

Consortium Management Response to the External Review of AAS

The AAS CRP was approved in July 2011 and this evaluation started in February 2014 and was finalized in March 2015. The review emphasizes that there are many novel elements of the AAS program, but that there was also an important legacy component of WorldFish research. On the one hand, therefore, the evaluation was an early review of a young program, but on the other hand the review assessed the WorldFish research that was brought into the new program and that was based on, in some cases, many years of research.

The overall conclusion of the evaluation team was that:

- *“Aquatic agricultural systems present issues of sufficient importance and relevance to justify further investment by the CGIAR;*
- *AAS has a number of important achievements where the potential for progress can be demonstrated; and*
- *The program faces a range of obstacles and challenges, which affect quality of science, relevance and effectiveness, and to be overcome will require substantial changes in key areas including program design, staffing and implementation.*

The evaluation team concludes that to date AAS has been led and managed primarily from the perspective of using AAS as a way to establish and legitimize new skills and competences. Insufficient attention has been given to the historic competences of WorldFish and other CGIAR centers. Instead of minimizing the value of these competences and experiences, the evaluation team recommends using them as an invaluable springboard. It is therefore the primary recommendation of the evaluation team that the CGIAR should justify further investment in aquatic agricultural systems more on the grounds of comparative advantage.”

The evaluation team presents ten recommendations that jointly have significant consequences, in the view of the Consortium, for the re-design of the work undertaken in the AAS CRP. These recommendations range from a stronger conceptualization of aquatic agricultural systems, moving away from participatory action research as the core research methodology, significantly increasing the number of PhD level researchers working at field level, significantly increasing the capacity for systems research to moving towards a truly collaborative, multi-center research program. It should be noted that around 95% of all AAS resources were spent by or through WorldFish, with only 5% through IWMI and Bioversity (the only 2 other centers participating in AAS) – and that only WorldFish mapped any bilateral work to AAS (roughly 50% of the total budget).

WorldFish and AAS management accepted 9 out of the 10 recommendations fully, but rejected the governance recommendation to significantly strengthen the role of the Program Oversight Panel (POP). Interestingly, AAS does not disagree with the recommended approach for governance, but maintains that the POP already largely played the role as recommended by the evaluation team.

The evaluation team indicates, and the Consortium agrees, that going forward the governance and management should be arranged as agreed in response to the IEA review of CRP governance and management, and as laid out in the Guidance for the CRP 2nd Call pre-proposals.

The evaluation team did not make any recommendations directly addressing the Consortium. The Consortium accepts and supports all recommendations of the evaluation team and agrees that they should be taken into account in the next generation of CRP proposals.

The new portfolio of second generation CRPs does not include a CRP on Aquatic Agricultural Systems per se, but it does include a Fish Agri-Food System CRP, which is expected to have a “systems flagship” as a key component. In the view of the Consortium, WorldFish should ensure that all recommendations of the AAS evaluation are taken into account when developing the proposal for the Fish Agri-Food System CRP.