

Minutes of virtual meeting of the WLE Independent Steering Committee (ISC), 22 July 2020

Present

Diane Holdorf
Izabella Koziell
Jo Puri
Claudia Sadoff
Brent Swallow
Ann Tutwiler (Chair)

Observers/ Presenters

Emma Greatrix

Apologies

Sasha Koo-Oshima

1. Update on finance discussion

A short update was provided on the financial discussion from the last meeting, pertaining to Risk 3: Increased recovery costs. Following ISC advice, a meeting was held between the ISC Chair, IWMI and WLE to reach an agreement on this issue. The figures are now being reviewed, to take account of the new IWMI recovery rate that will be applied for the next twelve months, from July, as well as an adjustment in how the 2019 carry-forward funds are calculated. The overall picture is more positive than previously thought. There will still be a funding gap for PMU and CoSAI planned activities, which will need to be addressed, but the gap will be lower than expected. A final decision on these budgets will be made by the IWMI Board, in August.

2. CGIAR reform and transition: next steps for WLE?

A [presentation](#) was provided on the CGIAR reform process, and to frame potential areas of focus for WLE.

Five impact areas target the delivery of multiple benefits, to pull together the strengths across the system together in:

- Nutrition & food security
- Poverty reduction, livelihoods & jobs
- Gender equality, youth & social inclusion
- Climate adaptation & greenhouse gas reduction
- Environmental health & biodiversity

These fit well with the Food Systems Summit tracks, which are:

1. Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
2. Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
3. Boost nature positive production
4. Advance equitable livelihoods
5. Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stresses

It is envisioned by the CGIAR reform process, that the CGIAR impact areas will be built into 3-year investments plans called ‘Big lifts’, which will be regionally rooted. A number of fundamental questions remain, and are currently being worked on, in terms of how to articulate the agenda into concrete programming, including on specific research areas, the administrative model, and how the transition will be managed, post-2021.

Advice was sought on how to ensure that issues pertinent to WLE, given relevance to the new CGIAR mission, are carried through into new CGIAR structures? It is important not to miss this valuable opportunity. So far, WLE has elements of our work integrated into some of the newly funded/unfunded ‘initiatives’ emerging across the system (*Climate Smart Ag in Africa, Two Degree Initiative, Agroecology, COVI19 Hub, Technologies for African Agriculture Transformation, Agronomy.*) In terms of leadership, WLE is limited to the Commission on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification, which was always envisioned as a one-off, time-bound effort. It is important to note that these are not formal initiatives, but rather emerging creative efforts from across the System. Several already have donor backing. A very high-level analysis points to the fact that few tackle:

- The kind of ‘wicked’ challenges that WLE strives to address (farm to cross-scale, cross sector, cross discipline) for which there is not simple, easy approach to resolution.
- Integrating and addressing trade-offs across food, land and water systems
- Nexus issues in agriculture and the transition to renewables
- Urbanization, city region food system futures

When asked to consider options for presenting WLE results and outcomes to 2021, such as a **lessons learnt review paper, or a series of synthetic analyses**, the ISC advised that in taking this forward, purpose and audience are key. Such a paper would be a public good product, which would serve to have a much wider audience that just the CGIAR, but other funders of the kind of complex and cross scale work that WLE conducts. ISC opinion **was to carry out any such work in conjunction with the Commission, with a specific audience and uptake channel in mind.**

If there is a clear argument to develop some kind of topic level syntheses, in addition to those currently underway (Water4Ag, Business models and NRM, Controlled Environment Framing, Landscapes) it would be important to stick with under promoted areas, that should be considered in future CG research, e.g. city region food systems. It is important to find a way to claim space within the next generation of CGIAR research, but it may be too early to focus on very specific areas given that the strategy and next reform steps, will not be finalized until end 2020.

It could however be useful to **review the WLE portfolio and group it by region**, to be prepared for the possible regional integrated programming focus.

Working on **what WLE can do to influence, inform, and shape global processes like the UN Food Systems Summit (e.g. track 3: Nature Positive Production) should be considered** (noting that CoSAI is already working on this). **By doing so, and focusing on summit tracks 3 and 5, this could help WLE to put forward a framing to demonstrate the importance of these themes remaining at the core of the CGIAR beyond 2021.**

The ISC was **not in favor of allocating resources towards preparing a potential post-2021 ‘initiative’**, in preparation of the likely call for engagement in the design of the big lifts, given the level of uncertainty on the structure of the portfolio.

WLE should build on CoSAI as far as possible, with ongoing communications and policy efforts up to 2021, and **consider how CoSAI could evolve into a future portfolio**. Is there a way that CoSAI can help to bring out key themes for future research, whilst recognizing that CoSAI’s focus is beyond the CG, looking at how investors use their resources? It is important to remember that CoSAI is somewhat independent from WLE; it neither represents all research areas of WLE, nor can it be influenced to serve the requirements of WLE. How to bring WLE into the work of CoSAI in this way will need further thinking through.

It is also important to remember to also work on the COVID-19 ‘building back better’ theme (NB: papers on WLE and COVID have been circulated to the ISC.).

Conclusions and next steps

1. CoSAI is WLE’s main portfolio level engagement to end 2021. WLE is advised to consider how i) CoSAI could be used as a framework to bring out key future themes of research in context of research programming and priorities 2022+ and how ii) CoSAI could help bring in lessons and recommendations from WLE delivery since 2012 in a way that helps evolve a future research portfolio. The challenges of doing so, whilst maintaining the independent and external nature of CoSAI, are recognized and need to be worked out.
2. WLE and CoSAI are advised to further strategize on how to i) influence, inform, and shape global processes like the UN Food Systems Summit, and ii) use the Summit, or similar processes, as a framing to demonstrate the importance of WLE-related themes. WLE and CoSAI would need a clear pathway of engagement from now through to UNFSS, as well as some support and help in making contacts, being brought into the key networks etc.
3. A lessons learnt style paper and/or topic based syntheses are not currently considered to be priority for WLE ISC in 2020-21, unless there is a very specific gap and target audience, and an objective that will somehow link to/ feed into the future CGIAR, e.g. to ensure key under-researched topics are built into the research strategy. However, there could be some value in collating data on how the portfolio works in its various regions, to be prepared for the future regional focus.
4. It is not recommended for WLE to focus time and effort on the development of an initiative for consideration under the new CGIAR research areas. However, as these proposals/initiatives will be led by Centers, it is important that those responsible in the Centers are aware of the water, land and sustainability work that has been done under WLE so that this can be incorporated and built on and to bring in lessons and recommendations, from past programming.