

ISPC Assessment of Flagship 2 (Small Scale Fisheries) of the CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems (2017-2022)

1. Summary

FP2 FISH aims to sustain and increase the contribution of Small Scale Fisheries to poverty reduction and food and nutrition security. In its September 2016 assessment, the ISPC rated FP2 as a “strong”; however, there were three important caveats: (i) there was weak articulation of the understanding of the complexity of achieving systemic change; (ii) there was little acknowledgement that the evidence base in this area of research is evolving rapidly (and hence a need to define comparative advantage); and (iii) the proposed strategy to scale up results was not convincing.

The ISPC’s rating of the FP’s resubmission is still strong. It sits well both within the CRP as a whole and with regard to the portfolio of CRP clusters. The goal of promoting and sustaining small-scale fisheries deserves to be part of the CGIAR’s agenda. The FP makes a strong case that other CRPs, ‘need’ complementary fisheries research in a number of key ecologies to address SLOs that are linked to climate change, sustainable ocean management, and human nutrition. In addition, the revised FP document demonstrates a very good understanding of the challenges involved in system-wide transformation as well as some of the avenues of thinking needed to overcome them.

The re-submission provides more concrete evidence of past success, includes reference to independent peer reviewed outputs, and adds new skills and expertise to the FP team. Although it’s assumed that the nature and scope of this involvement will be clarified further in the FPs annual reports, the experience of the nominated leader, provides additional strength to the proposal.

The FP’s body of work relates to access rights, policies and regulations, and fisheries governance. While this focus can certainly be justified in terms of political economy, and is supported by prevailing views in the published literature, the proposal still lacks a convincing case on the potential for translation of science into actual policy changes. Thus, while the ToC laid out for this FP2 is plausible, it remains to be seen if it is feasible. Testing, if, and how, FP2 can measurably shift policy and governance to achieve positive outcomes in SSF through a variety of possible change mechanisms at scale, rather than through a narrow focus on influencing governments and donors with evidence from community-level studies, would add to the FP’s business model.

This re-submission is an improvement over the original. It does, however, not deal comprehensively with all caveats made on the earlier submission, and thus only partially improves the confidence in a research program that can generate measurable results at large scale. The ISPC is, however, confident that the experienced FP leadership will be able to apply themselves to the tasks of prioritizing a convincing research-based agenda that will support SSF transformation within the proposed budget and timeframe. An early articulation of a coherent science agenda underpinning desired institutional and policy change to be provided in the FPs first annual report would thus be most helpful.

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

Previous ISPC comments (14 Sep 2016)	CRP response/changes proposed	ISPC assessment
<p>1. Weak articulation of the complexity involved in achieving systemic change</p>	<p>FP2 responds to the challenges of translating the policy intentions of the SDGs, the FAO SSF guidelines and the shift in private sector investor priorities toward social objectives, food and nutrition security by applying interdisciplinary research necessary to develop the management, technology and governance innovations required to translate these commitments into outcomes.</p> <p>Revisions to the impact pathways and ToC aim to articulate more clearly how capacity to facilitate systemic change is built into FP2 with investment in four change mechanisms targeted at (i) local adoption of technologies and management approaches; (ii) equitable value chain development; (iii) public sector policy and institutional change; and (iv) policy and priorities of civil society and development agencies.</p> <p>Change mechanisms rely on a partnership strategy that is “focused on national, regional and cross-regional influence; we invest in these in conjunction with global partners with proven convening power and policy influence to accelerate impact at scale.”</p> <p>In addition, revisions articulate the links between developing a robust understanding of the place of SSF in regional fish agri-food systems and identifying opportunities to influence systemic change. This draws upon foundational research in clusters 1 and 2 that relate to marine and freshwater production systems and their broader policy and economic context.</p>	<p>The FP2 revision clearly lays out the scope and scale of the challenges and complexity ahead in achieving governance and large-scale policy change. The detail on the actual streams of science that will be pursued in this respect is, however, light. While there is significant attention in the document to the broad domains of change needed at macro level, further detail on how this links to the research questions under FP2 would further strengthen the proposal.</p> <p>Cluster 1 and 2 appear to focus on different aspects of research of place-based FISH-relevant livelihood and productivity increases. The questions relate to how the lessons learned from these localized activities will be translated into policy influence to accelerate impact at scale. A number of the assumptions in Table 2.4 on how research outputs lead to changes at various scales (from community to region), whilst undoubtedly desirable, might be difficult to realise.</p> <p>A clearer alignment of cluster 1 and 2 activities with the framing and approaches of Cluster 3 would have further strengthened the proposal.</p>
<p>2. Evidence base in this area of research is evolving rapidly</p>	<p>FP2 revision states that success in achieving early milestones of the FISH CRP in 2017 has led to increased organizational and researcher buy-in from partners,</p>	<p>Although it is clear that much of the work proposed falls into the category of ‘implementation science’, additional clarity on how FP2 engages with, and complements other bodies of work on</p>

	<p>growing integration with other CRPs and improved research linkages across the CRP. In its revisions to the Staffing of management team and flagship, FP2 presents the team of lead researchers that “are committed to the delivery of FP2; a strategic growth that enhances our continuing position at the frontier of SSF research, policy and practice. “</p> <p>The research track record of FP2 research leaders is said to demonstrate that the team assembled to deliver FP2 keeps abreast of, and makes substantial contribution to this growing evidence base. In addition, FP2 aims to convene regular learning events, as part of its results based management approach, enabling FP2 (and FISH) research, milestones and the ToC to respond efficiently to newly emerging evidence and opportunities for systemic change.</p>	<p>fisheries biology, ecology, economics, and policy would have further strengthened the proposal. There was no introduction and background on the management experience of the proposed new FP leadership in any of the revised FP documents or the letter accompanying the FP submission. This was rectified, however, following a specific question by the ISPC, which led to the appropriate information being provided on this.</p>
<p>3. Strategy to scale results up and out</p>	<p>The FP2 revised scaling strategies have been selected due to the strength of evidence emerging in 2017 that demonstrate tracking on impact pathways towards outcome targets. The afore mentioned change mechanisms further aim to ensure research is designed, developed, disseminated and shared to ensure research outcomes and development outcomes. These change mechanisms are particularly reliant on working in conjunction with partners focused on national, regional and cross-regional influence that will accelerate outcomes at scale, and rely on national and regional partnerships that have been built through preceding in-country engagements of implementing partners.</p> <p>Further revisions to the partnership strategy also aim to reflect that, in addition to work with partners focused on national and regional scales, FISH also works with organizations with convening power that span regions. Moreover, the revisions aim to more clearly articulate the comparative advantage of the managing partners - a coalition</p>	<p>Testing, if, and how FP2 can measurably shift policy and governance to achieve positive outcomes in SSF through a variety of possible change mechanisms, rather than through a sole focus on influencing governments and donors with evidence from community-level studies, might have added further strength to the FP’s research logic.</p>

	that is said to be “uniquely positioned for impact at scale.”	
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3. Characterization of the Flagship

Main strengths	Weaknesses
Understanding of the complexity of achieving systemic change	Ambiguity on links between FP2 research activities and governance change at different levels
Breadth of SSF science leaders and practitioners associated with the FP	
Degree of alignment with national and regional priorities and initiatives	Research-to-impact assumptions might be difficult to realise
Articulation of the proposed learning-based approach to FP management	