

International Center for Biosaline Agriculture

---

# ICBA External Stakeholder Assessment

## Project Final Report



January 2016

# Table of Contents

<b>SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION 3: SURVEY AND DATA ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 SURVEY METHODOLOGY: .....	4
3.2 DATA GROUPINGS AND ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY:.....	5
<b>SECTION 4: SURVEY RESULTS.....</b>	<b>5</b>
4.1 RESPONSE RATE .....	5
4.2 PARTNERSHIP KPIS.....	7
4.3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL WORK, PRIORITIES AND COMMUNICATION OF GOALS .....	10
4.3.2 GOALS, END-USERS AND BENEFICIARIES .....	11
4.4 AREAS OF OPERATION, PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.....	13
4.5 MUTUALITY AND BENEFIT OF PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS.....	14
4.6 COMMUNICATION PROCESSES .....	16
<b>SECTION 5: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1 ICBA'S STRENGTHS .....	18
5.2 ICBA'S WEAKNESSES .....	21
5.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR ICBA'S IMPROVEMENT .....	22
<b>SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>ANNEX:.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>PROJECT FUNDING PARTNERS .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>PROJECT PARTNERS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>STRATEGIC FUNDING PARTNERS.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>STRATEGIC PROJECT PARTNERS.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CORE DONORS .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>ABOUT ICBA .....</b>	<b>30</b>

The Stakeholder Assessment Report was developed by an independent, external consultant, Mr. Stephen Fragaszy, who was hired by ICBA to carry the Stakeholder Assessment Survey and prepare the final report that presents the main findings and conclusions.

## Section 1: Executive Summary

The findings of ICBA's inaugural external stakeholder assessment conclude that ICBA has a solid track-record in critical aspects of partnership management. Individuals from 40 global funding, research and project implementation partners provided comprehensive feedback and information necessary to determine ICBA's baseline score on partnership success as measured by the defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

According to the survey results, ICBA currently meets or exceeds the envisioned target of 75% partnership success on numerous partnership KPIs. They show that ICBA is particularly strong in terms of organizational adaptability, communication and information-sharing as well as relationship management processes. Identified weaknesses include benefits-sharing and project monitoring and evaluation which must be addressed by ICBA going forward.

Findings indicate that the majority of ICBA's lines of research are well-known and respected by its peers in the research community and by other stakeholders. ICBA is regarded as a research center of excellence for salinity management and is increasingly recognized for its work in other linked fields. Stakeholders view its niche scientific expertise and capacity for extensive, extended and controlled field trials as the primary source of its sterling reputation. However, ICBA's overall weak global visibility and lack of strong publication record are areas in need of improvement.

Stakeholders appreciate ICBA's unique links with global research and donor institutions. The survey identified a number of potential collaboration opportunities for ICBA based on its ability to take advantage of these links and its research and project management experiences to act as a central node in connecting and facilitating donors' involvement with project implementation partners. These opportunities are most obvious in fields where project and funding partners' priorities are not currently aligned and ICBA can serve as an anchor to link and connect the various institutions involved. Potential partners, the only group asked explicitly about ICBA's overall reputation, all said ICBA has a very strong reputation.

The assessment identifies the lack of scaling up of project findings and impacts as ICBA's most obvious weakness. This failure to realize ICBA's ambitious objectives in augmenting the food and water security of people in marginal environments is the result of a combination of factors according to respondents: ICBA's lack of long-term programmatic development, non-systematic approach to partnerships with local implementing institutions and perceived deficiencies in ICBA's management of relationship continuity and monitoring and evaluation post-project implementation.

Overall, the stakeholder assessment provides insights and baseline information that can help ICBA position the center for future collaborative developments, improve communication of its expertise, capabilities and competencies, target messages to specific audiences and address the flaws stakeholders perceive it has. The assessment is a first stepping-stone in ICBA's path to become a partnership-driven organization, and the results show ICBA has a solid foundation on which to embark down that road.

## Section 2: Introduction

ICBA's global orientation and ambition in mission have evolved quickly since the institution's foundation in 1999. ICBA's mandate in the First Strategic Plan (2000-2007) was to demonstrate and prove the concepts, values and methods of salinity-impacted agriculture<sup>1</sup> whereas ICBA now seeks to

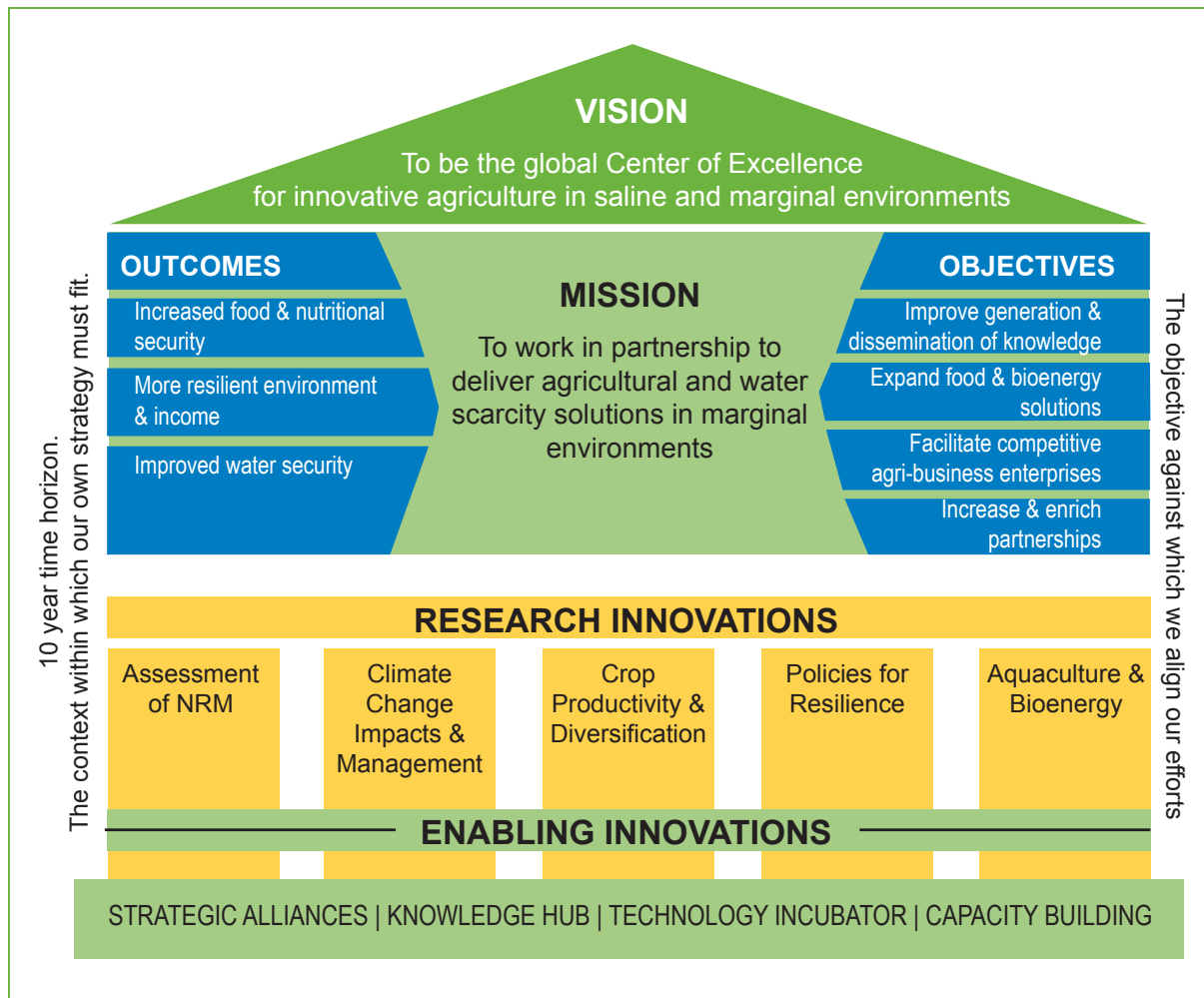
---

<sup>1</sup>The ICBA Evolution: 1999-2012.

become the “Global Center of Excellence for innovative agriculture in saline and marginal environments<sup>2</sup>.”

The major expansion in ICBA’s scope, remit and aspiration requires a similarly broad expansion in its partnerships. As such, becoming a partnership-driven organization is one of four foundational pillars of ICBA’s 2013-2023 Strategy<sup>3</sup>. By leveraging its core competencies and competitive advantages in collaboration with funding, research and implementation partners, ICBA believes it will be able to expand the geographical reach, scale and impact of its applied research programs. Figure 1: ICBA’s Vision and Mission

Figure 1



This report is the public component of ICBA’s External Stakeholder Assessment initiative (hereafter “the assessment”), a critical component of ICBA’s efforts to extend, deepen and enrich its collaborative relationships. The assessment follows the Stakeholder Baseline Assessment Design (hereafter “phase I”) that aimed to identify internal barriers to partnerships and gather background information about ICBA’s collaborative partnerships; it completed in January 2015. An external,

<sup>2</sup> The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture: Strategy 2013-2023

<sup>3</sup> See the ICBA Stakeholder Baseline Assessment Design Final Report for a definition of what a partnership-driven organization is, how becoming one fits into ICBA’s strategic objectives and ICBA’s internal barriers to becoming one.

independent consultant Mr. Stephen Fragaszy was commissioned for carrying both phases. Combined, these phases constitute ICBA's first comprehensive stakeholder assessment with the aim to provide a broad overview of:

1. Stakeholders' understanding of ICBA's operations, mission and goals;
2. The overlap between stakeholders' missions and goals and ICBA's;
3. The benefits accruing to stakeholders because of the partnership;
4. The effectiveness of ICBA's current project and relationship management practices.
5. Communication processes and channels with partners

The results are expected to help shape ICBA's future stakeholder engagement strategy and help ICBA meet the following objectives:

- Measure ICBA's performance as a partnership-driven organization through the KPIs described in Section 3;
- Gauge outside organizations' understanding of ICBA's remit and vision;
- Appraise existing and potential partners' greatest needs to enable ICBA to tailor proposals to the problem-focus of its end-users and implementing partners;
- Identify partners' available research and technical expertise as well as their gaps to shape ICBA's involvement of partners for the greatest mutual benefit;
- Assess the efficacy of ICBA's partnership management and joint-development processes.

## **Section 3: Survey and data analysis methodology**

### **3.1 Survey methodology:**

The assessment consisted of seven surveys, each targeting a different stakeholder group. During Phase 1, ten stakeholder categories were identified, these were: core donors (CD), strategic funding partners (SFP), strategic research partners (SRP), project implementation partner (PIP), project funding partner (PFP), project research partner (PRP), potential funding partner (PFP), potential research partner (PRP), potential implementation partner (PIP) and project funding partner (PFP). A questionnaire was developed for each category.

However, at the start of the implementation phase, as ICBA started identifying the institutions under each category, it was discovered that many partners overlapped in two categories (implementing partner category, and project partner category). Subsequently, these categories were joined and the questionnaires merged resulting in seven distinct stakeholder categories: core donors (CD), strategic funding partners (SFP), project funding partners (PFP), strategic project partners (SPP), project partners (PP) as well as potential funding (Pot. FP) and project partners (Pot. PP).

The surveys consisted of a mix of yes/no, scale and rank order questions for quantitative analysis as well as open-ended questions designed to elicit responses to contextualize quantitative responses and elaborate key themes.

Surveys were provided to 183 stakeholders in mid-August 2015. To maximize response rates, a follow-up reminder email was sent to stakeholders in the beginning of September followed by a letter from ICBA Director General in mid-September and calls from ICBA staff in early October. Survey response collection stopped on 18 October, approximately two months after the surveys were initially dispersed.

Special care was given during the development of the stakeholder list to identify multiple individuals from partner institutions to ensure acceptable survey coverage of existing partners. The resulting overall partner response rate was 33% which is higher than the global average of 15-30%<sup>4</sup> for such stakeholder assessment surveys.

### **3.2 Data groupings and analytical methodology:**

Each survey group's responses were tabulated to determine ICBA's baseline performance in regards to partnership KPIs. Survey data were subsequently grouped in a variety of manners to compare responses within relationship tiers (strategic versus project partners versus potential partners) as well as by relationship types (funding versus project implementation/research partners). Each stakeholder's partnership type and tier was clearly stipulated in the stakeholders list provided by ICBA to the consultant prior to commencing the survey.

Partner groups' performances on KPIs were analyzed through the following steps:

1. Tabulate responses to each KPI sub-question for every partner group;
2. Calculate KPI sub-question sample average;
3. Calculate KPI mean - the average of KPI sub-question means;

This simple yet sound method for determining whether ICBA meets its KPI targets with each partner group is replicable at the individual partner level and can be scaled easily as ICBA's partner universe expands. Other analyses presented in Section 6 use a mix of statistical and graphing techniques to visualize the survey data.

Respondents' answers to the open-ended questions are presented in this report through narrative descriptions of how they align with and elaborate upon the quantitative analytical findings as well as through idea flow charts which show qualitative responses' interconnections. Detailed responses were provided in a separate internal report to ICBA.

## **Section 4: Survey results**

### **4.1 Response rate**

Survey completeness was determined by responses to quantitative questions only, as responding to the qualitative questions was optional. Partially-completed surveys are those from respondents who completed beyond the relationship processes portion of the survey from which the KPI scores are derived. Abandoned surveys are those for which the respondent did not meet this cutoff point. Partially complete surveys were considered within the response analyses but abandoned surveys were not.

Overall, 31% of respondents (57) began the survey. Of those, 70% (40) completed the survey, 7% (4) partially completed it and 23% (13) abandoned the survey. Table 1 below presents the results of the

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the studies described in Section 4.1

different stakeholder groups. Stakeholders at four partner institutions provided two complete surveys and the KPI scores are the average of both respondents.

**Table 1: Survey Responses**

Survey group	Total partners	Survey recipients	Complete surveys	Partial complete surveys	Abandoned surveys	Partner response	Partner response rate	Survey response rate
<b>Core donors (CD)</b>	3	10	4	0	2	3	100%	40%
<b>Strategic Funding Partners (SFP)</b>	6	18	3	0	0	3	50%	17%
<b>Funding Partners (FP)</b>	8	11	2	0	2	1	12.5%	18%
<b>Potential Funding Partners (Pot. FP)</b>	17	26	3	0	2	3	17.6%	12%
<b>Strategic Project Partners (SPP)</b>	23	31	8	2	3	9	39.1%	32%
<b>Project Partners (PP)</b>	44	58	14	2	3	15	34.1%	28%
<b>Potential Project Partners (Pot. PP)</b>	19	27	6	0	1	6	31.6%	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>24%</b>

Extant project partners were 59% (26) of respondents with extant funding partners and potential partners constituting 20.5% (9) of respondents each. Project partner survey recipients overall had significantly higher response rates than those from funding partners. Respondents had a mix of experience working with ICBA with 9% (4) working with ICBA for more than 10 years, 25% (11) for 5-10 years, 23% (10) for 3-5 years, 30% (13) 1-3 years and 5% less than one year. Of 40 total respondents, 60% worked with ICBA directly, 30% indirectly and 10% not at all. Further characterization of respondents is provided in Figures 1-5 below.

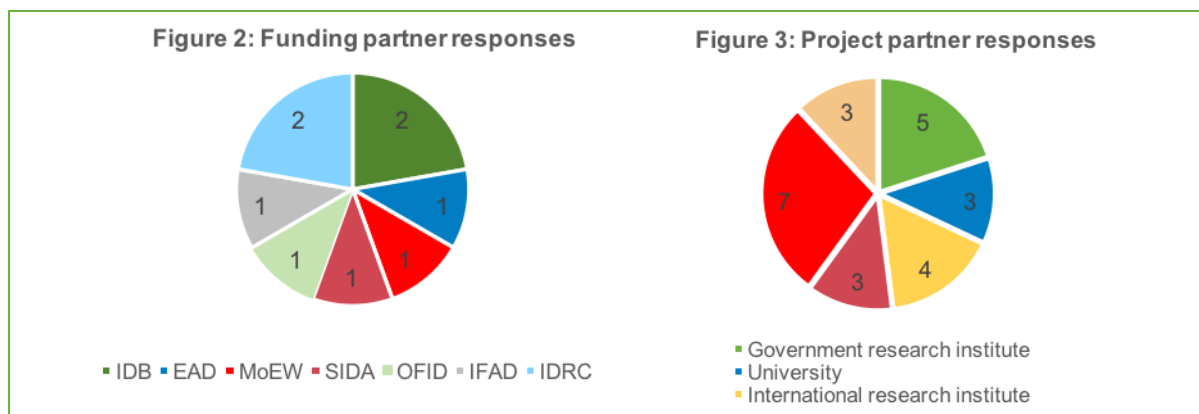
The overall response rate of 33.3% of partners (40) and 24% (44) of total respondents is comparative to similar peer-group studies. For example, CGIAR's stakeholder surveys (2006 and 2012) had response rates of approximately 27%<sup>5,6</sup>, the World Health Organization's 2012 external stakeholder perceptions survey<sup>7</sup> response rate was 20.5% and Oxfam's 2013<sup>8</sup> study response rate was 18%.

<sup>5</sup> CGIAR, (2006) 2006 Stakeholder Perceptions Survey: Report on the CGIAR Overall. September 2006: [http://library.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10947/4175/agm06\\_cgiar\\_perception\\_survey\\_overall\\_report.pdf?sequence=1](http://library.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10947/4175/agm06_cgiar_perception_survey_overall_report.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>6</sup> CGIAR, (2013) 2012 CGIAR Stakeholder Perceptions Survey: Final Public Report. May 2013: [http://library.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10947/2803/CGIAR\\_2012\\_Stakeholder\\_Perceptions\\_Survey.pdf?sequence=4](http://library.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10947/2803/CGIAR_2012_Stakeholder_Perceptions_Survey.pdf?sequence=4)

<sup>7</sup> WHO, (2012) Stakeholder Perception Survey: Global Communication Strategy Review. [http://www.who.int/about/who\\_perception\\_survey\\_2012.pdf](http://www.who.int/about/who_perception_survey_2012.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Oxfam NOVIB, (2013) Development Partnerships Survey 2013. [http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/Rapporten/Oxfam\\_partnerfeedbackreport\\_2013.pdf](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/Rapporten/Oxfam_partnerfeedbackreport_2013.pdf)



## 4.2 Partnership KPIs

The KPI results shown here focus on the entire partner group rather than individual partners. All partner types were assessed through KPIs 1-7; in addition, SFP and SPP had KPI 8, CD, PP and FP had KPI 9, and CD had KPI 10. The questions used to assess KPIs were rated on a scale of 1 to 5 and a score of 3.75 represents a 75% “success” rate.

The assessment shows that the ICBA Business Plan target of 75% partnership success for each stakeholder as measured by the KPIs outlined in this study is both reasonable and achievable with concerted effort by ICBA. Current KPI results of 75% or above are highlighted in green and those at or below 60%, a score of 3 or lower and representing a problematic feature of the relationship, are highlighted in yellow.

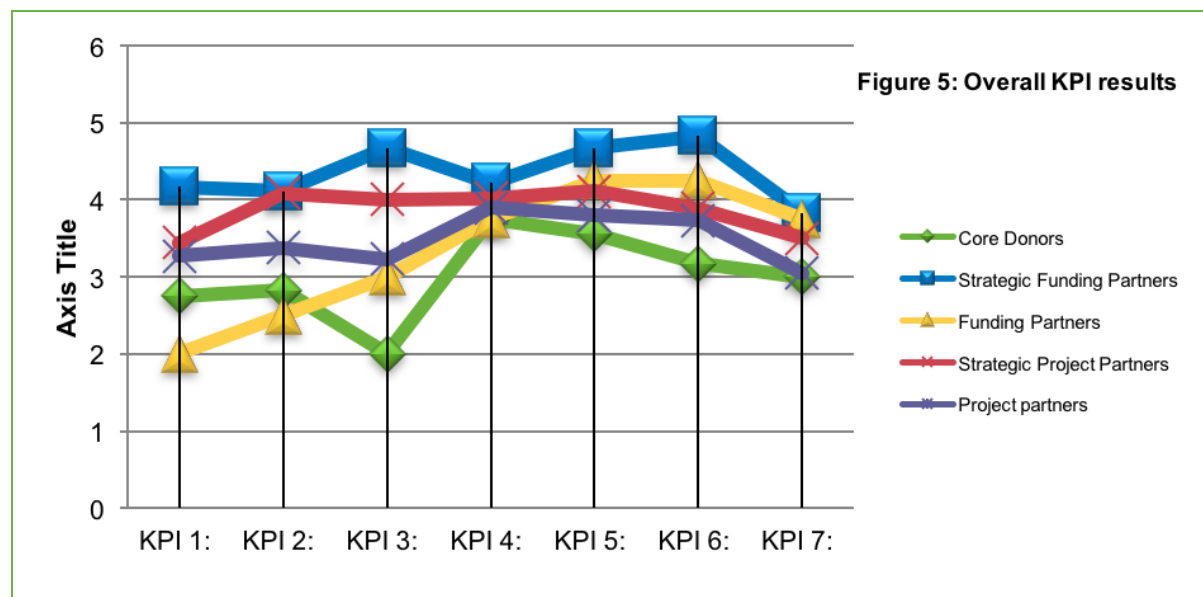
**Table 2: Overall KPI Results**

	Core Donors	Strategic Funding Partners	Funding Partners	Strategic Project Partners	Project partners
KPI 1: Partnership impact on institutional credibility	2.75	4.17	2	3.44	3.27
KPI 2: Partnership impact on organizational work	2.83	4.11	2.5	4.09	3.38
KPI 3: Overall partnership effectiveness	2	4.67	3	4	3.23
KPI 4: ICBA organizational adaptability	3.75	4.22	3.75	4.02	3.9
KPI 5: ICBA communication & information-sharing	3.56	4.67	4.25	4.11	3.8
KPI 6: ICBA relationship management	3.17	4.83	4.25	3.89	3.73
KPI 7: ICBA benefit-sharing	3	3.83	3.75	3.5	3.05
KPI 8: Joint proposal development & post-project evaluation	N/A	2.33	N/A	3.5	N/A
KPI 9: Project evaluation	4.17	N/A	3.5	N/A	2.82



KPI 10: Strategic planning	4.11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
KPI average	3.26	4.1	3.38	3.82	3.4

KPIs were composed of characteristics which define the mutuality of relationships between ICBA and its partners. The individual KPI characteristics are shown in Table 3 below under the question category and vary depending on the specific relationship type and tier.



**Table 3: KPI Sub-Question Results**

KPI	Questions	Core Donors	Strategic Funding Partners	Funding Partners	Strategic Project Partners	Project partners
1	Increased my organization's credibility with internal stakeholders	2.67	4.00	2.00	3.44	3.57
	Increased my organization's credibility with external stakeholders	2.83	4.33	2.00	3.44	2.97
2	The partnership has been successful in raising the profile of issues of concern to my organization	2.67	4.00	2.00	3.89	3.00
	Provided my organization with access to a more diverse range of organizations and people	3.00	3.67	2.50	4.39	N/A
	After working with ICBA, my organization has a better understanding of its end-users/beneficiaries	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.50
	The partnership with ICBA has helped my organization to respond to emerging issues in its core competencies	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.80
3	Enabled my organization to be more effective in its work	2.00	4.67	3.00	4.00	3.23
4	ICBA is responsive to new ideas about problem-solving	3.67	4.33	3.00	4.11	3.73
	ICBA takes into account other stakeholders' views in project implementation	3.83	4.00	N/A	4.06	N/A
	ICBA is a flexible organization that adapts easily to project specifications	N/A	4.33	4.50	3.89	4.07
5	The terms of my organization's partnership with ICBA are clear	3.17	5.00	N/A	4.33	3.90

	ICBA shares information, data and knowledge effectively	3.50	4.33	4.00	4.28	3.57
	Open channels of communication are consistent even after project completions	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.56	N/A
	ICBA is a trustworthy organization	4.00	4.67	4.50	4.28	3.93
6	ICBA pays adequate attention to managing relationships with my organization	3.00	5.00	4.00	3.94	3.73
	ICBA's senior management is effective in managing relations with partners	3.33	4.67	4.50	3.83	N/A
7	When appropriate, ICBA researchers collaborate on publications and conference proceedings	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.33	N/A
	ICBA provides ways for my organization to share its successes and gain greater recognition	2.50	3.67	4.00	3.44	3.17
	ICBA gives adequate credit to its partners	2.33	4.00	3.50	3.72	2.93
8	My organization is very involved with ICBA in planning new projects	N/A	1.33	N/A	3.72	N/A
	ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process	N/A	3.33	N/A	3.28	N/A
9	ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process	4.17	N/A	3.00	N/A	2.67
	I am familiar with the evaluation criteria for the ICBA projects funded by my	N/A	N/A	4.00	N/A	2.97
10	My organization is very involved with ICBA in planning new projects	4.17	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	My organization plays a critical role in ICBA's strategic planning decisions	4.33	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	My organization plays a critical role in shaping ICBA's strategic direction	3.83	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

The KPI results show very clearly ICBA's perceived strengths and weaknesses according to various partner types.

**Core donors** have particularly strong perceptions of ICBA in the strategic planning and project evaluation categories (KPIs 9, 10) and positive, but less so, in the project formulation and implementation categories (KPIs 4, 5). Identified weaknesses relate to the mutual benefit and utility of the partnership in terms of its impact on partners' work and effectiveness with internal and external stakeholders (KPIs 1-3, 7).

**Strategic funding partners** have exceptionally good perceptions of partnerships with ICBA across the board (KPIs 1-7) with the sole exception of joint proposal development and post-project evaluation (KPI 8). The strongest features of the relationships are their impacts on partners' work effectiveness (KPI 3 – 4.67), communication and information-sharing (KPI 5 – 4.67) and overall relationship management processes (KPI 6 – 4.83).

**Funding partner** respondents, two from the IDRC, by and large had similar perceptions of ICBA as core donors did. The two respondents had strong perceptions of ICBA's project implementation and management processes (KPIs 4-6) and also good views on ICBA's capacity for benefit-sharing (KPI 7). However, impact on work and effectiveness with internal and external stakeholders (KPIs 1-3) is an identified weak area.

**Strategic project partners**, all categorized as research partners in Phase I, have exceptionally good perceptions of their partnerships with ICBA. Responses indicate a high valuation of ICBA's impact on their work effectiveness (KPIs 2, 3 especially) and positive relationship and communication features

(KPIs 4-6). Benefits-sharing and project monitoring and evaluation, while not over the 75% threshold, are both very close (KPIs 7, 8 – 3.5).

**Project partners**, the single largest group in terms of survey respondents (14), overall have highly positive perceptions of ICBA’s organizational adaptability, communication and relationship management processes (KPIs 4-6). The only major weakness was project evaluation (KPI 8), and ICBA’s capacity to share benefits (KPI 7) is an area to watch.

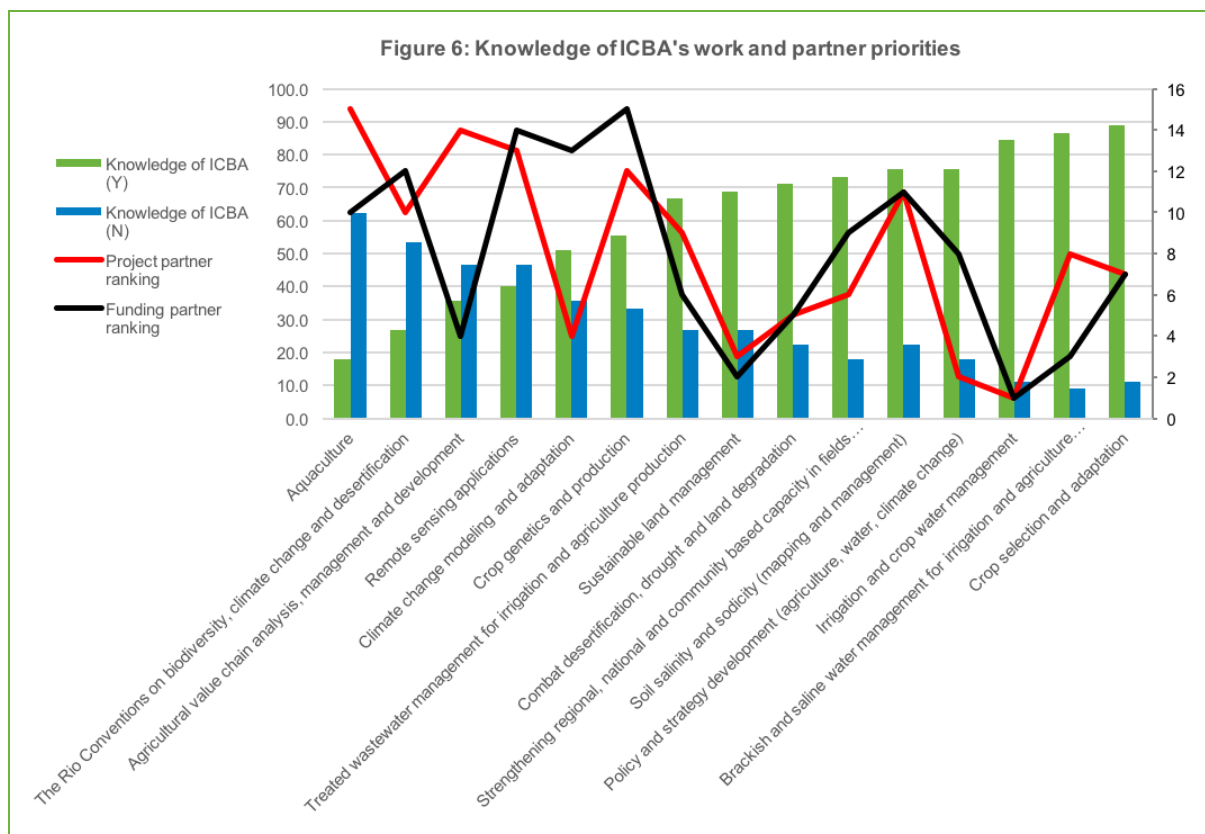
### 4.3 Knowledge of ICBA’s scope and mission and partner priorities

The surveys’ first primary sections included questions that aimed to provide information on respondents’ understanding of ICBA’s scope and mission, beneficiaries and communication of goals as well as partner organizations’ own scope, priorities and beneficiaries. These questions include:

- a) How well do you understand ICBA's mission?
- b) How well does ICBA explain how it works towards its mission?

#### 4.3.1 Organizational work, priorities and communication of goals

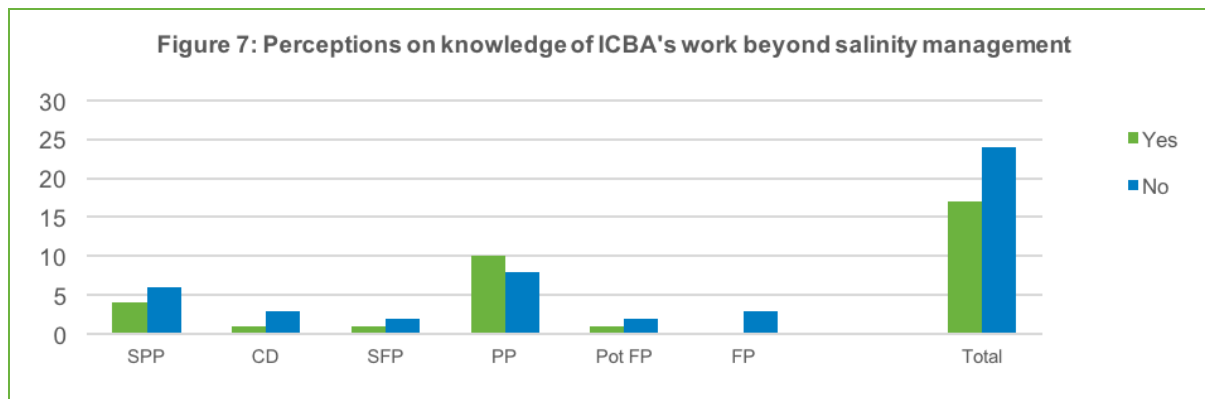
All respondents were asked whether they knew of ICBA’s work in 15 different categories in a yes/no format. Next all respondents were asked the priority of each category to their own organization on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being highest priority). Figure 6 below shows the responses to these questions with partner priorities shown as a 1-15 ranking (1 being highest priority) of weighted priority averages for each category.



Results indicate that most of ICBA’s fields of work are generally well-known with the exceptions being aquaculture, the Rio conventions, agricultural value chain analysis and remote sensing applications

which fewer than 45% of respondents knew ICBA conducted. Several important gaps exist between project and funding partner priorities. For instance, funding partners do not place a very high priority on agricultural value chains analysis while project partners do, and funding partners place a great deal of emphasis on climate change modeling and adaptation whereas project partners do not. Likewise, there are significant gaps between project partners' strong desire to work in policy and strategy development which is a less prominent funding priority and vice versa for brackish and saline water management for irrigation which is a high funding priority but relatively low priority for project implementation partners.

As a follow-up question, all groups except Pot. PP were then asked whether ICBA's scope of work beyond salinity-management is well-known. About 60% of respondents (24 of 41) answered no with project partners the only category with a majority responding yes.



Several groups were then asked to rate how well ICBA communicates its mission and goals and how it works towards those goals on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being very well).

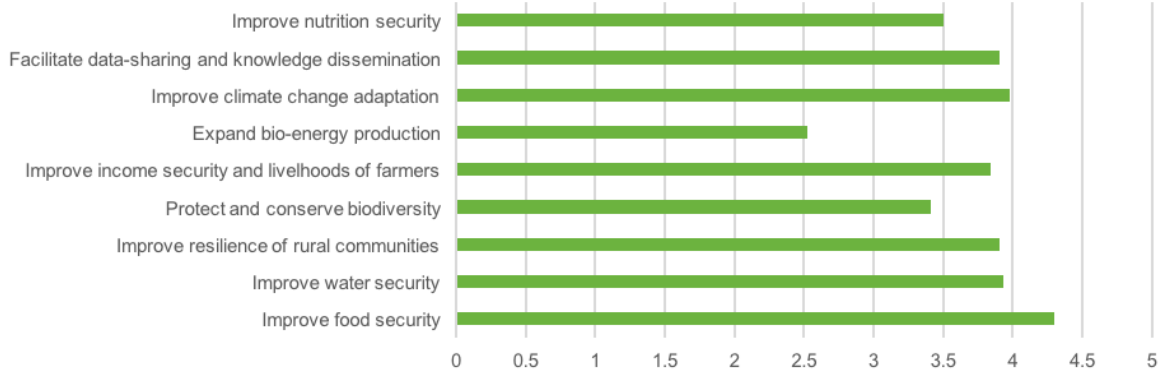


Funding partners believe themselves to have very good understanding of ICBA's objectives and mission with all responses rated 4 or above. Strategic project partners are more familiar with ICBA's mission and goals (average response 4) than PP (average response 3.32) and believe ICBA communicates its work more effectively (3.5) than project partners do (3.16).

### 4.3.2 Goals, end-users and beneficiaries

All respondents were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (5 being highest) how much the following goals were connected to their institutions' own objectives and mission.

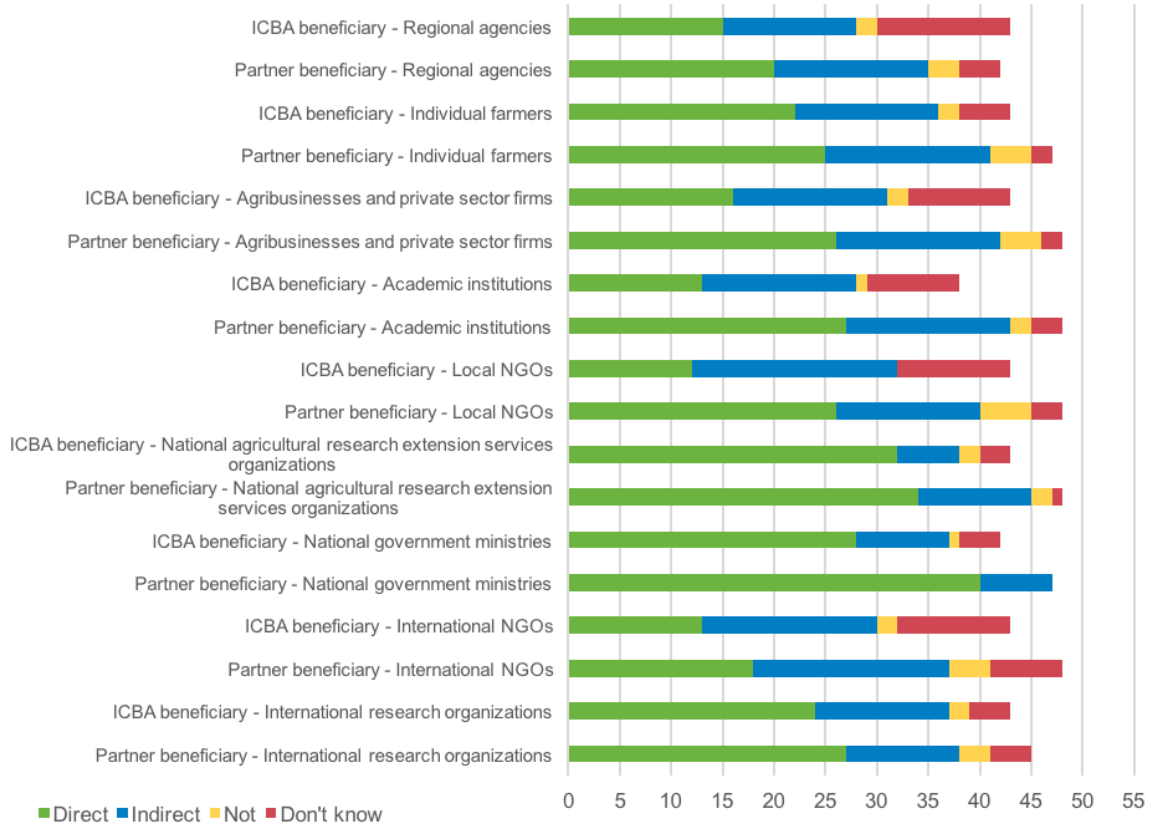
**Figure 9: Partner mission and goals**



With the exception of expanding bio-energy production (2.50) and protecting wildlife diversity (3.41), all of the themes were highly important (3.5 or higher) for partners. Improving food security (4.30), climate change adaptation (3.98) and water security (3.93) were the top three most important goals with facilitating data-sharing and knowledge dissemination and improving resilience of rural communities a close second.

Lastly, recipients of all surveys were asked about their organizations' direct and indirect end-users or beneficiaries as well as their perceptions of which of the same group constitute ICBA's end-users and beneficiaries.

**Figure 10: Perceptions of ICBA's end-users/beneficiaries and partners' own end-users/beneficiaries**



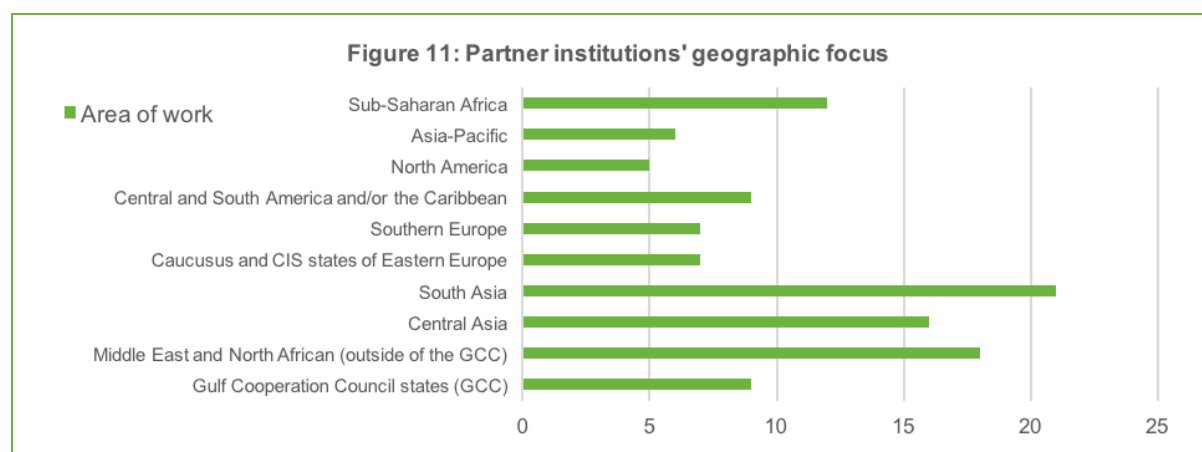
ICBA's most frequently identified direct beneficiaries were national government ministries and national agriculture research systems (NARS) with more than 25 respondents noting each.

Respondents were least likely to identify local and international NGOs or academic institutions as direct beneficiaries of ICBA's work with fewer than 15 respondents noting each of those categories.

#### 4.4 Areas of operation, partnership opportunities

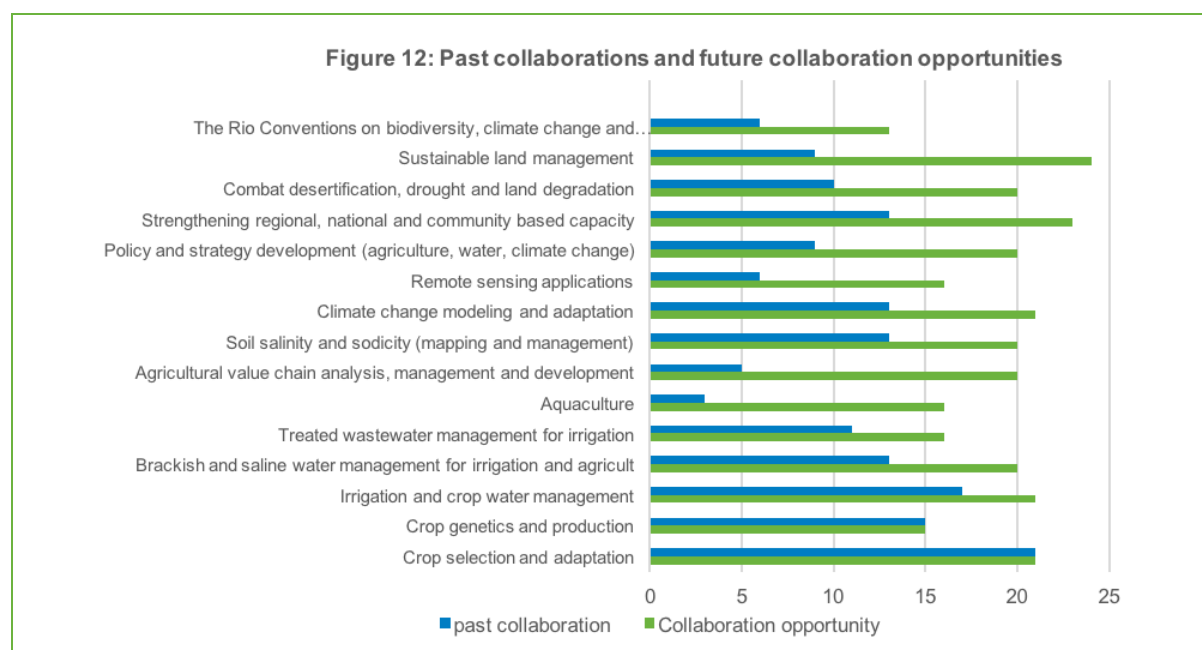
Respondents were asked a series of questions about their geographic areas of operation, access to officials and thoughts on opportunities and barriers to further collaboration with ICBA in the future.

SPP and PP were asked to select up to three regions in which they operate primarily with the results shown in Figure 11 below.



ICBA's project partners work predominantly in the MENA region (both including and excluding the GCC) as well as South and Central Asia. However, ICBA's partners work globally and so every major geographic region of the world is represented in its partners' areas of operation.

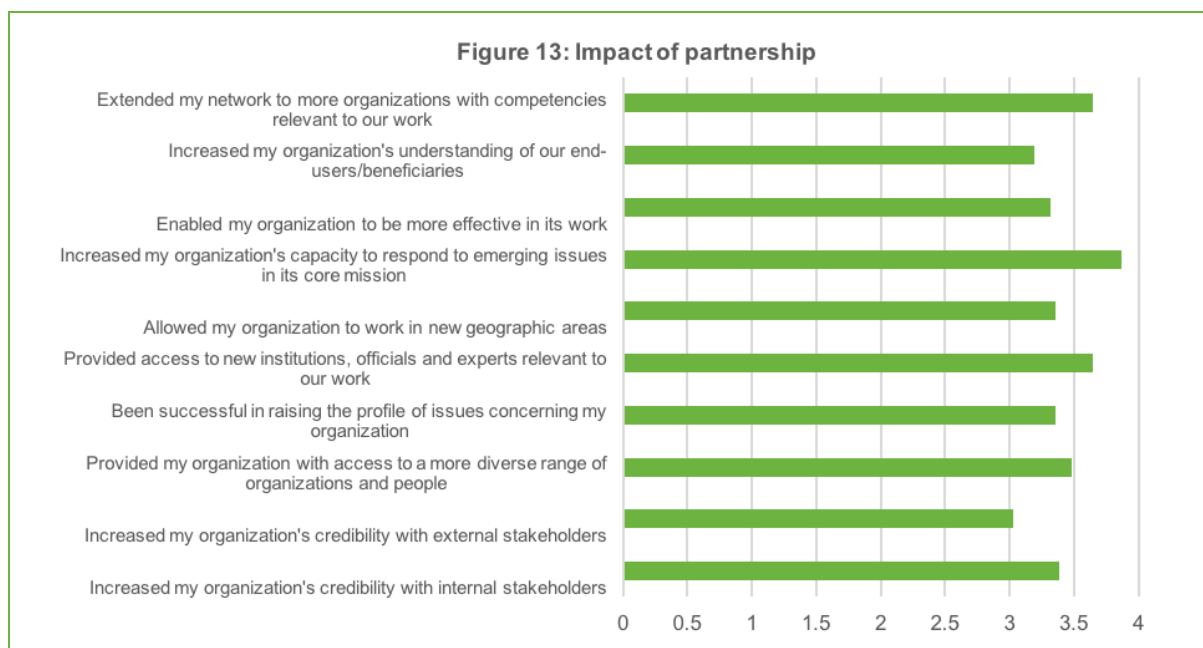
All survey respondents were asked in which themes of work they had collaborated with ICBA in the past and also in which themes of work they would like to expand their collaboration with ICBA in the future.



Respondents' past collaborations with ICBA spanned all categories of ICBA's work with crop selection and adaptation (21) as well as irrigation and crop water management (17) topping the list. Opportunities for future collaboration were generally positive across all of ICBA's scope of work. The largest gap between past collaboration and future opportunities are present in aquaculture and agriculture value chain analysis. Sustainable land management and capacity-building were the two top areas for potential future collaboration with 24 and 23 respondents selecting those categories respectively.

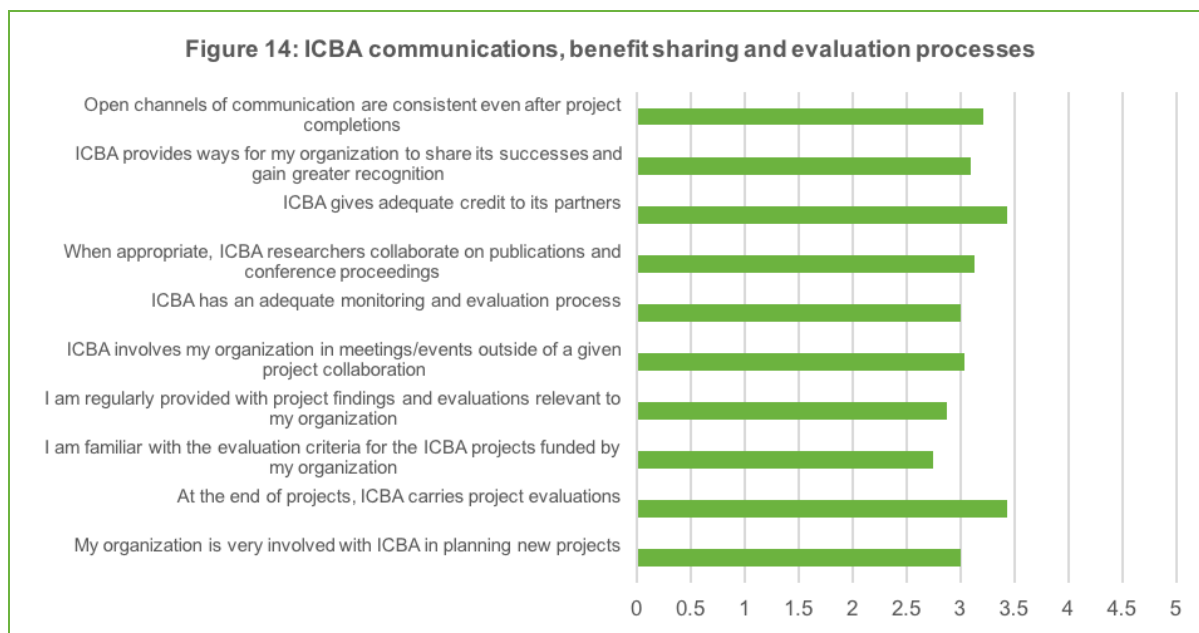
## 4.5 Mutuality and benefit of partnerships and relationships

Extant partners were all asked about numerous aspects of the benefits and mutuality of relationships with ICBA. These questions form the basis of the KPIs and are described in greater detail per respondent category in Section 4.2 whereas this section provides an overview of responses. Partners were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (5 being completely valid) the following statements about how partnering with ICBA has impacted the partner's capacities and operations.



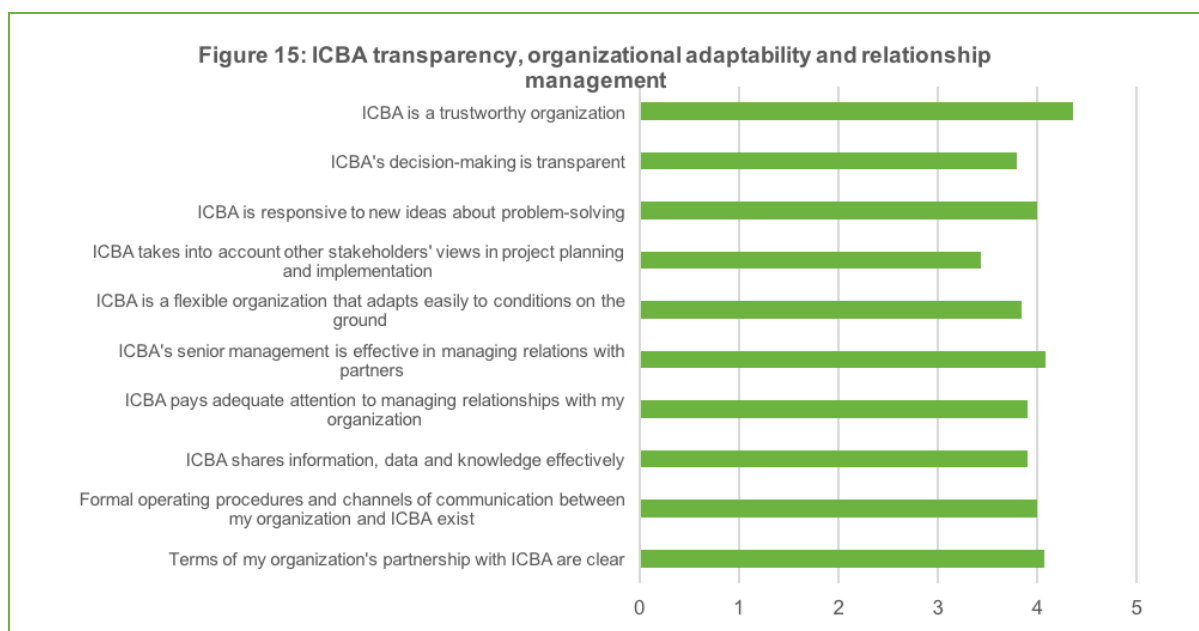
Extant partners were most positive about ICBA's role in helping them increase their ability to respond to emerging issues within their core mission (3.87) as well as ICBA's capacity to expand their connections with competent third-party partners (3.65) -and the institutions, officials and experts necessary for their work. All categories of responses were above 3 and partnership impact on credibility with external stakeholders was the lowest scored category with a result of 3.03.

Extant partners of all types were also asked to evaluate ICBA's communications, benefit sharing and evaluation processes by assessing the validity of the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 indicating completely valid).



Overall, partners viewed ICBA's communications, benefit-sharing and evaluation processes described in this series of questions less positively than other themes within the stakeholder assessment. The highest-ranking categories are that ICBA gives adequate credit to partners and carries out end-of-project evaluations (both 3.43). The lowest-ranking themes are familiarity with evaluation criteria of projects for funding partners (2.74) and regular provision of project findings and evaluations relevant to all partners (2.87).

Next partners were asked about the validity of statements related to ICBA's transparency as well as organizational adaptability and relationship management on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 indicating completely valid).

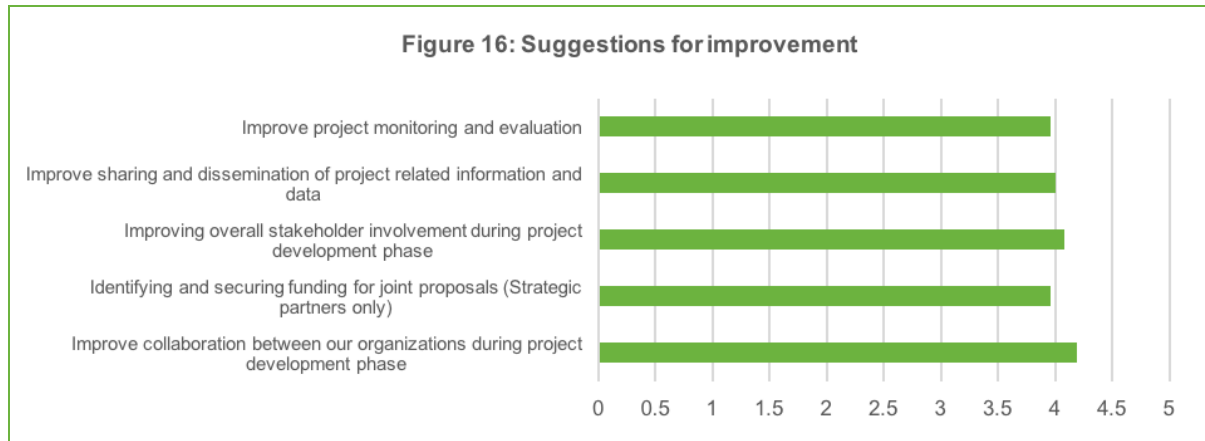


Partners were highly positive about this set of themes. ICBA's trustworthiness was the highest-rated category with a score of 4.36. Several other categories – clarity of terms of partnership, formal



procedures and channels of communication, responsiveness to new ideas about problem-solving and ICBA senior management's efficacy in managing relationships – all had scores between 4 and 4.09. The lowest score in this series was 3.43 for ICBA's accommodation of other stakeholders' views in project planning and implementation.

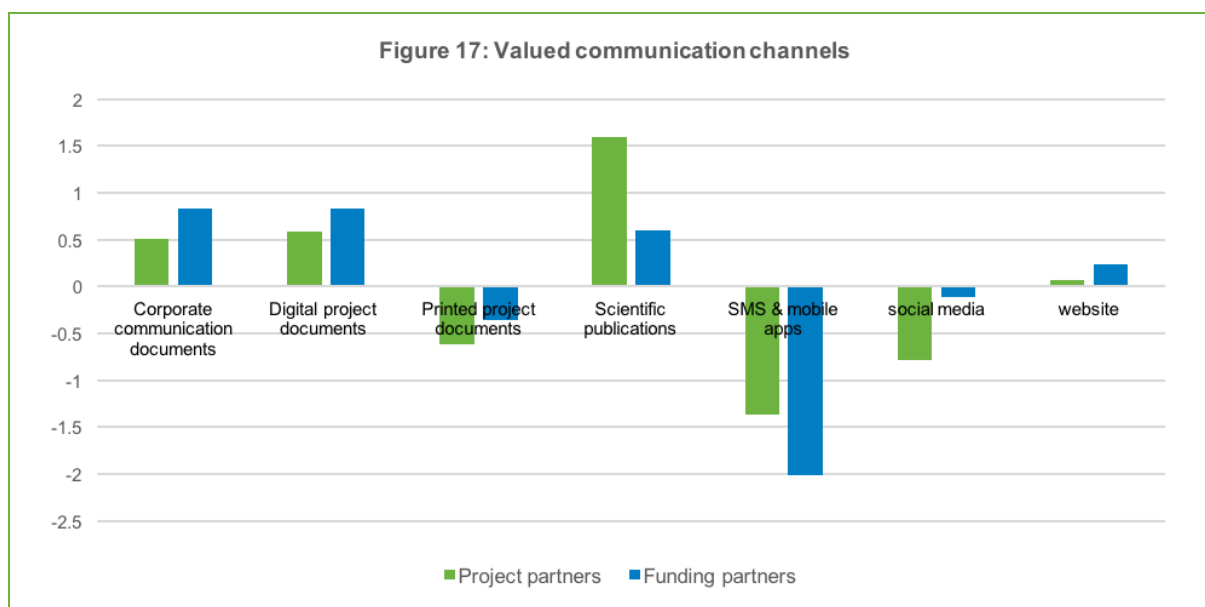
Last in this section, partners were asked their recommendations for ICBA to prioritize improvements to its project formulation, management, monitoring and evaluation processes on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being top priority.



Responses to this series of questions were quite closely grouped with scores ranging very slightly between the lowest - 3.96 for identifying and securing funding for joint proposals - to the highest – 4.19 for improving collaboration during the project development phase

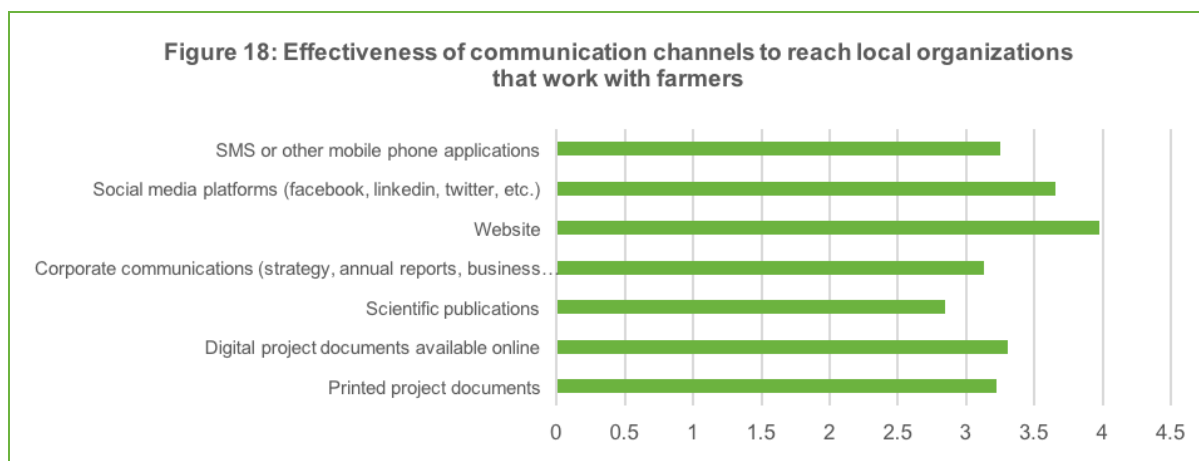
## 4.6 Communication processes

The last major theme of the survey was to evaluate the importance of various channels of communication to reach partner organizations local institutions which work directly with farmers in marginal areas. Respondents were asked to rank-order the importance of the following communication channels and Figure 17 below shows the normalized z-score of each communication channel. This graph shows relative importance of a channel compared to the mean via standard deviations of ranked scores.



Funding partners viewed digital project documents and corporate documents as the most and equally important communication channels. These were followed closely by scientific publications and the website. Project partners viewed scientific publications as by far the most important avenue followed in the second tier by digital project documents and corporate documents. The preponderance of research partners in the project partner category likely accounts for the major emphasis on scientific publications. All partners viewed social media and SMS or other mobile phone applications as the least important channels.

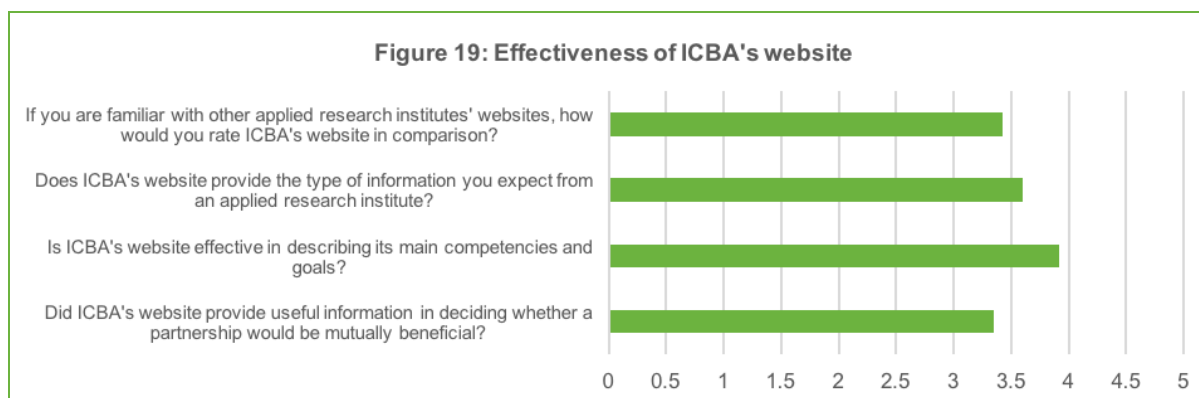
Respondents were then asked to rate the effectiveness of the same communication channels to reach local NGOs and grass-roots organizations working with farmers in marginal environments on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being highly effective.



Partners stated that website and social media platforms were the most effective to reach local NGOs and grass-roots organizations that work with farmers with scores of 3.97 and 3.65 respectively. However, beyond that results were largely ambiguous, though scientific publications were ranked the least effective channel with a score of 2.85.

When asked to provide further detail on communication channels with ICBA's project beneficiaries in an open-ended follow-up question, respondents primarily repeated the categories provided in the survey and shown above. However, they also emphasized to a great extent the importance of face to face communications via exhibitions, training sessions, fairs, and the importance of utilizing radio and television, particularly for remote regions.

Lastly, respondents were asked about the effectiveness of ICBA's website through rating questions from 1 to 5 with 5 being positive.





**ICBA** Partners' comments reflected a range of positive features derived from individual organizational relationships with ICBA and also reflections on its broader work. Funding partners in particular focused on ICBA's ability to target projects within their funding scope connected to food and water security and ICBA's ability to direct its own work and research in the MENA region as a specific strength with one funding stakeholder noting that it had

*"independence to set a research agenda based on science, evidence and [cutting] edge approaches."*

Respondents also frequently mentioned ICBA's effective capacity as a network node linking global best-in-class research partners, funding agencies and local government and scientific agencies through effective project management. ICBA's role as a coordinating and intermediary institution is highly appreciated, especially in regards to technology transfer and funding for local implementation partners and for its ability to work with regional government and research institutions by global partners.

The responses based on ICBA's scientific expertise highlight its ability to conduct comprehensive field trials assessing crop cultivar as well as soil and irrigation water variability factors. Specific fields within ICBA's core biosaline agriculture remit were the most widely-mentioned theme of valuable research, but partners engaged in remote sensing and climate change adaptation work with ICBA noted its capabilities in those fields as well.

Potential partners were the only group asked explicitly about ICBA's overall reputation, as this reputation is what may encourage or inhibit them from entering into a partnership with ICBA. All potential partner respondents said that ICBA has a very strong reputation. Those who provided further detail stated that this reputation is due to its scientific expertise in niche but highly relevant fields in marginal environment agricultural productivity as well as its regional focus. Also, they focused on its location and facilities in Dubai which allow it to fulfill its field trials and training roles very effectively. As one respondent from a CGIAR organization stated, ICBA's

*"location and farm with the possibility of effective variation of salinity treatments is a major advantage and one of the keys to the center's credibility."*

The concept map provided in Figure 21 on the next page, shows the interconnections between these themes in more detail.

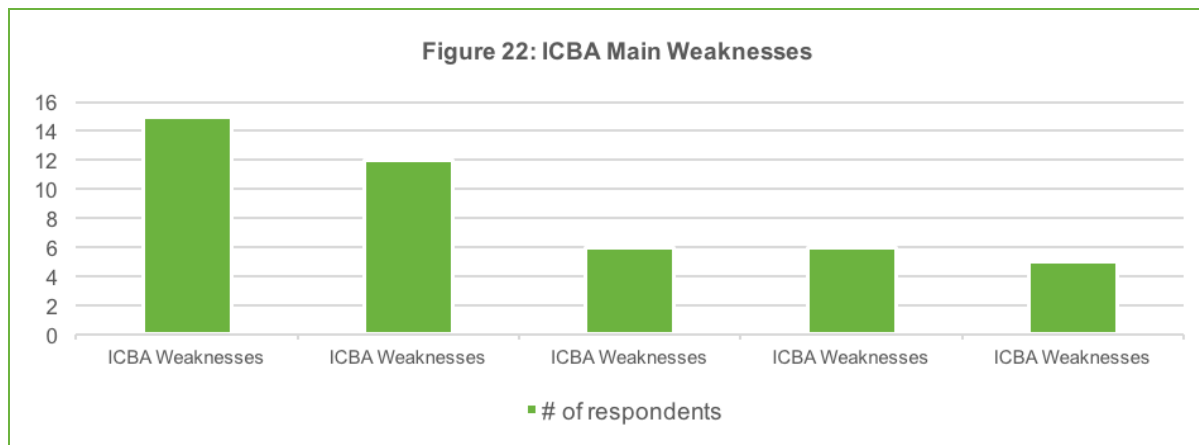
**Figure 21: Concept map of ICBA's strengths according to respondents**



## 5.2 ICBA's weaknesses

When describing ICBA's weaknesses, respondents identified the following interconnected themes:

- Little emphasis on long-term programmatic development and/or relationship continuity;
- Lack of effective institutional relationships in work areas;
- Poor scaling up of research findings;
- ICBA's lack of international visibility;
- Continuity of funding for project efforts;



These issues all connect to the identified weakness of ICBA's poor performance in scaling up project impacts and research findings. Respondents described the weakness in scaling up as a result of several factors:

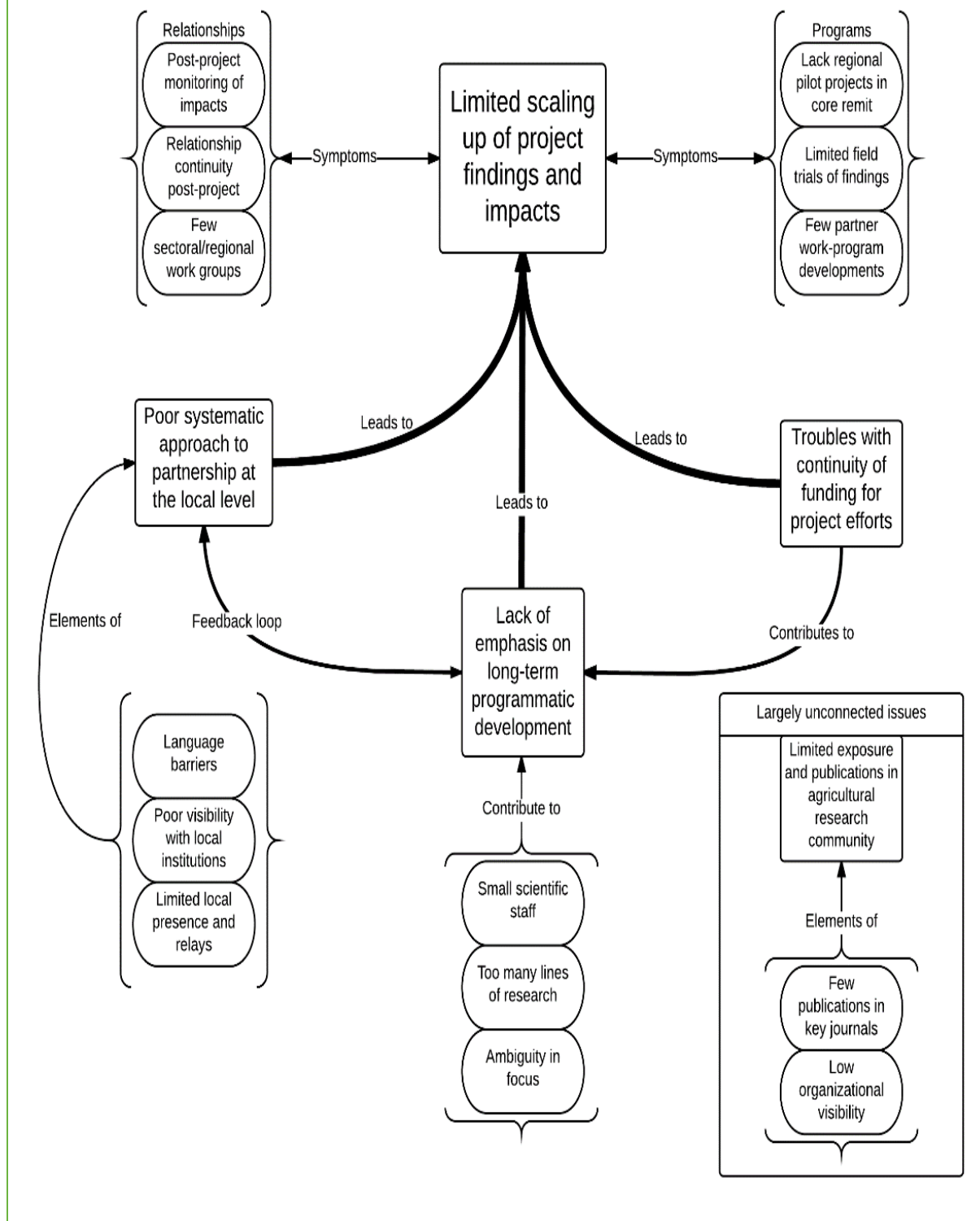
- Limited development of or engagement with region-wide pilot projects
- Weak systematic approach to initiate partnerships with local institutions in project areas
- Lack of long-term program development frequently connected to poor funding continuity
- Ambiguity in organizational focus

This host of issues was described by project partners working for global, MENA, Central Asian and Sub-Saharan Africa institutions. The following quote from one respondent summarizes the majority of the comments received in this regard:

*"ICBA has too many lines of research based on project funds that may generate problems of sustainability and difficulties in finding its identity and best comparative advantage."*

The connections and relationships between respondents' most-frequently mentioned perceived weaknesses of ICBA are shown in Figure 23: Concept map of ICBA's weaknesses according to respondents.

**Figure 23: Concept map of ICBA's weaknesses according to respondents**



### 5.3 Suggestions for ICBA's improvement

In total 23 respondents answered the question relating to ensuring long-term project impacts, the single most important weakness identified by respondents to the survey. In this regard, the following suggestions were made:

- Develop defined post-project strategies including partner work programs;
- Help partners secure funding for work programs, ideally as part of the original budget;
- Ensure the technology transfer strategy considers local constraints;
- Evaluation officers dedicated to design and implement post-project impact review studies;
- utilize outcome mapping to adjust strategic direction;
- Provide avenues for partners to get credit and recognition for their successes in scaling-up project impacts, even if it is just through mentions on ICBA's website and newsletters.

Another broad category of suggested improvements connects to ICBA's perceived lack of visibility with both local and global constituencies. When asked how ICBA could better leverage its expertise to achieve concrete impacts in food and water security, respondents tended to focus on expanding awareness of ICBA's activities as a first step. To achieve this, respondents suggested the following:

- Strengthen ties and increase role in CGIAR system to "piggyback" off their resources and ability to facilitate relationships globally;
- Increase participation in regional and global forums and symposia alongside project partners;
- Create permanent sectoral working groups with relevant institutions to exchange experiences and assess replicability of findings;
- Exhibit using model farms the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategies developed based on research results;
- Utilize search engine optimization so that when people Google "ICBA", it is the first result;
- Provide research findings, publications, datasets and other core information online.

The last of these points connects with respondents' primary suggestion for improvements to ICBA's website and communications i.e. increase the visibility of scientific publications and data as well as project results.

Both funding partners and project partners place overwhelming importance on scientific publications and project results including published datasets and accessible infographics that are either absent or difficult to find on ICBA's website, especially the datasets.

## **Section 6: Conclusions**

It is the belief of the writer of this report that the assessment provides critical baseline data that ICBA can use to measure progress against. Furthermore, results clearly prove the viability of the partnership KPIs that were identified in the Business Plan.

The assessment provides valuable insights regarding ICBA's relationship management, engagement and communications processes while remaining broad enough to allow generalizable conclusions about ICBA's efficacy in various aspects of partnership. In particular, the results can be very helpful to ICBA's management going forward with regards to:

- Identifying overarching themes for marketing and communications materials that address current perceptions of ICBA's strengths, unique features and capabilities;
- Evaluating partners' understanding of ICBA's organizational identity and which components of its operations and missions must be communicated more effectively and how best to do so;
- Maximizing complementarity with partner institutions by developing proposals and research collaborations designed around identified partner needs and ICBA strengths.



In relation to maximizing complementarity, the survey helps identify gaps in the applied research field which fall within ICBA's core operational themes as well as the core needs of ICBA's current and potential partners. This information can be utilized at the strategic planning level to help characterize opportunities and project development planning.

The survey also identifies the direction which partners expect and hope ICBA to take in the future. For instance, partners, to a very wide extent, believe that agribusinesses and private sector firms are, or should be, direct or indirect beneficiaries of ICBA's work. However, the lack of partnerships with private sector entities and barriers to such partnerships are evident in this survey indirectly by the fact that only 8 of the 120 organizations contacted for the survey were from the private sector and of them only 3 were extant partners.

The survey highlights the arc of ICBA's effectiveness throughout the project preparation, execution and post-project periods in relation to communication and relationship management elements: ICBA's effectiveness in development of joint proposals with strategic partners is currently sub-optimal. ICBA's performance on information-sharing, while overall not currently problematic, also hides the relevance of timing as ICBA is viewed very favorably for information-sharing during projects' implementation but is viewed poorly in terms of its provision of project findings and evaluation results which are relevant to partners.

As ICBA's inaugural stakeholder assessment, this study incorporated a wide range of components to develop baseline knowledge about how ICBA's partners understand and perceive the institution. Going forward, this baseline information can contribute substantially to future engagement, development and communication strategies and serve as a critical point of reference for comparison when assessing ICBA's evolution and perceptions of it over time.

## Annex:

### Project funding partners

KPI	Questions
1. Partnership impact on institutional credibility	A. Increased my organization's credibility with internal stakeholders
	B. Increased my organization's credibility with external stakeholders
2. Partnership impact on organizational work	A. The partnership has been successful in raising the profile of issues of concern to my organization
	B. After working with ICBA, my organization has a better understanding of its end-users/beneficiaries
3. Overall partnership	A. Working with ICBA has enabled my organization to be more effective in its work
4. ICBA organizational adaptability	A. ICBA is a flexible organization that adapts to conditions on the ground
	B. ICBA is responsive to new ideas about problem-solving
5. ICBA communication and information-sharing	A. ICBA shares information, data and knowledge effectively
	B. ICBA is a trustworthy organization
6. ICBA relationship management	A. ICBA's senior management is effective in managing relations with partners
	B. ICBA pays adequate attention to managing relationships with my organization
7. ICBA benefit-sharing	A. Does ICBA give adequate credit to partners including your organization?
	B. ICBA consistently provides my organization with information and feedback that we can use to communicate successes and gain greater
9. Project Evaluation	A. ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process
	B. I am familiar with the evaluation criteria for the ICBA projects funded by my organization

### Project partners

KPI	Questions
1. Partnership impact on institutional credibility	A. Increased my organization's credibility with internal stakeholders
	B. Increased my organization's credibility with external stakeholders

2. Partnership impact on organizational work	A. The partnership has been successful in raising the profile of issues of concern to my organization
	B. After working with ICBA, my organization has a better understanding of its end-users/beneficiaries
	C. The partnership with ICBA has helped my organization to respond to emerging issues in its core competencies
3. Overall partnership	A. Working with ICBA has enabled my organization to be more effective in its work
4. ICBA organizational adaptability	A. ICBA is a flexible organization that adapts to conditions on the ground
	B. ICBA is responsive to new ideas about problem-solving
5. ICBA communication and information-sharing	A. The terms of my organization's partnership with ICBA are clear
	B. ICBA shares information, data and knowledge effectively
	C. ICBA is a trustworthy organization
6. ICBA relationship management	A. ICBA pays adequate attention to managing relationships with my organization
7. ICBA benefit-sharing	A. Does ICBA give adequate credit to partners?
	B. Does ICBA provide ways for your organization to share its successes and gain greater outside recognition?
9. Project Evaluation	A. I am familiar with the criteria ICBA uses to evaluate projects with my organization
	B. ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process

### Strategic funding partners

KPI	Questions
1. Partnership impact on institutional credibility	A. Increased my organization's credibility with internal stakeholders
	B. Increased my organization's credibility with external stakeholders
2. Partnership impact on organizational work	A. The partnership has been successful in raising the profile of issues of concern to my organization
	B. Provided my organization with access to a more diverse range of organizations and people
3. Overall partnership effectiveness	A. Enabled my organization to be more effective in its work
4. ICBA organizational adaptability	A. ICBA is responsive to new ideas about problem-solving

	B. ICBA takes into account other stakeholders' views in project implementation
	C. ICBA is a flexible organization that adapts easily to project specifications
5. ICBA communication and information-sharing	A. The terms of my organization's partnership with ICBA are clear
	B. ICBA shares information, data and knowledge effectively
	C. ICBA is a trustworthy organization
6. Relationship management	A. ICBA pays adequate attention to managing relationships with my organization
	B. ICBA's senior management is effective in managing relations with partners
7. Benefits-sharing	A. ICBA provides ways for my organization to share its successes and gain greater recognition
	B. ICBA gives adequate credit to its partners
8. Joint proposal development & post-project evaluation	A. My organization is very involved with ICBA in planning new projects
	B. ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process

### Strategic project partners

KPI	Questions
1. Partnership impact on institutional credibility	A. Increased my organization's credibility with internal stakeholders
	B. Increased my organization's credibility with external stakeholders
2. Partnership impact on organizational work	A. The partnership has been successful in raising the profile of issues of concern to my organization
	B. Provided my organization with access to a more diverse range of organizations and people
3. Overall partnership effectiveness	A. Enabled my organization to be more effective in its work
4. ICBA Organizational adaptability	A. ICBA is responsive to new ideas about problem-solving
	B. ICBA takes into account other stakeholders' views in project implementation
	C. ICBA is a flexible organization that adapts easily to project specifications
5. ICBA communication and information-sharing	A. The terms of my organization's partnership with ICBA are clear
	B. ICBA shares information, data and knowledge effectively

	C. Open channels of communication are consistent even after project completions
	D. ICBA is a trustworthy organization
6. Relationship management	A. ICBA pays adequate attention to managing relationships with my organization
	B. ICBA's senior management is effective in managing relations with partners
7. Benefits-sharing	A. When appropriate, ICBA researchers collaborate on publications and conference proceedings
	B. ICBA provides ways for my organization to share its successes and gain greater recognition
	C. ICBA gives adequate credit to its partners
8. Joint proposal development & post-project evaluation	A. My organization is very involved with ICBA in planning new projects
	B. ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process

## Core donors

KPI	Questions
1. Partnership impact on institutional credibility	A. Increased my organization's credibility with internal stakeholders
	B. Increased my organization's credibility with external stakeholders
2. Partnership impact on organizational work	A. The partnership has been successful in raising the profile of issues of concern to my organization
	B. Provided my organization with access to a more diverse range of organizations and people
3. Overall partnership effectiveness	A. Enabled my organization to be more effective in its work
4. ICBA Organizational adaptability	A. ICBA is responsive to new ideas about problem-solving
	B. ICBA takes into account other stakeholders' views in project implementation
ICBA communication and information-sharing	A. The terms of my organization's partnership with ICBA are clear
	B. ICBA shares information, data and knowledge effectively
	C. ICBA is a trustworthy organization

6. Relationship management	A. ICBA pays adequate attention to managing relationships with my organization
	B. ICBA's senior management is effective in managing relations with partners
7. Benefits-sharing	A. ICBA provides ways for my organization to share its successes and gain greater recognition
	B. ICBA gives adequate credit to its partners
9. Project Evaluation	A. ICBA has an adequate monitoring and evaluation process
10. Strategic planning	A. My organization is very involved with ICBA in planning new projects
	B. My organization plays a critical role in ICBA's strategic planning decisions
	C. My organization plays a critical role in shaping ICBA's strategic direction

## About ICBA

**International Center for Biosaline Agriculture - ICBA** is an international, non-profit agricultural research center. Established in 1999, the center carries out applied research and development programs focused on improving agricultural productivity and sustainability in marginal and saline environments.

ICBA takes innovation as a core principle and adopts a multi-pronged approach to addressing the closely linked challenges of ensuring water, environment, income, and food security. ICBA's research innovations focus on the assessment of natural resources, climate change adaptation, crop productivity and diversification, aquaculture and bio-energy and policy analysis. The center contributes to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 5, 7, 13, 15, and 17) by working on a number of technological developments, including the use of conventional and non-conventional water (such as saline, treated wastewater, industrial water, agricultural drainage, and seawater); water and land management technologies and remote sensing and modeling for climate change adaptation.

Improving the generation and dissemination of knowledge is one of ICBA's strategic objectives. The center is focused on establishing itself as a knowledge hub on sustainable management and use of marginal resources for agricultural production and environmental protection in marginal environments. Supported by its partners, ICBA innovates, builds human capital, and encourages the learning that is fundamental for change.

ICBA's work reaches many countries around the world, including the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, the Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia and the Caucasus, South and South East Asia, and Sub Saharan Africa.

Much of our innovative applied research work is supported by three core donors: the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates, the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, and the Islamic Development Bank. We gratefully acknowledge their support as well as the support of many other donor agencies that have contributed to our efforts over the years.



P.O. box 14660, Dubai, UAE  
Telephone: +971 4 336 1100  
Fax: +971 4 336 1155  
E-mail: [icba@biosaline.org.ae](mailto:icba@biosaline.org.ae)  
Website: [www.biosaline.org](http://www.biosaline.org)