Comments of the U.S. NMO Committee for IIASA
on the Revised IIASA External Review Implementation Task Force Report
November 3, 2018

General Reactions

The Task Force Report seems to be improved from the version that we saw earlier, but several of the same weaknesses remain.

Big Picture Ideas
We worry that the Task Force has missed an opportunity to focus on the big picture ideas of the future where IIASA can play a leadership role and has instead focused too much on internal details of organization. For example, Dr. Klaus Schwab, the Founder of World Economic Forum (WEF) posits that: "We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society... The possibilities of billions of people connected by mobile devices, with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity, and access to knowledge, are unlimited. And these possibilities will be multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing." This kind of re-thinking will be increasingly essential at IIASA as it implements its strategic research agenda and management and operations program.

IIASA Vision and Mission
The cogent words are early in the report: "The *Review Panel found that IIASA needs to reflect on its vision and mission, in other words, its core purpose. The panel noted that IIASA's raison d'être should be based on an understanding of what it is that makes IIASA unique, and why the world needs an organization of this nature*." We continue to believe that IIASA's Vision and Mission statements need to be revised to connect IIASA's Future within the new 21st Century realities. The realities of the 21st Century are substantively different from those of the past century during which IIASA was born. These changes have been outline by many. For example, five forces are increasingly reshaping institutions in this century:

1. Economic and social disruption is continuing to accelerate. *This has the potential to place institutions and their research program at risk on many scales.*
2. The global knowledge economy is leading to the globalization of higher education and research institutions. *This leads to intensifying competition as well as cooperation.*
3. New business and delivery models are gaining traction.
4. Greater transparency and accountability for universities are becoming the norm.
5. Those investing in universities and research institutions (state governments, donor institutions and the parents of students) are expecting greater return on their investments.

Hub-Spoke-Node Operating Model
We continue to have concerns about the adoption of the Hub-Spoke-Node Operating Model recommended by the Task Force. For IIASA, it could add new layers of administration onto a system that is already overloaded. For IIASA's National Member Organizations (NMOs), it would impose

requirements that seem to ignore the great diversity of the NMOs in orientation, scientific competence, and degree of closeness to the national government. Just as one example, the report has "… NMOs serving as spokes that would take responsibility for the development of concrete national applied systems analysis activities in competent institutions or nodes." (Section 4.2). This is far from the mission of the U.S. NMO, which is:

> "The U.S. Committee for IIASA carries out the responsibilities of the National Academy of Sciences as the U.S. National Member Organization for the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (USNMO/IIASA). It has two primary responsibilities: one is oversight of IIASA, including formulating U.S. views regarding IIASA's research, budget, and administration, and representing those views at the IIASA Governing Council. The second is to foster increased participation in and awareness of IIASA in the American academic, governmental, corporate, and non-governmental organization (NGO) communities."

Oversight and fostering increased participation are a far cry from developing concrete national activities. We suspect that some of the other NMOs are likely to have even fewer resources and less capability than the U.S. NMO. It would be much better simply to expect the NMOs to provide at least (a) oversight of IIASA, and (b) liaison between IIASA and the national government, including facilitation of the payment of annual dues. Additional activities could be negotiated between IIASA and the NMO. There is no reason to impose a one-size-fits-all model.

The Hub-Spoke-Node model is a useful conceptual devise, but it has significant issues that are not fully explored in the report. Some big elements are breezily recommended, as if it would be straightforward to acquire co-funding for co-designed IIASA-NMO projects, or to evaluate the policy impact of a researcher or research program (Recommendation 6, Section 4.2.1).

Effective Leadership

IIASA needs more effective top-level governance. We agree that IIASA needs to return to a community-based cross-program integrated leadership strategy with a well-articulated management strategy. We believe IIASA is currently run with a laissez-faire strategy, i.e., a policy or attitude of letting things take their own course without interfering. IIASA needs more of a central leadership position and overall management strategy to enable it to be the global institution that it was chartered to be. Specifically, the recent practice of making a very large proportion of decisions at the Director General/CEO level was unworkable.

IIASA also needs a more effective and more transparent set of Human Resources (HR) policies and HR functions, including:
- Clear descriptions of career opportunities and of opportunities for temporary and/or part-time affiliations;
- A transparent system for filling leadership positions, including the expectation of periodic turnover;
- Clear and transparent explanations of the principal duties of those holding positions; and
- Regular internal reviews to ensure that HR policies are up to date and that they continue to comply with Austrian law.

Some specific areas of concern:
- Some recommendations are over-prescribed, such as (i) the hub-spoke-node model and its detailed project-selection mechanisms (Section 4), (ii) the responsibilities of the Council

Secretary (Section 3.2.2, though preparation of Council Minutes and other reports is not among those responsibilities), and (iii) the details of the conference support unit, right down to the inclusion of the audio-visual equipment staff (Recommendation 31).

- The role of the NMO continues to appear fundamentally changed. Is there an assumption that NMOs are funding agencies, with resources that they can make available to support collaborative projects with IIASA (Section 4.3.2)? There are, in addition, new responsibilities for NMOs, with no real suggestion that NMOs have the resources or inclination to carry them out — though the Council is charged with holding NMOs accountable (Section 4.3.5)

- Some specific recommendations are offered without rationale. This includes the inclusion, the transfer of the fundraising unit out of Finance (Recommendation 27), and the transfer of the alumni relations unit to Communications (Section 6.8). The latter two do not take into account the role of alumni relations in fundraising strategies.

- Some specific recommendations are contradictory, suggesting in some cases that non-Council members should be appointed to Committees to provide needed expertise, and in other cases that experts be consulted by committees as needed (Section 3.2.1.3 and Section 3.3). The latter seems much more sensible, particularly the suggestion that the Finance Committee expertise be augmented via consultation with NMO organization experts (Section 3.3.2.2).

- The long tenure of program directors is addressed in a backhanded way (Recommendation 24, Section 6.3.2) but is treated separately from the diversity question with which it is closely entwined.

- The emphasis on migrating from in-house-developed software systems is very welcome.