

Minutes of virtual meeting of the WLE Independent Steering Committee (ISC), 15 January 2021

Present

Diane Holdorf
Sasha Koo-Oshima
Izabella Koziell
Jo Puri
Brent Swallow
Ann Tutwiler (Chair)
Stefan Uhlenbrook

Observers/ Presenters

Emma Greatrix
Julia Compton
Dave Shearer
Keith Child
Sarah Humphreys
Christo Fabricius
Jack Durrell

Apologies

Mark Smith

1. Introduction

The Chair began the meeting by introducing Stefan Uhlenbrook, IWMI's Strategic Program Director for Water, Food and Ecosystems and the Co-Lead of WLE Flagship Two (Land and Water Solutions). Stefan represents Mark Smith who has been asked to attend a meeting of the Executive Management Team (EMT) of One CGIAR, at short notice.

2. WLE Plan of Work and Budget 2021

The POWB is one of two official program documents submitted to the CG each year, and each year we seek move to approval by the ISC, to pass on to the IWMI Board for final approval. The ISC provides its approval based on the presentation given, with the final document due for submission to the SMO at the end of the month.

The expected W1/2 reductions the ISC had discussed last year did not materialize, and there is medium to high confidence in WLE income for 2021, except for funds provided by FCDO which remains a risk. This means that there is much higher total expenditure budget in 2021 (c. \$14m) as this includes carry over and reserves from 2020. This is all fully programmed for the year ahead.

The emphasis of the 2021 POWB is largely on synthesis, tools, dashboards, lessons etc., given that this is the final year of the program. The synthesis work referenced in the POWB goes beyond WLE. The approach generally taken is to review the status of work in a given research area, and synthesize WLE contributions.

FP5 aims to equip partners and One CGIAR with tools to able to continue work on WLE issues. How is One CGIAR preparing itself to be a repository for these products going forward? Are there any innovative relationships with publishers, or others who might house such sets of tools? How can WLE position a set of WLE outputs to stand out from the crowd? Currently, while we expect that there will be

certain brands and activities from WLE (e.g. Thrive) that will continue, this is all work in progress as the One CGIAR initiatives are under development. Organizations like FABLE, FOLU etc. will also of course continue such work.

WLE is engaging in a variety of policy processes in 2021, including UNFSS, COP etc. Examples of engagement with UNFSS including on the water and food systems nexus. WLE will work with UN Water to create global dialogue on water and good systems (with FAO, IFAD, IWMI) in April, which will feed into the UNFSS Action Tracks. WLE is also working on regional dialogues in Pakistan, Central Asia, Southern Africa and MENA, to feed WLE knowledge into UNFSS. The ISC requested a mapping and timeline of WLE's involvement in UNFSS to support Anne and other ISC members who are involved in this process.

The ISC advises the WLE Management Committee to avoid planning for significant travel and in person meetings as far as possible. To do so poses a risk of potential under-expenditure if events are cancelled.

Action Point: WLE to provide mapping and timeline of WLE involvement in UNFSS

WLE projects that still include 2021 travel and event costs will develop alternative options

Decision: POWB is moved to approval by the ISC

2. WLE and CoSAI Communications and influencing

2a. WLE Communications Strategy

Scriptoria will lead WLE Communications for 2021. A presentation was given around the five key objectives of the Communications Strategy for WLE:

- 1: Influence future decision making, planning and investments** through the continued communication of results and strategic synthesis products.
- 2: Engage influential audiences through strategic communication** activities that maintain and enhance WLE's profile.
- 3: Strategically position WLE at external events** during a packed international agenda.
- 4: Supporting CoSAI** to promote more and better-targeted investment in innovation for sustainable agricultural intensification in the Global South.
- 5: Position WLE within the wider CGIAR and to carry through into 'One CGIAR'.**

The issue of ownership of data, post 2021, is not yet clear – this is being factored into transitioning planning, including the possibility of reviving an earlier idea on compiling WLE data sets. The Big Data platform also has repository on CG data, and we would expect some clarity from One CGIAR on how website data and knowledge across the CRPs will be managed, and whether this will become property of IWMI in the case of WLE. If needed, WLE might consider using some contingency funding to work on data and knowledge management.

2b. Commission on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification (CoSAI) influencing strategy

Dave Shearer, Deputy Head of CoSAI, presented the Commission's influencing strategy, which centres around:

- **influencing global investment priorities and approaches to innovation** in agricultural systems to promote SAI, including innovation in science and technology, finance, policy, and social institutions, and
- fostering international **agreement on principles and metrics for innovation** in SAI, and their uptake and use by funders and managers of research and innovation

CoSAI will use three key assets to achieve this:

1. Global South Commissioners
2. Evidence to build the case, on investment, principles and metrics and priorities and pathways
3. inquiry-based approach, working with partners

ISC noted the strong approach and looks forward to hearing progress. The ISC Chair will connect WLE/CoSAI with the Policy Action Coalition (PAC), as WLE was not in a recent meeting on policy repurposing.

Action: ISC Chair to connect CoSAI with PAC

3. Independent Review of WLE

A light touch review of WLE commissioned by CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS) was completed in late 2020. Findings and recommendations were presented by the independent reviewers, Sarah Humphreys and Christo Fabricius.

Five of the recommendations are aimed at WLE, and nine are aimed at CGIAR. WLE recommendations:

1. Showcase the role of WLE and of CGIAR as thought leaders through participation in relevant global events, including the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit
2. Harness the capacity of under-represented researchers, pioneering innovative research ethics procedures, and promoting co-created transdisciplinary research that catalyzes systemic change
3. Synthesize and analyze WLE results and learning at the outcome level, including the WLE "theory of action"
4. Undertake a strategic review of (i) WLE's externally oriented capacity development work (ii) WLE's partnership engagement and strategies
5. Undertake an appraisal of WLE projects and expertise, and possible gaps in contributing to One CGIAR global challenges.

WLE MEL specialist Keith Child noted that WLE will prepare a management response although this is not mandatory. This may be a useful factor in One CGIAR development and so this should be prioritized. WLE should be strategic on the recommendations to focus on, given that this is the final year of the program. ISC noted that gender is highlighted in the report – it is important that sufficient funds are available for this work in 2021.

4. AOB

Program Director Succession planning

Izabella will be leaving WLE in late March. A list of key priorities to end 2021 for WLE to deliver on commitments and manage risks has been drafted. At IWMI, Mark and Stefan are working on replacement options, noting that it will be a busy year with a lot to do. Izabella has expressed concerns about tasks being spread across too many individuals. It is equally risky to bring in someone from outside of WLE, as the learning curve would be too steep. ISC members expressed a preference for the bulk of the responsibilities to remain with one person; it was also suggested to reach out to CG Centers and even staff who have retired for possible availability. ISC supports the suggestion that the lead individual should have 50-70% of time available for the role.

It was suggested that the broad set of responsibilities within the rest of the PMU also needs to be clearly defined.

Action Point: Maintain ISC informed of discussions on replacement PD

A follow up meeting to be organized with ISC before Izabella's departure