



**Sub Saharan Africa
Challenge Programme**

Securing the future for Africa's Children

PROGRESS REPORT

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SUMMARY

At its 2006 Annual General Meeting, the CGIAR granted approval for the SSA CP to commence its three-year research phase, starting in January 2007. As its first research phase task, the CP was charged with developing an Action Plan that addressed concerns raised by the CGIAR's executive and science councils on findings of the latter's inception phase review. The Action Plan was submitted to the relevant CGIAR organs (secretariat and science council) in May 2007 as the Programme's medium term plan (MTP) for the three-year research phase. In addition to completion of the Action Plan, commencement of SSA CP research was contingent on availability of sufficient funds to sustain continuity of field research activities for at least half of the year, and contractual arrangements for managing activities at sub-regional and site level. Thus, the programme devoted the first half of the year towards not only developing the action plan but also fulfilling the above-mentioned conditions. It devoted the latter half of the year to implementing actions stipulated in the Action Plan as well as responding to unforeseen, albeit crucially important issues, that emerged during the year, notably a review of the programme's governance and management arrangements.

The programme registered several achievements in 2007. The first set of achievements it realized were aimed at putting in place all the requirements for initiating the research (including defining the research design, entering contractual arrangements for managing the programme's operations and funds at sub regional and site level, mobilizing the funds to finance the programme's activities, and assembling the required expertise). The second set of achievements resulted from implementation of the Action Plan, which is still ongoing for 2007. It is very important to note that the outputs from field-based research which are stipulated in the Action Plan were expected to be achieved under the assumption that this type of research would start in September 2007. However, by the beginning of September 2007, most of the programme's funds for the first research year had not yet been released. In order to assure continuity of activities for at least 6 months, FARA deferred commencement of research activities until October 2007 when it received sufficient funds to sustain activities for such a period.

Thus FARA is commencing the field-based research in earnest in early November 2007 (two months behind the original schedule). Accordingly some of the outputs expected by December 2007 will most likely be realized in February 2008. Nevertheless, most of the requirements for embarking on the field work such as a methods guide, indicators, research protocols, site selection criteria, sampling designs, database structures and the necessary human resources are in place. FARA is confident that by the end of the year the research sites will have been delineated, sample households will have been identified and baseline data will have been captured. The actual expenditure for January to September 2007 and the projected expenditure for October to December 2007 reflect the intensity of field activity over the two periods – moderate followed by intensive.

There remains a divergence of view between the CGIAR science council and SSA CP on what constitutes IAR4D and how its effects relative to alternative approaches should be evaluated. The science council favours a reductionist approach whereas the SSA CP considers a middle-of-the road approach to be more appropriate and feasible. The SSA CP has made efforts to engage

with the science council on this matter and refreshingly the SC has been fairly accommodating and as a result there is now greater convergence of view. However, more dialogue is required to harmonize the views held by both sides.

The total amount of funds available for the programme at the start of 2007 was the US\$2.3 million that it carried forward from 2006. The programme's budget for the first year was US\$9.9 million, thus FARA was faced with the task of mobilising the balance of US\$7.6 million. These concerted efforts in engaging with the programme's donors were rewarded with confirmation of funding pledges by most of them such that by October 2007 the programme's funding for the first year was fully secured. FARA wishes to thank the Programme's donors for their confidence in the Programme, which they have demonstrated through their contribution towards its implementation. It also acknowledges the immense support and guidance extended by the various organs of CGIAR (secretariat, science council, ExCo and members) towards ensuring that the SSA CP lives up to the very high expectations of its African stakeholders.

FARA and its stakeholders in Africa strongly believe that the SSA CP presents them with a unique opportunity to test an approach that promises to radically transform the way agricultural research for development in SSA is organised in order to improve its capacity to deliver development impact. It is refreshing to report that after enduring persistent delays, the SSA CP has finally commenced implementation of its research phase.