

Response to EC/IFAD “Review of CGIAR Research Programme 7: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security”

Introduction

EC/IFAD conducted a review of CCAFS in late 2012. The review was led by Guy Jobbins and Didier Pillot. CCAFS received the final report in late June and prepared a response to the review for tabling at the ISP October 2013 meeting. After the meeting the response was updated and tabled at the CIAT Board meeting in November 2013.

The review is framed around evaluation of processes and tools in the context of the current CGIAR reform process rather than observed impact of a specific project. The review focusses on programme provisions for monitoring and evaluation, the progress of the CGIAR reform process, and the role of EC funding within a CRP. The review focused on the West African region, and was based on documentary analysis, face to face and telephone interviews, and visits to the CCAFS Coordination Unit in Copenhagen and field site at Lawra-Jirapa, Ghana.

In general CCAFS performed well in the evaluation, as indicated in the summary table from all the EU evaluations conducted in 2012.

CGIAR Center	Project Short Title	Relevance	Efficiency	Effective-ness	Potential for impact	Visibility of EC funding
CIAT TSBF	ISFM	S	LS	S	S	LS
CIMMYT	CA systems	S	LS	S	S	HUS
CIMMYT	CASFESA	S	S	S	S	S
ICRISAT	ZimGoat	S*	LS/HUS*	LS/HUS*	LS/HUS*	LS/HUS*
ILRI	IndMozGoat	HS/S*	S/LS*	S/LS*	LS*	LS*
IRRI	Submergence-prone and salt-affected rain-fed rice	HS/S/LS*	LS*	S*	S/LS* but rather early to say	S*
IRRI	Stress-tolerant rice	HS/LS*	HS/LS*	HS/LS*	Too early to say	S
IWMI CPWF	Small reservoirs in the Volta Basin	HS	S	S	S	LS
AfricaRice	RAP	HS	HS	S	HS	LS
WorldFish	Sustainable aquaculture	S*	HS*	HS*	HS	S*
CIAT	CCAFS	(HS*)	(S*)	(HS*)	(HS*)	(S)
Bioversity International	Conserving forest and other wild species	HS/S*	S*	S*	S	LS
IITA	Agrobiodiversity of roots and tubers	HS*	S*	S*	S*	LS

HS = Highly satisfactory; S = Satisfactory; LS = Less than satisfactory; HUS = Highly unsatisfactory
 * = No overall rating provided, so estimated; (...) = No rating provided, so interpretation from text

The reviewers made 34 recommendations, which form the basis of this response from the CCAFS Program Management Committee (PMC). A number of the recommendations are directed to agencies other than the PMC – these are also listed here, but no substantive response is made for these recommendations. The evaluators have ordered the recommendations under the headings: (i) relevance, (ii) efficiency, (iii) effectiveness, (iv) practical implementation of the CRPs; (v) synergy and collective action, (vi) lessons regarding the CGIAR reform process, (vii) monitoring and evaluation at the consortium level, and (viii) impact, sustainability and visibility of EC/IFAD funding.

i. Relevance

The evaluators noted that CCAFS has in place processes to ensure relevance of Thematic and Regional Program activities at local, national and regional levels, as well as positioning itself in terms of strategic research. Nonetheless, the evaluators believe there are opportunities to improve the alignment of Center activities, strengthen focus on comparatively under-resourced areas within the portfolio, and capacitate CCAFS sites.

Their recommendations, and our response, are as follows:

- 1. More focus should be placed in Theme 2 and on non-productivity dimensions of food security, and this may involve recruiting appropriate staff to increase the capacity and capability of Centres, or bringing in outside suppliers of research**

The issue of going beyond productivity dimensions of food security was discussed by the Independent Science Panel (ISP) in the Ouagadougou meeting, with the ISP holding the opinion that CCAFS should indeed cover more than food production. The report of the Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change also supports the comprehensive approach, indicating in their seven recommendations that access, consumption and waste are crucial elements of a sustainable global food system. However, given the historical strengths of the CGIAR, the PMC has recognized that it has a long way to go in order to truly tackle food security in a comprehensive manner. Currently work on food security is embedded in all Themes, not only Theme 2. The CCAFS PMC reiterates its previous position that CCAFS will invest in filling gaps, via strategic research or partnerships, to address food security in its wider sense. As per a previous ISP decision, CCAFS will consider the whole food value chain, but primarily not as an implementer of new research but rather to define key questions and attract various partners to address the issues thus identified. CCAFS will also stimulate the development of important synthetic outputs based on research results from a variety of partners.

- 2. In coming years CCAFS should be prepared to reduce non-strategic Centre-led research in its portfolio**

The ISP and PMC recognise that the CCAFS agenda has been partly inherited from work initiated prior to the start of CCAFS, and are committed to getting strategic alignment. Each year Centre activities are rated for strategic alignment and budget allocations are partly dependent on alignment. We have constant discussions with Centers about strategic directions. This has resulted in an improved portfolio of activities over the years, though we recognise that more needs to be done. In Phase 2 of CCAFS we plan to adopt a

more drastic approach, whereby only a certain number of Centers are selected for different Themes/Flagships – with a key criteria being the degree to which alignment is being achieved with thematic and regional priorities. This will already be trialled in 2014 for one component of CCAFS (“Flagship 4”): national to regional policies for climate-resilient food systems.

3. This (“strategic alignment”) would need to be done in an objective and transparent manner, clearly communicating expectations in advance, sharing evaluation criteria, and focusing on activities with potential for most improvement.

The criteria for budget allocation (including strategic alignment) have in past years been communicated to all Centers and results for all centres are shared amongst all Centers. In the Flagship 4 trial (mentioned in the previous item), we have spelt out the evaluation criteria for concept notes, shared all concept notes with centres, and are getting input from Centers on where they see the priorities. In addition we hired an independent evaluator to give input on the concept notes. This process will be repeated for all the Flagships in CCAFS.

4. The Consortium Office should prepare to support a CGIAR system-wide policy incentivising Centres to focus on CRP priorities, and to support CRPs implementing it.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). We believe the CO is very keen to ensure strategic focus and has made clear statements to this effect in recent months (e.g. by stating that bilaterally-funded projects that do not support CRP objectives should be kept outside CRPs). In addition, the CO is very committed to performance-based management, as is indicated in the proposed call for phase 2 of the CRPs.

5. Increased alignment between the Thematic and Regional Programmes and Centre-led activities at CCAFS sites should be an area of focus over the next period

In the past Centers have been attempting to get alignment with Thematic priorities and have paid less attention to helping build regionally coherent programs. In addition, the planning tools have largely been theme-based. Given the problem that regional priorities have received less attention, we will propose a new approach in phase 2 of CCAFS and will trial that approach in the Flagship 4 trial. This will involve Centers bidding into regional programs, with winning bids partly dependent on whether or not regional program priorities have been addressed. Both Regional Program Leaders and Theme Leaders will play a major part in the selection of the activities to be funded. Through the concept of “climate-smart villages” we hope to achieve greater coherence at site level. The forthcoming external evaluation will focus on the management of the theme by region matrix.

6. CCAFS should strengthen the climate change knowledge of CCAFS site teams

CCAFS works with numerous partners at its various sites around the world, some very strong on climate change knowledge and some less so. CCAFS PMC acknowledges that capacity is a problem in some sites and more attention needs to be given to capacity strengthening. The PMC will put together a web-based primer on climate-smart agriculture and a capacity strengthening process for site teams.

ii. Efficiency

The evaluators noted that despite a challenging year, CCAFS has improved on its financial performance from 2010 (in terms of budget management and achieving targets). They noted that the majority of the challenges experienced were not within the control of CCAFS staff, and they have noted that CCAFS has done well to manage financial risks.

Most of the recommendations are not addressed to CCAFS, but to the CO and funders. The recommendations, and our response, are as follows:

7. CO should try to move financial planning earlier in the year and provide confirmation of next financial year's budget to CRPs before commencement of the financial year

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). CCAFS has seen constant improvements in this over the last few years, though there is still room for improvement.

8. Donors should ensure that funds are with the CO to allow disbursement to CRPs a quarter in advance

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO).

9. Reform at the level of the Consortium Office and Fund Council would be needed to make financial arrangements more accessible to non-CGIAR partners

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). This relates to the finding that our main University partners have decided to largely leave their funds to be managed by the CGIAR Centers because of the problems of managing the funds according to CGIAR guidelines and fund uncertainty.

10. Financial efficiency of CRPs would be improved if they were able to negotiate lower rates with Centres, or to preferentially select Centres based on lower indirect costs.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). The key problem here relates to cascading indirect costs, as funds move from CIAT to Centers and along to partners, each unit having some indirect costs.

11. The Consortium Office should make provisions for indirect cost charges on pass-through funds, particularly on long-term multiple year commitments, to be lower than indirect cost charges for operations.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). It is apparent that pass-through rates for projects have largely disappeared, and thus the problem referred to in the previous recommendation.

iii. Effectiveness

The evaluators were positive that CCAFS had a range of processes in place to ensure effective program delivery. They noted that the development of M&E tools is a significant aspect of the CCAFS workplan, but cautioned that quantitative techniques need to be balanced by qualitative methods. They considered that

the programme logframe was internally consistent, but they called for the indicators to be improved in terms of specificity and measurability.

Their recommendations, and our response, are as follows:

12. The positive role of the ISP should be considered as a model for other CRPs.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO).

13. Quantitative impact assessment tool should be complemented by qualitative assessments examining farming systems and decision-making.

This recommendation refers to the fact that CCAFS has established baseline surveys in all of its core sites and is complementing them with various modelling studies. These baselines are indeed a mixture of the quantitative and the qualitative (the village and organisational baseline surveys particularly are essentially qualitative). In addition, it should be noted that not all (or even most) of CCAFS's impact will occur at these core sites and will thus be amenable to measurement using the CCAFS baselines. A substantial part of the CCAFS portfolio of activities is taking place in other sites and regions, and for these, different baselines are being undertaken to monitor impact, again using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative tools. With the move to performance-based monitoring, the identification and measurement of annual indicators that can demonstrate progress by Centres, Themes and Regions towards CCAFS's outcomes becomes critically important, and this will continue to require an appropriate mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

14. CCAFS should strengthen internal processes for planning and integrating activities to ensure that challenges in programme management are not contributing to additional delays in participatory processes at CCAFS sites.

This recommendation comes about because of the numerous small contracts of short duration that were analysed in relation to the West African site visit of the evaluators. The evaluators were referring to the first year of operation (2011) when funding uncertainty and late arrival of funds was at its worst extreme, and ICRISAT was not willing to pre-finance activities until funding was more certain. The situation has greatly improved since then and much larger multi-year contracts are being issued.

15. CCAFS needs to focus on approaches for integrating research results from multiple activities, partners and sites.

The evaluators recognise that integration is happening through the Head of Research, Theme Leaders and Regional Program Leaders, but they are concerned that the majority of current CCAFS funds are in Center-led activities not located at CCAFS sites. Therefore there is an important need to develop ways to integrate these activities and their findings into a functional analytical framework. CCAFS PMC believes that the process that has been started for Phase 2 (i.e. the Flagship 4 trial) will achieve much greater coherence within regions and across the whole Flagship. This topic is also one of those that will be tackled in the forthcoming matrix evaluation.

16. CCAFS should consider accepting multi-year project proposals to ensure that annual research activities are strategic.

This largely refers to the problem already addressed in R14 – that of short-term contracts. This problem has been addressed. In addition, in the second phase, each Center will be bidding into a long-term project, not a single year activity.

17. CCAFS should screen Centre-led proposals more rigorously, rewarding strategic research with increased funding and withdrawing funding from non-strategic research

This is definitely what CCAFS has been doing, but the process will be intensified as we put together the portfolio for phase 2. This issue has been referred to under our response to R2.

18. CCAFS should consider implementing a monitoring and evaluation system tracking progress in partnership development.

As the Consortium has recently put in place a regular partnership survey, we don't believe CCAFS needs a specific system of its own. CCAFS is however now tracking partnerships in multiple ways: types of partners, geography of partners, pass-through funds to partners and co-publications with partners.

19. The specificity, measurability and achievability of logframe indicators should be improved if the document is to be used for accountability purposes

CCAFS will ensure that this is done.

iv. Practical implementation of the CRPs

Their recommendations are follows:

20. CCAFS should move towards longer term work-planning and contracting at each site

The evaluators stress the need to develop longer-term workplans and contracts for CCAFS sites as this would reduce transaction costs and strengthen integration between Regional and Thematic Programmes, and would reduce burdens on participating country partners. The evaluators are largely referring to a situation in year 1 when funding uncertainty was at its extreme. The issue has been tackled under R14 and R16. The situation has greatly improved since then and much larger multi-year contracts are being issued.

v. Synergy and collective action

The evaluators note that there are positive signs of engagement between CRPs.

21. In the future, the Consortium Office and/or donors may wish to map and evaluate synergies between CRPs

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). In CCAFS we are aware of numerous recent efforts by the CO to achieve synergies amongst CRPs. This has been late in coming but it is only recently that the CO is fully staffed.

vi. Lessons regarding the CGIAR reform process

This set of issues and those in the following sections largely refer to broader issues than to CCAFS specifically. The evaluators note that there is a need for increased, but flexible, harmonisation between Centers and CRPs of policies and procedures. They also discuss where CRPs should be placed in relation to CO and Lead Centers. They also express a concern about the tension between an increased focus on achieving development impact and supporting high quality research, although they do say that as yet there are no indications that this is a problem in CCAFS.

22. The capacity of the Consortium Office to generate harmonisation and manage the reform process should be reinforced.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). The staffing level in the CO has been substantially improved in recent months, and CCAFS recent experience is that much greater effort is going into harmonisation.

23. Over the medium term (2-3 years) the CO should map policy areas requiring harmonization and institute reviews across Centres with a view to harmonise, where possible

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO).

24. Over a longer term period, as the reform process stabilizes, the CGIAR may wish to consider reorienting governance towards a matrix management style with CRP directors reporting directly to the CO rather than to Centre DGs

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO).

25. Institutionalise mechanisms within the Consortium Office and CRPs for strategic engagement with non-CGIAR research institutions.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). This recommendation largely refers to a perceived lack of sufficient engagement with partners outside the CGIAR, partly due to issues related to uncertainty of funds and thus reduced opportunities for longer term strategic partnerships (in cases where funds are needed to support such partnerships). The evaluators note that CCAFS should be in a position to engage with recipients of significant resources from outside the CGIAR and shape their research. Options might include offering top-up funding to universities receiving research grants that align with CCAFS priorities. The evaluators note that current management systems do not incentivise such behaviour from CRPs (because leveraged funds are not counted by the CGIAR). Starting from 2013 CCAFS will indeed start record funds leveraged through partnerships. It will continue to attempt to forge longer term partnerships with the global change community.

26. After 3-4 years the ISP should commission a review examining the role of participatory action research approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation, specifically addressing scientific outputs.

It is proposed to focus an evaluation on this topic in early 2016.

27. CO to establish working group on the conditions for production of international science in the context of field-based action research

The major concern is that field based action research may not lead to IPGs. This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO). CCAFS will examine the degree to which its action research is generating IPGs in the evaluation proposed in the previous recommendation.

vii. Monitoring and Evaluation at the Consortium Level

The evaluators have deep concerns that a focus on making research accountable for development impact is misplaced, and that the CGIAR would be better served by M&E frameworks focused on evaluative learning. The evaluators are also mindful of the potential tension between the nature of research and the tendency of accountability frameworks to incentivize low risk behaviour. CCAFS management team does not see this as a problem as both impact and science outputs are monitored for performance.

Their recommendations will all be communicated to the CO. They are as follows:

28. The final CGIAR SRF and M&E strategy should incentivize innovative, collaborative and high quality research, which allows for the possibility of failure

29. The CO should manage expectations and ambitions for the ability to rigorously assess the development impact of research. A focus on evaluative learning rather than accountability would support better programme performance.

30. As the SRF evolves, increasing emphasis should be placed on the evaluation of quality research as the vehicle for achieving development impact.

viii. Impact, sustainability and visibility of EC/IFAD funding

The evaluators note that the current EC/IFAD funding arrangements result in delays in disbursing funds and do add to the programme's financial uncertainty and pose a reputational risk to EC/IFAD.

Their recommendations, and our response, are as follows:

31. Switching to multi-year commitments would reduce the transaction costs of CCAFS, as would abandon thematic and geographic earmarking

This refers to the need in the EC to move to multi-year funding that does not earmark regions and themes. This essentially means moving funds from Window 3 to Window 1. This recommendation is for the EC to consider, not CCAFS.

32. If the EC/IFAD wish to have stronger influence on CCAFS programming then they should consider advocating a stakeholder forum meeting once per year alongside ISP meetings, including site visits and substantive presentations and discussions with CCAFS partners.

CCAFS proposes to invite a selection of partners to stakeholder forums to be held in conjunction with major global events such as GCARD where CCAFS and partner science and engagement activities and plans are presented and discussed.

33. Other options for increasing collaborations with EU research include supporting participation of EU knowledge centres in CRPs, and providing backstopping support to the CO to better accommodate such participation.

This recommendation will be communicated to the Consortium Office (CO).

34. EC/IFAD should streamline contracting and disbursement procedures to reduce transaction costs and financial uncertainty of CCAFS, and reduce reputational risk to the EC and IFAD.

This recommendation is for the EC to consider, not CCAFS.