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Update on programmatic, corporate services and structural/governance alignment in eastern & southern Africa

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A great deal of progress has been made in all areas related to alignment between ICRAF and ILRI as well as under the Regional Plan for Collective Action in ESA.

- 1) **Governance:** Agreement has been reached with the Boards of Trustees of both ICRAF and ILRI to have two shared members. Dr. Romano Kiome, Permanent Secretary Agriculture, of the Govt. of Kenya who is very well known and respected in CGIAR circles will soon be joined by Prof. Samir Barua of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. He is an acknowledged leader in his field of corporate governance.

- 2) **Corporate Services and Information & Communication Technologies (ICT):** Good progress has been made with respect to most of the goals of the alignment process i.e.:
 - A common Human Resources (HR) strategy, a common set of policies, systems and services
 - A common ICT platform and systems
 - A common set of financial policies and processes, information systems and services
 - Rationalized and harmonized procurement and operations services
 - Streamlined cooperation in communication and knowledge management

At present the alignment teams working across all the areas above are busy 'mapping' and comparing policies, systems and process across both institutes. The Information and Communication Technology team has made the most progress so far in terms of achieving milestones set for themselves, although some Corporate Services units are equally far. Steps are now being taken to merge the two separate ICT teams, which are already under a single manager, into a single functional unit to serve both Centers globally, and the CGIAR Center scientists they host. Progress with common applications and information systems, IT systems architecture across the various functions of the institutes (e.g. grant management, HR, finance), finance policies and systems, personnel administration processes and procurement processes is very satisfactory. The steering committee of the alignment process, consisting of senior managers (including DGs) of both institutes, will be addressing the challenges of development a common HR strategy in late May. Alignment of Human Resources systems and processes presents the biggest challenge so far, because HR units in both Centers are also concurrently undergoing major staffing changes and restructuring. It is expected that the development of a common strategy will help catalyse this process.

As we move forward with the corporate services alignment between ICRAF and ILRI we have continued to dialogue and exchange with the shared service platform (IRSS) that IWMI and World Fish are currently setting up in Asia. We expect that this type of sharing to facilitate joint learning, and may lead to more integrated systems across centers globally.

- 3) **Research Methods Group:** This unit has achieved full alignment between the two Centers and is now beginning also to orient itself to providing its services to other Centers in the region and to supporting collective action under the Regional Plan for ESA.
- 4) **Regional Plan for Collective Action in ESA:** At ExCo 11 the two Regional Plans for Collective Action were still referred to as ‘Medium Term Plans’. In the interim there is an emerging consensus that the term ‘Regional Plan for Collective Action’ is a more appropriate description of their goal, which is to foster a cohesive and coordinated program of research that brings the System Priorities to bear directly on regional development goals, while achieving economies of scale and scope.

Salient achievements in the ESA region are the hiring of an Interim Coordinator (Ravi Prabhu) for the Regional Plan, commencement of activities under all four Flagship Programs with inter-center working groups involving active engagement of the Sub-Regional Organizations and networks – ASARECA in East & Central Africa and FANRPAN, a policy network of southern Universities in COMESA and SADC – and nine Centers currently (Bioversity International, CIAT, CIFOR, CIP, ICRAF, ICRISAT, IFPRI, ILRI & IWMI). These initial working groups are expanding, with more Centers and NARS partners engaging. We expect greater engagement with SADC-FANR once the relevant SRO emerges. All these activities are targeted at delivering outputs and outcomes that are regional in scope, relevant to the achievement of regional (and system) priorities and require multilateral cooperation if they are to be successful.

Responding to requests from the Science Council and CGIAR members, the Regional Plan has also completed an inventory of most (i.e. > 80%) of the research being conducted by the CGIAR Centers in the region. This data is now being analysed with a view to identifying overlaps, gaps and identifying opportunities for synergy among Centers with respect to research, research support, data and sites. While the purpose of this data and analysis is to serve improvements to efficiency and effectiveness within current structures, it does not preclude adjustments to structures, should there be an interest in proceeding down this path in future.

The Regional Plan has served as a venue for broader CGIAR coordination issues as well. In this regard its coordination mechanism of the ‘Hub’, which consists of senior regional representatives of all 15 Centers, has served it well. As a result the CGIAR Centers delivered jointly agreed statements at the ASARECA Board

meeting, the TICAD conference in Nairobi and interacted jointly with an EC review team. As a result of an initiative of the Regional Plan, all CGIAR Centers are likely to share a single exhibition booth at the upcoming FARA general assembly, the first time this will take place. It is important to note that all 15 Centers have supported the development of the Regional Plan so far, despite an initially cautious response from some Centers.

The Alliance has invested scarce funds in getting the Regional Plan off to a satisfactory start. Further progress will be dependent on raising additional funds for its programs and coordination. Currently it has proved difficult to raise additional funds, although it is expected that as momentum develops and the role the Regional Plans can and are playing becomes better understood, it will be easier to generate funding support. At the moment this remains an uphill climb!

A clear indication from ExCo of members' interest in the Regional Plans and the extent of their willingness to support them would be very helpful to the development of the Plans as it would allow the Alliance to properly plan this effort.

Members' may wish to consider creating a window or mechanism for reviewing and supporting research proposals under the Regional Plans that respond to the challenges set out by the SSA task Force and the IAC/Kofi Annan initiative of creating greater cohesion, collective action, economies of scale and scope as well as addressing both regional and system priorities . The Alliance faces particular difficulties in continuing to support the relatively modest costs of coordination of the Regional Plan and would especially welcome Members' support in this area.