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# Testing New Models of CGIAR–NARS Collaboration: Evidence and Lessons from the CapSha Pilots

Final Evaluation Report

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# Executive Summary

Funded by the Gates Foundation, the CapSha pilots were established to test improved equitable partnerships models, in response to a persistent challenge in how CGIAR works with national agricultural research systems (NARS). While collaboration has long been central to CGIAR's model, it has often been criticized for being insufficiently responsive to national priorities and for structuring partnerships in ways that remain CGIAR-driven. Within the CGIAR Engagement Framework, there is now a clear commitment to shift toward more balanced, long-term, and intentional partnerships. In practice, this means moving toward more equitable, interchangeable roles, where national systems define priorities and lead implementation, and CGIAR aligns its expertise in support of those agendas, rather than the reverse.

The CapSha pilots, implemented between 2023 and 2026 in Senegal, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, were designed to test how this shift works in practice under real delivery conditions. They provide direct evidence of what happens when this model is applied within existing institutional, capacity, administrative, and funding constraints. Upon the start of the CGIAR Capacity Sharing Accelerator in 2025, the CapSha pilots were incorporated into the accelerator's area of work on South-South and Triangular Collaboration.

A consistent finding across all three countries is that the effectiveness of this approach was not primarily determined by the quality of the research design or technical content. It depended on whether the underlying system conditions allowed the shift in roles to function. Where decision-making authority, financial and administrative capacity, and leadership alignment enabled national systems to take a leading role, the model worked. Where these conditions were weak or fragmented, it did not hold as well, regardless of how clearly roles were defined in project documents. "Flipping the model" therefore cannot be achieved through design alone; it requires alignment between authority, technical as well as administrative capacity, incentives, and the structural systems through which work is actually delivered.

The three pilots illustrated this pattern in different ways. In Senegal, CapSha worked within an already strong CGIAR (CIMMYT) –ISRA partnership and helped expand and deepen joint work: strengthening breeding pipelines, improving infrastructure, and extending collaboration into new areas. The result was not a shift in roles, but a scaling of an already functioning co-production model. In Ethiopia, CapSha supported a clearer move toward national leadership: EIAR set priorities, coordinated actors, and led implementation, while CGIAR provided targeted technical support.

This made it possible to bring previously fragmented CGIAR approaches into a single, nationally owned system, showing what the model can deliver when leadership and coordination are in place. In Rwanda, the same formal shift in roles did not lead to similar results. Although RAB was positioned to lead, implementation was not fully streamlined across teams and functions, with fragmented links between field activities, data systems, and analysis. The issue was not a lack of effort, but the absence of coordination, data governance, and institutional anchoring needed to function as a coherent system.

Across all three pilot studies, the main constraints to effective partnerships were not technical. Administrative procedures, financial and contracting arrangements, coordination across institutions, and incentive structures played a decisive role in shaping what could be delivered. In several instances, these factors were more limiting than gaps in scientific capacity. This changes how capacity sharing needs to be understood. In practice, it is less about transferring knowledge than about whether the surrounding systems (financial, administrative, organizational, and political) allow that knowledge to be applied and sustained.

At the same time, the pilots highlight concrete opportunities. The in-depth collaboration established between Ethiopia and Rwanda demonstrates the value of structured South–South exchange, where one national system builds on tools and approaches developed in another, with CGIAR facilitating and contributing technically. Such collaboration can accelerate progress and reduce duplication, but only when it is deliberately designed, resourced, and supported over time.

Taken together, the pilots show that more balanced and country-led partnership models are achievable, but not yet systematically supported. In practice, their success depended less on a one-size-fits all approach, but rather on specific fit-for-purpose combinations of leadership, institutional capacity, and operational flexibility that are not consistently in place. Current funding, contracting, and partnership arrangements, on both CGIAR and NARS sides, often work against the model rather than enabling it, particularly where they introduce delays, fragment responsibilities, or leave collaboration insufficiently resourced.

This is where the CapSha Accelerator becomes critical. The pilots generated substantial practical learning, but also showed that such learning does not automatically translate into broader change. Without a mechanism to consolidate, customize, and apply these lessons across contexts, they remain confined to individual countries and projects.



The role of the Accelerator is therefore to ensure that what has been learned is embedded in how new partnerships are designed and implemented, through more consistent approaches, stronger operational support, and the systematic development of fit-for-purpose partnering capabilities.

The overall conclusion is straightforward. Improving partnership models is not primarily a question of refining concepts, but of aligning the systems that enable those models to function in practice. The next phase is therefore one of integration: embedding these lessons and best practices into funding structures, operational processes, and partnership practices across CGIAR and its engagement with national systems.

# 1. General Background

## 1.1 Project Objectives

Despite decades of collaboration between CGIAR and national agricultural research systems (NARS), engagement patterns in many contexts continue to reflect a persistent structural imbalance in how research priorities are defined and operationalized. In practice, research agendas are often initiated within CGIAR-led processes and subsequently adapted in collaboration with national partners, rather than being systematically shaped through nationally led priority-setting processes from the outset. While such practices have enabled long-term scientific collaboration, they have also limited the extent to which national agricultural research institutes (NARIs) are positioned as primary agenda-setters in research and innovation systems.

Against this backdrop, a Gates Foundation investment supported the establishment of three Capacity Sharing (CapSha) pilots as a structured experimentation platform to test alternative engagement modalities between CGIAR and national agricultural research systems (NARS). These CapSha pilots were designed to operationalize a rebalanced engagement architecture in which NARIs take the lead in defining research priorities, while CGIAR organizes its technical engagement, expertise, and support around nationally articulated agendas. This approach is closely aligned with the key principles of the CGIAR Engagement Framework, particularly its emphasis on more structured, differentiated, and partner-led engagement modalities, including co-design, co-implementation, and capacity sharing.

Within this framing, the CapSha pilots were established to test how this reconfigured engagement model functions in practice across different institutional and country contexts. The pilots pursued three core objectives:

- To test whether and how NARI-led priority setting can be effectively operationalized in real-world CGIAR–NARS collaboration, and what conditions are required for this to function.
- To explore more structured and equitable engagement modalities between CGIAR and national systems, including clearer roles in co-design, co-implementation, and shared delivery of research outputs.
- To generate empirical evidence on how alternative engagement architectures perform across diverse contexts, with a view to informing future system-level engagement approaches, including the design of the CapSha Accelerator.

## 1.2 Overall Structure and Scope of the Project

The project was designed as a phased, learning-oriented process. It combined preparatory design work, co-design with national and CGIAR partners, pilot implementation, and system-level learnings and synthesis. Across all phases, the focus was on generating practical evidence on how more structured and equitable research partnerships with NARIs can work in real institutional settings.

The project followed a clear sequence: starting with prioritization and design, moving into pilot implementation, and ending with structured learning to inform possible future scaling through a CapSha Accelerator mechanism. Each phase built on the previous one, allowing lessons from implementation to feed back into analysis and future design.

The project had four main work packages. Work Package 1 set up the basic design and rules for the pilots. Its main role was to make sure that pilot selection and design reflected both CGIAR Initiative priorities and NARS priorities, while also being realistic given existing capacity, governance arrangements, and funding limits. This work package supported:

- Selecting CGIAR Research Initiatives, countries, and NARS partners
- Defining criteria for choosing pilot entry points and themes
- Setting up the overall framework for collaboration between CGIAR and NARS partners
- Reviewing existing partnership models and lessons from CGIAR and national systems
- Defining initial monitoring and learning approaches to support adaptive implementation

Rather than being a separate preparatory phase, Work Package 1 formed the foundation for the whole project. It set the scope and basic rules, while still allowing flexibility to adjust to different country contexts during implementation.

Work Packages 2–4 constituted the main implementation phase. They were carried out through pilots in Senegal, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, selected through a structured country selection process. These country pilots formed the core of the project's practical work.

The pilots tested different ways of sharing capacity through joint research work. They followed a common overall framework, but were adapted to each country's context, including differences in institutional capacity, governance structures, and working environments.

Across the three countries, the pilots explored:

- NARI-led research, with CGIAR providing technical support
- Joint setting of research agendas aligned with CGIAR priorities and national priorities
- Embedding capacity strengthening into day-to-day research work, rather than separate training activities
- Using national systems, staff, and infrastructure as the main platform for implementation

In all three countries, NARIs led the implementation, while CGIAR provided scientific input and technical support based on agreed workplans and priorities. This placed national systems at the center of implementation rather than treating them as external partners.

Together, the four work packages produced both scientific research results and practical lessons and best practices on what is needed for effective CGIAR–NARS collaboration under a capacity sharing approach. Although implemented in only three countries, the project was designed as a broader learning exercise to inform how CGIAR can work more effectively with national research systems in the future.



Photo credit: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)

## 2. Consultations

The CapSha project ran from 2023 to 2026 and was based on a structured, ongoing consultation process involving CGIAR Research Initiatives, NARIs, and the Gates Foundation. The consultations were not a one-off activity, but a step-by-step process that continued through the design and early implementation phases of the pilots.

The aim was to gradually shape the CapSha approach, select countries and research topics, and jointly design pilot activities that reflected both national and CGIAR priorities.

The process combined regular discussions, in-person co-design workshops, technical meetings, and ongoing engagement with the Gates Foundation. This allowed the design to evolve over time based on feedback and practical constraints.

### 2.1 Country selection

The three pilot countries were selected through a structured process in consultation with the Gates Foundation and CGIAR partners. Ultimately, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Senegal were chosen because:

- They all have established NARIs that have shown an interest in working more closely with CGIAR
- They were already receiving Gates funding through CGIAR initiatives, especially Excellence in Agronomy and Genetic Innovation, providing a clear entry point for the pilots
- Together, they represent a broad cross-section of African NARS (in terms of system size, agroecology, geography, language), allowing for learning across different settings
- CGIAR already had a physical presence and active partnerships in these countries, making implementation more feasible

The research topics were not pre-set. They were developed through consultation between CGIAR Research Initiatives (especially Excellence in Agronomy and Genetic Innovation / Accelerated Breeding), and national research priorities identified by NARS partners during country consultations. This ensured that the pilots focused on issues that were both nationally relevant and aligned with CGIAR program goals.

## 2.2 Consultations within CGIAR

Internal CGIAR consultations focused on selecting Research Initiatives, identifying possible collaboration areas, and agreeing on how the CapSha approach would work in practice.

These discussions moved in stages, from early planning to more detailed design work.

### *1. Initial framing (January 2023)*

A CapSha Taskforce meeting in early 2023 officially launched the work. This meeting defined the purpose of CapSha, clarified roles, and set out initial ideas for how CGIAR and NARS could work together in a more balanced way.

### *2. Work with CGIAR Initiatives (February–September 2023)*

Regular consultations were held with two main CGIAR Research Initiatives: Excellence in Agronomy and Genetic Innovation / Accelerated Breeding. These discussions focused on:

- Identifying research areas that could be tested with NARS partners
- Matching CGIAR research priorities with national priorities
- Exploring how NARS could lead or co-lead parts of the research

### *3. Preparation and alignment work*

Additional meetings were held to prepare CGIAR teams for the co-design process. A key shift during this phase was moving CGIAR staff from leading project design to supporting NARS-led prioritization and design.

### *4. Engagement with the Gates Foundation*

CGIAR teams and the Gates Foundation held regular discussions to review progress and agree on key design decisions. These meetings helped confirm country selection, research focus areas, and the overall pilot approach.

All these CGIAR consultations led to:

- Selection of CGIAR entry points for collaboration
- Agreement on research areas aligned with both CGIAR and NARS priorities
- A shared co-design approach where NARS partners led priority setting

## 2.3 Consultations with NARS Partners

Consultations with African NARIs were central to the co-design approach. These took place through in-country, face-to-face meetings, followed by regular follow-up discussions (Table 1). The aim was to ensure that the pilots were based on national priorities, existing capacity, and the day-to-day realities of the NARIs.

Each country consultation followed a structured process, including:

- Identifying national agricultural research priorities
- Assessing institutional strengths and gaps
- Jointly defining research questions
- Developing initial workplans and implementation approaches
- Identifying risks, sustainability options, and intended users of the research outputs

After the main workshops, follow-up discussions continued from September to November 2023 to refine concept notes and finalize pilot designs.

**Table 1 – Country consultations with NARS partners**

| NARS Partner                                                    | Period                    | Participants                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)             | August 3-4, 2023          | EIAR (15)<br>CGIAR/EIA (2)<br>CapSha (2)          |
| Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) | September 13-14, 2023     | RAB scientists (9)<br>CGIAR/EIA (3)<br>CapSha (2) |
| Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA)              | September 25-27, 2023     | ISRA (14)<br>CGIAR/GI (3)<br>CapSha (1)           |
| ALL – follow-up meetings and exchanges                          | September – November 2023 | NARS focal persons (3)<br>CapSha (2)              |

## 2.4 Consultations with the Gates Foundation

Engagement with the Gates Foundation ran throughout the project (2023–2026). These were regular check-ins that provided both feedback and approval at key stages.

In 2023 and the first half of 2024, meetings took place every two weeks. These discussions focused on:

- Progress on pilot design and country selection
- Alignment with Gates Foundation investment priorities
- Review of co-designed research plans
- Identification and management of implementation risks

The consultations with the Gates Foundation led to key decisions on the selection of the three pilot countries, the definition of research focus areas, the review and refinement of NARS-developed concept notes, and the approval of pilot implementation.

## **2.5 Outcome of the consultation process**

The consultation process resulted in a set of country-specific pilot designs that defined what would actually be implemented under CapSha. These were then formalized through contracts with the three implementing countries.

While the pilots differed largely in content, they shared a common structure:

- NARIs took the lead in defining research priorities and implementation
- CGIAR aligned its technical support to these priorities
- Capacity strengthening was embedded within the research itself, rather than treated as a separate activity

The result was not a single CapSha model applied across countries, but a set of comparable pilots built on the same principles but adapted to different themes and contexts. These agreed designs form the basis for the technical description and analysis of implementation presented in the next section.

## 3. Country Pilots: Design and Implementation

### 3.1 Cross-cutting design assumptions

At the outset, the CapSha pilots were designed around a shared set of core assumptions intended to operationalize a shift in how CGIAR and NARS collaborate.

First, the pilots were based on a rebalanced ownership model, in which NARIs would take primary responsibility for defining research priorities and leading implementation, with roles between CGIAR and NARS becoming more equitable and interchangeable over time. CGIAR's role was to shift from that of primary implementer to that of a technical partner providing scientific support, methodological guidance, and access to global expertise.

Second, capacity strengthening was not conceived as a standalone activity, but as something to be embedded within ongoing research processes. The expectation was that participation in design, data generation, analysis, and application would itself serve as the primary mechanism for strengthening institutional and individual capacity.

Third, the pilots assumed that co-design processes would align CGIAR and national priorities, resulting in jointly defined research agendas that would be both scientifically robust and nationally relevant. This implied a transition from CGIAR-led proposal development to more balanced, partner-driven design processes.

Finally, the pilots were designed with the expectation that existing national systems (technical, administrative, and institutional) would serve as the primary platform for implementation, with CGIAR support complementing rather than substituting for national capacity.

These assumptions provided a common design logic across the three pilots. However, as implementation progressed, the extent to which these assumptions could be operationalized varied across countries, leading to differences in how the pilots unfolded in practice.

## 3.2 Research Pilots

### 3.2.1 Senegal: Crop breeding and genetic innovation

#### A. Planned design

The CapSha pilot in Senegal focused on strengthening national crop breeding systems through close collaboration between the Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA) and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). The aim was to improve ISRA's ability to develop, test, and deploy improved varieties of sorghum, pearl millet, and groundnut, while embedding more advanced breeding tools and approaches within the national system.

ISRA, primarily through its Centre d'Étude Régional pour l'Amélioration de l'Adaptation à la Sécheresse (CERAAS), was responsible for leading implementation. This included trial design, population development, phenotyping, data collection, and day-to-day management of research infrastructure. ISRA also led the definition of research priorities and target traits, ensuring alignment with national agricultural needs.

CIMMYT acted as the main technical partner, providing scientific backstopping and methodological support. This included guidance on breeding strategies, support in experimental design and data analysis, and access to advanced approaches such as marker-assisted selection and high-throughput phenotyping. CIMMYT was also closely involved in joint planning and technical review processes. It is important to note that CIMMYT's engagement in Senegal was itself relatively recent, having established its dryland crops program at CERAAS in 2022.

Additional CGIAR partners included the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (ABC), and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

The pilot focused on four main areas:

- Infrastructure and genetic resource management: rehabilitation of a 12-hectare drought phenotyping platform and strengthening of germplasm management systems, including regeneration of pearl millet accessions and improved seed viability protocols.
- Breeding pipeline development: advancement of structured populations (biparental, NAM, and MAGIC) to accelerate identification of lines with improved yield, resilience, and resistance traits.

- Multi-environment testing and screening: field trials across agroecological zones and strengthened phytosanitary screening systems to ensure robustness of breeding outputs.
- Capacity strengthening and regional collaboration: integration of students and early-career scientists into research activities, and positioning of CERAAS as a regional hub for training and knowledge exchange.

Capacity strengthening was designed to be embedded in day-to-day research work rather than delivered through standalone training.

## **B. Implementation reality**

In practice, the Senegal pilot operated within a system where many elements of capacity sharing were already well established before CapSha began. Partnership had long been embedded in how CERAAS operates, a direct consequence of its designation as a Center of Excellence for dryland cereals under the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP). As staff put it during field visits, partnership had become part of CERAAS's DNA. When CIMMYT established its dryland crops program at CERAAS in 2022, it stepped into an institution already shaped by this culture. By the time CapSha began, shared infrastructure, joint breeding pipelines, and close day-to-day interaction between ISRA and CIMMYT were already in place. As a result, CapSha did not create a new partnership model, but rather expanded and formalized an existing system of co-production.

CIMMYT is hosted by ISRA at the Bambey campus, where offices, trial plots, and facilities are genuinely shared. In the field, it is often impossible to distinguish CIMMYT trials from ISRA trials, a degree of integration that staff captured with the Wolof concept of "mbolo", or co-everything. This was not accidental. Weekly meetings between breeders for each crop, regular joint sessions between ISRA and CIMMYT staff, and constant informal interaction made co-design a daily operational reality rather than a project requirement. CapSha did not create this model; it expanded and deepened it.

CapSha funding enabled this system to scale, however. Breeding populations were expanded, more extensive trials were conducted, and infrastructure investments were made, including irrigation systems, pumps, and laboratory upgrades. Investments in genotyping and phenotyping capacity were particularly important, as they reduced reliance on external services and shortened breeding cycles.

Capacity strengthening took place largely through this embedded collaboration. Researchers were trained through ongoing interaction, including support from CIMMYT teams based in Nairobi, rather than through formal training alone.

This included work on breeding optimization, use of molecular markers, and digital data collection tools. At the same time, CERAAS continued to function as a regional hub, hosting scientists from across West Africa.

At the same time, the implementation highlighted some stresses in the original design. While ISRA was formally designated as the lead across all areas, this did not always reflect comparative advantage. In some domains, CIMMYT had stronger technical expertise but stepped back to maintain the intended leadership model. This supported national ownership but may have limited technical progress in certain areas.

Administrative and operational factors also shaped implementation. ISRA's general approach was to have close linkages between administrative and financial staff with the project implementation, through kick-off meetings etc. Procurement emerged as a major constraint, particularly given the scale of infrastructure investments. Government procedures were slow and often resulted in higher costs or quality trade-offs. A key adaptation was the direct recruitment by ISRA of a procurement specialist from the government procurement system. This significantly improved performance, with 12 out of 13 planned procurements completed successfully by the end of the pilot and broader spillover benefits within ISRA. This was seen as a major achievement by the ISRA staff themselves.

Staffing changes also affected implementation. Transitions in leadership and financial management roles required adjustment, and early challenges with CGIAR reporting requirements led to delays and corrections. These issues were resolved over time but highlighted the importance of early support for administrative functions.

Finally, the broader institutional context played an important role. ISRA operates in a system heavily reliant on competitive project funding, which has fostered strong capabilities in proposal development, partnership management, and project execution. This was an important component contributing to the overall effectiveness of implementation.

## **C. Key changes, constraints, and adaptations**

Several cross-cutting issues shaped how the pilot evolved.

A central stressor concerned the rigidity of the “flipped” leadership model. Assigning ISRA as lead across all technical areas strengthened ownership, but did not always align with comparative advantage in technical expertise.

In practice, more flexible arrangements, where leadership shifted depending on the task, would likely have improved technical performance.

Procurement constraints were one of the most significant operational bottlenecks. Government rules, including requirements to select lowest-cost suppliers, affected both efficiency and quality. The successful recruitment towards the end of the project of a procurement specialist showed that targeted investments in administrative capacity can have a very large impact.

Leadership capacity varied across thematic areas. ISRA as an institution is strong, and CERAAS in particular has focused and experienced leadership. However, some thematic area leads, while technically competent, had limited experience in coordinating teams, managing activities, and driving progress across a complex multi-partner workplan. In those areas, implementation moved more slowly. Both ISRA and CIMMYT staff identified this during the pilot, and ISRA itself flagged leadership development as a priority going forward, not as a criticism of individuals, but as a recognition that technical expertise and leadership capacity are different things, and that both need to be developed.

The design of financial flows also created imbalances. While ISRA managed the CapSha budget, CIMMYT did not receive dedicated implementation funding. This meant that a significant share of technical support was effectively provided in-kind. While this worked in the short term, it raises questions about sustainability.

Short timelines during the design phase also affected the depth of co-design. The initial concept note was largely prepared by CIMMYT, with limited time for ISRA to engage fully. Although collaboration improved during implementation, this early imbalance had some lasting effects.

Finally, the Senegal pilot was shaped by ongoing changes within the CGIAR system itself. CIMMYT's transition from the Breeding Management System (BMS) to the Enterprise Breeding System (EBS) required ISRA to adapt its data management systems, introducing additional training requirements and potential risks related to system compatibility and long-term sustainability. These types of system-level changes, while driven by CGIAR, have direct implications for NARS partners and require careful management to avoid disrupting ongoing work.

## **D. Outputs and current status**

By the end of the pilot period, the Senegal project had strengthened both technical capacity and institutional systems.

Breeding programs were expanded and accelerated. Larger populations were developed, testing environments were increased, and improved breeding schemas were implemented. Investments in genotyping and phenotyping infrastructure have created capabilities that extend beyond ISRA itself. The upgraded facilities can now host scientists and students from across the region for training, reducing the need to travel abroad for advanced analytical work. Other research infrastructure was upgraded as well, including field stations, irrigation systems, and laboratory facilities. These investments provide a strong foundation for future work and reduce reliance on external support. And administrative staff were recruited to focus on needed areas such as procurement.

Data management capacity improved through the introduction of digital tools and more structured workflows, although the transition to new CGIAR systems (EBS) is still ongoing.

At the institutional level, the pilot reinforced and deepened an already strong partnership model. Coordination mechanisms, joint planning, and day-to-day collaboration between ISRA and CGIAR partners are now more structured and consistent.

CERAAS continues to play an important regional role, supporting training and knowledge exchange across West Africa.

At the same time, some challenges remain. Leadership capacity at thematic level needs further strengthening, procurement systems continue to impose constraints, and the long-term sustainability of collaboration depends on addressing funding imbalances between partners.

Overall, Senegal represents a case where CapSha built on an already mature system. Rather than creating new capacity, the pilot expanded and strengthened existing structures. It shows that where institutional foundations are strong, capacity sharing can be highly effective, but also that even advanced systems require continued attention to accountability, administrative capacity, and partnership design to sustain results.

### 3.2.2 Ethiopia: Integrated digital soil fertility decision support system

#### A. Planned design

The CapSha pilot in Ethiopia focused on developing an integrated national digital tool for site- and crop-specific fertilizer recommendations. The work was led by the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), in close collaboration with ABC, with additional technical support from CIMMYT and ICRISAT. The aim was to improve fertilizer use by providing more precise, location-specific, data-driven advice for major cereals such as wheat, maize, tef, and sorghum.

Prior to CapSha, fertilizer recommendations in Ethiopia were produced through multiple parallel and uncoordinated advisory systems developed by different institutions and projects. In some cases, these systems generated different or inconsistent advice for the same crops and agroecological conditions, reflecting a very fragmented advisory landscape rather than a unified national framework.

The pilot was therefore designed not only to develop a new decision support tool, but also to move toward integration across existing approaches through harmonization of different models.

The division of roles reflected this ambition. EIAR was responsible for leading implementation and coordination within the national system, including development and management of an integrated soil and agronomy database, coordination with regional research institutes, field validation, and engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture and extension services to support uptake and long-term institutionalization.

ABC acted as the principal technical partner, working closely with EIAR on data integration, statistical analysis, and the development of predictive models, including the use of machine learning approaches. Model development was intended as a joint process, combining agronomic knowledge with data science and AI methods. CIMMYT and ICRISAT contributed additional expertise in agronomy, modelling, and calibration. The pilot covered the full development cycle of a national digital advisory system, including:

- consolidation and harmonization of soil and agronomic datasets
- development of predictive models for fertilizer recommendations
- field validation across agroecological zones
- development of delivery mechanisms through national extension systems

Capacity strengthening was embedded throughout, particularly in data management, modelling, and digital advisory systems.

## **B. Implementation reality**

In practice, implementation in Ethiopia progressed rapidly, particularly in technical areas. EIAR took an active and central role in coordinating activities, mobilizing national partners, and driving field implementation.

A key operational factor was the close collaboration between EIAR and the ABC Ethiopia team. Their physical proximity enabled frequent, informal interaction, which in turn supported rapid problem-solving, continuous model refinement, and strong alignment between field activities and analytical work. Rather than proceeding in distinct phases, data consolidation, model development, and validation evolved together in an iterative process.

The pilot made early progress in consolidating previously fragmented datasets into a more structured and usable format. This required substantial effort, including data cleaning, standardization, and integration across sources that had not previously been systematically linked.

Model development advanced in parallel. EIAR and ABC worked jointly on predictive approaches that combined agronomic understanding with machine learning techniques. Models were tested, adjusted, and refined continuously, drawing on both historical datasets and new field observations.

Field validation was implemented across multiple regions, with EIAR coordinating trials through regional research institutes. These trials compared model-based fertilizer recommendations with existing practices and incorporated both agronomic and socioeconomic data. Importantly, fieldwork was closely integrated into the modelling process, allowing results to feed directly into model refinement.

Engagement with government stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, began early and remained active throughout implementation. This created strong visibility for the decision support tool (DST) and generated high expectations regarding its potential role in national advisory systems.

One of the most significant developments during implementation was the gradual alignment of previously separate fertilizer recommendation approaches into a more coherent national system. While not fully resolved at the outset, this process became a defining feature of the pilot as it progressed.

### **C. Key changes, constraints, and adaptations**

Despite strong technical progress, implementation was shaped by several operational challenges.

A major issue related to financial management and planning. A misunderstanding of budget structure and disbursement modalities led to a situation in which a large share of the allocated funds was spent within the first year. This created pressure on second-year activities and required adjustments in planning and resource allocation.

EIAR also faced constraints in pre-financing field activities. Institutional rules limited the ability to advance funds ahead of reimbursement, which in some cases led to the temporary use of funds from other projects to maintain continuity. This added complexity to financial management and introduced implementation risks.

Coordination among CGIAR partners was initially a big source of friction. Different centers entered the pilot with their own soil fertility decision-support models and sought to advance them. Initial alignment among CGIAR partners proved difficult, with different centers (ABC and ICRISAT) bringing distinct methodological frameworks that were not harmonized. This resulted in parallel technical trajectories rather than a unified CGIAR approach. The situation was eventually resolved following intervention from the Ministry of Agriculture, which requested harmonization. CGIAR partners then aligned around a common framework. While this enabled progress, it slowed early implementation and placed a significant coordination burden on EIAR.

At the same time, CGIAR support became more structured over time. ABC and ICRISAT provided technical training in model development, automated data collection, and validation approaches, including the adoption of standardized frameworks. EIAR also adopted systems for real-time data uploading and validation, which strengthened data quality and comparability.

Another important factor was the role of political expectations. High-level interest in the DST created pressure to deliver results quickly and at scale. In some cases, expectations exceeded the scope of the pilot, requiring ongoing effort to manage and align them with technical realities.

EIAR's funding environment, in which researchers draw on multiple concurrent project grants, created workload pressures on the Principal Investigator, particularly given the high visibility of the DST and strong ministerial interest in rapid delivery.

## **D. Outputs and current status**

By the end of the pilot period, Ethiopia had developed a nationally owned digital decision support system for fertilizer recommendations. A central achievement was the integration of previously fragmented and partly competing approaches into a single, coherent harmonized framework.

Where multiple advisory systems had previously co-existed (sometimes producing inconsistent or conflicting recommendations), the CapSha process enabled their alignment into a unified data and modelling architecture. This is widely regarded within the system as one of the most important technical and institutional outcomes of the pilot.

The resulting system combines consolidated national soil and agronomic datasets, validated predictive models, and an operational advisory tool that has been tested across multiple agroecological zones. EIAR is now positioned as the central institution responsible for further model development, validation, and scaling.

This technical progress has been matched by strong institutional and political embedding. The system has been featured in national forums, supported by senior leadership within EIAR, and aligned with ongoing work in the Ministry of Agriculture and the extension system.

At the same time, some elements remain dependent on continued support. Ongoing model calibration, system maintenance, and the establishment of routine data flows are not yet fully embedded in core funding structures. While parts of the system are expected to be absorbed into extension services, full operational sustainability is not yet secured.

Looking ahead, the main challenge is therefore not technical viability, but long-term sustainability. This will depend on securing stable financing, embedding data and modelling workflows more deeply within EIAR systems, and maintaining coordination between research, extension, and policy actors as the system moves beyond the pilot phase.

### **3.2.3 Rwanda: Integrated soil fertility management for improved crop productivity and climate resilience**

#### **A. Planned design**

The CapSha pilot in Rwanda focused on strengthening the national system's ability to develop and apply site- and crop-specific soil fertility and climate-smart agriculture (CSA) recommendations. The work was led by the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB), in partnership with CGIAR organizations including ABC, the International Potato Center (CIP), and IITA. The aim was to move beyond blanket fertilizer recommendations by generating locally adapted Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) options and conservation agriculture practices across key crop systems.

RAB led the overall design and implementation of the pilot, including selecting priority crops and sites, designing and managing multi-location field trials, coordinating data collection, and ensuring alignment with national research priorities. A central element of the design was the use of the Rwanda Soil Information Service (RwaSIS) as a foundation for developing more targeted fertilizer and agronomic recommendations.

CGIAR partners worked alongside RAB to provide technical support in experimental design, data collection protocols, statistical analysis, and methodological guidance on ISFM and CSA approaches. The collaboration aimed to combine RAB's national knowledge and field implementation capacity with CGIAR's technical expertise in agronomy and data analysis.

The pilot covered several major crop systems (maize, potato, beans, soybean, and tomato) across different agro-ecological zones, combining two main workstreams. The first focused on ISFM, with field trials designed to test crop responses to different combinations of macro- and micronutrients under varying conditions, generating evidence for more site-specific fertilizer recommendations. The second focused on CSA practices, testing soil and crop management approaches such as minimum tillage, ridging, and the use of mulch.

In addition to generating field-level evidence, the pilot aimed to strengthen national capacity for data-driven agronomic research, including skills in experimental design, data collection and analysis, and improved use of RwaSIS to support decision-making. Overall, the Rwanda pilot was designed as an integrated research and capacity-strengthening effort, with RAB in the lead and CGIAR providing targeted technical support.

## **B. Implementation reality: a pilot with difficulties**

In practice, implementation in Rwanda did not evolve into a continuous, integrated research process. It developed in disconnected phases, with clear divergence between planned activities and what was actually sustained over time.

The pilot began with a structured setup phase. Planning workshops were held, consultations took place between RAB and CGIAR partners, and priority crops and trial sites were identified. Training sessions were organized for national researchers on experimental design and field implementation, and field trials were established across multiple locations. At this stage, implementation broadly followed the original design.

After this initial phase, implementation became increasingly fragmented. Field activities continued, but not as part of a coordinated research cycle. Data collection took place across sites but without consistent consolidation or systematic use for analysis. The expected link between field experimentation, data management, and the development of recommendations did not materialize.

Several structural problems compounded one another. A major disruption occurred when the Principal Investigator (PI) left the project mid-implementation without a structured handover, creating a vacuum in institutional memory that stalled activities for a significant period. A new PI was later appointed, but the transition required restarting coordination from scratch.

Sustained senior leadership engagement was not consistently maintained throughout the pilot, limiting institutional visibility and the ability to resolve bottlenecks as they arose. At key moments during implementation, it became clear that the pilot had not been fully embedded in leadership priorities, a pattern that made it harder to resolve bottlenecks and sustain momentum when they arose.

A particularly difficult dynamic emerged around RwaSIS, which had been expected to serve as the integrated data platform for the pilot. Instead of functioning as a shared backbone, RwaSIS operated largely in parallel, and at times in competition, with the CapSha work. A pre-existing internal role allocation at the data platform level created friction around data sharing that was not surfaced to the broader team until late in implementation, with lasting consequences for integration. This created a direct barrier to data integration, reinforced internal fragmentation, and was not surfaced to the CGIAR team until much later. Critical time and momentum were lost before the issue was identified and addressed.

CGIAR involvement during implementation was also insufficient. While CIP and IITA were engaged in early design discussions, their presence during execution was limited because no dedicated resources had been allocated for sustained CGIAR engagement. This made their role ad hoc rather than embedded. Notably, CIP's country coordinator in Rwanda held deep institutional knowledge of RAB and a clear understanding of how RwaSIS could be anchored sustainably, but because the CapSha grant did not allocate staff time to CIP, his involvement was limited to a few early meetings. When the original CGIAR leads later left the organization, continuity was lost entirely and this in-country expertise was never recovered.

Operational and administrative constraints added further pressure. Multiple coordination meetings were cancelled or postponed. Financial processes also created delays, as RAB did not consistently meet reporting deadlines, which in turn slowed CGIAR payment processing and affected field implementation timelines. The recurring need for external initiation of activities throughout the project implementation period pointed to persistent gaps in RAB's internal coordination, ownership, and follow-through mechanisms.

By early 2025, it had become clear that additional efforts would be needed to ensure the pilot could deliver its intended capacity-sharing outcomes within the remaining project timeframe. A progress report submitted at the start of the year indicated limited advances in data collection, analysis, and the translation of findings into RwaSIS. To maximize the value of the pilot and support timely delivery of results, adjustments to the implementation approach were considered necessary.

### **C. Course correction: the South–South reset**

At the same time as Rwanda's pilot was struggling, a clear contrast had emerged with Ethiopia. There, work on the DST for soil fertility management had progressed to a stage where core components were already operational: consolidated national datasets, functioning predictive models validated at over 1,500 field sites, and early integration of advisory outputs into extension systems backed by ministerial endorsement. The difference was not simply one of speed, but of where each pilot stood. Ethiopia was refining tools already in use, Rwanda was still trying to build the basic infrastructure.

This contrast created a practical opportunity. Rather than continuing to build two largely parallel systems under tight time constraints, Rwanda could work with an existing system that already covered several of the technical functions still under development.

In March and April 2025, CGIAR initiated a series of virtual meetings with RAB leadership and the broader CapSha team to clarify roles, reset expectations, and propose formally linking the two pilots. RAB welcomed the idea. A dedicated session followed in which the Ethiopian PI walked RAB team members through the pilot's methods and workflows, building confidence and paving the way for a more structured engagement.

This led to the Kigali workshop in July 2025, which served as the pilot's official reset. Hosted over two days, the workshop brought together RAB leadership (including the Deputy Director General), RAB soil scientists, agronomists and extension specialists, the RwaSIS coordinator, the EIAR soil scientist who had led DST development in Ethiopia, CGIAR staff from multiple centers, and the CapSha core team from the Alliance. Its objectives were clear:

- Understand the technical, organizational, and operational issues that had held back Rwanda's pilot and enabled Ethiopia's success
- Identify which elements from Ethiopia's work could be adapted to Rwanda's context
- Develop a practical six-month action plan with specific activities, deadlines, and responsibilities
- Establish clear check-in routines and decision-making roles
- Document lessons for the design of the CapSha Accelerator

Day 1 focused on understanding Rwanda's context and learning from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian team provided an extensive presentation on their DST development process, from data collection and database creation to field validation and ministerial integration. CGIAR representatives explained their role in supporting harmonization through data cleaning, standardization, and capacity strengthening within EIAR. The day closed with an open discussion on Rwanda's specific soil fertility management priorities and what a fit-for-purpose DST would need to achieve.

Day 2 focused on technical alignment and roadmapping. A key session examined RwaSIS architecture, data flows, and integration with Rwanda's Smart Nkunuzire System (SNS). The workshop then turned to DST design options for Rwanda, covering data harmonization, validation protocols, and modeling approaches. In the afternoon, participants collaboratively developed a six-month action plan built around four strategic pillars: data harmonization, capacity strengthening, leadership engagement, and sustainability.

The agreed collaboration framework established a structured Rwanda–Ethiopia–CGIAR triangular partnership, with EIAR and the ABC Ethiopia team providing targeted, hands-on support to help Rwanda develop a high-quality DST for ISFM. Key activities included:

- Reconstituting a core CapSha team within RAB, with active involvement of the RwaSIS coordinator
- Creating a catalogue of core soil datasets, harmonizing the data, and consolidating them in a shared repository
- Two CGIAR/EIAR-led training workshops in Kigali in September: one on data collation and standardization, one on fertilizer recommendation modelling and analytics
- Regular peer mentoring sessions between Ethiopian and Rwandan researchers
- Co-development of a sustainability roadmap to ensure RwaSIS has strong institutional anchoring beyond 2025
- Bi-weekly technical meetings and monthly coordination check-ins

In parallel, part of the remaining Rwanda budget was reallocated to Ethiopia to support this cross-country collaboration and to build on existing investments. This resulted in a reduced implementation budget for Rwanda, but allowed the program to make much greater use of already-developed systems and tools. CGIAR's role in this new configuration was not primarily as a technical implementer, but as facilitator and learning partner, coordinating collaboration, managing expectations, capturing lessons, and supporting policy engagement where needed.

In September 2025, EIAR and ABC delivered a seven-day in-depth training to X Rwandan scientists (y% women) on bean datasets and data analysis workflows in Kigali for key RAB staff. The training was well received, with participants gaining practical analytical skills. It was agreed that these skills would then be applied to other crop datasets, with EIAR and ABC remaining available for follow-up support through scheduled Q&A calls.

A second training round was planned for November–December 2025. Funds were available, and EIAR and ABC team members were ready to travel to Kigali. However, the training did not take place. Internal administrative and travel approval processes within RAB created significant delays, and the institution was not well equipped to organize international missions or approve implementation steps in a timely manner. At one point, RAB requested that CGIAR arrange travel instead, which was not possible, as the full CapSha Rwanda budget had already been transferred to RAB.

As a result, an important tranche of planned capacity strengthening was not delivered, despite the availability of funding, technical support, and partner willingness.

## **D. Outputs and current status**

Despite the implementation difficulties described above, the Rwanda pilot produced a more substantial set of outputs than its troubled history might suggest, in part because the South–South reset gave real momentum to the final phase.

Field experiments were conducted across two full cropping seasons on six priority crops, covering both ISFM and CSA-based technologies across multiple districts and agro-ecological zones. Four draft manuscripts are ready for internal review: two on carrots, one on tomato, and one on soybean. Using the modelling and machine learning skills acquired through the September 2025 training event, the RAB team also developed decision support tools for maize and rice independently, with only virtual support from EIAR and ABC, a concrete sign that the peer learning had begun to take hold. A data repository has been developed and is ready for use by RAB researchers.

That said, a significant share of originally planned deliverables was not completed. Only around 6 out of 21 planned manuscript writing activities were finished. Promotional materials, farmer training programs, and the updating of RwaSIS all remain outstanding. As RAB noted in its own final report, the two-year project period was simply not long enough to take the work from experimental data through to validated recommendations and farmer-level uptake. This is a broader design lesson: workplans that are ambitious relative to available time and administrative capacity make it harder for implementing partners to demonstrate the real progress they have made, and realistic scoping at the design stage is essential

## **3.3 Recurring implementation challenges: a summary**

Across the three pilots, several recurring operational challenges shaped implementation, though their effects varied significantly by country context. Staffing continuity was a persistent issue everywhere, but strong institutional structures in Ethiopia and Senegal absorbed disruptions that proved detrimental to momentum in Rwanda. Financial and administrative systems (procurement constraints in Senegal, pre-financing limits in Ethiopia, reporting delays in Rwanda) were not peripheral inconveniences but core determinants of what could be delivered. Internal CGIAR coordination, resourcing of centers contributions, and the disruption caused by the transition from Initiatives to the new Science Program Portfolio all left visible marks across all three pilots.

Together, these experiences point to a pattern: the gap between how the CapSha model was designed and how it performed in practice was shaped less by technical choices than by institutional maturity, administrative capacity, and political anchoring. Where those conditions were strong, the flipped ownership model worked. Where they were weak, it remained formal rather than functional.

Section 4 takes these observations as its starting point and develops them into the cross-cutting findings and design implications that run across all three pilots.



Photo credit: CGIAR Breeding for Tomorrow

## 4. Cross-cutting findings from the pilots

### 4.1 How the model performed in practice

The three pilots set out to test a specific proposition: that CGIAR and national agricultural research systems could operate in a genuinely different way with NARIs in the lead, co-design and co-implementation a reality, and CGIAR functioning as a technical partner rather than a primary implementer. Senegal, Ethiopia, and Rwanda each tested this proposition under different institutional conditions and with different results. What they share is the evidence they generated about what the model actually requires in practice.

This chapter draws that evidence together. It does not repeat the country narratives; those are in Chapter 3. Instead, it identifies the patterns that cut across all three cases: where the model worked and why, where it struggled and why, and what this means for how similar partnerships should be designed, resourced, and managed going forward.

The analysis is organized around six cross-cutting findings. The first four are primarily diagnostic; they describe what happened and why. The fifth addresses a dimension the pilots made visible but that is rarely named directly in reports of this kind: CGIAR's own behavior as a constraint on the model it was trying to promote. The sixth captures what is arguably the most innovative outcome of the program: the emergence of South–South cooperation as a model in its own right, not a fallback. Section 4.2 translates all six findings into forward-looking design implications.

#### 4.1.1 Ownership exists on a continuum, not as a binary

Across the three pilots, CapSha was designed around a clear conceptual shift: NARIs would move into a leadership position while CGIAR transitioned into a supporting, technical role. In practice, this shift proved uneven and context-dependent. In no case was it fully realized in the way the design narrative implied, but the reasons differed significantly across countries.

The most useful frame for understanding what happened is not a binary of “ownership achieved” versus “ownership not achieved,” but a continuum shaped by institutional maturity, administrative capacity, prior collaboration history, and political anchoring. Seen through this lens, the three pilots represent three distinct positions on that continuum rather than three versions of the same model.

Senegal reflects a long-standing co-production system. Well before CapSha began, CERAAS's role as a WAAPP Centre of Excellence had already embedded partnership as a core institutional practice, and CIMMYT's arrival in 2022 built on that foundation. By the time CapSha started, shared infrastructure, joint breeding pipelines, and embedded day-to-day interaction were already in place. CapSha mainly formalized and expanded this existing reality rather than changing it fundamentally. The question in Senegal was therefore not whether ownership could be achieved, but whether a maturing co-production model could be deepened and scaled.

Ethiopia reflects a case where strong national leadership drove the agenda from the outset. EIAR took an active and central coordination role, mobilized national partners, and maintained close alignment with the Ministry of Agriculture throughout. CGIAR's contribution, particularly from the ABC Ethiopia team, was technically decisive in specific areas, especially data integration and model development, but it was shaped by and subordinated to national priorities. The result was a functioning, nationally owned system that progressed further than any other pilot.

Rwanda, by contrast, shows that formal ownership on paper is not enough when it is not backed by stable internal coordination, data governance, and sustained institutional attention. RAB held the formal lead role but was unable to convert it into consistent implementation. Internal fragmentation, staff turnover, and the absence of sustained senior leadership engagement meant that the “flipped” model remained largely nominal. Ownership in Rwanda was “assigned”, but not “built”.

This continuum framing has an important implication: the appropriate role for CGIAR is not the same in all contexts. Stepping back only works where there is sufficient institutional capacity on the NARS side to take up that role in practice. Where that capacity exists, as in Ethiopia and (in a more embedded way) Senegal, leadership can shift meaningfully. Where it does not, as in Rwanda, a different engagement model is needed from the start, not as a compromise, but as a deliberate design choice.

Finally, it is worth noting that CGIAR itself is not a uniform actor. Different centers showed different levels of engagement, flexibility, and commitment across the three pilots. This variability shaped implementation outcomes just as much as differences on the NARS side, and it points to an internal coherence challenge that is taken up in section 4.1.5 below.

### **4.1.2 Co-design worked where the right conditions existed, and struggled where they did not**

A second cross-cutting finding concerns the gap between co-design as a stated commitment and how it actually functioned in practice. In all three pilots, co-design was formally part of the process. In none of them did it work exactly as intended.

Co-design was also undermined by the absence of a shared understanding of what it actually meant. In several cases, neither CGIAR nor NARS partners had a clear common picture of what “owning the process” required in practice: who made which decisions, how disagreements would be resolved, and what the escalation pathway looked like when things went wrong. Without this clarity, confusion was resolved by defaulting to more familiar CGIAR-led working patterns.

Where co-design worked better, two conditions stood out. First, early and sustained senior leadership engagement, at Director General or Ministry level, helped align institutions and created the internal authority needed to drive coordination across departments. Ethiopia is the clearest example: consistent backing from EIAR’s DG and the Ministry of Agriculture kept the process anchored at institutional level throughout. Second, co-design that continued through implementation, rather than being treated as a one-off design phase, proved more durable. Where it stopped after the initial concept note, partners gradually reverted to more transactional modes of working.

There is also a structural point about NARS diversity. There is no single model for co-design that works across contexts. NARS differ widely in capacity, mandates, internal governance, and research culture. Partnership models need to be genuinely adapted to each context, not applied from a standard template. This requires more upfront investment in understanding how partner institutions actually function than was typically made during the CapSha design phase, an important lesson for going forward.

### **4.1.3 Administrative and operational systems shaped what was possible as much as technical choices did**

Across all three pilots, administrative and financial systems were among the most significant determinants of what could actually be delivered. This is not a marginal observation about project management, but a finding about the structural conditions under which the CapSha model can function.

On the CGIAR side, funding moved through multiple contractual layers, from the Gates Foundation to System Office, to the Alliance, and then to country partners, each with its own approval and reporting requirements. This created delays at the start of implementation and slowed responsiveness throughout. Heavy reporting requirements and strict contractual deadlines reinforced a dynamic in which CGIAR retained effective control of the process as a “funder” even when the stated intent was to shift leadership to national partners.

On the NARS side, constraints played out differently across countries but were equally consequential. In Senegal, government procurement rules requiring selection of lowest-cost suppliers slowed purchasing and affected quality. The successful recruitment of a dedicated procurement specialist, an adaptation made during implementation, resolved much of this bottleneck and had spillover benefits across ISRA as an institution, demonstrating that targeted investment in administrative capacity can have outsized returns. In Ethiopia, pre-financing limits put pressure on field implementation, and foreign currency regulations further constrained financial flexibility. Sub-granting arrangements, where needed, had to be built into the original design; introducing them later proved practically impossible due to strict regulations. In Rwanda, reporting delays triggered payment delays, which in turn slowed already fragmented field activities in a compounding cycle.

A cross-cutting issue was that CGIAR contributions were frequently expected but not properly resourced. Much of the technical support provided by CGIAR centers was delivered in-kind, without dedicated staff time or budget. This created gaps between what was anticipated and what could realistically be sustained, and it placed an invisible burden on CGIAR staff who were expected to contribute while managing other commitments. This reinforces the importance of realistic project design, both when it comes to technical implementation being feasible, and budgeting appropriate.

The most disruptive factor across all three pilots was the CGIAR transition from Initiatives to the new Science Program Portfolio in January 2025. Because CapSha operated under Window 1 funding, flowing from the Gates Foundation through System Office to the Alliance and then to country partners, all country contracts had to be cancelled at the end of 2024 and reissued under the new structure. The re-contracting process took several months, during which implementing countries had no valid contracts and in some cases no access to funds.

Activities stalled at a critical phase of delivery. For partners on the ground, this was not just an administrative inconvenience, but it directly contradicted the principle of placing national partners in the lead, and reinforced the perception that CGIAR could open or close the funding tap at will regardless of its stated partnership commitments. The consequences were significant enough that two of the three countries (Rwanda and Ethiopia) formally requested no-cost extensions at the end of the project to recover lost time. The Gates Foundation approved both requests. However, System Office did not. The same institutional layer whose internal processes had caused the original contracting delays was subsequently unable to approve no-cost extension requests submitted by country partners. This is a concrete illustration of how the Window 1 funding architecture, and the intermediary role played by CGIAR's central system functions, can work against the country ownership principles the model is intended to support.

#### **4.1.4 Capacity sharing means strengthening systems, not just training people**

A recurring pattern across all three pilots was that capacity was understood too narrowly at the outset, as the transfer of technical knowledge and skills to individual researchers. In practice, this framing consistently proved insufficient.

Non-technical constraints were just as important as technical ones, and in several cases more limiting. Procurement processes, financial management systems, data governance, reporting workflows, and coordination mechanisms between institutions all shaped whether technical capacity could be put to use. When these systems were weak, technical training did not translate into sustained results. Rwanda is the clearest illustration: field trial data were collected, training sessions were delivered, and analytical skills were partially built, but without a functioning data management system, internal coordination, or institutional ownership of the process, none of these inputs accumulated into usable outputs.

Senegal's experience with the procurement specialist points in the opposite direction: a targeted investment in a non-technical administrative function had more impact on implementation effectiveness than almost any technical intervention during the same period. This suggests that administrative capacity strengthening should be treated as a core component of the partnership model, not a supporting function.

Training quality also emerged as a distinct issue. One-off sessions, however well designed, are not sufficient.

The September 2025 training delivered by EIAR and CIAT in Kigali was well received and built genuine skills, but the absence of a follow-up session (due to RAB administrative constraints) meant that skills were not optimized or efficiently applied across additional datasets as planned. Learning requires repetition and application over time, and training design needs to account for this from the start.

Single-person dependency was a critical vulnerability across all three pilots as well. In Rwanda, the departure of the PI without a structured handover stalled implementation for months. In Ethiopia, the PI operated under sustained overload due to high visibility and government interest of the DST and the absence of adequate support structures. In Senegal, transitions in leadership and financial management roles required significant adjustment periods. Continuity planning, including documentation, formal handover processes, and deliberate institutional anchoring of key functions, needs to be built into the design of future engagements, not treated as an afterthought.

Finally, capacity sharing requires a change in how CGIAR itself works, not only in what it delivers. Being a genuine technical partner means something different from being a primary implementer. It requires facilitation skills, the ability to step back at the right moment, and sustained engagement over time rather than ad hoc involvement. These are not yet standard competencies within CGIAR, and they are not currently incentivized by its internal recognition and career structures. This extends to the soft skills that technical staff are rarely trained for but increasingly need: project management, leadership within multi-agency research teams, and the ability to communicate and negotiate across institutional boundaries. Building these skills, for both CGIAR and NARS technical staff, is as important as developing analytical or methodological expertise.

#### **4.1.5 CGIAR processes and internal fragmentation created their own implementation constraints**

The findings above focus primarily on contextual and design conditions. This fifth finding concerns a dimension that is sometimes underweighted in program reviews: the extent to which CGIAR's own processes and internal organization shaped, and in some cases constrained, implementation outcomes.

A first issue is that CGIAR is not a single, coherent actor. It is a collection of institutions with different mandates, working cultures, and incentive structures. Across the three pilots, this internal diversity produced uneven engagement: different centers showed different levels of commitment, flexibility, and follow-through, which directly affected how smoothly implementation progressed.

In Ethiopia, competing methodological approaches between ABC and ICRISAT created parallel technical trajectories that slowed early progress and placed a significant coordination burden on EIAR, placing a coordination burden on EIAR that would have been better managed within CGIAR itself. Coordination within CGIAR, and across its centers, is not a detail, but a precondition for functioning as a reliable partner.

A second issue is the structural mismatch between CGIAR's internal incentive systems and what the CapSha model requires. Career progression within CGIAR remains largely tied to scientific publications, cutting-edge methodological work, and high-visibility technical outputs. The sustained, patient work that genuine capacity sharing requires is not well rewarded by these structures. This creates a quiet but persistent pull away from the kind of engagement the model depends on, particularly for more senior staff who are most often asked to lead such partnerships.

These dynamics are not unique to the CapSha pilots, but the pilots generated concrete evidence of their effects in practice, and that evidence should inform how the CapSha Accelerator can help address some of these issues.

#### **4.1.6 South–South cooperation proved effective and merits more deliberate investment**

The sixth finding concerns the Rwanda–Ethiopia–CGIAR triangular partnership that emerged during the final phase of the CapSha pilots. South–South cooperation is not new to CGIAR, and peer exchange between national research systems has featured in various programs over the years. What the CapSha experience adds is a concrete illustration of what structured South–South cooperation can achieve within a capacity sharing model, and what it requires to work in practice.

The experience also highlighted what South–South cooperation requires to function: a credible and available peer partner with directly relevant experience; a structured process with clear objectives and follow-up mechanisms; dedicated resources, including budget for travel, joint workshops, and coordination time; and active facilitation to manage expectations and sustain momentum. It does not bypass the institutional readiness conditions that shape other forms of capacity sharing (i.e. Rwanda's administrative constraints still prevented the second planned training from taking place), but it offers a complementary and sometimes more effective pathway to building national capacity.

The CapSha Accelerator should treat this experience as a foundation to build on in its Area of Work on South-South and Triangular Collaboration. More deliberate investment in South–South modalities, including systematic identification of potential peer partnerships, dedicated brokering capacity within CGIAR, and explicit budget lines for cross-country exchange, would allow this approach to be applied more consistently across future engagements rather than emerging ad hoc under pressure.

## **4.2 What the findings mean for future design**

The six findings above point to a set of structural changes needed in how CGIAR–NARS partnerships are designed, resourced, and managed. This section draws those implications out directly, organized around the six findings.

### **Implication 1: Partnership design should reflect the institutional context of each partner**

The appropriate role for CGIAR (how much it leads, how much it steps back, what kind of technical support it provides) must be calibrated to the institutional maturity and system readiness of each NARS partner. This requires genuine upfront investment in understanding how partner institutions actually function: their decision-making structures, administrative capacity, incentive mechanisms, coordination mechanisms, data governance, and leadership dynamics, including a basic actor mapping to surface potential internal frictions before they affect implementation. Treating all partners the same regardless of where they sit on the ownership continuum is not productive.

### **Implication 2: Co-design and co-implementation need to be actively resourced**

Co-design will not happen simply because it is stated as a principle. It requires dedicated time, clear role definitions, active facilitation, and senior leadership engagement at Director General and Ministry level from the start, as well as a QA step to ensure feasibility. It also needs to continue throughout implementation, not just at the design phase. Where it stops, partners tend to revert to more familiar and transactional modes of working. Co-design quality should be tracked as a program outcome in its own right, not only as a means to technical outputs.

### **Implication 3: Funding and contracting arrangements need to be compatible with country-led implementation**

Multilayered contracting, slow disbursement of funds, heavy reporting requirements, and rigid sub-granting rules all reintroduce top-down dynamics that country-led models are trying to move away from.

Simpler, faster, and more flexible funding mechanisms, with pre-agreed scope for resource reallocation and reduced transactional reporting, are a precondition for genuine country ownership in practice.

#### **Implication 4: Non-technical capacity development requires explicit investment**

Capacity strengthening in CGIAR–NARS partnerships has historically focused on technical expertise: research methods, analytical skills, and scientific knowledge. The pilots showed consistently that this framing is too narrow. Three distinct but connected dimensions of capacity all proved critical, and all three require deliberate investment. The first is science management skills for technical staff. Researchers leading pilots need more than scientific competence. They need to manage budgets, plan and sequence activities realistically, coordinate across institutional units, and sustain implementation through staff transitions. Gaps in these capabilities were often more limiting than gaps in technical knowledge. The second is leadership and interpersonal skills for technical staff. Co-design and co-implementation depend heavily on the ability to facilitate across institutional boundaries, negotiate disagreements, and lead teams through uncertainty and change. In several instances across the pilots, progress stalled not because of technical problems but because of coordination failures that stronger enabling skills could have prevented. The third is administrative systems and non-technical roles. Project managers, data stewards, and financial officers are not overhead; they are the infrastructure through which technical work is actually delivered. Senegal's procurement specialist is the clearest example of the outsized impact a single well-placed administrative investment can have. Capacity sharing programs that invest only in scientific staff while leaving administrative systems unchanged will continue to find that the systems cannot carry the work the technical capacity was built to do.

#### **Implication 5: CGIAR's internal incentive structures need better alignment with what genuine capacity sharing requires**

CGIAR's career and recognition systems reward scientific publications, methodological innovation, and high-visibility technical outputs. The work that genuine capacity sharing requires — sustained engagement with national systems, facilitation of co-design processes, administrative and institutional strengthening, long-term mentoring — sits largely outside this reward structure. This is not a marginal tension. It means that the model CGIAR is being asked to promote through programs like CapSha is structurally at odds with what CGIAR staff are incentivized to do. The most experienced scientists — those whose engagement would matter most — are also those with the least career incentive to prioritize this kind of work.

The result is that capacity sharing tends to depend on individual commitment and goodwill rather than on a system that makes it the natural thing to do. Addressing this requires more than adjusting program design: it requires CGIAR institutions to examine whether their internal recognition, funding, and performance systems are compatible with the partnership model they are publicly committed to. Until that question is taken seriously at a system level, the gap between CGIAR's stated ambitions for equitable partnership and its actual operating model will persist.

### **Implication 6: South–South cooperation warrants more deliberate investment as a capacity sharing modality**

Peer-to-peer technical exchange between national systems can be highly effective, particularly when one system has already developed tools or approaches that another is still building. The credibility of a peer who has faced the same institutional constraints and resource realities is a distinctive asset that more conventional CGIAR-led support does not provide. For this to work, South–South cooperation needs to be planned, resourced, and facilitated as a deliberate program element, with dedicated budget for travel, joint workshops, and structured follow-up. CGIAR's most valuable role in this modality is as convenor and facilitator, not as primary technical provider.

Taken together, these six implications point to a consistent conclusion: the gap between the CapSha model as designed and how it performed in practice was shaped less by technical design choices than by the interaction between institutional readiness, administrative systems, political anchoring, and CGIAR's own internal dynamics. Changing the model means changing those conditions. Section 5 translates these findings into a set of enabling conditions and operational requirements for the CapSha Accelerator.

## 5. From pilot evidence to system-wide practice

### 5.1 Enabling conditions for country-led, co-designed research partnerships

The cross-cutting findings in Section 4 point to a consistent underlying pattern: the effectiveness of the CapSha model was determined less by its conceptual design than by whether the conditions for it to function were actually in place. This holds across all three country pilots. In Ethiopia, where institutional readiness, leadership continuity, and data governance were relatively strong, the model performed well. In Senegal, where a long-standing co-production relationship had already built many of the necessary foundations, CapSha deepened and extended what existed. In Rwanda, where several of these conditions were absent or fragile, implementation struggled despite a sound design on paper.

The question this raises for the CapSha Accelerator and for CGIAR more broadly is: what, precisely, are those conditions? The pilots provide enough evidence to answer it with some specificity. Across the three cases, a set of enabling conditions emerges that consistently separated contexts where the model functioned from those where it did not. These conditions operate at two levels simultaneously: what CGIAR needs to bring to a partnership, and what the NARS partner needs to have in place. Neither side alone is sufficient. Where both are present, even imperfect designs tend to work. Where either is missing, even well-designed programs tend to drift.

Table 5.1 sets out these conditions across fourteen dimensions, organized to show what each requires from CGIAR, what it requires from the NARS partner, and what the system-level consequence of weakness in that dimension tends to be. The table is not a checklist for gatekeeping; not every condition needs to be fully in place before a partnership can begin. It is mostly an analytic tool; a basis for honest pre-engagement assessment, for identifying where investment is needed, and for understanding why implementation unfolds as it does.

**Table 2 – Enabling conditions for rebalancing roles in CGIAR–NARS partnerships**

| Domain                                          | CGIAR partner conditions                                                                     | NARS partner conditions                                                                        | System implication of domain weakness                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Clarity of roles and decision-making</b>     | Explicit definition of roles, authority, and accountability across the partnership lifecycle | Shared internal understanding of roles across technical, administrative, and leadership levels | Ambiguity leads to duplication, gaps, or re-centralization of decision-making                     |
| <b>Alignment of authority and resources</b>     | Delegation of decision-making authority consistent with the partnership model                | Capacity to manage financial and operational responsibility                                    | Mismatch between control and responsibility undermines functional ownership                       |
| <b>Realistic and iterative design processes</b> | Flexible timelines and openness to adapting design based on context                          | Ability to engage in design as a coordinated institutional process                             | Overly compressed or rigid design processes produce unrealistic or non-implementable plans        |
| <b>Predictable resource flows</b>               | Timely, transparent, and reliable funding and contracting mechanisms                         | Ability to plan and execute activities without excessive reliance on pre-financing             | Financial unpredictability reduces trust and disrupts implementation cycles                       |
| <b>Resourced engagement on all sides</b>        | Dedicated staff time and budget for collaboration, not only technical inputs                 | Clear allocation of personnel and time for sustained engagement                                | Unresourced collaboration leads to uneven participation and declining engagement over time        |
| <b>Functional administrative systems</b>        | Provision of standardized tools and support for finance, procurement, and reporting          | Operational administrative systems capable of meeting project requirements                     | Administrative constraints often determine implementation feasibility more than technical factors |

| Domain                                                  | CGIAR partner conditions                                                       | NARS partner conditions                                                                | System implication of domain weakness                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Partnership management and coordination capacity</b> | Ability to coordinate across organizational units and partners                 | Internal coordination mechanisms across departments and stakeholders                   | Partnerships require active management; without it, fragmentation is likely          |
| <b>Institutional anchoring</b>                          | Alignment with national strategies and engagement with senior stakeholders     | Formal endorsement and prioritization within institutional leadership                  | Strong anchoring enables coordination and sustained attention over time              |
| <b>Data governance and interoperability</b>             | Promotion of shared standards and interoperable systems                        | Clear frameworks for data ownership, access, and sharing                               | Weak data governance leads to parallel systems and limits integration                |
| <b>Continuity mechanisms</b>                            | Structured handover processes, documentation, and redundancy in key roles      | Institutionalized knowledge management and succession planning                         | Reduces dependency on individuals and protects against disruption from staff changes |
| <b>Incentive compatibility</b>                          | Formal recognition of collaboration, facilitation, and system-building efforts | Incentives that support sustained engagement rather than fragmentation across projects | Misaligned incentives weaken long-term collaboration and co-creation                 |
| <b>Collaborative capabilities</b>                       | Skills in facilitation, negotiation, and adaptive management                   | Ability to coordinate across departments (technical, administrative, and leadership)   | Effective co-implementation requires more than technical expertise                   |

| Domain                                        | CGIAR partner conditions                                                  | NARS partner conditions                                                                 | System implication of domain weakness                              |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Learning and adaptation mechanisms</b>     | Willingness to adapt based on experience and lessons from other countries | Ability to absorb, adapt, and apply external knowledge                                  | Accelerates progress and reduces duplication of effort             |
| <b>Shared understanding and communication</b> | Consistent articulation of objectives, roles, and expectations            | Ensuring all relevant staff understand roles, responsibilities, and how the model works | Misalignment in understanding leads to inconsistent implementation |

These conditions are mutually reinforcing. Weakness in one area (e.g. financial predictability, institutional anchoring, or incentive alignment) can undermine otherwise strong technical collaboration. Conversely, where conditions are broadly in place, partnership models can function effectively even in complex environments. The implication is that country-led, co-designed partnerships are not primarily a matter of intent or goodwill. They are a system-level arrangement that requires deliberate alignment across institutional, administrative, and incentive structures on both sides.

A further implication follows directly from the Rwanda experience. When core enabling conditions are absent, the appropriate response is not to persist with the original design under pressure, but to adapt, including, where relevant, through South–South approaches that substitute peer exchange for conventional CGIAR-led support. The Rwanda–Ethiopia triangular partnership demonstrated that this kind of adaptive response can open a more effective pathway than either doubling down on a struggling model or withdrawing support. Recognizing when and how to make that shift is itself a capability that the system needs to develop. The Rwanda–Ethiopia triangular partnership showed that when this shift is made deliberately, with a credible peer partner, structured objectives, and proper resourcing, it can open a more effective and more equitable pathway than either persisting with a struggling model or scaling back ambition.

## 5.2 What the pilots mean for CGIAR

The CapSha pilots were a cost-effective investment in system learning. Under real implementation conditions, across three very different national contexts, they tested whether CGIAR and national agricultural research systems can move toward more country-led, co-designed, and co-implemented partnership models. What they produced is not a simple verdict of success or failure. It is something more valuable: concrete evidence of what enables or constrains that shift in practice.

Taken together, the pilots functioned as a stress test of CGIAR's partnership ambitions. They showed where the current operating model supports the kind of collaboration CGIAR has publicly committed to, and where it quietly pulls implementation back toward more familiar, CGIAR-centered ways of working. The gaps they exposed are not incidental. They are structural: in how CGIAR resources its own contributions to partnerships; in how its internal incentive systems reward (or fail to reward) the sustained, facilitative work that genuine co-implementation requires; in how its administrative and contracting architecture interacts with the goal of country ownership; and in how it coordinates across centers when multiple institutions are engaged in the same country context.

These are not new observations about CGIAR. What the pilots add is field-level evidence of their effects, across different systems and different degrees of institutional readiness. That evidence matters because it shifts the conversation from aspiration to diagnosis. The question is no longer whether CGIAR should work in more equitable and country-led ways; there is broad agreement that it should. The question is what, specifically, needs to change in order for that commitment to be consistently operationalized in practice.

The pilots point to three implications that go beyond individual program design.

### **CGIAR needs to translate its partnership commitments into operational practice**

The Engagement Framework and related policy documents set out a clear ambition. The pilots show what acting on that ambition actually requires: clearer and more consistently applied role definitions across the project lifecycle; more predictable, adequate, and flexibly managed resourcing; stronger discipline in co-design; and a shift from ad hoc, project-by-project engagement to more sustained institutional relationships with NARS partners. These are not design refinements. They are changes to how CGIAR organizes and incentivizes its work.

## **Mainstreaming is now the central challenge**

The CapSha pilots tested partnership principles under real operational constraints. The learning they generated is valuable precisely because it is grounded in implementation reality rather than design aspiration. The next step is not further experimentation, but systematic uptake of what has been learned: embedding partnership quality, co-design discipline, and attention to administrative feasibility into how CGIAR programs are designed, funded, and assessed across Science Programs and Centers. This includes South–South and triangular cooperation modalities, which the pilots showed can be more effective than conventional CGIAR-led technical support in certain contexts, and which deserve to be treated as a standard option rather than an improvised response.

## **Uptake will not happen without a dedicated mechanism**

Learning from country-level implementation does not automatically translate into system change. Without something to consolidate lessons, develop shared tools, support individual and center-level partnership capability building, and create accountability for partnership quality, insights will remain fragmented and dependent on individual champions. This is the gap the CapSha Accelerator was designed to fill.

## **5.3 What the Accelerator should focus on next**

The Accelerator is not an additional layer on top of CGIAR systems. It is the mechanism intended to turn dispersed country experiences into consistent, scalable partnership practice. Its added value lies not in implementing programs directly, but in building the system infrastructure and mechanisms that make better partnerships the default rather than the exception.

The next step is not to replicate the pilots, but to scale what has been learned into system-wide practice. The CapSha Accelerator should focus on a set of practical functions that convert pilot learning into operational capability across CGIAR and NARS.

## **Consolidating and formalizing the partnership model**

A first priority is to develop a CapSha Partnership Playbook that clarifies in practical terms how country-led and co-designed partnership models work: where NARIs lead and CGIAR acts as a technical and knowledge partner, how roles evolve across the project lifecycle, and what different configurations look like in practice.

The Playbook should make explicit that no single model fits all contexts, and should set out a small number of operational configurations, including NARS-led models with CGIAR technical backstopping; hybrid models where CGIAR leads in specific technical domains; co-led models; and structured South–South arrangements.

### **Integrating partnership quality into program performance**

A second priority is to ensure that partnership quality is systematically measured and managed. This requires integrating CapSha indicators across Science Programs, with clear metrics for co-design, co-implementation, and collaboration quality. Partnership performance should become a visible and explicit element of how success is defined and reported within CGIAR, not an implicit background condition that is assumed.

### **Developing usable tools, methods, and operational support**

A third priority is to translate pilot learning into practical instruments that can be adopted and scaled across countries. The CapSha Innovation Lab should distil lessons from implementation into tools and methods that travel, including co-design facilitation guidance, feasibility assessment frameworks, and continuity planning protocols. The objective is to reduce repeated implementation bottlenecks and lower the transaction costs of good partnership practice, rather than leaving each new engagement to work through the same problems from scratch.

### **Building good partnering capabilities on both sides**

A fourth priority is capability strengthening. The pilots showed that effective co-implementation depends heavily on skills that are often underdeveloped or undervalued within CGIAR, including facilitation, negotiation, adaptive management, and working across institutional boundaries. These are not marginal competencies, but central to how the partnership model is supposed to function. The Accelerator should support structured development of these capabilities through the CapSha Marketplace and related learning platforms, for both CGIAR staff and NARS partners.

### **Strengthening peer learning and South–South exchange**

In parallel, the Accelerator should strengthen structured peer learning across countries. The Ethiopia–Rwanda South–South collaboration provides a strong foundation for this. The lessons from that experience about what makes peer exchange effective, how partners should be matched, and what facilitation and resourcing it requires should directly inform how future country-to-country engagements are designed. These lessons should directly inform how AoW3 designs and supports future South–South engagements within the Accelerator.

## Connect CapSha principles more closely with CGIAR Science Programs

Finally, the Accelerator should actively connect the CapSha principles of co-design and co-implementation with broader CGIAR Science Programs and Accelerators, especially Scaling for Impact (S4I), to ensure that partnership modalities and lessons are embedded into system-wide processes rather than developed in parallel to them.

The CapSha pilots demonstrate that more effective CGIAR–NARS partnerships are both necessary and achievable, but only when supported by appropriate system infrastructure. Partnership quality is not determined by intent alone; it depends on whether the underlying tools, incentives, and capabilities are in place to support it. Continued investment in the Accelerator is therefore a critical step that turns pilot learning into system-wide practice.



Photo credit: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)

## 6. Conclusion

The three CapSha pilots set out to test a specific proposition: that a different model of CGIAR–NARS collaboration—one in which national systems genuinely lead, co-design is real, and CGIAR acts as a technical partner rather than a primary implementer—was achievable in practice. Across Senegal, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, the answer is neither a straightforward yes or no. What the pilots demonstrate, collectively, is that the model works where the underlying conditions support it, and struggles where they do not.

That is the central finding this report leaves with. Institutional readiness, administrative and operational capacity, leadership continuity, and incentive alignment shaped outcomes more decisively than technical design choices. The pilots showed, in concrete and specific terms, what enabling those conditions requires; from CGIAR, from NARS partners, and from the systems that connect them. They also showed what happens when those conditions are not in place: not failure in any simple sense, but drift, fragmentation, and a quiet return to more familiar ways of working that leave the stated ambitions of equitable partnership unrealized.

Two things follow from this. The first is that the CapSha model works, but only when it is genuinely supported. Ethiopia demonstrated what country-led, technically grounded, ministerially anchored implementation can produce: a nationally owned digital decision-support system, integrated across previously fragmented advisory approaches, with strong institutional embedding and a clear pathway to scale. Senegal demonstrated what sustained co-production looks like when both sides bring genuine commitment and complementary strengths. Both country pilots are proof that the model CGIAR has committed to is both achievable and productive.

The second is that piloting is not the same as system change. Learning from three country contexts will not automatically spread across CGIAR Science Programs and Centers. Insights from what enabled Ethiopia's success will not automatically inform how the next partnership in a similar context is designed. The conditions that constrained Rwanda will recur in other settings if the system does not develop better tools for diagnosing and addressing them early. At the same time, Rwanda also showed something more constructive: that when a pilot is struggling, a well-designed South–South reset can create a more effective pathway forward than simply pressing on with the original model. That is a lesson the system should carry forward.



The pilots are best understood as a stress test of CGIAR's partnership ambitions. They revealed where the current operating model supports more equitable, country-led collaboration, and where it works against it. The question now is not whether CGIAR should move in this direction—that question has been long settled—but whether it has the system infrastructure to do so consistently. That infrastructure does not yet fully exist. Building it is what the CapSha Accelerator is for.

Continued investment in the CapSha Accelerator is not about running more pilots. It is about putting in place the structures, capabilities, and accountability needed to make CGIAR's partnership model work in practice and at scale. The pilots have already shown what is possible. The task now is to make it the standard.



CGIAR Capacity Sharing helps CGIAR and its partners turn research into lasting human, institutional, and system capacity. It advances demand-led, evidence-based, and co-owned approaches through three complementary pillars: CapSha Innovation Lab, CapSha Marketplace, and South-South and Triangular Cooperation, supported by a system-wide Community of Practice. Working globally across 12 CGIAR Centers and with national, regional, and international partners, Capacity Sharing connects capacity needs with expertise, tools, and peer learning, strengthening how knowledge is developed, shared, and applied across food, land, and water systems.

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