

CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA)

10th Meeting of the Independent Steering Committee (ISC)

Monday 8 January 2019

Virtual on Bluejeans.com

Meeting minutes approved by the ISC

Participants

ISC members:

Anne-Marie Izac (ISC Chair), Florencia Montagnini, Susan Braatz, Linda Colette, Robert Nasi, Rene Boot, Stephan Weise, Vincent Gitz.

Absent with apologies:

Yemi Katerere

MSU observers preparing minutes:

Alexandre Meybeck, Monika Kiczakajlo

Executive Summary

The Chair opened the meeting and Ann Tutwiler, DG of Bioversity international, briefed the ISC on the Bioversity-CIAT alliance.

The Chair welcomed two new members, Susan Braatz and Linda Colette.

The ISC discussed the implications for FTA of the CGIAR business plan. It also discussed how to add value to FTA's priorities, the issues of performance management standards, foresight, placed-based research and sentinel landscapes, as well as reinforcing strategic partnerships for the program. It made several recommendations to the FTA Director on these issues.

Next ISC meeting will be virtual during the week of Nov 5th to approve the 2019 POWB, and the actual 2018 allocations, for recommendation to CIFOR BoT on time for its meeting of end November 2018.

Having discussed impact assessments and FTA's results, the ISC suggested to hold a special workshop with FTA scientists and possibly external experts, by mid 2019 on impact assessment methods.

Introduction

Ann Tutwiler, Bioversity Director General, welcomed ISC to Bioversity's offices and stressed that the system is punching below its weight on NRM, landscapes, natural capital. FTA and WLE have an important role to play. Could we aim at a special initiative? Stephan mentions restoration and the FTA-WLE-PIM land restoration workshop end August 2018. Ann explained that the alliance between Bioversity and CIAT is driven by the consideration of scientific complementarities and potential for scientific collaboration and synergies. This is important for FTA since both CIAT and Bioversity are program participants.

In her introduction the Chair recalled ISC roles, from the TORs, recently unanimously approved by the board of CIFOR:

- strategic programmatic oversight, which includes a dimension of risk management
- monitoring delivery of results
- oversight and strengthening of partnerships
- review funding allocations from the CGIAR and other program resources, and make recommendations to the CIFOR Board, which has fiducial responsibility for FTA.

Since 2015, start of ISC in its present form, CIFOR Board has unanimously approved all ISC decisions and recommendations. In the CGIAR system there is no overall agreement on functions of ISCs; these vary across CRPs.

The discussion clarified that the time ISC spends on each function depends on the CGIAR overall calendar and on what is happening at system level that directly affects FTA. It is important to maintain a balance between discussions on money and ISC's overall oversight.

The ISC welcomed its two new members, Linda Colette and Susan Braatz. The link between research and development was an important criteria in the new ISC appointments. It is part and parcel of the programmatic role of the ISC and it is important to make it visible. Also, the Chair welcomed Rene Boot (Tropenbos) as a new representative of FTA non-CG partners, Stephan Weise (Bioversity) as a representative of CG partners, both participating for the first time to an ISC face-to face meeting.

1) Adoption of the agenda

Given that FTA's annual report is in an incomplete draft form and given the CGIAR deadline for its submission of 17 July, it was decided that the ISC won't discuss it during this meeting but rather make written comments on the next draft. The agenda was adopted with that proviso.

2) CGIAR developments and implications for FTA

2a) CGIAR funding situation

The Director presented the last estimates from the CGIAR SMO for 2018 end-of year funding. These would enable to fund tiers 1 and 2. Tiers 3 will not be fully funded, but it is difficult to guess to which extent: such information will be known only later in the year. The reason for such a delay is that the final W1 instalment gets distributed by the SMO only when all W2 allocations are known. W1 is distributed so that it fills the gaps between a CRP finplan and its W2. This is done in an equal manner for all CRPs, i.e. each CRP's W1 covers the same percentage of these gaps. That exact percentage is known only generally towards December.

In the discussion, members called for extra care as the SMO in its funding projections has foreseen the mobilization of a substantial part (20m) of its reserves. This hides the continuous decline of W1-W2, and is certainly not a sustainable situation. Therefore the SMO numbers (showing for all CRPs and platforms an expected funding of over 90% in 2018) might be optimistic and a very temporary situation.

2b) CGIAR business plan

The Director summarized the main points of the **business plan proposals** made by the SMO (Doc 2). For the SMO, the main purpose of the business plan is to revert the lack of confidence from donors, to try to address their unhappiness with the current portfolio, while incentivizing them to make funding commitments on a 3-year basis. The business plan has 5 areas: strategy, structure, processes, rewards, people. The business plan is still under elaboration (so far only a 47 slide ppt is available) and it is expected that a first written document will be presented to the SMB end September and to the SC in November 2018. The Director highlighted main implications for FTA (see Doc 2):

- **CRPs would be shortened by one year, ending by 31 December 2021.** Legal and contractual implications will need to be sorted out, as well as implications on the realization of the Theory of Change of FTA, and the end-of-programme outcomes, which were crafted for a 6-yr program, not 5-yr.
- A series of **special initiatives** will be launched progressively to dynamize the portfolio. Two of them are potentially important for FTA: climate change, and gender (with the creation of a fully-fledged gender platform). FTA will need to position itself vis a vis these initiatives, taking care of keeping ownership of what we do.
- A set of **performance management standards** will be put in place, that each CRP will have to meet. A short list is currently in discussion between the CRP directors, the DDG-Rs, the SMO and the donors. Failing on one standard would mean no W1+2 funding for the CRP.

In the discussion, ISC members expressed much scepticism about the purposes and implementation of the draft business plan.

It was mentioned that **ending CRPs one year earlier** and giving up the last year 2022 *de facto* increases transaction costs for the CRPs for preparing new submissions. A better option would have been to organise a solid mid-term review (for which there is no time now). A 2nd consequence of shortening CRPs is that we need to start thinking now about what's next: Vincent pointed to the (now) urgency to know before mid 2019 about the process, then launch the consultations, and prepare documents/proposals.

ISC members wondered whether the changes in the system and the business plan are the appropriate response of the system to **donors' real concerns**, or a response to what the system thinks are the donors concerns? The business plan is unlikely to address the fundamental uncertainty and annual fluctuations of individual donors contributions to the System and CRPs. ISC members pointed to a gap in the understanding of the CRPs by the donors, that may have lost track of what the CRPs are expected to accomplish in the midst of continual reforms. The Director replied that FTA tried to reconnect with a set of potential donors for the future: Switzerland, UK, Canada, Sweden, and actively continues with others such as NL.

The Director emphasized that what is clear is that donors want to see **development results**, and are asking for proofs of impacts. ISC members discussed the overall paucity of impact assessments in the CRPs. The Chair stressed that it would be good for FTA to have a reflection on it, in order to be able to distinguish itself and improve the way the program functions and implements its research activities. ISC members also challenged the view that impact assessments of NRM/natural resources management and policies are more difficult to conduct: it is not more difficult, it is just different; both in terms of methods and of result indicators given the specificities of FTA. The Director recalled that FTA does impact assessments rigorously on some projects, but that it is impossible (far too costly) to undertake it at scale for each of the projects close to 150 projects it has. The question is therefore how to extrapolate from a small number of assessments, what proxies., etc?

3) Adding value to FTA's priorities

The Director presented the item, which was raised during the ISC last meeting. FTA's website is being reorganised, our brochure is being reviewed to incorporate the new priorities. The priorities have potential to attract W2 funds as well as bilaterals. So the question is how can we do this best. Donors are often interested in quite precise topics. Another issue is how can we use the priorities to prepare for 3 year planning.

In the discussion, ISC members mentioned the importance of better communicating about FTA's priorities. The priorities are means to an end, but they should show how they can achieve an end, how do the priorities lead to impact, as this is what attracts donors.

ISC members made a series of remarks on the current document on priorities (Doc 3 to this meeting): (i) it needs significant rewording to address the needs of an external audience ; (ii) explanations for each priority are too long: these should be one short paragraph, explaining what the priority is and its connection to development outcomes; (iii) the different priorities should all read in a comparable manner, as written by one individual; (iv) many of the current priorities are stated not as priorities but as methods (e.g., agroecology), so rewording to focus on the priority behind the methods is necessary; (v) numbers should be added where possible; (vi) text should be more actionable, the writing is often too weak, rambling and not precise enough. Finally, ISC members suggested that the document should better show, maybe as a table, how the different flagships contribute to the priorities, in a very concrete way. To a related question, Vincent explained that the "cross cutting" priorities are those that heavily involve several flagships. Other ones are mainly in one flagship, with links to other FPs.

ISC members recommended that the priorities be mapped to the theory of change, so that one understands how they contribute to the impact of the program. It could also be valuable to explain how the priorities relate to FTA's partnership strategy.

The **links between the priorities and the SDGs** was discussed. ISC members concurred that the document should better show the link to the SDGs. Especially because donors use the SDGs to figure out what is important. ISC members also pointed to inherent challenges about linking to SDGs: if we do it we need to do it carefully so that it is credible and also so that it really addresses country level concerns, as the SDGs are to be implemented by countries.

Regarding communicating and engaging with donors, ISC members stressed that the priorities are a more effective way to communicate with donors than the FPs.. **The ISC recommended :**

- First, preparing dedicated communication kits for each donor: the full list of priorities is useful, but it is also good to target a few priorities to sell to each donor depending on their interest, with each donor specific priority accompanied with one page of more detailed description. Donors will ask simple questions, such as the link to the SDGs, to the ToC, and what FPs do. The objective is to present FTA's work in a more accessible way.
- Second, organize meetings with donors. Several ideas were put forward, ranging from a one day specific fundraising meeting, to a series of meetings. ISC members said it would be important to ask donors what are their needs, what is the research that they need for their own priorities. Members also pointed to the need to be careful not to mix exercises, the internal meetings on priorities' elaboration and implementation, and the external meetings with donors.

4) Annual report

The Director apologized for not being able to circulate a complete draft in time ahead of the meeting. The reason is that the SMO templates and guidance on them were received in May 2018, that is 5 months into the year following the reported exercise (2017) when they should have been received prior to the beginning of the year that is reported upon. The Annual report template includes a new set of tables. Table A on results indicators is important, but most of these indicators are new; we learned we had to report on those only after the closure of the exercise. As a result, information is not always available for 2017. In Table B, milestones are still the same as in the proposal: next year they will need to be reviewed.

In the discussion, ISC members pointed out that this report is mainly directed to the SMO and is internal to the CG system. It is unclear whether donors do really read it. FTA would need to prepare a shorter, more user friendly, slicker, meaningful version, for the purpose of communication

- **An updated version of the 2017 AR will be sent to the ISC for comments after the meeting. A draft version will be sent to the SMO on July 17.**

5) Performance management standards

The Director introduced the long list of standards prepared by the SMO. A short list needs to be elaborated. The Standards will be “pass or fail”, with consequences on W1+2 funding. One single standard failed would mean a “fail” for the whole CRP. Based on the SMO long list, CRP directors and DDG research have identified a short list of 9 standards (document in Annex) that could be rolled out in 2019.

In the discussion, ISC members pointed to the importance of assessing the existence of processes versus results, with an emphasis on the first. Regarding standard 8 (*Program works effectively and efficiently with all “Program Participants”*), ISC members emphasized that this should be about the existence of appropriate processes. On Standard 1 (*Projects in program have credible documentation of objectives and assumptions, and clear explanation of how they are aligned with program objectives*), ISC members pointed to the need to clarify the wording, to orient it towards existence of processes.

The Director mentioned that CRP directors are trying to promote the principle of subsidiarity, some standards could be implemented portfolio-wide, but others could be left to CRPs to implement as appropriate. For instance those linked to quality of research for development (QoR4D). IEA has mentioned the interest to pilot QoR4D assessment work with some CRPs, including FTA.

- **The ISC recommended that the FTA/Director sensitizes informally the SMO-Ed on the ISC discussion, and that it especially raised the issues of taking care about time and cost implications of the standards, distinguishing between assessing processes and results, as well as being open to the principle of subsidiarity for some standards. Also, wording is currently loose and needs to be tightened.**

6) Foresight

The Chair introduced the item, recalling that a discussion on foresight was decided by the ISC, triggered by the need to instill a forward-looking dimension in our work. A number of things have to be considered, such as an understanding of trends, a good representation of the drivers. The Chair said that the objective of the present discussion is only to prepare for the workshop tomorrow, to share our understanding of the issues.

The Director shortly introduced the topic. It figures in the proposal. Since then, there has been an increasing demand for foresight because of the SDGs and of the NDCs. Foresight is present in various activities undertaken by FTA that integrate future perspectives, including its longer-term activities. For instance, FTA is feeding parameters on palm oil into the IMPACT model. But, there isn't however a coherent approach about foresight program-wide, in terms of assumptions and scenarios. Outside FTA, forests are generally not a focus of foresight work, to the exception of the regional outlooks of FAO, but only one – the one on Asia and Pacific, to which we are associated – is still conducted on a periodic (10-yr) basis. There are also some partners that would like to engage more with us, for instance IAASA on forest management.

ISC members discussed the **various reasons why FTA should engage in foresight**.

- First, FTA should be able to say something about possible future scenarios regarding forests, land use and the services (and their value) they provide, and comparing them with the aspirational targets for 2030 and beyond.

- Second, FTA should be able to check if its research agenda is still relevant considering possible evolutions. FTA should be prepared in case the assumptions it has been using are not true or no longer relevant. FTA should have the agility to see what the big emerging issues are, to draw lessons from existing analysis, and to avoid missing big things in the future.
- Third, it could help both FTA's prioritization and stakeholders' prioritization.
 - On internal prioritization, it was mentioned that foresight can help to focus on most important issues, like the approach for biodiversity hotspots.
 - On external prioritization, members pointed to the need to be cautious: the important question is "where do people need to invest in countries"? For this, we might need more than data, and start with asking "what is the most important question". The MSU said that these issues could derive from the demands from countries, inserted into global projections. For instance, what are the linkages to economic development? What are the global scenarios for food? Competition: what do you use the land for? Also, stakeholders at national level would need to be involved, to discuss hypothesis and share the objectives.
- Finally, and as a consequence, the most important are not the futures studies in themselves, but what FTA does about it.

ISC members discussed the **geographic scale** of FTA foresight work, recognizing that various nested scales from global to local are needed. They also pointed to the possibility to link foresight to some key area of place-based work, such as Sentinel Landscapes.

Following a suggestion by one member, the ISC recognized that foresight in FTA cannot be reduced to a single approach. Rather, it **encompasses a range of approaches** that combine: (i) futures (forecasting, forward thinking, prospective), (ii) planning (strategic analysis, priority setting), and (iii) networking (participatory, dialogic) tools and orientations. ISC members recommended FTA to be careful of being comprehensive and use several levels.

ISC members discussed **FTA's best partnership approach** to foresight. They noted that working with IFPRI's IMPACT team has limitation as the IMPACT model does not integrate land use. Here IAASA's Globiom model has a comparative advantage. One other question is if what FTA is doing fits with what the CGIAR wants to do. On this, the director replied that most of the current reflection in the CGIAR is driven around IMPACT, but there is also lots of issues that are not reflected in it. There are other ways to address those, but a challenge is the need to gather the competencies.

The **issue of costs** was also debated. Here ISC members said FTA needs to be cautious about spending a lot of time and energy, and needs to be pragmatic. Rather than starting big initiatives with models and tools, FTA could organize an expert workshop for brainstorming. It could also use other studies, such as the Global Perspectives studies of FAO. But members also underlined the limitations of these studies that often only consider forests as a land bank available for the expansion of agriculture.

Another related issue is **the one of timing**. A member mentioned that one important development agency of a European country considers that making a foresight study every 6 years is enough, seconded every three years with a horizon scanning exercise, on what is emerging.

Finally, ISC members pointed to the importance of clearly delineating the **differences between foresight and ex-ante impact assessment**.

The chair concluded the discussion inviting the Director to consider the points raised.

Three key questions are (i) how can FTA best benefit from foresight? Can it allow FTA to stay ahead of the curve in very rapidly changing times (including institutionally)? (ii) how does it plan to use foresight data? (iii) with whom to partner to engage meaningfully? There are numerous methods and approaches, requiring different levels and types of resources. The Chair stressed that the ISC does not micromanage the CRP in pushing for choices here.

7) Sentinel landscapes (SL)

The Chair introduced the topic: the ISC special workshop (to be held the subsequent day) was requested by the ISC, as there is a concern that the work has not lived up to expectations. So, how can this be remedied? There are different options, all are on the table. The options include closing down the set-up, considering it as a sunk cost, because FPs have not used the SLs, and FTA W1+2 funds (used to fund SL work so far) have drastically reduced. The ISC needs to listen to what the scientists say (and do not say). There are also substantive elements to feed into the discussion: the minutes of the FTA December 2017 science workshop, and the interim report of the 3 stock-taking case studies launched earlier this year.

ISC members discussed the **philosophy and ambition of the original approach**. SL was too ambitious. It was also supply driven and the so-called “data-driven” approach proved to be inappropriate. SL cannot be a *raison d'être* in itself. More problem-focused approaches should be preferred, such as those adopted by the ASB (Alternatives to Slash and Burn) program, where the problem statements drove place-based research. One member recalled that SLs originated 10 years ago following a request from the CGIAR Consortium Office for CRPs to plan to have baseline databases, and to identify representative areas from which extrapolation could take place. FTA was the only CRP which addressed this request by creating SL. At the time FTA was supposed to be a 10-year program. The question is can we afford it in the new funding context.

Second, the **ISC discussed what FTA itself could do with SL data**. Only one data collection took place and what was collected cannot really be used as baseline data as it does not include economic and social datasets. FTA has been struggling with how best it can use these data.

- ISC members raised a series of questions: (i) why aren't FPs interested in the data? If there was an interest in it, it would work; (ii) if there is a clear advantage in doing research in common sites, why aren't we doing it?
- ISC members also made suggestions on how to link SL work with FTA: (i) look back at our priorities and how SL could contribute to it, are the sites going to help more than if we did not have them? How is the data going to be used, for what? Then exploit it as part of FTA; (ii) use SL data in localized success stories aiming at showing what can be upscaled and scaled out: for this we need base line data.
- ISC members recommended to abandon the original ambition and primary focus on cross-landscapes comparison: the research focus and research questions have to be different in different places.

Third, the **ISC requested that the data be made available** to stakeholders, local authorities, universities, in a usable format. 12 to 18 months after collection it should be into the public domain. This could be then used by projects, by students. FTA should get the dataset together. Then we should stop or find project money to look at the database. The Director said that work is needed to facilitate the use of the data.

Fourth, the ISC discussed the **broader picture of data on land use and land use change, beyond SLs**. Comprehensive landscape data is mostly assembled by others, not in FTA. In FTA, there are databases constituted for projects, that could be used much more and better. Several databases scattered and all sitting in different centres. Could FTA facilitate the gathering of all this data in an organized way? A lot could be done but requires a bit of money. How can we look at the huge databases? To create a global database, we need free money, invest W1+2, or fundraise (knowing that data is a tough area in terms of donors attractiveness).

Finally, the ISC discussed the **future of SL sites**. A member said that it seems that some SL sites have other funding resources than W1+2, and that scientists will not disappear, hence data can be analysed by the researchers. Can FTA prepare papers building on the work being done? Another member pointed out to the need to be clear about available resources, and warned against engaging in ideas that could not be financed.

8) Strategic partnerships

The Director presented the paper prepared by the MSU. In FTA, partnerships play a particularly important role. There are currently three categories of partners: managing partners, program participants (= those that have received W1+2, which includes the managing partners), and all the others:

- There are some questions about managing partners: CIAT was a managing partner in phase 1, but not anymore in phase 2 as it is not very much involved in FTA. There seems to be an interest of CIAT to become more involved, and the Director has invited CIAT as active observer at the next management team meeting.
- Regarding the other partners, in 2017 efforts were made at program level to work more with IUFRO and with FAO, more on policies, and with countries. IUFRO is interested to do things with FTA, it is research focused. FAO is interested in working with FTA as a partnership gathering major centers, saving transaction costs, providing evidence to sustain their policy-oriented work
- Partnerships also play an important role in SLs; they can play a big role to ensure long term activity.
- Non-CG partners are important to deliver on the ground.
- There is a partnership strategy in the proposal: how could we better organize our work with the wide range of partners. This issue is also key for donors.

The Chair started the discussion in pointing to the need, now that we have a set of operational priorities, to figure out **what are the gaps in skills and competencies that have to be addressed so that FTA can deliver on those priorities?** What research partners, downstream partners, translational partners do we need, the quality of these, to implement and achieve the program's objectives? As transaction costs of partnerships are high, FTA should really identify where a partnership makes a difference in its impact pathways and in the ToC. It was mentioned that often there is a bias to focus on research partners, which are not the most important for outcomes/scaling out. The role of other partners is often more important, and is an essential component of our impact, for instance having an influence on a political measure. We need partners at national and international policy level. This is just as important than publishing in Science and Nature. We also need to convince the private sector to work with us.

ISC Members emphasized that strengthening **partnerships is not about having the longest possible list of partners**. FTA should aim at a manageable, strategic, list of partners. For instance, the Rice CRP had mentioned 3000 partners, and this had been criticized by ISPC, raising questions on how can they all be relevant and managed? One other member suggested launching a survey on partners, to which the MSU said that the information should be in MARLO, but that managing partners do not always fill it in properly.

ISC members suggested that **partnerships be mapped to the operational priorities**, looking at their role within. Given that the program is large, FTA could select a couple of priorities and look at the theory of change and the role of partners.

Following a suggestion by the ISC Chair, members recognized that **we need partners at different levels, from global to local**. There is here a specificity of FTA, whose partnerships have to reflect the different environments in which FTA works, probably more so than in other CRPs. We need a cascade of partnerships to coordinate effectively. Some ISC members questioned whether there is enough visibility of sub national and national partners. If the objective is uptake, one objective should be to strengthen national research institutions, for more research and more sustained up take.

ISC members then discussed **the typology of partners**. They requested the Director to check whether there is such a typology in MARLO. FTA needs to be careful also not to call everybody a partner: sending money to an organization does not make it a partner, it is a service provider. ISC members also agreed that donors need to be considered as partners (investors), to whom we provide a service.

Regarding the **revision of the partnership strategy**, one member stressed that the focus should be less about a new partnership strategy but more about increased care of external

communication, using the info we have, highlighting the partnerships in the priorities as part of pathways.

The lead center DG stressed that **FTA is first and foremost a partnership**, and a good one: the partnership is what makes the value of the program. We could use this partnership element more, in terms of visibility. The Chair agreed, adding that very often it is important for people to know that they work with a partnership, a conjunction of institutions. This increases credibility. One member said however that we need to understand in which cases (and why) an external partner/organization needs to know they deal with FTA. Sometimes it's needed, sometimes not, but when it's needed FTA participating centers could make more use of FTA as a global partnership, showing there is a structure behind issues. It could help pushing everyone's agenda, based on complementarities and synergies, and save costs. For instance, A4NH has a focal point to the Rome Based Agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP): for these agencies it makes sense to engage with a bigger program rather than with a series of separate institutions. So, a question for us is when does it make sense to have that kind of engagement? Also, given the very tight financial situation, FTA participating partners could do more in terms of joint fundraising.

On the partnership with IUFRO, the ISC suggested that we could propose a working group, and organize a session in an upcoming IUFRO meeting and at the next World Forestry Congress in September 2019 in Curitiba.

- **The Chair requested** FTA/D to take into consideration the discussion and various recommendations. FTA could put this into a paper linked to the priorities, plus favor joint fundraising.

9) Next meetings

The Director recalled the ambitious objective to have the 2019 POWB approved in November 2018 (for the CIFOR Board of 16-29 November 2018) rather than in March 2019. The lead center DG agreed that it would put FTA planning more in line with the budget planning of CIFOR.

Following a discussion, it was decided that there would be two different short virtual meetings ahead of the next CIFOR Board:

- The first during the week of Nov 5th, to discuss the POWB 2019 and the final 2018 W1+2 allocations and use of tiers 3.
- The second to discuss the results of the CGIAR SC (System council) of 15 November 2018, ideally between the SC and CIFOR BT.

The next face-to-face meeting could be in June 2019, back to back to a workshop on impact assessments. The ISC suggested that an internal discussion on impact assessment would probably be effective before discussing with other CRPs like WLE. This internal discussion could include some external invited experts.