly, the provision of materials and on-line course development). CGIAR CapDev investment is well covered within the CRP pre-proposals, and it is thus expected that the CGIAR CapDev Community of Practice (CoP) could expand its current analytical, advisory, and inspirational functions within the current CapDev allocations. In addition, prior to proposing any significant additional investment, more clarity is required on the CGIAR's role and comparative advantage in CapDev, the performance of its past and current CapDev investments, and the type of CapDev activities that would achieve long-term, enduring impact at a global scale. The latter should also be considered in terms of the CGIAR's advisory and / or advocacy role in influencing the vast sums invested nationally and bilaterally in CapDev.

In light of the above, and the detailed commentary on both EoIs provided below, the ISPC advises against either of the EoIs for a CapDev platform going forward.

[Score: D]

ILRI-led consortium

1. Excellence and quality of the proposed coordination of Lead Center and partners

"The objective of the coordinating platforms is to step up the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out across the CRP Portfolio, including exchange of information and best practice and implementation of joint research activities. The coordinating platforms will support the CRP portfolio and provide a focal point for both internal and external engagement."

This EoI for a Coordinating Platform on CapDev builds on the work of the CapDev CoP, through which, since 2012, members of the CGIAR Consortium and the Consortium Office have been working to mainstream CapDev as a means of achieving outcomes and impacts of CGIAR research programs. It has produced the *CGIAR Capacity Development Framework* and supported inclusion of one cross-cutting IDO and four sub-IDOs on CapDev in the *SRF*. The EoI is supported by all CGIAR Centres with the exception of IITA. ILRI, one of the Centres with a large group of dedicated CapDev professionals, is proposed to host the Coordinating Platform, whilst the work will also draw extensively on other professional CapDev staff across Centres and CRPs. Governance and oversight of the proposed coordinating platform and its various functions, however, is referred to in passing, and no clear or convincing proposal is presented.

2. Level of ambition described in the collaboration/network and the commitment of the participants/partners

The EoI sets out an ambitious program of work and budget, under four inter-related pillars that aim to (i) Coordinate CapDev across the CRP portfolio through a well-functioning community of practice; (ii) Enhance CRP impacts through the CapDev Framework elements; (iii) Develop NARS and future research leaders through training and mentoring; and (iv) Facilitate a Strategic

CapDev Alignment Fund across the CRP II portfolio in close coordination with Centers/CRPs and the donor community. Duplication among pillars and CRPs as well as other proposed system-wide platforms is significant. As a result, the current proposal risks driving a wedge between researchers and trainers, rather than facilitating the mainstreaming of CapDev as a means of achieving outcomes and impacts.

3. Strategy for system wide networking

The EoI appears weak on its strategy for system-wide networking. Whilst it is appreciated that, at this stage, it may be complicated to begin forging partnership arrangements beyond the immediate realms of the CGIAR, the proposal is not clear whether the detail of the proposed coordination and control role for the platform has been discussed by its proposers with CRPs/Centers. In addition, given that the CapDev CoP is said to have been operational since 2012, it is surprising that this has neither contributed to the forging of more concrete networks and partnership, nor the identification of an appropriate strategy to do so. Possible partners that are identified by name do not currently go beyond a select group of regional apex research organizations, ARIs, and Universities (from the North).

4. Quality and efficiency of the implementation including strategy for strengthening expertise across the system

The proposal's strategy, much as per its instructions, focusses most of its attention on the within CGIAR mainstreaming of CapDev tools, approaches, and lessons, CGIAR and partner research organization technical and normative training, the implementation of a research fellowship programme, and the management of a strategic CapDev alignment fund (which, appears to duplicate the combined functions of the other 'pillars' within the proposal). Whilst such a strategy might have an impact on parts of the science 'discovery' function of the CRP portfolio, no convincing ToC or uptake pathways beyond research consortia are currently evident. An overarching research framework (including its MEL strategy) that the platform proposes to use in its own system-wide research activities, is not presented. In addition, the proposal seems most interested in activities and data that simply conform to, and confirm 'appropriate' CapDev framework use, rather than the continuous evaluation and adjustment of the existing framework and its approaches in light of emerging lessons and impact evidence. Integral to the proposal are two large 'bespoke' funds to pay for training and alignment of activities. The proposed functions and governance of such funds, however, it not made clear. It is further suggested that any CapDev platform should preferably perform an advisory and / or advocacy role to influence bi-lateral CapDev funding, rather than move into (core) fund management.

5. Potential impact

From the information provided it is not possible to discern where the impact of any additional investment in the platform would be most significantly felt, or where significant efficiency savings and progress may be achieved. There is also no information at the moment that allows readers to assess whether the proposed activities are likely to have impact beyond the immediate research consortia and possibly CRP partnerships that may create local value for farmers or the private sector.

6. Contribution to establishing and strengthening a durable cooperation between the partners that will contribute to the CRPII Portfolio and the SRF.

In its current form, as already enumerated under #5 above, this is likely to remain restricted / linked to the scale of project, mission or commercial opportunity.

IITA-led proposal

1. Excellence and quality of the proposed coordination of Lead Center and partners

It is difficult to assess the excellence and quality of the proposed leads, as no information apart from a list of names and a very general description is provided. Whilst IITA is the only CG Centre not currently involved in the ILRI-led consortium, this proposal does carry the names of individuals representing 7 other CG-Centres. It is not clear from the proposal in which institutional capacity they are involved. The proposal also lists the names of a number of individuals of potentially interesting research and development partner organizations, but there is, in the current write-up, little clarity on the nature of the partnership arrangements and / or institutional commitments to the proposal. The proposal is largely silent on the existing CGIAR CapDev CoP and the CapDev framework or how it aims to integrate and / or build on its experience and lessons. In addition, governance and oversight of the coordinating platform and its various functions are not detailed.

2. Level of ambition described in the collaboration/network and the commitment of the participants/partners

The proposed activities of the platform range from (i) the collation of existing CapDev materials, (ii) the development of new CapDev materials and approaches in collaboration with the CRPs, to (iii) the identification and development of strategies and materials to assist in enterprise development (with the emphasis on women and youth), (iv) services to the other proposed system-wide platforms and the private sector to support their CapDev services, and (v) the establishment of a mechanism to leverage additional donor investment. Whilst the EoI in places provides a fresh interpretation of CapDev that could add an interesting ‘systemic change’ slant to the platform, most descriptions of what will actually be done remains too vague and general. The proposal does not cover the 6 enumerated key objectives, and also shows significant overlaps within its own activities, other proposed platforms, and the CRPs.

3. Strategy for system wide networking

Although specifics are lacking, the EoI appears to show a keen awareness for the need to develop a strong strategy for system-wide networking. The partnership (in- and external) arrangements are focused on SSA only, and institutional commitments are not specified. The platform also seems to focus predominantly on enterprise development and technology dissemination. Clearly both have strong CapDev aspects, but these should be part of a range of CapDev services (and research) provided, rather than its overriding purpose.

4. Quality and efficiency of the implementation including strategy for strengthening expertise across the system

The proposal’s strategy has a number of interesting aspects. As indicated, however, it does not cover the 6 enumerated essentials in the current text. MEL is mentioned, but there is no information as to the proposed overarching framework for such system-wide analysis and learning, or how these will be mainstreamed in the proposed normative functions of the platform. Moreover, the service and coordinating functions to existing or proposed CapDev activities in the system are not evident beyond the repository and dissemination function of existing CapDev materials and approaches.

5. Potential impact

The impact of the platform on the system-wide management of CRP-related CapDev activity, and the efficiency saving that may be achieved is difficult to assess. The proposal seems to focus on collation of, and access to existing materials, and to focus on CapDev-related technology identification and dissemination activities for local enterprise development. There is no

information in the proposal that would allow one to assess whether these activities are likely to have impact beyond research consortia or partnerships that may create local value for farmers or the private sector.

6. Contribution to establishing and strengthening a durable cooperation between the partners that will contribute to the CRPII Portfolio and the SRF.

In its current form, as already enumerated under #5 above, this is likely to remain restricted / linked to the scale of project, mission or commercial opportunity.