Independent Science and Partnership Council

CGIAR

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Assessment of Flagship 2 (Trees for smallholder livelihoods) of the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees, and Agroforestry (2017-2022)

1. Summary

Flagship 2 (trees for smallholder livelihoods) of the Forests, Trees and Agroforestry CRP aims to offer options for improved food security and livelihood outcomes through improvements in the management of: natural resources; timber and non-timber forest product production; tree-crop systems; pastures; and through the diversification of production systems. In its September 2016 assessment, the ISPC rated FP2 as weak. There was an overemphasis of the importance of trees in smallholder livelihoods, unrealistic assumptions of the impact of the FP's work, and a weak theory of change. In addition, the coherence of the production systems selected for inclusion was questioned.

The ISPC's rating of this FP's resubmission is strong. FP2 has been mostly successful in addressing the ISPC's September 2016 assessment comments. Of the three weaknesses the ISPC identified in the September 2016 resubmission, two have been adequately addressed. The FP theory of change (TOC) carefully considers the spheres of control, interest and influence and, when compared to the previous versions of the proposal, there is evidence of considerable reconceptualization and improved articulation for why and how the FP will succeed. A significant effort has been made to compile the evidence for why forests, trees, and agroforestry matter for smallholder livelihoods both directly and indirectly. The FP-level targets have not been scaled down but, in response to ISPC concerns that the magnitudes were unrealistic, FP2 proponents have rephrased the targets in terms of the number of people to be "reached" by the program. There is evidence of improved leadership and realistic assessment of challenges in successfully implementing the proposed activities.

The third weakness raised by ISPC of the 2016 proposal – that "the coherence of the set of different production systems selected for research remains unclear" – is still an issue in the current proposal as this is largely a legacy of large bilateral projects and a likely consequence of the low shares of W1/2 funding available.

A final cautionary note is the lack of examples of well-documented impacts at scale, despite the diligence of the proponents in trying to identify these. In mitigation, it should be noted that our understanding of the limitations and challenges associated with attempting to improve livelihoods through trees is, to a significant extent, shaped by scientists in the FTA CRP.

2. Assessment of CRP response to the ISPC major comments on the FP

Previous ISPC comments (Sep 2016)	CRP response/changes proposed	ISPC assessment
The mismatch between evidence of documented historical impacts, and expected future impacts, is stark. Even though targets are overly optimistic for many CRPs, FTA is an outlier among all CRPs	Making livelihoods the focal point of the FP, the proponents have provided a compelling narrative, aided by graphics for further explanation. Rather than claiming unrealistic and unsubstantiated benefits, the FP now demonstrates how trees and plantations can add value and make a major,	Table A provides a very good overview of major pathways by with trees and forest resources can improve smallholder livelihoods. This includes examples of strong science partnerships as well as case-study based evidence of public-private partnerships, such as FTA's leadership in the tree-crop value chain program of the African Development Bank (TAAT). Amongst others, FTA is also showing leadership in the food security / land productivity area in East Africa (Trees4FoodSecurity, T4FS). They also provide a

regarding targets that lack credibility, particularly the one relating to the number of farmers likely to be lifted out of poverty. Sections of the proposal which refer to targets or provide justification for the figures quoted need to be rewritten. **The revised CRP should have a stronger rationale for targets, including past evidence, especially for SLO 1.**	additional contribution on a path to intensification. Aspects such as fodder, soil fertility, nutrient and water cycling, resource use efficiencies and the value of diversification are used to demonstrate how yield gaps of staple food and cash crops can be closed via targeted integration. Links to SLOs, sub-IDOs (particularly Table B) and SDGs are now clearly outlined and targets are much clearer. The explicit acknowledgement of targets as cumulative numbers is helpful.	strong link to nutrition by demonstrating a link between the right amount of tree cover and avoiding micronutrient deficiencies in many rural and smallholder communities throughout Africa. Although not explicitly mentioned, this work also addresses the huge concerns of stunting in children. The proposed FP mitigates against this risk. In stepping back from their targets, without actually changing them in a substantive way, the FP now uses the concept of people "reached" to describe the link between the program and livelihood outcomes. This is a very limited and modest measure of the potential for the program to generate outcomes. Some kind of indicator of adoption or uptake of research outputs would be much preferred – a measure in which the users must do something proactive in order for it to count towards an outcome. The numbers of people to be reached by the FP remains quite high at 100 million in 20 million households (to take the most conservative interpretation of table 1). Despite the greater conceptual clarity offered by the revised version, there is still concern about the lack of well-documented cases of large-scale, sustained impact to justify the numbers. This concern is ameliorated somewhat by the fact that ICRAF and CIFOR scientists have contributed significantly to our understanding of this gap between ambition and achievement.
Over-emphasis on contribution of trees to smallholder livelihoods	This concern is addressed in comments above and below.	
It is not clear how the research in this FP will generate a broader understanding of diverse contexts, hence raising questions about capacity to deliver proposed targets.	The Theory of Change has been clarified using three interrelated assumptions, i.e. • trees can improve livelihoods via higher TFP • smallholders, particularly women, can increase their income and • minority groups can benefit if policies and investments are appropriately geared towards tree establishment Pathways of integration have been clarified. For instance, the time-lag between initial investment in tree crops or timber has been made explicit, including feasible options how this can be addressed via	The ToC narrative has been convincingly revised, including the partners at various scales. Fig. 4 provides an overview of the key stages of co-generation of knowledge that explicitly addresses the spheres of control, influence and interest, ultimately leading to impact. The "options by context" extrapolation framework deserves recognition, not just as a clear strategy for impact but perhaps even more importantly as an explicit way to tackle high contextual heterogeneity. The strategy to generate international public goods (IPGs) through place-based research and systematic planned comparisons may seem common sense, but is coherent and, if implemented well, can set an example for other CRPs. The discussion of IPGs (p. 22) is clear ,and there is a realistic assessment of the challenges in realizing them. However, the concerns about evidence and track-record outlined above regarding delivery against targets remain.

	technical and financial innovations.	
The coherence of the set of different production systems selected for research remains unclear.	Table C provides an overview of the current co-located, place-based research portfolio, with an accompanying argument that W1/2 funding is required for integration and value-adding.	Although Table C makes a convincing case for the need for integration – and resourcing such integration – it also shows a potential vulnerability in the portfolio related to the diversity of bilateral funders. Integration across production systems implies a retro-fitting of concepts and analysis plans onto a large, and thinly-spread portfolio (20 different countries are listed in table C) of bilateral projects.

3. **Characterization of the Flagship**

Main strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Robust FP theory of change (TOC) carefully considers the spheres of control, interest and influence improved articulation for why and how the FP will succeed	• The targets specified in terms of numbers of people "reached" by the CRP makes it very difficult to understand the potential scale of benefits from the CRP, and is potentially misleading as it conflates people exposed to policy change, with direct and indirect beneficiaries from project interventions
• Conceptualization and communication of how science in the clusters of activity can be brought together to support livelihoods	• The coherence of the set of different production systems selected for research remains unclear
• Options by context framework integrates across the clusters of activities, and can unify perspectives from the different disciplines represented in the FP	