

Responses to the MTR Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - That the process that supports engagement of the project with policy at both national and regional level, should be strengthened. This needs to be progressed as early as possible and not left until the later stages of the project.

Progress was made in that direction during the workshop held in Harare between the 3rd and the 5th of August 2015. The main objective of the workshop was to review the national inventories (on-going for the past year or so) of national policies affecting directly or indirectly the expansion and adoption of smallholder agricultural mechanization in the project target countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe). The workshop also help preparing national policy dialogue (two conferences planned by the end of the project in each country) aiming at reviewing national policies affecting mechanization (first conference) and identifying policy gaps, constraints and opportunities (second conference).

This – off course – may be modest compared to what the reviewers had in mind. However, it was agreed at the very beginning of the project that the project will not venture into policy advocacy itself, but will be linking with organizations specialized in policy advocacy. As such, IFPRI and FAO remain partners of the project, and exchange of information with these two organization is continuous. More intense policy advocacy would require additional resources, which don't seem currently to be available. In addition, on the side of the project, there is much more to be done to have clear communicable results from the research being conducted ('proof of concept').

Recommendation 2 - That the work being conducted on the gender aspects of farm mechanization be documented. It would be worthwhile to compile practice notes on the experience of trying to bring gender perspectives into this type of research project.

We agree with this recommendation and have tasked our gender specialist – Mulunesh Tsegaye -to lead such compilation. Mulunesh has proposed to develop an archive of all gender activities and findings, archive that would be available to project partners and the wider public through our website and other platforms. Mulunesh will also put efforts in publishing the studies conducted so far in collaboration with the global CIMMYT gender team.

FACASI-Ethiopia will also be partnering with a global gender initiative funded by BMZ for wheat-based systems (Gender in Wheat Based Livelihoods) and funded by CRP MAIZE for maize-based systems. In addition, FACASI-Ethiopia started collaborating with the Wageingen-KIT project 'Enhancing the effectiveness of systems analysis tools to support learning and innovation in multi-stakeholder platforms' (ESAP). One part of this collaboration will be to work with women groups involved in FACASI and understand how outputs from system tools can influence gender relation, women inclusiveness in decision-making and gender division of labour.

Recommendation 3 - That a key output of the project should be a critical analysis of the research modality it has pursued. In other words the project should aim to deliver a proof of concept of how to engage in understanding and progressing rural mechanisation as a route to sustainable intensification.

This is a very valuable recommendation. We have already given some thought to the project and publish part of it (see article in the journal Food Security). To further this process, we have decided to conduct a writeshop at the time of the next Review and Planning Meeting.

Recommendation 4 - That the project articulates a new impact logic based on its growing understanding of the mechanisation challenge it is dealing with. This is justified on an improved ability to deliver impact and would be valuable both as a monitoring and management tool, but also as a communication tool. It probably implies revisiting some of the sequencing and timing of milestones, as well as giving attention to the identification of outcomes that represent intermediary steps.

Whilst we totally agree with this recommendation, developing a new impact logic and theory of change is probably not a change we can afford at this stage of the project. We have instead revised some of the assumptions of the project, in consultation with AIFSRC/ACIAR: relaxing the concept of 'unsubsidized business model', allowing for geographic flexibility in the implementation of Objective 2, and decoupling slightly Objective 1 and Objective 2 activities.

Recommendation 5 - That the role of the Australian partners be clarified. In particular some further thought needs to be given about how the mentoring platform can add value by better identifying critical capacity building needs of partners.

While the project would no doubt benefit from more face-to-face interactions between Australian partners and the rest of the project team, this is difficult to achieve with the resource we have. But we should indeed strive to interact more via skype, email and any other mean possible.

Indeed, identifying critical capacity building needs to be funded by the International Mentoring Platform was rather challenging early in the process (as CIMMYT and CSU were expecting a bottom up approach whereby national researchers would identify the need of their national teams themselves), but it has improved a lot since the MTR and a number of activities are either being funded or will be in the near future. A study tour in Australia is been organized. Gender has also been identified by the team as a capacity gap, and a gender training will be organized immediately after the next RPM. Finally, a number of engineering/manufacturing activities are being organized to complement Objective 1 in this critical aspect.

Recommendation 6 - That the quality of learning in the project be strengthened. This could be achieved by creating more opportunities for country teams to meet and undertake facilitated reflection on what works and what doesn't, as well as focusing annual meetings on assisting cross-country learning. Further attention must be given to developing a mentoring platform within the project.

More interaction to exchange lesson learnt would be welcome, but this – again – may require resources that the limited travel budget of the project may not allow. However, small groups of FACASI researchers have started to meet quite regularly on particular topics (M&E, communication, policy, etc), which was very fruitful in exchanging experience and knowledge. We have attempted earlier in the project to organize regularly group conference calls, but this proved impossible considering the connectivity in the country involved and how busy national researchers (who provide their time in kind in FACASI and must cover their salary through other initiatives) are.

Recommendation 7 - That consideration should be given to providing targeted funding in Ethiopia to training of selected students in the operation and maintenance of 2-wheel tractors and seeding machinery for use in conservation agriculture, through courses provided by international trainers. The estimated cost would be \$30,000.

Everyone seems to be enthusiastic about this activity because they saw the potential from the Selam training centre in Ethiopia. This indeed would be an effective way to provide training. The training could be designed as a training of trainers so that it can be institutionalized into the centre. Carving 30 k\$ from the existing budget, however, appears challenging. The project MC has advised the Ethiopia team to use between 1/3 and 1/2 of the resources under 1.3.3., 2.3.4., and 2.3.7. for this (that is, between 6 and 9 kAus\$).

There may be other examples in the other countries of similarly effective centre, where the same model could be applied.

In Ethiopia, Selam could also receive additional funding (on top of the funding provided by FACASI) through GIZ-funded project and USAID-funded project on small mechanization, both led by CIMMYT.

Recommendation 8 - That active nodes of CA mechanisation spread should be sought, so that proactive ways of engaging with these can be explored, either as a learning

opportunity or as an avenue for conducting further technology, business, policy or engagement testing and analysis.

We notice that, although the MTR team made it very clear to decouple mechanization from CA, this recommendation has been included. We suppose that this reflects the *raison d'être* of FACASI and something that AIFSRC/ACIAR is unwilling to abandon. We presume the intention is to create synergies between FACASI and SIMLESA, which is occurring in Ethiopia and Tanzania (unfortunately, not up to our expectation in Kenya). Developing these synergies should be as much the responsibility of FACASI as it is the responsibility of SIMLESA.

More generally speaking, we see the combination of CA and 2WT as one path for the spread of small mechanization (the other one being piggy-backing on areas where small engines are spreading quickly for e.g. irrigation). Learning accumulated by FACASI on this path could be use by CA nodes, linked to SIMLESA or other initiative. The International Mentoring Platform of FACASI will be funding 2 studies in each country to understand (1) the spread of small engines in rural area and the possibility for 2WT to piggy back on this spread, and (2) changes in tillage intensity and frequency in the past decades and the possibility of CA combined with 2WT to help establishing a crop quickly and in a timely fashion.

Recommendation 9 - That the project be given licence to pursue new approaches and strategies based on its emerging understanding of mechanisation for conservation agriculture -- in the spirit of adaptive management. This would further strengthen the effectiveness of the project.

The call for greater flexibility has been made by the project team from the outset and this has been supported by AIFSRC/ACIAR after the MTR. This, we feel, answers this recommendation. Modifying further approaches in FACASI would take us too far from the original design of the project. However, FACASI has already stimulated a number of new initiatives on small mechanization (supported by USAID, GIZ, Syngenta Foundation, etc) while potential future initiatives (by the BMGF and others) are being discussed: informed by the lessons learnt in FACASI, these initiatives are able to be constructed on the kind of new approaches and strategies mentioned by the reviewers.