

ISPC Commentary on the CRP-6 Proposal (*dated Feb 2011*):

Forests Trees and Agroforestry: Livelihoods, Landscapes and Governance

Summary

The ISPC welcomes the great deal of work that has gone into this CRP proposal and the breadth of analysis, especially the extent to which the CRP has attempted to reach out to so many partners (beyond the usual collaborators) in the consultative process. The proposal is well presented and readable but falls short of the ambition for an innovative and streamlined CRP. It tends to read more like a compendium of current research by the four Centers and leaves an overall impression of business as usual. The proposal does not do well in addressing the fundamental issues that the reform process sought to tackle, namely, achieving a program focussed on core strategic research areas for which the CGIAR as a system has an advantage.

The core issues of forests and their roles in livelihoods; the intersection with agriculture; the sustainability of landscapes and ecosystem services; and the potential contributions of forests in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change are compelling and central to the CGIAR goals. The proposal as written, however, misses the opportunity to move towards a more coherent and innovative global program on the role of trees and forests in sustaining agricultural production and livelihoods in the decades to come.

The proposal's use of a forest transition model as an organizing framework is helpful, although other models could be used. An alternative framework might recognize more explicitly the significance of governance as the context that shapes actors' behavior and their use of resources. Governance, broadly defined, determines the outcomes of peoples' interactions with forests of all forms in terms of the values, services and products they deliver.

The collection of current activities leads to an unevenness in the probable global importance of the different elements. It is not consistent with the proposal's intention to focus on international public goods. The ISPC believes that prioritization is important and that carrying the complete suite of activities forward beyond current project funding should not be automatic. Likewise, as the forests and trees research program of the CGIAR, the proposal could articulate better its situation within and alongside the CGIAR's agricultural portfolio.

The ISPC thus has *concerns about the focus and targeting* of the proposed program. The most interesting innovations are: (i) the potentially unifying concept of sentinel sites, (ii) the emphasis given to small scale private forestry, and (iii) the concept of a forest transition model. But even if the proposed budget (US\$232.9 million, first 3 years) was funded, the claims for impact which could be delivered are highly ambitious. Our review also raises concerns about the proposed governance and management approaches, which appear to add to, rather than streamline Center arrangements.

Recommendation

The ISPC recommends that the proposal should be accepted in principle but the proponents asked to revise the proposal, supplemented with an action plan, to address the following issues:

- Enhancing the depth of research on the more innovative aspects such as the governance of forests and developing the concept of sentinel sites as a unifying concept;
- Prioritize research and focus on components and themes that deliver international public goods; consider whether parts of Components 1 and 2 would be better placed in CRPs 1.1 and 1.2 to deliver IPGs?;

- Ensure that CRP6 implements the expected links to other aspects of the CGIAR CRP portfolio (not just CRP7) so that interactions between forests and agriculture, forests and ecosystems services research, and forests and markets are made clearly synergistic and exploited as a CGIAR comparative advantage;
- Re-consider the management arrangements to ensure program coherence rather than piecemeal authority amongst major actors and to provide greater independence of the Steering Committee from the Lead Center in relation to scientific direction;
- Develop a budget incorporating more realistic growth rates (even if that extends into years 4 and beyond).

1. Strategic coherence and clarity of Program objectives

The proposal has been placed in the overall context of the SRF by recognizing the importance of, and adopting a land use “continuum” framework that recognizes the many linkages among agriculture, agroforestry and forest management. The proposal states that “...there is no discrete interface between agricultural fields and forests, but rather a blurred edge at which poverty commonly abounds,” recognizing that for the poor farmer – a main target for the CGIAR – the forest and trees in agricultural landscapes also can be a main source of livelihood and survival that complement agriculture. It is not clear, however, that this recognition is adequately reflected in the research proposed under the “Drivers of change”.

The proposal indicates awareness of the need for the CGIAR to focus on IPG research. It does so mainly by emphasizing cross-national and cross-site comparative approaches to the research, and by emphasizing development of tools and approaches for addressing issues within each of the research themes. Thus, the IPG element of the proposed research is not always clear in the first three components, and especially in Component 1. The proposal itself notes (P 34) that much of agroforestry research is unique to its location – and much of the research seeks to deliver detailed management recommendations. Considering other local suppliers, local agroforestry work in regional farming systems approaches could be conducted under CRP1.1 and 1.2, and better links created from this work to the strategic and generalizable work on small scale farm forestry.

The proposal brings together what the four proposing Centers are currently doing in forest and tree research. There is a need for the document to clearly identify these legacies, and which, where and when they would be phased out in order to invest in novel activities. With regard to prioritizing the work within and between the fifteen theme areas, the proposal is not convincing when it states that all five components are interrelated and are needed and that any reduction in funds will result in reductions in all five components, but not choices among them. Furthermore, the proposal does not provide insight about the relative priorities assigned to the various themes within components. Although the discussion for each component has a section entitled: “Prioritization”, the main message in all of them is that each theme fits with the others and they all are important. The ISPC considers that more strategic prioritization is possible and is needed.

The discussion of alternative suppliers of the proposed research is weak and will have to be addressed at some point. There is a separate discussion of the “comparative advantage of CGIAR Centers in leading this effort.” However, the comparative advantages are generic advantages assigned to CGIAR Centers and not particularly specific to this proposal.

Scale is correctly recognized as a complex issue to deal with, and the proponents talk of global, national and local scales. And while various program components operate at the different scales, a clear concept of how to integrate information across scales is lacking.

Indeed, this is truly a major scientific challenge; worthy of a CGIAR effort, but this proposal does not elaborate the challenge.

2. Delivery focus and plausibility of impact

The intended benefits of CRP6 research are directly related to the CGIAR's SRF goals, and the research draws strongly - sometimes completely - on the social sciences. The probability and plausibility of significant impact from most of the CRP6 research agenda is high because: (1) the proposal deals with central issues in the areas/fields covered, where we know there are needs and receptive audiences waiting for answers, (2) the key research partners and associated groups are of high quality, and (3) the awareness and involvement of those on the development side who must take the research and convert or adapt it to development actions. The major payoff should come from governance research, but this is challenging and probably merits greater intensity of effort than currently given in the proposal.

The proposal places strong emphasis on multidisciplinary and integrative work across theme boundaries and disciplines. Consequently, a fundamental issue for success is the extent to which multidisciplinary research is realized. It would have been good to see more specific examples of how some of the proposed linkages would work and contribute to program objectives in terms of intended impacts. For instance, specifically for Component 4, the proponents are optimistic about the program's impact. "Within five years, research results will have shaped key features of the global regulatory systems as well as governance and financing priorities for forest-related M&A measures. Within 10 years, research will have resulted in demonstrable improvements in policies and practices, and effective governance as "second-generation" initiatives incorporate lessons from those now getting underway or being negotiated, including those aimed at increasing synergies between M&A policies and measures." The large question here is attribution. Moreover, associated impacts are to be rated as tons of CO₂ emissions avoided or carbon sequestered in forests and trees, forest areas under improved management, and people benefiting from M&A initiatives. This represents heavy focus on environmental benefits and underplays trade-offs in allocating land to agriculture versus other ecosystem services, which reinforces the need for more explicit linkages with agricultural CRPs to address this issue.

The intended treatment of gender issues and opportunities in this proposal is thorough and thoughtful. Gender is addressed both in terms of the gender-specific aspects of the research questions addressed, and also as a major cross-cutting theme. The gender cross-cutting theme goes beyond the research stage to recognize the need to ensure that outputs get translated into gender-positive outcomes and on to impacts on the ground that address gender imbalances. However, the related budget should be reviewed because it currently appears to be treated as an optional add-on rather than intrinsic to the work described.

Capacity strengthening also is an acknowledged priority. It is recognized as a cross-cutting theme, as is partnerships, which play significant roles in the envisioned capacity strengthening strategy. It would be important to consider whether capacity building has been adequately resourced given needs in the focus countries. Both of these cross-cutting themes are partly a response to the need to have impact.

A drawback of the wide consultative process is the risk of accommodating the wishes of too many partners, thereby losing focus of the research program. Analysis of potential impacts should drive further focussing of the research program. From a practical perspective, the CGIAR needs to reflect on how large the potential impacts will be relative to the envisioned budget (US\$232.9 million for the first 3 years). Assuming a trajectory on the order of

increases shown for the first three years, about \$1 billion will have been spent on CRP6 by the end of the 10-year period, if fully funded. Annex 5 provides the assumptions and evidence used to develop 10-year impact projections that, as recognized in the proposal, are at best indicative. However, various figures given in the text for jobs in forestry and volumes of trade are all quite modest (e.g. page 16). Many would argue that forest dependence is in reality much greater.

The impact pathway analysis at this stage is very general and non-specific. This is perhaps inevitable, given the very general nature of the outputs envisioned and the breadth of the work described within each theme area. Each component provides activities over a ten year period. How outputs emerge from each component, and the synergies that can be optimally exploited, remain uncertain and will become clearer as individual projects within themes are developed. The strategic assumptions otherwise seem reasonable, but they provide no basis for judging the likely potential contribution of CRP6 to achieving them.

3. Quality of science

It is difficult to properly evaluate the quality of science in this proposal. The proposal has a separate section on “methods and research approach” for the work related to each theme. With few exceptions, the methods and research approaches addressed in the proposal are not new for the four main Centers involved. Most of the “science outputs” given in Tables are research tools and methods developed by the program and factual information derived from surveys and research. Thus, the main innovative contribution of the CRP6 proposal appears to be the way in which it intends to bring together in a productive, multidisciplinary manner the elements already being addressed by the Centers. The fact that much of the proposed research is fairly routine and mainstream adds emphasis to the need for closer assessment of comparative advantages of CRP6 over others working in the same or similar research and capacity strengthening areas.

An exciting new concept is that of the sentinel landscapes. Sentinel landscapes should be a starting point for addressing some of the research questions (without obviating the need to conduct other selected country case studies), instead of being treated as a free standing approach. As currently written, these sites are not presented as a research framework. If set up well, and linked to forest transition questions, they should fill a big gap in understanding land use tradeoffs and assessing environmental impacts. Wider synergy with other CRPs through the sentinel landscapes approach is not explored or exploited in this document and it should be. These are large research investments that should serve the CGIAR research agenda across the board. Given the intention to evaluate ecosystem services and land management, the proponents will have to decide on the basic unit of analysis, be it natural (watershed) or administrative (district). These aspects require reconciliation as longitudinal data that will allow in-depth analysis of the socio-ecological system and a common sampling frame. A clear picture of metrics and data to be collected from these sites (and what will be done with the data) should be better elaborated. Given high costs of sentinel site research, a lot of thought must go into their selection and design, and they should not be presented as add-ons.

The focus in the proposal on IPG is encouraged, and there are a number of research themes, such as C2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 where the ISPC wonders about the priority, on a global scale, of the work proposed. Similarly, a suggestion was made earlier about the reallocation of Component 1 research to other CRPs.

It is highly appropriate for the program to focus research on the major drivers of changes in forests and dependent services and livelihoods. It not clear, however, why the influence of

international markets on forests has been separated from other drivers of change. The themes for the research in Components 3 and 5 are similar and could be combined. Secondly, by focusing on the drivers of land use change, CRP6 acknowledges and takes into account the fact that many of the land use problems faced today exist because of external dynamics. Many of these changes have negative impacts on both the environmental functions of land resources and on the poor people who depend on the land for their livelihoods. It is not clear that these several issues relating to the frontier between agriculture and forest and land use are adequately covered simply through the relationship described with CRP7 (Table 2.5, P158). Although tables of likely interactions with other CRPs are furnished, the ISPC believes that the potential for more substantive synergies with agricultural CRPs should be maximized as this is surely where the CGIAR should be the global leader and has comparative advantage.

In relation to climate change, specific Component 4, Theme 2 (adaptation), the climate aspect of this research appears to depend upon a socio-ecological research program. The palette of methods discussed seems inadequate. A clear integrative tool that links social and bio-physical agents and allows for analysis of policy implications seems to be lacking.

4. Quality of research and development partners and partnership management

The proposal recognizes partnership as “the most important path to impact” as well as a critical part of making effective use of resources—financial, human, intellectual, political and influential. With this in mind, it proposes to engage with partners in new ways. Three types of partners are explicitly identified—research partners, policy and practitioner partners, and knowledge sharing partners. The last two are acknowledged not to have been engaged as strategically as possible as partners in the past, but critical to success in the future. They are assigned a particularly high value in terms of their capacity to mobilize positive change at global, national and regional levels, to influence funding and investments, and to bring information and ideas to key audiences, including the general public.

Although the strategy and mechanisms for partnership are well developed, the CRP is still very CGIAR-centered where resources and access to decision making are tightly held. This may change as the proposal includes a provision that envisions other organizations joining the steering committee as voting members on the basis of their financial commitment to the program. Linkages are explored in adequate detail in the proposal for strategic purposes (in Annex 5) and the climate research links between Component 4 and CRP7 are well presented. Obviously as themes within CRP6 develop operational plans, strategic partnership connections will need to be fleshed out. For instance, because water resources should be central to a consideration of ecosystem services, the CRP should consolidate its links to IWMI and to CRP5 (once formed) that it advertises in the proposal. Similarly in its market research, the CRP will need to effectively implement its links both to IFPRI and to other global providers of this type of research to derive the synergies alluded to in the proposal.

Overall however, this criterion is rated highly for CRP6 mainly because of: (1) the intention to treat partnerships as a cross-cutting theme; (2) the emphasis on different kinds of partners that take on different roles along the impact pathways envisioned; and (3) all four of the main Centers involved have good reputations for forming solid and productive partnerships with the best research and development groups dealing with the issues addressed in the proposal.

5: Appropriateness and efficiency of program management

The Role of the Lead Center: CIFOR takes on explicit responsibility for functions that might have been delegated to CRP-level entities. For instance, CIFOR, rather than the Management Support Unit (MSU), is responsible for “convening partners (external and internal) and stakeholders across the scope of CRP6 [p.233].” While an argument can be made that CIFOR’s Board is the legally accountable entity and should therefore rely on CIFOR’s management to maintain the confidence of partners and donors, this task might have been more appropriately assigned to the Steering Committee, which is in a better position than the lead Center (or any of the individual participating Centers) to serve as a neutral and disinterested party (or at least as constituted as suggested below).

In the effort to respect the legal standing of each Center, the proposal encounters the issue of the duty of boards to act in the interest of the Centers they govern. CIFOR clearly understands that in the absence of a CRP-level body empowered to provide independent oversight, the lead Center needs to make certain that its own actions sustain the trust and good will of its partners. To provide further assurance, the Steering Committee will review CIFOR’s performance as lead Center at the end of three years with the potential to shift leadership to another Center. This is a healthy stipulation, but also one that highlights the inherent challenges the lead Center will face in a complex, multi-partner enterprise that lacks a robust mechanism on which all the partners can confidently rely for independent oversight and decision making.

Program Management: Many management functions will be retained by each of the participating Centers (both as a necessary part of the continuing management of the Centers themselves, but also of specific components of the CRP). The use of existing capacity is intended to minimize (or make as “light” as possible) the additional costs (and the structure) for the MSU, the Steering Committee and the Scientific Stakeholder Advisory Committee. A general but serious concern with this model and the budget projections as presented is the difficulty in determining the total resources to be dedicated to key management activities.

Head of the MSU: The lead Center will appoint the Head of the MSU with provision for input from the Steering Committee, and the Steering Committee will review the Head of the unit’s annual performance. The duties assigned to the Head of the MSU are substantial: responsibilities for planning, overall coordination and monitoring of the program and its component initiatives, and to “provide intellectual leadership...and build a shared vision for CRP6 objectives among participating Centers and other partners...[p.236]” The title of “Head” rather than CRP program leader (or similar) falls short of conveying the relationship of this position to overall leadership of the CRP, understates the complexity of the job, and creates ambiguity about its standing and authority.

Component Implementation Teams: The Steering Committee will assign a lead Center to each component of the program and Component Implementation Teams will be identified from among the senior research staff of the Centers working on each component. This is likely to be one of those areas where the workability of proposed arrangements will be tested and refined by experience over time.

6: Clear accountability and financial soundness, and efficiency of governance

Financial Soundness: The most serious concern relates to the budget projections and whether the aspirations for growth are sound. Overall the ISPC finds that the proposed program growth and the expected impacts are very ambitious. The budget shows a current funding gap of USD3.7 million and gaps of around 14.7 and 30.8 million for 2012/2013 respectively if the program expands as planned. Further, there appears to be an absence of any anticipated net

financial or management gain that might be realized through greater alignment of research activities or consolidation of parallel infrastructures in areas such as communications, resource mobilization, technology, HR and accounting to name the most obvious. The budget projections make clear that the costs of management and coordination of the proposal, however “light,” will need new resources to be instituted. While none of the existing Centers appears to get “smaller” as a result of aligning the bulk of their research and partnership activities within the CRP, the scale of collaboration and cooperation anticipated by CRPs among Centers and other potential partners should give rise to some exploration of the economies that might result, particularly with respect to management functions that all the partners have in common. This is considered a general issue for all CRPs and the efficiency and effectiveness of the CGIAR reformation.

The process for budget development and resource allocation is clearly presented. The Steering Committee has a critical role in resource allocation, particularly if available resources do not accommodate full funding of proposed budgets. The proposal defines three criteria that will be applied in this event—effectiveness, efficiency and equity. Participating Centers are reassured that “all else being equal, the CRP6 Steering Committee will attempt to ensure equitable sharing of available resources across participating Centers [p.250].” This is followed by the statement that non-CGIAR partners are not likely to be allocated funding if it jeopardizes the viability of participating Centers.

Steering Committee: In spite of its assigned role in planning, resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluation, the Steering Committee is not structured to be an independent, disinterested oversight mechanism to the CRP (a role which is explicitly assumed by the lead Center). As proposed, four of its 8 members will be appointed by the current participating Centers to represent them. The remaining four members will be identified by the Steering Committee, which can draw on “internal or external individuals or organizational representatives, from within or outside the CGIAR [p.234].” No preferred qualifications are suggested. Instead, the primary criterion for membership and voting status within the Steering Committee is to “make *annual expenditures* toward CRP6 objectives *equivalent to or greater than those of the participating CGIAR centers* [p. 234, emphasis added]. Within the Steering Committee all interests at the table will be vested interests.

The ISPC strongly suggests that the Steering Committee be established with independent members who meet agreed upon standards for inclusion (not just financial participation), increase the number who qualify as independent to a majority of the committee (thereby diluting the voting power of representatives from the participating Centers), and provide each member with a single vote that is used unambiguously to advance the best interests of the program as a whole. The Board of the lead Center does not have to relinquish its legal and fiduciary responsibilities to give the Steering Committee a role that is intentionally independent and less likely to lead to conflicts of interest. An arrangement of this kind, rather than what is in the present proposal, would contribute more directly to the confidence of donors, partners and other stakeholders in the quality and integrity of decision making.

Scientific and Stakeholder Advisory Committee: The proposal does not articulate where the SSAC plays a meaningful role or provides a benefit that is not already realized through other means. For this reason, it makes sense to retain the “space” for an advisory committee but delay implementation until its role and value are clearer. The ISPC suggest that blending the two types of advice through a single committee may not be the most appropriate means to both enlist cutting edge science inputs or to gain from stakeholder perspectives and input.