



In this Issue:

Formal engagement of the SSA CP Cross-site Research Support Team (CRST) members

Post-doctoral fellows in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation recruited

Ade Freeman visits the PCU

Development of 2009-2010 SSA CP MTP

Approval of workplans and budget by PCU

Planning for the transfer of LI and MC roles to the SROs

Indicators and data collection tools for baseline surveys developed

New leader for the CIAT-led Taskforce

Updates from the Coordination Unit

Formal engagement of the SSA CP Cross-site Research Support Team (CRST) members

During the conception of the SSA CP, it was envisaged that the research teams will require backstopping in various areas such as: (i) organizational and institutional change; (ii) participatory monitoring and evaluation, (iii) impact assessment; (iv) capacity development; (v) knowledge and communication management, and (vi) integration and management of data to perform cross-site analysis and make program-wide inferences. These services were initially provided by “services providers” chosen from a roster of experts, who provided inputs through largely independent activities. However, feedback from the SSA CP research actors found the inputs provided by some consultants identified by the service providers unsatisfactory. There was also some concern about the way the consultants operated which left no room for continuity in the support extended to research actors. This dissatisfaction prompted FARA to consider alternative models of delivering research support to the research teams on the Program. The approach chosen by FARA has come to be known as the *cross-site research support team (CRST)* approach. This approach highlights the importance of having a core group of “specialists” who will be engaged to backstop all three pilot learning sites for the whole of the lifecycle of SSA CP, thus providing continuity of support. In the first run, three experts in the natural and social sciences have been formally engaged by the SSA CP. They are Dr. Jemimah Njuki, a Senior Social Scientist at CIAT in charge of PM&E, Mr. Peter Muraya, a Data Management Expert with the ICRAF/ILRI research methods group based in Nairobi, Kenya and Dr. Aliou Diagne, a Senior Impact Economist with WARDA based in Cotonou, Benin. As the implementation of the SSA CP picks up, other areas where expertise is needed will be identified leading to the engagement of new CRST members.

Post-doctoral fellows in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation recruited

FARA/SSA CP has recruited post-doctoral fellows in the area of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation. These social scientists will specifically: (i) facilitate the operation of innovation platforms (IP); (ii) track learning and change in the IP and research sites and (iii) collect and analyze data for testing the SSA CP hypotheses. Drs. Luke Olarinde (Nigerian) and Kefasi Nyikahadzoi (Zimbabwean) have accepted to work as postdoctoral fellows (PDF) within the SSA CP to be based at the KKM and ZMM pilot learning sites respectively. A third PDF to be based in the Lake Livu PLS is in the process of being recruited. In this regard, three agricultural research institutions have been contacted by FARA/SSA CP to act as host institutions for the post doctoral fellows. They are Institute of Agricultural Research, Zaria, Nigeria, Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Rwanda (ISAR), Kigali, Rwanda and Bunda College, Lilongwe, Malawi for the PDFs in KKM, Lake Livu and ZMM PLSs respectively.

Ade Freeman visits the PCU

Dr. Ade Freeman of ILRI visited the PCU in Accra during the quarter reported in this edition of our newsletter. The main purpose of the visit was to present highlights of the research conducted on behalf of the SSA CP by ILRI. ILRI had undertaken to backstop SSA CP by conducting research centered on identifying consistent strategies, entry points, and interventions that may be attractive for households and communities under different agro-climatic, market, and demographic contexts. The research also covered the identification of options that can be used to revive agriculture and spur growth in specific agricultural development contexts; supporting institutional arrangements; and policies that support technological change and pro-poor growth at the PLS. The research which was done with the Norwegian funding, enriched discussions on site selection for SSA CP projects.

Development of 2009-2010 SSA CP MTP

The SSA CP annually develops a rolling medium term plan (MTP) to articulate its research agenda, proposed workplan and budget. In previous years, the MTP covered three years. This year however, the MTP that will be developed will cover only two years, taking us to the proposed end of the current research phase of SSA CP, i.e. December 2010. The development of the MTP involves all the actors that contribute to the research, administrative and financial activities of SSA CP. This in effect means all of us. This year we will be drawing on the services of two consultants selected specifically for their experience in the preparation and review of CGIAR targeted MTPs as well as in the evaluation exercises related to the CGIAR and the Science Council. The process for the development of the 2009-2010 SSA CP commenced in March 2008.

Approval of workplans and budget by PCU

The FARA secretariat is pleased to report that the workplans and budgets received from the Taskforces working on SSA CP have been approved. Consequently, research activities based on the approved workplans have commenced in all sites. All activities in the approved plans are geared towards the proof of the concept of integrated agricultural research for development (IAR4D). Our proof of concept is basically coming out of the practice of IAR4D itself. The design adopted for the proof of concept will capture “before and after” as well as “with and without” effects of IAR4D for a combination of qualitative and quantitative parameters which have been chosen by the group.

Planning for the transfer of LI and MC roles to the SROs

As part of FARA’s intervention to reduce transaction costs in the SSA CP, the FARA Executive Board endorsed the transfer of Pilot Learning Site (PLS) Lead Institution (LI) and Management Committee (MC) functions to the Sub-regional agricultural research organisations (SROs). In this regard, FARA has started negotiations with the LI and SROs to ensure a smooth transition by January 2009.

News from Pilot Learning Sites

Indicators and data collection tools for baseline surveys developed

Each PLS organized workshop to identify the monitoring indicators and data collection tools required for the baseline surveys between January and March 2008. The workshops involved all the taskforces in each of the PLS working together to develop the monitoring indicators as well as the data collection tools.

New leader for the CIAT-led Taskforce

Dr. Andy Farrow has been acting as the new taskforce leader for the CIAT-led taskforce for Lake Kivu. He replaces Dr. Pascal Saginga. Andy Farrow is a GIS expert. We welcome Dr. Farrow aboard the SSA CP.

For more information on the above events, please contact Dr. Monty Jones by email: mjones@fara-africa.org

Endnote

Inside SSA CP is a quarterly publication of the SSA CP’s coordination unit. It is aimed at sharing information on activities and developments within the SSA CP to promote collaboration in our multi-stakeholder and multi-location program. It will be circulated among insiders and friends of the SSA CP. Information published in *Inside SSA CP* is gathered from activities carried out in the SSA CP’s Pilot Learning Sites. Members of these teams are encouraged to contribute news items from their teams by sending such items to the coordination unit.