



**SC Commentary to CIFOR'S Strategic Plan  
and CIFOR Response**

**SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT  
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**CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH**

**CIFOR Management's Response to Science Council comments on  
CIFOR's STRATEGY 2008-2018  
'Making a Difference for Forests and People'  
CIFOR  
September 02, 2008**

**General**

We appreciate the SC's conclusion that "CIFOR has developed a credible strategy which conveys a thorough appreciation of current thinking of forest/livelihood/poverty issues". CIFOR also understands many of the concerns raised on specific issues such as partnerships, and believes that our other planning documents adequately address these concerns.

**The level of detail of the Strategy**

CIFOR appreciates the SC's interest in more details than the Strategy provides on certain topics. The planning framework adopted to prepare CIFOR's new strategy was explicit in its intent that the outcome would be a dynamic, flexible and responsive strategy that would allow CIFOR to position itself to respond to a changing environment. For more information on the process that we used, please see *Strategic Leadership for Nonprofit Organizations, Stanford Graduate School of Business*, which is available at <http://www.gsb.stanford.edu/exed/sino>.

The strategy process was as much about an engaging process that facilitated healthy discussion and debates about CIFOR's future as it was about the final product. CIFOR's BOT decided that the resulting strategy document should be clear, concise and effective for different audiences (not just the CGIAR but other stakeholders, including prospective donors, private sector, regional bodies and governments). This necessitated that many of the details that the SC sought couldn't be included in the main Strategy document.

CIFOR also produced a separate internal Alignment Plan that lays out the specific operational steps CIFOR will take over the next two years to ensure smooth transitions in all areas of the strategy such as retaining existing and cultivating new partnerships, capacity building and engagement with the CGIAR. In addition, the Plan integrates measures necessary to respond to recommendations from the 2006 EPMP that remain outstanding.

**System Priority alignment**

The SC's concern that the System Priorities are not sufficiently referenced in the plan is understandable, but our decision to leave it out was intentional. Given that the CGIAR System Priorities still have shifting bounds, due to the ongoing Framework Plan development process, as well as the likelihood that the Priorities might be altered by the CGIAR Change Management process through the introduction of new "Strategic Objectives", we decided not to explicitly present alignment of the Domains to Priorities that would likely become obsolete within the initial portion of the Strategy period. However, the System Priorities were

considered during the planning process, and our most recent MTP illustrates our total alignment with them.

### **Priority-setting process**

The SC's suggestion that it would have been useful to include more details about the priority-setting process in the strategy documents accords with earlier drafts of the Strategy, which included such details. Annex 1 to this response provides the text on priority setting contained in the draft final strategy document submitted to CIFOR's Board of Trustees in May 2008 for approval. The BOT considered this to be too much detail for the wider audience, and, as a result, it was deleted. The process included both a modified Delphi approach to overall ranking of domains, as well as a structured scoring process against specific criteria by Strategy Steering Committee members.

Similarly, the draft final strategy document presented to the BOT in May 2008 also provided a short explanation on why each of the seven research domains not included in the strategy was not selected (See Annex II for details). This section was also removed on the recommendation of the BOT, as it was considered to be of little interest to most external audiences.

### **Geographic distribution**

We note the concern that there is no indication of a strategic analysis to justify the geographic distribution of CIFOR research programmes. Our starting point was the analysis undertaken for the CIFOR's 1996 strategy. We built on this analysis with data and information on emerging global forestry trends highlighted in the review of the external environment and an articulation of Domain-level impact pathways. The outcome of these inputs was a compelling justification to continue working in the three major humid forest blocks (the Amazon Basin, the Congo Basin and Southeast Asia) as well as the African dry forests. The strategy process went further by prioritizing countries for research and a subset for impact for each Domain, but we did not include it in the strategy document as it would quickly be outdated. The whole point of the strategy and its alignment plan is to achieve focus and avoid making decisions based on funding opportunities alone.

### **Partnerships**

We agree with the observation that the discussion on the subject of partnerships is not very revealing in terms of the Center's partnering strategies. We could have been much more explicit regarding the other partnerships. However, we intentionally did not do this for the same reason we did not explicitly present alignment of the Domains to Priorities. Partnerships are dynamic and are driven by the research agenda.

We will make every effort to further clarify selection criteria and capacity development benefits of the partnerships as part of our alignment process.

While it would appear that the strategy sees little value in linkages to the CGIAR System as a whole, CIFOR does recognise the many benefits of being part of the System and actively participates and contributes to many System-level activities. With respect to the Challenge Programmes, CIFOR has actively participated in all stages of the first and second rounds of relevant Challenge Programme development, but has not yet been successful in leading a CP or a programmatic component within a CP. Currently, we are fully engaged in the Climate Change CP. CIFOR management have gone further to explicitly state that the CPs and the Climate Change Initiative will be the most effective vehicles for CIFOR's inter-centre collaboration on climate change.

As correctly noted CIFOR does not intend to create a capacity-building unit and will continue with the current policy of carrying out capacity building as an integral part of research activities. As part of its Alignment Plan, CIFOR will require the Domain Leaders to produce a plan that defines capacity-building targets, and how they will be achieved and measured. We anticipate that this plan will identify appropriate partners for capacity-building activities. For example, universities constitute an important category of partner that makes use of CIFOR's research findings in their training programmes. A means of tracking capacity-building activities at the Domain level and in performance contracts will also be developed.

Finally, CIFOR thanks the SC for the thoughtful and constructive comments and looks forward to further engagement and discussion.

## ANNEX 1: Priority Setting Process

The process of research prioritization followed five steps.

First, a preliminary long-list of research topics—or domains—was developed by CIFOR scientists on the basis of three inputs 1) Task Force 1’s articulation of CIFOR’s mission and goals; 2) Task Force 2’s analysis of the external environment in which CIFOR operates; and 3) suggestions elicited from stakeholders and partners through interviews and an on-line survey. Taking into account the above inputs, thirteen candidate research domains were identified (see Box 1).

### Box 1. Candidate research domains before prioritization using Delphi

#### **Research Domains**

1. Maintain and expand forest-based carbon sinks
2. Achieve livelihood improvements and forest conservation in responses to climate change (adaptation)
3. Guide the biofuels revolution for forest conservation and development
4. Ensure sustainable income generation from small-scale & community forestry
5. Harness industrial scale forest plantations for sustainable development
6. Achieve conservation and development in Integrated Landscape Management
7. Put forests to work for water resources management
8. Address corruption and weak governance through the forestry sector
9. Build capacity to deal with contemporary resource management issues in national forestry systems
10. Recognize, protect and improve the contributions of forests to human health
11. Trade and Investment
12. Manage degraded and deforested land (accelerated natural regeneration; secondary forest management)
13. Sustainable forest management (natural forest commercial timber harvesting; poverty alleviation; certification)

Second, teams of CIFOR scientists with requisite thematic knowledge were asked to write domain narratives using a common template comprising: (1) problem context, challenges and opportunities for CIFOR; (2) overall goal and scientific value; (3) target client/users and anticipated impacts; (4) geographic focus and timeframe; and (5) overall feasibility in terms of funding and in-house research capacity. The draft domain narratives were shared among staff and were individually discussed and refined during CIFOR’s 2007 Annual Meeting.

## Box 2. Criteria used by Delphi panel to prioritize research domains<sup>1</sup>

### Criteria related to CIFOR and the external environment

*Political Feasibility:* prominence on the public agenda; demand for research on the issue; existence of relevant policy processes that might use the outputs

*Legitimacy and support (fundability):* fit within CIFOR's mandate; existence of social and political support to function effectively within this area; availability of funding for this kind of work

*Promotion and Enhancement:* potential to raise CIFOR's profile; existence of a niche for CIFOR's leadership in the area; potential to increase CIFOR's capacity

*Organizational Credibility and Capacity:* CIFOR's credibility in the area; potential for CIFOR to define the research agenda; CIFOR's ability to mobilize resources, partners and organizational framework to achieve impact in the area

### Criteria relating to the research domain

*Justice/Equity Consideration:* opportunity to enhance the equity of outcomes; magnitude of improvements in the equity of decision-making; likelihood to amplify the voices of women, minorities, or other disadvantaged or marginalised groups

*Contribution to Human Well-being:* likely magnitude of impact on specific target groups

*Expected Economic Benefits:* magnitude of economic benefits (area, number of people)

*Environmental Benefits:* magnitude of environmental benefit ( e.g. increasing forest cover, carbon storage, biodiversity, water quality and yield, and soil fertility and integrity, etc.)

*Geographic Relevance:* How widely applicable will the outputs of work in this domain be

*Novelty/Innovation:* Scientific importance; potential for introducing new thinking and action on the issues

Third, the Delphi approach was applied to select an indicative list of key research domains. The Delphi was moderated externally and carried out throughout September 2007. It comprised an iterative, anonymous process involving three separate panels. Two of the panels were composed of CIFOR scientists (one of globally-recruited scientists and a second consisted of nationally-recruited and junior scientists) while a third panel consisted of senior management and two BOT members. Narratives of the 13 domains and a set of selection criteria were provided to panel members, who were asked to score the degree to which domains merit inclusion into CIFOR's future research

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<sup>1</sup> The criteria were provided to the Delphi panel members to consider, but they were not required to score the domains against the criteria.

portfolio. Three iterations took place during which panel members scored, provided the rationales for their scores, and reviewed the rationales and scores from other panelists. Five research domains consistently scored high with a high level of intra-panel consensus, while five were consistently given low scores. Three domains were subject to a wide divergence of opinion within and among the panels.

Fourth, a structured scoring exercise was undertaken by members of the Strategy Steering Committee against criteria identified by CIFOR scientists and management. These included the scale of potential benefits, relevance to CIFOR's revised mission, fundability, and complementarity/spillover benefits to the rest of CIFOR's work.

Finally, Strategy Task Force leaders selected the following six priority research domains on the basis of the outcomes of the first four steps for inclusion in CIFOR's future research agenda:

1. Enhancing the role of forests in climate mitigation (with a focus on REDD)
2. Enhancing the role of forests in adaptation to climate change
3. Increasing rural income generation through small-scale and community forestry
4. Achieving conservation and development in integrated landscape management
5. Managing impacts of globalized trade and investment on forests
6. Shifting the paradigm for management of tropical production forests

## **Annex II: Excluded Research Domains**

Out of the 13 research domains considered during the strategy process, seven were not selected for inclusion in CIFOR's research agenda. The excluded domains are outlined briefly below.

### **Guide the biofuels revolution for forest conservation and development**

The Biofuels topic is globally important and CIFOR needs to track how biofuel production impacts on forests and the forest-dependent poor. CIFOR's previous work on the underlying drivers of forest conversion is pertinent to the biofuel debate and can be a useful source of information for the global community. Yet, the consensus was that the scope of the research is too narrow (as a driver of deforestation) to justify a domain. Further, the biofuels topic clearly transcends forests (e.g., implications for food prices and nutrition), thus other organizations (such as IFPRI) may be better positioned to address those issues and be active in biofuels-related policy arenas. Finally, biofuels research can be incorporated, as appropriate, as a driver of deforestation under the climate change mitigation and trade and investment domains. Research can be tailored to influence policy by focusing, for example, on developing forest-related sustainability criteria for biofuel production.

## **Harness industrial scale plantations for sustainable development**

While recognizing that plantations will be the source of at least 40 percent of industrial roundwood in the future, the primary focus of this proposed domain is on the sustainability of large-scale industrial plantations and not on issues of community wellbeing and equity that are at the core of CIFOR's mission. A real concern in trying to work for the benefit of smallholders is the tendency of private companies engaged in industrial scale plantations to 'close doors' when researchers are looking at sensitive issues of partnerships between communities and corporations.

There are options for combining elements of this domain with other domains. The domain on Trade and Investment can incorporate elements dealing with how to condition investments in plantations on social and environmental sustainability criteria. The domain sustainable income generation from small scale and community forestry offers possibilities to address issues related to reducing barriers faced by small-scale producers to improve productivity and access to markets. And finally the domain dealing with climate change adaptation offers another possibility to incorporate research issues related to where to establish plantations and what species to plant.

## **Put forests to work for water resources management**

Although water is an important environmental service, the Delphi panel members noted that research on the topic should be integrated into other forest functions. There was agreement among the panel members that there are many international actors doing research in integrated watershed management in forested catchments, including ICRAF, and the topic is currently being researched from many angles by others. Furthermore, scientific findings have weakened the positive perception of forest-water interactions. Hence the marginal returns for CIFOR investing into this domain would be very limited for the years to come. Yet clear links to other domains were identified. These include climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as integrated management approaches in fragmented landscapes—particularly in the context of research on payment for watershed services.

## **Address corruption and weak governance through the forestry sector**

While corruption is a major issue behind unsustainable and unfair forest policies and practices in many countries, there was consensus that CIFOR's research on this topic should not be organized as a separate domain. Corruption will be a cross-cutting research topic, and aspects of the issue that are relevant to the impact pathways of each research domain could be covered under that particular domain. The bulk of CIFOR's current research on corruption will be subsumed under the trade and investment domain. This decision was based on: the need to understand the issue in context; challenges related to methods and data; and the necessity of framing the issue in a way that would engage key stakeholders.

## **Build capacity to deal with contemporary resource management issues in national forestry systems**

This research domain as originally proposed focused on collecting data on current investments in forestry research in developing countries, and analyzing various constraints on the effectiveness of forestry research institutions. Participants in the strategy process concluded that such a research focus was not a strategic priority for CIFOR; instead, as described above, discussions of the proposed domain led to agreement on a less-ambitious “project”-level activity to propose an institutional reform agenda to meet contemporary challenges in the forest sector.

The decision to exclude this domain does not in any way reflect a diminution of CIFOR’s commitment to undertake capacity building as part of our mandate. CIFOR will continue to integrate capacity-building into its research, outreach, and partnership activities. In this regard, priority research domains will mainstream capacity building in a targeted manner into impact pathways.

## **Recognize, protect and improve the contributions of forests to human health**

In the Delphi process this domain had a final mean ranking outside the top 3 rankings across all panels. Being an important component of human well-being, health is likely to surface in many of the CIFOR research domains. However, we decided not to have a domain on forests and health since we do not believe that CIFOR has a comparative advantage to engage public health policy-makers and health practitioners to the level that a health-focused domain would require to achieve impact. There are a number of other very strong groups who work on forests and health, and who have major connections with the medical profession. The Delphi panel members also gave useful comments for excluding this domain: the proposed research on the effectiveness of traditional medicines falls far outside of CIFOR’s comparative advantage; the linkages between reproductive choices and forests do not seem logical; and it is unclear who the audience would be for the proposed research.

## **Managing degraded and deforested lands**

CIFOR has done a significant amount of research in this area in the past, and we feel that the field has now moved on to a phase of implementing the results of research. The Delphi panel members noted that the domain does not lend itself to generating global public goods because the insights needed to implement any intervention are largely site specific. Moreover, there are many other international actors engaged on the topic. Thus research on rehabilitation can be easily carried out by national research institutions or universities. In spite of the current extent of degraded forest area being globally significant, research on forest rehabilitation within CIFOR can be more effectively integrated into broader livelihood and environmental services research. For example, one approach would be to include rehabilitation into mitigation and adaptation to climate change research as well in integrated landscape management.

## SCIENCE COUNCIL OF THE CGIAR

### Comments on CIFOR's STRATEGIC PLAN 2008-18

#### *'Making a Difference for Forests and People'*

SC Secretariat, August 27, 2008

#### *General comments*

The SC considers that CIFOR has developed a credible strategy which conveys a thorough appreciation of current thinking of forest/livelihood/poverty issues. The Council congratulates the center on producing a good plan and on the fact that the center went through a highly participatory process in developing it.

Although the Plan does not discuss the linkages with CGIAR Priorities the *research areas* identified within the six priority research domains are consistent with CGIAR goals and all merit attention. The *plan development process* involved extensive discussions among staff, outside stakeholders and partners. At some point, it involved a Delphi, or modified Delphi process with an appointed Delphi panel. The overwhelming issue that emerged from the process is climate change issues related to forests. The second most important one is forest governance, including the trend towards decentralization of governance in many countries. Other prominent issues also were mentioned. All of these appear to be adequately reflected in the strategy. However, the process used in moving from concerns of stakeholders to specific priority research domains and sub problems on which CIFOR will work during the Plan period is not discussed in the Plan. More information on the priority setting process would have been helpful. For example, the reader is informed that 6 out of 13 potential areas made the priority agenda. Of the seven that did not make the cut, only two are listed. Which criteria were used to eliminate the seven losing propositions remains unclear. One of the criteria for elimination was fundability. The SC wonders why a topic that meets all other criteria should be taken off the agenda and how the Center could know whether fundability is a sustained constraint. The external environment is very volatile and what is not fundable today may be tomorrow (e.g. REDD). And there is no indication of a strategic analysis to justify the *geographic distribution of effort*. Clearly the three major humid forest blocks (the Amazon, Congo and SE Asia) figure prominently but it looks as though geographic distribution of effort is largely determined opportunistically – and given the center's dependence on restricted funding this may be inevitable.

A major section in the Strategy is devoted to "*CIFOR's positioning and comparative advantage.*" The Center sees its comparative advantage primarily in an institutional context and not in terms of specific types of research and issues, i.e., the substance of the research. Thus, it sees the components of its institutional comparative advantage in terms of: brand name, quality of staff, partnerships, global mandate, national relevance, and its distinctive perspective. While there are numerous international institutions that deal with forest policy related issues and opportunities, CIFOR is rather unique in having

policy oriented forest research as its primary focus. At the same time, there are many ARIs and NGOs that have forestry research capabilities and programs and a lot of NARS have strong forestry programs that deal with the issues that CIFOR researches. CIFOR has done a good job of fitting into the international forestry context and is now considered a primary player in terms of informing the international forest policy arena. To a great extent, this is because it has developed a good reputation for its neutrality and has widespread contact with the other relevant entities involved in forestry research related to issues in the developing countries (e.g., through such partnerships as the CPF, discussed below). This context is recognized in the CIFOR Strategy in terms of the niche that CIFOR would like to fill.

Given that CIFOR is a “center without walls,” it has to rely heavily on *partnerships* in the context of a strong cadre of scientists in headquarters and the regions in which it works. The Plan recognizes this need. Yet, the discussion on the subject of partnerships is not very revealing in terms of the Center’s partnering strategies. Rather, the discussion of partnerships in the Plan focuses on three existing partnerships, the Center in the context of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the partnership with ICRAF, and the partnership with Indonesia, its host country. “CIFOR and CGIAR” also is singled out in the Plan as another example, but the discussion in that section is not about partnerships with specific centers. Rather, the focus is on the advantages and disadvantages for CIFOR of being in the CGIAR.

CIFOR has a good reputation in terms of its partnering. For example, FAO singled out the partnership between CIFOR and the FAO Forestry Department as being one of the more successful ones in which FAO is involved. Similarly, according to the Strategic Plan, the external stakeholders involved in the planning process gave CIFOR high marks for its partnering. It would have been useful for the Plan to have a more detailed discussion of such partnerships, e.g., partnerships with NARs, ARIs, NGOs, as well as discussion of the partnering strategies and criteria that the Center intends to use, including how they will be chosen and used in moving towards the goals of the Center. Overall, the section on partnerships lacks a discussion of the criteria and strategy CIFOR intends to use in developing and maintaining partnerships.

The Plan sees little value in *linkages to CGIAR System* as a whole. The section on “CIFOR and the CGIAR” (p.18, under a discussion on ‘partnerships’) analyzes the advantages and disadvantages for CIFOR of being in the CGIAR. The purported benefits of being in the CGIAR are seen solely in the access to unrestricted funding. Nothing is said about the overarching CGIAR mission, the System Priorities, the role of Challenge and Systemwide programs. Much more is said about the downside of CGIAR membership. While most of this does not seem to belong in a strategic plan, the lack of a CGIAR corporate view and the role of CIFOR within it, and the lack of engagement with CGIAR stakeholders is disappointing for its lost opportunities. For example little is said about the potential interactions between agriculture and forestry. The conflict between provisioning and servicing functions of land remains a strategic dilemma and this is one of the issues in which the CGIAR as a whole needs to be informed by CIFOR. Since form normally should follow function, it would have been logical to first describe the priority areas on the CIFOR agenda and then address those

alliances that are critical to its implementation.

### **Specific observations**

*Priorities and focus (a key point of the last EPMR).* The Council finds that the priorities identified in the Plan make eminent sense. They are well articulated and subdivided in an overall set of research themes. CIFOR has clear ideas on how it wishes to generate impact and what partnerships are needed to accomplish this. Two of the six priority areas are climate change related. CIFOR does not indicate how it wishes to dovetail these activities with the new CGIAR Challenge Program or wider CGIAR research on Climate Change.

A lengthy list of criteria was utilized to rate and choose among potential research domains (Box 1, p.28). However, it is not clear how in fact the criteria were used, since the participants on the Delphi panel that was used to focus in on the priorities were not required to score the domains considered against the criteria. Without a discussion of how the criteria were used, it is not possible to say how CIFOR views its comparative advantage in terms of its chosen priority research domains (a description of the strategic planning process is missing from the Plan, although bits and pieces of information come out in various places). The analysis conducted to support the priority setting is not clear in the document. So criteria included such things as “contribution to human well-being” and “environmental benefits”. The plan does not refer to any data sets to substantiate scoring against these criteria.

Research domain 6.1 on policy regimes looks very promising and given the weak assumptions underlying much international support for improved forest governance the proposed research is badly needed. However, one cannot tell from the plan how this research would be conducted.

A framework developed by Stanford University Graduate School of Business was used to prepare the plan, but that is about all that is mentioned. Overall, the first half of the plan states lots of things that would represent good practice in any organization. It’s a bit of an “off the shelf” plan. Since the process followed in developing the Plan is only briefly mentioned, it is not clear why the lengthy discussion on implementation issues and opportunities precedes the discussion of the substance of the priority research domains that the center will be addressing. While the six priority research domains are discussed adequately for this type of plan, there is a lack of discussion of the important synergies among the research domains. All the Plan says about the synergies is: *In addition, the domains are not mutually exclusive as there are links between them, reflecting the cross-sectoral and non-discrete influences on forests and the corresponding interdisciplinary nature of modern forest management. Where these convergences occur and how they will be managed are shown in Table 1.* However, Table 1 does not explain the asymmetry shown, for example, why, for Research Domain 1 there only are three other domains that are listed as having cross linkages, while Domain 1 shows up in column 2 as having cross linkages with four, not three other Domains. The same lack of symmetry exists for several other domains. There may be a logical explanation why CIFOR has this asymmetry in the Table, but it is not obvious to the

reader and not explained in the text.

*Capacity building.* CIFOR does not have a capacity building unit, instead preferring to build capacity strengthening into its ongoing research programs in the context of R4D where such is possible and warranted. This approach is not a departure from past practice; and it appears to have worked quite well in the past. It uses more of a “learning by doing” approach rather than training courses and other formal training activities. However, the extent to which it intends to partner with capacity strengthening/training entities is not discussed in the Plan.