

CGIAR Research Program Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA)

Perspectives on the findings and recommendations of FTA's Independent Review

8 April 2021

FTA's Independent Steering Committee (ISC) and FTA's Management Team (MT) have a shared perspective on the final report of the Independent review of FTA, including its annex and the brief, commissioned by the CGIAR system and produced by the CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS). These documents are available online at:

<https://cas.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/crp-2020-review-fta>

We very much welcome the results of this external evaluation and thank CAS and the review team for their professionalism, transparency, and willingness to dialogue during the process.

The review report is a very solid endorsement of the program's achievements, from FTA's actions within its sphere of control (outputs) to its sphere of influence (outcomes and impact). The reviewers stress that *"FTA showed strong implementation performance in phase II and is likely to make significant progress toward most planned end-of-program targets."*¹ It further highlights that the *"close collaboration between FTA partners, its independent and efficient governance, and the effective prioritization and management of resources resulted in a high level of programmatic value-added"*. The report emphasizes the important role played by partners, including universities and research institutions in strengthening FTA. In summary, the report gives a glowing acknowledgement of the quality of FTA's scientific work and of its partnerships, as well as FTA's efficient, strategic, and inclusive management and governance.

The report makes several important recommendations to FTA and to the CGIAR system in general. We agree with all of them. Those addressed to FTA are being considered and taken onboard by the program's MT and the ISC. They are guiding the last year of implementation of FTA and provide elements of reflection and implementation as we move forward with our partners beyond 2021.

We concur that *"FTA should ensure that current overall high scientific productivity and implementation performance continue until the end of 2021"*. Processes are in place for this to occur. We welcome the report's endorsement of FTA's work on impact assessment and the suggestion that this be carried out in a pragmatic way, to produce results in 2021 (Recommendation 6). The development of novel, integrated approaches for assessing FTA's outcomes and impacts was a specific priority of FTA's ISC and FTA's leadership, starting in 2019 with a joint dedicated workshop.

¹ CAS Secretariat (CGIAR Advisory Services Shared Secretariat). (2020). CGIAR Research Program 2020 Reviews: Forests, Trees and Agroforestry. Rome: CAS Secretariat Evaluation Function. p.2
<https://cas.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/images/FTA%20CRP%20Review%202020%20Report.pdf>

We also concur with recommendation 3 which states that “*FTA should engage in more targeted communication and dissemination of research findings to different audiences, especially in developing countries*”. FTA sees communication as an integrated part of its theories of change. This recommendation is already taken on board in 2021, with a change of approach to outreach and with the program capitalizing on its digital experience.

Turning to the future, we believe that the independent review provides valuable insights for the current partnership, when reflecting upon what should come after the program closes at the end of 2021. For instance, the ISC and the MT take good note of recommendation 4 that “*FTA should find ways to conserve and protect the significant value-added it has built beyond 2021, within or outside One CGIAR*”. Interestingly, the independent review also asks that the CGIAR provide support to FTA partners for doing so (Recommendation 7). They stress that: “*Without a global program addressing the critical R4D needs currently covered by FTA, CGIAR would lack a critical portion of its R4D portfolio.*” FTA partners and its ISC, have started reflecting on how best to integrate into global agendas the multidimensional contributions of forests and trees. This reflection also includes considering the potential relations and complementarities between FTA’s successor post 2021 with the new initiatives being developed within one CGIAR. We totally agree with the reviewers that “*the most important impact pathways for FTA should continue to be its influence on government and on international policy processes*”.² Work on policy issues at national and regional level, for instance on NDCs, and linkages with global policy processes in which trees and forests provide key entry points is very promising in terms of the significance of its potential impacts to facilitate upscaling of technical, social, and institutional innovations.

Since 2011 FTA’s managing partners have invested together considerable resources and human power in the program, with close to USD 820m of cumulated research investments, of which about 170m were CGIAR W1W2 resources.

None of the challenges that FTA is working on can be solved by one single organization, no matter how big, or where geographically located. Effective, innovative, and quality research for development requires solid, agile, focused, and meaningful long-term partnerships. Such partnerships, based upon complementarity of expertise and experience along the R4D continuum, need nurturing for partners to trust each other. The various comments in the review report highlight the solid foundation upon which all partners can now work together to jointly construct the post 2021 era.

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² Ibid, p.3