

CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) 13th Meeting of the Independent Steering Committee (ISC)

Thursday 20th February 2020

Online meeting, 13h00-14h30 London Time

Meeting minutes approved by the ISC

Participants

ISC members:

Anne-Marie Izac (ISC Chair), Florencia Montagnini, Linda Collette, Robert Nasi, Vincent Gitz (ex-officio). Rene Boot and Susan Braatz had given their views to the Chair.

Excused:

Richard Muyungi, Stephan Weise.

MSU observers preparing minutes:

Alexandre Meybeck.

1) Approval of the agenda

The agenda is approved.

Stephan Weise was not able to attend. He confirmed in writing that the Bioversity-CIAT Alliance is fully committed to FTA. Rene Boot discussed at length prior to the meeting with the Chair who reported his comments. Susan Braatz had nothing special to raise or convey.

2) Up-dates on organizational issues

Robert Nasi reported on institutional developments:

- The CIFOR-ICRAF merger process is continuing. There was a meeting last week with all the science teams preparing joint plans. The support teams met as well. Each team is currently building joint roadmaps. In the different countries, offices will be merged.
- The Bioversity-CIAT Alliance: there are now 6 research teams, each led by a research director. The six research directors report to Andrew Jarvis. The Alliance will also recruit 6 regional directors.
- One CGIAR is moving forward but there is still no clear idea of how this is going to occur. A Transition Consultation Forum (TCF) was established whose membership comprises System Council members, SMB members, DGs, Board Chairs and the Chair of ISDC, around 60

people. It will be working via a set of sub-groups the transition advisory groups (TAG). TAG Research is the sub-group on research strategy and has 17 members. Robert Nasi is a member of TAG research. There will be a meeting of the TCF end of March. There was also a meeting on the Big Lifts in Eschborn where Vincent was representing CIFOR-ICRAF.

The Chair asked if all the centers are supporting One CG, and whether centers that have been conducting research on biodiversity, landscapes... are talking together? Linda asked whether there were discussions on the importance to consider ecosystems as part of the solutions to the identified challenges.

Robert answered that 4 or 5 centers are fully supporting of One CGIAR. For some others centers there are contradictory positions between DGs and Board Chairs. A last third of centers is supportive but cautious on the way it is proposed to be done, especially some of the governance elements. The reform is mainly pushed by Gates Foundation and USAID's Feed the Future, which are mostly interested in modernizing and reprioritizing the crop improvement and breeding agenda of the CGIAR, and in technological approaches to food security. They aren't so much interested on other dimensions of CGIAR work including our own. It's not necessarily the case for all donors including some important European donors. It is important to note that all donors are supportive of the reform, agree on the idea of One CGIAR and concur that the CG needs to evolve, but without necessarily fully grasping all the consequences for centers. Centers are talking to each other, but also cautious towards donors. And at the same time Gates is creating its own organization (Gates Ag One). And donors have not agreed at this point on thematic or country priorities. So, there is still a remaining uncertainty relative to the importance that will be given to the agenda of forests, trees and agroforestry.

Vincent agrees with the analysis of Robert. The reform answers demand from some donors interested in breeding who were tired of having to talk to several centers and several CRPs to address one single issue. Some of the donors support our own priorities. But the question is still open on the place these topics will have in the future and what the programmatic modalities will be. A nice point of Eschborn is that the word "program" reappeared. He pointed to the need for the CGIAR to consult national and international partners, that have been left out of the discussion so far.

The Chair concluded that it is important for us to keep updated on the way the rules of the game are shifting.

3) 2020 POWB of FTA

Vincent presents the POWB 2020.

POWB 2020 is the mid-year of the 3-year workplans started in 2019.

We are now getting closer to the date when all CRPs will close down. . These workplans were "pruned" in order to focus on W1-2 funded activities that can realistically and meaningfully deliver the most significant results by the end of 2021.

The aim is to show the legacy of the FTA partnership for our donors and beneficiaries, and to advocate for a strong programmatic component on trees within the reformed CGIAR as part of its ambition to transform food, land and water systems.

There are some important foci in this POWB:

- assessing outcomes and impacts of the program in a credible manner as a follow-up of the ISC workshop, with increased investment in MELIA and related workplan with a doubling of budget.
- consolidate the evidence on what trees can bring to farming systems and agriculture, and

- support key international processes such as the UNFCCC, CBD, CFS, and key global sectoral sustainability platforms, such as for rubber.

Other key features of the budget are:

- the integration of contingency planning, with the same approach and formula than in previous years, with 25% of the W1 finplan put into funding Tier 3.
- A W1-2 budget up to USD 10m
- 3 additional priorities that consist of three different workstreams formerly integrated into Priorities #1 (for the new priority on seeds and seedling delivery systems), #2 (for the new priority on smallholder tree-crop plantations) and in the MSU (for the new priority on foresight) were created to give more visibility to these workstreams.
- the allocation of carry-over funds from 2019 through a specific process targeted to impactful research with a special emphasis for demonstrable results, e.g. additional influence, on-the-ground impacts, by the latest end 2021, on what trees can bring to farming systems and agriculture.

The MELIA workplan will focus on:

- Two integration studies documenting FTA contribution to addressing two key global challenges (reduction of poverty; avoided deforestation) where FTA is particularly expected to deliver results and to assess FTA contribution to SRF relevant targets associated with these challenges.
- Studies documenting progress within selected impact pathways representative of FTA's work. For example, analysing how research influences policies, then impacts people on the ground. An example would be an impact assessment of our work in Vietnam on Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) now inscribed into the new forest legislation.
- Additional studies to assess the longer-term impact of FTA research, for instance an analysis of what has happened to the agroforestry systems that were put in place by CIFOR and its partners more than 10 years ago in West Kalimantan for rubber.

Vincent concluded by saying that the W1-2 budget strategically builds upon a bilaterally funded program in line with what was foreseen in the proposal (over 70m USD). This attests to the attractiveness of our work to some bilateral donors. Some of these bilateral proposals were generated through discussions amongst FTA partners. In other words, FTA played a catalytic role for the generation, integration and alignment of such projects to the priorities of the program. This attests for the dynamism of the partnership.

Comments from the members of the ISC:

Florencia endorses the budget. On the narrative, wonders if it is ok to always put emphasis on the same projects or if it would not be better to enlarge a bit The range of examples.

Linda supports the POWB. Regrets that it has be so short for FPs. A comment may be more for the future: we have a lot of priorities but the budget is by FPs and the FPs do not seem to work a lot together. For instance, on climate change there is nothing on genetic resources. Linda welcomes the increased investments in MELIA in the POWB compared to previous years.

Robert has no specific comments. Budget and narrative are fine.

The Chair has one overall comment: there are really too many priorities, and some of them are not priorities, like agroecology which is an approach but can't be an objective per se. The ISC did agree previously that the current priorities should be regrouped into things that are really more important than others. And now additional priorities are presented. As a communication tool the current list of priorities is not very effective. It would be good to have only 10 or 12 of them in the

future. The POWB itself is good, strategic, takes into account delivery, integrates contingency planning and is aiming to better position FTA. And the written document is readable and convincing. However, we need a better communication tool for donors and partners.

Rene Boots is supportive of the budget. He notes that non-CG partners receive a small proportion of the W1-2 budget and that transactions costs are high. He would advocate a simpler process for the future. He is also supportive of the written part of the POWB.

Vincent agrees with Florencia that for us some examples are well known, but we still need to have stronger supporting evidence. For instance with the Vietnam PES schemes (that are now just entering implementation at district level): we need stronger evidence to convince people outside our own sphere, which are currently skeptical.

Addressing Linda's remarks, it is true that amongst the 25 operational priorities not all of them are cross-cutting across FPs. Some are deliberately cross-cutting and integrative, like restoration, plantations... Some of the cross-cutting activities do not necessarily appear in the budget. Climate change was in only one FP in the proposal; it is now in several priorities, which facilitates some links.

On the comment by the Chair on the high number of priorities and presentation, Vincent acknowledged that indeed they are numerous but they are all of a manageable size from an operational perspective (with a budget of USD 3m/yr on average), so they must be seen as "operational priorities", as we call them. In fact, we use a published narrative that presents them by blocks to donors. And then we also use them in a more fine-tuned way for those donors that have an interest in narrower part of the research agenda, like for instance Japan for bioenergy and biomaterials. The "FTA highlights publication" (that we will prepare for 2021) will give the opportunity to present the priorities differently and by blocks with some tighter/narrower range.

Vincent mentioned that time to construct the budget and associated transactions costs for partners were considerably reduced this year as compared to last one, as we are following the 3 years plans. However, some time to co-construct the program of work is nevertheless inevitable due to the willingness to have an activity-based POWB for W1-2 funds.

The Chair summarizes the discussions as follows: initial allocations 2020 take into account all the parameters that the ISC wanted. The narrative part is ready to be sent to the SMO and donors

The Chair concludes in proposing the decision (see D1 below), which was agreed by all.

4) Performance assessment of the ISC

The Chair presents the item. We did such an assessment in 2017 and the results were very interesting. For instance, the fact that we needed much more specific terms of reference to clarify the roles of ISC vis-à-vis those of the Board of the Lead Centre concerning FTA. The ToRs of the ISC were significantly revised and it was very helpful. The chair also stressed that the 2017 assessment was costly as a consultant senior HR specialist had to be hired to ensure a fully professional approach. In addition, Vincent and Anne-Marie spent a fair bit of time on the design of relevant questions.

The question now is how useful it would be to have another performance evaluation given that CRPs are closing down at the end of next year and also given that the cost of the exercise is not insignificant.

Florencia agreed that a new self-assessment is not really useful right now, given that the CRP is to close in less than 2 years, that the ISC has done its evaluation not so long ago and that its results are still useful;

Rene had relayed to Anne-Marie before the meeting that he supported not doing a new assessment given the time frame.

Linda also agreed. Given the situation, there are other priorities for using scarce W1-2 funds and the time of Vincent and the MSU.

Vincent: the evaluation of 2017 had a very specific purpose, namely to identify ways of improving the functioning of ISC. But now there won't be much time for replicating the very systematic assessment which took place in 2017. Instead of doing a new evaluation, more pragmatically, the ISC could look at the questions and results of the previous assessment and reflect on how things have evolved and whether there is still a need for improvement on some of these questions. This would build upon last assessment's results by checking that all follow ups were (or not) done. In addition, there will be a light desk evaluation of all CRPs this year, which might include some scrutiny on the governance. We will know more about it in the days to come.

Linda totally agrees; it would be interesting to go back to the questions of the previous evaluation.

The Chair concludes that the ISC will not undertake a new performance assessment but that each ISC member will kindly reread the synthesis document of the previous assessment, look at the questions and how they have been addressed to determine whether there are areas where improvements in the functioning of ISC are still called for. ISC members can then send their main points to the Chair and Vincent, by March 31. We will organize a follow up discussion on the matter, to see where we stand and how we can further improve.

5) Wrap up of decisions

D1. The ISC unanimously recommends to the Common board to approve the initial 2020 allocations of W1-W2 and the 2020 POWB, including its narrative part.

D2. The ISC unanimously considers that, given the closure of CRPs in less than 2 years, a new performance assessment is not timely. Rather, individual ISC members should go back to the report of the last assessment and see whether there are issues in that report that, from their perspective, have not been addressed and need addressing. This would then be discussed at a dedicated ISC (virtual) meeting.

6) Any other business

The dates of the next face to face meeting of the ISC are confirmed. Vincent recommends to members to block 7 - 10 December. 3 full days of meeting might be useful from Monday midday to Thursday midday as in 2019. In early December we will know more about the directions in One CGIAR (as the 2030 high level strategy is expected to be approved in November 2020 by the System Council) and therefore we could discuss how we can more concretely contribute to the programmatic aspects. Also, the ISC could discuss the follow-up of FTA work on impacts, and hold a first discussion on the "FTA highlights" publication. The meeting could take place in Rome, either in Bioversity HQ that by the time will have moved from Maccarese to the center of Rome, or in another place near Rome, or somewhere else in Europe.