

ISPC Assessment of the Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) CRP-II revised proposal (2017-2022)

ISPC CRP RATING¹: B+

1. Summary

- The CRP on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry supports a portfolio of projects of high strategic importance to the CGIAR related to forest management, agroforestry, land-use change, and climate change. In aggregate, the CRP aims to: assist 19 million people to exit poverty through improved livelihood options and food security to 31 million farm households; improve governance in 25 countries and business practices in 20 multinational companies (directly), indirectly influencing 500 private sector actors; reduce 0.2 Gt CO₂eq /yr in GHG emissions; and restore 30 million ha of degraded land area².
- The CRP is structured as five Flagship Projects (FPs) responding to research challenges that, while subject to feedback loops that create inter-dependencies across scales, are broadly nested in ascending scale from the level of genes to the level of the integrated global climate system.
- The impact pathways from research at each of these scales usually hinge on achieving changes in government policy or private sector practice, or through institutional innovations. The major outputs are a range of new decision-support tools, and participation in multi-stakeholder / co-learning / landscape approaches. While it is certainly difficult to generate rigorous evidence of effectiveness in these kinds of complex change processes, the CRP could be doing more to document the linkages between research outputs, research outcomes, through to development outcomes.
- The underlying biophysical / ecological / forest management research taking place at ICRAF and CIFOR is often of very high quality. However, the CRP theory of change is strongly based on the assumption that a lack of technical knowledge is the binding constraint to improved management of competing land-uses at all scales. One of the risks for the FTA CRP is that it generates a supply-driven portfolio of technical research.
- The alignment with the SRF is strong for SLO3. There is however a generally low level of clear differentiation regarding how the individual FPs are expected to contribute to sub-IDOs. This is symptomatic of both a lack of prioritization and a difficulty in articulating credible, focused theories of change at CRP and FP level.
- FTA contains some high quality biophysical research with potentially significant policy implications, and a number of strong flagship projects. There is also research within the CRP that has the characteristics of international public goods.
- A permanent leader has yet to be appointed for the FTA CRP, which has contributed to the fact that it has yet to live up to the potential shown at the pre-proposal stage.

¹ A+: Outstanding - of the highest quality, at the forefront of research in the field (fully evolved, exceeds expectations; recommended unconditionally).

A: Excellent – high quality research and a strongly compelling proposal that is at an advanced stage of evolution as a CRP, with strong leadership which can be relied on to continue making improvements.

A-: Very good – a sound and compelling proposal displaying high quality research and drawing on established areas of strength, which could benefit from a more forward-looking vision.

B+: Good – a sound research proposal but one which is largely framed by ‘business as usual’ and is deficient in some key aspects of a CRP that can contribute to System-wide SLOs.

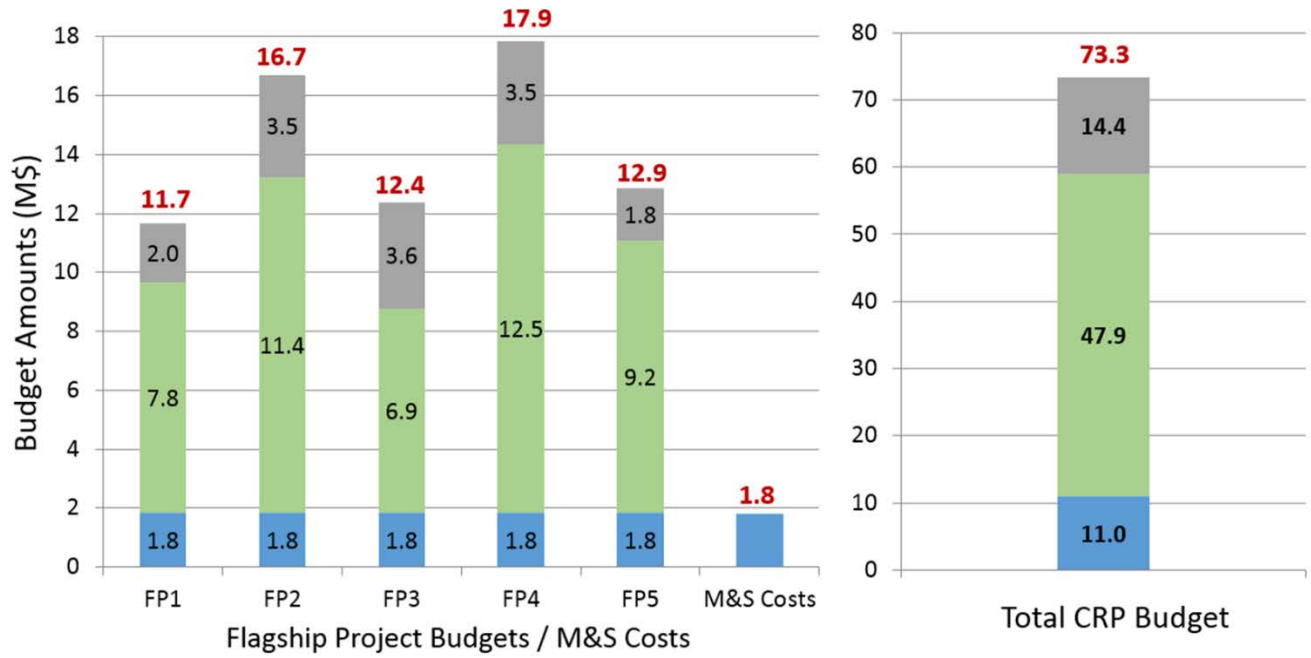
B: Fair – Elements of a sound proposal but has one or more serious flaws rendering it uncompetitive; not recommended without significant change.

C: Unsatisfactory – Does not make an effective case for the significance or quality of the proposed research.

² The CRP targets have not been independently verified.

**FTA 2017 FP and CRP Budgets:
W1/W2 Amounts, W3/Bilateral Amounts & Shortfalls (US\$M)**

■ Projected 2017 W1/W2 Amounts ■ Secured 2017 W3/Bilateral Amounts
■ 2017 Budget Amounts not yet Secured *Figures in red are Total 2017 Budgets Needed*



Data Source: CGIAR System Management Office

2. Characterization of Flagships

FP	Main strengths	Weaknesses/Risks	Rating
<p><i>FP1: Tree genetic resources to bridge production gaps and promote resilience</i> Aims to translate ecological research into policy-oriented tools relating to safeguarding genetic diversity, tree domestication, and planting material delivery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative advantage in tree genetics is well-established. • A good track record of delivery of online tools for decision support gives a degree of confidence about delivery of the research outputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not clear that a lack of technical advice, or a lack of specific tools for use in policy processes, are the binding constraints preventing more tree-planting. • A major weakness is the absence of relevant partners working on policy in relevant areas. • Lack of focus and realism in impact pathways – with a highly diffuse set of 17 different sub-DOs targeted – makes accountability unlikely. 	Moderate
<p><i>FP2: Enhancing how trees and forests contribute to smallholder livelihoods</i> Aims to develop context-specific options for smallholders that will be congruent with sustainability principles at landscape and livelihood scale.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding smallholder livelihood options associated with trees is an important topic for the CGIAR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not clear how the research in this FP will generate a broader understanding of diverse contexts, hence raising questions about capacity to deliver proposed targets. • Over-emphasis on contribution of trees to smallholder livelihoods. • The coherence of the set of different production systems selected for research remains unclear. 	Weak
<p><i>FP3: Sustainable global value chains and investments for supporting forest conservation and equitable development</i> Supports uptake of more intensive and integrated agricultural production and forest management systems, with the goal of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategically relevant research that aims to reconcile trade-offs among SLOs 1 and 3 on a regional to global scale. • Synthesis of state of research in the field is excellent, giving confidence in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CGIAR investment in the CoA on ‘Scaling through responsible finance and investments’ is low, with the assumption that there will be complementary investment from the private sector. Without this outside investment, targets will not be met. 	Strong

FP	Main strengths	Weaknesses/Risks	Rating
reducing deforestation while meeting growing demand for high-value crops.	<p>the proponents' ability to deliver, and indicative of high quality research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established partnerships and track record consistent with strong comparative advantage. 		
<p><i>FP4: Landscape dynamics, productivity and resilience</i> Place-based research that aims to support negotiation of trade-offs among the SDGs – examining the inter-linkages between land-use / land-cover change and the provision of ecosystem services – through new policy instruments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong comparative advantage and scientific track record of the researchers involved. Innovative research on an important topic. Sophisticated understanding of why some interventions are successful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of strong evidence of the effectiveness of “landscape approaches” in reconciling conservation and economic development objectives has been well-documented. 	Strong
<p><i>FP5: Climate change mitigation and adaptation opportunities in forests, trees and agroforestry</i> Research on mitigation, adaptation, bioenergy and cross-cutting performance assessment, to clarifying carbon and non-carbon benefits from alternative policy instruments at national to global scales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scientific leaders of FP5 are at the cutting edge of the climate change – land-use debate. Strategy for national partner engagement is well thought-through and likely to succeed. Alignment and potential for partnership with CCAFS research on mitigation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The deliverables from the CoA on adaptation are unclear, making it difficult to judge feasibility of the theory of change. 	Strong

3. Assessment of CRP response to the ISPC major comments

Initial ISPC comment (16 June 2016)	CRP response/changes proposed (31 July)	ISPC assessment (14 September)
<p>1. “The mismatch between evidence of documented historical impacts, and expected future impacts, is stark. Even though targets are overly optimistic for many CRPs, FTA is an outlier among all CRPs regarding targets that lack credibility, particularly the one relating to the number of farmers likely to be lifted out of poverty. Sections of the proposal which refer to targets or provide justification for the figures quoted need to be rewritten. The revised CRP should have a stronger rationale for targets, including past evidence, especially for SLO 1.”</p>	<p>FTA responded by stating that given the magnitude of the areas and populations living in and/or depending from FT&A systems, they continue to believe their targets were realistic. However, they recognized that they had used an additive model, to calculate the sum of the targets across an FP for one country. In response to the reviewers’ comments, they agreed that it seems more reasonable to use a combined model, as the beneficiaries are likely to be the same – at least partially – when several FPs operate in the same country.</p> <p>A completely revised Annex 3.12 was included. The assumptions and evidence used to develop aspirational targets provides a stronger rationale as well as revised assumptions behind our targets, supported by examples of past achievements. Each target now details the total target population, how FTA research can bring solutions, our expected contribution based on FTA Phase I, the geographic coverage and existing portfolio of activities, examples of past or current achievements, and caveats wherever relevant.</p> <p>Section 1.0.2 – Goals, objectives, targets has also been revised and updated with the new revised targets values.</p> <p>PIM Table A has been updated in the online tool and the aligned proposal document</p>	<p>Partially addressed.</p> <p>The evidence presented of past adoption rates was not well referenced in support of uptake by millions. The evidence on FTA research lifting people out of poverty was even less convincing. The pathways between research outputs and income are not as straightforward as appears to be assumed on p 156 of the Annexes.</p> <p>The key objective for the addendum, to provide a stronger rationale for targets, especially for SLO 1, has been addressed but the information presented does not materially change our opinion of the underlying problem i.e. there is little evidence of a central priority-setting function by the CRP management.</p>

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<p>2. While the team of FP leaders is impressive, FTA directorship has been unclear for some time, and despite expectations that a director would be appointed in late 2015 this has not been resolved. (“At the date of submission, the DDG-Research of CIFOR is the acting FTA director as the position is under recruitment” p. 38). The uncertainty regarding this vacancy should be resolved before 31 July 2016.</p>	<p>The Addendum notes that recruitment of a new FTA Director has been carefully considered by the Independent Steering Committee, especially in light of uncertain funding and future scenarios for the CRP (for example, not long ago there were plans to merge FTA with WLE). However, the Acting Director has assumed full responsibilities during this period of adjustment, and as such there has been no void in leadership.</p> <p>Recruitment timeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The FTA Director position was still open during the full proposal preparation and closed on 31/03. • A long list was created in concert with the Independent Steering Committee. • A short list was developed and candidates were interviewed by phone in June 2016. • Two potential candidates have been selected and will be interviewed in person by a panel on 1 August 2016. • Depending on the actual fate of FTA and on available funding, the selected candidate will begin at the start of 2017. 	<p>Partially addressed.</p> <p>Progress with recruitment is noted, but the nature of the responses in the Addendum continue to concern the ISPC that insufficient time is being given to leadership of this CRP, given the dual role of the Acting Director. This will continue to be flagged to donors as a risk to delivery until the ISPC has had the opportunity to assess a nominated Director.</p>
<p>3. The proponents should attach an annex that clarifies site integration plans with respect to the role of the sentinel landscapes, including results from Phase 1.</p>	<p>A new Annex 3.19 was included - Creating a data-driven network of socio-ecological indicators across the Global Tropics that details the requested information about the Sentinel Landscapes.</p>	<p>Satisfactorily addressed.</p> <p>Annex 3.19 is very helpful in providing useful, quantitative data on indicators such as erosion and tree density as well as bio-economic data in relation to sentinel landscapes. It is surprising that such information was not included in the original proposal. However, referencing is not very clear and it was difficult to</p>

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	<p>In addition, the narrative of Section 1.0.7 – Cross CRP collaboration and site integration was updated to synthesize FTA’s involvement in the site integration process including the Sentinel Landscapes. The detailed information about site integration is in the Template 2b of Annex 3.7.</p>	<p>establish where the data came from. Nonetheless, the team makes a convincing case for outcome-oriented, place-based research complemented by long-term monitoring.</p>
<p>4. The revised proposal should do more to strengthen the argument for why the individual FPs add up to more than the sum of the parts.</p> <p>To this end, an additional annex describing the priority-setting process that was applied to the planning of the CRP, and the results of the process, is requested.</p>	<p>Completely revised the CRP narrative <i>Section 1.0.6 – Program structure and Flagship Projects</i> and includes a new Figure (1 on p 29 of the new narrative) which illustrates the two-way exchange of knowledge between the Flagships. There is also information earlier (section 1.06) on the role of the Support Platform which will use ‘all methods of interfacing and coordination between FPs’.</p> <p>A new Annex includes < 2 pages on prioritization, at CRP and FP level. At CRP level, priority setting included an on-line questionnaire of forestry professionals (which generated an impressive 2,500 research questions) as well as lessons learnt from FTA Phase I. At FP level the approach incorporates recognition of demand, alongside internal lesson learning and outward looking foresight and assessment of opportunities arising from site integration activities. Prioritization of policy-related research appears to be developed internally.</p>	<p>Partially addressed.</p> <p>The new diagram does illustrate the potential for connectivity between the FPs, but the all-embracing nature of what is proposed for the Support Platform does not suggest that a strategic approach has been thought through. The degree of specialization at the FP level between ICRAF (1,2 and 4) and CIFOR (3 and 5) does not help enhance the idea of synergies at CRP level from the often high quality research taking place at FP level.</p> <p>The comment that ‘...A core portfolio of research in development supported by bilateral projects’ also raises concerns - bilateral funding is important, but it is unfortunately rarely strategic to the extent that should be expected when prioritizing justification for W1 and W2 funding.</p> <p>In summary, the additional annex was unconvincing and did not materially change the ISPC’s opinions of the underlying issue about poor prioritization.</p>