Near-term Strategies in ICRAF for Theme Leaders

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In ICRAF, the Theme Leaders are expected to propose and coordinate strategic directions for our agendas of research, development, and capacity building. In early 2003, the Theme Leaders self-defined their niche in ICRAF's recent Organizational Change (see *Annex 4, Theme Leaders Roles and Responsibilities,* in *Implementing Organizational Change at the World Agroforestry Centre, February 2003*). That annex is appended. The Theme Leaders provided the following rationale for wanting to clarify what they do:

- To establish a framework for the development of workplans and expected outputs in consultation with supervisors;

- To clarify expectations for other personnel at ICRAF who interact with the Theme Leaders in various ways; and

- To assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities of the Theme Leaders to external partners, clients, and investors (donors).

The present guidelines provide practical suggestions regarding how the Theme Leaders can review and re-balance what they committed to do, covering their five responsibilities: (1) planning and resource mobilization, (2) leading and coordinating activities within the themes, (3) ensuring integration across themes and regions, (4) representation and partnerships, and (5) reporting and public awareness.

While we wouldn't want all of them to be alike, each strategy by a Theme Leader should address a minimum set of dimensions (i.e., questions and topics). Here we propose to define these dimensions, encouraging each Theme Leader to address them in some form and at some level.   You are free in terms of how you frame, order, aggregate, and disaggregate the critical issues.   But when you finish the exercise, you should have satisfactorily addressed each of the three **bold-headed** dimensions below.

Most strategies are developed through teamwork and open forums in order to establish a shared framework of values, concerns, and directions.   Most strategies also have a more confidential aspect in matters of sensitive topics.

Thus in ICRAF, we expect a team approach for Sections #1 ("**Accomplishments**") and #2 ("**Targets and Benchmarks**") below. Section #3 ("**Re-Balancing**") may benefit from a team effort in the beginning, but should conclude with each Theme Leader

committing to specific actions which spell out what is to be done. That may remain at a confidential level, depending on its tone and content.

1. Summary of Recent Accomplishments

Method: This is suitable for a team approach, possibly a "brainstorm" on what's been achieved. Depending on whether you can manage it smoothly, you should consider inviting your fellow Theme Leaders and other participants for this phase. All observations should be recorded, and the Theme Leader (or her/his delegate) will then organize and summarize the results into concise terms.

By reflecting on what's been done (and not done) recently, you begin with an overview and high points. Your mind sorts out what is important and what is not.

What are your accomplishments and shortcomings across each of the five guiding responsibilities of Theme Leaders? The detailed bullet points which support each of the five responsibilities make it straightforward to develop your assessments from beginning to end. There are 22 such bullet points (or tasks) in *Annex 4, Theme Leader Roles and Responsibilities,* in *Implementing Organizational Change at the World Agroforestry Centre, February 2003.* That document is the template for defining your progress and for clarifying your future intentions.

Your assessment should cover each of those 22 tasks. Where there is little progress or relevance, this should not be hidden or disguised. ICRAF will accelerate its future progress by being objective in matters of self-assessment.

2. Targets and Benchmarks (Progress Indicators) for Next 1-2 Years

Method: Like Section #1 on Accomplishments, the establishment of Targets and Benchmarks is potentially suitable for a team approach. You may want to start this part of the strategy by identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (S-W-O-T) with respect to your theme at ICRAF.

The challenge is to keep the discussion focused in relation to recent achievements and deficiencies. Benchmarks have to be actually achievable, and they have to directly relate to your five main responsibilities as a Theme Leader rather than going into abstract directions. All observations should be recorded, and the Theme Leader or her/his delegate will then organize and summarize the results.

Strategy is always goal-oriented, and so you need to determine where you're intending to go. In light of recent accomplishments (i.e., summarized in the preceding section), what aspects will you improve and strengthen? These are your targets. That is, what do you propose in order to achieve higher impact as a Theme Leader as you go forward?

It helps to facilitate your thinking if you can develop a 1:1 correspondence to Section 1 on Accomplishments. What are your targets and benchmarks over the next 1-2 years in

each of these areas?   This should not turn into a fanciful wish list or a hollow essay.
Rather, what can you and should you realistically achieve?

3. Re-Balancing Your Efforts

*Method: Considering the total picture of (1) Accomplishments plus (2) Targets and
Benchmarks, what do you conclude in terms of future commitments and actions? What
directions will you take in the next 1-2 years? This can be a group exercise to start, but
ultimately each Theme Leader has to commit to certain specific actions.   Depending on
the types of information it contains, this section of the strategy may or may not circulate.*

Each Theme Leader should consider how s/he will alter her/his balance of efforts going
forward in view of the perspectives shaped by Sections 1 and 2 preceding. On this, each
Theme should develop a concept of itself "improved" in the near future compared with
the present. What will that take – and can you tie your vision of improvement with your
endowment of funds, professional time, and other commitments? In other words, your
vision should be compatible with reality, but improving upon the current situation. Each
thematic area and Theme Leader must grow and develop according to a feasible path.
Can you explicitly state the actions to guide you on that path?   These should be discrete
steps that you can monitor for progress.

This final section of the strategy has to be done after deep reflection.   It is the capstone
of what strategy is all about, and merits your most careful attention. It is also the
platform for your interactions with Senior Leadership on how you see the future
developing. This is another reason for investing conscientiously in doing it well.

Appendix: Roles and Responsibilities of Theme Leaders

(originally presented as Annex 4, *Theme Leaders Roles and Responsibilities*, in Implementing Organizational Change at the World Agroforestry Centre, February 2003).

Introduction

The roles of the Theme Leaders have thus far been described in two important documents: a document of the Implementation Task Force entitled "Getting the Job Done" that was circulated to all staff on 10 February 2003 and a memo of the Director-General on January 17th on the organizational change process. The designated theme leaders have individually and jointly reflected on these documents to devise their suggestions for the duties of the theme leaders. It is recognized that these are duties which are assigned to particular senior or principal scientists, rather than complete position descriptions.

Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all of the Theme Leaders is important for three reasons. First, it establishes a framework for the development of workplans and expected outputs for the Theme Leaders in consultation with their supervisors. Second, it should help to clarify expectations for other personnel at ICRAF who will interact with the Theme Leaders in various ways. Third, it will assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities of the Theme Leaders to external partners, clients and investors.

Responsibility 1: Planning and resource mobilization

Each Theme Leader will be responsible for the development of planning documents for the theme he or she leads. These documents will be consistent with the ICRAF corporate mission and vision, the BOT structure of themes and regions, regional priorities and plans, and corporate format. The Theme Leader will be responsible for ensuring that the planning process is inclusive, transparent and participatory and for ensuring the quality, timeliness of the documents produced.

1. prepare and update a strategic plan for the theme

2. complete the rolling Medium-term plan and annual workplan for the CGIAR and other external stakeholders

3. engage in the development of priorities and a strategy for the theme within regions, across regions and across ICRAF's mandate area

4. contribute to the thematic content of regional strategies and plans

5. seek out new funding arrangements and opportunities for new projects, particularly projects that span across regions

6. establish and maintain relationships with investors with special interests in the theme

Responsibility 2: Leading and coordinating activities within the theme

Each Theme Leader will be responsible for providing overall intellectual leadership and coordination for the research, development and education activities conducted towards the theme and focal area objectives.

1. develop and update the content of the theme in an interactive manner

2. convene theme and issue-based workshops to synthesize past progress and conceptualize and plan new R, D and E activities

3. identify achievements and promising approaches within the regions and facilitate their transfer across the regions

4. manage and coordinate staff inputs into theme and focal area development

5. assist scientists to find key sources of information, networks, partners and finance

6. identify new challenges, trends and opportunities relevant to the theme, including those that are not well covered by the existing focal areas

Responsibility 3: Ensuring integration across themes and regions

The Theme Leaders will have individual and collective responsibility to ensure coherence of the overall agenda and capitalization of opportunities for synergies between themes. Theme Leaders and Regional Coordinators will have collective responsibility to ensure coherence of the overall agenda across projects and regional strategies.

1. identify and conceptualize ideas for cross-theme projects

2. identify and advance elements that cut across themes

3. pro-actively discuss an examine regional strategies, work plans and proposals to identify opportunities for greater harmony and synergy

4. jointly review overall progress toward thematic, regional and corporate objectives

Responsibility 4: Representation and partnerships

Theme Leaders will be responsible for representing ICRAF in events, consortia and policy fora (including important electronic fora) relevant to the theme and to ICRAF's overall mission.

1. representation in relevant CGIAR Challenge Programmes, System-Wide Programmes, bi-lateral arrangements with other centers, and other priority CGIAR events and activities

2. representation in relevant inter-governmental fora and events

3. representation in national and regional policy and research fora

Responsibility 5: Reporting and public awareness

Each Theme Leader will be responsible for preparing reports and public awareness material for the theme.

1. seek out and prepare promotional material for key public awareness and policy fora relevant to the theme

2. compile, review and synthesize material for the ICRAF annual report, web page and Board of Trustees

3. prepare and coordinate material for external reviews