

ISPC commentary on the EoI for a Cross-Cutting Platform on Gender

Summary

The expression of interest for a coordinating platform on gender outlines a number of worthwhile activities and does a good job of explaining how they will be implemented and to what purpose. A strong, culturally grounded gender perspective on agricultural production and consumption should play a prominent role in informing the priorities and activities of all CRPs. However, the ISPC notes the overlap in objectives and personnel with the 2nd cluster of activities in FP 6 of PIM. The ISPC considers there needs to be a strong case (added value over what already exists) to justify the creation of a new platform and considers that the case has not been made by the EoI proponents as to why the activities described in the expression of interest need to be implemented by a separate gender platform.

The ISPC recommends that the functions proposed in the EoI which are complementary to those proposed in PIM Flagship project 6 are folded into the full proposal for the PIM CRP. PIM is an integrating CRP for the System as a whole, and as such should be well positioned to assume the mandate for pioneering good practice on gender based around a community of researchers.

The remainder of the comments presented here are therefore targeted towards ensuring an efficient integration of the materials presented in the EoI with the FP 6 of PIM, rather than supporting the concept of a separate entity being created.

[Score: D – purely for the reason given in paragraph 1]

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

The Expression of Interest was submitted by IFPRI, CIAT and ICRAF as lead CGIAR Centers. The Principal Investigator and co-PIs from IFPRI/PIM have international reputations in this area and are well placed to lead a platform which aims to contribute to the three specific system-level IDOs and sub-IDOs that relate directly to gender equity and women:

- *Gender equitable control of productive assets and resources*
- *Technologies that reduce women's labor and energy expenditure developed and disseminated*
- *Improved capacity of women [and young people] to participate in decision-making*

CIAT's contribution is to build on their current role in “communications, knowledge sharing, and data and information management” for the CGIAR gender network. These are all areas that CIAT has gained a strong reputation in, and CIAT now has a very distinct niche specializing in cross-cutting topics within the CGIAR that is very distinctive and different from all other 14 CGIAR Centers. ICRAF's contribution is through their extensive connections in communities, particularly in Africa, through long-standing partnerships and field experience. Together, these three Centers bring very complementary expertise.

The proposal to include a mentoring program is linked with AWARD, an organization well-positioned to coordinate building the capacity of local partners in Africa, and AWARD is providing a Co-PI to the platform. Similar regionally-focused partners would be valuable for all regions. Given the need for

mentoring more broadly throughout the CGIAR system, the ISPC ask whether consideration has been given to forming a mentoring team comprised of AWARD alongside other similar regionally-focused partners?

Given the centrality of natural resource issues across the CRPs and in this Platform proposal, it would seem necessary to include at least one CGIAR senior biophysical scientist for whom gender has not been such a central concern in their research career to date in the team. This should not be regarded simply as a token appointment and could add valuable insight into constraints and opportunities for influence in the system.

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

This EOI is proposing an ambitious program of co-ordination and support, although in large part it is directed at very specific capacity-building activities: around sex-disaggregated data collection; qualitative data methods (for investigating, for example, gender norms and dynamics); and asking gender questions. There is nevertheless a plan – to be developed further – for addressing the ‘bigger questions’, and gap-filling in ‘high priority areas’ although there is no detail provided in the EOI of what these might be.

The time commitments of the PI and co-PIs are small considering the planned activities and workplan arrangements. However, almost all the CRP pre-proposals include working with the planned gender platform, and there is some indication that they will bear the costs of this collaboration. Much of the collaborative effort, including capacity-building, is presumed to take place online.

3. Strategy for system wide networking

The proposal is well focused on system-wide networking and the agri-food systems CRP pre-proposals suggest that there is considerable support and enthusiasm for the support proposed to be provided by the platform. Although the strategy is not yet finalized or settled in the sense of detailed activities, the ISPC would challenge whether influencing through ‘focal points’ alone is likely to be successful.

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

The implementation plan is thus far limited to identifying leads for different objectives amongst the PIs. All the CRP pre-proposals include some aspect of capacity strengthening, and networking and the initial activities should include a review of their strategies and their perspectives on impact. This is particularly important for implementation of Objectives 4 and 5. The platform does not plan to conduct outreach or capacity development themselves, recognizing that it should be the domain of the CRPs.

The strategy for strengthening expertise across the system, including that of partners, presently covers a wide range of options (see Platform Objective 5). Much of the expertise being strengthened is very specific, and has a major focus on sex-disaggregated data sets (Objective 3), which have been the centre of the gender research within IFPRI. It is to be noted that this proposal, and especially Objective 3, will depend on the results of Objective 1, to assess priorities for gender research across the system. This review is intended to cover methods, presentations and papers as evidence of work already completed, and presumably levels of competence in the system (although this is not highlighted in the proposal). Finally, it would be helpful if the term “Transformative Agricultural Development Approaches” that is used in this proposal could be defined.

5. Potential impact

The underlying theory of change is that the CGIAR’s portfolio can be more effective if it consciously and deliberately draws on analysis of the gendered patterns of social and economic behaviour – related to both production and consumption. This premise has been made explicit and central to the current round of

CGIAR planning and the CRP proposals. This Platform will support the implementation of a gender-aware portfolio and therefore should have enhance the potential for impact at the System level..

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

All the CRP pre-proposals, and indeed each of the flagship sections, have produced statements of their gender relevance and gender-related activities. It is essential to take stock of the potential overlaps, and to identify areas of commonality in the questions, methods, and data that will be needed. Some agreement on common metrics would be useful, and if the platform were able to achieve a degree of coordination on research plans could be a very useful contribution to the effectiveness of the System in relation to gender. In some cases, this might point towards a strategy of pursuing similar research in multiple Centers and CRPs, with an idea of developing comparable findings. In other cases, there might be a need to agree on diversification of research so as to avoid duplication.

The Gender Platform would have presented a stronger case if it were to have: (a) a well-defined mandate to carry out research; and (b) a well-defined role in providing feedback to the CRPs on gender aspects of their proposed research programs. As currently configured, no original research will take place under the auspices of the platform. Were a research program to be developed, it should differ from that carried out under individual CRPs and might focus on data and methods – for example, a program of data experiments, related to rigorously testing alternative means of collecting sex-disaggregated data or of various gender metrics. Well-chosen and carefully implemented data experiments could provide a useful source of information about what to collect and when / why / how the choice of collection method might matter. The Platform could reasonably coordinate multi-locational data experiments to be carried out by individual Centers and CRPs. A role for the Platform in providing feedback to CRPs might allow for collegial consultation, to complement the more formal evaluations of the IEA.

With regards all of the considerations outlined here, the ISPC believes that the greatest chance of success lies with the complementary activities described in this Expression of Interest being incorporated into the Flagship Project 6 of the PIM CRP, which has a similar focus and draws on a number of the same research personnel.