Social Science Research Priorities for the CGIAR

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CGIAR Mission: Science for a food-secure future

High Quality Science is Necessary for Impact
Tangible development impact from high quality research is uncertain. But poor quality research almost surely has no major sustained impacts. It even risks malpractice damages.

CGIAR Social Science is Small – just 300-some PhDs – i.e., size of a major research university – so need to be strategic. Can't do everything well. Be ruthlessly selective.

Focus on comparative advantage for high quality social science to support mission.

From 2009 Social Science Stripe Review:

CGIAR social science has comparative advantage in generating international public goods (IPGs) due to:

(a) Low interdisciplinary boundaries and problem focus

(b) Locational advantages, honest broker reputation

(c) Highly trained, IRS staff

Key topical areas of CA thus relate to:

(i) sustainable agricultural productivity increases by and for the poor

(ii) natural resource conservation that benefits the rural poor directly or indirectly via crucial environmental services, especially to help agricultural productivity

(iii) institutional, policy and technological innovations that enhance the quality of life for poor and marginalized agrarian populations.
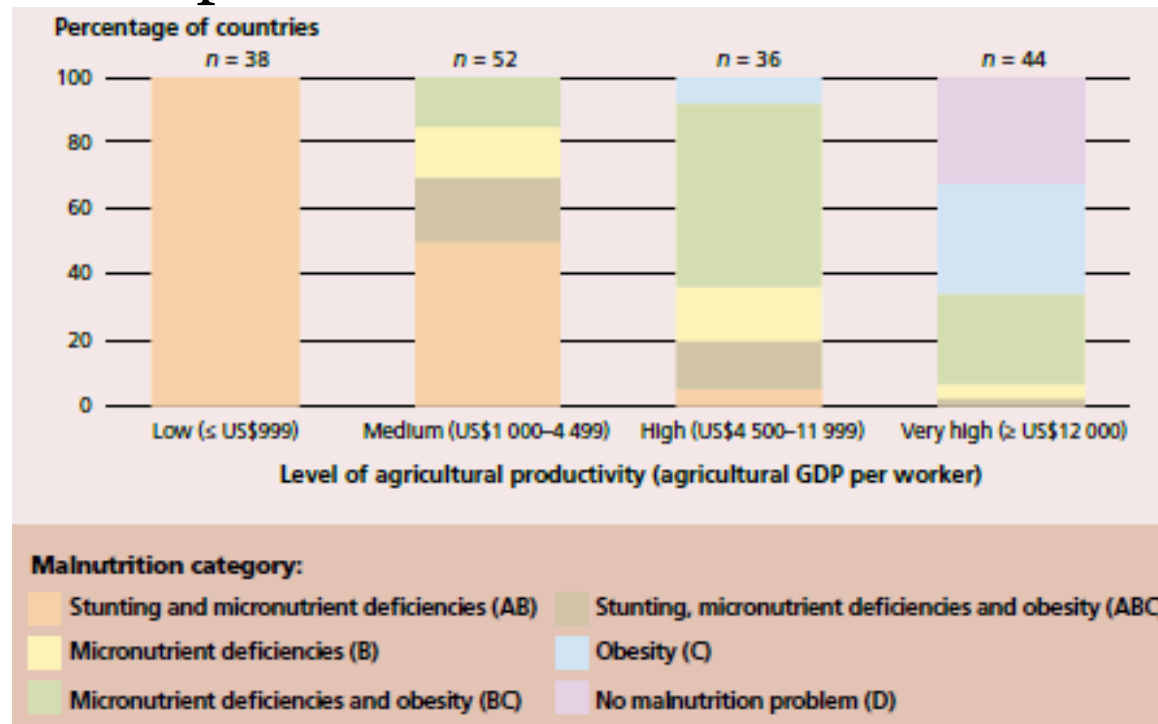
1. **Rebalance portfolio from production to exchange:**

-   CGIAR successes ⟶ prod'n no longer first-limiting for food security. Global DES>125% of needs. Distribution has become and will remain the main issue for poverty and malnutrition.

-   Income growth and Bennett's Law mean consumer demand for attributes, not DES, increasingly drive demand.

-   Exchange is a 'technology' too … inefficiency, variable rates of 'adoption', etc. Not very successful yet at applying production analysis tools to exchange. But neither are we ARIs! Location and relationships are major advantages for CGIAR.

2. Rebalance from staples and undernutrition to high value and micronutrients:

- MND 2-3x more widespread and less responsive to income
- Where w/n value chain to intervene most effectively?
- BTW, CGIAR has proved it can do this: World Food Prize

Countries by malnutrition problem and ag productivity (SOFA 2013)

3. Rebalance from ex post to ex ante IA

- Ex post impact assessment is crucial but hard. Only invest in high quality IA. Too much low quality epIA w/n CGIAR today.

- Ex ante IA has waned with core $. Rigorous ex ante research prioritization a partial antidote to excessive opportunism.

- Need not only rigorous causal inference but equally rigorous prediction (e.g., for targeting). Machine learning movement.

- Identify highest likelihood impact pathways then focus on priority topics and impact pathways.

4. Establish and maintain long-term sites

- Most impactful CGIAR social science builds on locational and boundary-spanning advantages.

- Emphasize long-term, multi-locational, mixed methods data collection at sentinel sites in platforms that draw together social/natural scientists.

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The ARIs and the world need CGIAR social science to thrive.

Focus on comparative advantage and on highest quality science for impact in highest return areas of future research.

Thank you for your time and interest