

CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) 14th Meeting of the Independent Steering Committee (ISC)

Wednesday 22nd April 2020

Online meeting

Meeting minutes approved by the ISC

Participants

ISC members:

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

MSU observers preparing minutes:

Alexandre Meybeck.

Agenda

- Update on 1-CGIAR
- Revisions to the original POWB to take into account operational adjustments due to COVID-19. (Document 1)

Main Points

The ISC examined and discussed amendments to be made to the POWB to accommodate the impacts of the pandemic on its activities.

The ISC approved unanimously the approach and process to manage the Covid-19 related uncertainties and associated changes in the POWB.

The Chair opens the meeting which has as main item discussion and recommendations about amend-ments to be made to the POWB to accommodate the impacts of the pandemic on its activities. She then gives the floor to Robert Nasi to present up-dates on the merge of CIFOR-ICRAF and on One CG.

1) Update on the CGIAR

The merge of CIFOR-ICRAF is progressing as planned. The Common board is in place; with its 3rd meeting next week. The common management team has been established. There was an alignment meeting in February. Each team is preparing a roadmap. We have started to align policies. BMZ has given USD 2.8 million to support the merger. The merger will be fully operational in the beginning of 2021. Legal aspects still need to be solved.

The System Council (SC) of the CGIAR approved the recommendations of the System reference Group in November 2019. The System Management Board (SMB) has established a Transition Consultation Forum constituted of the members of the SC, SMB, DGs of centers, Board Chairs. It is supported by 7 Transition Advisory groups (TAG) on various issues. Robert is a member of TAG2, on research. This TAG is intensely working, with one meeting per week. The 1st draft of the Research Strategy Framework is due in June. The renewal of the System Management Board is planned. There is a discussion on the recruitment of the members of the EMT (Executive Management Team), with the objective of having them recruited in June. Everything should be ready in November 2020.

In answer to questions Robert Nasi adds that there is a Search Committee in charge of selecting members for the one board. The timeline is ambitious considering that there are no physical meetings due to Covid-19.

Rene Boot asks if partners will be able to provide input on the process. Robert Nasi recalls that he has insisted on the need to involve partners; there will be a partner consultation, probably through a questionnaire. It is the moment to manifest interest. Stephan Weise adds that one way to do it could be through CRP directors. The question of the consultation of partners is important.

Susan Bratz asks if, given that 2021 is a year of transition, there is not a risk of a dip in funding.

Robert Nasi: yes there is a risk, including because of the transition from bilateral to pooled funding and also because of the impacts of the Covid crisis on funding of research. The Chair adds that on this last point there is clearly a risk. There were already voices in some countries, in the UK for instance, asking to redirect development funding towards the increasing numbers of national poor due to the pandemy.

Richard Muyungi: understanding the risk of reduced funding do we have options, alternatives to address it? Robert Nasi answers that at the level of the system there is just a beginning of realization; we will develop a scenario in June.

2) Discussion of the amendments to the POWB

Vincent Gitz introduces the changes, referring to the documents sent in advance of the meeting. Things have evolved very rapidly FTA started a month and a half ago (early March) by asking FP leaders to assess levels of operational risks, from 0 to 3, for each planned activity or deliverable and then to devise adaptation measures. The objective is to show donors that we deliver and to spend the money. To achieve this objective adaptive management is crucial. We are learning about the situation on the ground; we need to build a common understanding of the situation and

its evolution. There were two meetings of the management team (MT) to discuss the adjustment procedure, the risk assessment, and the proposed revised workplans. Those activities that cannot be conducted this year (risk level 3) have been canceled and replaced by activities that can play the same role in the Theory of Change (ToC) and are implementable under the constraints of the pandemic. Overall the changes concern 4% of the budget, with very little impact on repartition of allocations between centers. There are still activities representing 10% of the budget that are classified in risk level 2, kept in the workplan but which will be examined in a second revision.

The chair, noting that scientists have identified activities at risk and some of them have been proposed to be replaced, asks for a clarification on how the new/replacement activities were selected.

Vincent Gitz: Instructions were given to the MT to identify, for each activity and output, the level of operational risk. New activities need to be devoid of risk of disruption due to Covid-19 and be contributing to the same global orientations of the POWB and its priorities, respecting the same budget. Possibility was given to swap activities from tier 3 to tiers 1 or 2. For instance FP4 had four engagement activities linked to global events that will not happen in 2020. They were replaced by other activities in the same work packages. The direct engagement activities have been reduced and replaced by additional work on the production of synthesis papers.

Richard Muyungi: p 7, number 6, maybe it would be important to indicate activities that have been removed distinctly from those that have been replaced. Would these new activities have to be reexamined in June.

Vincent Gitz: We can give more details. The activities that replace are themselves not at risk; so they will not need to be replaced. But there are other activities that are at risk. For instance, we are still planning the FTA Science Conference as a face-to-face meeting in September but we will probably need to replace it by a digital event and are already working on this alternative. There is also field work, such as the evaluation of work on rubber, at this stage postponed but which will need to be reviewed.

Susan Braatz: There is a lot of work assessed in risk 1, 41%. What happens if this package gets at risk?

Vincent Gitz: When we identified levels of risk we identified the following underlying reasons for it:

- Depending on field work
- Depending on an international event
- Organization of FTA international events

There is now a recognition among the MT that the situation is serious. The principle is that we cannot delay decision further until the uncertainty is solved. We will need a sequential approach for decision under uncertainty, with a series of moments where the POWB will be assessed and revised, based upon the evolving situation and uncertainty.

Stephan Weise: This is a smart approach. May is a good moment to review the plan of work. Impact will be very country specific. It is a good pragmatic way to proceed.

Florencia Montagnini : it is a good approach to plan for the worst and hope for the best. Need to plan ahead; we cannot wait for the uncertainty to be resolved. It is the right approach; Ready to endorse. Wisely done.

Linda Collette: Agree with the approach.

Rene Boot: Also very much appreciates the process, finding it transparent. FTA communicated well with the partners. It is wise to start looking at alternatives as soon as possible. Rene doubts it would be possible to organize large meetings in September or October. Applauds Vincent's leadership;

Richard Muyungi: It is a good way to analyze and progress.

Vincent Gitz: When we say a next revision will take place at beginning of 2nd semester, it means in fact that we start working on it next month. Very often a deliverable is the result of diverse activities, some already done, some activities that can be replaced by others (for instance replacing field work to assess vegetation, by remote sensing). The whole process is also useful for the scientists to understand the seriousness of the situation. We also need to be clear that if there is a delay, there will not be additional resources just to cover salaries of people in standby: other deliverables need to be done during the time.

Chair: It is a very pragmatic approach. Probably the best that can be done in such a situation when there are so many uncertainties. Carry on as much as possible while managing the current very high level of uncertainty should turn out to be very effective over the coming few months.

Decision: The ISC approves unanimously the approach and process to manage the Covid-19 related uncertainties and the associated changes in the POWB. The ISC will present this to the Cifor-Icraf Common Board. There will be discussions later for a 2nd iteration on the POWB.