



**Africa RISING West Africa Steering Committee Meeting
25 March, 2015
Accra, Ghana**

Minutes of Meeting

April, 2015

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Present

1. Robert Asiedu, IITA - Chair
2. Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon, IITA - Secretary
3. Jerry Glover, USAID
4. Apurba Shee, IFPRI (representing Carlo Azzari)
5. Abdou Tenkouano, AVRDC
6. Birhanu Zemadim, ICRISAT
7. Asamoah Larbi, IITA
8. Jonathan Odhong', IITA
9. Diarisso Niamoye Yaro, IER
10. Kehinde Makinde, AGRA
11. Edward Decker, CSIR (representing CSIR Director General)

Apologies

1. Carlo Azzari, IFPRI
2. Ousmane Ndoye, CORAF

Agenda

1. Welcome of PSC members (R. Asiedu, Chair PSC)
2. Follow up on action points from last meeting (R. Asiedu)
3. [Management and implementation issues encountered since last PSC meeting](#) (I. Hoeschle-Zeledon, Project Coordinator; A. Larbi, Chief Scientist)
4. Reflection on the [planning and review meeting](#) of the previous day, approval of draft work plans presented and budget (R. Asiedu)
5. Status of discussion on Measuring the “sustainable” in sustainable intensification (J. Glover)
[Implementation of Data Management Plan; use of Project Monitoring Mapping Tool](#) (A. Shee, IFPRI)
6. [Communications update](#) (Jonathan Odhong, Project Communication Specialists)
7. Briefing about ESA Steering Committee meeting and PCT and SAG meetings (I. Hoeschle-Zeledon)
8. PSC membership (replacement of AVRDC, new rep from CSIR, Communication, IFPRI)
9. Next activities and upcoming events (I. Hoeschle-Zeledon)
10. Any Other Business (AOB)

The meeting started at 8:30 am and ended at 12:50 pm. Robert Asiedu chaired the meeting.

1. Welcome

Asiedu officially opened the meeting and welcomed members to the third steering committee meeting. He commended the project implementation progress and also thanked the steering committee members for their continued role in ensuring project implementation remained on course. Asiedu also reminded members of the upcoming program-wide external review commissioned by USAID later in the year and noted that the outcomes of the exercise will inform decisions by the donor with regards to funding a second phase of the program.

2. Follow up on action points from the previous meeting

Partner's monthly meetings

It was noted that project partners had not been regularly holding monthly meetings as was advised by the steering committee last year. Larbi explained that while the original recommendation for partners to hold monthly meetings was a good one, due to various factors the meetings had failed to take place. He proposed that the earlier decision be adjusted so that the teams should aim to have a meeting or a team telephone call at least once every two months.

Action

- Zeledon to remind Research team Coordinators they have to hold regular team meetings or calls at least once in every two months. The minutes from these meetings or calls have to be shared in a timely manner with the Program Coordinator information and subsequent upload to the project wiki page.

Reporting timelines for AVRDC

Zeledon informed that she had explained to Rouamba from AVRDC that partner reporting deadlines are set in such a way that IITA can report timely to USAID. Partners are expected to report the status of the project implementation at the point of time of the report, independently whether activities are completed or not.

Review of the DANIDA project

Larbi reported that he hadn't been invited to the review of the DANIDA project. Makinde informed that the project has been terminated by now.

IFPRI baseline surveys for Ghana and Mali

Members were briefed that the baseline surveys for the two countries had been completed. Some of the data had been presented at the review and planning meeting the previous day. However, to encourage usability of the data by scientists, it was proposed that IFPRI prepares a summary of the data that has been analyzed and share it with the scientists.

Action

- Shee to prepare the summary of the already analyzed data and share it with all the project partners by end of April, 2015.

Exchange visits

The exchange visit to project sites in Tanzania had not taken place. The planned exchange visit by the Mali research team to Ghana also did happen. Larbi explained to the committee the reasons for this. It was proposed that a second attempt be made to hold the exchange visit to Ghana in 2015.

Action

- Zeledon and Larbi to make a decision by end of June on when the exchange visit to Ghana can take place this year.

Completion of the farming systems analysis work

It was planned to have this work completed by a PhD Student. Due to various factors, the project was not successful in finding a qualified candidate for PhD studies at Wageningen University. As a result, the project management made a decision to use part of the funds to support the MSc studies of the

Research Associate Socio-Economics (Shaibu Mellon) working with the project in Ghana Wageningen University will provide another PhD student to come to Ghana for several months to complete the research .

M&E and Project Monitoring Mapping Tool

The Project Monitoring and Mapping Tool (PMMT) is in place. Training on its use has been carried out but seems to be insufficient. Researchers have been requested to upload metadata. The data management plan has been adopted by the Program Coordination Team and compliance with its provisions will become part of all new partner contracts.

Action:

- IFPRI to provide more training on PMMT

Gender strategy

Members were informed that the gender strategy developed by Humidtropics has been shared with the USAID gender specialist who gave some useful feedback. This strategy has been adopted by the PCT for Africa RISING. Africa RISING now has a gender specialist on board (G. Fischer) and she will develop an implementation plan.

Steering committee membership

Invitation to AVRDC and IER to the steering committee was done. Larbi also briefed the members that he had had a meeting with the new CSIR Director General and he had expressed firm commitment to ensure maximum participation by CSIR in the subsequent steering committee meetings. A representative from CSIR (E. Decker) represented the CSIR Director General at the meeting. The committee decided to extend the tenure of AVRDC by another year.

Action

- Zeledon to remind the CSIR Director General to nominate a permanent representative for the steering committee.

Execution of agreements (Mali)

Zemadim briefed the members of the decision by ICRISAT management to increase its overhead charges for fund transactions to 16.7%. He noted that this will have implications in the execution of some agreements. Committee members discussed this development and advised that all project partners be alerted about this development and its implications in regards to their agreements with ICRISAT.

Action

- Zemadim to brief project partners.

Write up on scalable technologies

The write up on scalable technologies hasn't been done. Glover said that this was very important, but cautioned the team working on the write ups to ensure they are very sure that the technologies represented in the write up as scalable are attractive and adoptable by farmers. He explained that this was because these write ups will be used by the USAID country missions as the basis of funding the scaling up of these technologies and therefore the reputation and credibility of Africa RISING project hinged so much on this.

Action

- Larbi to oversee completion of this activity by 30 August 2015.

Finalization of the West Africa project document

The project document was developed and circulated to all project partners last September. Some comments were received and improvements to the document are underway. However, Larbi noted that the proposed theory of change/impact pathway format by Jim Ellis-Jones was complicated and that he didn't have the expertise to complete it.

Action

- Larbi to complete revision of the project document by 30 April 2015, he will then circulate it within the broader team of project partners for further comments, after which he will collate the second round of comments again before delivering a final version by 30 June 2015.
- The theory of change/impact pathway will be developed at program level and will be considered as part of the agenda for the Africa RISING retreat on 2-5 June 2015. An update on this will be given at the next steering committee meeting.

Challenges with financial reporting by some of the university partners

Zeledon explained some of the challenges she has been experiencing with some of the national partners, including universities on financial reporting. Members agreed that a re-think of how to support students implementing Africa RISING activities from the universities was necessary going forward.

Action

- To reduce the instances of poor financial reporting by partners from the universities, the committee decided that henceforth all students being supported by the project will be registered with the IITA training unit and all funds administered through the training unit. The universities will only receive the tuition fees while the university faculty will be involved in the supervision of students. Zeledon to enforce this decision.

3. Reflections on the [planning and review meeting](#) of the previous day, approval of draft work plans presented and budget

Reflections

Glover: Teams seem to be working much better from the appearance on the discussions. However, there appears to be very few activities on soil health other than on fertilizer combinations. Below 1.1% organic matter soils are not responsive to fertilizer. ADVANCE is looking at cover crops. Organic matter is a standard component of measurements for soil health.

Tenkouano: It would be good for the program to define what "farmer's practice" means in the context of Africa RISING. The idea of using recommended practices (farmer's practice) as a control may not be correct as many may not be updated.

Shee: The project is testing a lot of technologies which are supply driven rather than demand driven. It may be important at this stage to study farmers' willingness to pay for the technologies.

Larbi: Fertilizer trials were only done for the newly released varieties. And there is only one recommended practice. It was to mainly look at early maturing, mid and late maturing. There is a government recommended blanket for maize etc. Sometimes that is what the extensionists go and tell farmers. All the trials in Ghana have used what the farmer actually does regularly with guidance from

the Agricultural Extension Officers. On the issue of conducting more demand driven research; some community analysis and ranking of technologies was done and also the platforms too now develop proposals for some of the research that they would like done. So in a way there is some progress in having demand driven research in the project.

Glover: At the beginning, the work in the program was very demand driven, but as scientists came with suggestion it created a tilt towards supply driven research. In part the farmers' requests at this initial stage were that scientists address all the various challenges they faced which forced the scientists to prioritize. This created a perception that again now the work is less demand driven. I agree too that more cost benefit analysis and ex-ante studies of these technologies need to be done. IFPRI can help play a role in ensuring that there is more demand driven studies/activities going on in the program.

Asiedu: Can we bring more focus to the research and the technologies that work?

Tenkouano: We are focused but we respond to many different situations.

Yaro: The approach used by Africa RISING for incorporating farmer's views while setting research priorities through the platforms is similar in some ways to what we do at IER in Mali. Farmers usually have their meetings before the rainy season, come up with their own challenges and share them with IER. Based on these suggestions, the institution therefore works together with them to address some of these challenges.

Tenkouano: The whole process/approach used by Africa RISING e.g. Innovation Platforms, Mother-Baby-trials also needs to be evaluated. This will be important for knowing how well these approaches are working or not. Assessing this at various levels will be quite important.

Larbi: This is work under RO3. We have no research done yet on which approaches have worked elsewhere. We are lacking the expertise to do it.

Approval of draft work plans presented and budgets

Committee members took note of the fact that there were certain themes where new activities had been added to the work plans that had been presented. The members also discussed the separate, but related issue of the addition of the new theme 3 to the Mali work plan. Zemadim explained the circumstances that led to the addition of the new theme. Concerns about funding for the new theme and its operation were then discussed.

Action

- ICRISAT to revise the proposal for theme 3, look for linkages with other partners like IER and ILRI then resubmit the proposal to the Chief Scientist by 15 April, 2015.
- Glover to call USAID Mali Mission to find out interest of the mission in livestock activities in Mali. Yaro to find out whether IER already has a grant from the Mission.
- All other work plans with additional activities to be reviewed by Zeledon, Larbi and Zemadim for relevance and decisions made by 15 April 2015 on whether to include the new activities in the current implementation period.

Project budget for October 2014 to September 2015

Zeledon presented a brief overview of the budget. She explained that it wasn't the final version because some adjustments on it were still pending.

4. Status of discussion on measuring the “sustainable” in sustainable intensification

Glover informed the committee that discussions on how to measure sustainable intensification were still ongoing. The most recent of a series of meetings was held in February 2015 in San Jose, California. He noted that no timelines had been fixed yet on completion of the activity, but it will be a critical aspect/issue of focus in the second phase of the project. He also stressed that USAID was expecting Africa RISING to be leader in this discussion together with the Sustainable Intensification Innovation Lab at Kansas State University.

5. Management and implementation issues

Zeledon made a presentation on some of the challenges being faced by the project management. She highlighted the following:

- Late submission of work plans last year which led to delayed approval and issuance of partner contracts
- Some partners still don't adhere to reporting deadlines
- Submission of poor quality reports by some partners
- Summary report on baseline survey findings in Ghana and Mali expected by scientists
- Change of staff at partner institutions (for example IWMI and AVRDC last year)
- Opportunities for exchange visits to Tanzania and Ghana were missed
- Identification of a PhD student for studies at Wageningen University failed
- Key partners in some cases not present in action countries
- Lack of integration of research sites and scientists in Mali
- Platforms are not yet operational
- Capacity/Commitment of SARI in Ghana
- Alignment with other USAID initiatives not yet operational e.g. with ATT and ADVANCE in Ghana, Innovation Labs (Sustainable Intensification, Mechanization, Irrigation, Post-harvest)

Action

- Zeledon to write to CSIR Director General to present situation of SARI involvement

6. Implementation of Data Management Plan; use of Project Monitoring Mapping Tool

Shee reported to the committee that in the past year, IFPRI had managed to complete the following:

- Development of the PMMT
- Feed the Future indicators data for FY2014 were compiled and aggregated to a mega-site level through the PMMT
- Five in-country trainings were conducted in 2014 in Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Ghana, and Ethiopia on use of PMMT
- ARBES data have been collected from all program countries (except Zambia),
- AR data management through ILRI's CKAN was ongoing

In response to the presentation, the committee members also raised the following issues of concern with regards to the use of the PMMT:

- No training has been offered for the French speakers in Mali. This has in some ways affected use of the PMMT. There were also concerns about how the initial round of trainings was done; this could have impacted the subsequent use of this tool.

- Glover emphasized that USAID prefers less activities with good data management to many activities and not having resources for data management.

Action

- IFPRI team to identify a resource person (from each of the project countries) to get well trained on use of PMMT by the IFPRI team so that he/she can become sort of on ground support for the partners. This would ease stress, especially with the project teams, of waiting for one training per year by the IFPRI team.
- IFPRI team to address the issue of bandwidth limitation which was also cited as a major barrier for data upload into the system.
- Mali team should consider employing a data entry officer. The Ghana team has already employed somebody to do data entry for them.
- Larbi to share the terms of reference for the data entry officer in Ghana with Zemadim.

7. Communications Update

Odhong' reported on the communications activities accomplished in 2014 and also presented a framework for the draft communication strategy for the project. He highlighted the following challenges in implementation of communication work:

- Some partners still don't use the branding guidelines consistently
- Need more support for communication e.g. stories and updates from Mali and Ghana field activities aren't forthcoming
- More capacity building needed to increase use of some of the internal project communication tools
- No established criteria for determining "best-bet" technologies that the communications can dedicate resources to and build strategic activities around.

Action

- Odhong' to contact the communications personnel from the partnering institutions who will then provide him with information and write ups on their activities for use in the Africa RISING website and other communication materials and tools. The scientists and site coordinators should facilitate this process.
- The publication guidelines being developed for the project need to be shared with partners for their information and reference.

8. Briefing about ESA Steering Committee meeting, PCT and SAG meetings

Zeledon presented key discussions and recommendations from the previous ESA steering committee meeting, the Program Coordination Team, and the Scientific Advisory Group.

ESA Steering Committee Meeting held on 10 September, 2014

Key recommendations from the meeting were as follows:

- Visualization of SI: Program Communications team to come up with a suggestion on how this task can be completed
- Data management/sharing: To become part of new partner contracts
- Teams need to conduct monthly meetings and share minutes with the Program Coordinator for information and subsequent upload to the project wiki page
- IFPRI to provide gender disaggregated data for further analysis to strengthen gender research,

Program Coordination Team meetings held in 2014

Key recommendations from the meetings were as follows:

- Use of Africa RISING communication tools needs to be improved
- Exploring opportunities to work with USAID mission funded projects; find ways to better present specific deliverables
- Revision of WA project document and logframe to be completed by December 2014
- All project logframes need to be revised annually
- Access of project documents on website needs to be easier
- Organize workshop on sustainability indicators (few specific, measurable indicators)
- Organize a program-wide scientific symposium (Oct/Nov 2015)
- Attend a learning visit to CSISA project in India and Bangladesh
- Hold a phase 2 planning meeting (retreat in June 2015)
- Data sharing plan to be approved and binding to all partners, included in sub-contracts.

Science Advisory Group meeting held in July and November 2014

The following feedback points emerged from the Science Advisory Group:

- Focus of the research: many supply-driven technologies
- Project should think about possible partners who can be effective in scaling up
- There is limited assessment within the project of the social and economic analyses of technologies to help farmers make decisions on risks and implications
- Research hypotheses need to be revised for testability and linkage to objectives
- Projects should involve more social science partners, capacity building of partners that goes beyond formal degree, partner more with policy makers to facilitate change
- Wondered whether agricultural intensification with market orientation is a viable option for resource poor farmers with no incentives given
- The projects need to use identified farm typologies in their research
- Is the involvement of female farmers by chance or intended?
- More efforts should be put to get private entrepreneurs involved in the platforms.

9. Status of Project Steering Committee membership

Zeledon gave updates regarding changes in membership of the project steering committee.

- New Communication Officer, Odhong' is joining the steering committee
- CSIR DG to nominate a permanent representative for the steering committee
- CORAF has not been able to take part in the previous meetings, should membership be given to another partner?
- IFPRI – C. Azzari remains the official steering committee member
- AVRDC's term is ending in September 2015

Action

- AVRDC's term in the steering committee be extended by one more year.
- Zeledon to write to CSIR DG requesting name of representative

10. Next activities and upcoming events

Zeledon briefed the members of the following upcoming activities within the program and project:

- Submission of technical reports to donor (April)
- Regional log frame and project doc need revision

- Finalization of 2015/16 work plans by 15 April, 2015
- Approval by Steering Committee within one week
- New partner contracts immediately after work plan approval by steering committee
- PCT meetings April and June
- SAG meeting - date to be determined
- Exchange visit to Ethiopia on watershed/landscape management (April)
- Program learning event (October, 2015)
- Program scientific symposium (October, 2015)
- Program retreat (June, 2015)
- Contract reviews (for Chief Scientist, Coordinator)
- USAID commissioned Program Evaluation – date to be determined

11. Any Other Business

Glover noted that there were ongoing discussions with IFPRI for the monitoring function to be shifted back to the researchers. This move could free up some funds for IITA and ILRI to hire data managers. This discussion hasn't yet been concluded, but the committee will be appropriately briefed once all discussions between IFPRI and USAID are concluded on this issue. He emphasized the fact that data management is currently a major priority issue for USAID and will form part of the review criteria during the USAID commissioned external review of the project.

Zeledon invited members to ponder the issue of providing inputs to farmers (especially those in the baby trials). How does it help adoption, sustainability and does it really make the technology “attractive”? When the project ends, are the farmers expected to be able to afford the inputs? A decision on this issue was deferred for discussion at the upcoming Africa RISING retreat in June.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:40 pm. The date and venue of the next meeting will be communicated to members in due course.

Ibadan, 7 April 2015

I. Hoeschle-Zeledon (Secretary) and J. Odhong'

PSC Africa RISING West Africa Project