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*CO Comments to CRPs regarding 2015-2016
CRP Extension Proposals:
CRP on FTA*

Submitted by:
Consortium Office

CO Comments to CRPs regarding 2015-2016 CRP Extension Proposals

CRP Name: Forests, Trees & Agroforestry (FTA)

A. Overall assessment

FTA is the only CRP that works on all aspects of the value and benefits of trees and forests for agricultural landscapes and agricultural sustainability (environmental, social and economic). This is an absolutely essential dimension of a forward looking portfolio of research programmes addressing 'grand' development challenges in agriculture. Unfortunately, this proposal is not convincing, mainly because it is at times too generic and at other times too focused on processes rather than the substance of FTA's work. As it stands, this extension proposal is not ready for submission for approval to the Consortium Board and the Fund Council and first requires significant amendments. We do understand that after an external evaluation lasting a year and half, and all the preparations required for that; a 6-month extension proposal for 2014; the 2014 programme of work and budget; and the 2013 annual report some proposal/document fatigue must have set in for FTA. Since FTA has until now submitted good quality documents to the Consortium Office, we are certain that the CRP will be able to make the appropriate amendments to its extension proposal and re-submit it by August 25th, 2014.

In essence, the amendments need to provide concrete information, currently missing, on FTA's impact pathways, flagship projects, collaboration with other CRPs, and workplans. The current presentation of the CRP's impact pathways is inadequate: it does not explain how and through which mechanisms the proposed work is going to achieve the selected IDOs. The description of the flagship projects raises a number of questions concerning apparent overlaps, internal priorities, and integration across flagships. The partnerships are described in too generic a manner and the workplans do not provide the expected information on what FTA is going to deliver during the 2-year extension. Given the significant financial expectations on the part of the CRP, the proposal needs to be far more convincing.

We request FTA to address the specific comments below and resubmit the amended proposal to the CO by August 30, 2014.

B. Requested amendments

1. The discussion of IDOs, theory of change/impact pathways must be more concrete. Currently, it contains some truisms, such as: 'credibility of research is characterised by the use of appropriate data, collected and analysed by the best methods, with emphasis on comparative analyses and generalisable results and recommendations. Results will be published in open access, peer-reviewed publications and transformed into appropriate media for targeted users' (p. 2). There is general agreement about this. What the proposal needs to explain is how FTA operationalises such principles.

2. The proposal describes 4 main impact pathways on policy influence, market development, technology advance, and institutional innovations. For market development, the description talks about influencing policy-making on markets for tree products. It is not a convincing pathway because it does not explain how the market flaws which FTA identifies as disadvantaging the poor will actually be removed through FTA's research. How does FTA 'put in place more inclusive business models'? What does 'putting in place' an inclusive business model amount to, in concrete terms, with respect to the poor and vulnerable? The impact pathway description needs to convey how change on the ground will occur for the poor, based on FTA's research.

3. The description of the impact pathway for technology advance is also not convincing. It is very generic and does not explain how and through which mechanisms FTA's work on technological innovations can be scaled up effectively. Likewise for the description of how FTA embeds research in uptake streams (p. 3). It is unconvincing because it is totally generic.

4. FTA should provide enough specificity when explaining the impact pathways for the hypotheses about how its research leads to impacts on the ground to be clear (see ISPC's detailed comments in this respect). This can be done through the judicious use of examples and/or through an analytical commentary, as well as through the use of weblinks to more detailed literature already written by FTA. FTA also needs to provide more information on possible indicators and potential targets for its IDOs that are more robust than what is currently provided in the table on page 4. This will give concrete examples of the kinds of outcomes FTA aims for and will thus support the narrative on impact pathways.

5. On what basis and criteria did FTA select its current set of flagship projects? Some rationale for arriving at these flagship projects is needed because it is not easy to see how the 5 flagships constitute a well integrated research for development agenda on forests and trees. The flagships are: (i) enhancing production and income of forest dependent communities, (ii) managing forests and trees for tomorrow's needs, (iii) co-management of forests and trees in multifunctional landscapes, (iv) climate change adaptation/mitigation, and (v) enhancing contribution of global trade and investment. They are in addition 6 cross-cutting themes, namely: gender integration, capacity building, tenure, communication, sentinel landscapes and M&E. This makes for a complex matrix that is difficult to manage, and raises various questions. Flagship 1 (enhancing the contribution of trees to production and incomes) and Flagship 2 (managing and conserving forests and tree resources for tomorrow's needs) appear to overlap. The proposal states that Flagship 1 entails work on improved management of trees and forest resources and marketing of their products. In the description of work under Flagship 2, improved management of forests and woodlands for sustainable production is mentioned. What are the actual differences between these 2 flagships, since both are about improving the management of systems containing trees in a sustainable manner? We trust that they do not

represent heritage projects managed separately by CIFOR and ICRAF. At this stage in the life cycle of FTA, this would not be justifiable.

6. FP 4 on climate change adaptation and mitigation appears to concern forests uniquely, rather than forests and agricultural lands with various tree cover densities. This needs clarification. It is very surprising that no mention at all of CCAFS is made in the description of this flagship. Does this indicate that all the work under this flagship is undertaken without collaboration with CCAFS? If so, this needs to be justified, given CCAFS's objectives. FTA is requested to clarify the climate change research areas in which it collaborates with CCAFS and those in which the work is undertaken separately. A similar request has been made to CCAFS, so the two CRPs need to agree on how they are going to respond with 'one voice' to this request.

7. An explanation of how the different flagships interact and work together through the cross-cutting themes is needed, given the high number of cross-cutting themes and because the overall coherence of the current set of flagships does not clearly come through. The ISPC's comments provide more details on this.

8. The description of partnerships is very generic and does not provide a good sense of how FTA manages the complexity of partners and relations along its impact pathways. More clarity is needed regarding the operational meaning of different types of partners and their roles. In particular, FTA needs to clarify how it is working with other CRPs in its different research sites as well as across sites, for Humidtropics, PIM and WLE, for instance (in addition to CCAFS, already addressed in point 6).

9. The phased work plan is too general to serve as sound and convincing justification for the funds requested by the CRP. FTA needs to explain the priorities each flagship will follow, along with the associated key deliverables by 2016, appropriately quantified. This can be done effectively in 2 pages.