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**AGRODEP Steering Committee (SC) Meeting
Monday, July 16, 2012
Virtual Meeting**

Minutes

Steering Committee Participants

Soamiely Andriamanjara, World Bank Institute
Ousmane Badiane (SC Co-Chair), IFPRI
Mutasim Mekki Mahmoud Elrasheed (Members'
Representative)
Cristina Mitaritonna, CEPII
Lindiwe Sibanda (SC Co-Chair), FANRPAN
Greg Traxler, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Terrie Walmsley, GTAP

AGRODEP Staff Participants

Antoine Bouet (IFPRI)
Sarah Dalane (IFPRI)
Betina Dimaranan (IFPRI)
Ismael Fofana (IFPRI)
Soonho Kim (IFPRI)
David Laborde (IFPRI)
Maximo Torero (IFPRI)

Meeting Agenda

The first virtual meeting of the AGRODEP Steering Committee was hosted at the IFPRI headquarters in Washington, DC on Monday, July 16, 2012. The agenda items included the following: i) Opening Remarks and adoption of the agenda; ii) Discussion of 2011 Activities; iii) Review of 2012 Workplan followed by a discussion; iv) Review of Outreach and Communications Plan followed by a discussion; v) General Discussion; vi) Closing Remarks

The [online meeting page for the SC virtual meeting](#) on the AGRODEP website provides links to all pre-meeting video presentations, powerpoint presentations and documents for the virtual meeting and other documents related to the meeting agenda items. The pre-meeting video presentations provide background about the projects activities in 2011 and plans for 2012 under each of the projects' components. The presentations include: Overview of AGRODEP 2011 Activities, Models Component, Data Components, and Network Component.

The minutes are organized according to the agenda items and the discussions among the SC members and AGRODEP staff present at the meeting. The approved items and the main action points are summarized at the end of the minutes.

1. Opening Remarks

Ousmane Badiane gave the opening remarks and introduced the agenda for the meeting. A comment was made about the length of time that has passed between the last meeting of the Committee which was held in June 2011 in Dakar and this meeting. A recommendation was made to hold meetings more frequently.

A quick roll call was made among the participants in the virtual meeting. Seven Steering Committee members were connected to the virtual meeting. Eleven members originally accepted the meeting but four members were unable to attend due to unexpected scheduling conflicts.

2. Discussion of 2011 Activities

The session was led by Lindiwe Sibanda. Antoine Bouet presented a quick [overview of the 2011 activities](#) of AGRODEP. The highlights of AGRODEP's 2011 activities include the Members' Meeting and Workshop and the meetings of the Scientific Advisory Board and the Steering Committee held in Dakar in June 2011, the launch of the AGRODEP website in October 2011, the launch of the AGRODEP Newsletter and the Quarterly Update series, and the launch the AGRODEP Grants Program.

A request was made for the recommendations made by the Steering Committee during the June 2011 meetings in Dakar to be mentioned and addressed in the meeting. Ousmane Badiane remarked that there are three recommendations that came from that meeting and each one will be addressed during the course of the meeting.

Mutasim Elrasheed pointed out a problem with the disbursement of funds for Sudanese researchers and asked if there is an issue of discrimination. Betina Dimaranan acknowledged that there is a problem in providing funds, including research grants, for the AGRODEP members from Sudan and that it is actually a problem that is being addressed by IFPRI and not just by AGRODEP. The issue concerns U.S. government restrictions regarding individuals from certain [countries](#). To resolve this problem, IFPRI is applying for a license from the U.S. government in order to release the grant funds, but the application process takes several months. AGRODEP management has already informed the Sudanese researchers about this and will keep the affected members updated as new information becomes available. Lindiwe recapped that the affected AGRODEP members have been advised and that IFPRI is making efforts to solve the problem.

3. Review of the 2012 Workplan and Discussions

Betina Dimaranan presented a review of the 2012 workplan ([document](#), [presentation](#)). The presentation is based on the 2012 workplans developed for each of the components of AGRODEP. Details are available from the video and powerpoint presentations provided in the SC virtual meeting page. Although progress in the Models Component was hampered in 2011 due to delays in hiring of AGRODEP staff and in collaboration with external partners, the Component expects to catch-up and make available several sets of standard modeling tools, with model codes and documentation, by the end of 2012 as well as new models and modeling tools under the innovation window. The Data Component will complete some remaining set-up activities such as the development of data standards and protocols and a data partnership plan (as recommended by the SC) and will continue the data warehousing activities (for available datasets) and implement data construction projects to support specific models.

The Network Component hosted the first physical meeting of the Network Advisory Committee (NAC) in Dakar in June 23, 2012. The Component also completed new member recruitment in May 2012 which brought total AGRODEP membership up from 55 to 84 members. The Component will continue with activities related to the AGRODEP grants programs, training activities, the monthly AGRODEP newsletter, and the AGRODEP working paper series. The project managers will continue with coordination activities and website maintenance and updates, donor reporting, staffing and collaborator contracts, and production of the AGRODEP Bulletin and Quarterly Updates.

Greg Traxler led the discussions about the workplan. He indicated that the 2012 workplan is very ambitious but is consistent with what AGRODEP has been doing. The AGRODEP team concurred that the workplan is ambitious since the team also wants to catch up with some activities that were delayed from the previous year. The following specific components of the workplan were also discussed:

- Working Paper Series:

Soamiely Andriamanjara inquired about the current status of the working paper series, the submission and review process, and the target number that AGRODEP wants to reach. Antoine Bouet explained that we currently have one paper up on the website and 5 papers are under review. AGRODEP aims to encourage more submissions from the members and to publish 4-5 papers on the website by the end of the year. The process involves submission by an AGRODEP member to the Editor of the working paper series who then assigns the paper to one of the Associate Editors. Together with an external reviewer, the Associate Editor should provide a review of the paper and deliver the two reviews within three months. Similar to a journal review process, the paper can be accepted as is, rejected, or a resubmission with revisions may be requested. Although the review process is similar to that for a journal article, the AGRODEP team decided to keep the publication as a working paper series rather than launch an AGRODEP journal since a journal would be a more complex task and since AGRODEP is not yet generating sufficient research material. The reviewers, however, can provide recommendations to the authors regarding appropriate journals to target for specific research papers.

- Prioritization and uptake of models:

Greg Traxler asked how prioritization among the models is done and how uptake of the models among members is assessed. David Laborde explained that AGRODEP has started with existing models that already run, have documentation, and that have already been used in publications. If needed, AGRODEP works on improving the documentation. Uptake of the models will be monitored based on research and publication activities and also from training courses on the models and the mentorship activities that will follow the training. The training courses on more current and advanced tools and models will be used with other incentives to encourage members to go beyond the tools and models and that they are already comfortable with.

- AGRODEP Membership:

Terrie Walmsley inquired about the target number of AGRODEP members after noting that membership has recently increased from 55 to 84 members. Antoine Bouet indicated that the membership extension plan actually calls for 75 members in 2012, and the recent selection was done to achieve more balance in terms of fields of interest to correct the initial bias towards people interested in computable general equilibrium modeling. Betina Dimaranan explained that the initial membership extension plan called for recruiting around 25 new members every year (after the first year) so that we will have 150 members at the end of 5 years. However, we

realized that new members who will join during the final year will not benefit much from AGRODEP and so we are revisiting the membership plan. We will open another recruitment round this year with greater focus on people interested in impact evaluation and will have one or two more recruitment rounds next year to achieve the target of 150 members.

Decisions:

- The SC approved the 2012 AGRODEP Workplan.

4. Review of the Outreach and Communications Plan and Discussions

Antoine Bouet presented an overview of the Communications and Outreach Plan ([document, presentation](#)). As requested by the SC, the plan aims to identify cost-effective activities that will link the AGRODEP research network to the policy decision-making processes in Africa. The plan outlines three sets of communications and outreach tools differentiated by the main actors, namely, tools designed and implemented by AGRODEP management, by AGRODEP and its partners, and by the AGRODEP members.

Terrie Walmsley led the discussions about the Outreach and Communications plan. The following specific issues related to the outreach and communications plan were discussed:

- Communications with national policymakers:
Lindiwe Sibanda commented on the need for AGRODEP to communicate better with policymakers, especially in providing evidence-based policy options in support of the CAADP agenda. Ousmane remarked that with its limited staff and infrastructure, AGRODEP does not have the resources to make direct contacts and carry out communications with policymakers without help from other organizations. AGRODEP must partner with other organizations who can help reach more people and communicate the work of AGRODEP more effectively. The plan is to work in close collaboration with ReSAKSS and its national SAKSS nodes. In terms of support towards the CAADP agenda, Betina Dimaranan reminded the group about the ongoing research being conducted by several AGRODEP members who were awarded grants for innovative research. Out of the 14 research grants, 6 groups are conducting 2-year research projects under one of the 4 priority areas related to the CAADP agenda, i.e. climate change and water resource management, output an input marketing policies, trade policies and competitiveness, and market access. Lindiwe remarked that we need to make sure that AGRODEP members integrate their research with teams in countries that are doing related work. Ousmane provided assurance that AGRODEP will work closely with ReSAKSS in the future but that there is a matter of sequencing and timing that will have to be addressed; trying to link up at this stage could be problematic.
- Website Strategy:
Soamiely Andriamanjara asked for clarification about the website strategy regarding increasing visibility in Africa since the website statistics (included in the presentation on Overview of 2011 Activities) indicate that most visits come from the United States. Betina Dimaranan explained that the statistics provided are rather outdated and were actually from a low activity period (January 2012). External traffic has actually increased by more than 400 percent since that period and 43% of the external visits are from Africa. We observe spikes in web activity corresponding to AGRODEP activities such as announcement of grants, training opportunities,

and calls for membership. Soonho Kim, the AGRODEP web portal specialist, performs a monthly web activity analysis and identifies ways in which the use of the website can be further improved to communicate AGRODEP's activities.

Decisions:

- The SC approved the Communications and Outreach Plan.

5. General Discussions

General discussions were led by Ousmane Badiane. He commented that the presentations were clear and that the workplan is very ambitious. He expressed appreciation for the AGRODEP website and the work that has gone into its development and that it is now successfully showcases AGRODEP's many activities. Going back to Lindiwe's remark, he stated that AGRODEP will engage more with ReSAKSS over the next few months.

The timing of the next physical meeting of the Steering Committee was discussed. It was decided that a parallel physical meeting of the SC and the Scientific Advisory Board will be scheduled sometime in November 2012. The AGRODEP team will provide updates on its various activities and present progress towards its 2012 workplan at the meeting. As well, the draft workplan for 2013 will be presented for discussion. A common session of the SB and the Scientific Advisory Board will be scheduled for later in the day. The SC and SAB meeting will be preceded or followed by a one day conference of selected AGRODEP members. A feasible date for the meetings will be identified soon.

6. Closing Remarks

The closing remarks were provided by Lindiwe Sibanda. She thanked the AGRODEP management team for the meeting preparations and congratulated them on the hard work. She reiterated that the workplan is ambitious but thanked the management team for *sticking to their guns* on the delivery. She indicated that the SC will look forward to an update in November.

Key Action Items:

- Identify a meeting date in November as soon as possible.
- The minutes of this meeting should be sent to the other members of the SC and they should be encouraged to access the background documents so that all members will be on board in November.