

**Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
Science Council and CGIAR Secretariat**

**Report on
The External Review of the CGIAR
Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Program (SSA-CP)**

Prepared for the CGIAR Science Council

By

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Overview Documents

Recommendations:

1. Program:

- a. The SSA-CP should be allowed to continue for a three-year period during which the proof of the IAR4D concept will be established and appropriate lessons learnt and IPGs shared. This implementation phase should occur only at the current three PLSs, and adequate funding channelled to allow this continuation in a manner that avoids the possibility of fatigue and fragmentation of the newly formed and still delicate partnerships. At the end of the three years, the SC should commission another review to determine whether the IAR4D concept works and can generate deliverable IPGs/RPGs, and whether the SSA-CP should merit continued endorsement by the SC and CGIAR. Establishment of an exit strategy is necessary to determine future funding options. Once valuable lessons are learnt and the IAR4D concept proven, additional sites then can be logically added and scaling-up and out done.
- b. The SSA-CP PCU must now give serious attention to defining and consolidating key priority PLS projects so they can help provide proof that the IAR4D concept works. The PCU should review currently selected PLS projects and allow them to be integrated and consolidated to ensure they adequately address critical linkages between productivity, market, policy and natural resource management issues. Each PLT should provide joint project proposals that show specific and realistic outputs have ways to test the IAR4D approach and include adequate M&E measurements. Traditional ex-ante M/E profiles may not be applicable in the innovation platforms. If necessary, missing skills and expertise should be co-opted or commissioned from among ARIs and other institutions. But this outsourcing must be weighed against resource availability and utilization efficiency.
- c. Gained knowledge and experience from implementing the inception phase, including preparing a joint MTP, must be well documented and shared amongst partners and collaborators. Such knowledge should be reviewed to determine whether it constitutes IPGs/RPGs, and an effective method used to disseminate the same.
- d. Capacity building is critical to effective implementation of the SSA-CP mandate. Once specific PLS projects are formulated, the PCU must work with its collaborators to determine the specific skills required and skill sources that need to be approached in order to enhance the capacity of various stakeholders to effectively implement their projects in a timely and efficient manner. Sourcing of such skills must not be random, and sometimes may be embedded within members of the various committees. Revealed inconsistencies among various stakeholders on what constitutes an “innovation platform” should be dealt with and a more practical approach used to bring everyone on the same page to avoid further confusion.
- e. A Competitive Grant System was used to select concept notes that led to development of the current approved PLS projects. This system has its limitation, especially within the

IAR4D approach which emphasizes co-operation and team building. According to the SSA-CP, *“the competitive grants process highlighted important lessons where IAR4D elements have either not been internalised by PLTs or are poorly understood, namely organisational and institutional change, capacity building, knowledge management, M/E, log-frames and project impacts on the environment and on gender. It was also clear from this exercise that the IARC-led proposals were far stronger than the NARS-led ones. Whereas this might not be surprising, it highlighted the need for change involving awareness raising, capacity building, and some affirmative action to ensure a more level playing field”*. This being the case, the review team recommends that future concept notes and project proposals be sought using a combination of CGS and commissioned research that allows for synergistic cooperation among bidders and a more consolidated project proposal that addresses all the valid issues. The CGS alone might be detrimental to the desired partnership building needed for the SSA-CP development.

- f. The SSA-CP should critically identify its comparative advantage and strategic role vis-à-vis other stakeholders in the agricultural research and development process. This will allow a clear formulation of activities that complement rather than duplicate existing research activities. According to the MTP, the SSA-CP strategy would be to work at the interphases of productivity, markets, policy and natural resource management issues, and be a leader, facilitator, advocate, capacity builder and knowledge synthesizer on these dynamic issues. To be effective in these roles, the SSA-CP must be empowered to be flexible, network with others and respond promptly to new opportunities and cutting-edge issues.

2. Governance:

- a. The direct management role, including staff and routine management issues, of the SSA-CP should be gradually devolved to the SSA-CP Program Co-ordinator, who must work in consultation with the FARA Secretariat. This will relieve FARA Secretariat the implementation burden so that it can carry out the oversight role envisaged in Article 5.0 of the FARA Constitution. Further, it is suggested that the Program Steering Committee (PSC) be renamed the Program Advisory Committee (PAC), since the steering role is mostly the function of the SSA-CP leadership and FARA.
- b. The SSA-CP PCU must be given more authority to steer the direction in which programs at the PLSs evolve. To this end, the PCU should develop a more efficient and interactive communication system between the various teams, taskforces and management committees. This will improve performance, monitoring and decision-making, and reduce transaction costs throughout the CP. In addition, the PCU should have discretionary funds to consolidate different PLS projects so that these, where deemed necessary, can provide proof of the IAR4D concept and context.

3. Partnership:

- a. The SSA-CP has invested great resources to establish a diverse group of stakeholders and to energize their participation in the CP. But there remains a great institutional and disciplinary imbalance. Most current participants are from research institutions, particularly IARCs and NARs. This should not be allowed to skew research and project interests. The SSA-CP must reach out to representatives from the private sector (PS), civil society (CS) and farmer association (FA), and engage them at project identification and prioritization stage. Clearly, the success of scaling out and up is nested with these stakeholders. Current links, particularly with PS, CS and FA, are weak. The SSA-CP may benefit from expertise of someone who understands Africa's and multinational PS, CS and FA, including their entry, participation requirements, expectations and incentives. In addition, more gender balance is needed within the CP. Many agricultural projects have failed in the past because of such gender insensitivity.
- b. A lucrative and untapped source of new skills, opportunities and innovations is Africans in Diaspora. Many of these are well linked to public, private, civil and international institutions in developed countries, and provide new avenues of funds, technology and information to stimulate productivity growth in Africa. The SSA-CP should explore these linkages and start by commissioning a survey of Diaspora resources available "out there" that can be harnessed for "business unusual" investments in Africa. In effect the SSA-CP could create an innovative reversal of what has been termed as Brain Drain for Africa to Brain Gain.

4. Clarity from the SC/CGIAR:

The SC had recommended that the SSA-CP concentrate on "new knowledge creation" and "cutting-edge science". This seems to have created confusion and apprehension among SSA-CP stakeholders about the kind of "science" they are expected to generate. Similar apprehension still existed during the review. The Panel recommends that the SC works closely with the SSA-CP leadership to clarify its expectations of the program. Further, the Panel suggests that proof that the IAR4D approach works and will deliver research outputs effectively to the African farmer and business community, and the shared knowledge from this experience, be considered as an IPG. Subsequent delivery of RPGs and NPGs will be desirable additional outcome

Conclusion of FARA's Response to Recommendations by the CGIAR Science Council Review of the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme

This review by the SC is an important milestone for the SSA CP. We welcome its recommendations. The Programme will draw on them to re-focus its research agenda. We are thankful to the SC Secretariat for allowing FARA sufficient time to engage in consultative processes for eliciting feedback and consensus on a response to the review report. The large constituency of FARA stakeholders that are participating in this Programme are anxiously waiting for the go-ahead from the SC to embark on full implementation of the Programme.

Science Council of the CGIAR
Commentary on the external review of the SSA CP Inception Phase
September 25, 2006

Summary

The SC thanks the External Review Panel for a comprehensive and clear report. The basic findings of the Panel is that while the CP has not met the main milestones set for the Inception Phase, there is evidence of progress towards the milestones to support an extension in order to address the original research question of the CP, i.e. the testing of the benefits of an innovative platform—the IAR4D concept—in designing and implementing research at the interface of productivity, environment, policy and markets that would increase demonstrably the delivery of the benefits to the end users. Thus, the Panel recommended an extension of the CP for 3 years. It does, however, add a number of conditions, one of which is to remain focused at three sites, and that the program strengthens the research planning and design and implements a process to ensure systematic monitoring and evaluation to develop IPGs.

The SC agrees with the basic findings of the Panel. The SC adds some additional conditions to the Panel recommendations which are explained in detail below.