



**Prepared by FARA  
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**FARA'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE  
CGIAR SCIENCE COUNCIL REVIEW OF THE SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA CHALLENGE PROGRAMME**

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### **PREAMBLE**

The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) would like to express its gratitude to the CGIAR Science Council for assembling and supporting a high quality and dedicated Review Panel. We wish to reaffirm our high regard for the Science Council's vital contribution to upholding the quality of science in the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme (SSA CP). We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Panel's report and look forward to continuous dialogue with the Science Council with a view to achieving our common goal which is the success of this Programme.

FARA wishes to thank the review Panel members for the effort they put into understanding a novel and complex programme and ably accomplishing the review within a very tight schedule. They skilfully prompted frank and open debates with stakeholders to elicit the information they needed. The constructive nature of their observations is greatly valued in our mutual endeavour to guide the Programme's evolution and improve its performance.

The SSA CP follows three guiding principles: (i) fostering solid partnerships among all relevant stakeholders across the value chain; (ii) continual learning that leads to greater understanding of the dynamics of complex systems; and (iii) the desirability of the integration of agrobiophysical and social sciences to generate international public goods (IPGs). SSA CP uses the integrated agricultural research for development (IAR4D) approach to address problems along the interfaces of four domains, namely: agricultural productivity, sustainable natural resource management, efficient markets, and appropriate policies with supportive institutional structures. These elements would be managed to generate both development impacts and new knowledge.

The principal feature of our IAR4D approach is the opportunity-focused "innovation platform". This platform involves joint participation of all relevant actors (including farmers, pastoralists, rural communities, researchers, extension agents, development specialists, traders and processors, policy makers, and consumers). It also includes institutional arrangements needed to facilitate effective, efficient, targeted research for development as well as uptake and dissemination of innovations that deliver the benefits demanded by end-users. A principal driver of the IAR4D and innovations platforms will be the impact pathway analysis. This analysis will enable assessment of outcomes and impacts for the projects and the programme, and the identification of stakeholder and partner groups that need to be engaged in the evolution of the challenge programme.

We are happy to note that the enthusiasm generated by the SSA CP within the agricultural research and development community in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is extremely high, and continues to grow. In Africa's quest to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, recognises the SSA CP as one of the main vehicles for achieving Pillar 4 of its Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). This Pillar is concerned with agricultural science and technology generation and dissemination.

Our response to the panel's recommendations is the result of consultations among SSA CP stakeholders who participated in the review exercise. It is structured according to recommendations of the panel.

## **RESPONSES TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. THE PROGRAM**

***Recommendation 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 PLS and 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 can be logically added and scaling up and out done.*

#### **Response**

We do understand the rationale for this recommendation, and see it as being largely in line with the 'business unusual' approach of the SSA CP. We recognise that IAR4D has not been adequately tested and widely applied in Sub-Saharan Africa. There are therefore some apprehension and cautionary concerns being raised in relation to the scale of initial operations. We see the Panel's recommendation restricting the further expansion of project sites over a three year testing period in this light.

The recommendation mentions the requirement of 'proof of concept' on IAR4D to be established within a three year period, as a condition for the continuation and further expansion of the Programme. We are of the opinion that in the long run, proof of the IAR4D concept will be the achievement of the programme goal, i.e. improved rural livelihoods as a result of greater impact from agricultural research for development. Our view is that it will require significantly more than three years operating at three sites to be able to have such proof of concept. However, a three year period would enable certain operational and programme milestones and output targets to be attained, which could be used as the basis of any assessment. Therefore, we would like to engage in dialogue with the Science Council to reformulate the Programme's output targets and related IPGs as outlined in the SC review recommendations.

With regard to the restriction of projects to the current three pilot learning sites (for 3 years), we agree in principle to the recommendation. At the same time, we call for flexibility to be built into the Programme so that based on its performance and lessons learned, decisions can be taken to expand to new sites, should this be found necessary before the end of three years. Such need for expansion can be developed in the context of the MTP and annual workplan of the CP. We would wish to refer to the fact that the SSA CP programme had received an endorsement to be implemented at 9 sites over a 5-year period. This however now needs to be scaled down during this first three year period.

With respect to an exit strategy for this Programme, FARA is working with African governments and development partners to increase support for the Programme in its current form and to ensure its sustainability.

**Recommendation 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 NRM 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 utilisation efficiency.*

### **Response**

We welcome this recommendation. Consolidation and integration of the projects is ongoing as described in our medium term plan (MTP) for 2007-09. We are using several models to integrate projects within and across PLS; for example the Zimbabwe-Mozambique-Malawi (ZMM) PLS is in the process of consolidating its three projects into one project using value chains as the integrating factor. The consolidated project will be implemented at several sites within the PLS. The Lake Kivu PLS is consolidating its projects using the watershed approach. The Kano-Katsina-Maradi (KKM) PLS projects are located in three agro-ecological zones, but are based on common themes and common entry points which allow for cross-site comparisons.

At each PLS, efforts are ongoing to improve the rationalization, interaction and/or integration of projects, to have joint protocols and to craft appropriate methodologies for monitoring and evaluating the interactions, institutional change and innovation platforms. We shall continue to refine the project proposals so that realistic deliverables that not only test the IAR4D approach but also result in regional and/or international public goods (RPG and IPG) are produced. Crosscutting projects will provide a further avenue for integration and comparison in this regard.

**Recommendation 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.*

### **Response**

We agree with this recommendation. Several efforts for documenting lessons learnt are ongoing. Work is in progress to synthesise and report on all processes during the inception phase, including, selection and setting up of pilot learning sites, validation exercises, priority setting and establishment of innovation platforms. We believe that this will amount to IPG/RPG for the Programme. Among the forums where this information will be shared is the FARA General Assembly in June 2007, where a special side-event on the SSA CP will be launched. We also aim to publish this work in peer-reviewed journals (if possible) and in other documentation channels.

**Recommendation 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 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 and to avoid further confusion.*

### **Response**

We accept this recommendation. Capacity building is a major pillar of IAR4D, and a lot of work is required in this area. We recognize that, at this early stage in the process, and given the diversity of stakeholders and partners, a lot more effort is needed to ensure that there is common understanding of the fundamental concepts such as innovation platform, that make this CP a ‘business unusual’ proposition. Part of our capacity building activities will focus on bringing everyone on the same page of understanding. Additionally, we will organize specific capacity building activities on IAR4D approach, including areas such as systems approaches and analysis, landscape scale operations, cross-thematic interactions and participatory methods involving diverse stakeholder groups.

**Recommendation 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.*

### **Response**

We accept this recommendation. Whereas we have experienced a number of advantages with the CGS process, we have also experienced some downsides, as spelt out in the Panel’s recommendation. With regard to work at the current project sites, we note that some discretionary funding will be necessary to bridge any gaps that may have resulted from the CGS process, and also to strengthen synergies across the different projects. The PCU would also be leading the development of a strategic document on how a joint CGS and Commissioned Research Grants could be organized for future project development.

**Recommendation F:** *The SSA CP should critically identify its comparative advantage and strategic role vis a vis other stakeholders in the agricultural research and development process. This will allow a clear*

*formulation of activities that complement rather than duplicate research. According to the MTP the SSA CP Strategy would be to work at the interfaces of productivity, markets, policy and natural resource management issues and be a leader, facilitator, advocate, capacity builder and knowledge synthesiser on these dynamic issues. To be effective in these roles, the SSA CP must be empowered to be flexible, network and respond promptly to new opportunities and cutting edge issues.*

## **Response**

We agree with this recommendation. The unique feature of the SSA CP is that it focuses on the interfaces of agricultural productivity, sustainable natural resource management, efficient markets, and appropriate policies and supportive institutional structures. Present institutional arrangements do not address the problems on these interfaces. Most AR&D institutions in Africa are working on productivity of commodities or policies or markets or NRM. SSA CP is focussing on promoting organisational and institutional change that bridges the divide among all these elements, and between research and development. Innovation platforms are the drivers of this organisational and institutional change.

## **2. GOVERNANCE**

***Recommendation A:** The direct management role, including staff and routine management issues of the SSA CP should be gradually devolved to the SSA CP Program Coordinator, who must work in consultation with the FARA Secretariat. This will relieve FARA secretariat of the implementation burden so that it can carry out the oversight role envisaged by the constitution of FARA in article 5.0 of the FARA constitution. Further it is suggested that the Program Steering Committee (PSC), be renamed Programme Advisory committee (PAC) since the steering role is mostly the function of the SSA CP leadership and FARA.*

## **Response**

This recommendation creates an impression that there is currently duplication of function between the SSA CP Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) and FARA Secretariat. This is not the case. The day-to-day management of the programme is fully under the responsibility and control of the PCU. FARA Secretariat provides overall oversight, as stipulated in the Programme's proposal. This is in line with the role of FARA<sup>1</sup> as implementer of the SSA CP, as well as for other programmes, for both the CGIAR and the African Union (AU). FARA provides management oversight for all such programmes.

We are also of the opinion that the PSC should remain as currently constituted. The PSC is representative of the Programme's stakeholders and provides advice and direction to the Programme. There is an absolute need to retain the steering function of the PSC. Upon commencement of the implementation phase, the PCU will recommend to the FARA General Assembly, through the Executive Committee, the establishment of a small group of technical advisers that are skilled in the special needs of the various aspects of the Programme such as the implementation of IAR4D.

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<sup>1</sup> FARA is the umbrella organization that brings together major stakeholders in agricultural research and development in Africa. Its constituency includes: national agricultural research systems, sub-regional research organisations, international agricultural research institutions, advanced research institutes, farmer associations, the private sector and development organisations involved in agricultural research and development in Africa.

**Recommendation B:** *The SSA CP PCU must be given more authority to steer the direction in which programmes 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 these, where deemed necessary, can provide proof of the IAR4D concept and context.*

### **Response**

We partially agree with this recommendation. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the direction in which programmes at the PLS evolve is primarily the responsibility of PLS management committees (MCs), within an agreed framework established by the CP at the level of the PSC. The Programme Coordinator is a member of management committees at the PLS and the FARA Secretariat levels. He therefore plays a key role in steering the direction of the Programme, through his participation in these committees.

The PCU and MCs have established mechanisms for integrating key elements within all the PLS and also for ensuring cross-PLS comparisons, synthesis and learning. These include joint PLS MTP and the cross-cutting projects as well as the engagement of service providers to support M&E, capacity building and impact assessment.

To improve interaction among the Programme's actors, the PCU is working with PSC to implement a recommendation of the EU review panel to hire an information and communication specialist. To improve communication among taskforce partners with limited access to communication facilities, notably NARS and local organisations, FARA is putting in place mechanisms to improve information sharing and communication through its regional agricultural information and learning systems (RAILS) programme.

### **3. PARTNERSHIP**

**Recommendation A:** *The SSA CP has invested great resources to establish a diverse group of stakeholders and to energise 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 prioritisation 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.*

#### **Response**

We agree with this recommendation on the need to proactively reach out to engage the private sector, civil society and farmer associations in the implementation of the CP. This indeed is the whole basis of the innovation platform approach, and we would argue that reasonable progress has been made thus far, in this regard.

The concept of innovation platforms aims to even out current institutional and disciplinary imbalances in programme participation. The evolution of this Programme from launch of the pilot learning team through validation, concept note and project proposal development to consolidation of the projects by taskforces has shown growth in participation by civil society groups (farmer associations and non government organisations) and the private sector. As we strengthen the innovation platforms, the participation of these groups and women's representation will increase and become more evident. For example, at the validation stage, special efforts were made to take gender into consideration both in the composition of the teams and in the design of methodologies that meet cultural sensitivities. Special efforts will be made at the implementation phase, to increase participation of women in decision making, in particular at the PSC and management committees. We shall continue to explore mechanisms to strengthen the involvement of the private sector and civil society groups within the context of the innovation platform.

**Recommendation B:** *A lucrative and untapped source of new skills, opportunities and innovations is Africans in the diaspora. Many of are well linked to public, private, civil and international institutions in developed countries, and provide new avenues of fund, technology and information to stimulate productivity growth in Africa. The SSA-CP should explore these linkages and start by commissioning a survey diaspora resources available "out there" that could 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.*

#### **Response**

We accept this recommendation. We wish to point out that this issue is being addressed within the framework of the AU and NEPAD. A number of Sub-Saharan Africa countries have also initiated programmes to link up with Africans in the diaspora and to explore possible

collaboration and partnership that could be of benefit to Africa. The SSA-CP would keep itself engaged with such processes and would take advantage of any opportunities that might emerge through such initiatives.

#### **4. CLARITY FROM THE SC/CGIAR.**

***Recommendation A:** 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 IPG. Subsequent delivery of RPGs and NPGs will be desirable additional outcomes.*

#### **Response**

We welcome this recommendation. We would welcome and appreciate further deliberations with the SC to explore these critical cutting edge issues in relation to the SSA-CP goals and strategic directions, in the context of the overall CGIAR priorities.

#### **CONCLUSION**

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.

## ACRONYMS

ARI	Advanced Research Institute
AU	African Union
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CGS	Competitive Grants System
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
IAR4D	Integrated Agricultural Research for Development
IARC	International Agricultural Research Centre
IPG	International Public Goods
KKM	Kano-Katsina-Maradi (Pilot Learning Site)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MTP	Medium Term Plan
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PAC	Programme Advisory Committee
PCU	Programme Coordination Unit
PLS	Pilot Learning Site
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
RPG	Regional Public Good
SC	Science Council
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSA CP	Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme
ZMM	Zimbabwe-Malawi-Mozambique (Pilot Learning Site)