



## 1 Objectives

The objectives of this first Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) meeting was to formally launch the IAC, present the overall framework and functioning of Humidtropics, to clarify the links between Humidtropics and IAC membership, and to enable IAC members establish a strategy for achieving its objectives.

All IAC members participated in this first meeting that focused in large part on learning about Humidtropics from CRP program leaders, along with reading through a detailed set of documents relating to the program plan, and progress in implementation. This process of learning has only just started for a number of the Committee members.

This report consists of observations and recommendations of the IAC members. They were formulated on the basis of documentation provided to the Committee, the presentations and discussions of these that took place during the two-day meeting, and at two closed sessions of the full Committee members. In its first closed session, Committee members briefly reviewed the Terms of Reference for the Committee, and shared initial observations based on the documentation they had received. An initial draft of this report was prepared during the second closed session and a verbal report was presented to all those who were present at the meeting before the final closing.

The report begins with a summary of the most important observations and recommendations of the IAC. These are followed by the full report. The report ends with a brief statement regarding the interest of Committee members in this particular Program, and their understanding of the challenge ahead.

## 2 Summary of Key Observations and Recommendations

The IAC observes that the complex Program design, with numerous partners, components, issues, scales, research areas and sites, and ambitious objectives, is not yet visibly supported by a proportional governance and management system, or budget. Since the Program is still in its early stages, the Committee recommends that it be carefully assessed as impact evaluation plans are being developed.

1. In terms of the governance and management system we offer the following comments as input to the recommendation:
  - i) The IAC concluded that at present, in each research area and component, the teams appear to be setting their own location-specific research questions. Given the overarching Program objectives, we are concerned about such an approach given an

apparent absence of an explicit and convincing plan to integrate and synthesize the results from the various locations and components. The alternative for such a complex program whose ambition is to impact at scale, is for it to be guided by a limited number of well-defined, overarching research questions that cut across dimensions, scales, countries, areas and participants. Illustrative examples of such questions are: “Under what conditions can pro-poor and sustainable agricultural intensification occur in the humid tropics?”, “Why are certain rural regions in the humid tropics more likely than others to undergo sustainable agricultural intensification?”, “How does urbanization and economic diversification impact on the likelihood, and the distributional and environmental effects of agricultural intensification in sub-national regions in the humid tropics?” Hypotheses would then need to be defined for each question.

- ii) Regardless of which approach is taken, it is extremely important that the research questions be clearly linked (conceptually and with evidence) to major drivers of change in the rural regions of the humid tropics. It is also essential that the Board of IITA, and the program management decide on specific and concrete mechanisms (methods, processes, responsibilities) for producing an on-going synthesis of the numerous strands of program work. IAC is of the view that it is unclear at present how the different products and results will be brought together. We argue that a clear set of questions, linked with identified drivers of change, and a stronger and more visible conceptual framework, would lay the basis for such a synthesis.
- iii) The selection of research areas and sites should be clearly justified on the basis of their contribution to the overarching research questions and hypotheses. Presently the rationale for site selection is not as clear as it needs to be if this is to happen.
- iv) In such a complex programme, an effective communications strategy is of the essence, both to support the “internal” functioning of the initiative distributed across many partners, projects, components, cultures and teams, but also for impact. We want to underline the fact that we are talking about “two-way communications,” and not merely about one-way dissemination of information.

## 2. In terms of budget:

- v) The IAC is of the view that the different bilateral and “core-funded” (Windows 1 and 2) projects need to be mapped to the different research questions. While we understand that the program grew out of a collection of pre-existing projects of the different partners, it is critical to “discipline” (conceptually, methodologically, and managerially) this situation in order to increase the likelihood of program success. Equally, unless the budget of the program increases significantly in the short to medium term, the workplan must be downsized: The existing and foreseeable resources are spread too thin. IAC had a clear sense that this is a recipe for failure.

In future meetings the IAC will focus especially on these specific concerns when assessing program progress, in addition to following progress and processes towards meeting equity targets, and the creation of an “innovation system” that addresses equity concerns and includes new partnership processes.

## 3 The Report

### Introduction

The Committee endorses the expressed need for systems research more so now than ever before, and is of the view that this Humidtropics CRP has an advantage in this respect because of the complexity of the systems in these regions that extends beyond crop mixes, and the experience of IITA, the lead Center in the CRP. Throughout the meeting all members expressed their commitment to supporting the program.

The following observations and recommendations are made bearing in mind the fact that this CRP has experienced a slow start, and is in its first 6 months, added to the complications arising from working in a context where the old and new ways of working exist side by side. The Committee members also appreciate the challenge presented of integrating and managing a programme with numerous objectives, action areas, sites and flagship projects, research themes and entry points, with a mix of CGIAR Centers and other implementation partners accustomed to working more or less in isolation from one another, or at least in competition with one another.

In view of all this, and the fact that this was the first meeting of the Advisory Committee, the openness of all CRP members with the Committee in its attempt to grasp the key elements of the Program was much appreciated.

Our overall observations and recommendations begin with budgets and funding arrangements and end with communications, including participatory processes, and capacity building.

## **Observations and Recommendations**

### Fundraising and Budgets

The Committee is aware that budget considerations are central to the CRP strategy and it is concerned that the present Humidtropics budget is spread thinly across the program. We are in agreement with the fundraising strategy on behalf of the CRP that is designed to increase the common pool over time, that is, the alignment of Window 3 and bilateral funding, and the emphasis on seeking collaborative work with other CRPs as a means of increasing the funding base. It also agrees with the program management that a major challenge for the Humidtropics lies in getting the centres involved in this CRP to use their individual strengths to make this an excellent program rather than competing with one another for funds.

In relation to its concern that the present budget is spread too thinly even across activities and sites where work has already started, the Committee strongly suggests that work at new sites be delayed. At sites where work has already started but situation analyses have not been finalised, there is urgent need to complete baseline data collection, not least in order for impact evaluations to be possible. Compiling and making use of existing data sources should be at the centre of such efforts, and the collection of new baseline data should be kept at a minimum.

Having reached this conclusion, the Committee is of the view that more time should be given to analysing the macro and meso level processes such as national and regional government policies and programs, in each of the Action Areas. This is particularly important in view of the fact that the sites selected extend over several national borders. It also risks missing the opportunity to study the importance for planned interventions of differences in institutions and policies (or lack of policies) related to macro conditions in the countries/regions respectively. Members felt strongly that the program must be aligned with these if it is to receive the support – possibly financial but definitely programmatic - for scaling up findings and for achieving sustained impacts. Evidence that attention has been paid to these should be visible in the work plans and especially in the analyses of drivers of change which are not at the household or even village level, such as markets, key policies on market prices for inputs and products, cross border trade, migration and so on.

If the remaining planned sites are retained, apart from baseline data, the criteria for site selection should be made clear, situation analyses should be used for determining entry points, and a national and cross border perspective should be incorporated from the outset.

Overall, members argued for fewer activities and fewer sites, and suggest that the program seek room within the different SRTs for a prioritisation of activities in order to reduce the budget pressure.

In relation to the fact that that place-based/Action Area budgets are not yet detailed, one member observed that the ideal solution to the management and governance system necessary for system

integration, and the coordination of a wide variety and changing composition of actors as learning progresses, would be the allocation of budgets to one director per site. The site directors would then be in a position to purchase specific services from the SRTs.

#### Clarification of Concepts Around Strategic Objectives

The Committee discussed the program and strategy at length and acknowledged that while the speakers made it clear that this CRP is not about 'business as usual', it was difficult to identify from the presentations what was new about the program. The Committee suggests that a useful starting point in presenting the program in future might be to first spell out its farming systems approach, and then its systems innovation approach, and then to elaborate on the difference that this latter makes to the program. In response to the question, 'what is new here?' the program presenters were very clear that it is not the technical agenda but rather the processes that enable linking the technical research outcomes with agricultural systems and the livelihoods and well-being of those involved.

The Committee encourages the role of Wageningen (individuals and/or a specific program) in working with management and the various teams to strengthen the implementation on the ground of 'institutional innovation approaches' (the creation or enabling of 'conducive social conditions' that 'define systems of innovation' (IDO 6). This Wageningen role must involve capacity-building within the program at various levels in order to bring the social and technical solutions that lie at the core of this Humidtropics CRP, to scale.

The Committee did not discuss in session the strategic objectives and Intermediate Development Outcomes (IDOs) regarding the link between agriculture and nutrition, the empowerment of women and youth, or poverty reduction. Members were on the other hand very concerned about the understanding of change processes, along with the drivers of change that are central to achieving these IDOs. The Chair noted that she was attending the Science Forum to be held in Bonn immediately following this meeting, where these links were to be discussed in more detail. She also informed members that she had been invited to attend the Humidtropics gender strategy workshop to be held in Entebbe towards the end of October. This strategy, yet to be completed, forms part of the agreed consortium gender mainstreaming process. Her concern in relation to gender and youth is to move the gender strategy from focusing on women in social isolation, to a strategy relevant to both gender and youth that acknowledges the way in which women and men, young and old, both separately and together are likely to engage in different ways with this Program. She notes that there is little information available that would enable the prediction of how precisely they will use any increase or change in their agricultural input and benefit access gained from working with the Program.

Questions were also asked about the proposed research on markets using value chain analysis (SRT2): What are the concerns about markets that are driving this research, and were these concerns identified with the participation of interested organisations? And: How will these concerns be researched? 'Will the research result in farmers/processors, etc., being able to move more freely around value chains'? As one member of the Committee pointed out, whereas it is important to identify the important actors in every action area, it is also important to evaluate how this program component will help solve farmers' problems in relation to market access and more so, how it will position the farmers at the centre of the process.

A major concern shared by a number of Committee members was that the value chain concept has become very academic, yet at the same time, on the ground, it is focused more on roles than on power relations. This should be avoided in the program: ideally we should be seeing how the program can facilitate the governance and smooth operation of a range of value chains for diversified production systems. This involves ensuring the necessary linkages – horizontal and vertical – within and between the different chains. Although it is important to understand the macro and meso level processes, it is also vital to understand how farmers experience these locally. Ideally the program will not limit itself to working with new value chains but will also strengthen existing ones.

IAC members agreed that this component of the program needs further elaboration.

### Communications

The Committee welcomed the hire of a communication manager. It demonstrates clearly that the Program managers recognize the importance of communications to the success of the program. The committee notes that in developing a communications strategy, the Program should focus not only on information *dissemination* but also on other aspects of communication including using it as a “*listening*” device. As one member noted: ‘Two-way communication processes are integral to harnessing the power of multiple enablers and drivers, can contribute to areas such as capacity-building, partnerships and relationship management, risk management, and to scaling.’ The cross-cultural nature of this program at multiple levels makes communication even more important while also posing challenges for the program’s success.

Further elaborating on communications, while it is true that the international centers and donors have been fostering participatory processes and participatory research over at least two decades, there are many interpretations of “participatory”, from engaging to learn, to inform, to test, or to actually work together in a horizontal relationship, sharing knowledge systems in order to create the environment in which innovations thrive. It is this last process that can reveal how new information can be used in a context of uncertainty. Strategic communication would be central to all these functions.

### Strategy for Impact

Although the program documentation defines impact pathways and goals by Action Areas, and potential outputs of Flagship Projects within these that will contribute to the Intermediate Development Outcomes (IDO) and then to System Level Outcomes (SLO), the Committee felt that the Program still had some considerable work to do to develop a ‘plausible, convincing process towards impact’, including detailing the underlying assumptions. It is not clear for example how ‘the empowerment of women and marginalized groups will reduce poverty, increase food and nutritional security, and contribute to sustainable livelihood and NRM integrity’ (i.e. the link between IDO and SLO).

In making these observations, the Committee accepts that there may be/will be unexpected outcomes from the various program activities, and that these will reflect to some extent on the way activities are valued by the different actors involved in the program. For example, symmetry in resource access will not automatically result in all household members contributing in the same way towards the building of sustainable livelihoods. We might hypothesise for example that young men and women might be more interested in quick returns rather than ‘sustainable system intensification’, and long term food security i.e. Short vs. long term perspectives.

Related to these concerns above about impact and processes for achieving this, is the development of knowledge that is of use, and valued by decision makers, male and female farmers and others. Research about what type of information, how different individuals use new information, and the barriers to use, such as existing valued knowledge, trust of the knowledge source, and so on, are all elements of assessing the process of knowledge to action, and this need to be a visible activity within the Program.

In conclusion on impact, the Committee stressed the urgency in getting the M&E systems (including baseline data) up and running, arguing that this should help the program focus on what it can realistically plan to deliver in the short and longer term (3 and 6yrs), in addition to assisting with the identification of necessary changes to improve impact as the Program progresses. Does the Program have a clear plan for monitoring and evaluation both within Action Areas, sites and Flagship Projects, and across these? It was noted that the Program will need to continually review the process of working with farmers and other actors as to whether it is likely to deliver/generate new knowledge, and the Program can say that it has produced or rather successfully facilitated the creation of an ‘innovation system’.

The Committee had a sense that the Program is pinning a lot of hope on partners delivering impact, and asked a number of questions related to their role, such as:

- Are partners always about impact in the sense of for example, technology adoption, more sustainable livelihoods?
- Are partners simply being used instrumentally?
- Is the gender strategy simply designed to enable the program to use women (and young people) for meeting its own ends?
- Is the building of partnerships simply about building networks?

#### Program Goal, Objectives and Strategies

Overall, the Committee emphasised that the Program needs to be able to present:

- i) a compelling sense of Program objectives and strategies i.e. the 'why' and 'what' of the humid tropics on the ground;
- ii) the role of Action Areas and Sites in fulfilling Program objectives and strategies;
- iii) a clear rationale for the different sites selected, including the specific research problems and related questions that each can answer, and
- iv) a sense that the process involving a complex mix of Areas, sites and actors is being managed, monitored and assessed.

Members concluded that the Program had some way to go to achieve this. Members also noted the use of various words - from partners to stakeholders and actors – to convey a similar group of program participants and suggest that the meaning of these vis a vis one another be clarified to avoid confusion.

#### Subsequent Committee Meetings and Overall Mode of Committee Operation

As the first meeting of this Committee, members had to absorb considerable information within two full days of presentations. Some points raised in these notes reflect subsequent reading, and observations that individual members had been unable to express at the meeting itself. Nevertheless, all members are agreed on the points made.

Members expressed a concern about the frequency and type of proposed future meetings of the Committee. Specifically, they felt that the proposal for a virtual - skype - meeting in six months was not appropriate given that the next 6 months is a critical time for the program when IAC members needed to keep up with progress. The meeting therefore ended with a proposal to regroup around March 2014, possibly with a smaller group of program leaders, and a third meeting six months later on skype. Meanwhile all committee members expressed their willingness to contribute their individual diverse skills to the Program.

#### **Endnotes**

##### Terms of Reference for the Advisory Committee of the Humidtropics

The IAC of Humidtropics has a major advisory role concerning priority setting, strategic allocation of resources, and external linkages and partnerships, to ensure that the technical program of Humidtropics is well aligned and that the needed set of partners participate to achieve the goals and objectives of the program. It is expected to provide both scientific and management advice to the Lead Center Management/Board, and to the Executive Office/Management of the Humidtropics program.

The specific responsibilities are listed as follows:

1. Provide advice on scientific direction, science quality and feasibility of proposed approaches for the successful implementation of Humidtropics.

2. Provide advice on partnership and uptake/impact strategies.
3. Review the global program performance and the relevance of its outcomes.
4. Review prioritization processes for the program.
5. Make recommendations to Lead Center Board and Management, and to the Executive Director, on opportunities for enhanced performance of the program.
6. Provide advice on other strategic elements, such as gender mainstreaming, innovation and capacity-building, which are essential for the success of the program.
7. Review and advice on annual workplans and budgets prepared by the Executive Office, and make recommendations to the lead center management and board.
8. Periodically review the principles that guide resource allocation between Projects, Program Participants and other partners; and consider and approve proposals from the Executive Director and Lead Center Management for significant changes to be made in this respect.
9. Mediate any dispute that may arise between the Lead Centre and Program Participants or between Program Participants.



*The IAC is composed of the following members (from left to right):*

<i>Dr. Julio Berdegue</i>	<i>Principal Researcher, RIMISP – Latin American Center for Rural Development, Chile</i>
<i>Dr. Ann Tutwiler</i>	<i>Director General, Bioversity International, Italy</i>
<i>Prof. Krishnamurthy Sriramesh</i>	<i>Professor of Communication and specialist on strategic partnerships, Purdue University, USA</i>
<i>Prof. Magnus Jirstrom</i>	<i>Professor of Social and Economic Geography, Lund University, Sweden</i>
<i>Mr. Adrianus Spijkers</i>	<i>Consultant on comprehensive food security, natural resources management and social development (retired from FAO)</i>
<i>Dr. Christine Okali (IAC Chair)</i>	<i>Coordinator, Gender and Social Difference Theme, Future Agricultures Programme, Institute of Development Studies, UK</i>
<i>Dr. Nteranya Sanginga</i>	<i>Director General, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Nigeria</i>
<i>Prof. Corinne Valdivia</i>	<i>Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, College of Agriculture Food and Natural Resources, University of Missouri, USA</i>
<i>Prof. Seth Danso</i>	<i>Professor of Soil Science, University of Ghana, Ghana</i>
<i>Mr. Stephen Muchiri</i>	<i>CEO, Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, Kenya</i>