



**Sub Saharan Africa  
Challenge Programme**

*Securing the future for Africa's  
Children*

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA  
CHALLENGE PROGRAMME**

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## ACRONYMS

ACP	African Caribbean and Pacific
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre
CORAF	Conseil Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricole
CP	Challenge Programme
CRST	Cross-site Research Support Team
CTA	Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
EC	European Commission
EIARD	European Initiative on Agricultural Research for Development
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
IAR4D	Integrated Agricultural Research for Development
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
HH	Household
IITA	International Institute for Tropical Agriculture
INRAN	Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger
IPG	International Public Good
ISAR	Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Rwanda
KKM	Kano-Katsina-Maradi
LI	Lead Institution
MC	Management Committee
MTP	Medium Term Plan
NARS	National Agricultural Research System
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PCU	Programme Coordination Unit
PLS	Pilot Learning Site
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
RPG	Regional Public Good
SADC-FANR	Southern African Development Community-Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources
SC	Science Council (of the CGIAR)
SRO	Sub-Regional Agricultural Research Organization
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSA CP	Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme
TSBF-CIAT	Tropical Soil Biology and Fertility Institute of CIAT
WECARD	West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development
ZMM	Zimbabwe-Mozambique-Malawi (corridor)

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Program (SSA CP) was initiated in 2004 following extensive consultations with numerous agricultural stakeholders (researchers, extension and development agents, policy makers, farmers, and the private sector) to diagnose the main reasons behind the underperformance of agricultural research in Africa and propose solutions. These consultations established that, besides inadequate investment in the sector, the main impediment to the realization of the full potential for African agricultural research to catalyze wide scale development impact lies in the way the research is organized and conducted i.e. in issues concerning process. The research-to-development process currently employed in Africa treats research, technology transfer, and technology use as largely independent activities whereby research-derived knowledge consisting principally of prescriptive technology packages flows linearly from researchers to farmers through extension agents.

An alternative approach that overcomes many shortcomings of the conventional method is known as international agricultural research for development (IAR4D). It bears very appealing characteristics and an anecdotal record of successes. It has caught the attention of major policy making institutions and the temptation to push for its out scaling is palpable. However, a rigorous analysis to confirm whether IAR4D is feasible in Africa and to test the widely held hypothesis that it delivers more benefits than conventional approaches has not been carried out. Such knowledge is essential to assure that the investment in scaling out and adopting IAR4D will produce a good return and lead to the desired wide scale development impact.

## SSA CP Objectives and research questions

The SSA CP aims to: (a) empirically establish whether IAR4D is feasible in Africa more cost-benefit effective than conventional agricultural research and development (ARD) approaches, and replicable on a large scale, and to (b) characterize IAR4D and derive principles on how it should be implemented in Africa. In pursuing the above objectives, the Programme seeks to answer the following three research questions:

1. Does the IAR4D concept work and can it generate International Public Goods (IPGs) and Regional Public Goods (RPGs) to end users?
2. Does the IAR4D framework deliver more benefits to end users than conventional approaches (assuming conventional research, development and extension approaches have access to the same resources)?
3. How sustainable and usable is the IAR4D approach outside its test environment, that is, can it be scaled out to achieve broader impact.

## Programme structure

The SSA CP stands out as the only challenge programme (CP) defined by a geographic domain (sub Saharan Africa) and is hosted and coordinated by a non-CGIAR institution (FARA secretariat). The other CPs are thematic but with a global reach. Currently the SSA CP's research is carried out in three pilot learning sites (PLS), namely (i) the Kano-Katsina-Maradi (**KKM**) PLS, which straddles southern Niger and northern Nigeria (West Africa); the **Lake Kivu** PLS, located on the borders between the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda (East Africa), and the Zimbabwe-Malawi-Mozambique (**ZMM**) PLS, a transect that runs through these countries in Southern Africa.

With regard to structure, the SSA CP operates at three levels: (i) programme-wide (regional level); (ii) at the pilot learning site level (3 PLS)—the work in each PLS constitutes a research project (sub regional level); and (iii) at sub-project level (9 sub-projects in total)—each sub project is implemented by a multi-stakeholder, multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary taskforce..

The SSA CP's research is organized around four projects, namely: one meta-analysis project and three PLS projects. Each PLS project comprises three sub projects. The sub projects are designed to generate outputs that will result in similar outcomes, though the activities for each sub project are aimed at addressing problems specific to the circumstances of the environment and production chain the sub project is dealing

with. The meta analysis project organizes all the cross-PLS research work to generate inferences that are generalizable across SSA.

### **SSA CP Achievements in 2007**

The Programme devoted the first half of 2007 to: (i) developing a new research plan, (ii) mobilizing the extra human and financial resources required to implement the plan, (iii) establishing the contractual arrangements for managing activities at sub-regional and site level, and (iv) convening a side event on lessons in multi-stakeholder agricultural approaches at the FARA general assembly. It realized all the outputs it set out to achieve in the first half of the year, namely:

- A new research plan was developed and submitted to the science council in May 2007,
- the cross site research support team (CRST) was established,
- the funds required to finance the Programme's budget for the first year were all secured—the SSA CP started the year with a financing gap of US\$7.6 million and by the end of the year had received fresh contributions amounting to US\$8.0 million;
- contractual arrangements were entered with all lead institutions and taskforces, and
- a side event on multi-stakeholder approaches was successfully organized at the FARA general assembly.

The SSA CP devoted the latter half of the year to implementing **research actions** stipulated in the May 2007 (first version) of the research plan. However, for legitimate reasons, during the latter half of the year it was unable to uphold the high level of accomplishment it registered in the first half. Overall, approximately 50% of the planned outputs were realized. These mainly comprised outputs from activities that did not involve field-based work. All the activities the programme did not initiate were moved forward to 2008. The partial implementation of the year's work programme is reflected in the modest expenditure over the year, which amounted to only 29% of the budget.

Two crucial unplanned activities were carried out during the second half of the year. They are: (i) a review of the Programme's governance and management structure aimed at reducing transactions and increasing the programme's decision making efficiency, and (ii) revision of the research plan to address concerns raised by the CGIAR science council about the May 2007 version of the plan. Both activities generated outputs of strategic value to the programme. The review of the governance and management structure led to changes in the structure which are projected to free up a substantial amount of funds (US\$1.3 million per year), which will be directed to field research activities.

The variance between expected and realized outputs for the second half of the year is traceable to three main causes: (a) a delay in disbursement of funds. It was not until October 2007 that the SSA CP accumulated sufficient funds to consider initiating field operations in the research sites; (b) The science council's concerns about the scientific robustness of the May 2007 version of research plan. This necessitated a revision of the research plan, which inevitably entailed delaying some activities notably site selection, identification of baseline indicators and establishment of platforms until a revised research design that laid out how the above tasks would be carried out was in place; and (c) ambitious planning: with the benefit of hind sight, it is now evident that the May 2007 research plan was too ambitious with regard to the deliverables it aimed to generate.

### **SSA CP Governance and Management**

The SSA CP's governance and management was the subject of a review following dissatisfaction by the Programme's stakeholders over its structure, which they characterized as cumbersome (i.e. it did not advance decision making efficiency) and expensive (i.e. it entailed high transaction costs). The review recommended changes that were approved by the Executive Board of FARA and implemented with effect from November 2007. The changes affected the following:

- a. the pilot learning site management committees (MCs), which were responsible for governance at PLS level. These were dissolved and their functions transferred to the governance organs of the Sub regional agricultural research organisations (SROs);

- b. the Programme's steering committee, which was responsible for overall governance oversight. This was also dissolved and its functions transferred to the Programme sub committee of FARA's Executive Board. Three advisors were designated to provide technical support to this sub committee when it is carrying out its governance oversight of the SSA CP.
- c. the pilot learning site lead institutions (LIs) which are responsible for financial management, administration and research coordination at PLS level. The LI functions, currently performed by two CGIAR centers, are to be transferred to the respective SROs, i.e. ASARECA shall take over LI functions for Lake Kivu PLS, likewise CORAF/WECARD shall do the same for KKM and SADC-FANR for ZMM PLS. These changes are planned to be completed by the end of 2008.

In June 2007 the SSA CP bid farewell to the then outgoing coordinator, Dr. Freddie Kwesiga and welcomed the current one, Dr. Adewale Adekunle.

#### **Transaction costs**

In 2007, the SSA CP's transaction costs fell from 35.3% in 2006 to 25.7%, a margin of 9.6%. The FARA secretariat aims to substantially cut the transaction costs to single digits (9%) before the end of the current research phase. It expects to achieve this target by instituting other transaction cost cutting measures in addition to the changes in governance and management highlighted above.

#### **SSA CP Finances**

At the beginning of 2007 the SSA CP's funding status was a major cause for concern. The Programme started the year with a financing gap of US\$7.6 million or 77% of its annual budget (US\$9.9 million). Thankfully, the Programme's donor's responded favourably to FARA secretariat's appeal for contributions. By October, the Programme had secured US\$8.0 million as fresh contributions towards its budget for the first year. Thus, the budget for the first year was fully funded. However, partly because the major disbursements were effected towards the close of the year, which in turn contributed to delays in commencement of field-based research activities, only the non-field based activities in the work programme were implemented. As a result the expenditures for the year amounting to only US\$2.86 million account for a modest proportion (29%) of the first year's budget.

The FARA secretariat hereby expresses its deep appreciation to the government of Italy, DFID, the European Commission and the World Bank for responding to its appeal. It also recognizes the contributions of other donors who have supported the SSA CP since its inception in January 2005 (i.e. the governments of Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands). The secretariat anticipates that the new financing arrangement proposed by FARA's donors will contribute to insuring it from a recurrence of the fund disbursement delays experienced in 2007

#### **Lessons learned.**

The main lessons learned from implementing the SSA CP in 2007 are summarized in section 7 of this report. Two key lessons among them are:

- The SSA CP will be venturing into largely "uncharted waters" when it commences the establishment of innovation platforms, the strengthening of IP and community capacities to innovate and in measuring process-level changes then establishing their causal connections with observed changes in welfare indicators. It will therefore need to devise means of improving the effectiveness and speed of learning by doing, that is, it will need to evolve methods for rapid capture and sharing of lessons and experiences (communication) in order to improve upon innovation processes. These represent some of the key capacity strengthening areas for the Programme. It will also need to draw on contemporary experiences by other initiatives experimenting with rural institutional innovations.
- Several characteristics of the SSA CP, notably the multiple levels of management and operation, multiple sites and an emphasis on innovation, which entails interaction among multiple partners, place high demands on the communication systems the SSA CP ought to have in place. The programme needs to make substantial investment into improving communication and knowledge management.

This is the third annual Challenge Programme report the SSA CP is submitting to CGIAR secretariat.