

SANREM CRSP Technical Committee teleconference minutes

April 2, 2009, 2-4 p.m. EDT

Call-in number: (866) 842-5779; code: 5402311230

Participants

Jacqueline Bauer, Indiana University

Alex Travis, Cornell University

Jeffrey Alwang, Virginia Tech

Corinne Valdivia, University of Missouri

Manuel Reyes, North Carolina A&T

Jerry Shively, Purdue University

Shirley Tarawali, ILRI

Maria Elisa Christie, Virginia Tech

Harry Rea, USAID (ex officio)

S.K. De Datta (ex officio), Virginia Tech

Michael Bertelsen (ex officio), Virginia Tech

Theo Dillaha (ex officio), Virginia Tech

Keith Moore (ex officio), Virginia Tech

Action items

1. Project leaders are to spend all allocated funds by Sept. 30.
2. Technical Committee members will send comments and questions about the Phase IV Concept Paper to Program Director Theo Dillaha and Associate Program Director Keith Moore, and the Management Entity will revise and update the paper to sharpen the focus and clarify the priorities. The revised paper will be posted on the SANREM website.
3. Moore will conduct a survey on feasible dates and locations for the annual meeting and share the results with TC members, who will make the decisions.
4. Semiannual progress reports are to be filed by the April 15 deadline.
5. Project leaders will file reports on USAID indicators in August, ahead of writing and submitting their annual reports.

Agenda items

Chair Jerry Shively called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m. EDT. No additions were made to the agenda.

1. Opening remarks by Administrative Principal Investigator S.K. De Datta and update on SANREM renewal

De Datta elaborated on the SANREM CRSP Phase IV Concept Paper distributed by Program Director Theo Dillaha on April 1. The cornerstone of the next phase of the program will be global food security. Regarding the final months of Phase III, he encouraged each Long-term Research Award (LTRA) principal investigator (PI) to use all allocated funds by Sept. 30 to complete goals in the project's approved work plan. Invoicing will have a 60-day grace period, but there should be no expenditures after Sept. 30. Regarding Phase IV, the SANREM Management Entity (ME) is awaiting official notification of renewal from USAID. LTRAs for the next phase must complete their work within five years, that is, by Sept. 30, 2014. Based on the request for applications (RFA), the selection process for new projects will be open and transparent, with recommendations for selection to be made by the SANREM External Evaluation Panel (EEP). Existing projects will not be renewed automatically.

Harry Rea said USAID does plan to extend the current award, so any funds remaining could be rolled over into Phase IV; no money would be lost. Formal notice of renewal is awaiting signatures. The agency's intention is to allocate \$29 million annually for all CRSPs and to renew SANREM at \$3 million

annually for five years, a total of \$15 million. Earlier plans to designate 25 percent of the USAID budget to the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA) may change to allocate all USAID funds for a global food security initiative. Rea clarified questions about overhead and other aspects of the CRSP budget. Jacqueline Bauer asked about the possibility of no-cost extensions at the end of SANREM Phase III. De Datta said those will not be possible except for small projects like funding for students to finish their degree work. Such exceptions would be at the discretion of the ME.

2. *Discussion of proposed SANREM Phase IV research theme: conservation agriculture production systems*

Dillaha said comments are coming in quickly about the concept paper, sent on April 1. Shively asked whether Malawi should be included among countries in southern Africa to be the focus of the new projects. Dillaha and Associate Program Director Keith Moore explained that the focus is to be on food-insecure regions within the specified countries, that the initial list is neither all-inclusive nor definitive, and that some regions, though food insecure, may be excluded because of safety issues related to political instability. Michael Bertelsen said those writing proposals for Phase IV need to approach USAID Missions beforehand in countries being considered to see if projects are feasible and likely to win approval. Shively asked whether proposals must include Mission endorsement. Moore said no, but early consultation is strongly encouraged.

Shively said the concept paper has a strong focus on soil science and asked whether a soil scientist will be an essential member of each Phase IV team. Dillaha responded that a soil scientist need not necessarily be a team member. Jeffrey Alwang said the paper reads like a concept for a soil CRSP and asked that the section on economic analysis and impact be revisited given the difficulty in monetizing the benefits of a research project. Shively said the emphasis on soil quality may need to be modified if the program is to attract proposals of the highest quality. Moore, Bertelsen, and Dillaha explained that the aim is to facilitate the writing of the new LTRA proposals with cross-cutting issues integrated from the outset. De Datta said impact happens on several levels, and the goal is to design Phase IV to ensure that results can be shown within five years. Alwang said the concept paper ignores the potential impact of research on behavior and does not make clear how to elicit cooperation within and among projects. It is too focused on production systems and technologies, and does not make clear how research is related to livelihoods, given that food security is much broader than merely farm activities. Corinne Valdivia said the concept paper appears to take a huge step away from concerns about people's livelihoods, knowledge, and actions. Shirley Tarawali shared the previously mentioned concerns about omitting contexts and items necessary for systems to be successful. De Datta said the next phase will focus sharply on agriculture, taking into account that food security cannot happen without new technology. Shively said the concept paper leaves out context and social dynamics, and that impact requires an integrated agenda. Alex Travis said soil science is a tool, but if the outcome is to be food security, then natural resource management must be considered too. Valdivia requested that the ME revise and clarify the concept paper. De Datta said that will be done, taking into account all comments and ideas received. Shively encouraged the TC to send questions and comments to Dillaha and Moore.

3. *Pipeline issues and no-cost extensions for Phase III research*

The deadline for all Phase III expenditures is Sept. 30. Dillaha reiterated that project leaders should spend money according to their work plans and send invoices as soon as possible. He said some projects have fund pipelines as big as 93 percent. Valdivia asked whether no-cost extensions will be available for Ph.D. students to complete their degree programs. Dillaha said SANREM has every intention of supporting students through completion of their degrees and advised contacting the ME on a case-by-case basis to make arrangements.

4. Date and place for the SANREM CRSP 2009 Annual Meeting and who should attend

The ME has proposed holding the meeting in late August or early September either in Blacksburg or in Washington. The latter has the advantages of being an airline hub, facilitating travel; and near USAID headquarters, allowing the possibility of including agency personnel in some sessions. There was extensive discussion about the options and about the focus of the meeting; whether host country researchers can be included, given budget and visa restrictions; to what extent meetings would be open to the public; and what dates would best accommodate the most people, given teaching schedules. Dillaha agreed to conduct a survey and share the results with TC members, who will make the decision.

5. Semiannual progress reports and USAID reporting requirements

Reports on LTRA activities for the first six months of the fiscal year are due April 15. Moore advised PIs to write a brief executive summary followed by highlights of critical tasks, emphasizing progress and avoiding extensive technical details. He recommended that degree training tables be updated and new publications entered into SANREM Knowledgebase before the reports are written, facilitating the process. The emphasis for this year's annual reports to USAID is to be on accomplishments, with less technical language than in the past and more vignettes and accounts of how research has changed lives and improved livelihoods. Reports should include one-paragraph stories about how research has made a difference to real people. Moore explained that USAID is pushing for early reporting of program results. He proposed submitting Form 19 separately and earlier than full reports. Rea said reporting requirements are being updated and that requesting results in the first quarter of a fiscal year, as some in USAID would like, is not practical. Dillaha proposed sending tables with USAID indicators in August, with full reports to follow. The PIs agreed unanimously that this is feasible.

6. New business and further discussion

Valdivia asked what the expected date is for the Phase IV RFA. De Datta said it will happen as soon as the ME is officially informed of the program's renewal and knows specifics of USAID's goals. After the RFA is made, applicants will have a two-month turnaround time. Rea advised writing the RFA now and revising it as details become available. Shively proposed posting the concept paper on the SANREM website to facilitate comment and to help project leaders begin to recruit their teams. Dillaha agreed to do so.

ME members reported on upcoming events involving SANREM personnel:

- SANREM will sponsor a daylong conservation agriculture symposium at the Soil and Water Conservation Society's annual meeting in July in Dearborn, MI.
- Moore will represent U.S. land grant universities and the SANREM CRSP in the International Agronomy Division Symposium at a joint annual meeting of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America in November in Pittsburgh. SANREM plans to hold an evening reception.
- Valdivia and team members will make a daylong presentation in May to USAID personnel in Washington on climate change and farmer adaptation in the Andes.

Chair Shively adjourned the meeting at 3:52 p.m. EDT.