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**Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)**

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**SCIENCE COUNCIL**  
**Per Pinstrup-Andersen**  
**Chair**

30 September 2004

Dear Ian,

The Science Council considered the SSA Challenge Programme Proposal in the open session of the SC 2 Meeting. After discussion among members of the SC and observers during the plenary and a special Working Group session with representatives of FARA, the SC concluded that, at this stage in the evolution of the SSA CP, sufficient information is not yet available within the proposal, in terms of the specific research plans and science to be applied, for the SC to make a judgement on the relevance and quality of the science and therefore to justify an investment of \$70 million over the five-year plan.

A major constraint for this CP, in terms of identifying specific research objectives and science to be applied, is the lack of institutional arrangements as a prerequisite for further planning and implementation. Therefore, the SC recommends to Ex Co that, at this stage, support be provided to the CP for activities to develop the appropriate institutional arrangements and subsequently undertake the diagnostic phase for the research (Phase I) only. This phase is expected to be completed within 18 months, at which time the proponents would be in a position to define in specific terms, the research priorities and expected outputs of the CP and would have in place the appropriate institutional arrangements. Funding for this diagnostic phase is recommended with the intention that after one year, the project will be reviewed by the SC, so that if a recommendation for continuation is made and endorsed at that time, the project could continue beyond the 18 month period with a smooth transition.

Attached is the full commentary and recommendation of the SC concerning the SSA CP proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Per Pinstrup-Andersen  
SC Chair

Mr. Ian Johnson  
Chair, CGIAR  
Vice President  
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**CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
SCIENCE COUNCIL**

**Assessment of Challenge Programme Proposal:  
Improving Livelihoods and Natural Resources Management  
in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA):  
Securing the Future for Africa's Children**

SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT  
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
SEPTEMBER 2004



## SC Commentary on the SSA Challenge Programme Proposal

The Science Council (SC) members considered the SSA Challenge Programme (CP) Proposal in the open session of the SC 2 Meeting. After discussion among members of the SC and observers, which included extensive interaction during the plenary and a special Working Group session with representatives of FARA, the lead proponent of the proposal, the SC concluded the following:

At this stage in the evolution of the SSA CP, the SC does not believe sufficient information is available within the proposal, in terms of the specific research plans and science to be applied, for the SC to make a judgement on the relevance and quality of the science and therefore to justify an investment of \$70 million by investors over the five-year plan. However, as indicated below, the SC is recommending an alternative plan to move forward with the CP.

The SC notes that a major constraint for this CP, in terms of identifying specific research objectives and science to be applied, is the lack of institutional arrangements that the CP proponents see as a prerequisite for further planning and implementation.

The SC recommends to Ex Co that, at this stage, support be provided to the CP for activities to develop the appropriate institutional arrangements and subsequently undertake the diagnostic phase for the research (Phase I) only. This phase is expected to be completed within 18 months, at which time the proponents would be in a position to define in specific terms, the research priorities and expected outputs of the CP and would have in place the appropriate institutional arrangements.

### ***Key Points***

The SC agrees with the proponents that within the new research paradigm described in the proposal - one which advocates working closely with farmers, local institutions and relevant partners at the field sites - specific priorities can not at this stage, prior to in-field diagnosis and stakeholder agreement on the priorities for change, be expected without compromising the bottom-up, participatory research process itself.

There was considerable discussion about the nature and objectives of the CP, in particular, whether it was aimed more at development through dissemination and uptake of *existing* knowledge via new types of partnerships, or aimed more at knowledge creation and generation of IPGs. The SC felt strongly about the need for the latter and that the CP should focus on areas of CGIAR comparative advantage, including the generation of IPGs derived from research for sustainable poverty eradication. The SC understands that an effective partnership is a necessary precondition, to be followed by the scientific generation of outputs. It also acknowledges that the institutional learning from the formation of this partnership is a legitimate research activity of the CGIAR which can produce IPGs. In order to provide research leading to IPGs on institutional learning, the SSA CP is advised to seek research inputs from a partner skilled in research related to institutional development.

The SC notes that there is a considerable risk that IAR4D approach as described by the SSA CP may focus more on local public goods than on IPGs. The SC urges the SSA CP to clearly explore the development of IPGs through the purposeful selection of sites that provide a

transect in delivery variables (closeness to markets, infrastructure, institutional frameworks, social and economic conditions, etc.) so that generalisable lessons can be established from the otherwise “local activities”.

The SC recommends that the SSA CP be funded as an investment in research, namely a large scale experiment in institutional development for conducting more effective and efficient research, with the end objective being sustainable alleviation of rural poverty through the intermediate outcomes of NARS and CGIAR research, and development of a research system that effectively identifies and carries out research on the key needs in rural areas within different contextual situations. There is full agreement between the SC and the SSA CP proponents that the approval of the programme is at this stage only for a diagnostic phase of 18 months. The experiment will be initiated in three sites with three different contexts, and will initially focus on team building and training. It will be time-bound and will as a result have a detailed logframe prepared with milestones, and indicators that can be monitored. When the institutional arrangements have been put in place and specific research plans have been defined, the SC will evaluate the experiment and make a recommendation on continuation. This will be based on effectiveness in priority-setting, definition of the specific research to be conducted, identification and longer-term commitment of the partners to be involved, and the planned outputs and outcomes specified. Initial funding will be for eighteen months. FARA will make no financial commitment beyond the initial 18 months based on CGIAR funding. Funding for this diagnostic phase is recommended with the intention that after one year, the project will be reviewed by the SC, so that if a recommendation for continuation is made and endorsed at that time, the project could continue beyond the 18 month period with a smooth transition.

The summary budget for the first eighteen months (estimated at US \$4.8 million) and the major activities timeline for the diagnostic phase, as submitted by FARA in response to the proposed 18-month diagnostic phase, are attached. The Pilot Learning Site workplans, which are targeted for delivery to the SC after 12 months, are expected to document the following: Identified site problems/development constraints; entry points; research and development objectives; activities and milestones timelines; and science/technology to be used. This will include a logical framework, detailed budget, and the monitoring and evaluation process to be followed.

With respect to the budget, the SC has reviewed detailed budget tables provided by FARA for each of the major CP activities to be undertaken during the inception (diagnostic) phase, i.e., for the inception phase, full IAR4D actions, facilitation and mentoring, methodology analysis and dissemination, impact assessment, Programme Steering Committee and Programme Coordination. The budget appears to be reasonable for accomplishing the stated objectives during that time period.

The SC views this CP as potentially a major investment in institutional development. If successful, it represents a broadly applicable model for making research more relevant and effective in sustaining poverty alleviation through locally driven agriculturally research. In this strict sense of the word, it could be regarded as an ‘experimental activity’ - testing whether this new research paradigm can successfully address major constraints in the development, dissemination and uptake of research results. The ‘learning process’ component is fundamental and requires that all CP activities be thoroughly documented and performance indicators well defined throughout. Deriving generalisable lessons will be of

key importance. Special attention needs to be given to identifying appropriate methods with respect to observing, measuring and learning from setting up the programme.

There was some discussion about need and desirability for selection of three sites, as opposed to only one, since developing the proof of concept for the new paradigm is the focus of the work. The SC believes that there is merit in implementing the diagnostic phase at three sites rather than one but cautioned the proponents about the need to select the sites, and the areas within them, carefully, due to security risks. It also is important that the points of comparison between the three sites be identified explicitly right from the start and that appropriate means be put in place to make valid comparisons among sites

### ***Programme Evaluation***

It is suggested that the SC convene a review panel to evaluate performance at the end of one year. FARA has indicated that at that time the Programme Coordinator, the Programme Steering Committee, and the three Pilot Learning Teams will be in place, trained, and operating. The IAR4D structure and teams will also be in place and operating. Request for proposals will have been written for competitive bidding. The diagnostic phase will have been completed, with specific problems for research identified. Logframes will have been completed, with outputs and milestones specified by problem area (to cover the expected problem areas in biological/agronomic/horticultural, economics, institutions, policy and marketing domains).

The SC-commissioned external review of the CP would take place in January – February, 2006 and would include a visit to at least one of the Pilot Sites by panel members to assess progress and outcomes in the field at the site(s), as part of the review's overall assessment of the entire programme, e.g., institutional arrangements, research teams, partners' perceptions, and quality of the research proposed (logframes, etc.) over the next phase. The SC would discuss the review findings at its Spring 2006 meeting, reach its own conclusion and make a recommendation about the continuation of the CP to the ExCo in May, 2006. As the 18-month funding period would expire in June or July of 2006 (depending on when funding commences), a rapid response by ExCo and the Group would help ensure continued funding and minimal disruption for the CP in case the SC assessment is positive.

## SSA CP Financing Plan

### B.11.1 **Module 1 Funding and support for three Pilot Learning Teams (US\$000)**

		Year 1	Year 2	Total	<i>notes</i>
B.11.1.1	Inception phase	1,398	0	1,398	<i>a</i>
B.11.1.2	Full IAR4D actions	0	1,968	1,968	<i>b</i>
B.11.1.3	Facilitation and mentoring	279	132	411	<i>c</i>
B.11.1.4	Methodology analysis and dissemination	0	169	169	<i>d</i>
B.11.1.5	Information and knowledge management	0	0	0	<i>e</i>
B.11.1.6	Local awareness and capacity for IAR4D	0	0	0	<i>e</i>
B.11.1.7	Postgraduate exposure to IAR4D	0	0	0	<i>e</i>
B.11.1.8	Impact assessment	140	62	202	<i>f</i>
B.11.1.9	Programme Steering Committee	207	103.5	311	<i>g</i>
B.11.1.10	Programme Coordination	238	121.5	360	<i>g</i>
B.11.1.11	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,262</b>	<b>2,556</b>	<b>4,818</b>	

#### Notes:

- a. Start up activities for three pilot learning teams at US\$466,000 per team.
- b. Forty five percent of Year 2 budget for three pilot learning teams (US\$656 per team). This is 45% of the budget for Year 2 pending full approval of SSA CP but with consideration of the need to ensure the capacity to sustain momentum should there be a lag in disbursements for Phase II.
- c. Two-thirds of annual budget (\$44,000 per team), on assumption that more facilitation and mentoring will be needed in first six months as field work is launched.
- d. Full budget for year 2 activities, on assumption that if SSA CP is not renewed, full documentation of methodology will still be called for.
- e. Assuming the SSA CP is approved for full implementation, these activities will begin after the 18-month start-up phase.
- f. Over the 18-month period, assumes three person months of senior evaluator consultant time, six month of junior consultant time, and corresponding expenses. A workshop to present and discuss evaluation approach will take place in Year 2
- g. Assumes six months of Programme Coordination activity and one Programme Steering Committee meeting.



