



**SC Commentary on World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF)
2008-15 Strategic Plan
and
Center Response**

**SCIENCE COUNCIL SECRETARIAT
SEPTEMBER 2008**

**Response to the Science Council Commentary
on the World Agroforestry Centre Strategy**

	SC Comments	World Agroforestry Centre Response
1.	It is not certain whether the emphasis now on the “integrated” scenario vs. the intensification of single commodity crops is indeed intentional.	It is very much aligned with the tradition of agroforestry research and development to counter the (over) specialization of commodity based approaches.
2.	In general, the Strategy could be enriched by a debate of what is plausible for small farmers at forest margins in the future.	We agree. This is, however, an issue at the level of the ASB Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins, rather than for ICRAF alone
3.	The vision is a true challenge and makes good sense although the emphasis could be on strategic increases or options for optimal use of trees rather than massive increases in the use of trees in agricultural landscapes.	Agree – the wording ‘strategic’ increase rather than ‘massive’ provides a substantial improvement in the vision statement. “a rural transformation in the developing world where smallholder households <i>strategically</i> increase their use of trees in agricultural landscapes to improve their food security, nutrition, income, health, shelter, energy resources and environmental sustainability”
4.	Strategically it would also be wise not to lose sight of the intermediate level farmers (the ones operating where the Center would wish the bottom billion to be in the future) and to place emphasis on the systems that will enable the poorest to cease to be poor.	Implicit in our work is that for a majority of rural poor, the escape from poverty implies a move away from labour-intensive low-returns food-crop based agriculture, either via higher-value components on and off farm, or via shifts along the village-urban (‘Desakota’) gradient. It may be worth articulating this somewhere
5.	it is unfortunate that criteria relevant to the CGIAR mission were not used, i.e. likely impact on poverty, improving rural labour productivity (and increasing labour opportunities), and likely impact on environmental health	There may an issue of wording here, rather than of content. In the salience or ‘global importance of the problem’ we did explicitly and implicitly consider rural poverty and environmental ill-health as important criteria. The ‘rural labour productivity and labour opportunities’ of the CGIAR mission appear to be a more specific subset of agriculture based development, while increases in tree-based income fit well in ‘out of agriculture’ scenarios of development (compare comments above)
6.	Apart from applying the four criteria, nothing is said about the actual priority setting and how relative importance was	15 issues were considered in the strategic planning exercise on the basis of a first screening. A numerical score across the four categories of

	<p>judged. It would be useful if the Strategy contained some indication of the application domains and numbers of beneficiaries.</p>	<p>indicators showed general consistency across the criteria and no major differences between external and internal (headquarter or region-based) judgement. Overall the differences between highest and lowest aggregate scores were small, and the strategic planning process proceeded by deconstructing these ‘issues’ by a focus on the type of knowledge products that can help in solving them, and repackaging these knowledge products into the current set of Global Research Priorities. The list of 15 topics were assessed by external and internal referents, on the basis of a couple of paragraphs for each topic. The documentation on this process will be made available on our Web site for further reference.</p>
7.	<p>It is also disconcerting that fundability is one of the criteria used. Although no details are given about research that was dropped, nothing should have been eliminated from the Center’s agenda a priori because the Center is pessimistic about the changes of getting funding – an opportunistic criterion.</p>	<p>We fully agree that if this were a scientific strategy for a Centre with secured long term funding, practicalities of getting money to do the research could have been left out of consideration. Moreover, for a publicly-funded research institution like the World Agroforestry Centre, fundability serves as a proxy for client demand for our products and services.</p>
8.	<p>One could argue, however, that even greater emphasis could be in Sustainable agroecological intensification in low and high-potential environments where there are major opportunities, and especially on Rural Institutions and their Governance where obstacles to adoption of ICRAF products might be tackled.</p>	<p>We agree that much of our work cuts across the way the System Priorities have been defined, and that any percentage-wise (additive) attribution does not do full justice to the synergies achieved. In this light it may be important to note that the GRP’s nor the System Priorities are best served by a project structure that is exclusively oriented at a single priority at a time; rather, the more integrated work at the basic level of operation can be used for various ways of packaging for higher-level syntheses</p>
9.	<p>Engagement seems most heavy in the sub-humid tropics with a lot of work in the highlands (conditions found around Nairobi and upland SE Asia). Whether this is intentional or an accident of history is unclear. The Center should challenge its researchers to conduct objective assessments of where the greatest potential impacts lie. The semi-arid tropics of Africa might emerge quite high.</p>	<p>This impression is not correct; a significant part of our work in SE Asia is in the humid tropics, while the densely populated and poor Western Kenya receives considerably more attention than the area around Nairobi. The nuclei in humid tropics of Africa, the semiarid Sahel and poverty hotspots in southern Africa are equally important parts of our agenda. We will modify the text to get this across</p>

10.	There is little sense in this Strategy of what it would take resource-wise to accomplish what the Center sets out to do in the various regions, which is a shortcoming. It would also be of utility to include a risk analysis for the potential to achieve the outputs and outcomes	More refined levels of planning and risk analysis take place in the annual planning cycle of POWB and the Medium-Term Plan, as external conditions tend to change more frequently than the 7 year strategy.
11.	This analysis seems to be inward looking and does not bring in an outsider's view of the real comparative strength of the Center. The term "comparative advantage" needs to be defined with greater specificity. While the above abilities and accomplishments certainly exist in the Center, many of them also exist in other entities that may be better placed locally to produce the desired outputs.	A considerable amount of external consultation was part of the process, complementing the involvement of a large part of the staff at various levels. Relations on the ground with existing partners certainly informed our debate.
12.	It might have been more helpful to focus on those areas in which the World Agroforestry Center stands out as being a fairly unique entity (for example in areas of expertise 3,5,6, and 9 above) and a preferred partner for carrying out large scale, integrated and scientifically sound agroforestry research that produces the IPGs that the CGIAR System strives for.	We agree with this assessment and see the strategic planning as an ongoing process of providing and maintaining focus. The reality of the Center is shaped on the negotiation table with partners and investors, and the primary attention is towards solutions for recognized urgent problems – providing opportunity for, but not focusing on, the syntheses on agroforestry. We will adjust the text to be clearer on the unique attributes of the Centre.
13.	This, coupled with the somewhat inward-looking criteria for priority selection (including whether the work is fundable!!), does not appear to provide the basis for making the hard decisions for the Center. There is a risk that the Center will try to do too many activities without first seeking others to help. It would have been more reassuring if the center, coming out of the self-analysis, including assessment of strengths AND weaknesses, could have trimmed the core business to fewer areas of comparative advantage.	Our process certainly involved our self-assessment of weaknesses at various levels. That these are not as explicitly mentioned as the strengths, is due partly to the use of the strategy document for external audiences, rather than as a full document on how strategic planning was undertaken. The renewed emphasis on partnerships as one of the four key implementation objectives demonstrates our commitment to work with others where we don't have the comparative advantage ourselves..
14.	The Center could have included more focused insights on its comparative and strategic advantages in doing research for agroforestry development and	We agree – as stated above, it is an ongoing process, where the annual planning cycle and the effective learning- by-doing in funded and (therefore) staffed projects guides the way our role evolves

	expansion and thus its role in the context of its chosen six priority GRPs.	
15.	Chapter 4 dedicated to the execution of this strategy (altogether rather a vague chapter) also leaves it unclear where the Center sees its boundary in the research-development continuum and how it will ensure the delivery of international public goods.	The Center is indeed focused on <i>understanding</i> the whole research-development continuum and the types of boundary objects (including but not exclusively ‘international public goods’) that play a role in linking knowledge to action in the more strategic use of trees on farm and in the landscape. These K2A pathways, on the interface of ‘forestry’ and ‘agriculture’ institutional traditions do indeed differ from those of most other CG centres. An exclusive focus on ‘international public goods’ would lead to low impact, as the uptake capacity is finite. We engage in the processes of full knowledge delivery alongside and with partners, in topics/areas deemed to be of strategic relevance, and ensure that the experience is used for global syntheses
16.	(although it does not discuss other new research opportunities that did not pass the four selection criteria, as discussed above).	See elaboration of the selection process above. Will add a footnote linking to information on web site
17.	However, the respective roles of ICRAF, NARS, NGOs and farmer organizations need to be more clearly differentiated to ensure that ICRAF is not delivering technologies directly to farmers.	A more detailed discussion of respective roles is best done within the regional context and differentiated by maturity of the topic. Our role and active participation in direct delivery of technologies to farmers is restricted to ‘pilot’ tests and is geared to learning from the reality tests that such attempts at delivery entail. We have moved away from a perspective of technology development segregated from technology delivery, and focus on the continuous adaptation of any technology by farmers to suit their conditions – indeed challenging the sharp definition of any technology
18.	There are other potential partnerships, particularly the linkages with the new Climate Change CP that will need to be taken in to consideration. Also Bioversity would seem to be a logical partner in GRP1, yet is not discussed.	The Centre is certainly interested in the Climate Change CP and has actively participated in the discussions and feedback to strengthen the systems approach in it, relative to the commodity focus. It is too early to say how the implementation arrangements of the CP will interact with the CC agenda of the Centre, but we certainly make an effort. Ongoing dialogue with Bioversity probably indeed deserves special mention – but so do others (CIAT and its TSBF program, IITA,

		ICRISAT, IRRI, etc. Any specific example raises questions about others not mentioned.
19	Reference to the other documentation, particularly on-line sources, would have been useful.	We agree, and will make an effort to complete the set of online resources as they may have relevance beyond the current strategic planning process.

Science Council of the CGIAR

Commentary on World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) 2008-15 Strategic Plan: Transforming Lives and Landscapes

6th August 2008

1. The Center's contributions to the broader CGIAR Priorities and Strategies in the context of the System's Vision, Mission and Goals.

ICRAF's strategic plan is, in the main, clear, relevant and concise. The mission and goals are clear and the Center's contribution to the broader goals of the CGIAR system are well articulated; the set of priorities are, in general, relevant for and consistent with the vision, goals and priorities of the CGIAR, as indicated in section 3.7 and Table 1 of the Strategic Plan. The mission and goals are guided by the broad development challenges pursued by the CGIAR:

- poverty alleviation that entails enhanced food security and health,
- improved productivity with lower environmental and social costs, and
- resilience in the face of climate change and other external shocks.

Overall this Strategy provides a compelling case for ICRAF's activities for the next seven years.

The Center contributes to these goals through research in agroforestry and natural resource management that addresses productivity and environmental constraints in smallholder production contexts. The Center's mission is to generate science-based knowledge about the diverse roles trees play in agricultural landscapes and to use its research to advance policies and practices to benefit the poor and the environment. The plan follows a dual track for bringing about benefits from trees in agricultural systems and securing the integrity of landscapes for ecosystem services. The Center makes a bold move away from factor and component research into landscape systems and production systems research with great emphasis on policy issues. However, it is not certain whether the emphasis now on the "integrated" scenario vs. the intensification of single commodity crops is indeed intentional. In general, the Strategy could be enriched by a debate of what is plausible for small farmers at forest margins in the future. The vision is a true challenge and makes good sense¹; although the emphasis could be on *strategic increases* or *options for optimal use of trees* rather than *massive increases* in the use of trees in agricultural landscapes. Indeed, trees may compete with arable crops for labor, land, water and other inputs. Strategically it would also be wise not to lose sight of the intermediate level farmers (the ones operating where the Center would wish the bottom billion to be in the future) and to place emphasis on the systems that will enable the poorest to cease to be poor.

¹ a rural transformation in the developing world where smallholder households massively increase their use of trees in agricultural landscapes to improve their food security, nutrition, income, health, shelter, energy resources and environmental sustainability

ICRAF has, through extensive consultation and its own assessment of needs and consideration of its capabilities, developed six interconnected “global research priorities” (GRPs) that it intends to address over this plan period. Each priority considered was judged against 4 criteria: salience (the global importance of the problem), credibility (trustworthiness of our knowledge and capability to deliver), legitimacy (comparative advantage), and fundability (potential to generate research funding). While one can see the practicalities of these criteria, it is unfortunate that criteria relevant to the CGIAR mission were not used, i.e. likely impact on poverty, improving rural labour productivity (and increasing labour opportunities), and likely impact on environmental health as well as a thorough analysis of alternative suppliers of the research. Apart from applying the four criteria, nothing is said about the actual priority setting and how relative importance was judged. It would be useful if the Strategy contained some indication of the application domains and numbers of beneficiaries. It is also disconcerting that *fundability* is one of the criteria used. Although no details are given about research that was dropped, nothing should have been eliminated from the Center’s agenda *a priori* because the Center is pessimistic about the changes of getting funding – an opportunistic criterion.

The development challenges are identified for agroforestry and the emphasis is on the multi-functionality of agricultural landscapes to address issues such as fuel needs, gender gap and the enormous footprint of agriculture through agro-forestry deployment. Five impact pathways, three in productivity and two in landscape integrity and ecosystem services lead to the emergence of the following six GRPs:

GRP1: Domestication, utilization and conservation of superior agroforestry germplasm.

GRP2: Maximizing on-farm productivity of trees and agroforestry systems.

GRP3: Improving tree product marketing for smallholders.

GRP4: Reducing risks to land health and targeting agroforestry interventions to enhance land productivity and food availability.

GRP5: Improving the ability of farmers, ecosystems and governments to cope with climate change.

GRP6: Developing policies and incentives for multifunctional landscapes with trees that provide environmental services.

There are strong direct linkages between these six GRPs and specific System Priorities as indicated in Table 1 in the Center’s Strategic Plan (p39). The strength of the indicated linkages will vary, with some being much stronger than others. However, overall it is clear that the World Agroforestry Center is focused on priorities that contribute directly or indirectly to the achievement of the goals and priorities set by the System as a whole. One could argue, however, that even greater emphasis could be in *Sustainable agroecological intensification in low- and high-potential environments* where there are major opportunities, and especially on *Rural Institutions and their Governance* where obstacles to adoption of ICRAF products might be tackled. Some of the major obstacles to climate change adaptation and mitigation lie in this area.

Based on a review of the strategic plan and the six GRPs, one can interpret (in the simplest terms) the Center’s strategy in approaching its Vision, Mission and goals as follows: Make more widely and easily available new and better germplasm (GRP1); then develop improved agroforestry systems that involve higher sustainable productivity both for the new, improved germplasm and for conventional germplasm (GRP2); simultaneously, research ways to

improve the marketing and the ways in which farmers can access markets with their outputs in order to earn needed income (GRP3). At the same time research ways to reduce risks of land deterioration and thus productivity deterioration and focus on the issues associated with sustainability (GRP4) and in parallel focus specifically on farmers and governments approaches to cope with climate change (GRP5) and support through research and other means development of the policies and incentives needed to ensure that the multi-functionality of agroforestry landscapes is considered explicitly in providing needed environmental services to the broader society (GRP6). Cutting across all of these is capacity strengthening and training of NARS and other partners. Although focus on multi-functionality of agricultural landscapes is commendable, it would be helpful to move beyond a generalized multi-functionality to discussing locally-adapted “precision” agroforestry systems to be developed thereby contributing to the diversification of agriculture systems.

The Strategy addresses scales at which research programs operate (Plan Fig. 3) and describes the regional context. The Center plans to continue to operate in six ecoregions across sub-Saharan Africa (eastern, southern, and west and central) South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America. However, the programs in each, while implementing the six GRPs, will vary in emphasis driven by the specific needs and opportunities in each region. The Strategy is not explicit about the justification of the geographic focus of ICRAF’s work. Engagement seems most heavy in the sub-humid tropics with a lot of work in the highlands (conditions found around Nairobi and upland SE Asia). Whether this is intentional or an accident of history is unclear. The Center should challenge its researchers to conduct objective assessments of where the greatest potential impacts lie. The semi-arid tropics of Africa might emerge quite high. In reality, most of the research expenditures will continue to be allocated to Africa, where persistent poverty and environmental degradation are particularly acute. There is little sense in this Strategy of what it would take resource-wise to accomplish what the Center sets out to do in the various regions, which is a shortcoming. It would also be of utility to include a risk analysis for the potential to achieve the outputs and outcomes.

2. The Center’s role and comparative advantage in the broader context of global agroforestry research.

In the workshops for staff to facilitate the development of a new mission statement and strategic priorities, the framework included clarification of the Center’s role, niche and strategic advantage as one of the elements.

In terms of expertise and contributions to its Vision, the Center sees its comparative advantages in agroforestry research for development as follows:

1. advanced expertise on the role of trees in the multi-scale, cross-scale and integrated management of landscapes for multiple functions;
2. the production of databases on agroforestry species and toolkits for tree seeds for farmers;
3. credibility in promoting policy processes through knowledge synthesis and brokerage, as well as expertise in providing science-based negotiation support and evidence-based design;
4. a proven track record in capacity building;

5. the ability to connect and interface at different levels, particularly across institutions;
6. the capacity to address complex, integrated problems with interdisciplinary teams;
7. the application of the principles of natural resource management to development challenges;
8. an extensive record of achievements in science and development impact;
9. the development of tools, expertise and approaches to understand tradeoffs at different scales in agricultural landscapes; and
10. a strong base in the developing world, as our headquarters in Kenya places us near several United Nations hub offices, and our regional programmes span the tropics.

This analysis seems to be inward looking and does not bring in an outsider's view of the real comparative strength of the Center. The term "comparative advantage" needs to be defined with greater specificity. While the above abilities and accomplishments certainly exist in the Center, many of them also exist in other entities that may be better placed locally to produce the desired outputs. It might have been more helpful to focus on those areas in which the World Agroforestry Center stands out as being a fairly unique entity (for example in areas of expertise 3,5,6, and 9 above) and a preferred partner for carrying out large scale, integrated and scientifically sound agroforestry research that produces the IPGs that the CGIAR System strives for.

This, coupled with the somewhat inward-looking criteria for priority selection (including whether the work is fundable!!), does not appear to provide the basis for making the hard decisions for the Center. There is a risk that the Center will try to do too many activities without first seeking others to help. It would have been more reassuring if the center, coming out of the self-analysis, including assessment of strengths AND weaknesses, could have trimmed the core business to fewer areas of comparative advantage. The Center could have included more focused insights on its comparative and strategic advantages in doing research for agroforestry development and expansion and thus its role in the context of its chosen six priority GRPs. Chapter 4 dedicated to the execution of this strategy (altogether rather a vague chapter) also leaves it unclear where the Center sees its boundary in the research-development continuum and how it will ensure the delivery of international public goods.

3. Response to changing needs and capacities of NARS

Notwithstanding the critique on the geographic focus presented in the Strategy (discussed above), the document includes a good discussion of the changing agroforestry scene and the corresponding changes in research needs. The Strategy more specifically recognizes that the different regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America have been changing and evolving and operate at different stages of economic growth and structural transformation. They broadly characterize the economies as agrarian in Africa, transforming in Asia and urbanized in Latin America. The Center's strategy for each region aligns with its predominant development needs as well as the capacities of its NARS. The Plan also recognizes that *"Unlike 3 decades ago, agroforestry has now come of age as a science. It is being taught and investigated at hundreds of universities and research organizations around the world. Some of the research areas that we have discontinued will be domains of comparative advantage for other institutions. We will continue to evaluate our strategic advantages in research in light of changing needs and opportunities and the strengths of our partners."*

Good linkages with NARS and ARIs and the sensitivity of the Center to the importance of such linkages in developing appropriate R4D are indicated in the discussion on implementation of the plan, where the use of local knowledge and feedback mechanisms are recognized as tools for ensuring that Center research is relevant and addresses real issues as seen by the Center's clients and partners. The Center recognizes the advances that have been made (including by itself) in understanding certain elements of agroforestry, the changing needs of the clients and partners, the advances in local research institutions, etc. Particularly, it also recognizes the strengths of NARS in agroforestry research particularly in South Asia, where the Center plans to leverage the relatively strong infrastructure "to focus on regionally and internationally relevant methods and solutions that address key issues in environmental resilience". The Strategy provides a good analysis of the areas of research which have been completed, and therefore an explicit reason to discontinue that line of research (although it does not discuss other new research opportunities that did not pass the four selection criteria, as discussed above). It is very positive development that ICRAF has been able to devolve some of the previous work to the NARS. However, the respective roles of ICRAF, NARS, NGOs and farmer organizations need to be more clearly differentiated to ensure that ICRAF is not delivering technologies directly to farmers.

The Center's strategy for NARS capacity strengthening is laid out in the Plan, albeit only very briefly. The approach will focus on continued training and promotion of learning compatible with their research priorities and on strengthening and sustaining NARS partnerships, with the assumption being that partnerships are an effective vehicle and mechanisms for promoting capacity strengthening. The Strategy emphasizes activities that increasingly shape the Center to become what the Strategy calls a 'learning organization'.

4. Research alliances and partnerships

The partnering strategy of the Center involves four factors or criteria—applied at all levels, local, regional and global—one or more of which must be met to justify a partnership. Thus, an optimum strategic partnership should:

- enable the Center to achieve critical mass in relevant areas of their agenda;
- complement the Center in completing the research chain from needs analysis to technology development, testing, adoption and scaling up to achieve impact;
- support the active participation of local institutions in advancing agroforestry, thereby incorporating local ecological knowledge and expertise in the center's work; and
- support policy and institutional transformations conducive to expanding and improving agroforestry.

These are four sound criteria for judging the value of a partnership in terms of moving towards the Center's vision and goals. Cutting across the four criteria for judging relevance and effectiveness of partnerships are the political factors that enable the Center to move ahead with its agenda, i.e., open the local and regional doors that need to open in order to permit the carrying out of effective field research. Some partnerships become strategic mainly for that reason.

The Center complements the work of many of the other Centers and CGIAR programs and works closely with some of them, e.g., in the Systemwide ASB program that the Center leads. The main system partnerships are:

- partnering through the ASB program and some of the other Systemwide programs in which the Center participates
- The Amazon Initiative
- the direct linkages to CIFOR through an alliance that the Plan recognizes and suggests can be strengthened even further
- an alliance with ILRI, involving a formal agreement (2007) related to a joint Research Methods Group and Information and Communication Technology Service Unit. The Plan recognizes that further streamlining and partnering with ILRI will be an important step to take during this Plan period,

and these are fully described.

There are other potential partnerships, particularly the linkages with the new Climate Change CP that will need to be taken in to consideration. Also Bioversity would seem to be a logical partner in GRP1, yet is not discussed.

ICRAF has partnerships with many non-CGIAR entities, including being a member of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, which includes the 14 major international entities involved in one way or another with forest and related agroforestry policy and the international forestry agenda.

5. The process used in developing the Strategic Plan: Is it described in the Plan?

The Strategy provides a lot of detail about the process. Reference to the other documentation, particularly on-line sources, would have been useful. In developing its new strategic plan, ICRAF (the World Agroforestry Center) used an iterative process of consultation, particularly internally by “engagement of our Board of Trustees, senior leadership team, project leaders, regional coordinators, heads of global units and professional staff in wide-ranging and iterative consultations with our national and international partners”. However, a more frank assessment of the core strengths of the Center as a “preferred partner” could have been expected to emerge from the involvement of the outside world. This would have been beneficial in bringing even more focus to an exciting new strategy. The SC is pleased to note the plans for monitoring and reporting.