

CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) 12th Meeting of the Independent Steering Committee (ISC)

4th November 2019

Face-to-face meeting, Bioversity Rome

Meeting minutes approved by the ISC

Participants

ISC members:

Anne-Marie Izac (ISC Chair), Florencia Montagnini, Linda Collette, Susan Braatz, Richard Muyungi, Rene Boot, Stephan Weise, Vincent Gitz (ex-officio), Robert Nasi (connected remotely)

MSU observers preparing minutes:

Alexandre Meybeck, Monika Kiczakajlo (MSU)

Executive Summary

The ISC considered the latest developments in the CGIAR and their implications for the future of the FTA partnership.

The ISC made comments on the proposed draft Plan of Work and Budget (POWB) for FTA in 2020, as prepared by the FTA director and the FTA Management Team. It requested the director to prepare, when 2019 W1-2 final allocations to FTA and 2020 CGIAR finplan are fully known, a final version of the POWB 2020 (including contingency planning) taking into account the directions given by the ISC in this discussion, and to send it to the ISC. The validation by the ISC of the 2020 POWB will be conducted by dedicated teleconference or by electronic means.

The ISC unanimously endorsed the revised Terms of Reference for the FTA Management Team.

The ISC made comments on the communications and outreach strategy, as well as on the partnerships' strategy: the ISC endorsed the documents with minor edits, and gave directions on priorities for their implementation.

1) Introduction and adoption of the agenda

The Chair opens the meeting and welcomes Richard Muyungi, participating for the first time to the ISC face-to-face meeting. The Chair highlighted that the expertise of Richard complements very well the ISC and expressed her appreciation that Richard has taken this responsibility.

The agenda is approved.

2) CGIAR updates (for discussion)

The Chair asked Robert to provide a short update about the **merger of CIFOR and ICRAF**. Robert explained that now the two centers have a common Board and that a common Senior Management Team is being established. The centers are working together on harmonization of policies, two workshops on programmatic alignment were held in September, and in October with external stakeholders.

Stephan updated the ISC about the **Bioversity - CIAT Alliance**, explaining that the two centers have not been rebranded, hence it is called an alliance and not a merge. There is one DG and one Board as of 1st January 2020. Operational leadership was defined (HR, Communications etc.), towards a single system in place in 2021. Research leadership is being defined, with 7 positions opened for internal recruitment, one of these being ADG for strategy and innovations. There is an advanced draft of the Alliance research strategy to be presented to the Alliance Board in November. Six entry points were identified, and some of them have potential links with FTA, such as Multifunctional Landscapes, Climate Action, or Biodiversity for food and agriculture, where the role of trees is important.

Next, Vincent provided a summary of the CGIAR reform or “**one CGIAR**”, noting that it is a very ambitious reform, probably the biggest ever. The System Reference Group’s recommendations to the System Council, if approved by the Science Council (SC9 to take place end November 2019), will set the direction of the reform. There are five recommendations:¹

1. **One CGIAR Mission** of “*Ending hunger by 2030 – through science to transform food, land and water systems in a climate crisis*”
2. **Unified governance:** One CGIAR Common Board providing a unified governance system for all CGIAR’s legal entities (CGIAR Centers and the CGIAR System Organization).
3. **Institutional integration**, with:
 - one Integrated Operational Structure (a One CGIAR Executive Management Team),
 - unified Policies and Services in Human Resources, Information Technology, Finance, Procurement, Communications, Resource Mobilization, Research Performance and Results Management
 - One CGIAR at the country and regional levels
4. **A new research modality**, meaning the end of CRPs and the creation of large integrative CGIAR Projects, organized around “big lifts”.
5. **More, and pooled, funding.**

The research strategy would be directed to five impact areas:

- Nutrition & food security
- Poverty reduction, livelihoods & jobs
- Gender equality, youth & social inclusion
- Climate adaptation & greenhouse gas reduction
- Environmental health & biodiversity

¹ These were subsequently endorsed unanimously by the System Council at its [9th meeting in Chengdu](#), China.

The calendar is pressing, with already major changes for 2020. The above would mean the end of CRPs in the form they are now, by end 2021, replaced by 3-yr CGIAR Projects, commissioned and awarded by the System Council. Additionally, pooled funding is envisaged to be fully detached from bilateral funding. Vincent concluded by inviting to reflect on what these recommendations would mean for the future, and despite the fact there will be no Phase 3 for CRPs, whether we can build on the legacy of FTA and make sure that the collaborative investments since 2011 are not lost. On a positive note, for instance, our areas of work contribute to all five impact areas.

Next, Robert was asked to provide his commentary on the reform. He sees more risks and hardly any benefits of the reform and this view is shared by several DGs and BoT Chairs. Moreover, cost analysis and proper assessment of legal implications should be conducted first before transforming the centers into operational units, that would unlikely lead to enhancing cooperation. It would also require changing the charter of the CGIAR and the constitutions of each of the centres. Robert also pointed to the risk vis a vis non-CGIAR partners, especially for a partnership such as FTA, which value is far bigger than just the W1/W2 received from CGIAR. The reform would also imply changes in the way research is done, given the envisaged full de-linking of pooled funding from bilaterals (which constitute 80% of the centers' funding). Also, he was sceptical about giving control of all centers to a single Board.

The Chair opened the floor for the questions and comments.

Stephan said a word on the fundamental motivation of the donors: while no one knows where this reform could lead to, donors would like to see centres collaborate and work as a single corporation, without competing with each other.

Stephan advised to carefully monitor the development of the “big lifts” of the new CGIAR strategy in order to get involved in the process and possibly, lead some of the lifts.

Susan asked whether other scientists outside FTA understand the role of forests and trees, for food security etc. If there is little knowledge about FTA, the risk is of being marginalised. The Chair responded that there is always such a need, as scientists working in one CRP are oblivious to what happens in another CRP, so internal communication is important. The Chair proposed to discuss this further under agenda item 4, during the discussion on communication strategy.

Anne Marie observed that when she participated to the CGIAR reform that took place in 2010, there had been extensive inclusive discussions for two years before a decision on implementing the reform was taken. All the stakeholders were represented in that process. The issue of focus was important. CRPs (called mega programs at that time) were discussed as a way to focus and move away from many projects not sufficiently focused on the bigger picture. There were already similar considerations on the need to have one coherent HR strategy, legal advice, etc. However, at the time a conclusion was reached that it is not feasible to have one system embracing all the diversity of the centres.

Vincent responded that we may try to influence one or several of the big lifts, but for the time being we do not know what the process will be, and right now there is no space for contributing, e.g. proposing a concept note. However, we need to be ready to act, when anything more concrete materializes. Meanwhile, it is a reasonable and no-regret strategy to focus on delivery and on demonstrating our impact.

The ISC felt that it is unlikely that the current reform process on “one CGIAR” will stop. Anne-Marie concluded that there is not much room to influence the reform, that FTA should be pragmatic and that the partnership that it encompasses should decide on the most strategic approach from now on. She pointed to the discussions on the matter later in the week between the ISC and the Management team.

3) Preparations for the ISC workshop on impact assessment (for discussion)

The ISC had requested the organization of a joint workshop on Impact Assessment for Natural Resources Management and Policy Research in FTA, with the FTA Management Team and MELIA. The aim of this workshop is to strengthen a shared understanding within FTA of (i) NRM, institutional and policy research impact pathways and (ii) how we can reliably evaluate effectiveness and impact by addressing the challenges just mentioned. This agenda item was a brainstorming session to prepare for the joint workshop, to take place the following day on 5 November 2019.

The Chair mentioned that it is a challenging topic, but a critical one for FTA and the ISC workshop will be a key milestone. ISC members agreed that the workshop is very timely from both an internal perspective and to prepare for the last two years of the program, where demonstration of FTA's results, outcomes and impact should be a priority.

Vincent highlighted that the preparation of the workshop revealed also some important gaps in understanding and preparedness within FP teams and the research they conduct, regarding outcome/impact assessment objectives and methods. It was challenging for FP teams to write their draft background papers, which need to be considered interim documents at this stage.

- ⇒ The brainstorming session enabled the ISC members to be all on the same page regarding the inputs to the workshop, the expected outcomes of the workshop (see concept note for the workshop), and the way to conduct discussions.

4) POWB 2020 (for discussion)

Vincent explained the process followed by the FTA management for the preparation of the POWB 2020 and, as a result of this process, the proposed provisional allocations of CGIAR Window 1 and Window 2 (W1+2) funds to FTA priorities in 2020, including the contingency planning scheme. The presented allocations and contingency planning scheme are still provisional as they are based on a set of hypotheses for the 2020 W1-2 budget: (i) the 2019 final actual W1-2 allocations from the CGIAR to FTA (which will determine the level of possible carry-over into 2020) and (ii) the 2020 W1-2 allocations to FTA. Both variables were not known at the date of the ISC meeting. Also, some internal fine-tuning of the activities (and related allocations to partners and tiers) was still under development for seven of the priorities: P11-12-13-14-15-21-24 (covering FP2, and MELIA whose workplan will depend on the results of the ISC workshop). Therefore, it is proposed that the ISC takes note on progress but that the ISC will consider formally the 2020 POWB at a later stage.

The Chair commented that it is necessary to bear in mind that the context has changed as the CRPs are going to stop in two years, hence the POWB needs to focus on what is most important to accomplish in these two years, not on business as usual. Decisions on the best use for the funding are fundamental. It should be done by looking systematically at each priority. We should aim at being positioned the best possible to be able to demonstrate to the rest of the CGIAR that trees are important.

Stephan noticed that the scientists and teams need continuity and predictability of funding, and that was clearly a key point when 3-years plans were developed, so we should not introduce any fundamental shifts at this stage. It would be a good practice to encourage certain areas that can be more results-oriented, however, this should not lead to fundamental changes for the scientists.

Richard highlighted that restoration is an important area of work and FTA could reflect on how to bring it to the front to get attention of donors.

Vincent responded that the proposed POWB is at this stage not opening any new work. The big decisions on the priorities were taken last year, when FPs prepared 3-yrs priorities' plans (2019-2021), having already in sight the end-of-program outcomes. Therefore, this year there are not

major changes in the priorities workplans: we are confirming that the broad choices we made last year are still valid, and making adjustments at the margin to focus within the priorities' workplans on those activities that are critical for the end-of-program outcomes. However, Vincent mentioned that in case there is a program-level carry over, it will need to be managed strategically by the management team, to complement the priorities workplans to strengthen in some strategic ways. The results of the ISC discussions and workshop will be important as the MT will be able to consider the strategic directions emerging from these.

Stephan noted that some partners appeared to benefit from a high percentage of Tier 1 and 2 which are more secure funds. Vincent explained that non-CGIAR partners often cannot pre-finance, and that FP leaders were instructed to take this into consideration when delineating the budget (giving them appropriate attention in Tier 1 and 2 when relevant). However, the POWB is activity based: the nature of the activities (and not whose centre is responsible for it) is what triggers their inclusion in the POWB.

⇒ **The ISC Chair concluded in requesting the Director** to prepare a final version of the proposed FTA 2020 W1-2 budget (including contingency planning), when 2019 allocations and 2020 finplan are fully known, and taking into account the directions given by the ISC in this discussion. This should be done in ensuring the funds are allocated in the most strategic way both within the priorities but also at program level. The validation by the ISC of the latter, including the related priorities workplans will be conducted by electronic means or through a teleconference if need be.

5) Oversight of FTA performance and delivery

a) 2019 highlights and key 2020 forward plans

Vincent briefed the ISC on main 2019 program level achievements and on 2020 program level forward plans. Vincent explained that most outputs are progressing well. There has been some issues in 2018 with delivery in the inclusive finance priority in FP3, but delays have been caught-up during 2019.

Next, Vincent provided the highlights on the key events foreseen for 2020. The main event is the organization of science conference in Nairobi (15-17 September 2020). The conference would aim at stock taking of the wide spectrum of FTA scientific achievements, gathering around 150-200 FTA scientists. It would enable to get insights into the latest results and discuss scientific issues for the future. Additionally, FTA is organizing in May a seminar with CAS in Kunming, China, whose outcomes will be relevant for the CBD COP 15, taking place in October in Kunming. ICRAF has an office in Kunming that can facilitate the organization of the event. The participants will be half Chinese scientists and half FTA.

Next the ISC was asked to review and endorse three documents prepared by the management team; ToRs of the MT, Communication and Outreach Strategy, and Partnership Strategy.

b) Updated ToRs of the FTA MT

Vincent introduced the revised ToR of the FTA MT, approved by the MT in March 2019. The new ToR clarify the way to solve the disputes in case there is no consensus in the MT.

⇒ **The ISC unanimously endorsed the updated FTA MT ToR**

c) Communications and outreach strategy

Vincent presented the document, the purpose of the document was to provide elements to inform the discussion on a communication and outreach strategy for FTA. Vincent presented the reasons why the communications strategy is needed, the challenges to be addressed and the means to address them. In terms of outreach at international level, the effort is targeted to platforms enabling impact at bigger scale, such as CFS, GCF, CBD, GLF, and at national level,

outreach engagement focuses on some key countries, e.g. Indonesia, Peru, Kenya etc. Vincent concluded that FTA welcomes ISC feedback on what should be the areas to engage.

Anne Marie remarked that FTA needs to be known by a broader audience, and it would be useful to send the newsletter to all donors, centres, other CRPs. It would lead to awareness raising.

Linda observed that in the “Way forward” section of the background document, the word “environment” is not mentioned.

Susan added that the strategy is a comprehensive vision. FTA should use it and prioritise.

Richard mentioned the “One planet network”, where FTA could be institutionally involved, for instance sustainable food systems could be an item of interest for FTA.

Rene stressed the importance of making sure that donors understand what the programme is generating. FTA should be communicating on impact and to donors on what the program is doing. It should also engage with donors to better understand what they want, so that donors can indicate what is important to them.

⇒ **The ISC endorsed the document with the minor edits** suggested and as a follow-up for implementation, Anne-Marie Izac requested the Director to ensure the following: Check who receives the newsletter; Add awareness-raising as an element to the strategy; Ensure proper communication with donors.

d) Updated partnerships strategy

Vincent recalled that a partnerships strategy was already included in the Phase 2 Proposal. The background document with the updated strategy was discussed during the MT meeting. It contains some proposals for the consideration of the ISC in the “Way forward” section of the document.

Linda observed that in the « Way Forward » section of the background paper, the environment community is missing.

Rene highlighted the importance of mapping the partners in terms of their contribution to the FTA ToC. FTA should know what kind of partner is needed to achieve impact. Also a gap analysis should be conducted to ensure no elements are missing, for instance, in terms of geographies.

Susan agreed on the need to identify the gaps and for a reflection on what needs to be addressed to fulfil gaps. For instance, whether FTA needs to strengthen some partnerships with private sector etc.

Another point of reflection should be on how FTA can reach out to partners to spread impact.

Anne Marie added that we should strengthen the message of what impact of FTA could be.

Stephan advised evidencing stock taking, where securing impacts could be part of it. FTA should reflect whether there are right resource partners in place, for instance, so we could learn from that.

Rene pointed out that due to FTA’s operational priorities that kind of analysis is easier to conduct. For instance, taking restoration as an example, to check what platforms are there etc.

⇒ **The ISC endorsed the document and** Anne-Marie Izac requested the Director to take into account the ISC feedback into the operationalization and roll-out of the updated strategy.