

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

16th Meeting of the Independent Steering Committee

7-8 December 2020 (virtual on zoom)

Item 6 : FTA post- 2021

Doc 1

Background paper : What future for the collaboration between FTA partners?

The purpose of this paper is to nourish preliminary reflections on a way forward for the collaboration between FTA partners.

The purpose of this paper is **not** to deal with the implications, for centers and scientists, of the end of the program¹. It is to address the question of the continuity of collaborative research on the topics of FTA and to examine the role of the partnership in this.

The mission given to FTA is even more important now, than it was in 2011. The adoption of the SDGs and of the Paris Agreement make it even more urgent than ever: the importance of forests and trees, of a holistic approach to problems, and of the need for evidence-based solutions and innovations. The end of FTA phase 2 coincides with the start of the post 2020 agenda on climate change and on biodiversity, as well as the UN decade on ecosystem restoration. The Covid crisis and the willingness to “build back better” reinforces these three points (importance of forests and trees; holistic approaches; evidence-based) and creates opportunities. There is therefore a need, an interest and a potential demand from donors. There is an opportunity for a clearly identified place and vehicle to answer this demand. It is important for our historic donors, and even more to attract potential new ones.

The discussion on the future of the FTA partnership started already in 2019, when both the MT and the ISC started reflecting on a way forward, including in a joint session. Since then, the situation has evolved, and it is now clear that the CGIAR CRPs will not be extended into a phase 3, nor replaced by a comparable programmatic approach. But that does not necessary means that FTA should just break apart, archive things, and do as if nothing ever happened?

Key questions

Key questions to consider are:

- Where do we come from? (Including as a CGIAR CRP, see Box 1)
- What have we achieved together in the partnership?

¹ Scientists working in the program are all employed by centers. These scientists are involved, for most of them, in several projects, as well as in W1W2 funded activities. The “dependence” on W1W2 funding is diverse for different teams of the program. It is close to 100% for the MSU, or the gender CCT. It is lower for other teams. There is an indirect dependence on FTA for some centers or teams in two ways: (i) some donors (e.g. NL) provide specific, additional resources to institutions because they take some active part in FTA, and (ii) in other instances, research teams were able to win a bilateral project because of some link to FTA.

- What is our common legacy under FTA?
- What part of the common capital deserves to be preserved and valorized?
- What do we want to do next, together: what would be our common, particular, distinctive mission?
- What other partners do we want/need to bring in?
- How to engage donors?
- Which modalities, governance, modus operandi?
- Which process in 2021 to build and prepare for this?

We need a sequential approach to progressively tackle these questions, knowing that some -like the modalities and modus operandi – may come only later on in the thinking process.

Short summary and key points of initial discussions

During the FTA science conference 2020, a specific session was dedicated to the question of the way forward for the partnership. **FTA partners shared their perspectives on strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges that emerged over the course of the 10 years of FTA, in order to draw lessons for the future.** They highlighted that FTA facilitated the development of multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and systemic approaches, leveraging the strength of each partner to address complexity embedded in the issues we need to address. It supports coordination of research development and planning to allow integrated approach and maximize impact. Being part of a global platform offers, for the involved partners, multiple opportunities for global outreach, “a highway to the world”, increasing capacity to make impact in the sphere of influence and sphere of interest. It also brings benefits to national and local partners. They also mentioned the importance of social capital as well as specific examples where the partnership facilitated progress and more systemic approaches like on landscapes, seed systems, nutritional value of tree species, gender. They also noted that there is room to deepen collaborations. Non CGIAR partners remarked that the frequent institutional and management changes in the CG system were difficult to follow. The representative of the Chinese Academy of Forestry commented on the advantages of FTA to address broad and interconnected challenges, including adaptation to climate change, restoration of all ecosystems and integrated management of diverse ecosystems.

During the meeting of the management team of 1st December 2020, partners highlighted the importance of building together projects and initiatives for joint fundraising, and that can build on the common understanding -built over a decade- of the comparative advantages of the partners. Was also mentioned that different sets of partners can be involved within different projects. There is also a need to reflect, in a self-critical approach, on the way the partnership functioned to ensure equity in a future partnership.

A common capital

FTA is a research for development partnership that has developed in 10 years a rich common capital of:

- Research findings, knowledge, information, products
- Collaborative methods to jointly plan and implement research for development
- Collaborations
- Mutual understanding and trust
- Credibility

- A network of partners on the ground

As recognized both by the ISC and by FTA managing partners during the FTA Science Conference, this common capital needs to be preserved and valorized even after the end of the CRP that has created it.

As part of it, there could be a critical review of our process of work inside FTA, taking into account and distinguishing the constraints imposed by the CGIAR system.

A 2021 POWB oriented to show the legacy

As per the recommendations of the ISC, FTA will focus in 2021 on activities that valorize its findings since 2011, bringing them to next users to facilitate up-scaling and out-scaling. It will do so through:

- Synthesis
- Impact studies
- Statistics on joint projects, joint publications...
- Specific joint activities for up and out-scaling.
- Strengthen some important partnerships (IRSG, FAO...)
- Show the partnership and its value added, (Internally to each partner (non CIFOR-ICRAF), to the global forest community (WFC), to donors, to the broad interested public: webinars post conference, highlights publication, specific synthesis

Identifying promising areas for joint work

As discussed in the management team meeting on 01 December 2020, could be identified promising area for joint work. This could lead to answering collectively calls or designing joint proposals. This would build upon the legacy of the program on the comparative advantage of each of the partners, their networks in the field and specific geographies, and on our trust and habits of working together, including on sharing intelligence on funding opportunities. Increasingly, donors ask for proposals by a consortium. It is much easier to build such consortium on a backbone of partners that are used to work together. Depending on issues, it would associate variable numbers of partners (as is already the case).

Expanding the partnership?

As per the recommendations of the ISC and following previous discussions in the MT and the FTA science conference, FTA will consider means to extend the collaboration between the managing partners of FTA. It will do so in a pragmatic way, starting from its achievements, for instance considering how to preserve and valorize the knowledge generated by the program, build upon our history of collaborations for joint projects, identify areas of strategic importance in which to build a common vision and joint programmatic approach. It will also analyze what has worked and what can be improved, building upon the preparation and results of the evaluation.

In parallel, specific potential partners, or potential friends of such an initiative could be contacted to search feed-back and build support.

The intention to extend the collaboration between partners could be announced through a common declaration of the managing partners of FTA. Other partners could announce their intention to support it.

Being attractive to donors

Donors are generally very favorable to joint activities and proposals (see the numerous calls, like IKI, where it is a condition). A structured partnership offers opportunities for stronger, ex-ante, engagement.

FTA has been attractive to both the historical forest donors, and increasingly attracts some of the more innovative resource partners that can link forests and trees to boarder agendas, first agriculture, but energy, climate, biodiversity, etc as part of holistic solutions.

Engaging donors is critical but experience has shown the importance to associate them pro-actively and to give them the proper time for them to get ownership.

The experience of the agroecology TPP confirms that it can be more efficient and attractive to partners and donors to start from concrete initiatives and activities rather than from formalization of a structure.

Box 1 : CGIAR Collaborative research programs (CRPs) : vision, role and missions

- **Propose and implement joint programming** of longer term for research on key themes, leveraging complementarities and synergies across CG centers and partners, for increased relevance, effectiveness and attractivity of research for development efforts.
- **Respond as one** to diverse stakeholders needs in different locations
- **Align** efforts and build critical mass and foster collaboration of CGIAR research Centers, researcher communities and partners and donors towards addressing main development challenges, to tackle common problems through shared impact pathways-
- **Mobilize** the expertise of the various relevant centers and experts/scientists in the CGIAR and partner organizations, from different perspectives, for a systematic approach to R4D partnerships along the generated knowledge-to-systemic changes (or R-to-D) continuum
- **Add value** to single/bilateral streams of work, covering a larger set of different contexts and scales to generate operational solutions to development challenges, and to facilitate adoption, upscaling and out-scaling in different contexts.
- **Facilitate** adoption of research results on the ground though participatory research, partnerships and capacity building.
- **Integrate learning loops** in the design of impact pathways, research questions and workplans, given feedback from learning on results. Integrate in this regard into a mid-term perspective (6 or 9 years) clear moments for reorientation and prioritization.

Source : building on different (unpublished) versions of the January 2019 CRP white paper document.