



# Final Report

## **Evaluation of the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC): Final Report**

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Submitted by  
**Upper Quartile**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
AIGLA	Agricultural Investment, Gender and Land in Africa Conference
ALINe	The Agricultural, Learning and Impacts Network
ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
ATA	Agricultural Transformation Agency (Ethiopia)
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AULPI	African Union's Land Policy Initiative
BMGF	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CBAA	China and Brazil in African Agriculture (FAC theme)
CBSP	Community-Based Seed Production Programme
CDI	Centre for Development Innovation (Wageningen University)
CEC	Claremont Evaluation Center
CEIL PEAKS	Climate, Environment, Infrastructure and Livelihoods (CEIL) Professional Evidence and Applied Knowledge Services (PEAKS), DFID
CISANET	Civil Society Agricultural Network (Malawi)
CMAAE	Collaborative Masters on Agriculture and Applied Economics
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECF	Early Career Fellowship
EQ	Evaluation Question
FAC	Future Agricultures Consortium
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FHH	Female Headed Household
FISP	Farm Input Subsidy Programme (Malawi)
FUM	Farmers Union of Malawi
GIZ	German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation
GLGI	Global Land Grabs Initiative
GRAD	Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development (Ethiopia)
GSD	Gender and Social Development (FAC Theme)
GTP	Growth and Transformation Programme (Ethiopia)
HBAP	Household Asset Building Programme (Ethiopia)
HoS	Head of State
ICAS	Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies
IDS	Institute of Development Studies (located at the University of Sussex)
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ISS	Institute of Social Sciences (Erasmus University Rotterdam)
ISSD	Integrated Seed Sector Development

ISSER	Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (Ghana)
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KI	Key Informant
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LDPI	Land Deal Politics Initiative
LSLBI	Large Scale Land Based Investment
M&L	Monitoring and Learning
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MNKAL	Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands
MoAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NASFAM	National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi
NDMA	National Drought Management Agency
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PCR	Project Completion Review
PCANR	Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi
PIPA	Participatory Impact Pathway Analysis
PE	Political Economy
PEAPA	Political Economy of Agricultural Policy in Africa
PLASS	Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (University of the Western Cape, South Africa)
QCA	Quantitative Content Analysis
ReSAKSS	Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System
RED	Research and Evidence Division (DFID)
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN programme)
RELIVE	Resource, Environment and Livelihoods (International Institute of Social Studies)
ROA	RAPID Outcome Assessment
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation (FAC theme)
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
USP	Unique Selling Point
UQ	Upper Quartile
VfM	Value for Money

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<p>Political economy</p>	<p>A branch of social science that studies the relationships between individuals and society and between markets and the state, using a diverse set of tools and methods drawn largely from economics, political science, and sociology. The term <i>political economy</i> is derived from the Greek <i>polis</i>, meaning “city” or “state,” and <i>oikonomos</i>, meaning “one who manages a household or estate.” Political economy thus can be understood as the study of how a country—the public’s household—is managed or governed, taking into account both political and economic factors.<sup>1</sup></p>
<p>Policy framing</p>	<p>Policy framing is a concept used in public policy and social movement theory to explain the process by which actors seek to understand and act on complex situations. The policy framing process involves policy actors (a) confronting a situation where the understanding is problematic and uncertain, (b) creating an understanding or story that helps analyse and make sense of the situation, and (c) then acting (and persuading others to act) on it. Its basic premise refutes the notion that different individuals can observe the same social and natural phenomena and necessarily arrive at the same conclusions. Because the framing of the situation requires the assessment of the potential roles of other policy actors, framing will define the degree to which other potential actors are included and benefit from the policy process and policy decisions. Marginalised groups are more likely to contest a particular frame and promote a counter frame.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p>Discourse</p>	<p>Discourse denotes written and spoken communications such as<sup>3</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In semantics and discourse analysis: A generalization of the concept of conversation within all modalities and contexts.</li> <li>• The totality of codified language (vocabulary) used in a given field of intellectual enquiry and of social practice, such as legal discourse, medical discourse, religious discourse etc.</li> <li>• In the work of Michel Foucault, and that of the social theoreticians he inspired: discourse describes “an entity of sequences, of signs, in that they are enoncements (énoncés)”.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Definition from Encyclopaedia Britannica available online at:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/467600/political-economy>.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony R. Zito from the International Encyclopaedia of Political Science (2011) Eds. Badie B., Berg-Scholsser D., Morlino L. SAGE Publications.

<sup>3</sup> Compact Oxford Dictionary, Thesaurus and Wordpower Guide (2001). Oxford University Press, New York

<sup>4</sup> M. Foucault (1969). L'Archéologie du savoir. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Upper Quartile (UQ) has undertaken an independent evaluation of the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC). FAC is an international alliance of research organisations coordinated by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). FAC seeks to provide information and advice to improve agricultural policy and practice in Africa in order to reduce poverty and strengthen growth.

FAC was set-up in 2005 with funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) in response to increasing interest in learning how to promote policy reform to stimulate pro-poor and pro-growth agricultural transformation in Africa. FAC does this by contracting pieces of research, by convening conferences and research exchange events on topical issues, synthesising research into policy useful formats, hosting a variety of research outputs on its website and actively communicating information to decision makers. FAC's research is characterised by a **political economy approach**; providing a framework to understand the policies that are "*politically feasible*" in different contexts, why decisions are made and with what effect.

Over time, the geographic and thematic scale, management and governance arrangements for FAC have evolved. FAC now comprises an international secretariat (based at IDS) with three African Regional Hubs (based at Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development; the Institute of Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies; and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research) and a network of over 130 researchers working across ten research themes.

The focus of this evaluation was on understanding the pathways from high quality outputs to policy and practice change outcomes and impacts, and what can be learnt from the FAC experience in relation to these. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the relevance of FAC's policy research and communication work to agricultural policy in Africa;
- Document lessons from FAC, and accordingly, make recommendations and/or outline options for commissioning agricultural policy research; and

- Assess FAC's performance with respect to the achievement of logframe indicators.

The evaluation was commissioned by DFID at the end of a nine year period of core funding. The period covered by the evaluation is 2008 - 2013, but the evaluation team recognises that some outcomes and impact in this period may be due to prior periods of FAC activity, while others may be realised after 2013.

The evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014) clarified the evaluation terms of reference (TOR) (rephrasing focal areas and evaluation questions, and making explicit that the scope of the evaluation did not extend to assessing FAC against comparators). The evaluation sought to answer 11 priority evaluation questions (EQs), with a further six subsidiary questions to be addressed if sufficient evidence was available.

The evaluation methodology tested an ex-post theory of change (TOC) developed with FAC. This complements the overarching theory-based approach with case studies of eight specific 'impact events'. The evaluation used mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, combining desk-based secondary data with desk- and field-based primary data collection and analysis. The evaluation methodology for primary data collection was based on RAPID Outcome Assessment (ROA)<sup>5</sup>. The evaluation involved primary research in five countries: the UK, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa.

The evaluation team experienced several challenges in the implementation of the evaluation and identified various limitations of the approach (specifically the need to adapt the ROA method, limited number of identified impact events, contextual differences between cases, and low response rate to one of the surveys). Overall the team feels that these challenges have limited, but not undermined the robustness of the findings reported.

**Part B** of this report addresses each of the evaluation questions in turn, presenting a synthesis of the evidence base across all strands of the research and linking this back to the programme TOC. Headline findings are presented in Table E1 below.

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<sup>5</sup> Developed by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

Table E1: Evaluation findings	
Relevance and engagement	FAC’s research themes, political economy orientation and activities closely fit the expressed needs of users. There is more limited, but still sufficient evidence, triangulated across different sources, to conclude that in the main these fit the needs of policy makers and practitioners. Continued review and revision of communication formats and FAC priorities are needed in order to maintain relevance. More attention could be paid to meeting the needs of practitioners within the private sector along with innovative ways for including more ‘farmer voice’.
	There is evidence (although not consistent, programme-wide evidence) that organisations are using FAC knowledge products in their own advocacy work, in project design, to guide their own policy and to complement their own research and internally derived evidence. Often FAC is valued for providing a wider (multi-country) evidence base and interesting perspectives and framing. The perception is that the products are of high quality.
	FAC has contributed to filling nationally important knowledge gaps, provided new site specific evidence and contributed to new or different framing of key issues. FAC has brought new knowledge from experience elsewhere to national policy debates, although the knowledge may not always be ‘new’ in a global sense.
	FAC has worked well with other actors and networks and, in some cases, has been particularly effective in bringing together different actors and organisations in specific events that have sought to reframe policy issues. FAC has provided inputs to a wide variety of other actors and networks, and there are significant opportunities to build and deepen the current relationships.
Policy Processes (outcomes)	The TOC is a valid description of the policy processes observed operating in practice within FAC. FAC’s influence on outcomes has been observed to be stronger in some parts of the process than others. Weaknesses were found in the cycles of engagement and reflection with a stronger monitoring and learning system required at outcome level.
	FAC has built significant capacity among its researchers, fellows and grant recipients. In most cases this capacity is not only sustainable but is growing as researchers use the experience with FAC to further develop their careers and themselves mentor new researchers.
	The majority of research work currently done by FAC is by Southern based researchers and their influence within the network (as theme convenors and members of the coordination team) is growing. The majority of FAC’s policy influencing is led by African FAC members and this has been positively noted by some African policy makers. A major outcome for the researchers is improved job prospects and consultancy opportunities – which further contributes to their influence.
	Mainstreaming of gender and social difference (GSD) in FAC has not been systematised, nor backed by sufficient authority and resources to have consistent results. The ‘demand-led’ approach and variable level of focus and expertise of theme convenors and FAC researchers on GSD have contributed to limited integration of GSD in outputs and outcomes. “Mainstreaming” in capacity building has been effective in ensuring a good representation of women as ECF and grant holders, but women remain very under-represented among more senior FAC researchers, especially in some countries.
	Earlier EQs show FAC to have achieved significant and sustainable research capacity outcomes, and with research and influencing increasingly led by southern researchers. Data from FAC knowledge product users, although not statistically representative, show increasing levels of uptake; with many considering that their knowledge of agricultural policy and ability to engage has increased. Theory-based analysis shows that FAC is influencing policy processes at the outcome level, but current monitoring is not sufficient to quantify this at programme level. Individual impact case studies do show outcome level policy change.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Influencing policy (Impact)</p>	<p>Evidence from the impact case studies show that the FAC TOC is operating at the impact level. The evaluation identified one case of current impact and six cases of limited current impact; in four of these there was significant potential for future impact. Some attribution is possible at the ‘influence of evidence’ and ‘capacity to use PE thinking’ level of the TOC. At the ‘adoption of policy and practice’ (super-impact level of the TOC) contributions from FAC can be identified. Quantifying the contribution, or using the null hypothesis to estimate what would have happened without FAC, remains difficult.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Lessons from FAC experience</p>	<p>Starting as a consortium provided the appropriate springboard for FAC to develop into a predominantly African-based network of researchers, coordinated through a number of hubs. The network approach provides value for money by enabling productive research and capacity building relationships with individuals, without the significant transaction costs of developing formal relationships with 50+ organisations across Africa. Decentralisation remains a work in progress, with increasing African ownership and decreasing reliance on DFID core funding. In the past two years FAC has had significant success in attracting project funding; recognition of FAC’s value to a variety of organisations.</p> <p>FAC shows significant use of evidence in African policy making, but also that the relationship between research derived evidence and policy making is not simple. Evidence is used to justify existing policy choices and to convince others that the policy being promoted is supported by evidence. Evidence is also used to improve delivery and to counter criticism in the media or elsewhere.</p> <p>FAC has followed the key recommendations of previous reviews within the funding available. A hub structure hosted by African organisations has been implemented as recommended and the limited experience to date appears to be successful. Progress is being made with links to NEPAD and the AU. However, in the last year the ECF and the role of country coordinators has paused due to lack of funding. DFID has not followed recommendations for increased quantity and certainty of funding, and FAC is struggling to manage a rapid transition to project funding.</p> <p>DFID provided FAC with the security and flexibility to develop into an increasingly African capacitated network delivering significant value. Evidence for this comes from two MTRs and the current final evaluation. FAC is increasingly succeeding in winning project funding but still relies on DFID for core funding; although this has reduced from 100% to under 40% in the last two years. Delays in DFID launching a competitive call for policy research has created uncertainty that is proving difficult to manage while trying to maintain the value and viability of the FAC network. Lessons include formally responding to external review recommendations and managing changes in funding regimes in ways that minimise uncertainty. Building network capacity takes time. To maximise returns on DFID investment, the timing for withdrawal of core support should be objectively assessed and proactively managed.</p> <p>Evidence from the impact case studies show that limited investment in a researcher network model of delivery seems capable of producing quadruple wins in terms of: quality research output, communication, policy influencing and capacity building. VfM is increased through the non-financial incentives possible with such a model and paying attention to organisational culture and relationships. It is necessary to experiment with monitoring and learning systems able to track outcomes and contribution to impact in a complex environment. Additional value may be released by increasing collaboration between DFID staff, other programmes and the FAC network.</p> <p>The VfM of FAC at activity level is good, with a significant volume of publications produced with modest resource. It has not been possible to rigorously assess VfM or return on investment at outcome or impact level. There is qualitative evidence that the processes followed by FAC do deliver VfM, albeit, management controls may be tightened to ensure accountability and maintain productivity. Limited data from some impact case studies show very small FAC expenditure in relation to very large potential benefits. Therefore, even a very small contribution to change could represent significant benefits compared to costs.</p>

Despite exhaustive enquiries, few unintended consequences came to light. Lessons include the importance of risk analysis and continuation of flexible planning to be able to make use of surprises.

A proportionate and cross-cutting focus on CAADP processes was appropriate, with opportunities available for FAC to add value; although, how important a user of evidence and influencer of policy and practice CAADP actually is at national and regional level is contested. The approach to CAADP as initially envisaged and implemented by FAC was, however, not appropriate and some opportunities were missed. More recently, decentralisation of FAC has increased its legitimacy with CAADP and its capacity to engage in the CAADP continental processes. To date the influence of FAC's work on AU/ CAADP processes has come about mainly through FAC building an evidence base on themes of relevance to AU/CAADP policy makers, and then generating demand for further evidence within AU or CAADP institutions through on-going direct engagement with key officials and existing policy forums. This strategy is coherent with the FAC TOC and PE approach.

**Part C** of the report draws attention to a number of additional or cross-cutting issues for discussion. Many of these would need further work to confirm findings and to reflect in detailed recommendations. Part C makes a small number of recommendations for both FAC and DFID.

### Issues for discussion on FAC organisation

FAC's flexible and researcher-driven planning process keeps it relevant. It may need to be combined with a more rigorous approach to prioritisation of themes to avoid spreading resources too thinly and to ensure adequate reflection, monitoring, adjustment and follow through.

To improve outcomes and impact, FAC should focus its contribution on particular policy processes, using its TOC combined with internal political economy analysis of each engagement opportunity, in order to identify FAC's core comparative advantage in relation to other actors. This process should be backed-up by more explicit and documented cycles of engagement and reflection.

To maintain and increase relevance, FAC could develop co-creation mechanisms for inputs in the process of defining, commissioning, generating and peer reviewing knowledge products by forward thinking and ambitious end-users amongst policy makers and practitioners.

With FAC moving into a phase of greater reliance on project funding, there is a danger that effective capacity building through Early Career Fellowships (ECF) will get squeezed out. FAC may wish to consider ways to integrate a flexible ECF scheme into project funding, with

ECF opportunities advertised in relation to specific projects.

Communications through new and traditional non-specialist mass media (especially television which is important for influencing politicians and higher level policy makers) matters. FAC should continue to invest in communications capacity as this will add value to FAC's overall impact.

Mainstreaming gender and social difference (GSD) across FAC will require a commitment from all senior staff, as well as systems for ensuring incorporation of GSD in planning, implementation and peer review. This will require additional human resources, preferably decentralised to Africa. Systems for monitoring the progress of mainstreaming GSD in each theme and as a cross-cutting issue should be developed.

FAC delivers most value through synergy between themes/ disciplines and systematically incorporating political economy across them. This can be further deepened. Geography is also important with much agricultural policy being driven at national level. Creating FAC organisational capacity and synergy at country as well as regional hub level is a future challenge for FAC that provides the opportunity to increase overall impact.

Insufficient monitoring capacity as well as lack of funding for annual reflection workshops has left FAC with a weak evidence base on both outcome and impact. Although monitoring outcomes and impact from research and policy influencing work is not straightforward, more should be done. There is a need for FAC to experiment with ways of monitoring and learning (M&L) linked to a clear TOC, building on FAC's

earlier use of the Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA), or ROA methods.

FAC has produced significant outputs with a very limited institutional and management footprint. To an extent this has relied on the goodwill and above contracted hour commitment from key staff. With the move towards increased multi-donor project funding, the management load will increase in both winning funds, managing an increasingly complex portfolio and reporting to multiple donors. Judicious additional investment in management, M&L and organisational capacity is needed, while remaining lean and networked in order to maintain FAC's comparative advantage, value for money and sustainability. With DFID core funding coming to an end, project funding will have to contribute more towards the core costs and there may be a temporary overheads deficit that needs to be managed. A clear business plan is required.

The evaluation's impact case studies revealed some insight into policy influencing 'enablers'. Although these did tend to be context specific, some enablers are common across a number of impact events:

- Involvement of dynamic and committed individuals, who are interested in using evidence, in decision making positions;
- Availability of pre-existing research evidence and political economy analysis;
- Involvement of experienced and respected capacity to support the process; and
- An appropriate '*moment*'.

The impact case studies also provided some insight into policy change 'inhibitors'. These inhibitors are also context specific and were commonly a disruptive external event or difficult to influence political system. Political economy (PE) analyses of the influencing context, working with the appropriate people within the system and being sufficiently nimble to deal with surprises, were all found to be useful in reducing the influence of policy change inhibitors.

The FAC Africa Hub model appears to be working, with the advantage of the current arrangement being that hub hosts can be changed if the synergy on either side is no longer beneficial. The hubs can evolve through increased African leadership and further decentralisation of capacity, but this will need

funding confidence. Hubs may need a local legal status in order to qualify for some funding opportunities.

## Issues for discussion on DFID support for agricultural policy research

DFID started by funding a consortium of UK-based research organisations. This has developed into a network of 130+ evidence producers, 2,000 regular and 65,000 occasional evidence "consumers", with increasing exposure in the African media and success in winning project funding. This underscores the value of FAC as a network (over and above the value of each individual consortium member), and raises the question of how important it is for FAC to be sustained as a network, whether FAC can survive without DFID or other core funding and whether DFID has particular opportunities or responsibilities in this regard.

FAC's researcher led network approach has a number of features, including flexibility and non-financial incentives based on organisational culture with consequent lower costs, which make it good value for money (VfM). As a researcher led network, FAC has a comparative advantage in getting topical, policy-relevant evidence rapidly into the public domain, in providing alternative framing<sup>6</sup> to issues, in convening debate and in building African policy researcher capacity while doing this.

While providing core support to FAC, DFID has avoided micro-management and created space for researchers to prioritise themes and activities. This has positively reflected on the relevance of FAC outputs to many users.

It is important that FAC is an increasingly African dominated network and this should not be compromised. However, there are under-exploited opportunities for more synergy between FAC evidence and Africa based capacity on one hand and DFID advisers in country on the other. Realising this synergy will require raising awareness of opportunities for collaboration on both sides.

Tables E2 and E3 set out the evaluation's recommendations for FAC and for DFID.

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<sup>6</sup> See Glossary of Terms for a definition.

Table E2: Recommendations to FAC	
1.	Invest in an outcome and learning focussed M&L system with adequate capacity. This could be linked with innovative approaches to measuring and learning about outcome and impact, with a focus on enablers and inhibitors in different contexts. This could profit from the experience of ODI.
2.	Invest in additional limited high quality management and organisational capacity. This should be linked to a clear business plan with project funding contributing sufficiently to the core costs.
3.	Continue to evolve the hub model and further reinforce African leadership, input and output. The additional capacity recommended in recommendation 2, should be located in one or more of the African hubs, providing virtual input across all hubs, similar to what is currently being successfully practiced on communications. The appropriate legal status of the hubs should be further investigated.
4.	Develop ways of integrating the ECF scheme in a flexible way into a largely project funded portfolio to maximise synergy between evidence generation and capacity building. Dedicated funding for ECF capacity building should also be sought.
5.	Look into ways of co-creating evidence to ensure relevance and ownership of policy makers and practitioners. Develop institutional mechanisms for end-user input into research generation and peer review.
6.	Mainstream gender and social difference by developing appropriate organisational systems, including for planning and peer reviewing work, and provide the resources required to back these up.

Table E3: Recommendations to DFID	
1.	Having invested in the creation of a network with future value, DFID should manage its exit from core funding in ways that minimise risk of value loss and maximise potential future returns from the investment made.
2.	If the exit strategy from an accountable grant includes an opportunity for replacement with competitive funding, this should include realistic assessment on the timescale for DFID launch and contracting and formal consideration of contingency risk management actions if the timetable changes.
3.	While not making recommendations on criteria for a future competitive tender, the following lessons from FAC suggest that consideration should be given to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The specific advantages of a researcher led structure in terms of flexibility, getting information rapidly into the public domain, convening and framing debates; it would make sense for a proportion of future research funding to be researcher-led;</li> <li>b. The potential VfM of creating synergy between policy research, communications, capacity building and using the evidence to influence policy;</li> <li>c. Ways of combining African ownership which is valued by policy makers with access to global thinking and communications;</li> <li>d. Organisational culture, relationships and individuals matter and help deliver value; therefore support organisational models that build and increase VfM through non-financial incentives.</li> </ol>
4.	Develop institutional mechanisms to enable DFID staff, country offices and partners to engage creatively with centrally funded research, evidence generation, communication and policy processes, thus releasing the latent opportunities for synergy.



**PART A: EVALUATION BACKGROUND**

upperquartile

## 1. Introduction and background

Upper Quartile (UQ) is pleased to submit this report of the evaluation of the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC). FAC is a multi-disciplinary and independent learning alliance of academic researchers and practitioners involved primarily in African agriculture.

FAC conducts agricultural policy research in ten thematic areas. It seeks to produce timely, high-quality and independent information and advice to policy makers and 'opinion formers' in Africa, encouraging dialogue and the sharing of evidence and good practice. Through its network of researchers across the UK, Africa and around the world, FAC aims to show how agricultural policy in Africa can help to reduce poverty and strengthen growth.

FAC has received core funding from DFID since 2005. Over the course of three funding rounds FAC has received £7,543,422 in funding support from DFID; mostly from the Research and Evidence Division.<sup>7</sup> The nature and operation of FAC is discussed in more detail in section 1.2.

The findings presented in this report relate mostly to FAC work undertaken in the period 2008-2013. This report is presented to the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

### 1.1. Evaluation purpose, scope and objectives

#### 1.1.1. Evaluation purpose

UQ was tasked with undertaking a rigorous evaluation of FAC to assess the performance and impact of the research consortium with regard to influencing agricultural policymaking in Africa. The specific objectives of the evaluation were as follows:

- Assess the relevance of FAC's policy research and communication work to agricultural policy in Africa;
- Document lessons from FAC and, accordingly, make recommendations and/or outline options for commissioning agricultural policy research; and
- Assess FAC's performance with respect to the achievement of logframe indicators.

Both the evaluation terms of reference (TOR) and subsequent discussions with DFID made it clear that the evaluation was primarily for learning, rather than accountability purposes.

The evaluation was commissioned by DFID at the end of a nine year period of core funding. Given that earlier reviews<sup>8</sup> demonstrated that FAC has consistently exceeded expected milestones on production and communication of evidence and policy options, the quantity and quality of FAC's outputs are not a major focus of this evaluation. The focus is on understanding the pathways from high quality outputs to policy and practice change outcomes and impacts and what can be learnt from the FAC experience in relation to these.

Notwithstanding some minor deviations, agreed in full with DFID and recorded in the evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014), the TOR remain valid in guiding the delivery of the evaluation. The TOR are presented as Appendix 1. The main variations from the TOR are in the phrasing of evaluation focal areas and evaluation questions (EQs) and in making explicit that the scope of the evaluation does not extend to assessing FAC, its activities, outcomes, impacts and value for money against comparator organisations. Variations from the TOR and the rationale for these are reported in full in the evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014). The Inception Report remains a valid representation of the process that has led to production of this evaluation report.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> DFID Research for Development (R4D) funding record: <http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/Project/60706/>.

<sup>8</sup> See Bahigwa et al (2007), (2012) and DFID (2013b).

<sup>9</sup> As noted in the Inception Report, the evaluation team over-sampled impact events to allow for some of them to be dropped if no clear pathway to impact emerged. The final set of impact events is shown in Table 2 of this report. The highly specific nature of the evidence gathered through the ROA approach meant that the analysis using NVivo software that had originally been planned, was not really appropriate or practical. Instead the ROA evidence has informed detailed impact event stories (see Appendix 8). Individual researchers manually coded country level research findings against the framework provided by the EQs. This was triangulated across countries (in a team triangulation session)

### 1.1.2. Scope of work

The period covered by the evaluation is 2008 to 2013. However, it is recognised that some of the outcomes and impacts achieved in the 2008-2013 period may be due to inputs and outputs from the earlier phase of FAC (2005-2008). It is also recognised that impact from FAC work done from 2008-2013 may not be realised until sometime in the future.

The evaluation covers all aspects of FAC activity supported by DFID funding (which is more or less all FAC activities due to the core funding nature of DFID support).

### 1.1.3. Evaluation questions

The evaluation aims to answer eleven priority questions, with a further six subsidiary questions to be addressed if sufficient evidence is available. EQs were posed by DFID in the TOR and refined by the evaluation team during the inception phase. The final set of EQs clearly addresses the evaluation objectives and spans the breadth of focal areas of interest to DFID. The EQs are detailed in Table 1, section 2.3 of the evaluation methodology. Priority EQs are highlighted in blue.

### 1.1.4. Evaluation timing

The timing of this evaluation, coming at the end of FAC's core funding, is not ideal. A learning orientated evaluation covering the whole FAC period from 2005-13 and reporting in mid-2013 might have been preferable. This would have given time for the evaluation to feed into future DFID commissioning of agricultural policy research in advance of designing a new research call and the ending of FAC's core funding. An earlier study would have also given FAC time to use the learning to plan for a post-core funding future.

### 1.1.5. Evaluation audiences

The target audience for this evaluation includes DFID (DFID-FAC Reference Group, DFID Agricultural Research Team, DFID Research and Evidence Division, DFID Economic Inclusion and Agriculture Team, DFID Nutrition Team). Given the learning-focused orientation of the evaluation, the FAC leadership team and the wider FAC network/ membership are also a key audience, as are other donors who may be interested in investing in FAC and/or related programmes.

### 1.1.6. Transparency and lesson learning

In line with DFID guidelines (DFID, 2013a), which refer to the need to fill knowledge gaps and to improve the effectiveness of aid delivery, findings and recommendations from the evaluation of FAC are intended to generate lessons to improve the use of research in agricultural policy making/ influencing, the future commissioning of agricultural research and, more generally, contribute to satisfying the principle of transparency of DFID work.

## 1.2. Context of the evaluation

### 1.2.1. About the Future Agricultures Consortium

The Future Agricultures Consortium is a multi-disciplinary and independent learning alliance of academic researchers and practitioners involved primarily in African agriculture. FAC conducts agricultural policy research and seeks to produce timely, high-quality and independent information and advice to policy makers and 'opinion formers' in Africa, encouraging dialogue and the sharing of evidence and good practice to improve agricultural policy and practice.

The consortium does this by contracting specific pieces of research, by convening conferences and research exchange events on topical issues (for example Large Scale Land Based Investment (LSLBI) or '*land grabs*' in Africa), synthesising research into policy useful formats, hosting a wide variety of research outputs, presentations, blogs, podcasts etc. on their website and actively communicating this information to decision makers. More information is available on the FAC website [www.future-agricultures.org](http://www.future-agricultures.org).

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and with the wider evidence base to inform this report. NVivo analysis was undertaken in relation to the Personal Professional Capacity survey of FAC researchers. The detailed evaluation method is provided in Appendix 2.

The FAC secretariat is hosted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Other consortium partners are the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. Governance of the consortium is premised on an equal partnership between consortium members, with accountability provided through a Steering Committee. Financial and quality accountability and control are ensured by the Secretariat (based at IDS) (IDS et al 2005).

In addition to UK-based consortium partners, FAC has three African Regional Hubs (East, Western and Southern Africa) relating to the major regional economic communities in Africa. FAC's East Africa hub is hosted by the Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development (Nairobi, Kenya), the Southern Africa hub by the Institute of Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies - PLAAS (Cape Town, South Africa) and the Western Africa hub at the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research - ISSER (Accra, Ghana). Each hub is linked to a network of regional and international researchers. The Hub model is part of FAC's transition to an African-based organisation (see section 1.2.3).

FAC's research network now consists of more than 130 researchers. Individual researchers/ teams of researchers are contracted on a case by case basis to undertake specific pieces of research commissioned by the Secretariat and/ or the regional hubs. Within the overarching objectives of FAC (and the individual themes), there has been relative flexibility around the focus, type and scope of research undertaken; a model that has proven largely successful in allowing FAC to respond to changing context and emerging '*moments*' for influence. Commissioning of research is also discussed in section 6.6.1 in relation to value for money.

For each theme, FAC follows a process of engaging with the existing evidence, reflecting on this, and identifying knowledge or evidence gaps. Each theme then develops a work programme aimed at filling the gaps and, if appropriate, *reframing* of the policy debate. By reframing we mean considering the prevailing discourse/ thought in relation to an issue (i.e. the way in which an issue is commonly portrayed or understood) and actively seeking to change the way that the issue is conceptualized by key actors.<sup>10</sup>

FAC's networked structure (whereby the majority of researchers are on the payroll of other organisations/ institutions or operate as independent consultants) means that FAC itself operates with a lean team of only two full-time and eight part-time employees.

FAC's research is organised around a set of ten themes - Policy Processes, Commercialisation, Growth and Social Protection, Science Technology and Innovation, Pastoralism, Climate Change, Young People and Agri-food, Land, Gender and Social Difference, and Brazil and China in African Agriculture.

Core outputs (as defined in the programme logframe) for the evaluation period were:

- **Policy options and their evidence base produced and communicated amongst target audiences for core thematic areas.** This is achieved through undertaking primary research, producing working papers, policy briefs, communications materials etc;
- **Capacity of junior African researchers in generating quality policy relevant research and using this to influence policy processes strengthened.** This is achieved primarily through scholarship and grant programmes for junior researchers (discussed in detail subsequently); and
- **Consortium effectively managed and transitions to an African base & sustainable funding.**

FAC's agricultural research is characterised by a **political economy approach**; i.e. its research and analysis is informed by the view that "*it is a country's political system which generates the incentives (strong or weak) for the state to take action to promote agricultural development... It is also the political system that influences the type of development promoted*". The political economy approach (see also Glossary of Terms) provides a framework to understand the policies and investments for

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the GSD theme has sought to challenge common framings in policy and practice that equate "gender" with "women", and put women and men in opposition to each other.

agricultural development that are “*politically feasible*” in different country contexts<sup>11</sup>, why and how policy and investment decisions are made in different places and with what effect.

FAC has been core funded by DFID since it started in 2005. Over the course of three funding rounds, FAC has received £7,543,422.<sup>12</sup> Funding was initially from DFID’s Policy Division. The programme now sits within the portfolio of the Research and Evidence Division (RED).

### 1.2.2. The rationale for FAC

FAC’s work is premised on the fact that agriculture remains a key economic driver in poorer countries. Consequently, pro-poor agricultural development is a driver of growth in the wider economy and a means to economic development and poverty reduction (IDS et al, 2005). In spite of this recognition, the development potential of the agricultural sector has been under-utilised and the sector has, in the past, been largely neglected in terms of policy making and investment.

At the time of FAC’s inception, agriculture was beginning to move up the poverty reduction agenda in sub-Saharan Africa, with many agencies according it special strategic priority (for example, agriculture became a strategic priority for New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) (established in 2003); the UN Millennium Project (2005); the Africa Commission (2005) and the World Development Report (2008) (Bahiigwa et al, 2007)). Coupled with this was the realisation that previous *agricultural fixes*, focused on technology, markets and institutions, had been found wanting and that there was a need to revitalise the debate around agriculture asking what works, in what circumstances and why. FAC’s political economy approach addresses these questions head on.

### 1.2.3. The evolution of FAC

Over time the geographic and thematic scale, management and governance arrangements for FAC have evolved considerably. In its first operating phase (2005-2008) FAC activity focused on three core themes (Bahiigwa et al, 2007). These were:

- **Agricultural growth and social protection:** researching synergies between achieving agricultural growth and forms of social protection that contribute to productive engagement;
- **Agricultural commercialisation:** market engagement of small farmers, as well as research into high value markets, and domestic and international value chains; and
- **Policy processes:** a political economy perspective considering how to influence strategic policy priorities and open responsiveness to new policy ideas.

Additional funding secured for the period 2008-2010 allowed the expansion of these core themes and the addition of a fourth thematic area, Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), which specifically considered the politics of seed policy and the political economy of seed systems.<sup>13</sup>

In 2010 FAC secured a further three years core funding from DFID’s Research and Evidence Division. Objectives for this period included expanding FAC work in Africa (including the introduction of further thematic research areas), linking more closely with CAADP processes of NEPAD and the African Union and the transition of FAC to an African led and managed institution leveraging funding from a range of sources by 2013 (DFID, 2013b).

Over the third phase of the programme (FAC III), FAC significantly expanded its geographic and thematic reach. 2010 saw the launch of the Climate Change, Pastoralism, Young People and Agri-Food and Land themes. These were followed in 2011 by Gender and Social Difference (GSD) (cross-cutting theme) and China and Brazil in African Agriculture (CBAA). These additions brought the total number of research themes to ten.

<sup>11</sup> See Future Agricultures Consortium ‘Political Economy of Agricultural Policy in Africa (PEAPA): <http://www.future-agricultures.org/research/policy-processes/592-political-economy-framework#.VCanF8twbDc>.

<sup>12</sup> £750,000 in 2005-2008; £5,869,999 in 2008-2013; £923,423 in 2013-2014.

<sup>13</sup> Added in FY 2008-10 grant after additional resources were secured from a number of parts of DFID, as well as Gates Foundation.

FAC has also made progress with its decentralisation. The 2011 report of the FAC Africa commission made proposals for the transition of FAC to an African-based and African-led organisation. It was felt that this structure would be more likely to gain acceptance from, and therefore influence, African governments and other policy actors, many of whom may be sceptical of externally driven agendas.

#### 1.2.4. Previous assessment of FAC

The first Mid-Term Review (MTR) of FAC was in 2007. This found that FAC had substantively met its outputs and project purpose, within limited resources for its policy-influencing approach (Bahigwa et al, 2007). This review immediately precedes the period covered by the current evaluation.

The second MTR took place in late 2011. Once again the review found that FAC had met or exceeded quantitative targets for research outputs; concluding that the volume of research activity was substantial in relation to budgetary resources (Bahigwa et al, 2012). The review also considered that FAC had demonstrated creativity and agility in its selection of policy relevant research and conference topics, and had started the process of connecting with the AU/ NEPAD.

The Project Completion Review (PCR), conducted in July/August 2013, assessed results over the period July 2010-July 2013. The PCR was encouraging about FAC's progress noting that the consortium consistently performed well against indicators and milestones, the project had been completed within budget and in line with expected timescales (DFID, 2013b). FAC's performance at Output level was rated as A+. However, while FAC performed well in terms of Outputs, the link between Outputs and Outcomes was considered more tenuous. The PCR awarded a score of B (moderately did not meet expectations) on FAC's overall Outcome, noting that clear evidence of policy strengthening was limited.

It is within this context that the evaluation takes place. The next chapter presents a summary methodology. The remainder of the report presents the evaluation findings (and supporting evidence) in relation to each EQ. The report concludes with cross-cutting learning points and recommendations.

## 2. Evaluation methodology

### 2.1. Introduction

The evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014) submitted in May 2014 provides a detailed description of the methodology adopted and the rationale for this. This is summarised below. An expanded methodology is provided as Appendix 2.

### 2.2. Methodological approach

The evaluation design combines elements of theory-based and case-based approaches. These stem from a *realist perspective*; recognition that outcomes are affected positively and negatively by the real world context in which they occur (Stern et al, 2012). Realist evaluation recognises the complexity of interventions in the social world and the difficulty of isolating the impact of a single intervention, seeking instead to explore what works, for whom, in what circumstances and why. In line with realist, theory-based approaches, the evaluation design seeks to test a theory of change (TOC) for the FAC intervention. As FAC was established prior to the requirement for a DFID TOC, as part of the evaluation inception phase an ex-post TOC was developed and employed retrospectively to assess FAC's performance.<sup>14</sup> The visual articulation of the TOC is shown in Figure 1 below. The full narrative description is provided in Appendix 3, including key assumptions.

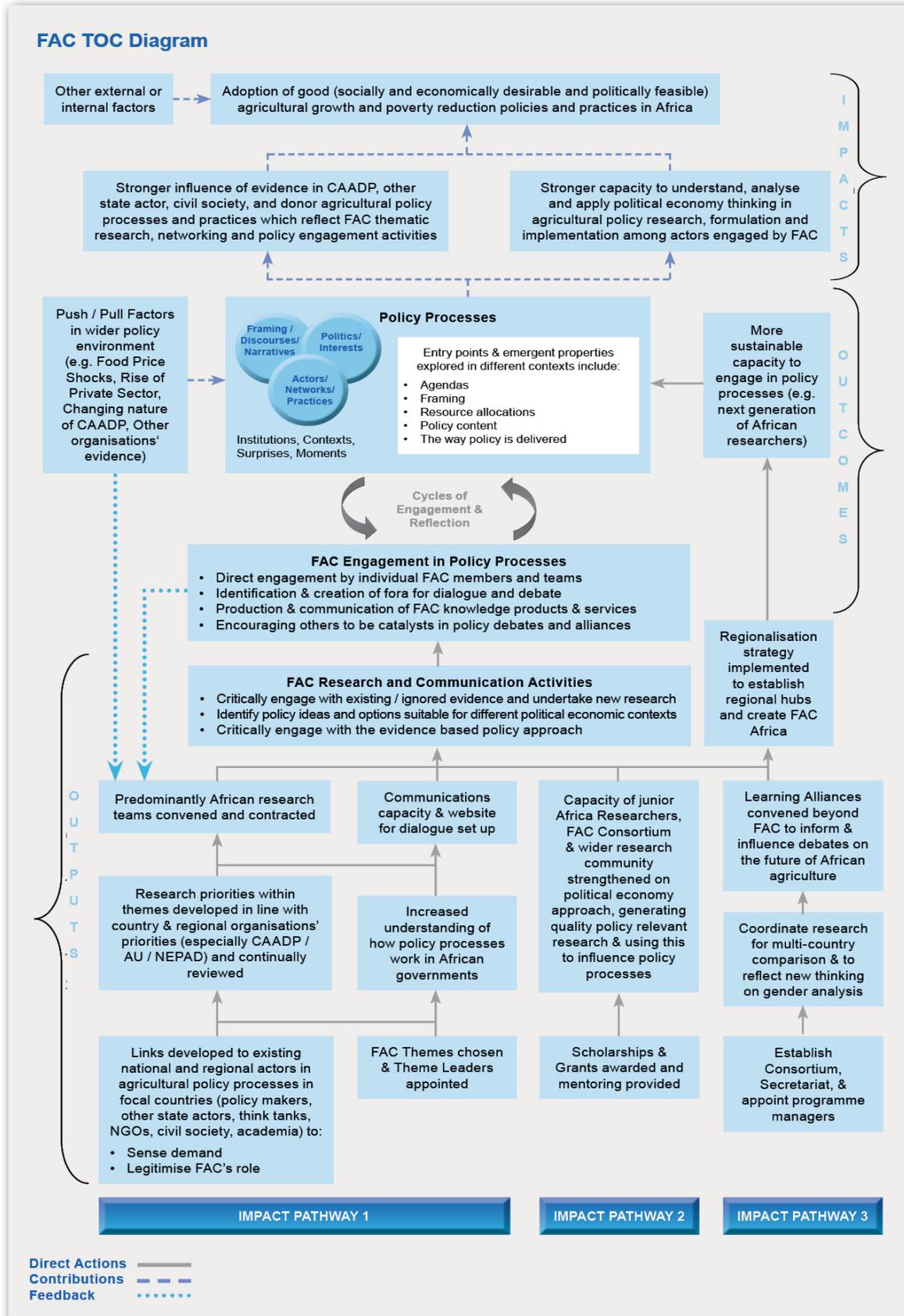
Complementing the overarching theory-based approach, the evaluation design incorporates 'studies of the case' (Stern et al, 2012). In most instances these cases are specific '**impact events**'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> The TOC is ex-post in the fact that for majority of the period being evaluated FAC did not have an explicit TOC. This TOC builds on the 2010 FAC logframe, as well as FAC's own thinking and experience, and input from the UQ team. This TOC is the consensus output of the Evaluation Preparation Workshop facilitated by UQ for FAC on 9 April 2014. It included opportunities for all of the FAC Team to contribute by email or to participate in person.

<sup>15</sup> The term '**Impact Events**' is being used in this evaluation to denote examples of where FAC appears to have made a contribution to stronger influence of evidence, stronger capacity to use evidence and/or the adoption of a policy or

Figure 1:



practice as explained in the TOC. An impact event can be time limited, or it can be a process that has been influenced in some way by FAC.

## 2.3. Evaluation questions

The original TOR provided an indicative set of evaluation questions. These were refined, prioritised and agreed with DFID during the evaluation inception phase based on the evaluation team's preliminary desk-based research, key informant interviews and the agreed TOC. Table 1 presents the EQs. The prioritised questions (numbers highlighted in blue) were to be answered specifically by the evaluation and other questions were to be addressed where evidence allowed. The questions are aligned with the OECD-DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance.

## 2.4. Evaluation methods

FAC is a complex programme with a wide variety of themes, interventions, outcomes and impacts. As a result, various data collection methods were required to address the EQs. The evaluation design employs mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, combining desk-based secondary data with desk and field-based primary data collection and analysis. These methods were agreed in the evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014) and are summarised below.

### 2.4.1. Secondary data collection and analysis

**Document review:** The evaluation began with a review of FAC and selected non-FAC documentation. The review considered the rationale for FAC intervention, FAC's organisational and management structures, progress and achievements against targets and FAC's evolution over time.

**Quantitative data review:** FAC holds a variety of quantitative data including a comprehensive Output Database (MS Excel), data on document downloads, website usage and other social media activity (twitter, Facebook, slideshare etc.) and detailed project budgets (charting projected and actual expenditure). The evaluation team carried out quantitative analysis to assess FAC's activities and outputs, the success of FAC in communicating and disseminating their research (viewed as an indicator of influence) and to consider Value for Money (VfM) issues.

**Quantitative content analysis:** Upper Quartile (in partnership with researchers from Claremont Evaluation Center (CEC), Dr Tarek Azzam and Sarah Mason) undertook an experimental Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA).<sup>16</sup> The purpose was two-fold 1). to identify and assess the impact of FAC research on policy framing and policy narratives and 2). to assess the efficacy of this method for evaluating policy influence. As this was an experimental approach, the decision was to trial the QCA method in Malawi only.<sup>17</sup> The QCA addressed five research questions related to but distinct from the overarching EQ's (primarily EQ14 and 15). The QCA report (including the sampling strategy and analysis) is provided as Appendix 4.

### 2.4.2. Primary data collection and analysis

**Key informant interviews:** The evaluation team conducted semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in the UK and in Africa. Key informants included core members of the FAC Secretariat, their counterparts in FAC Africa regional hubs and FAC Theme Convenors. KIIs were also conducted with a range of stakeholders from within DFID. A full list of Key Informants is included as Appendix 5.

**Online surveys:** The evaluation team conducted two separate online surveys. The surveys were disseminated via SurveyMonkey®. The surveys were a knowledge product user survey (FAC mailing list subscribers) and a personal professional capacity survey (lead and co-researchers, Early Careers Fellows and other grant recipients). The surveys are provided in Appendix 6 and Appendix 7. The limitations of the survey data are discussed in section 2.5

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<sup>16</sup> Quantitative Content Analysis is a methodology for structuring written material that allows researchers to analyse trends and make valid inferences (GAO, 1996). It is commonly used to determine the relative emphasis placed on issues in the mass media and to study trends in communication over time (Crano & Brewer, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Malawi was selected due to the availability of English language policy documentation, the duration and scale of FAC intervention in Malawi.

Table 1: Evaluation Questions			OECD-DAC
Evaluation objective 1 - To assess the relevance of FAC's policy research and communication work to agricultural policy in Africa			Criteria
1	How closely did FAC's research themes, political economy orientation and activities fit the needs of policy makers and practitioners?	Relevance of research and communication	Relevance
2	How have a range of organisations used FAC's knowledge products (including social media) and what is their perception of these products?		
3	How effectively has FAC engaged Southern researchers & included their perspectives and with what outcome?		
4	To what extent has FAC contributed new ideas and filled important knowledge gaps?		
5	To what extent has FAC and its partners built sustainable research capacity (particularly in Africa) to engage in policy processes?	Theory-driving understanding of policy influencing	Impact Sustainability
6	To what extent has the FAC ToC been shown to be operating in practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have the four elements of FAC interventions in policy processes, which were identified in the ToC, contributed individually to the policy process and what has been the synergy between them?</li> <li>How have the 'Cycles of Engagement and Reflection' between FAC interventions and policy processes worked in practice?</li> <li>What can FAC tell us about using institutions, contexts, surprises and moments to influence policy processes?</li> <li>What does FAC experience reveal about how to design, monitor and manage research in ways that creates and sustains space to work with emergent properties and entry points in policy processes?</li> </ul>		Effectiveness
7	Has FAC worked effectively with other actors and networks?		
8	In what ways has FAC shown that evidence is used in African Policy making?	Lessons and implications	Effectiveness
9	What can be learnt from the recommendations from previous reviews?		
10	Was the focus on CAADP, as an important user of evidence and influencer of national and regional policy and practice, appropriate and what lessons can be learnt from it?		
Evaluation Objective 2 - To provide DFID with lessons from FAC experience to inform commissioning of future agricultural policy research			
11	What are the insights from FAC on how DFID could increase the effectiveness of agricultural policy research work?	Lessons and implications	Effectiveness
12	What was the value added of creating, funding and then decentralising FAC as a consortium?		Efficiency
13	How effective was DFID support to FAC and what lessons can be learnt from this?		Effectiveness
Evaluation Objective 3 - To assess FAC's performance with respect to achievement of logframe indicators			
14	To what extent has FAC achieved its expected Outcomes and Impact?	Outcomes & impacts	Impact
15	What are the outcomes from gender and social difference mainstreaming?		Impact
16	What have been the unintended, positive and negative outcomes and impacts and what lessons can be learnt from them?	Unintended	Impact
17	What are key insights on how FAC could strengthen its outcome and impact and boost its VfM?	VfM	Efficiency Impact

**Knowledge product user survey:** The survey was sent to a total of 2,387<sup>18</sup> individuals who receive information from FAC via their newsletter. The survey received 284 (219 complete) responses.

**Personal professional capacity survey:** The survey tested key elements of the FAC TOC (specifically impact pathway 2). The survey achieved 79 responses from a distribution list of 136 valid contacts.<sup>19</sup> The breakdown of researcher vs. grantee responses is shown in the detailed methodology at Appendix 2. Full survey analysis provided in Appendix A7.2. Quantitative analysis was undertaken in MS Excel and qualitative analysis in NVivo10.

**RAPID Outcome Assessment:** The evaluation methodology for primary data collection was based on RAPID Outcome Assessment (ROA);<sup>20</sup> an approach developed by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) drawing on various methodologies (including Outcome Mapping, Episode Studies and Most Significant Change) to assess and map the contribution of a project’s actions and outputs to change at policy level. The ROA approach involved four sequential steps (orientation and focus; background research and preparation; outcome mapping; and analysis in relation to evaluation questions and the TOC) described in detail in Appendix 2. The resulting ‘impact stories’ (included in summary at section 2.7 below and in full in Appendix 8) describe the contribution of FAC to outcomes identified by key informants (KIs), in relation to specific ‘impact events’.

The selection of ‘impact events’ (see footnote 14) to analyse in more detail through ROA was critical to the validity and achievability of the evaluation. A two step selection process was used, with an initial selection of themes and then, within the selected themes, selection of ‘impact events’ in specific countries. The full criteria and logic for the selection is described in detail in the evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014).

Table 2 outlines the final selection of ‘impact events’ which form the basis of the evaluation. The evaluation involved primary data collection in four countries; the **UK (all evaluators), Ethiopia (led by Sally Baden), Kenya and Malawi (led by Martin Whiteside) and South Africa (led by Kathleen Latimer).**

**Table 2: Final selection of impact events**

Impact event	Impact to be assessed	Country	Themes*	Lead evaluator
Co-founding the Land Deal Politics Initiative as a global research network	Co-Founding the LDPI as a platform and network generating solid evidence through detailed field-based research that incorporates and complements a range of policy-oriented donor and NGO-led reviews, as well as more activist political work on global land deals	Global	Land	Carl Jackson
Institutionalisation of Kenya ASAL Policy Gains	FAC contribution to policies of the Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands and its institutionalisation after the Ministry was discontinued	Kenya	Pastoralism, Policy Processes	Martin Whiteside
FAC providing evidence for civil society led advocacy in Malawi	FAC influence on advocacy capacity of three CSOs and their resulting influence on FISP, CAADP, Agricultural Policy and Community Land Policy	Malawi	Policy processes	Martin Whiteside

<sup>18</sup> FAC’s mailing list contained 2,423 email addresses. After cleaning to identify and remove undeliverable and duplicate addresses, the valid survey population was 2,387.

<sup>19</sup> Data cleansing removed a number of broken/ unavailable email addresses from the distribution list. We also excluded those contacts who participated extensively in qualitative aspects of the research in preference to completing the survey, those who were unavailable to take part for the duration of the survey due to, for example, annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave, sabbatical etc and those who claimed to have had no contact with FAC and were unable to comment (two recipients of LDPI grants).

<sup>20</sup> See Rapid Outcome Assessment Toolkit (2012), ODI, London: <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/6800-rapid-outcome-assessment>.

Impact event	Impact to be assessed	Country	Themes*	Lead evaluator
Improvements to implementation and maintained donor support for FISP	FAC contribution to evidence and its effect on donor and Malawi Government policy and implementation of FISP	Malawi	Agricultural Growth and Social Protection	Martin Whiteside
Deferral of Kenyan Community Land Bill for extended consultation	FAC influence on the deferment and changes made to the Community Land Bill	Kenya	Land	Martin Whiteside
African Union 'Drivers of Success' study	FAC researcher collaboration in AU commissioned study for review and renewal of CAADP targets and commitments by African Union Heads of State (HoS) in Malabo	Africa	AU/CAADP	Sally Baden
FAC influence on policy and practice in graduation from the PSNP in Ethiopia	Changes in perceptions of, and piloting of new practices, with potential to influence policy on graduation of food insecure people from Ethiopia's Social Protection Graduation Policy/PSNP	Ethiopia	Agricultural Growth and Social Protection	Sally Baden
Adoption of integrated and inclusive seed system in Ethiopia	Development of an integrated and inclusive cereal seed system and supportive enabling environment in Ethiopia, that will enable farmer access to affordable cereal seed	Ethiopia	Science, Technology and Innovation	Sally Baden

\* Gender and Social Difference was looked at as a cross-cutting issue across all impact events

## 2.5. Challenges and limitations of the evaluation approach

The evaluation team experienced several challenges in implementation of the evaluation and identified various limitations of the approach. Overall the team feels that these challenges have limited but not undermined the robustness of the findings reported. Key challenges and limitations (described in more detail in Appendix 2) are:

- **Application of the ROA approach:** The nature of the evaluation meant that this method could not be applied in text book style. The evaluation team adapted the approach to retain its principles and apply them in a pragmatic way;
- **Selection of impact events:** A challenge was the limited number of identified impact events from which to sample, clustering in some countries, and their diverse nature.<sup>21</sup> A purposive selection was made as this had the benefit of ensuring positive examples from which learning could be gleaned. The limitation here is in identifying the overall impact of FAC at programme level. However, the evaluation team feels that the breadth of methods used overcomes this limitation sufficiently.
- **Limitations of the impact case studies:** Comparative analysis across cases (at country and/or thematic level) is limited by the significant contextual differences. It is also noted that there is an inherent 'positive-bias' in the case study selection and findings. This was inevitable as cases were chosen from examples where it was thought by the FAC team that FAC evidence had contributed to some kind of impact. This bias is recognised in the interpretation of the evidence and in linking findings to the overall programme level impact of FAC.
- **Limitations of the knowledge product user survey:** As may be expected in a self-selection survey of this type (i.e. a group with light-touch engagement with the programme intervention) the

<sup>21</sup> The pool from which impact events were selected was derived from existing documented 'impact stories' produced by FAC and subsequent suggestions made by FAC during discussions with the evaluation team.

response rate was low.<sup>22</sup> Survey data that appears in this report is appropriately caveated. The rationale for this survey approach and justification for data use is detailed in Appendix 2.

As mailing list subscribers sign-up online by providing their name and email address, it is not possible to profile the FAC mailing list in relation to the survey respondents. FAC members (including researchers, partners and grantees) were, however, removed from the list of survey recipients, meaning that those who received the survey invite are external to the FAC organisation.

Interpretation of the user survey data is done with the assumption that this is a self-selected group of informants who are sufficiently interested in FAC knowledge products to both sign-up for the newsletter and to reply to the request to participate in an on-line survey. There is not an assumption that they are statistically representative of all potential or actual FAC knowledge product users. It is considered however that these are a group of informants who have legitimate opinions that can be triangulated with opinions from other informants and information from other sources for the benefit of the evaluation.

- **Limitations of the personal professional capacity development survey:** Overall there was a strong response rate from ECFs/grantees who were invited to participate in the survey (84%). The response from lead/ co-researchers was more disappointing at 49%. The results for grantees are therefore considered more robust than for researchers. Despite this, the evaluation team feels that the survey provides a reasonable evidence base when viewed in conjunction with findings from other research strands, upon which to comment on the outcome and impact of FAC in relation to capacity development.

The evaluation team considers that the varied combination of methodologies and the triangulation between them has provided the depth of information required to answer the EQs.

The richest (and hence most relied upon) source of evidence on FAC's outcomes and impact comes from the ROA of impact events. Secondary data analysis, the user surveys and key informant interviews were also important in understanding the activities, outputs and outcomes of FAC.

## 2.6. Inclusion and ethics

Upper Quartile and our contractors operate with strict adherence to our Professional Code of Conduct. Research conducted for this evaluation is in line with the principles of research ethics set out in the DFID Ethics Principles for Research and Evaluation. Further detail is provided in Appendix 2.

## 3. Impact case study summaries

As discussed, to understand the outcome and impact of FAC on specific policy processes, the evaluation team looked in detail at eight case studies from a list of examples where it was felt that FAC had contributed. The selection process is described in detail in the Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014). The extended case studies are provided in Appendix 8. A short summary of each is given below.

The individual impact case studies are important source material for answering the EQs and this evidence is referenced throughout the report using the impact story number; for example IS1.

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<sup>22</sup> The confidence interval for a survey estimate of 50% is +/- 6.3%. Results should therefore be interpreted with caution. In addition, there is likely to be a significant positive response bias in the survey results with those most positively predisposed to FAC being most likely to take time to complete the survey. This too should be considered in any interpretation of responses.

# Impact Story Summaries

## **1: FAC co-funding the Land Deal Politics Initiatives in 2010 as a global research network**

The Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) is a platform for generating, highlighting and discussing political economy evidence on land deals globally for and with policy-makers, NGOs and civil society and building the capacity of young, largely African, researchers. Through co-convening LDPI, FAC has significantly contributed to making the land deals policy space one where more evidence informed positions on land deals policy are now taken by most stakeholders; meeting a recognised need among policy makers and practitioners. FAC leveraged its networks and resources to LDPI, thus catalysing others to engage, bringing together southern and northern researchers. The provision of two rounds of grants to primarily young African researchers through the LDPI has led to the development of their capacities and publishing profile. FAC's real time communication activities have reached a significant number of practitioners, which has reinforced the cycle of engagement and reflection on agricultural growth and poverty reduction that FAC aims to feed. FAC's personal networks have contributed to the rapid mobilisation of LDPI participants, paving the way for their sustainable commitment. As result of LDPI, key informants reported that NGOs and civil society are now taking more evidence informed decisions in taking positions on land deals. At decision-making level, the African Union Land Politics Initiatives is now working with LDPI researchers, and some agribusiness/food companies feel social pressure to pay attention to issues in their operations.

## **2: Institutionalising Kenya ASAL Policy Gains**

This study looks at the contribution of FAC to a significant process of longer term policy development, culminating in a shorter-term opportunity for policy adoption, and attempts at longer-term institutionalisation of policy changes to sustain implementation. The opportunity was presented by the creation of a Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (MNKAL) 2008-13, led by a Minister committed to using international best practice to promote development and resilience in pastoral areas. Improved policy was developed and serious attempts made to institutionalise the new thinking and practice into the post Ministry period. A wide range of actors and events were involved in this complex and dynamic process. This analysis identifies the role FAC played in this process, makes estimates of FAC's contribution to the different components of policy change and institutionalisation. One key lesson is that policy change is not sufficient, institutionalising the change in national plans, budgets and institutional mandates is also required. Another lesson was that evidence can be used to reinforce political policy choices and to persuade cabinet colleagues to come on-board.

## **3: Providing evidence for Civil Society led advocacy in Malawi**

This study looks at the impact of FAC generated evidence, policy framing and analytical input into three civil society organisations (CSOs) – the Civil Society Agricultural Network (CISANET), the Farmers Union of Malawi (FUM) and the National Association of Smallholder Farmers of Malawi (NASFAM) as well as the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources (PCANR). Working in partnership with these organisations enabled FAC members to concentrate on

their comparative advantage of research and analysis, with the CSOs able to use their much larger advocacy capacity and political weight to use evidence and analysis from FAC for policy influencing. This approach is in line with the ToC engagement strategy of 'encouraging others to be catalysts in policy debates and alliances', but goes further than encouragement in the provision of evidence and analysis. The importance of 'moments', 'pre-moment capacity' and the building of advocacy relationships are explored. Although assessing attribution in this multi-actor process is difficult, the approach was deemed effective and significant policy influencing opportunities are underway, including the National Agricultural Policy.

## **4: Improvements to implementation and maintained donor support for Malawi Farm Input Support Programme (FISP)**

The FISP is one of the highest profile government policies in Malawi, comprising about 70% of the Ministry of Agriculture's budget. It features in the election pledges of all the political parties and has been strongly influenced by a succession of Presidents. While FISP is supported by the rural majority, it is a contested area for the private sector and donor community. FAC and FAC members have contributed to a series bi-annual evaluations, on-going monitoring and academic analysis and comment on the programme. This impact story explores the effect of these outputs on the policies of key stakeholders and the implementation of the programme. The principle conclusion is that evidence of the effectiveness of FISP has encouraged those donors that already supported FISP to continue funding and muted the criticism of those that were ideologically opposed. Real-time monitoring of implementation had resulted in some improvements to delivery practice.



## **5: Deferral of Kenyan Community Land Bill for extended consultation**

This study analyses the impact from the deferment of the Community Land Bill. The deferment resulted from advocacy stemming from dissatisfaction among pastoralist leaders and civil society, informed in part by FAC research, about pastoralist land rights within the draft Community Land Bill. FAC researchers organised direct contact between parliamentarians and community leaders and pastoralist parliamentarians achieved a deferral and extended consultation with community stakeholders. At the time of writing the Bill has just returned to parliament accompanied by a report on the consultation. There are changes recommended to the governance structures, with communities given more power to manage their land and natural resources and different levels of arbitration of conflicts. Many of the suggested changes are in line with the recommendations of FAC and other CSOs and reflect the findings from community consultations, but the final Bill is yet to be approved, so this remains 'work in progress'.

### **6: African Union Drivers of Success in African Agriculture study and Malabo Declaration**

FAC has attempted to engage with the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) institutions to strengthen CAADP policy processes although, until recently, these efforts have failed to gain significant traction. In 2013, FAC was invited to participate in the 'Drivers of Success' in African Agriculture study, commissioned by the AUC. The study covered seven countries and involved a number of researchers from FAC's network. Completed in November 2013, it was shared with senior officials and African Agricultural Ministers in the lead up to the AU Heads of State Ministerial in June 2014. The study catalysed considerable energy from senior officials and agricultural ministers, by bringing to the fore a political, rather than a purely technical, understanding of why some countries are meeting their AU/CAADP commitments while others are falling behind. Under this momentum, the Declaration of the AU HoS meeting restated and extended its CAADP commitments for the coming decade. This engagement has brought FAC's frame of analysis into the CAADP process, garnering interest from the AUC and member states and laying the groundwork for FAC researchers to be involved in future policy analysis and capacity building.

### **7: Graduation from the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia**

Since 2005, the Government of Ethiopia has implemented a Productive Safety Net (PSNP), with the objective to 'graduate' millions of chronically food insecure Ethiopians to productive livelihoods, supported by donors including DFID, the World Bank and USAID. By 2010 the graduation debate had become polarised, between the Government's desire to meet targets set in its Growth and Transformation Programme (GTP) at all costs; and a donor consensus that graduation requires a solid evidence base. In 2010, FAC began a project aiming to broaden understanding of social protection as requiring both long-term safety nets for the most vulnerable, as well as flexible interventions to support food insecure people to develop sustainable livelihoods. Drawing on an 'enablers and constraints' of graduation framework, research was undertaken with households and communities to deepen understanding of their perceptions and experiences of graduation. Results were shared with regional and district officials, NGOs and donors, and subsequently published as a FAC working paper, and later in journal articles. FAC's research on social protection in Ethiopia has been one of a number of influences on thinking about graduation and has shaped FAC's involvement in other research activity (with IFPRI and other donors) and in donor dialogue with government about modifications to existing and the design of future policy and programmes. The extent to which government positions on graduation and social protection have shifted will become apparent when the design of the next phase PSNP is finalised later in 2014.



### **8: Development of an integrated seed system and revised seed policy in Ethiopia**

In 2009 Ethiopia's cereal seed system was based on central planning, with no recognition of informal seed systems, or the role of markets in seed distribution. This system was not functioning effectively, such that farmers were unable to access quality seed at the time they needed. FAC's work on seeds has contributed significantly to the decentralisation and liberalisation of the cereal seed system in Ethiopia. Key changes have included: establishment of regional seed companies; the successful piloting of direct seed marketing to farmers; the development of independent regulatory authorities; and the adoption of a new Seed Proclamation in 2013. FAC's pioneering research on the political economy of the cereal seeds system in 2010 was a timely and distinct contribution to the policy debate in a context of grain seed shortage and endemic low productivity. In 2011, FAC supported an International Workshop on Seeds systems organised by the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), which provided a forum for the main stakeholders in country to share their existing knowledge, creating a shared 'evidence base' to inform new policy. FAC also brought experts from its wider network in Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe, to share learning from their seed systems, highlighting key lessons for Ethiopia. The lead FAC researcher on seeds in Ethiopia (based in the EIAR) has been effective in networking and influencing policy processes informally via engagement in discussions in the Agriculture Ministry, and numerous consultancy assignments. Mostly notably, he has been an adviser to the Integrated Seed System Development (ISSD) project run by Wageningen University's Centre for Development Innovation (CDI), financed by the Dutch government, which has pioneered direct seed marketing in the four main regions of Ethiopia and is widely acknowledged as having the largest single influence on changes to the cereal seed system. FAC has provided strategic support to the emergence of this programme in Ethiopia and is currently engaged in a wider partnership with CDI to scale up this programme in various African countries.



**PART B: EVALUATION FINDINGS**

upperquartile

The following sections address each of the EQs in turn, presenting a synthesis of the evidence base across all strands of the research and linking this back to the programme TOC. The findings are structured into four broad sections:

- **Relevance and engagement (activities);**
- **Policy processes (outcomes);**
- **Policy influencing (impacts);**
- **Lessons and implications**

In relation to each EQ, the report sets out the key finding of the evaluation team before presenting the evidence base and discussion.

## 4. Relevance and engagement (activities)

### 4.1. Introduction

This section contributes to answering the EQs below. The section begins with an overview of FAC's activities in relation to logframe targets.

<b>EQ1</b>	How closely did FAC's research themes, political economy orientation and activities fit the needs of policy makers/ practitioners?
<b>EQ2</b>	How have a range of organisations used FAC's knowledge products (including social media) and what is their perception of these products?
<b>EQ4</b>	To what extent has FAC contributed new ideas and filled important knowledge gaps?
<b>EQ7</b>	Has FAC worked effectively with other actors and networks?

### 4.2. Activities and outputs

The two MTRs, the PCR and this evaluation all confirm that FAC has exceeded practically all its logframe output targets, often by considerable margins. In some cases output reporting does not map directly onto logframe indicator targets, but even so FAC's achievements are clear. While there has been some underachievement on qualitative targets (such as decentralisation to FAC Africa), this is explained in the MTRs and PCR. A breakdown of achievements against logframe at output level is provided in Appendix 9.

As would be expected for a research programme, FAC has been very output-focussed in relation to publications. The quality of these publications is highly regarded by a wide cross-section of key informants and respondents to the evaluation's online survey of knowledge product users.

In the process of generating published outputs, FAC has given many young researchers an opportunity to get into print. Indeed, it is apparent that outputs from research grants and Early Careers Fellowships (ECFs) exceeded logframe targets and proved exceedingly valuable for most of those involved. More information on FAC's capacity building outcomes is given in section 4.3.

FAC has paid significant attention to communicating its outputs and has invested in permanent specialist communications staff to support this aim.<sup>23</sup> In 2011 (updated 2013) FAC developed a new communications and outreach strategy which defined the over-arching goal as "*communicating high quality, relevant and timely scientific research results that provide policy solutions to the agricultural sector in Africa*" and to "*engage in and contribute to policy dialogues around agricultural issues with key stakeholders*" (FAC 2011b, FAC 2013). The strategy highlighted the need to combine traditional and online methods and emphasised the need for an interactive communications approach.

An update to this strategy covering the period 2013-14 was aimed at managing the risks from reduced research funding, the focus on research linked to the 'New Alliance' and greater reliance on the regional hubs. The update defined a clearer interactive communication strategy to be deployed

<sup>23</sup> This is in contrast to some prevailing research programme practice of bringing in communications support piecemeal or relying on staff without specialist skills, both of which undermine quality because such staff either do not fully understand the programme context or how to communicate within it.

before, during and after major events. This has since been successfully deployed in relation to the 'Agricultural Investment, Gender and Land in Africa Conference' (AIGLA, 2014) and the 'Greening the South Conference' (2014). The strategy recognises the importance of communication multipliers like international NGOs and research institutes.

### 4.3. How closely did FAC's research themes, political economy orientation and activities fit the needs of policy makers/ practitioners?

#### Finding 1:

**FAC's research themes, political economy orientation and activities closely fit the expressed needs of users. There is more limited, but still sufficient evidence, triangulated across different sources, to conclude that in the main these fit the needs of policy makers and practitioners. Continued review and revision of communication formats and FAC priorities are needed in order to maintain relevance. More attention could be paid to meeting the needs of practitioners within the private sector along with innovative ways for including more 'farmer voice'.**

Over the period 2008-2013 FAC actively engaged in research across ten broad thematic areas.<sup>24</sup> Some of the themes reflect well the 'hot topics' in African agriculture at the time – land grabs, Chinese investment, commercialisation, seed (STI), CAADP, climate change and alternative models of social protection. Others are also relevant because they are trying to keep an important issue on the agenda or bring in a new/ alternative framing<sup>25</sup> of the issue (such as pastoralism or young people in agriculture). The Gender and Social Difference (GSD) theme was more inward looking – trying to encourage a consistent framing of GSD issues across the other FAC themes. Also cross-cutting was the Policy Processes theme; using political economy (PE) approaches across all themes has differentiated FAC outputs from those of other organisations, increasing relevance to policy makers.

At a basic level the relevance of FAC research to those who engage with it is demonstrated by the extremely high number of website hits (in the 12 months to June 2014 the FAC website was viewed 177,739 times by 65,937 individual users), over 665,000 document downloads and active social media presence (see Figure 2).<sup>26/27</sup> This engagement with FAC research outputs is evidence that the materials are valued and are meeting a need among knowledge product users.<sup>28</sup>

Primary research undertaken as part of this evaluation found a consistent view among key informants (DFID advisors, policy makers and practitioners) that FAC research themes and activities are relevant to policy makers and practitioners in the field of African agriculture. An example is provided in Box 1.

#### **Box 1: Extract from Impact Study 1 – Co-founding the LDPI as a global research network**

In relation to FAC co-convening the Land Deal Politics Initiative, it is clear that the growth of private sector interest in investment in African agriculture (following the US housing and global financial markets crash 2008 that limited traditional investment options, associated in some countries with the phenomenon of large scale land acquisitions) and subsequent media attention promoted by civil society advocacy, created a very clear moment of opportunity for FAC to co-convene the LDPI. The start of discussions on the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land in 2009-2010 also created a policy process focus to which the founders of LDPI could relate their work. Spotting moments in policy processes and their relevance to FAC's mandate (to strengthen the use of evidence and capacity in political economy analysis in Africa) is central to FAC's opportunistic way of responding to nascent policy and practitioner demand. It is notable that no other platform on land deals with comparable reach or diversity of stakeholders was established during the same period.

<sup>24</sup> It is noted the research themes came on board at different points across this period.

<sup>25</sup> See Glossary of Terms for definition.

<sup>26</sup> Note: it is outside of the evaluation scope to provide comparator analysis with similar organisations.

<sup>27</sup> Note: In Figure 2 'other' in relation to downloads relates to document types that are not recorded separately for the purpose of the logframe e.g. conference papers, journal articles and special issues, book chapters, blogs etc.

<sup>28</sup> It is not possible from FAC's download diagnostic information to tell how many of FAC's knowledge product users are policy makers and practitioners.

These findings are shared by FAC researchers who strongly feel that they are engaging in topics of relevance to African agriculture. Over 80% of researchers who responded to the survey of FAC lead/ co-researchers and grant recipients commented that their ability to identify and undertake policy relevant research has increased as a result of their engagement with FAC.

Positive findings in relation to research relevance are backed up by evidence from the survey of FAC knowledge product users (Box 2). As previously stated, this survey is not considered a representative sample and results cannot be generalised for the population of FAC knowledge product users as a whole.

However, when considered in conjunction with other research evidence, the survey provides interesting insights and depth to the evaluation findings with 93% of respondents 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' that FAC materials are relevant to agricultural policy issues in Africa and 80% 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' that they reflect the priorities of agricultural policy makers. While the issues that users are interested in vary greatly, from the total of 167 comments provided it is clear that FAC is providing relevant material to those who responded to this survey.

FAC has invested a considerable proportion of its modest resources (financial and human) in convening and contributing to high profile conferences, seminars, workshops and other events. In the period 2008-2013 FAC's output database records 318 outputs related to engagement activities (including conference papers and reports, presentations and workshops). This is 32% of all formal outputs over the period. The fact that FAC members are invited to participate in events (for example by civil society to present evidence from the LDPI at a side event to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Committee on Food Security as part of the Voluntary Guidelines process in 2010) and that researchers, policy makers and practitioners continue to attend FAC convened events is evidence of their relevance to those involved in African agriculture.

Participant feedback on conferences is reported by FAC to be very positive (see for example Figure 4 for feedback on the AIGLA conference). However, the relevance of the conference format has been questioned in a minority of cases (for example among some attending CSO/FAC conferences in Malawi - IS 3). Where a conference has addressed new issues (such as China and Brazil in African Agriculture - CBAA), where an unusual mix of participants has been achieved (for example the recent AIGLA conference - Figure 4) or brought to bear a new or qualitatively improved body of evidence to a current policy debate or process (IS 1 and 8) then the conference format is perceived to work.

Timing is however key. For example, in relation to the International Seeds Workshop in Ethiopia in 2011 (IS 8) - the event coincided with an on-going process of revision of the Seed Proclamation (2000/16), involved all key policy makers and made visible a wide body of evidence from within Ethiopia and, crucially, from neighbouring countries with more liberalized and better functioning seeds systems. Direct policy engagement followed.

Providing a format to genuinely hear the *farmer's voice* can be a challenge. An interesting experience was the 'University of the Bush' in Kenya. This appears to have been very successful in hearing from pastoralist elders. The format was subsequently copied by the Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (MNKAL) for consultation on the new constitution (IS 2). Apparently this, or modifications of it, has not been replicated as a methodology by other FAC themes.

**Box 2: Quotes from FAC knowledge product users regarding relevance of FAC research**

*"I work at the former CIDA. My work is in Africa, food security and resilience. FAC policy briefs/ working papers have high relevance to our programme development"* – Donor (User Survey)

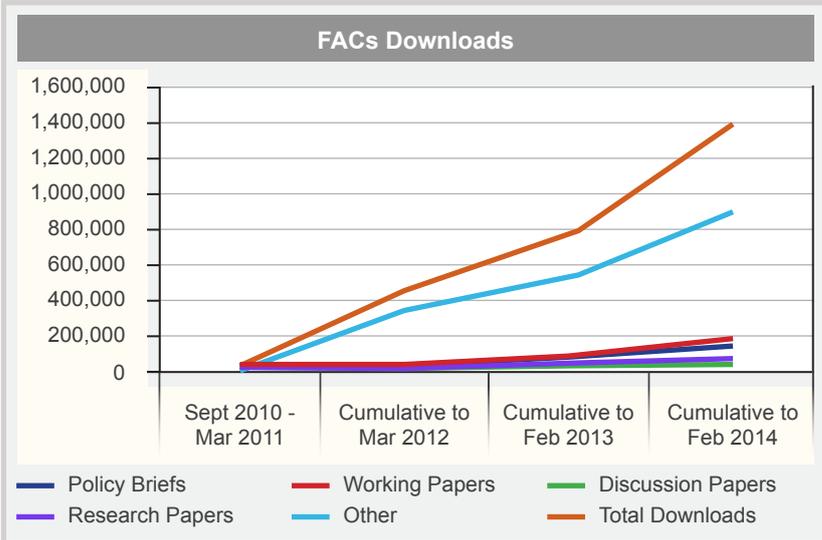
*"I work in the agricultural economics department in the ministry responsible for agriculture in my country and the research foci of Future Agricultures are key to my work because the findings guide us in implementing agricultural policy"* – Policy maker (User Survey)

*"I look forward to FAC as a vehicle for addressing new challenges in the field of agriculture such as user friendly research based on users quest for solving their problems"* – Policy maker (User Survey)

*"It (FAC evidence) helps to update the knowledge base of the staff of my department"* – Policy maker (User Survey)

Figure 2:

# Summary User Diagnostics



## FACs Top 5 Downloads

- 41,937** - CAADP and agricultural policies in Tanzania: Going with or against the grain?
- 11,299** - The Political Economy of Agricultural Extension in Ethiopia: Economic Growth and Political Control
- 9,537** - Future Scenarios for Pastoral Development in Ethiopia, 2010-2025
- 8,703** - Agricultural Policy in Kenya
- 8,618** - Land Grabbing in Africa and the New Politics of Food

## Social networking and microblogging

- **Average 1.23 Tweets per day**
- **52% of Tweets are re-tweeted**
- **20% of Tweets favourited**



Source: Twitonomy, Period: May '11 – June '14

## Social networking

- 1394 unique users sharing stories;**
- *liking* Page
- posting to Timeline
- commenting on or sharing Page posts
- *tagging* Page, or *checking in* at location.



Source: Facebook Period: October '12 – June '14

## Sharing knowledge online

- **Views: 38,845**
- **Downloads: 463**
- **Shares: 107**



Source: Slideshare Period: October '12 – June '14

## Key findings:

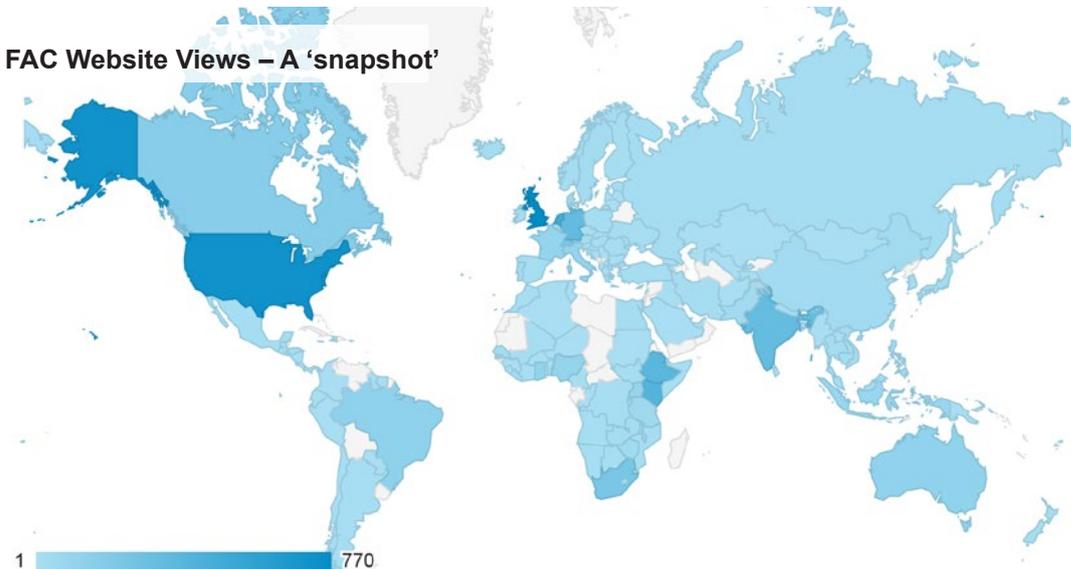
- **High levels of interest in FAC publications as demonstrated by download statistics**
- **Downloads increasing year on year**
- **An established presence on social media**
- **A worldwide audience for FAC outputs**

## FAC Website: A 'snapshot'

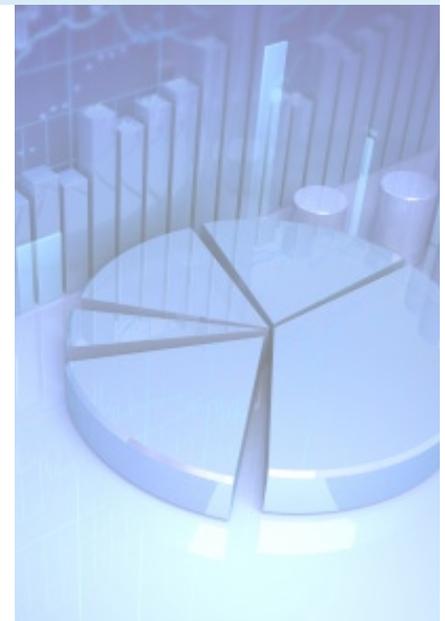
### In the last 12mths ...

- FAC Website viewed 177,739 times by 65,937 users
- 665,126 documents downloaded
- FAC Blogs shared 1,071 times
- Website pages shared 2,444 times

## FAC Website Views – A 'snapshot'



Source: Google Analytics, Period: May '14 – June '14



In line with the theory-based approach to the evaluation, it is important to consider not only if FAC research meets the needs of policy makers and practitioners but also why. In this sense, FAC's political economy perspective is important.

The political economy approach is considered by a wide range of key informants (including researchers, policy makers and practitioners) to be a key strength of FAC because it makes the information provided more relevant to policy making. For example, in relation to IS 1, FAC co-convened LDPI as a platform and network to generate solid evidence (some of it for the first time). It sought to map and make sense of the terminology used to frame prevailing discourses and narratives that key informants variously described as being at the time fragmented, sensationalist, unscientific, unsystematic, overly quantitative, self-referential, and traditional.

Assertions on the importance of FAC's political economy approach are supported by significant download numbers of documents with an explicit PE content and also of the more policy orientated 'Policy Briefs'. Comments relating to FAC's PE orientation are shown in Box 3.

### **Box 3: Comments/ quotes on the relevance of FAC's political economy perspective**

One respondent commented that FAC research is considered high quality and highly relevant due to the PE perspective it takes. It was noted that while CAADP and AGRA tend to focus on technical solutions (which are also important) FAC considers context (political economy) and is not afraid to ask difficult questions *"It [FAC] can be seen as the awkward squad...the ones who say "yes but what about ..."* – **non-FAC academic (KI)**

*"there is recognition that there is a lot of technical expertise around agricultural production and development and that this is not our unique selling point. We know that uptake of policy relevant research is really poor...this is an area of policy that is absolutely intractable, it repels research evidence ...so if we don't look at the political economy of these processes, doing the work is pointless. One has to understand how things are really happening, what kinds of framing of development problems is dominant, what kinds of framings and assumptions underpin those"* - **academic FAC Theme Convenor (KI)**

*"As a regional policy and markets analyst, I am keenly interested in FAC research / activities because they provide me with updated tools and literature for providing evidence-based policy options for decision makers in the food and agricultural sector in Africa"* - **Policy maker (User survey)**

*"FAC provides reliable and pertinent insights on the political economy of agricultural development - which is key to understanding policy processes for a range of actors, including "outsiders" (donors, NGOs, etc.) who seek to support progressive change"* – **Donor / NGO employee (User survey)**

In line with the ex-post TOC developed for the evaluation, there is evidence that *'research priorities within FAC themes have been developed in line with country and regional priorities'*<sup>29</sup> in some cases; contributing to relevance and ensuring that outputs and activities meet the needs of policy makers and practitioners. For example:

- The 'Drivers of Success' case study (IS 6) showed FAC research themes and PE orientation very closely fitting the needs of the African Union Commission (AUC) where key interest is in (a) understanding why some countries are progressing CAADP and others not and (b) ownership of 'political process' and therefore explicit interest in political analysis; and
- The focus on graduation in Ethiopia (IS 7) was very relevant, as was the focus on the PE of the seed system (IS 8). The focus on graduation was timely and filled a gap not being addressed by others in the context of a policy vacuum when government was looking for solutions to a major challenge of grain seed shortage and low productivity.

<sup>29</sup> Extract from the FAC TOC (see Figure 1).

However, the evaluation has also raised questions around the issue of supply vs. demand driven research/ production of evidence and supply vs. demand driven policy forums / engagements.

While counter examples are evident<sup>30</sup>, much of FAC's output is undoubtedly supply-led with theme leaders and African-based researchers driving research priorities.<sup>31</sup> Although the predominance of supply-led research does not undermine relevance per se, it is possible that policy relevant issues may be overlooked due to the lack of academic interest and there is no clear mechanism in the FAC model to prevent this.<sup>32</sup>

In saying this, the FAC TOC assumes that (assumption d) *'new policy ideas and options can be generated through FAC research and made available, accessible and attractive through FAC communications and networking efforts for policy makers and practitioners to engage with'*.<sup>33</sup> This assumption is at ease with FAC's supply-driven approach, but it does not explicitly include relevance, which would make it stronger.

In relation to its ability to retain relevance, FAC's relatively flexible accountable grant contract with DFID and networked structure has enabled it to be nimble in shifting resources and activities to address emerging issues and evidence needs. An example of this was the support for a writing workshop and publication of an unplanned working paper to help institutionalise the experience of MNKAL (Elmi and Birch, 2013 see IS2).

In contrast however, some key informants in DFID noted that FAC can be slow to respond to opportunities presented to them by DFID, in particular in relation to CAADP. This is the downside of a network with hardly any full-time staff and with most members working primarily for other organisations. It is noted by the evaluators that FAC has continually added, but not dropped any themes. The extent to which to spread resources and the need for more rigorous prioritisation is an issue returned to in later sections of this report.

One area in which FAC has not engaged very fully with the needs of policy makers and practitioners is the private sector. The private sector may be analysed in FAC themes (e.g. land and CBAA) but there has been less emphasis on trying to understand their policy needs and find ways to supply these needs – for instance private sector participation in FAC conferences has tended to be low and this may not be the most appropriate format for them.<sup>34</sup> Key informants suggested that private round tables may be more conducive to private sector engagement (particularly on sensitive issues) than public conference formats.

A number of key informant policy makers in Kenya and Malawi commented on the greater usefulness of verbal policy briefings from researchers, rather than just written materials (although they also liked paper copies to back-up the conversation). The civil society partnership model operating in Malawi (IS 3) does enable such briefing, within the limited human resources available to FAC.

**Overall, there is sufficient evidence triangulated across different sources to conclude that FAC's research themes, political economy orientation and activities do in the main fit the needs of policy makers and practitioners. Continued review and revision of communication formats and FAC priorities are needed in order to maintain relevance. More attention could be paid to meeting the needs of practitioners within the private sector.**

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<sup>30</sup> Examples of demand-driven research and engagement do exist and include DFID/FAO/UNICEF commissioning social protection work; work commissioned by Self Help Africa; and the AIGLA conference instigated by the FAO.

<sup>31</sup> Being supply led is not necessarily a problem; policy makers may not realise something is an issue in time and researchers may see upcoming issues and the opportunities for research evidence to fill knowledge gaps.

<sup>32</sup> In practice, FAC has looked for relevant opportunities based on gaps in existing supply. With LDPI FAC looked at the existing supply on land deals, saw it overly quantitative and not based in PE and chose to invest in improving the quality and accessibility of the supply.

<sup>33</sup> Extract from the FAC ToC (see Figure 1).

<sup>34</sup> In relation to the AIGLA conference, while private sector representation was present, the 'big names' did not engage in spite of attempts by event organisers.

#### 4.4. How have a range of organisations used FAC’s knowledge products and what is their perception of these products?

##### Finding 2:

There is evidence (although not consistent, programme-wide evidence) that organisations are using FAC knowledge products in their own advocacy work, in project design, to guide their own policy and to complement their own research and internally derived evidence. Often FAC is valued for providing a wider (multi-country) evidence base and interesting perspectives and framing. The perception is that the products are of high quality.

As Figure 2 illustrates, there is a high level of interest in FAC knowledge products both in written and online/ social media forms. FAC’s internal monitoring data shows a year on year rise in downloads. For the purpose of monitoring against logframe targets, FAC’s internal data tracks key download types (policy briefs, working papers, discussion papers, research papers etc.). Of the output types specifically tracked, FAC working papers are the most frequently downloaded (199,607 downloads to February 2014).<sup>35</sup>

FAC has a significant and growing online and social media presence with active website, Twitter and Facebook pages. Key points include:

- FAC distributes an online newsletter to a mailing list of circa 2,400 knowledge product users. The newsletter is intended to provide the policy community (specifically a wider non-specialist audience) with news of FAC’s latest research and events;
- FAC has 6,242<sup>36</sup> followers on Twitter. FAC puts out an average of 1.23 tweets per day, more than half of which are re-tweeted; and
- In the past 12 months FAC blogs have been shared a total of 1,071 times online.

Engagement with FAC outputs is clearly evident. What is less clear is: Who uses FAC knowledge products/ engages with FAC? How do they use material? What is their perception of it?

Programme level diagnostics do not help to answer these questions – the newsletter mailing list cannot be used to identify recipient ‘types’ and download data cannot be disaggregated by theme or country of download. Instead, this evaluation assessment draws on qualitative data from KIs and from the eight impact case studies. Where possible and appropriate this data is reinforced by data from the online survey of FAC knowledge product users (bearing in mind the caveats associated with this, see section 2.5).

The evaluation found examples of FAC knowledge products being used and valued among civil society organisations, NGOs, academics, donors and government stakeholders and in government ministries. Examples include:

- The Civil Society Agricultural Network, Farmers Union and Smallholders Farmers Union in Malawi made use of written materials and briefings from FAC researchers in their on-going work of influencing Malawi Government and donor policy (see IS 3). They used FAC outputs to provide additional evidence (beyond that from their own members) and to add an international perspective and cross-country comparisons. The perception was of high quality;
- The LDPI Working Papers, Briefs and other evidence (much of which FAC contributed to) have been used by donor government agencies, international NGOs, civil society and multilateral organisations. LDPI social media has also been picked up by the print media (IS 1). The availability of this evidence is considered to have ‘raised the bar’ on the evidence expected to back up policy statements and dialogue on a topic that had previously been subject to significant unsubstantiated claims and fractured discourses;

<sup>35</sup> Source: FAC Web Downloads Statistics.

<sup>36</sup> Correct as of 28 August 2014.

- Key figures in the MNKAL used FAC products both as confirmation that they were in line with international ‘best practice’ and as evidence to help convince cabinet and other colleagues to support emerging MNKAL policies (IS 2);
- DFID is also a knowledge product user. A number of DFID Advisers in country offices with responsibility for agriculture were contacted to comment on FAC materials. The consensus was that the quality and relevance of FAC knowledge products is good. FAC is considered to fill a particularly useful niche in focussing on political economy. FAC material is circulated within DFID by the Heads of Profession and also passed on peer to peer;
- Some examples were found of FAC linked African university lecturers making good use of FAC materials as case studies in their teaching and some students have used them for their project work. However, the opportunity to make a wider group of universities aware of the material does not seem to have been developed; and
- KIs variously commented on FAC publications giving them access to wider (multi-country) evidence base, interesting perspectives and different ways of looking at issues.

The finding that FAC outputs have a broad readership is backed up to some extent by the survey of knowledge product users. Survey respondents included those who identified themselves as academics/ researchers (101 respondents), NGO/ INGO or donor employees (42 respondents), policy makers (31 respondents), independent consultants (30 respondents), students (20 respondents), private sector employees (16 respondents), journalists (5 respondents), farmers/ activist groups/ CSOs (4 respondents) and other (2 respondents)<sup>37</sup>. Of these, the largest numbers of respondents indicated that they have engaged with FAC research outputs for ‘professional interest’ (56%) or ‘professional need’ (31%). Some comments included (see Box 4):

**Box 4: Quotes from knowledge product users on use and perceptions of FAC outputs**

*“I work for a company that offers improved services through new technologies to small holder farmers in Africa. FAC offers interesting political background info on what is happening in the region in regard to agriculture” – Private Sector (User Survey)*

*“I teach undergraduate courses on political economy of food” – Academic non-FAC (User Survey)*

*“[FAC] provides an opportunity to hear about similar initiatives and therefore benchmark our results and compare strategies. Hearing about academic research broadens the context for us to position our activities” – NGO/ Donor (User Survey)*

*“A more detailed knowledge about for example CAADP processes and stakeholders has allowed us to re-design engagement strategies”. – Think Tank Researcher (User Survey)*

*“After the AU meeting and having discussion with one the FAC members I am now able to engage policy makers in the issues that affect women farmers” – Women Farmer’s Activist (User Survey)*

*“Mostly it (FAC outputs) gave me a broader view of issues because of contact with other country experiences and other ways of thinking about the issue” – Academic non-FAC (User Survey)*

*“The numerous conferences on land grabs that FAC co-organized were seminal, and crucial in deepening and really honing my understanding of a range of issues related to land, agriculture and the conditions, policies and mechanisms shaping who gets what, where and how with regard to land and land rights, and how land gets used by competing actors” – Researcher in an NGO (User Survey)*

Findings of the knowledge product user survey, which come from a broad range of FAC users (although it is noted that academics are the most significant group of respondents) also point to the perceived quality of FAC research and knowledge products:

- There was almost universal agreement among the group that responded to the survey that FAC research is robust and credible (90% agreed or strongly agreed);

<sup>37</sup> The survey allowed respondents to select more than one job role.

- Seventy nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that FAC research activities are appropriately designed to influence the agricultural policy debate and policy making actors across Africa;
- Seventy seven percent consider outputs are produced at the right time to influence the debate and policy making.

These findings on the quality of FAC outputs are generally corroborated by the qualitative evaluation findings from KIs and the eight impact case studies. There are, however, some isolated examples of things that FAC could do differently or better in order to facilitate access to and use of their knowledge products. For example, in Malawi Government KIs wanted more access to paper copies of FAC materials. In another example, evidence related to land issues in Kenya was highly valued but the Policy Brief was produced too late to be most useful – an example of a missed ‘moment’.

**Notwithstanding some isolated examples, the evaluation evidence backs up the assumption of the TOC that ‘FAC’s research evidence and advice are viewed by policy makers and other users as being of sufficient quality, timeliness and relevance to their work needs and priorities that they value them and draw ideas and inspiration from them’.**<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.5. To what extent has FAC contributed new ideas and filled important knowledge gaps?

##### Finding 3:

**FAC has contributed to filling nationally important knowledge gaps, provided new site specific evidence and contributed to new or different framing of key issues. FAC has brought new knowledge from experience elsewhere to national policy debates, although the knowledge may not always be ‘new’ in a global sense.**

For each theme, FAC describes following a planning process of engaging with the existing evidence and current framing, reflecting on possible alternative framings and identification of knowledge or evidence gaps. Each theme then develops a work programme aimed at filling the gaps and, if appropriate, reframing of the policy debate.

Key features of FAC’s approach to contributing new ideas and filling knowledge gaps are described below:

FAC research activities have often included detailed **site-specific case studies** that have helped fill nationally important knowledge gaps (such as the Laikipia Land Studies that were important in informing the debate on the deferred Community Land Bill in Kenya (IS 5) and helped reframe some of the thinking about pastoralist-smallholder relationships (Letai and Lind, 2013)).

Bringing together evidence from a number of country studies into a **cross-country analysis** and synthesis has been a recurrent approach of FAC. A current example is the CAADP ‘Drivers of Success’ studies (IS 6); although political analysis of agricultural policy is not new, the more systematic application at country and cross-country comparison level has been a gap that few organisations are working on in a systematic way. A further example comes from the multi-country village studies on commercialisation (Wiggins et al, 2014).

The process of analysis and reflection usually involves **combining FAC research** and analysis with evidence from other sources. Therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to think in terms of the FAC’s contribution toward a process of articulating new ideas and filling knowledge gaps in which other actors are also engaged. This multi-actor approach is an important component of the FAC TOC.

A particularly valuable contribution of FAC, noted by a number of KI policy makers and influencers at national level in the impact case studies, is the ability of FAC to bring to the national debate **evidence and the latest thinking from other countries**. For example, FAC brought evidence and analysis from the Malawi agricultural programme to discussions on Kenyan subsidies with the Minister of Agriculture.

<sup>38</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

**Locally important evidence** is also highly valued and it is core to many of the 74 Research Working Papers produced in 2008-13. For instance, detailed research over a number of years in Laikipia, Kenya, produced a body of evidence, and perhaps more importantly a trusted relationship with local community leaders, which was important when the Community Land Bill was challenged in Parliament and referred back for further consultation and evidence (see IS 5). In another example, new evidence from Kenya and Ethiopia on the scale of the meat marketed from dryland areas filled an important evidence gap, which was used to persuade policy makers of the economic importance of such markets and the opportunities for further development with appropriate policy support (see IS 2 and the press cutting at Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Press Cutting from The Standard (Kenya) 26/02/2013 Dr Hussein Mahmoud is a FAC researcher and theme co-convenor**



There are a number of examples where FAC has **contributed to reframing of policy debates**:

FAC's involvement in setting up the LDPI provided a mechanism for generating and sharing qualitative evidence on land deals based on multi-country case studies. This helped to reframe the analysis and debate from one rooted in assertions, often based on unrepresentative examples, to one grounded in evidence (IS 1). In Ethiopia, the enablers and constrainers framework broadened the scope of thinking about graduation beyond individual household benchmarks (IS 7). Also in Ethiopia, the FAC Political Economy of the Seed System paper (Alemu, 2010) was perhaps the first time that anyone analysed the reasons for dysfunctions in the system, despite the dysfunction being widely recognised. This brought to light issues that had not previously been discussed. Without this analysis some changes that have subsequently happened in the seed system might have taken longer or would have been met with more resistance (IS 8). The work on meat markets in ASAL areas in Kenya is part of a wider reframing of these areas from being considered 'low-potential basket cases' to recognising their contribution to the national economy (IS 2).

Therefore, even within the small sample represented by the eight impact studies, there are a number of examples of reframing.

## 4.6. Has FAC worked effectively with other actors and networks?

### Finding 4:

**FAC has worked well with other actors and networks and, in some cases, has been particularly effective in bringing together different actors and organisations in specific events that have sought to reframe policy issues. FAC has provided inputs to a wide variety of other actors and networks, and there are significant opportunities to build and deepen the current relationships.**

Working across organisational and academic boundaries with a variety of networks has been a key feature of FAC's approach and is highlighted in its TOC (see Figure 1 and Appendix 3). FAC's networked approach is a feature of the theory underpinning its engagement in policy processes; through a) '*identifying and creating fora for dialogue and debate*' and b) '*encouraging others to be catalysts in policy debates and alliances*'.

As a research consortium, FAC started with a base in a number of organisations. Its wider network of researchers and Early Career Fellows (ECFs) now tend to be based in an even wider range of organisations/ institutions (many in fact belong to more than one organisation). The decentralisation of FAC has further extended the core network with each regional hub based within an existing research institution.

FAC's annual reports and logframes document its success in establishing partnerships with other organisations, including research institutes, donors, regional governmental organisations (AU, LDPI and the Pan African Parliament) NGOs and CSOs (particularly in later years). Gaining access to FAC's wider network is a consistent positive feature in responses provided by lead and co-researchers, ECFs and grant recipients in the personal professional capacity development survey undertaken for this evaluation.

FAC has also been particularly successful in working with other actors in co-hosting major events and conferences. Significant examples include:

- The recent Pastoralism conference in Ethiopia co-organised by FAC and Tufts University;
- The Agricultural Investment, Gender and Land in Africa (AIGLA) Conference, co-hosted by FAC, PLASS, the African Union's Land Policy Initiative (AULPI) and the FAO. This brought together a range of actors who rarely share spaces for dialogue and debate (see Figure 4 on page 26).

As well as working with and through existing networks, the evaluation found examples where the FAC has worked with other actors to create a new network. For example, the Land Deals Politics Initiative where FAC and four other research institutes created a unique platform for generating, highlighting and discussing political economy evidence on land deals for and with policy makers, NGOs and civil society (see IS 1). The newly approved Integrated Seed System Development programme is a further example of networking with the Centre for Development Innovation at Wageningen University (CDI) and Gates Foundation (IS 8).

Qualitative interviews with FAC staff, researchers and other KIs show that FAC researchers have been active in, and provided input to, a range of networks (see Box 5 and IS 3 & 4). However, in some cases the network recognises an individual researcher rather than FAC – the FAC brand was found to be unrecognised in several cases (e.g. IS 2 in Kenya, IS 5 in Kenya & IS 6 in relation to the AU). In discussing this issue with one FAC theme convenor the view was that, depending on the context, FAC's brand may not always be the most conducive to influence policy.

Figure 4:

## FAC adding value to other networks

FACs credibility among a wide range of stakeholders is a feature which is perceived to support and add value to the work of its partners and networks. An example, provided by the Southern African Hub, comes from the recent Agricultural Investment, Gender and Land in Africa (AIGLA) Conference, co-hosted by Future Agricultures, PLASS, the African Union's Land Policy Initiative (AU LPI) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

The concept for the conference emerged when the Gender Unit of the FAO contacted PLAAS, known and respected for its work on land issues in South Africa, to seek assistance in coordinating a research dissemination event. FACs Southern African Hub coordinator (based at PLAAS) saw potential to broaden participation and to host a regional multi-stakeholder event focusing on the highly topical issues of large-scale land based investment and gender.

The AIGLA conference was held in Cape Town in March 2014. The event attracted 116 participants from 17 countries representing a broad range of stakeholders from academics and researchers to practitioners, policy-makers, civil society organisations and (although more limited in attendance) the private sector.



The politically charged nature of the issues addressed meant that careful consideration was required of the choice of co-hosts, the sources of funding accepted, and the compilation of presentations.

The aim was to maintain neutrality and an open forum for dialogue and debate, maximising participation of stakeholders whose opinions may be polarised.

*"We placed priority on getting a forum that could be as broad as possible and we knew that between our 4 institutions we could hold that space and that it could remain a constructive space"* – **FAC Southern Africa Hub Coordinator**

### Co-hosting adding value

Co-hosting is considered key to the success of the event as each partner brought something different:

- Involvement of the FAO and AU facilitated participation of regional policy makers (including high ranking and ministerial participants);
- PLAAS, through its long-standing involvement in land-related policy focused research, has considerable credibility with CSOs and activist groups;
- Future Agricultures provided access to an Africa wide (and beyond) research community bringing leading academics and cutting-edge thought to the debate.

Throughout the conference FAC engaged in real time communications; tweeting regular updates and posting multi-media clips.

### Widespread interest in the virtual space

The conference culminated with delegates (separated into their various stakeholder groups) producing a set of recommendations for action to be taken forward within their various sectors. These have generated significant interest in terms of online hits and views.



### Slide share views

- *Researchers recommendations from AIGLA* = 278
- *Government recommendations from AIGLA* = 146
- *Private Sector recommendations from AIGLA* = 145
- *Civil Society recommendations from AIGLA* = 133

### New learning about key Learning

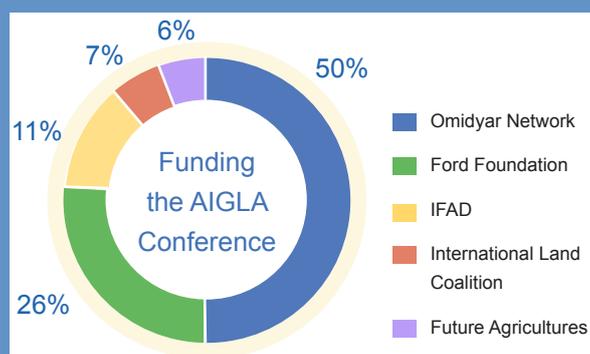
Results of a post-conference poll carried out with a sample of delegates showed a positive response with a majority of those surveyed indicating that they had learnt more about the conference's key issues as a result of participation.

### Participants increased knowledge in relation to:

- *National land policy and legislation, agricultural and investment policy*
- *Best practice and corporate social responsibility*
- *Value chain participation and employment creation*
- *Changes in land access, use and control*
- *Intra-household decision making and resource control*

### Value for money

The AIGLA conference, co-hosted by 4 influential organisations, levered funding from a range of sources. Overall FACs contribution was relatively small; around 6% of the total cost.



FAC's input also included considerable support in terms of communications and networking before, during and after the conference.

For example, if the subject of policy research is an area in which one of FAC's partner institutions is well established, it will likely be better to use that established brand. Similarly, if an individual researcher is well known to policy makers, capitalising on these personal connections may be more effective in gaining access.

In other cases, particularly pan-African research, it was felt that FAC's brand, widely perceived as independent and linked to world renowned research institutions, may carry significant weight.

Therefore, in choosing appropriate branding, contextual awareness is essential. If the overarching objective is stronger influence of evidence, the brand under which research is presented is not a key criterion. This does however create a challenge for evaluation, as it makes assessment of FAC's contribution problematic.

If, as is suggested subsequently (see section 4.3), FAC is a facilitator of career development and enabler of agricultural research for established and junior academics, then it stands to reason that in cases where the contribution of individual FAC members to policy debate is recognised (even where they are not recognised by stakeholders as being FAC members), then a contribution by FAC can be assumed. Indeed, in several cases the evaluation's ROA analysis identified evidence that the researcher's input and/ or credibility was at least partly due to their earlier or ongoing engagement with FAC (for example the FISP IS 4).

There are limitations to FAC work with some organisations which stem from FAC's resource constraints. Although FAC members/ researchers sit within many African organisations, the strong relationship tends to be between FAC and that researcher; the relationship with the organisation is often almost non-existent.

There is potential for more organisation-to-organisation relationship building, and significant synergy could be released, but this would require significant resources as organisation-to-organisation relationship building can be complicated and time consuming.<sup>39</sup> In these circumstances, with limited resources, FAC was probably right to focus largely on relationships with individuals. Even when FAC has worked to bring together organisations (for instance in some of the conferences or joint research/ advocacy initiatives), FAC has often not had the resources to continue to develop and deepen these organisational relationships.

**Overall, the person-to-person relationships which characterise FAC are considered to be a strength. Key informants note that diversity within FAC is important. FAC is not seen as a single entity and that is good because they are not affiliated with particular policy positions – FAC is perceived as diverse and independent.**

**Box 5: Extract from IS 3 (Malawi)**

In Malawi FAC has worked with Civil Society (CISANET) and farmer's organisations (FUM and NASFAM) in an effective partnership reflecting the strengths of the different actors.

FAC provided much of the evidence and analysis, CISANET provided the convening capacity, and the farmer's organisations provided the political weight due to their significant memberships.

This is a model that could potentially be developed in other countries. Entry points to policy influencing included the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources (PCANR) and a number of multi-stakeholder 'closed door' round tables, many of which included important players from the private sector.

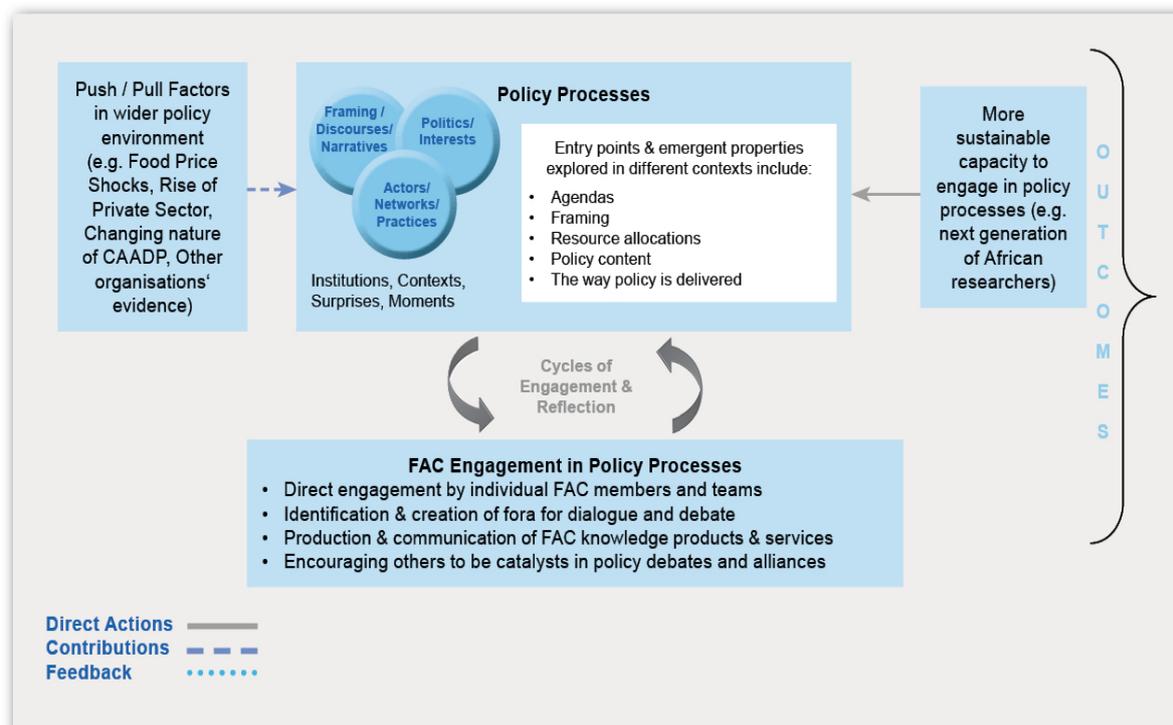
<sup>39</sup> For instance, FAC has found relationship-building with some of its hub hosting organisations quite challenging. To build formal organisational relations with the 50+ organisations in which FAC sits would be a big task.

## 5. Policy processes (outcomes)

### 5.1. Introduction

The FAC TOC at the outcome level shows a complex series of processes that interact in different ways in different policy contexts. These have been summarised in the diagram developed for the evaluation (see extract Figure 5 and Appendix 3). The TOC recognises that FAC is usually only one of many actors involved in a policy process and that external push/pull factors are extremely important. It also recognises that FAC may engage in a policy process directly as FAC, and may also contribute indirectly through the capacity built in African researchers.

**Figure 5: TOC extract (outcome level)**



This section contributes to answering evaluation questions:

EQ6	To what extent has the FAC TOC been shown to be operating in practice at Outcome level?
EQ5	To what extent has FAC and its partners built sustainable research capacity (particularly in Africa) to engage in policy processes?
EQ3	How effectively has FAC engaged Southern researchers and included their perspectives and with what outcome?
EQ15	What are the outcomes from gender and social difference mainstreaming?
EQ14	To what extent has FAC achieved its expected outcomes?

## 5.2. To what extent has the FAC TOC been shown to be operating in practice at outcome level?

### Finding 5:

The TOC is a valid description of the policy processes observed operating in practice within FAC. FAC's influence on outcomes has been observed to be stronger in some parts of the process than others. Weaknesses were found in the cycles of engagement and reflection with a stronger monitoring and learning system required at outcome level.

### 5.2.1. FAC engagement in policy processes

The evaluation shows FAC to have been engaging with all four engagement points identified in the TOC; with different entry points predominating in different policy processes and with synergy between them.

An example of direct engagement was the involvement of a FAC researcher in persuading parliamentarians to defer passing the Kenya Community Land Bill and his subsequent involvement in the Kenyan Government Consultation Commission which brought the Bill back to Parliament with recommendations for significant modifications (IS 5). The involvement of this researcher was built on a number of years of detailed context specific research, thus in relation to the TOC, **the 'moment' is important, but so is the 'pre-moment' evidence gathering and relationship building.** It is also important to note that although the initial meetings with Members of Parliament (MPs) were under the auspices of FAC, participation in the consultation was in an individual capacity. The network structure of FAC, which means that sometimes FAC members are operating as FAC and sometimes in another capacity, is a strong feature of many of the impact case studies analysed in this evaluation.

An example of FAC *identifying and creating fora for dialogue and debate* was explored in the LDPI impact case study (IS 1). In this case FAC achieved a strong synergy between all elements by catalysing others to engage in a learning alliance, successful communication and direct engagement by individual FAC members to open spaces for dialogue and debate. Other examples of fora have been the large number of conferences, workshops, e-debates and blogs which FAC has organised, often in partnership with other actors. The University of the Bush (IS 2) is an example of an unusual format and the AIGLA conference (Figure 4 on P26) is an example of FAC convening an important range of diverse actors.

An example of FAC *encouraging others to be catalysts in policy debates and alliances* has been the partnership between FAC and CSOs in Malawi (IS 3). In this case FAC focussed on the provision of evidence and analysis while the CSOs concentrated on using this evidence in policy influencing. This reflects different comparative advantages, with the CSOs having influence through membership numbers and seats at various policy round tables.

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### 5.2.2. Cycles of engagement and reflection

FAC's annual meeting format created a mechanism for cycles of engagement and reflection. In 2011 this was strengthened by the introduction of the Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) methodology (FAC, 2011). However, failure to integrate this with the DFID logframe outcomes and lack of resources for further annual meetings meant that this has not continued to be integrated into FAC's working practice. The result is that, although reflections took place in the annual meeting of 2012, the results were not fully recorded and there was no follow-up in 2013 or 2014. This has left FAC (and the current evaluators) without robust records of outcomes and reflections of progress and

#### Box 6: FAC engagement in Policy Processes (ToC Extract)

- ❖ Direct engagement by individual members and teams
- ❖ Identifying and creating fora for dialogue and debate
- ❖ Production and communication of FAC knowledge products and services
- ❖ Encouraging others to be catalysts in policy debates and alliances

learning at outcome level. FAC has not had dedicated M&L capacity to ensure that reflection was consistent, objective and properly recorded at programme level.

The individual case studies do provide some evidence around cycles of engagement and reflection and the benefits of this. For example, LDPI (IS 1) provides evidence of reflection after engagement, which resulted firstly in a change of research focus and secondly in a change of engagement approach.

**The importance of cycles of engagement and reflection in improving planning, recording outcomes and learning is confirmed and strengthening these is a recommendation to FAC from this evaluation.**

### 5.2.3. Using institutions, contexts, surprises and moments to influence policy processes

Different policy processes involve different institutions, contexts, surprises and moments. **Successful influencing requires prior analysis and evidence gathering, as well as the flexibility to identify the moment and manage surprises.**

Within FAC these issues were usually planned and managed by the individual themes and discussed in annual meetings. The late start on PIPA and weak recording of process, as noted above, means that some opportunities to learn from and share experiences at programme level may have been lost. The impact case studies do, however, provide individual examples of when and how FAC has used institutions, moments and surprises both successfully and less successfully.

For example, in relation to both institutions and '*moment*', the '*temporary*' creation of the Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (MNKAL) was critical (IS 2). Prior research, analysis and broad agreement were preconditions in being able to use various government institutions to move forward relatively quickly with policy adoption. Institutionalising the policy gains was also a critical learning experience. With the MNKAL example the space was created by others, not FAC. However, FAC was flexible enough to be able to use the space that became available.

Both the LDPI case study (IS 1) (engagement coming at a time of increased private sector investment, the rise of media comment and start of the Voluntary Guidelines process) and the Malawi case study on working with CSOs (IS 3) also illustrate the importance of '*moments*'. The need of the G8 New Alliance for a written 'Malawi Agricultural Policy' provided a *moment* and an opportunity for FAC's evidence to be presented and partners to feed into the policy process. This case study exemplifies '*pre-moment*' capacity in that established partnerships and previous research was extremely important in being able to feed into the agricultural policy development process.

In contrast, in relation to IS 5, the *moment* provided by the Customary Land Bill was recognised late (came as a surprise), and the response was less effective as a result. FAC's previous work on land, mainly focussed on foreign 'land grabbing', had not really laid the groundwork for an effective response to the Customary Land Act with a strong component of domestic land grabbing.

**These examples underscore that in all cases context is important. A strength of FAC is having been able to contribute to evidence gathering in a local context, while also being able to provide comparison with other contexts.**

### 5.2.4. Creating and sustaining space to work with emergent priorities and entry points in policy processes

A common theme from KILs, and confirmed by some of the impact case studies, is the attribute described as 'nimbleness' or 'agility'. This is a combination of identifying opportunities and then being flexible enough and having a sufficiently wide network of capable potential collaborators to respond to these opportunities, while the *moment* remains, sometimes in non-traditional ways.

The LDPI study (IS 1) shows that FAC was able to use its flexible budget to work with partners to convene the first Global Land Grabs conference at very short notice, to leverage its research networks to get significant evidence gathered and published in a short time frame, and to leverage its

policy and civil society/ NGO networks to get diverse and high level participation in response to an identified *moment* within land policy processes. Lessons from this are that the space to work with emergent properties and entry points is well served by agile administrative and management processes and a relatively high level impact and outcome focused (rather than input and output focused) logframe. The relative autonomy of FAC theme leaders to manage research in ways that leverage their personal networks has been shown in the case of LDPI to result in high levels of commitment from collaborators and participants.

There is also evidence that FAC has built more sustainable capacity to engage in policy processes. This is explored in the next section in response to EQ 5.

### 5.3. To what extent has FAC and its partners built sustainable research capacity (particularly in Africa) to engage in policy processes?

#### Finding 6:

**FAC has built significant capacity among its researchers, fellows and grant recipients. In most cases this capacity is not only sustainable but is growing as researchers use the experience with FAC to further develop their careers and themselves mentor new researchers.**

Building sustainable research capacity is a core component of the FAC TOC at activity, output, outcome and impact levels (see Figure 1 and Appendix 3). Through scholarships, grants and mentoring FAC aims to build and strengthen the capacity of junior African researchers, the FAC consortium members and wider research community. Through this process it aims to generate quality, policy relevant research, as well as to engage in and influence policy processes. The intended outcome is “*more sustainable capacity to engage in policy processes (e.g. the next generation of African researchers)*”.<sup>40</sup> Success in achieving these aims is premised on the assumptions set out in Box 7.

#### Box 7: Impact Pathway 2 Assumptions

- ❖ CMAAE and other comparable courses able and willing to work with FAC to implement the scholarship programme
- ❖ Junior researchers attracted to working with FAC and able to benefit from the opportunity provided
- ❖ Senior FAC members willing and able to provide necessary mentoring to junior fellows; and
- ❖ Field work supervision and support through existing FAC projects and opportunities for publication can be provided by FAC.

FAC’s work to build capacity of junior African researchers centres on its scholarships and small grant programmes, namely:

- **The Early Careers Fellowship (ECF) Programme** – scholarships awarded to students in the UK and Africa between 2010 and 2013 to undertake policy relevant agricultural research related to FAC thematic areas. A full-time fellowship was worth £10,000 and a part-time fellowship £5,000. The programme focused on early career professionals who had recently graduated from post-graduate studies and were starting their academic careers;
- **Collaborative Masters on Agriculture and Applied Economics (CMAAE)** – providing a field research fund to an established African Masters programme;
- **The Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) Competitive Fieldwork Grants** – small fieldwork grants, mentoring, publication and policy engagement opportunities; and
- **Youth and Agriculture Competitive Small Grants** –small fieldwork grants and mentoring.

The explicit capacity building focus of FAC was introduced in the period 2010-2013. The logframe for this period contained targets related to building the capacity of junior African researchers (see Table 3 below).

<sup>40</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

**Table 3: Achievement against capacity building logframe targets**

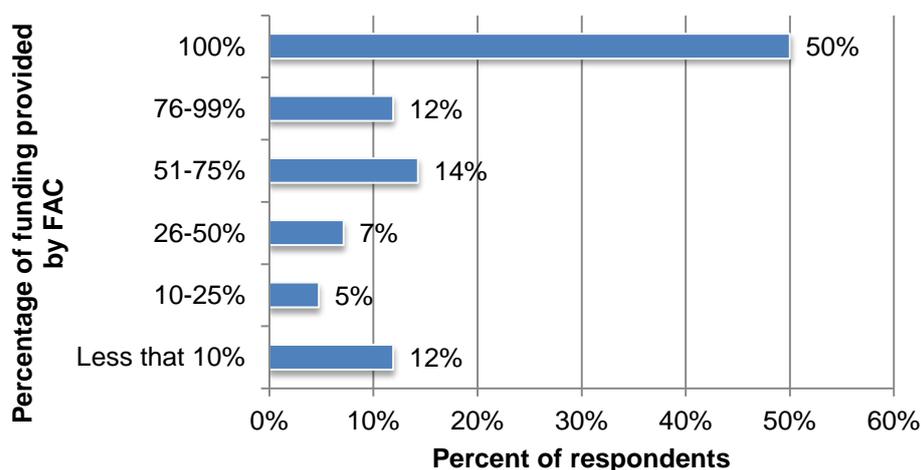
Output	Indicator	Target	Achievement
Capacity of junior African researchers in generating quality policy relevant research and using this to influence policy processes strengthened.	No. of fellowships for original research on African agriculture completed	8 completed of which at least 2 are women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 31 ECFs awarded. Of these 25 were to Africa based students (9 FT; 16 PT) and 6 were UK based students</li> <li>• 16 ECFs (52% to female students). This exceeds gender balance targets</li> <li>• All FAC research themes (except CBAA and gender (cross-cutting theme)) are represented.</li> </ul> In addition to ECF programme, FAC provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land Deal Politics Competitive Grants, 42 Grants (50% to female students)</li> <li>• Youth and Agriculture Competitive Grants, 12 Grants (33% to female students).</li> </ul>
	No. of fieldwork scholarships completed on FAC field projects	20 fieldwork scholarships (inc at least 5 women) spread across FAC research themes	
	No. of African scholars using research findings & publications in postgraduate studies	40 CMAAE dissertations using FAC research findings	The PCR notes that communications with CMAAE posed challenges to FAC and that data was not available to report on this indicator.

As part of the current evaluation an online personal professional capacity development survey was distributed to FAC members (the survey method and response rate is detailed in Appendix 2. The full survey analysis is provided in Appendix 7.2).

### 5.3.1. Developing capacity of junior researchers

The majority of junior researchers who participated in the survey had received an ECF programme award (25 respondents) or an LDPI small grant (14 respondents).<sup>41</sup> Three quarters of junior researchers indicated that FAC bursaries and support constituted a substantial part of the funding for their research (more than 50%); this indicates significant additionality of FAC support.

**Figure 6: Percentage of research funding provided by FAC**



Number of respondents: 42

While most (64%) grant recipients feel that their research would have proceeded without FAC support, engagement with FAC appears to have accelerated this process and provided additional resource allowing increased scale and quality of research. In the absence of FAC, around two-thirds of grant recipients said that their research would have:

<sup>41</sup> Two received a Young People and Agri-Food Small Grant and nine had received grants which they classified as another type.

- Happened at a later date (68%)
- Happened on a smaller scale (68%); and/ or
- Been of poorer quality (61%).

Eighty-nine percent of grant recipients indicated that the work they have done with FAC/ support they received from the FAC network will enable them to access career opportunities (such as employment, promotion, research grants, consultancy or similar opportunities) which they might not have had otherwise.

The view that FAC has furthered the research and policy careers of young researchers in Africa was backed up in qualitative interviews with Early Career Fellows (see Box 8).

**Box 8: Early Career Fellow, Joanes Odiwor-Atela**

Joanes did an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science in Kenya and a Masters in Agriculture and Resource Management in Germany. He saw the advertisement for the Early Career Fellowship when he had just finished his Masters; he applied in January 2011, heard he had been accepted in April and started the research in June. He went to IDS for a week at the start to design the study and meet his mentors, which he found incredibly useful.

Joanes chose to study the political economy of carbon, taking two contrasting carbon offsetting projects in Kenya as case studies – one working in extensive rangeland and the other in an intensive cropping area. He received £10,000 from FAC and a further £1,500 through STEPS.<sup>42</sup> To do the research he needed a local affiliate and he chose the Kenyan NEPAD secretariat. He considers that he received excellent mentoring, with helpful comments on his drafts. One of the most useful things he learnt was an improved writing style – “*simple, straightforward and passionate!*” He also feels he learnt enhanced analytical and networking skills, with FAC able to link him to lots of helpful people.

Joanes finished his research in June 2012 and wrote two Working Papers – one on Governing Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+): global framings versus practical evidence from the Kasigau Corridor REDD+ Project and one on The Politics of Agricultural Carbon Finance: The Case of the Kenya Agricultural Carbon Project. Between the two papers they have had over 4,500 hits on the FAC website. He also wrote two blogs for FAC.

Meanwhile Joanes’s attachment at NEPAD was paying off. The CEO asked him to design a fellowship programme so that they could increase their research capacity. They now have 3-4 fellows. He also helped start a youth based farm renewal project with advice from FAC which is now operating in collaboration with the National Youth Service under CAADP in alliance with the Ministry of Planning and Vision 2030. Joanes has since been offered consultancy contracts, is finalising a PhD and is attached to ICRAF/World Agroforestry who are funding part of his fieldwork – looking at the institutional design of climate change projects and how they interact with the socio-economic context. This is directly building on the research he started with FAC. He is also now approached to comment on issues related to his research, such as the launch of a new climate change adaptation fund for Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>43</sup>. His future plan is to do post-doc work at ICRAF and then eventually move into the Kenyan Government at a level at which he feels he can be most influential.

**Analysis:** FAC was able to add value through excellent mentoring – the opportunity to learn a more effective writing style, to be more analytical and to build a network of contacts. All of these are outcomes shared by other successful fellows interviewed as part of this evaluation. In particular FAC has enabled fellows to ‘step-out’ from academic research to policy relevant research. And once someone has a track record of policy relevant output, the opportunities for employment, consultancy and further research are all significantly enhanced.

<sup>42</sup> The STEPS Centre (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) based at IDS is an interdisciplinary global research and policy engagement centre uniting development studies with science and technology studies.

<sup>43</sup> Source: <http://www.scidev.net/sub-saharan-africa/climate-change/news/major-boost-for-climate-change-resilience-in-africa.html>.

The evaluation points to **two key factors** that are highly valued by young researchers:

**1. FAC facilitating the transition from academic to policy relevant research for young researchers and presenting opportunities to publish**

Evidence for this comes from qualitative interviews with ECFs and from the analysis of the personal professional capacity survey where over 90% of grant recipients indicated that their engagement with FAC has improved their ability to identify policy relevant research gaps; undertake policy relevant research; and critically engage with the research evidence. In a qualitative interview one ECF recipient said:

*“So I got the grant and it was great because it provided that bridging time to create the space to finish the PhD. and come up with actual outputs. That is often quite a constraint for a PhD. because you finish the thesis but then the research doesn’t actually go anywhere...it’s that transition out of academia into something more relevant...the big thing that really sticks out was writing a policy brief...it [writing a policy brief] wasn’t on my radar. I mean the notion of being relevant was there but [with FAC] it was the first time that it had really crossed my mind to translate research into policy briefs!”- ECF Grant Recipient*

**2. FAC provides mentoring and opportunities to work with highly respected academics**

When asked an open-ended question about the quality of advice/ mentoring and support provided by FAC to researchers,<sup>44</sup> qualitative NVivo analysis showed a clustering of positive responses. Respondents highlighted issues including the personal nature of the mentoring approach, good mentor-student matching, an informal friendly approach, provision of a peer review forum, engagement of senior academics, knowledge transfer, research oversight and provision of critical feedback.

A further factor which featured strongly in interviews with ECFs was that via FAC, junior researchers are engaging with and learning from academic leaders; building their capacity and inspiring them at the start of their careers. One ECF recipient said:

*“I was fortunate enough to be physically present to engage with them, these ‘top level’ experts in that area....when I go back now they still know who I am and you never feel like this awkward young researcher who is trying to take up their time, you are actually someone relevant who is working on things that they actually find important and they will give their time to communicate with you which really doesn’t often happen in this field ...you feel like you are a legitimate researcher in the space even though you are an early career person who is based in Africa. They have always been friendly and welcoming and never standoffish. The broader network of FAC, you are a part of that, you are not tangential to the process” ECF Grant Recipient*

Similar views were expressed in a small number of responses to the capacity survey (Box 9):

**Box 9: Quotes from the personal professional capacity survey response**

*“This one-to-one engagement between UK researchers and young African researchers is quite unique, in my experience.” – FAC lead/ co- researcher (capacity survey)*

*“The strength of FAC’s approach is the regular meetings where researchers present their work and the intellectual leaders bring to the attention of the researchers cutting edge debates.”- FAC lead/ co-researcher (capacity survey)*

*“The mentorship was high quality since the mentors were senior research fellows of significant research experience. The unique thing about FAC mentorship was for one of my mentors to accompany me to the field in Ghana to have a firsthand experience of my project area” - Grant recipient (capacity survey)*

*“There is an assembly of professionals highly rated and respected in their areas of expertise internationally”- Grant recipient (capacity survey)*

<sup>44</sup> Note: This question was asked of both established and junior researchers who completed the survey.

In spite of these positive comments, it is apparent that FAC's mentoring approach has not always worked in practice and the survey did show a small minority of views expressing dissatisfaction with the amount and timeliness of support.

Returning to the FAC TOC, **one of the assumptions for success is that 'senior FAC members are willing and able to provide necessary mentoring to junior fellows' – where this has been the case, the TOC can be said to be operating in practice.**

Functioning of the TOC may be enhanced further through opportunities for peer to peer networking. Qualitative interviews with ECFs highlighted a desire for the continued opportunity to network with other fellows, to create, in-effect, a network of FAC alumni. These networking opportunities have been constrained by FAC's budget reductions in the last year.

### 5.3.2. Developing capacity of established researchers

In addition to supporting young researchers, there is also evaluation evidence that capacity has been built among more experienced FAC researchers. Bearing in mind the data caveats in relation to response rates by lead and co-researchers, it is notable that 23 of the 26 researchers who answered the question indicated that involvement with FAC has enabled them to access career opportunities which they might not otherwise have had. Access to enhanced professional networks and the development of political economy perspectives, are two key reasons for this, as cited in the survey responses of lead and co-researchers.

An example from the qualitative primary research was provided by a senior Ethiopian researcher who strongly affirms that the mentoring he received in terms of the political economy approach, his exposure to a small peer group of other African researchers, and his involvement in wider debates, dialogue and peer review processes (including FAC annual meetings) have made major contributions to developing his personal capacity as a researcher. Equally, his international exposure has been significantly enhanced by the publication of his work on the FAC website, which means that he now gets direct enquiries from media and organisations looking for consultants (see IS 8).

In most cases (as indicated in responses to the personal professional capacity survey and in individual KIIs) those researchers whose capacity has increased are actively using their capacity and the associated marketability in consultancies and other research work – therefore, **capacity is not only being sustained, but is also growing in terms of increasing experience (learning by doing).** This indicates that the FAC TOC (Impact Pathway 2) does work in practice.

### 5.3.3. The impact of capacity development

In answering EQ5, analysis has sought to identify the impact of applying the skills and capacities developed as a result of involvement with FAC by established and junior researchers.

Overall, the impact case studies show a consistent increase in capacity with some attribution to FAC across a number of different contexts (e.g. IS 2, 3, 4 and 5). This is reinforced by the findings of the personal professional capacity survey which supports the broad linkages (activity, Output and Outcome level) and assumptions of the TOC.

Analysis of qualitative responses to the personal professional capacity survey shows three prominent response categories. The relative prevalence of response categories is illustrated in Figure 7 together with some sample quotes from respondents (Box 10). Prominent categories are:

- Personal career progression;
- An influence on policy; and
- Being better able to communicate or successfully disseminate research findings (e.g. via conferences, meetings, or publications).

Figure 7:



**Key:** In descending order this figure shows the prevalence of qualitative responses in relation to:

- 1. Career Development;
- 2. Policy Influence;
- 3. Communicating Findings;
- 4. Dissemination of Findings;
- 5. New Research Collaborations;
- 6. No Benefit to Date;
- 7. PhD Proposal;
- 8. Recognition by Funding Authorities;
- 9. Secured Funding;
- 10. Understanding Policy Process.

Source: NVivo analysis of qualitative responses to the personal professional capacity survey. Based on responses of 41 individuals.

Note: In this case the distinction between dissemination and communication is around the direction of flow of information. Dissemination is considered a one-way process while communication is more interactive and multi-directional.

**Box 10: Quotes from FAC researchers, fellows and grant recipients**

**Personal career progression:**

*“I used my experience and work that I have done with FAC to apply for lecturer position in the University and was offered the job. This would have been difficult without enough research background.”*

*“I was invited by the research coordinators to join them to apply for a research project on agriculture commercialisation which was successful. I am certain that our history with FAC was a positive factor. I am receiving more invitations to conferences than ever before. While this is not due solely to my involvement in FAC, my research outputs and publications from my work with FAC have no doubt strengthened my reputation as a leading researcher on land tenure issues in Africa.”*

**Influence on policy:**

*“This (work) resulted in critical debates in Parliament on these two issues resulting in the Bill on Land being referred back to Legal Affairs Committee although it was eventually passed with quite minor modifications.”*

**Successfully communicate and disseminate findings:**

*In terms of impact, to date my two FAC working papers (sole author) have been downloaded more than 7,000 times”*

**Most informants across all research strands mentioned a variety of ways in which their capacity has increased; a common thread is the ability to link their research to policy processes, identifying policy relevant stakeholders, leveraging FAC's networks and communicating with others about their research.**

In terms of applying increased capacity for the purpose of influencing policy and sustaining this capacity (the Impact level of the TOC), the personal professional capacity survey found that for those researchers who have engaged with stakeholders or influenced policy through their work, it is usually at the national level: e.g. engaging in national projects, or meeting with national level officials. **Qualitative responses of survey respondents most frequently cite 'engagement with policy makers' when talking about their activities rather than 'actual policy influence' (as some respondents noted, the latter can be difficult to attribute).**

For some of the respondents, interaction with policy makers or the policymaking process was not yet on the agenda. Often, the stage of their work is too early for this (this is compatible with the TOC given the recognised time lag in translating research to policy ready outputs).

One survey respondent highlighted potential barriers facing researchers, citing reluctance to engage with local policy makers due to their actual or potential hostility. While other informants commented on hostility and unwillingness on the part of policy makers to engage in some instances, there is no evidence that this is inhibiting the attempt of FAC members to engage (which would be counter to the TOC).

#### **5.3.4. Developing organisational capacity**

Capacity is also important at an organisational level. Knowing which African researchers are able to deliver to the required quality on time and having the network relationships to make this happen is part of organisational capacity. For instance, KILs showed that FAC's network of a critical mass of experienced PE researchers across a number of countries was a major factor in them winning the contract for the 'AU Drivers of Success' study (IS 6). It was also key to mobilising new evidence on land deals for the LDPI Global Land Grabs Conference in 2010 (IS 1).

An important observation from civil society key informants in Malawi was that the capacity of civil society organisations to use evidence had increased as a result of their ongoing engagement with FAC (IS 3). This provides an intriguing link from a practical impact study into the TOC at the Impact level on '*Stronger capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking in agricultural policy research, policy formulation and implementation among actors engaged by FAC.*'

### **5.4. How effectively has FAC engaged Southern researchers and included their perspectives and with what outcome?**

#### **Finding 7:**

**The majority of research work currently done by FAC is by Southern based researchers and their influence within the network (as theme convenors and members of the coordination team) is growing. The majority of FAC's policy influencing is led by African FAC members and this has been positively noted by some African policy makers. A major outcome for the researchers is improved job prospects and consultancy opportunities – which further contributes to their influence.**

The TOC describes a desired Outcome of FAC as being more sustainable capacity to engage in policy processes (e.g. next generation of African researchers) and a regionalisation strategy, which implies increasing African leadership. FAC has developed in the 2008-13 period from a preponderance of northern researchers (albeit with significant African experience) and northern base in 2008 to a preponderance of African researchers and an evolving hub model of organisation in 2013-14. The further expansion of southern capacity and influence in FAC is continuing to evolve from the current hub model and pool of African FAC researchers and previous research fellows:

- At the start of FAC all three (and then all four) theme convenors were northern. The current convenors are ten northern and eight southern;
- At the start, both members of the FAC Coordination Team were northern. There are now one northern and five southern members; and
- FAC's International Advisory Board is made up of three northern and seven southern representatives.

Southern researchers have defined the majority of the research questions in recent years and been responsible for the vast majority of the field research and writing up of results. Southern researchers have significantly increased their 'voice' due to the publication opportunities made possible by FAC and also through conference presentation and participation. For example, IS 3 shows that in providing evidence to civil society for policy influencing in Malawi, the demand, supply and influencing was all in the hands of Malawians. Also in Malawi, the detailed evaluation of the FISP and presentation of results to the government and donors has increasingly been led by Malawians - this was specifically commented on by government KIs as a positive example of capacity building (IS 4).

Northern researchers still play a significant role in final peer review, searching for funding opportunities and relations with donors. Funding constraints have meant that the International Advisory Board, with a majority of African representation, has only met once.<sup>45</sup>

FAC has been 'building capacity by doing' – and this includes both southern and northern researchers. For instance, 27 African researchers are involved in the current AU 'Drivers of Success' study, and for most of these researchers, their involvement has been made possible due to previous experience of working with FAC using the PE approach. In Ethiopia, FAC researchers are generally very positive about their collaboration with colleagues in the UK (and elsewhere) and have felt that their perspectives are included. In terms of influence, the position of FAC's seeds researcher in the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, which is under the Ministry of Agriculture, gives him a unique position to access information and influence policy informally; since 2009 he has very much been in the driving seat of the seeds work in Ethiopia (IS 8).

The influence of FAC linked researchers is not limited to their influence within FAC or while doing FAC work. Many researchers who have worked with FAC have been promoted or got more influential jobs as a result of their policy research experience and/ or have been engaged as consultants.<sup>46</sup> This is a way of spreading FAC experience and policy approaches.

A 'virtuous cycle' seems to be happening, with FAC members using their previous research with FAC to feed into consultancies for other clients; indeed, the importance being placed by consultancy contractors on previous FAC experience suggests that this is valued by the clients.

## 5.5. What are the outcomes from GSD mainstreaming?

### Finding 8:

**Mainstreaming of gender and social difference (GSD) in FAC has not been systematised, nor backed by sufficient authority and resources to have consistent results. The 'demand-led' approach and variable level of focus and expertise of theme convenors and FAC researchers on GSD have contributed to limited integration of GSD in outputs and outcomes. "Mainstreaming" in capacity building has been effective in ensuring a good representation of women as ECF and grant holders, but women remain very under-represented among more senior FAC researchers, especially in some countries.**

The GSD theme began in 2009/10. With a budget over four years of £50,250 (which it under spent), it had a significantly smaller budget than the stand-alone themes (which had an average budget of £320,000). The rationale for this small budget was that mainstreaming was to be demand-led and

<sup>45</sup> However individual members have provided advice and input into FAC activities outside of formal meetings.

<sup>46</sup> Key informant interviews with FAC members and Early Career Fellows.

other themes were intended to use their own budgets to integrate gender and social difference issues. The theme had one convenor (who is a freelance consultant rather than based in one of the hubs) compared to two for the other themes.

The GSD theme was conceived as cross-cutting and aimed at improving gender and social difference analysis and coverage through influencing other outputs of FAC. The objective of the theme is to challenge common framings in policy and practice that equate “gender” with “women”, and put women and men in opposition to each other. The focus is on processes of change - in particular:

- What circumstances allow structures to either open or limit access to opportunities? and
- What kinds of support do both women and men need if they are to benefit from and/or adapt to change?

In the first thematic discussion paper (Okali 2012a) the opportunity for FAC was identified; stating that *“the relevance and richness of FAC research will be significantly enhanced if it can move towards an understanding of gender relations as varying over time, in different situations, and in different locations; and an appreciation of the nuance and complexity that underpins the relations of women and men living and working in dynamic situations”*.

“Operating principles” were published in a 2012 Working Paper (Table 4 (Okali 2012b)). The FAC membership was briefed by the GSD theme convenor in the annual FAC meetings in Addis Ababa in 2010 and Ghana in 2011. The theme convenor also produced an analysis of the implications of the new thinking on GSD in the concept notes of the other themes in 2011.

**Table 4: Operating principles for a social relations approach to incorporating gender into agricultural research and development policy (extract from Okali, 2012b)<sup>47</sup>**

**Vigorously resist notions that:**

- The rural population is a collection of isolated, atomised individuals with only individual interests
- Farmers, producers and others are neutral actors with no gender, age, class or other identities
- All rural areas are the same (share the same history and social identity, and are experiencing similar rates of change etc)

**Question dominant narratives about:**

- Women and men in agriculture, gender relations and household decision making

**Remember that:**

- Gender disadvantage is about social structures
- Gender relations are dynamic, men and women seek to maintain or re-negotiate these to meet their own interests
- Men and women have multiple identities
- Changes in gender relations are intrinsically ambiguous and cannot be simply read off from sex differentiated data

**Avoid:**

- Simply cataloguing differences and seeking gap-filling solutions
- Repeating standard representations of women and men, youth or other groups

**Clarify:**

- The context in which any specific study is undertaken
- Which women and which men are the subject of the study
- Gender and wider relations in various institutional contexts

<sup>47</sup> Source: FAC Working Paper 26 (2012) – Gender Analysis: Engaging with Rural Development and Agricultural Policy Processes. Christine Okali (hits 3815).

So, to what extent has new thinking on GSD and the “operating principles” been used by FAC researchers in other themes and with what outcome?

In terms of output, the GSD theme itself produced 15 publications in the period to March 2013 (23 publications have been produced in the period to March 2014). This equates to around 2% of FAC’s total outputs since the theme became operational. With around 2% FAC’s thematic research budget, cost per unit of output is comparable to other themes.

According to the FAC Output Database, in the period 2010-2013 (the operational period of the GSD theme), 17% of all publications displayed an ‘explicit gender dimension’.<sup>48</sup>

The GSD theme convenor seems therefore to have efficiently used limited resources to provide a good framing of a social relations approach to mainstreaming gender (less so on social difference), complemented by training of, and engagement with FAC members. Download of conceptual and other papers has been significant suggesting *relevance* of this theme.

The ‘Women in Agriculture’ stereotypes have been challenged in a number of specific publications and blogs<sup>49</sup>, conference presentations and e-debates, as well as in the recent AIGLA conference (March 2014) (although it is noted that the GSD theme convenor was not involved in the conceptualising or planning of this event).

Uptake of GSD theme outputs seems to be reasonable (in terms of hits on gender publications and key informant FAC members remembering the 2012 Ghana presentation). Gender disaggregation has not been recorded

**Box 11: Extract from ‘A Quantitative Content Analysis of Malawian Agricultural Policy Documents’ (Appendix 4)**

In general, the Gender and Social Difference theme was less extensively and consistently integrated into FAC documents than the Subsidies and Political Economy themes. On average, FAC materials scored 5.3 on the Gender and Social Difference variable, indicating that the average document only vaguely referred to any of the Gender and Social Difference sub-themes. Breaking this down by each level, one in three FAC documents clearly referred to at least one sub-theme, one half vaguely referred to at least one sub-theme, and nearly one quarter did not refer to any sub-themes at all.

When broken down by sub-theme however, it becomes evident that the mean score for the Gender and Social Difference variable is shaped by the presence of one sub-theme in particular: the social relational sub-theme. Whereas nearly one third (30%) of the FAC documents contained a direct reference to the Social Relational sub-theme, and another two-fifths (40%) vaguely referred to it, very few of the remaining sub-themes received any mention at all. In fact, a large majority of FAC documents made no reference to the Challenging Framings (97%), Dynamism (93%) and Diversity (70%) sub-themes. Furthermore, a small number of materials (Diversity, 7%; Social Relations, 7% and Dynamism, 3%) even contained statements that were inconsistent with these sub-themes, receiving scores of three (arguments inconsistent with the sub-theme are present, but only vaguely). Common reasons for assigning scores of three were that documents referred to ‘women’ and ‘men’ as if they were homogenous groups whose roles and interactions were static and unlikely to change.

**The sub-themes coded for were:**

- Social Relational (problems of social disadvantage need to be analysed and addressed in the context of social relations)
- Challenging Framings (gender does not equate with women)
- Diversity (women and men are diverse social groupings with multiple identities)
- Dynamism (gender relations are not static)
- Support (there should be discussion around the different types of support).

<sup>48</sup> It was not possible to separately calculate how much of other theme budgets was spent on these publications or other gender and social difference activities.

<sup>49</sup> Blog 2013 Christine Okali - Women and climate change: another special relationship? (Hits 2770). FAC Working Paper 57 (2013) - Making Sense of Gender, Climate Change and Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa. Okali, C. and Naess, L.O. (hits 3127) Blog 2013 Siera Vercillo - For food security to work, women and men in Africa need more open and flexible policies, not stereotypes (hits 1930). Blog 2013 Agnes Otzelberger - More than numbers: Why counting heads in the climate talks won’t do women farmers any favours (hits 460). Policy Brief 64 Collective Action, Gender Relations and Social Inclusion in African Agricultural Markets (hits 1317).

for all FAC events, but for major conferences women's attendance has been around 34%.<sup>50</sup>

The outcome picture, as evidenced from interviews with senior FAC researchers, ECFs and from the impact case studies, is more mixed. While women are represented among the ECFs (52%), they are less well represented among researchers (26% - 25 women and 70 men) and in some countries this representation is much lower.

In terms of FAC research, those researchers who were interested in gender found the FAC theoretical papers useful and, if their research explicitly featured gender, some received advice and/or mentoring from the GSD theme convenor. However, very few of the researchers interviewed made direct reference to gender theoretical papers and nobody specifically mentioned the 'Operating Principles' shown in Table 4. Most of the researchers consulted got no specific gender advice on their research design and only occasionally received some gender focussed feedback on their drafts.

This point is reinforced by the findings of the quantitative content analysis (QCA) of FAC documents conducted in Malawi (reported in Box 11). The QCA corroborated key informant and impact study findings on the patchy mainstreaming of key GSD principles within FAC's own publications.

Considering specific in-depth examples, evidence on mainstreaming is mixed:

- KIIs see LDPI as having covered this theme well, having brought significant attention to gender and social differentiation (e.g. youth), which was previously lacking in the topic of land grabs; and to consequently have triggered more work on these issues (see IS 1). However, overall the response from other researchers in taking up the issue in relation to land grabs has not been strong;
- The more sophisticated analytical framing of issues developed under the GSD theme has not been fully integrated into the work on Social Protection in Ethiopia. Understandings of FAC Ethiopia researchers remain very much about women as a vulnerable group or female headed households (FHH) as a separate category to be tracked (as in the graduation research) (IS 7);
- Also in Ethiopia, the seed research work has not incorporated any focus on GSD issues as such, and these were not seen as relevant by the lead researcher (IS 8). The FAC Pastoralism theme convenor highlighted challenges faced in recruiting female researchers to work on pastoralism, despite apparent efforts on this, but emphasised that specialists on these issues were invited to key meetings and conferences.<sup>51</sup> Non-FAC informants in Ethiopia were not aware of any focus on GSD in FAC's work on pastoralism, nor in other themes.
- GSD was a major feature of the Malawi FISP evaluations (IS 4) and one Policy Brief was specifically focussed on gender differences in fertiliser use. However, evaluation team members did not report specific guidance from the GSD theme lead in the design of the evaluation work.

The GSD theme has produced some high quality, interesting and challenging outputs; and supported a small proportion of research and publications on other themes that had an explicit gender focus. However, it never had the capacity, nor were the institutional structures in place, to ensure that the operating principles were applied consistently across FAC's research and communications.

Wider mainstreaming objectives, beyond the conceptual level described above, do not seem to have been elaborated; nor have any specific mechanisms been put in place to reinforce or drive mainstreaming beyond the work and outputs of the GSD theme convenor. Although attempts were made to increase staff resources for the theme,<sup>52</sup> these were not successful and the theme remained under-resourced for much of the period covered by this evaluation.

It does not seem that significant demand was created through theme activities and in some cases the theme was marginalised in the design and production of GSD relevant outputs. All themes were expected to include GSD in their annual workplans, but the cross-cutting capacity to translate this into cutting-edge learning was limited. There was never sufficient capacity to mainstream gender at an

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<sup>50</sup> Figures provided by FAC.

<sup>51</sup> There was no specific impact study on pastoralism in Ethiopia but a number of KIIs were carried out related to this theme.

<sup>52</sup> A series of recruitment efforts were described in qualitative KIIs with the theme lead and the FAC convenors.

individual research initiative or publication level. Despite this, there has been attention to GSD in some themes, including the intra-household decision making component of the African Farmer Game.

Despite the title, the emphasis on social difference in the GSD theme seems to have been relatively light. Social difference was addressed in relation to gender, but not in a broader context – e.g. the operating principles in Table 4 relate to gender differences, but similar principles were not developed for other differences. Other themes did work on social difference but there appears to have been little cross-cutting intellectual exchange on this, except perhaps with the Youth and Agriculture Theme.<sup>53</sup>

In the TOC the ‘new thinking on gender’ is correctly situated under the institutional development Impact Pathway 3. However, in execution, institutionalising the gender mainstreaming process has been the most evident weakness.

## 5.6. To what extent has FAC achieved its expected Outcomes?<sup>54</sup>

**Finding 9:**  
 Earlier EQs show FAC to have achieved significant and sustainable research capacity outcomes, and with research and influencing increasingly led by southern researchers. Data from FAC knowledge product users, although not statistically representative, show increasing levels of uptake; with many considering that their knowledge of agricultural policy and ability to engage has increased. Theory-based analysis shows that FAC is influencing policy processes at the outcome level, but current monitoring is not sufficient to quantify this at programme level. Individual impact case studies do show outcome level policy change.

This evaluation covers outcomes generated from activities in the period 2008-2013. However, it is recognised that some of these outcomes may be more evident in the post 2013 period. Therefore, there has been flexibility with outcomes generated from the 2008-2013 period analysed where appropriate up to the time of the evaluation in August 2014. Targets in both the 2008-2010 and 2010-2013 logframes are not very explicit at outcome level, although the definition of policy strengthening was clarified for each target (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Logframe targets at outcome level**

Phase	Outcome	Indicator	Target
2008-2010	Improve policy and promote agricultural growth and poverty reduction in Africa.	Policy refinements of key public and private actors reflect major policy options presented by FAC.	None set
2010-2013	Improve policy and promote agricultural growth and poverty reduction in Africa.	Policy strengthening in key CAADP activities which reflects policy options presented by FAC. <sup>55</sup>	4 areas of policy strengthening
		Policy strengthening in civil society and/or donor activities in each of the FAC core countries and/or regionally as a result of FAC thematic research, networking and policy engagement activities <sup>56</sup>	8 areas of policy strengthening in CS and/or donor activities

<sup>53</sup> The evaluation team did not focus on this theme specifically.

<sup>54</sup> EQ 14 was given subsidiary status because the focus of this evaluation is on learning. Therefore, although a significant focus of the evaluation is on outcomes, these are primarily looked at in relation to the TOC, and in relation to answering the EQs, rather than against the expected outcomes in the logframe.

<sup>55</sup> By policy strengthening we mean that FAC contributes significantly to changing/improving policy in key areas of CAADP activity as defined in country Compact agreements and implementation plans. Evidence of impacts on policy strengthening will be documented through FAC’s adaptation of impact pathway analysis/outcome mapping.

<sup>56</sup> By policy strengthening we mean FAC contributes through evidence-based research to changing/improving policy in key areas of civil society and/or donor activity as defined by policy positions, funding foci, project investments and capacity of key personnel. Evidence of impacts on policy strengthening will be documented through FAC’s adaptation of impact pathway analysis/outcome mapping.

For the first part of the programme (2008-2011) FAC was weak at monitoring at outcome level. In 2011 FAC introduced the Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) methodology (FAC, 2011) which provided an opportunity for more rigorous and systematic assessment, planning, reflection and recording of outcomes.

Themes used PIPA to plan in 2011 and it was also used in reflection and setting of forward workplans at the 2012 annual meeting. However, the outcomes have not been systematically recorded since.<sup>57</sup> The lack of resources to bring theme members together meant that systematic reflection and recording did not happen in 2013 or 2014 and there was also a failure to integrate the PIPA information with the DFID logframe and annual reporting.

The PCR (DFID 2013b) hence noted that there are many examples where FAC's "*research outputs have been used to feed in to other areas of work, but policy level change is limited*". It went on to cite examples that may lead to policy strengthening in future. The PCR gave FAC an overall outcome score of B: 'Outcome moderately did not meet expectation'. This is a fair reflection of the evidence available to the PCR reviewer at the time.

At the most basic level, outcomes (in terms of user engagement with the outputs) can be tracked through website diagnostics (e.g. engagement of users with FAC materials, something not directly within FAC's control, can be considered an outcome and 'indicator of influence'). FAC's website diagnostics show a high level of visits and downloads, which continue to grow year on year (see Figure 2 and sections 3.3 and 3.4). The reasons for this growth seem to be due (at least in part) to increased hosting of links to documents on the FAC website by other sites such as ELDIS and ODI. Increased use of social media may also be a factor in generating more website hits. **Overall, download and other media interaction evidence shows that FAC has created a source of information that users find of interest.**

An additional source of evidence on outcomes (available to this evaluation) comes from the knowledge product user survey (questions were asked about how outputs from FAC are used and what outcomes have accrued). A qualitative understanding on how engagement with FAC knowledge products are changing the way that users work is provided by the qualitative responses in the users survey (see Box 12).

Bearing in mind the caveats on this data, these comments are corroborated by the quantitative survey results. The survey found that over 90% of respondents consider that their knowledge of agricultural policy issues has increased as a result of FAC and 75% consider that their ability to engage in agricultural policy debates has increased. At least for this group, FAC outputs are shown to have impacted on user knowledge, attitudes and practice (it should also be noted that only 3% of respondents<sup>58</sup> 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with statements regarding FAC's impact on their knowledge, attitudes and practice). In spite of this, there is no statistically robust evidence to say that these positive findings hold true for the full population of FAC knowledge product users and it is likely that many of those who did not respond to the survey invite will not have benefited to the same extent as those who did.

**Box 12: Selection of comments on how FAC engagement has changed the way users work**

*"FAC work has enabled me to tap into a community of practice and into research findings that subsequently allowed me to tackle certain policy processes from a different angle".*

*"Developing alternative policy scenarios in the policy process and skill in influencing the policy agenda"*

*"I use it as an input specially for comparison reason"*

*"FAC research has pushed us as an organisation to build evidence of our work at the local level so as to engage more systematically at the national level to be able to influence policies"*

*"Definitely I feel that how I work has improved as a result of clearer understanding of these issues and*

<sup>57</sup> IS7 shows how the lack of clarity on expected outcomes is also a feature of some of the detailed fieldwork.

<sup>58</sup> 7 of the 211 who answered the question.

*dynamics, and I have been able to be more effective in analysing situations in the field and policy processes as they unfold”*

*“My scope of engagement has widened, access to important debates and ideas on agricultural research and development, fresh thinking on Youth and agriculture”*

*“Able to consult more different sides; know roughly who thinks what and where to look”*

*“I interrogate new agriculture business models more rigorously especially their inclusion or exclusion of women”*

FAC research has been extensively published in established peer-reviewed journals and in some cases has contributed to special issues on FAC themes. An important example of this is the Journal of Peasant Studies, which for two years (2012 and 2013) came top in the journal impact factor rankings (Thompson Reuters, 2013), for both the ‘planning and development’ and ‘anthropology’ categories (see Box 13).

A significant contribution to this seems to have been the three special issues that FAC supported linked to outputs from the LDPI Global Land Grabs conferences in 2010 and 2012 and the 2011 Forum, the ‘green grabs’ issue and the ‘enclosures’ issue.

**Box 13: Message from the Journal of Peasant Studies Editorial Team to FAC**

*“For sure we know that your special issue contributed quite significantly to the impressive Impact Factor we got this year. BUT: more important than the Impact Factor accomplishment, we know very well that that special issue has inspired a lot of younger scholars in their own research and social movement activists in their political work - and no doubt that these are the more profoundly rewarding things for authors, guest editors, and journal editors!”*

## 6. Influencing policy (impact)

### 6.1. Introduction

This section of the report collates evaluation evidence on the impact of FAC, commenting where possible on the linkages and assumptions of the TOC at impact level. This section contributes to:

**EQ14** To what extent has FAC achieved its expected outcome and impact?

**EQ6** To what extent has the FAC TOC been shown to be operating in practice at impact level?

### 6.2. Assessing the impact of FAC

**Finding 10:**

**Evidence from the impact case studies show that the FAC TOC is operating at the impact level. The evaluation identified one case of current impact and six cases of limited current impact; in four of these there was significant potential for future impact. Some attribution is possible at the ‘influence of evidence’ and ‘capacity to use PE thinking’ level of the TOC. At the ‘adoption of policy and practice’ (super-impact level of the TOC) contributions from FAC can be identified. Quantifying the contribution, or using the null hypothesis to estimate what would have happened without FAC, remains difficult.**

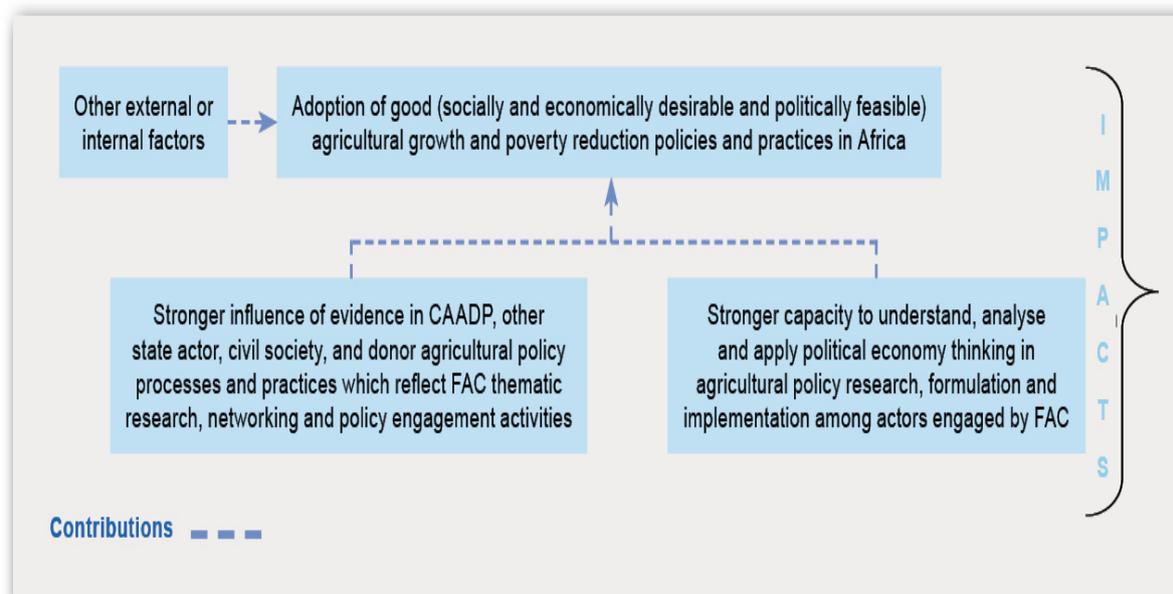
The impact sought by FAC in the period 2008-2013 as stated in the programme logframe was to **increase agricultural productivity** and **reduce poverty** in Sub-Saharan Africa; and to **improve public policies for pro-poor agricultural growth**. Success would be judged on the basis of achieved agricultural growth rates (CAADP targets) and reduced poverty headcount (MDG targets).

These are highly ambitious aspirations for an academic research consortium given a) the size of the FAC intervention in relation to the issues to be addressed b) the challenges in promoting and bringing into practice evidence-based policy making and c) the timescale over which any contribution by FAC to the stronger influence of evidence in policy may take to manifest at impact level.

In contrast, the programme TOC, which was refined through this evaluation process, sets out a more pragmatic view of FAC’s intended contribution at impact level and the potential ‘super impact’ results

of this. The impact level component of the TOC is shown in Figure 8. This is followed by a synthesis of the evaluation evidence base in relation to the impact of FAC.

**Figure 8: TOC extract (impact level)**



**Source:** Extract of FAC ToC (Upper Quartile, 2014)

As noted in the evaluation inception report, there has been no systematic monitoring and reporting of FAC performance at impact level. During the evaluation inception phase the team requested evidence and stories of impact from FAC theme convenors. As stated in the extended methodology (Appendix 2), these stories provided the basis of a sampling frame from which the evaluation team selected ‘impact events’ for further analysis.

These stories tended to reflect areas in which there were *indicators of influence* (for example high numbers of downloads, engagement of policy makers in events, invitations for FAC to participate in policy dialogues etc.) or potential future influence rather than tangible evidence of FAC’s contribution to improved policy.

Given the lack of robust data from programme monitoring, the evaluation’s assessment of FAC success at impact level comes mainly from analysis of the eight impact case studies. This is supplemented by information from wider KI interviews. Evidence on ‘*capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking*’<sup>59</sup> comes from impact case studies as well as from the personal professional capacity survey.

### 6.2.1. FAC contribution to TOC impact ‘Stronger influence of evidence’

The full TOC statement is ‘*Stronger influence of evidence in CAADP, other state actor, civil society and donor agricultural policy processes and practices which reflect FAC thematic research, networking and policy engagement activities*’<sup>60</sup>

The eight case studies show varying degrees of impact in relation to ‘*stronger influence of evidence*’. In all cases the influence of evidence is due to a number of actors, of which FAC is only one, and sometimes quite a minor one. However, as Table 6 shows, in the majority of cases FAC can be considered a contributor.

While the impact case studies looked at specific examples (viewed by FAC as areas in which they had made a contribution), the (trial) QCA looked at the visibility of FAC research themes and framings

<sup>59</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

<sup>60</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

in national level media and policy documents in Malawi. Overall, at this higher level, representation of FAC themes and evidence was low. This is not to say that FAC has not contributed, but it does show that the visibility of any debates and policy discussion was difficult to detect at this level (Box 14).

**Box 14: Extract findings from 'A Quantitative Content Analysis of Malawian Agricultural Policy Documents' (Appendix 4)**

The QCA considered a) the extent to which FAC themes are reflected in Malawian policy documents, b) the types and sources of documents that are most likely to reflect FAC themes, c) the extent of change over time and d) the factors that predict greater integration of FAC themes into policy documentation. Key findings were:

- Representation of FAC themes and sub-themes across media and policy documents was typically low. The average document made either no reference to any FAC sub-themes or only vague and indirect references to any FAC sub-themes.
- The extent to which FAC themes were reflected in media/ policy documents differed based on document type, source and level (regional vs. national vs. civil society). In general, newspaper articles and speeches reflected fewer and less extensive thematic content, whereas internal policy/ procedure documents tended to demonstrate higher integration.
- Among documents of the same type and from the same source, there was not enough evidence to suggest an increase in the breadth or depth of thematic integration over time.
- Documents that directly refer to FAC partners tended to reflect a greater number of sub-themes.
- The research hoped to examine if FAC's personal level of contact with document sources predicted the level of integration, but the requisite information was not available from FAC to allow this.

**Table 6: Evidence that the FAC ToC is working at impact level**

Impact Stories	Evidence of impact as defined in ToC	Influence	Enabling / constraining factors
1. Co-founding the Land Deal Politics Initiative	The availability of evidence through the LDPI consortium 'raised the bar' on the quality of evidence expected to underpin statements made about land grabs. Through co-convening LDPI, FAC has significantly contributed to making the land deals policy space into one where more evidence-informed positions on land deals policy are now taken by most stakeholders. Political economy evidence, which prominently includes the perspectives of southern researchers, is available and drawn upon, and compliments more traditional quantitative macro data. PE evidence also shows where attention is needed, the impact on / priority for getting benefits for communities, and transparency issues.	Potentially strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very clear moment of opportunity relating to contested global development issue created by rapidly growing external economic, civil society, and media interest in large scale land acquisitions; and the emerging multilateral Voluntary Guidelines policy process.</li> <li>• FAC staff who were personally highly networked with potential external research collaborators (especially Africans) and tuned into the contested interests of diverse policy stakeholders who might be engaged.</li> <li>• FAC's agile administrative and management capacities and a relatively high level and impact and outcome focused logframe giving flexibility to rapidly create and over time adapt FAC's response.</li> </ul>
2. Institutionalising Kenya ASAL Policy Gains	Research evidence obtained through FAC on the importance of livestock markets, and experience with nomad education was used by the Ministry of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands (MNKAL) and is reported by those most involved in the Ministry at the time to have made a small contribution to the overall ASAL policy and its suite of implementation plans.	Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The setting up of a Ministry keen to use research to improve policy. Previous experience of the Minister with research was a key factor.</li> <li>• Availability of a body of existing FAC research, the 2011 FAC Pastoralism Conference, experienced and respected Kenyan FAC researchers.</li> <li>• Abolition of MNKAL on expiry of the post-election violence deal.</li> </ul>
3. Providing evidence for Civil Society led advocacy in Malawi	Evidence of FAC impact on stronger CSO capacity to use evidence in policy influencing reported by CSO leaders and confirmed by activities of the CSOs. Limited evidence of actual change in policy. Potential future impact on the Agricultural Policy currently being drafted.	Limited to date, potentially strong in future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSOs and Farmer Unions wanting evidence and analysis to influence government policy (demand partially created by earlier FAC supply).</li> <li>• Farmer unions' influence due to membership numbers and position on number of policy fora.</li> <li>• Experienced and respected FAC members looking for channels to use their evidence to influence policy.</li> </ul>
4. Improvements to implementation and maintained donor support for Malawi FISP	Information from donor and Ministry of Agriculture officials that evaluation and monitoring evidence contributed to maintaining donor funding of FISP programme and the quality of government implementation – thus influencing the highest level in the ToC – 'growth and poverty reduction practices'. FAC was one of four main contributors to the evidence used.	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donor willing to fund systematic evidence collection and analysis and able to bring it to the attention of other donors and the Government.</li> <li>• High profile multi-year programme operating in contested space.</li> <li>• Previous FAC research and analysis instrumental in FAC linked team winning main contract.</li> </ul>
5. Deferral of Kenyan Community Land Bill for extended consultation	CSO, FAC and parliamentary informants suggest that FAC evidence and lobbying of parliamentarians contributed to the deferral of the Bill. A FAC member, backed by previous research commissioned under FAC, contributed significantly to pro-poor changes in the re-submitted Bill. Bill not yet passed through parliament.	Limited to date, potentially strong in future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earlier relevant land research and publications by FAC researchers.</li> <li>• Trust relationship between FAC researcher and community elders.</li> <li>• Direct exposure of parliamentarians to meeting elders in the field.</li> <li>• Coalition of CSOs collaborating on evidence and advocacy.</li> </ul>

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Impact Stories	Evidence of impact as defined in ToC	Influence	Enabling / constraining factors
<p>6. African Union Drivers of Success in African Agriculture study and Malabo Declaration</p>	<p>Evidence coming from the AU 'Drivers of Success' impact story demonstrated that FAC's work on PE of policy making has indirectly contributed to <b>growing demand for evidence</b> based on PE analysis at AU level (and potentially also country Ministerial level) as a means to understand why different countries are making differing degrees of progress in CAADP implementation and to catalyse political ownership and momentum behind CAADP in the coming decade. The study is cited by key informants as one influence on the formulation of renewed and extended commitments to CAADP in the Malabo declaration in June 2004.</p>	<p>Limited to date/ future potential strong (agenda setting)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gates Foundation funds for AU studies; and relationship to ALINe.</li> <li>• Dynamic, influential and networked leader in AUC who values FAC's approach and is championing this.</li> <li>• Positive, engaged collaboration with ALINe (which brought FAC influence in directly via FAC member).</li> <li>• Existing body of FAC studies on CAADP implementation at country level; shared at Africa wide conference in March 2013.</li> <li>• Key moment: African year of farming 2014; June 2014 AU HoS meeting.</li> <li>• Existing network of FAC researchers at country level.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Graduation from the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia</p>	<p>Very limited evidence (direct or indirect) of FAC's specific impact on policy formulation; nor any significant change to policy in the period concerned (2010-2014). According to KIIs, FAC's research was one of a number of 'sources of evidence' 'moving in the right direction' discussed by donors – with potentially strong though politically highly circumscribed and unpredictable influence on government policy processes.</p> <p>Any attribution of any direct influence to FAC would be difficult and there was little support for this in KI interviews. There were, however, indications that to a limited degree FAC research may have influenced the way in which the programme was implemented in districts where the research was carried out, as well as via informing the thinking of CARE as implementer of the USAID funded GRAD programme.</p> <p>IDS' wider engagement in the evaluation of the Food Security Programme has had minor influence on guidance and processes used in PSNP implementation in regions and woredas (<i>In-depth investigation at woreda level would be needed to verify these influences with a higher degree of certainty.</i>)</p>	<p>Limited influence at implementation level in some districts; future potential unclear</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some synergies between on-going consultancy work and research, but perhaps not exploited fully.</li> <li>• In Ethiopian context, policy making difficult to influence: heavy party influence and also federal system.</li> <li>• Graduation debate highly politicised, linked to government's development ambitions.</li> <li>• Huge programme/ budget, large number of donors, lots of actors working in this crowded space.</li> <li>• Changes in FAC staff/ leadership and operational difficulties.</li> <li>• FAC's focus on research, limited investment in partnerships, direct engagement communication.</li> </ul>
<p>8. Development of an integrated cereal seed system and revised seed policy in Ethiopia</p>	<p>The impact story established that evidence from on the ground innovation as well as research from Ethiopia and other countries has influenced policy making, and that FAC made a significant if often indirect contribution to this through a combination of direct engagement, research, strategic partnership, networking and communications.</p> <p>Several KIIs felt that FAC research and engagement in this area influenced at least some aspects of new the Proclamation adopted in 2013, although degree of influence was interpreted differently and not all agreed. Indirect influence on this and the wider seed system was also strong via FAC's partnership with CDI Wageningen's ISSD initiative, which piloted direct marketing in regions as well as other innovations; probably the biggest single influence on changes in the seed system. The formalisation of a partnership between ISSD, FAC and others in the pilot comprehensive Africa ISSD programme demonstrates potential to broaden and 'scale' up impact.<sup>61</sup></p>	<p>Limited – on policy formulation, with strong future potential on implementation and wider ISSD programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New analysis of reasons for failure in a system widely recognised as dysfunctional.</li> <li>• Key researcher sitting in strategic place within Government institution, able to engage both formally and informally.</li> <li>• 'Moment' of the failure of the crash programme in 2009/10 seized by FAC in Ethiopia to address some critical problems.</li> <li>• Quick publication established profile and credibility which was then built on through follow-up.</li> <li>• Partnership with an influential organisation pioneering a pilot programme.</li> </ul>

<sup>61</sup> ISSD Africa, 2014, Outline of the Piloting Phase for a Comprehensive Program on Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa; May 2014 – April 2016, February.

## 6.2.2. FAC contribution to TOC impact – ‘Stronger capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking’

The full TOC statement is ‘*Stronger capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking’ in agricultural policy research, policy formulation and implementation among actors engaged by FAC*.<sup>62</sup>

In assessing this impact, it is necessary to consider both the capacity built within the FAC network and more widely in Africa. The distinction between the two is not always clear cut. FAC members sit in universities, research institutions, consultancy companies, NGOs and government departments throughout Africa. Only a minority of their time are they engaged by FAC, but any capacity they have gained through FAC is available to the rest of their work and their organisation.

In relation to FAC members, there is primary research evidence that FAC has contributed to stronger capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking in agricultural research. In the personal professional capacity survey of FAC members (lead and co-researchers and grant recipients) between 80-90% of respondents indicated that their abilities to *identify policy relevant research gaps, undertake policy relevant research and critically engage with the research evidence base* have improved as a result of their engagement with FAC. Fifty two respondents (79% of those who answered the question) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement “*I am more likely to recognise and consider political economy issues in my current/future role*”.

The role of PE thinking in agricultural policy research also emerged in response to an open-ended question asking respondents to provide an example of an instance, in which they have applied the skills and capacities developed as a result of their engagement with FAC. Analysis of qualitative responses showed three broad areas for application of FAC skills and capacities.

- Area 1: Application of general skills and capacities, such as networking skills;
- Area 2: Application of research abilities with specific reference to policy research; and
- Area 3: Active consideration of political economy issues and engagement of policy makers.

Area 3 coded responses relating to **consideration of PE issues in agricultural research** were among the more prevalent types of response<sup>63</sup> (behind communicating research findings and identifying and engaging policy relevant stakeholders). Sample quotes from respondents are provided in Box 15.

In relation to capacity built in **applying PE thinking in policy formulation and implementation**, there is less evidence. The most compelling example from the impact case studies is from the Malawi work with CSOs (IS 3). In this case, CSOs reported increased capacity to analyse and use PE evidence supplied by FAC in their government policy influencing work. They also reported combining this evidence with evidence from their own members.

An indirect example of FAC’s impact in relation to ‘*stronger capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking*’ comes from its contribution in supporting the capacity and influence of other actors and networks; specifically by documenting their experiences. For example, the seeds paper on Farmer Based Seed Multiplication Systems (Dawit, 2011) is a good example of where evidence from programmes like those of Self Help Africa has been documented and is now influencing wider

### Box 15: Selected quotes from lead and co-researchers and grant recipients

**Quote 1:** “[FAC has developed] my capacity to investigate complex and interlinked socio-economic problems and work with stakeholders/economic actors and policy makers as well as non-state actors.” – ECF

**Quote 2:** “Drivers of Success study for AUC drew heavily on understanding developed through FAC PEAPA work. I believe it helped AUC to engage more confidently with Heads of State regarding their responsibilities if agricultural transformation goals are to be achieved” – Lead/ co-researcher

<sup>62</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

<sup>63</sup> NVivo analysis included 12 coding references across 58 valid responses.

programming and strategy. This FAC researcher has recently been engaged by the Agricultural Transformation Agency in Ethiopia to develop their Community Based Seeds Programme. Another example was when the ex-Minister and Chief Adviser of MNKAL asked FAC for help in documenting the Ministry's experience of creating policy space for pastoralism as a handover guide to other government departments taking on the ex-ministry's mandate (IS 2) (Elmi & Birch, 2013).

A further indirect indicator of FAC's impact in relation to '*stronger capacity to understand, analyse and apply political economy thinking*' could be the demand for capacity building support. The evaluation has found recognition and use of FAC as a leading supplier of PE capacity building support. Indeed, in the last year FAC has been asked to supply PE briefings to the following:

- 10th CAADP Partnership Platform Meeting, Durban, South Africa;
- African Union headquarters, Addis Ababa;
- African Union, DFID, IFPRI, USAID, World Bank sponsored Agriculture Policy Exchange and Learning Event, Dakar, Senegal;
- European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), Maastricht, The Netherlands;
- FAO Rome headquarters;
- Gates Foundation London office;
- GIZ Germany headquarters and regional meeting in Accra;
- IFAD Rome headquarters;
- IFPRI Washington, DC, headquarters;
- NORAD Norway headquarters;
- Pan African Parliament – several regional meetings on land deals – Equatorial Guinea, South Africa, Rwanda, Benin and Equatorial Guinea;
- SIDA Sweden headquarters; and
- Wageningen University, The Netherlands.

Capacity building relationships are often less direct and formal than suggested in the FAC TOC. The evaluation has shown that capacity has been developed through joint engagements and strategising, rapid comments on documents and even helping partners to understand what kinds of evidence are needed and what are the entry points into policy processes.

A couple of examples from the Seeds work in Ethiopia illustrate this point: in a workshop in Bahir Dar in April 2014, a FAC seeds researcher worked with ISSD to plan how to get a national seeds sector stakeholder platform set up, providing them with concrete practical advice on solving that problem through suggesting new entry points (PE perspective). Similarly, in order to maintain pressure on government to relax controls on prices of cereal seed (which were dampening demand and arguably constraining development of the whole sector) the same FAC researcher advised ISSD on research needed on comparative prices of cereal seeds and grain as a way to demonstrate this. This is an interesting example of FAC catalysing others' research and evidence production. This is part of the FAC TOC.

### **6.2.3. Contribution to TOC super-impact 'Adoption of good policies and practices'**

It remains challenging to assess the contribution of FAC to the next level of impact, defined in full in the TOC as: '*the adoption of good (socially and economically desirable and politically feasible) agricultural growth and poverty reduction policies and practices in Africa*'.<sup>64</sup>

Table 6 presents an overview of findings from the eight impact event case studies explored as part of this evaluation. Each impact event was operating in very different contexts so cross-event

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<sup>64</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

comparisons need to be made with caution. The analysis shows that in one case there is evidence of current impact, in six cases there is evidence of limited current impact and in four of these there is significant potential for future impact. Looking at the individual studies:

- **Co-founding the LDPI** study shows that FAC had an impact on the international policy process that led to the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land;
- The **Institutionalising Kenya ASAL Policy Gains** study shows the ASAL policy to be very significant but the contribution of FAC to it was relatively small;
- Providing evidence for **Civil Society Led Advocacy in Malawi** study shows limited impact to date, but with potential impact in the near future as the agricultural policy is decided;
- The **Improvements to Implementation and Maintained Donor Support for Malawi Farm Input Support Programme (FISP)** study shows impact on donor policy and on government implementation;
- The **Deferral of Kenyan Community Land Bill for Extended Consultation** study shows limited impact to date, but potentially strong impact in the near future if the suggested amendments are made;
- The **African Union 'Drivers of Success in African Agriculture'** study and 'Malabo Declaration' study show limited impact to date, but potential for strong impact in future;
- The **Graduation from the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia** study shows limited influence at implementation level in some districts and future impact is unclear;
- The **Development of an Integrated Cereal Seed System and Revised Seed Policy in Ethiopia** study shows that FAC has had limited impact on policy formulation, but there is strong potential for impact on implementation.

This analysis shows that the TOC appears to be operating across a diverse sample of interventions. It is to be expected that it is increasingly difficult to attribute influence to any single organisation at the higher levels. These one-off impact studies should be considered as a starting point of an improved impact monitoring and learning system in FAC, rather than endpoints.

A key question hence becomes what are the enablers and inhibitors? The final column in Table 6 provides some pointers to this. Although the contexts and cases are very different, there do appear to be some common enablers:

- Dynamic and committed individuals in decision making positions interested in using evidence;
- An appropriate '*moment*';
- Pre-existing research evidence and political economy analysis that can be drawn on when the appropriate policy influencing '*moment*' opens up;
- Experienced and respected capacity to support the process.

Inhibitors were also context specific and were commonly a) an external event and b) difficult to influence political systems. PE analysis of the influencing context, working with appropriate people within the system and being sufficiently nimble to deal with surprises were all ways found useful in reducing the influence of disablers.

#### 6.2.4. Do the TOC assumptions hold true at impact level?

Four assumptions are particularly pertinent at impact level (Box 16).

The impact studies do show a hunger for evidence and it being used to affect policy and practice (e.g. the Malawi FISP IS 4) therefore it holds that lack of knowledge does seem to be a constraint. It is more difficult to say how important a constraint it is, and this seems to vary according to context.

The case studies show that **some** policy makers are willing and able to use evidence, and a common enabler was identified as ‘dynamic and committed individuals in decision making positions interested in using evidence’.

Major political upheavals were particularly pertinent in the Kenyan ASAL case study (IS 2). Ironically in this case, rather than distracting, the political upheaval of post-election violence led to the settlement that temporarily created MNKAL (and other ‘additional’ Ministries).

Political change, specifically Presidential elections, was also important in making promises on the FISP Programme (IS 4) – this tended to limit the influence of evidence on lower level implementation decisions, but these could be significant nonetheless.

FISP also provides a very good example of some donors working together to jointly commission an evaluation and use it to influence programme implementation.

Therefore, the evidence shows that the assumptions of the TOC do hold true in at least some of the impact events. Furthermore, the evaluation has not found examples which show the assumptions to be wrong.

**Box 16: ToC Assumptions pertinent at Impact Level**

- ❖ A lack of evidence-informed knowledge and ideas grounded in the political economic realities of African agricultural policy contexts is an important constraint to the effectiveness with which the policy problems associated with FAC’s themes are addressed (therefore addressing this constraint should result in more effective policy and practice).
- ❖ Policy makers are willing and able to use well communicated, timely, and relevant externally generated research evidence provided by FAC and its partners.
- ❖ Policy makers are not distracted by major political upheaval or unforeseen events and use evidence to influence policy.
- ❖ Donors are willing to work together to support evidence informed alternative perspectives on agricultural policy processes.

## 7. Lessons from the FAC experience

This section uses the evidence from previous sections to present some lessons from the implementation of FAC. Some more cross-cutting issues and a small number of recommendations are given in Part C. This section specifically contributes to answering:

EQ 7	What was the value added of creating, funding and then decentralising FAC as a consortium?
EQ 8	In what ways has FAC shown that evidence is used in African Policy making?
EQ 9	What can be learnt from the recommendations from previous reviews?
EQ13	How effective was DFID support to FAC and what lessons can be learnt from this?
EQ11	What are the insights from FAC on how DFID could increase the effectiveness of agricultural policy research work?
EQ17	What are key insights on how FAC could strengthen its outcome and impact and boost its VfM?
EQ16	What have been the unintended, positive and negative outcomes (and impacts) and what lessons can be learnt from them?
EQ10	Was the focus on CAADP, as an important user of evidence and influencer of national and regional policy and practice, appropriate and what lessons can be learnt from it?

## 7.1. What was the value added of creating, funding and then decentralising FAC as a consortium?

### Finding 11:

Starting as a consortium provided the appropriate springboard for FAC to develop into a predominantly African-based network of researchers, coordinated through a number of hubs. The network approach provides value for money by enabling productive research and capacity building relationships with individuals, without the significant transaction costs of developing formal relationships with 50+ organisations across Africa. Decentralisation remains a work in progress, with increasing African ownership and decreasing reliance on DFID core funding. In the past two years FAC has had significant success in attracting project funding; recognition of FAC's value to a variety of organisations.

The consortium approach initially established the principle of researchers from different organisations collaborating to deliver FAC research. As numbers of African researchers increased, the relationship was generally with the researcher rather than his or her organisation and FAC developed into more of a network of researchers. Even in the UK the stronger relationship seems to have been between the researchers, rather than the consortium organisations in which they sit.

FAC could have invested more effort in developing relationships (for example formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)) with the 50+ organisations in which their African members sit. However, the effort to do this in relation to the resources available to FAC would likely have been disproportionate and could have undermined FAC's agility to respond to *moments* in policy processes. FAC was right to prioritise building and maintaining relationships with individuals. The option for further relationship building at organisational level is still open for the future, and to an extent this is already starting with the development of the hubs.

The network approach has proven effective in delivering relevant outputs and outcomes and some of the value for money features of the network are discussed in relation to EQ 17.

Considering the null hypothesis, FAC could have been created as a programme in one (UK based?) organisation and that probably would have worked. However, the initial pool of researchers (and their African contacts) would have been much more limited and thus, an opportunity would have been lost. There is a question over whether a programme based in a single organisation would have had a stronger organisational capacity (able to hold colleagues within the same organisation more effectively to account). Although a full organisational comparison was not possible as part of the evaluation, the assumption that a single organisation would have stronger organisational capacity to deliver<sup>65</sup> seems relatively weak:

- The ability to hold colleagues within one's own organisation to account to deliver, particularly in academic institutions, is not automatically strong with different departments or projects within an organisation often being quite autonomous;
- The ability in a consortium to have a more competitive approach and choose colleagues from a wider pool of talent across different organisations is also a possible motivating factor for accountable delivery if managed correctly;
- Accountability can be stronger for line managed staff. However, to have achieved this 'line-management premium' would have required a large pool of full or part-time FAC 'employees'. This would have required massively more resources than ever contemplated,<sup>66</sup> and FAC would have lost much of the flexibility and non-financial incentives which are so important in providing VfM for FAC;<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Raised in the interview with the FAC focus group.

<sup>66</sup> FAC is 'employee light' – with two full-time staff and eight part-time staff shared with other organisations.

<sup>67</sup> See EQ 11 for a discussion of non-financial incentives which can be important to academics linked in a network, but are less strong for 'full or part-time paid staff' in an organisation.

- The line management premium does not actually require FAC to be owned by a single organisation – it could still have been governed by a consortium structure – but still would have needed the employee model.

The advantage of access to a wider pool of researchers would have been even greater if a management agency model had been chosen, with the agency contracting on a worldwide merit basis. However, it is also likely that this model would have found it difficult to create the added value of the network, which delivers significant unpaid peer support and mentoring, as well as having found it difficult to quantify value from the ‘network and academic culture’ as described in the VfM section.

Therefore, although each organisational model has different pros and cons, the ‘Consortium Model’ seems to have been an appropriate starting point for FAC.<sup>68</sup>

IDS have proven a flexible and accommodating host, providing excellent base resources without making excessive demands. As noted above, as African membership has increased, FAC has evolved into more of a network of researchers. In the last year, after various decentralisation models had been explored, a hub model was developed with three African hubs hosted by different African organisations and IDS transitioning into a European hub.<sup>69</sup> Different hosts have different relationships with their FAC hub; only PLAAS really acts as a consortium member at this stage. The evaluators feel that this diversity is appropriate - the relationships are developing bottom-up and risks are minimised (with FAC able to move to different hosts if the relationship does not continue to be mutually beneficial).

Value has been added with hub coordinators creating a geographical focus as a counterbalance to the theme dominance, and providing opportunity for more geographically sensitive and cross-theme prioritisation and implementation. Having some ‘regional support funds’ to distribute from the hubs has been another facet of the decentralisation process. Significant value has been achieved by decentralisation of much of the communication work and there are opportunities to develop this further with additional, longer-term resources.

Overall, the decentralisation process and the value to be gained from it has been curtailed by the limited fund availability in 2012-2013 and future funding uncertainty, which has ended the role of country coordinators to save money. There is still more value to be added by developing stronger links between the hubs and countries – as countries are still the main focus for much of the case study work and most agricultural policy is at a country level.<sup>70</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to define the optimum future organisational evolution strategy for FAC. The issue of ‘decentralised legal entity’ is still pending, and needs further consideration by FAC. Therefore it is probably correct to continue the ‘decentralisation by doing’ journey, using network approaches and opportunities provided by communication technologies for remote working.

The current FAC model does seem to be effective in attracting funding (see Figure 9 below). It should be noted that the leveraged funds in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 represents funding won in those years – expenditure may be spread into future years. **This funding success represents a massive vote of confidence from a wide variety of organisations in FAC’s relevance and ability to deliver.**

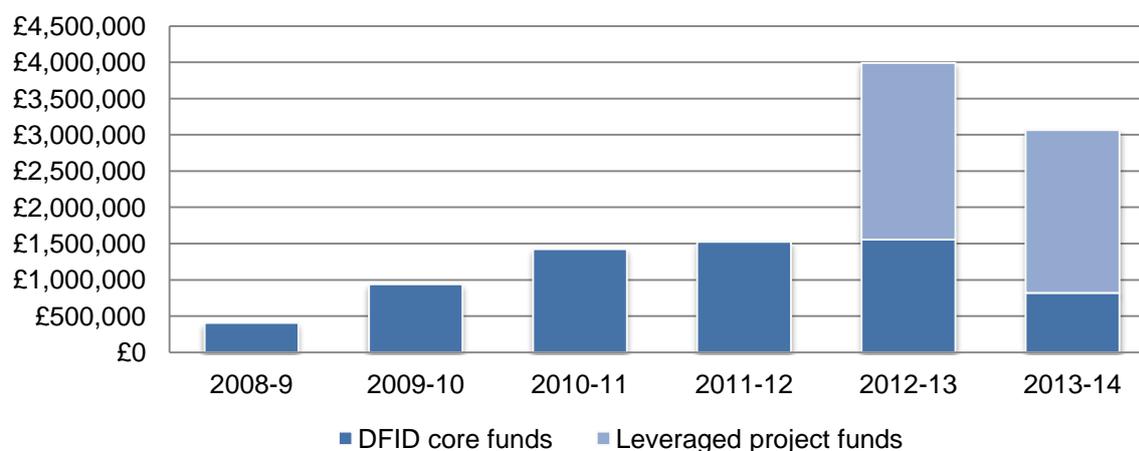
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<sup>68</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that a future competitive call for research and research capacity building may not need to specify a consortium or any other delivery approach. Calls can specify what is to be delivered; with the proposers justifying their delivery mechanism. In this way, there can be competition between delivery mechanisms.

<sup>69</sup> ISSER/Ghana – West Africa, PLAAS/South Africa – Southern Africa; Tegemeo/ Kenya –East Africa.

<sup>70</sup> This was particularly evident in the two Malawi Impact Studies (IS 3 and 4) but was also a common finding in other impact studies with a country impact focus. The Kenya Community Land Bill study (IS 5) noted - The combination of pastoralist and land themes at a national level was important – and this was partly a product of the consortium approach and the decentralisation. Greater decentralisation to national level (if resources had been available) would have added additional value in a national influencing process such as this.

**Figure 9: Core and levered project funds (GBP £)**



## 7.2. In what ways has FAC shown that evidence is used in African policy making?

### Finding 12:

**FAC shows significant use of evidence in African policy making, but also that the relationship between research derived evidence and policy making is not simple. Evidence is used to justify existing policy choices and to convince others that the policy being promoted is supported by evidence. Evidence is also used to improve delivery and to counter criticism in the media or elsewhere.**

This is an extremely big question which FAC's experience can only partly answer. The TOC talks about the stronger **influence** of evidence (emphasis added) and the TOC assumes that a lack of evidence-informed knowledge and ideas is an important constraint to effectiveness. All the impact case studies showed multiple examples of evidence being used and KILs with policy makers showed a significant demand for evidence. However, evidence tends to be used in a complex domain in which decision making is driven by a range of influencers; evidence is only one part of the process. It is probably also important to disentangle 'research derived evidence' from more 'experience derived evidence' which may be very important as well.

FAC shows that there is certainly a hunger for evidence among some African policy makers. For instance, members of the MNKAL actively went out to look for evidence (IS 2), including sending civil servants to attend FAC Pastoralism conferences. The MNKAL used evidence to reinforce or justify policy, but the policy itself was often derived from the Minister's own experience of pastoralism (first hand evidence!). The Minister also used evidence, presenting it to cabinet colleagues to convince them to support the policy as 'evidence based'.

The Malawi Input Subsidy impact case study (IS 4) showed evidence being used by the government to identify problems with implementation and make delivery improvements (and thus deflect criticism from the press). However, the big policy decisions were decided at Presidential level in order to drive political advantage, and were not very influenced by contrary evidence. The same study also showed detailed statistically valid positive outcome evidence being important for donor decision making. The evidence mainly seems to have been effective in keeping those donors on board who had previously decided to support the programme and muted the criticisms of those that had decided not to support it – but it affected decision making none the less.

The Malawi Civil Society influencing case study (IS 3) showed evidence being actively sought and used by CSOs in their advocacy work with the government; however, the organisations were clear that the status of the organisation presenting the evidence (e.g. how many votes their members might

have) was what really counted. Evidence of who will gain and who will lose from a particular policy was also considered important.

There is an important step between the availability of evidence and its use in decision making. This is highlighted in the FAC TOC. Addressing this step can involve helping to stimulate coalitions for change, who will use the evidence for advocacy, with FAC, as a research network, being more involved at the evidence generation end. The LDPI is a good example of this.

The Kenya Community Land Bill case study (IS 5) showed that the Pastoralist Parliamentary Group was influenced more directly by discussions with the Laikipia elders (organised by FAC) than by written 'research evidence'. It seems that there may be an important role for research in identifying who to talk to or visit, frame the conversation and back it up with evidence.

The 'Drivers of Success' case study (IS 6) showed that AU bureaucrats felt that they needed evidence to drive the process of political change at AU government (Ministers and HoS) level to determine the direction of CAADP/ AU commitments going forward and to feed into the process of formulating the new declaration. Significantly for FAC, the type of evidence required was substantially about the politics of agricultural policy, in order to make a political argument (essentially, and perhaps cynically, that inclusive agricultural based growth will deliver votes, or at least popular support) and to generate a sense of possibility that change can happen and CAADP can work with the right set of political as well as other conditions.

Key informant interviews with both researchers and policy makers tended to corroborate many of the observations from the impact case studies. There was a view that evidence is being used, but often not objectively in decision making. One highly experienced FAC researcher was clear '*Politicians listen, but only pick evidence that helps them...*'

Anecdotal examples were given of policy being influenced by agricultural policy makers seeing something in a field visit or talking to particularly persuasive farmers. Also being briefed by researchers was thought to be more effective than reading a policy document.

There was common agreement that 'evidence' that is presented on TV, radio or in the newspapers is particularly influential. This is recognised by FAC. In a KI interview with one of FAC's regionally based communications officers, the importance of '*hitting the headlines*' was discussed at length.

### 7.3. What can be learnt from the recommendations from previous reviews?

#### **Finding 13:**

**FAC has followed the key recommendations of previous reviews within the funding available. A hub structure hosted by African organisations has been implemented as recommended and the limited experience to date appears to be successful. Progress is being made with links to NEPAD and the AU. However, in the last year the ECF and the role of country coordinators has paused due to lack of funding. DFID has not followed recommendations for increased quantity and certainty of funding, and FAC is struggling to manage a rapid transition to project funding.**

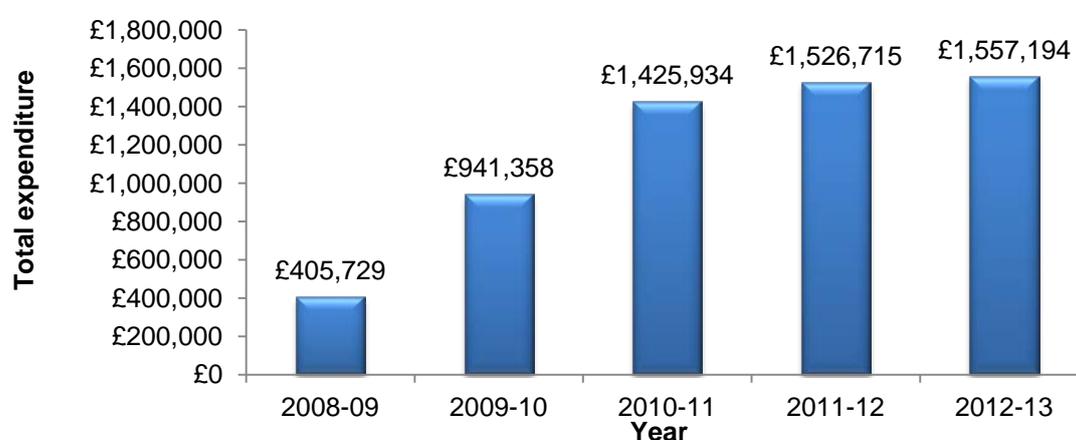
In the first MTR, which immediately preceded the period covered by the current evaluation, the reviewers considered that core activities of FAC should have more substantive and reliable funding and recommended that establishing effective focal point country coordinators and engaging in the CAADP process should be prioritised as well as the continuation of the three themes.

The second MTR took place in late 2011 and concentrated on the period 2007-2011. The review recommended further funding for five years (FAC 3) in order to secure longer term and cumulative commitment among key participants and stakeholders. A level of £2.2 million per year in real terms was considered the minimum acceptable for a policy research operation in Africa of this kind, and by comparison to other institutions fulfilling similar roles, this budget was considered low and representing unusually good value for money. The comparative advantage of FAC was considered to be identifying gaps, bringing neglected topics onto the policy agenda and anticipating future policy issues.

The review recommended a strengthened role for country coordinators and stronger links with the AU and NEPAD in order to influence the CAADP policy and analytical agenda. The review also recommended the Early Career Fellowship Programme continue. However, while supporting the principle of FAC African ownership, the review did not endorse FAC’s plan to relocate to Africa on the timescale and in the form proposed. Reviewers considered that alternatives involving a flatter distributed management structure, or taking advantage of technology to operate as a network with nodes or hubs had not been sufficiently explored. There was support for FAC at a country or hub level to be ‘hosted’ by existing African organisations, rather than creating a new African organisation.

An examination of the annual expenditure of FAC shows that FAC was never provided with the scale of funds considered necessary to put its research and policy influencing on a firm footing by the two MTRs. Neither was FAC given the five year funding stability (2012-2017) recommended in the second review (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: FAC Total Annual Expenditure 2008-2013 (GBP £)**



**Source:** FAC budget analysis

FAC did make efforts to work with the AU/ NEPAD on CAADP as recommended in both reviews. The outcome from this is discussed in detail subsequently. Country coordinators were supported in the 2012-2013 period, but were later cut for budgetary reasons. A hub model was introduced in 2013, with three regional hubs attached to existing African institutions (rather than the creation of a new African organisation) in line with the MTR recommendations. Although the hubs are still relatively new, assessments by the evaluation team of two out of the three African hubs, including the networked communication capacity, considered the model to be working well, with scope for further evolution to more African leadership.

#### 7.4. How effective was DFID support to FAC and what lessons can be learnt from this?

**Finding 14:**  
 DFID provided FAC with the security and flexibility to develop into an increasingly African capacitated network delivering significant value. Evidence for this comes from two MTRs and the current final evaluation. FAC is increasingly succeeding in winning project funding but still relies on DFID for core funding; although this has reduced from 100% to under 40% in the last two years. Delays in DFID launching a competitive call for policy research has created uncertainty that is proving difficult to manage while trying to maintain the value and viability of the FAC network. Lessons include formally responding to external review recommendations and managing changes in funding regimes in ways that minimise uncertainty. Building network capacity takes time. To maximise returns on DFID investment, the timing for withdrawal of core support should be objectively assessed and proactively managed.

As this was a subsidiary EQ there was not a planned process of collecting and sifting evidence to answer it. The commentary here is mainly based on comments from key informants in DFID and FAC.

FAC was in effect 'created' as a consortium in response to a DFID call for a consortium proposal. Initially it was 100% funded by DFID and it has remained highly dependent on DFID's Research and Evidence Division (RED) for core funding. As noted in the previous section, FAC has evolved into an increasingly Africa-based network with success in attracting project funding. It is, however, currently dependent on DFID for core funding for management and overhead costs.

DFID involvement largely followed an arm's length approach, allowing FAC to set its sub-priorities and approach within quite broad outcome and impact objectives. The opportunity for FAC to set its sub-priorities and approach was beneficial (i.e. avoidance of DFID micro-management). However, this seems to have been accompanied by lack of exploitation of some opportunities for collaboration (see section 6.5).

FAC has reported to eight different advisors in nine years as well as having their grant moved from the policy team to the agricultural research team. There has however been more continuity of officers to report to on the financial side. Under the current grant (FY2013-2014), DFID established a cross-divisional 'Reference Group' with quarterly meetings and occasional briefings. A DFID representative sits on FAC's International Advisory Committee.

The 2010-2013 logframe contained a target for 'Funding partnerships for support beyond 2013 established at donor roundtable at same level as annual funding (approx £1.5m)'. Although the amount of funding has been exceeded, the round table has never been established. This might have been a useful output for DFID to lead on.

DFID commissioned two MTRs, both of which recommended increased funding and the second one in late 2011 recommended continuity of funding for five years to 2017 to enable stable planning and organisational development by FAC. These recommendations were not followed by DFID, but do not seem to have been formally rejected either (FAC developed a 2013-2017 proposal in response to the recommendations). Following a decision by a senior DFID official that future funding would be allocated on a competitive basis, FAC was informed in March 2012 that a further accountable grant would not be forthcoming and that there would be a call for Research Programme Consortium proposals to start from March 2013. FAC would be eligible to tender for this.

There were a series of delays in launching the research call in 2013 and FAC was given an additional year of funding (2013-2014) with an agenda focussed on new G8 and New Alliance activities. This was subsequently extended on a no cost basis to September 2014. In late August 2014, due to staff issues, still no call for proposals has been launched by DFID.<sup>71</sup>

Following a period of funding continuity and predictability FAC received two very positive external reviews. This current evaluation has found that value has been created in the network as a result of this investment. Some of this value will inevitably be lost if the network closes.

There has been less funding security since early 2012. Although the ending of the present funding arrangements have been clear since 2012, there has been a strong desire to maintain the network capacity in order to compete for future funding. The repeated delays in launching a call for research proposals have made the implementation of this strategy exceedingly difficult. With DFID core funding ending in August 2014, some network capacity loss is inevitable. While FAC has been successful in leveraging additional project funding from other donors, managing these in the absence of core funding will be difficult.

Finally, it is noted that building capacity and organisational capital takes time. After nine years, FAC download numbers are currently increasing at an almost exponential rate and the hub model (after several false starts) seems well placed to reflect decentralised decision making. FAC also continues

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<sup>71</sup> This has had the advantage that the future call can take account of the recently produced Agricultural Refresh document but given contracting times etc. it is inevitable that there will be a gap between the ending of DFID core funding and the opportunity to apply to a new call.

to shift the balance to more African leadership and the critical mass of PE experienced policy researchers is a growing resource increasingly able to deliver much needed contextualised policy relevant evidence (as is demonstrated by increasing demand for collaboration and leveraged funding).

#### 7.4.1. Lessons

A formal response by DFID to recommendations in external reviews would increase transparency of decision making and leave a record of emerging thinking for future learning.<sup>72</sup>

Delay and the resulting uncertainty, rather than competitive tendering per se, is causing problems for FAC and uncertainty can negatively affect value. Realistic estimates of transition times to new competitive funding regimes will reduce the risk of unnecessarily losing the value created through DFID investment.

### 7.5. What are the insights from FAC on how DFID could increase the effectiveness of agricultural policy research work?

#### Finding 15:

Evidence from the impact case studies show that limited investment in a researcher network model of delivery seems capable of producing quadruple wins in terms of: quality research output, communication, policy influencing and capacity building. VfM is increased through the non-financial incentives possible with such a model and paying attention to organisational culture and relationships. It is necessary to experiment with monitoring and learning systems able to track outcomes and contribution to impact in a complex environment. Additional value may be released by increasing collaboration between DFID staff, other programmes and the FAC network.

Evidence to address this question comes mainly from an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the FAC approach in the various impact case studies alongside interviews with key informants within DFID, FAC, some other policy/research networks and a small range of evidence users. It is not within the scope of this evaluation to provide comparator analysis with how other donors support agricultural policy research or how other policy research providers operate.

In funding FAC, DFID committed a relatively modest amount of money (average £1.1m per year) to a portfolio of research whose content and style was driven by researchers. DFID played a 'hands-off' role through an accountable grant mechanism. This was largely successful, with researchers identifying key issues to look at, showing nimbleness in relation to emerging opportunities,<sup>73</sup> and responding to demand when appropriate.

FAC capacity building was also significant and synergised with evidence generation through good mentoring. The opportunity to 'be part of the agenda setting', 'get published' and 'make contacts' was a major non-financial incentive provided by FAC membership that delivered good value for money and was highlighted as an advantage by multiple KIs and ECFs. By combining the production of field research with the mentoring and networking of ECFs, FAC has delivered research and capacity building at the same time with the same budget, increasing its VfM (this is discussed in more detail in section 6.6).

Effective communication has also been a major strength of FAC as evidenced by download statistics and the user survey conducted as part of this evaluation. In most cases this has been taken beyond communication into the policy influencing process, in line with the policy processes element outlined in the TOC.

<sup>72</sup> It is acknowledged that this is now normal practice within DFID.

<sup>73</sup> The ability to respond quickly and creatively to emerging opportunities and needs was a feature of the LDPI (IS 1); the CBAA theme; the opportunities provided by the formation of the MNKAL (IS 2); adding value to the Malawi FISP evaluations (IS 4). The relative autonomy of FAC theme leaders to manage research in ways that leverage their personal networks has been shown in the case of LDPI to result in high levels of commitment from collaborators and participants.

Relationships and individuals are important, particularly in the academic world which FAC straddles; FAC has managed relationships well in order to deliver value and has largely avoided unproductive elements of academic competition. Many mentors and senior FAC staff have been relatively relaxed about insisting on 'lead authorship' and the various partners in FAC consortia have also been relaxed about co-branding. These are non-financial incentives to do research through FAC. The FAC Europe Coordinator has played an important role in creating a positive organisational culture with which many associates feel very keen to stay associated.

There appears to have been a lack of contact and collaboration, particularly at country level, between FAC as an evidence producer and DFID (and other DFID partners) as evidence consumers and, where appropriate, collaborators in policy influencing processes. In particular the lack of contact between FAC and DFID Country and Regional offices is striking. While there are some exceptions, opportunities for synergy and creating value have not been realised by either side. This has not been intentional, and has been due to workloads, rapid change-over of some DFID staff and lack of systems on both sides for ensuring it happens. Limited evidence from country based DFID advisers suggest that they have low awareness of FAC activities in their country of posting and when made aware of FAC publications they would find them useful for their work.<sup>74</sup>

For FAC, having DFID advisers using FAC evidence in their (often behind the scenes and multi-donor) influencing activity would create significant additional leverage opportunities. Appropriate feedback loops from DFID would help FAC members ensure outputs are relevant and respond to appropriate moments.

FAC has received a lower level of core funds than recommended in both MTRs. However, FAC also made a choice to spread its resources relatively thinly across many processes. This has resulted in a large number of outputs, but less capacity to engage consistently and intensively over time with some of the policy dialogue processes which are core to the TOC; that is beyond providing initial research evidence.<sup>75</sup> The pros and cons of this are discussed elsewhere in this report.

FAC has not had an adequate system for monitoring outcomes and contributions to impact<sup>76</sup>. The complexity of policy processes in terms of diversity of stakeholders, locations and contextual influences places a potentially large burden on monitoring compared to more single instrument and less contextualised approaches to policy change. This requires more resources and experimentation with different approaches.

There is a potential risk in the FAC model that 'researcher led' evidence generation may reflect researcher priorities and be supply driven, rather than reflecting policy maker demand or need. This was not identified as a significant weakness of FAC in the current evaluation or previous reviews and the conclusion to EQ 1 (section 3.3) is that FAC outputs have fitted the needs of policy makers and practitioners. There may also be a question of balance within the overall DFID policy research portfolio. It may be appropriate for a proportion of DFID agricultural policy research to be 'researcher driven' 'supply led' and 'blue skies' as long as other research is demand driven.

### 7.5.1. Lessons

The Unique Selling Point (USP) of FAC is as an academic impact investor, holding funds and spotting opportunities to fund networked policy research and capacity building that transcends organisational, geographical and disciplinary boundaries. The insights from FAC to increase the effectiveness of this approach are:

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<sup>74</sup> As discussed in Section 3.4, FAC material is circulated within DFID by the Heads of Profession and also passed on peer to peer – but there also is a view from some KIs interviewed that there is a significant amount of useful material available from FAC that DFID advisers are still not aware of.

<sup>75</sup> For instance, the prolonged engagement needed to gain traction with some CAADP processes. However, in Malawi, intensive policy engagement was achieved, despite limited resources, by providing the evidence to CSOs who did have the resources for the prolonged engagement (IS 3).

<sup>76</sup> PIPA could have been developed to do this, but was started late and never sufficiently resourced or consistently applied (see EQ6 section 4.2).

- There is a value in a proportion of agricultural policy research outputs being researcher (supply) led. Most policy research 'project funding' is demand led. Providing a proportion of DFID policy research funds to a researcher led process makes sense;
- A network like FAC, operating in a complex low capacity environment, needs an adequate level and security of core funding over a reasonable timeframe to build capacity. External review and evaluation can provide advice on this timeframe;
- Additional value could be delivered if institutional mechanisms are developed to enable DFID staff, offices and partners to engage creatively with the research process and thus release the latent opportunities for synergy;
- It is important to value and nurture the non-financial incentives provided by an organisational model like FAC which are able to increase value for money. Organisational culture, relationships and individuals matter and help deliver value;
- There are significant capacity building opportunities from early career competitive research grants linked to mentoring, networking and publication opportunities;
- It is important to ensure that policy research is complemented with adequate, innovative and flexible communications capacity; and
- It is important to experiment and develop monitoring and learning systems that enable flexibility on activities but rigour in tracking and learning from outcomes and contribution to impact.

## 7.6. Assessing the Value for Money provided by FAC

### Finding 16:

The VfM of FAC at activity level is good, with a significant volume of publications produced with modest resource. It has not been possible to rigorously assess VfM or return on investment at outcome or impact level.<sup>77</sup> There is qualitative evidence that the processes followed by FAC do deliver VfM, albeit, management controls may be tightened to ensure accountability and maintain productivity. Limited data from some impact case studies show very small FAC expenditure in relation to very large potential benefits. Therefore, even a very small contribution to change could represent significant benefits compared to costs.

The evaluation questions do not specifically ask 'what is the Value for Money (VfM) of FAC?' However, VfM is a focal area for the evaluation as set out in the TOR. The assessment below contributes in part to answering **EQ 17: What are key insights on how FAC could strengthen its outcome and impact and boost its Value for Money (VfM)?** Recommendations for strengthening outcomes and impact are given in the next section.

The evaluation Inception Report (Upper Quartile, 2014) highlighted a series of issues and challenges in relation to assessment of VfM of FAC. After discussions with DFID it was agreed that:

*"The assessment of VfM will be focused at the outcome and impact level (in keeping with the focus of the evaluation) and, given the challenges, this assessment will likely be qualitative, using isolated examples rather than comprehensive analysis to illustrate findings with conclusions drawn on the basis of what can reasonably be surmised from the evidence base (as opposed to what can be proven)"* (Upper Quartile, 2014, p.10)

In addition, DFID asked that the evaluation team not shy away from simple metrics (such as costs by output and activity) or use of isolated, qualitative examples, as the evidence base in this area is relatively thin and all information could potentially be useful.

As the PCR notes, no VfM measures were set for FAC and there is no definitive sense of what VfM in a network like FAC should look at. Given the external factors at play in achieving policy influence and

<sup>77</sup> Tangible examples of policy 'change' attributable to FAC are lacking and data availability on the potential economic impact of policy 'change' have not been identified. This was anticipated in the Inception Report.

the inevitable data caveats in trying to quantify the economic impact of policy change (e.g. policy affects different groups in different ways), it seems unfair to judge FAC at this level.<sup>78</sup> Instead, it seems more realistic to assess on the basis of value achieved in production of FAC outputs (activity level) and success in policy level engagement (outcome level).

The following sections present basic metrics arrived at through the analysis of FAC's budget and expenditure in the period 2008-2013. This is followed by a brief consideration of some of FAC's processes and discussion of whether they are likely to deliver optimum VfM. Where possible, analysis and discussion is presented within the overarching VfM framework promoted by DFID (DFID, 2011).

### 7.6.1. Basic measures of VfM

In simple terms, value for money is about the relationship between benefits gained and funds expended. For DFID, VfM is about maximising the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people's lives (DFID, 2011). DFID considers four key facets of VfM (see Table 7).

**Table 7: The 4Es approach to VfM**

<b>Economy</b>	Are inputs of appropriate quality attained at the right price? (Inputs include staff, consultants, raw materials and capital that are used to produce outputs)
<b>Efficiency</b>	How well are inputs converted into outputs of appropriate quality and quantity?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	How well are the outputs from an intervention achieving the desired outcome?
<b>Cost effectiveness</b>	How much impact on poverty reduction does an intervention achieve relative to inputs?

Table 8 sets out a high-level budget analysis for FAC over the period 2008-2013. It shows that DFID has provided total funds of £5,869,497; 99.79% of which were spent during the period. At 50% of total spend, FAC's thematic research programmes account for the most significant proportion of its expenditure. This is followed by communications activities (incorporating communication team costs, coordination support from the Secretariat, publications management, editing, production, website management and social media engagement).

**Table 8: FAC Budget Summary 2008-2013**

Budget line	Budget	Expenditure	% of total
Secretariat	£499,223	£486,468	8%
Communications and networking (central)	£621,848	£599,684	10%
Annual conference and annual review and planning meeting	£384,300	£426,433	7%
Policy engagement/CAADP engagement	£396,081	£362,143	6%
Country coordination and engagement	£328,498	£328,380	6%
African Regional Hub coordination and policy engagement*	£199,286	£199,285	3%
Thematic research programmes	£2,942,941	£2,952,508	50%
Special initiatives (including Farmers Game)	£116,931	£120,295	2%
Investing in young researchers (ECF and scholarships)	£414,071	£381,735	7%
Carry over from previous years	-£33,682		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£5,869,497</b>	<b>£5,856,931</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: FAC/ DFID Budget: updated 25 June 2014

Note: Figures have been rounded

\*This includes £73,025 for hub communications and regional policy engagement.

Core costs for the FAC secretariat account for 8% of total expenditure. The cost of supporting FAC research, engagement and capacity building activities (i.e. the sum of all core management and overhead costs<sup>79</sup>) has been circa £1.7million over five years.

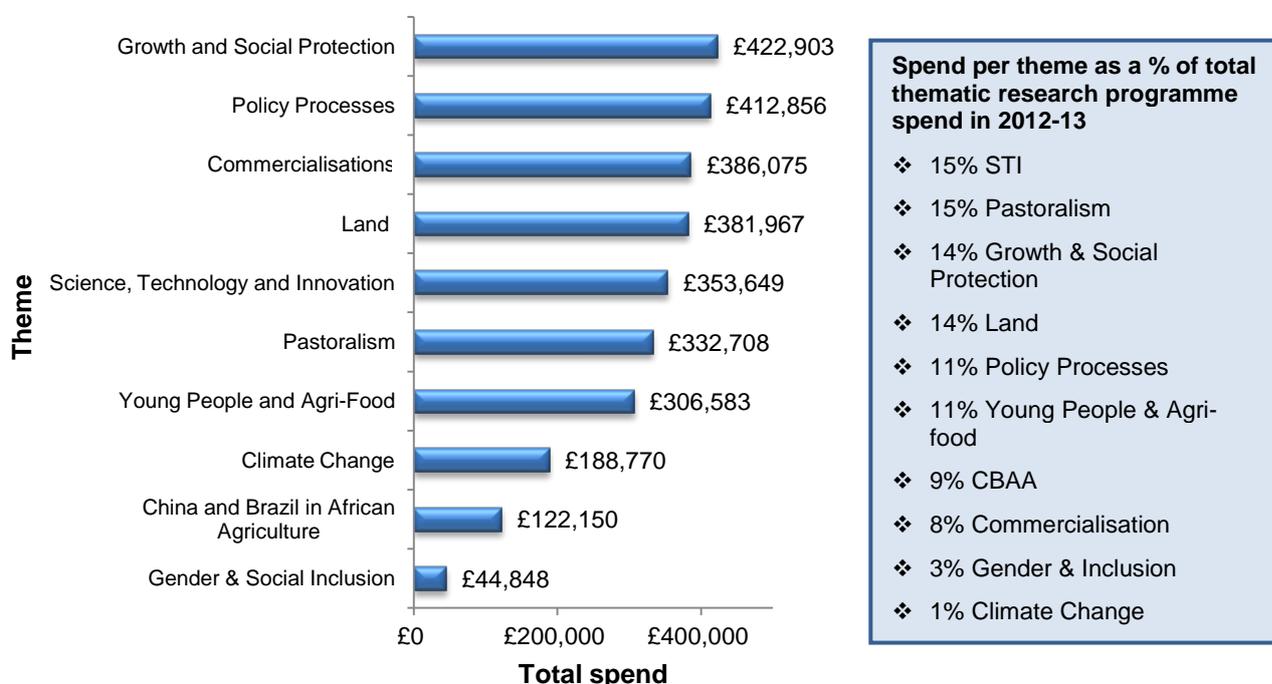
<sup>78</sup> Where examples of VfM at this level are identified, they should be recorded.

<sup>79</sup> This figure includes the Secretariat, Communications, the Annual Conference, and regional hub coordination.

Given the focus on transitioning to an African based organisation, at 3% of total expenditure the budget allocation to regional hubs seems low. It should however be noted that the regional hubs only received core funding in 2013 (a total of £42,087 per hub plus £73,025 across all hubs for communications and regional policy engagement). Funding for the regional hubs in 2013 accounted for 13% of total spend. This is in comparison to 6% for the Secretariat.<sup>80</sup>

A closer look at the thematic research programmes reveals that, unsurprisingly, the original themes (Growth and Social Protection, Policy Processes and Commercialisation) account for the highest spend (Figure 11). With a significantly lower budget than other themes, it is notable that the GSD theme (introduced in 2010-11) has spent only £44,848 (89% of its allocated budget). The rationale for this small budget was that mainstreaming was to be demand-led and other themes were intended to use their own budgets to integrate GSD issues. Given findings around the limited success in mainstreaming GSD within FAC, the evaluation team questions the resources allocated to achieve these objectives. In 2012-2013, a year when all research strands were operational, spending on the GSD theme accounted for 3% of total spend on thematic research programmes.

**Figure 11: Total spend per theme during 2008-2013**



As noted previously, it is agreed that within the confines of the available budget FAC has, overall, been hugely productive in terms of outputs. This is also recognised in the PCR which notes that in comparison to other organisations (such as AGRA or IFPRI) FAC’s publication to budget ratio is high and represents “*exceptionally good knowledge returns for the resources invested*” (DFID, 2013b).

In response to DFID’s request for basic VfM metrics, the evaluation team has undertaken a simple assessment of cost per output (a measure of efficiency). Outputs in this instance relate to all published outputs recorded in the FAC Output Database (including formal publications such as working papers, policy briefs, journal articles and special editions; the outputs of engagement activities such as conference papers and presentations; as well as the written outputs of social media activity, which are included as logframe indicators and therefore valid to be included in the analysis, such as e-debates and blogs).

<sup>80</sup> The Secretariat also spent £14,038 on the design and implementation of FAC Africa Regionalisation Strategy.

**Box 17: VfM Analysis caveats****There are significant caveats with cost per output analysis.**

Interpretation must bear in mind that analysis does not take account of output type e.g. a large scale primary research study is more resource intensive than production of a series of blogs; a policy brief may be four pages in comparison to a 60 page working paper. This budget analysis cannot disaggregate the costs of producing different outputs. However, given FAC objectives to achieve policy influence, a variety of activities and formats are valid and necessary. Estimates of cost per output (however crude) provide an indication of activity levels in relation to the available budget.

Another significant caveat is that the analysis cannot control for relevance or quality of outputs. There is, however, no evidence to question the quality or relevance of some themes in comparison to others (see section 3.3). Finally, this budget and output data does not tell us which outputs are related. For example, a cross-country primary research study may result in a working paper, journal article, a series of policy briefs, presentations and online activities. The level of 'new' evidence generated by each theme is not apparent in this analysis as all outputs are treated individually.

Bearing in mind the data caveats (Box 17), Table 9 shows that the most productive theme (in terms of volume of outputs) has been the Land theme introduced in 2010. The Land theme also achieved the lowest cost per output. This is followed by other core themes of Growth and Social Protection and Science, Technology and Innovation, which have also been very active in terms of recorded outputs.

The outlier (in terms of activity) is Agricultural Commercialisation. The MTR and PCR note that this theme had stalled for various reasons in spite of considerable spend. There was some criticism levelled at the lack of production in the theme in KII's; one KI suggested that there had been insufficient management accountability of thematic conveners within FAC for ensuring delivery. This evaluation has not focused on issues of institutional management and no further comment on this issue is possible.

**Table 9: Basic cost per output analysis [in ascending order of cost per output]**

	Total 2008/9-2012/13	Spend per theme 2008-13	Mean cost per output by theme 2008-13
Land and Tenure	250	£381,967	£1,528
Growth and Social Protection	167	£422,903	£2,532
Science, Technology & Innovation	125	£353,649	£2,829
Gender and Social Difference	15	£44,848	£2,990
Climate Change and Agriculture	54	£188,770	£3,496
Pastoralism	82	£332,708	£4,057
Policy Processes	99	£412,856	£4,170
China and Brazil in African Agriculture	26	£122,150	£4,698
Youth and Agriculture	59	£306,583	£5,196
Agricultural Commercialisations	36	£386,075	£10,724
Food Price Volatility (special initiative)	14	£6,600	£471
General	79	n/a	n/a
<b>Total for all themes</b>	<b>1006</b>	<b>£2,959,108</b>	<b>£2,941.46</b>
<b>Mean cost per output (combined for all themes)</b>			<b>£4,222.14</b>
<b>Median cost per output (combined for all themes)</b>			<b>£3,776.58</b>

Table 10 shows outputs grouped by type and theme, highlighting the percentage of academic outputs (academic outputs being the key assumed output type for an academic-based research consortium and likely to be more resource intensive in comparison to lower level engagement and media type activities that are also recorded in the output database). Considered in this way, the CBAA and STI themes have produced the highest percentage of academic outputs over the period.

As a further proxy for activity levels across different themes, Table 11 repeats the cost per output analysis, excluding non-academic outputs from the calculation. On this (admittedly crude) basis, the Land theme once again achieves the lowest cost per output, followed by STI and Climate Change. It

is stressed that the evaluation presents no evidence that ‘academic type’ outputs result in greater policy influence than others; the rationale for this basic metric is simply that, as an academic research network, the extent of production of academic outputs seems a possible proxy for comparing activity levels across themes and reaching broad conclusions on VfM on the basis of the available data.

**Table 10: Output type (grouped) by theme [in descending order of % academic outputs]**

Theme	Academic	Applied	Engagement Activities	Traditional media and awareness raising	Social media and multi-media and other	Total	% academic outputs
CBAA	11	0	2	0	13	26	42%
STI	49	10	37	5	23	124	40%
Pastoralism	30	3	39	4	6	82	36%
Climate Change and Agriculture	19	5	18	0	11	53	36%
Policy Processes	32	18	24	4	19	97	33%
Growth and social protection	39	17	84	6	15	161	24%
Land and tenure	56	4	65	11	113	249	22%
Youth and Agriculture	12	1	6	11	27	57	21%
Gender and social difference	3	0	0	0	12	15	20%
Agricultural Commercialisations	6	6	18	0	6	36	17%
General	17	1	17	9	34	78	22%
Food price volatility	2	5	1	0	6	14	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>992</b>	<b>28%</b>

Note: Academic outputs include working papers, journal articles and special editions, research reports, books and book chapters, discussion papers and technical documents. Applied outputs are considered policy briefs and occasional papers. Engagement activities include conference papers/ reports, presentations and workshops. Media includes media articles, press releases, and newsletters. Social media and multi-media include hot-topics and blogs, videos, e-debates, posters and the farmers game. Not all outputs in the output database are labelled with an output type, hence some discrepancy between table 9 and table 10

**Table 11: Basic cost per academic output analysis [in ascending order of cost per output]**

	Total academic outputs	Spend per theme 2008-13	Cost per academic output
Land and Tenure	56	£381,967	£6,821
Science, Technology & Innovation	49	£353,649	£7,217
Climate Change and Agriculture	19	£188,770	£9,935
Growth and Social Protection	39	£422,903	£10,844
Pastoralism	30	£332,708	£11,090
China and Brazil in African Agriculture	11	£122,150	£11,105
Policy Processes	32	£412,856	£12,902
Gender and Social Difference	3	£44,848	£14,949
Youth and Agriculture	12	£306,583	£25,549
Agricultural Commercialisations	6	£386,075	£64,346
Food Price Volatility	2	£6,600	£3,300
General	17	n/a	n/a
<b>Total for all themes</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>£2,959,108</b>	<b>£10,721</b>
<b>Mean cost per output (combined for all themes)</b>			<b>£17,476</b>
<b>Median cost per output (combined for all themes)</b>			<b>£11,098</b>

## 7.6.2. The 4Es in relation to FAC

The following sections present key findings and specific examples gained through the qualitative research that provide insight and learning on how FAC has sought to achieve VfM and how VfM may be boosted in the future for FAC and others. It is presented against the 4Es framework.

### 7.6.2.1. Economy

#### **Positive:**

1. Working through a network of researchers who are on the payroll of other organisations/ operate as independent consultants provides access to the widest pool of talent, while minimising overhead costs associated with a large/permanent payroll, offices etc. This has made it possible for FAC to operate with an incredibly lean team of two full-time and eight part-time employees.
2. FAC has contracted out research which provides the opportunity for 'payment on output' basis. This resulted in individual researchers receiving delayed payment and in one case a team not being paid at all due to failure to produce.
3. FAC commissions research negotiating daily rates within an overall ceiling rate. Rates vary for UK and African-based core and non-core partners. Having reviewed these rates (which for UK-based senior experts include an allowance to cover overhead costs of institutional partners and assume that additional backstopping support from partner institutions will be made available to FAC) they are considered to be in line with commercial rates that DFID would pay if research was contracted directly.
4. Some functions, such as peer review, are largely done on an academic exchange basis and are not paid. Similarly, academics are often prepared to attend and contribute to conferences on a cost only basis, or sometimes with their institution paying, out of academic interest or opportunities for career advancement. This 'academic culture' in which FAC sits enables VfM gains in terms of economy compared to if FAC was based on a consultancy culture.
5. The three FAC managed fellowship schemes were run on a competitive bidding basis and this appears to have delivered excellent research at a very competitive rate. New 'Regional Support Funds' distributed through the hubs are allocated on a competitive basis as well; a process that should increase VfM.

#### **Negative:**

6. Greater use of competition could have been used in the commissioning of research, potentially increasing VfM in terms of economy. Generally, research contracts have been allocated to established and trusted FAC members. While this is a good quality assurance mechanism (see effectiveness), it may have increased costs as a result of contracting more frequently with 'core' partners who command higher daily rates. It was outside the scope of this evaluation to conduct a full review of FAC's procurement and contract management functions, but given the high levels of activity and recognised quality of FAC research, there does not appear to be any major cause to question their processes.

#### **Conclusion:**

Within the confines of this limited assessment, FAC is considered to have achieved VfM in terms of economy; operating a lean, flexible model which enables quality research to be commissioned from established researchers at competitive rates and capitalising on its 'academic culture' to ensure quality at limited additional cost.

### 7.6.2.2. Efficiency

#### Positive:

1. In line with logframe targets to establish funding partnerships beyond 2013, FAC has been relatively successful in using its limited funds to lever in additional support and secure £2.5million in additional funds to March 2013 (against a logframe target of £1.5million). This has enabled FAC to maximise the outputs achieved with DFID funding. An example is provided by the recent AIGLA conference where FAC contributed 6% of total funding and in IS 4 where £115,000 from FAC added value in analysis and communications to £1.1 million for the core evaluation costs.
2. FAC has developed into a brand and organisational culture that many researchers wish to be associated with and to which long-term members feel loyal. This means that those involved are not purely driven by financial incentives in contributing (e.g. planning events, commenting on outputs) and many feel an incentive to produce high quality outputs on time beyond the pure financial reward.
3. Related to the above, qualitative interviews with young researchers highlighted that FAC mentoring encourages those seeking to follow an academic track to think beyond academic outputs; increasing efficiency as a result of increased diversity of outputs. One ECF recipient commented: *"We would sit down and he [mentor] would say... yes get the paper component, but you could also write a policy brief etc. It [writing a policy brief] wasn't on my radar...it [FAC] was the first time that it had really crossed my mind!"* – **ECF Recipient**  
  
This point also holds true at the broader level and there is positive evidence from KIs that overall, FAC has sought to maximise spin-off benefits from single pieces of research and draw on existing research or consulting work to develop publications, policy briefs etc.
4. Flexibility in the accountable grant funding rules has enabled greater efficiency as FAC has been able to move funding around to respond to changes/ openings in the policy environment and produce outputs that respond directly to these.

#### Negative:

5. The flip side of point 3 above is the possibility that FAC has not maximised the creation of 'new' evidence. As previously stated, it is not possible from the output database to see the volume of new primary research that has contributed to FAC outputs. Additional research at programme level is required to comment further on this point.
6. There is considerable variation in the activity/ output levels across themes (although the assessment in this section is relatively crude). Stronger management accountability may be required to ensure efficiency at theme level.

#### Conclusion:

FAC is considered to have achieved VfM in terms of efficiency with high levels of activity and outputs in comparison to available resources; albeit this is not consistent across research themes.

### 7.6.2.3. Effectiveness

#### Positive:

1. FAC's extensive quality assurance process aids effectiveness as everything is peer reviewed to some extent. This enhances credibility.
2. Grant programmes have facilitated the careers of dynamic, junior researchers from Africa and elsewhere. Consultations with KIs and the personal professional capacity survey illustrated many examples in which junior researchers, supported by FAC and keen to progress their careers, have proactively engaged in policy influencing activities. While the direct outcome/ impact of this is not always clear, the fact that junior researchers (at relatively low cost to DFID) are taking forward this activity is a positive VfM indicator. Among the 35 junior researchers who responded to the survey a majority said that in the absence of FAC their research would have been of lesser quality and scale.

3. To boost effectiveness and promote sustainability it is necessary for FAC to attract, retain and grow good scholars. A commitment (backed by flexible funds) is important. While grants and scholarships are viewed as a key success of FAC, sustained funding for young scholars may further boost effectiveness. This conclusion is backed by comments from KIs including:

*“making it a bit more long term, empowering [young] researchers and giving funds...saying “ look this is really important and we do want to invest in you to take up the mantle going forward”...that would hopefully be more sustainable.”* **ECF Recipient**

*“It is extraordinarily difficult to grow new research capacity in Africa and the system makes it very hard as there is a constant ‘drip drip’ of funding with very little long term investment”* – **academic non-FAC**

**Negative:**

4. In relation to point 1, while extensive peer review enhances quality, it takes time and may result in delays which impact on relevance to policy processes (which, as it is noted throughout this report, sometimes open up quickly). There is however only very limited evidence that this has affected FAC (the evaluation highlighted one example of a policy brief published too late to be of maximum value). In this case the positive benefits of extensive peer review override the negatives.

Also in relation to point 1, the evaluators consider that in some cases, while academic relevance is high, FAC has not invested enough resources in ensuring ‘user relevance’. There must be a balance between academic rigour and user relevance (in terms of timing and output type).

5. Countering point 3, FAC’s grant model has been a catalyst for young scholars with many gaining further academic or consultancy funding as a result, while also maintaining their links to FAC. In this way FAC benefits from their involvement with no additional cost. If FAC was to introduce sustained funding, this paid, retained cadre could undermine this aspect of VfM.
6. While MTRs have called for greater and more sustained funding for research and engagement activities in order to increase activity (and therefore effectiveness), the evaluation team note that FAC itself chose how to spread its resources. FAC chose to increase its thematic research while maintaining its core themes. This raises the question as to whether effectiveness was affected by spreading resources too thinly.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, FAC’s processes are perceived to have contributed to VfM in terms of effectiveness; particularly the quality of its research outputs (ensured by rigorous quality assurance) and support to junior African researchers.

**7.6.2.4. Cost effectiveness**

Where possible some of the evaluation’s impact case studies have made a (crude) estimate of the cost of the intervention and the value of the sector/ issue it was trying to influence. The evaluation does not have any tangible evidence of the financial or economic value of any benefits that have accrued. More in-depth monitoring on an ongoing basis (with a specific focus on monitoring VfM) would be required for this purpose.

However, it is apparent that if the FAC TOC can be shown to work in practice, there is potential for significant cost effectiveness (as defined by DFID) as a result of FAC intervention (where attributable policy influence is achieved). Examples are provided in Table 12. These very crude figures indicate that in most cases the amount being spent on this evidence base is very small in relation to the value of the sector and/or the processes being influenced. The potential VfM is therefore significant.

**Table 12: Assessing cost effectiveness**

Impact Story	Cost of FAC intervention	Value of sector being influenced	Relative cost	Potential benefit
IS 2 – Institutionalising arid and semi arid lands (ASAL) policy gains	£200,000	12% (£2.7 billion) of national GDP from ASAL areas	1 pence per person	Contribution to improved policies for 15 million people
IS 3 – Providing evidence for Civil Society led advocacy in Malawi on agricultural policy	£80,000	Agricultural sector contributes 1/3 GDP and 90% export earnings	Miniscule	Contribution to improved agricultural policy affecting 13 million rural population
IS 4 – Evidence influences Malawi Input Subsidy Programme	£125,000	FISP programme around £100 million per year or around £600 million over period	0.02% of FISP expenditure	Improvement to and continuation of programme received by around 1.2 million households
IS 5 – Deferral of Kenya Community Land Bill	£35,000	May affect the rights of 25% of the population – around 10 million	Miniscule	Contribution to potential land security of rural poor

Source: Impact Studies 2, 3,4 & 5

Note: All costs are approximate

## 7.7. What have been the unintended, positive and negative outcomes (and impacts) and what lessons can be learnt from them?

### Finding 17:

**Despite exhaustive enquiries, few unintended consequences came to light. Lessons include the importance of risk analysis and continuation of flexible planning to be able to make use of surprises.**

This question was asked in many different ways to different key informants with hardly any examples being proffered. It was also considered in each of the impact studies, with a similar lack of examples coming to light. Overall, only a small number of unintended outcomes have been identified:

- Negative – Government harassment of some FAC researchers for exposing deficiencies in agricultural policy implementation;
- Positive – Significant private consultancy contracts for FAC researchers, building on their FAC experience and further developing their experience and capacity in policy research;
- Positive – A growing number of collaboration requests and some significant contracts including the emergence of the whole new Africa Seed Programme with CDI, Wageningen (IS 8) and commissioning of the ‘Drivers of Success’ study which was a product of a number of serendipitous events and processes (IS 6). This demonstrates the dynamism of the environment in which FAC is operating and the need to maintain flexibility to respond to opportunities.

### 7.7.1. Lessons

Speaking out will often carry some risk. Risk analysis and planning may enable controversial evidence to still come out but at less risk to the individuals.

Flexible planning enables a smart organisation to take positive advantage of serendipitous events. This has generally been the case for FAC. Surprises are part of the TOC, as are a series of steps at different levels, which include identification of opportunities. These elements of the TOC seem to have been working well.

## 7.8. Was the focus on CAADP as an important user of evidence and influencer of national and regional policy and practice, appropriate and what lessons can be learnt from it?

### Finding 18:

A proportionate and cross-cutting focus on CAADP processes was appropriate, with opportunities available for FAC to add value; although, how important a user of evidence and influencer of policy and practice CAADP actually is at national and regional level is contested. The approach to CAADP as initially envisaged and implemented by FAC was, however, not appropriate and some opportunities were missed. More recently, decentralisation of FAC has increased its legitimacy with CAADP and its capacity to engage in the CAADP continental processes. To date the influence of FAC's work on AU/ CAADP processes has come about mainly through FAC building an evidence base on themes of relevance to AU/CAADP policy makers, and then generating demand for further evidence within AU or CAADP institutions through on-going direct engagement with key officials and existing policy forums. This strategy is coherent with the FAC TOC and PE approach.

The evaluation team was not able to collect adequate primary evidence to fully answer this question. This section is, therefore, reliant on documentary sources, a small number of KIIs and group discussions (mainly carried out for the AU 'Drivers of Success' impact story (IS 6)).

The recommendation for FAC to have a focus on CAADP processes came from both MTRs (2007, 2012) and there was also a strong steer from DFID. FAC has struggled to deliver this focus. Part of the issue was perhaps treating CAADP as an institution rather than as a set of processes operating at continental, regional and national levels.

In terms of engagement, FAC initially invested considerable time and effort in developing an MoU with CAADP. This was never signed. On FAC's side there was no explicit process for determining the best entry point(s) for influencing CAADP processes, nor a clear analysis of the USP that FAC had to offer to CAADP. The orientation of CAADP towards technical solutions diverges from the systems and PE approach of FAC, which contextualises and problematises policy agendas. Neither does the CAADP pillars framework easily lend itself to engagement with the cross cutting thematic work of FAC.<sup>81</sup>

In reality, the focus of FAC engagement probably needed to be broadened from the outset to include the AU as the political owner of CAADP and AU Commission as its secretariat (given the political economy orientation of FAC's work). Belatedly, some work is now being done by FAC to make contact with CAADP national focal points and make them aware of FAC outputs.

That CAADP is an important user of evidence and influencer of national and regional policy and practice is an assumption in the FAC TOC. This is contested by some and the evaluation does not have sufficient evidence to confirm or reject.<sup>82</sup>

CAADP as an institution has limited capacity for knowledge management. Within the CAADP framework, the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support Systems (ReSAKSS) are formally constituted as a resource centre to support regions and countries with technical knowledge and evidence. It is argued by a DFID key informant that FAC did not position themselves as a resource in the key processes taking place, especially in the past three years, to move CAADP's focus on country investment plans to a focus on how to influence the necessary public policy and investment reform at country and regional level. At a number of meetings FAC apparently stressed the need for political economy analysis, but were unable to offer their experience in PE analysis and the results of their analysis to help deliver tools to support change.

<sup>81</sup> CAADP framework has 4 pillars: land and water management, market access, food supply and hunger and agricultural research. <http://www.caadp.net>.

<sup>82</sup> One key informant interviewed in Malawi did not consider CAADP to be an important user of evidence at national level. Both CAADP's influence at country level and country level achievement of AU targets is the subject of considerable on-going debate, review and analysis (especially since the Maputo Declaration of 2003).

In terms of FAC's influence on CAADP, the importance of capacity within Africa has emerged as a significant factor. The institutionalisation process, leading to establishment of regional hubs, has given FAC greater credibility as an African network, with one dedicated African professional now working on this theme. This has enhanced its scope for relationship building and ongoing direct engagement with CAADP processes and institutions.

More recently, the body of working papers built up under PEAPA (2011-2012) and the communication of this in the PEAPA conference in March 2013 gave credibility and visibility to FAC's work on this issue. This has enabled it to participate in the AU commissioned 'Drivers of Success' multi-country studies (IS 6). These studies focus on understanding CAADP processes and implementation at country level in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Malawi. These studies are synthesised in a recent FAC working paper (Poulton et al 2014), and shed light on why progress is advancing faster in some countries than others.

Meanwhile, some other areas of thematic work clearly have resonance at a continent-wide level and have organically developed links with AU processes (see Box 18).

**Box 18: FAC's role in emergence of ISSD African partnership**

FAC work on the political economy of seed systems in Ethiopia and elsewhere emerged out of a critical engagement with the 'new seeds for Africa' approach of large and powerful funders like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) that emerged from 2006-2008 onwards. The work in Ethiopia in particular has been closely linked (informally initially and now more formally) with the Integrated Seed System Development (ISSD) Africa programme, which in turn has links to the AU Seeds and Biotechnology Programme (SBTP).

There has been a continued strategic focus on this Africa wide (rather than CAADP per se) level which is now bearing fruit in a more formal continental wide partnership (IS 8). An interesting comment from the Centre of Development Innovation (CDI) of Wageningen University on their wish to work with FAC on a new seed programme was *"We need FAC because of their understanding of the CAADP agenda. We really want to develop closer relations with them."*

It is apparent that some FAC themes have more traction at an AU policy level and others at a national level. In some cases work at the national level to improve national capacity to engage with CAADP (or indeed global initiatives like the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition - NAFSN) may be more relevant than explicit engagement with CAADP per se.

Any focus by FAC on an institution like CAADP needs to be grounded in the political economy of policy making and an understanding of what FAC has to offer (FAC's comparative advantage). From this perspective, AU/CAADP would emerge as targets or allies through the process of identifying influencing opportunities, which are relevant and important for particular issues.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, some of the work most likely to produce an impact at an Africa wide/ AU level has emerged in this way (see Box 18 on ISSD-Africa).

This approach is more in accordance with the FAC TOC, which states that *'research priorities within themes developed in line with country and regional organisation' priorities (especially CAADP/ AU/ NEPAD) and continually reviewed'*.<sup>84</sup> This suggests focusing on organisational priorities rather than the organisations themselves.

In a follow up interview, an FAC coordinator confirmed that they had learnt that there are a variety of 'ways in' to CAADP processes, beyond CAADP as an organisation, and that it is important to engage around particular themes where CAADP has an interest.

Two leading African researchers and policy makers working on CAADP (interviewed as part of the evaluation) clearly feel FAC has a role to play in AU/ CAADP processes, but that this potential has not been fulfilled to date. One commented that:

<sup>83</sup> Through power analysis, for example.

<sup>84</sup> TOC extract (see Figure 1).

*“We need FAC within the CAADP community, but FAC missed [the] opportunity: 2014 AU Year of Food and Agriculture. [FAC] Could have engaged with AU different institutions, leadership around the thematic areas that they work on. The key meeting was 10<sup>th</sup> CAADP partners meeting, March 2014 FAC was not there in any significant way.”<sup>85</sup>*

The other commented that:

*“FAC is the only actor linking politics and economy, no-one else is doing that re CAADP/AU processes. The FAC study raises questions that we hope in future that FAC answers.”*

As CAADP evolves and country ownership deepens in the next ten years there may be a growing opportunity for FAC to engage at country level, building on the capacities developed in the ‘Drivers of Success’ study.

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<sup>85</sup> Key Informant interview with African researcher and policy maker.



**PART C: EVALUATION LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## 8. Learning and recommendations

The focus of this evaluation has been on learning, particularly in relation to outcome and impact. The previous sections answered the specific EQs set by the TOR. This section draws attention to a number of additional or cross-cutting issues. Many of these would need further work to confirm findings with an evidence base and to reflect in detailed recommendations. The intention here is to open the debate in the spirit of learning. Finally, there are a small number of recommendations for FAC and DFID.

### 8.1. Learning on FAC organisation

#### 8.1.1. Combining flexibility with rigour

FAC's flexible and researcher driven planning processes enable rapid development of research topics that keep FAC relevant and address gaps in knowledge as opportunities arise. The challenge is to combine what has been described as a 'nimble' approach with sufficient focus to avoid spreading resources too thinly, while also ensuring there is adequate reflection, monitoring, adjustment and follow through. This requires prioritisation, making decisions to cut back on less promising research areas, which are not gaining traction, are no longer relevant or failing to leverage other funds. This may mean developing a more mixed portfolio, with emerging, established and paused themes. It also means getting a balance between longer term strategic work and other more reactive engagements.

#### 8.1.2. Focus on FAC's core comparative advantage

FAC's TOC describes the whole policy influencing process. However, this does not mean that FAC needs to be active in all parts; the role of other actors is explicit in the TOC. The evaluation's impact case studies found several effective examples of FAC providing the evidence, the framing or the convening capacity and leaving others with more political weight or advocacy capacity to carry through the policy influencing. FAC's comparative advantage may vary in different policy influencing contexts and therefore the parts of the TOC to focus on will differ in different cases. An internal political economy analysis of each engagement opportunity could help FAC plan their contribution based on FAC's comparative advantage and aided by more explicit and documented cycles of engagement and reflection. This should improve relevance and, consequently, increase outcomes and impact.

#### 8.1.3. Co-creating demand and involving end users

A recurrent theme in the impact case studies is the ability of FAC knowledge products to stimulate further demand. There is some evidence that FAC outputs are more relevant when produced in relation to a clearly understood demand and this seems a reasonable working hypothesis. Currently, most of the defining, commissioning and peer review is led by researchers. FAC could experiment with ways of actively fostering channels to influence through co-creation of demand for particular types of evidence from policy makers. It could be argued that this should be the 'end-goal' of each theme. As such, it could be made a more explicit channel within the TOC. Within this process, FAC could develop mechanisms for input by forward thinking and ambitious policy maker and practitioner end-users into the evidence generation and peer review process. This is not an explicit assumption in the current TOC, but could be considered in a future iteration.

#### 8.1.4. Investing in Early Career Fellowships

The ECF has proven effective in generating evidence, an important contribution to building capacity of individuals, and indirectly the institutions in which they are based. The ECF was cut when the DFID ECF budget ended. With FAC moving into a phase of greater reliance on project funding there is a danger that capacity building through ECF will get squeezed out. This would be unfortunate. FAC may consider ways to integrate a more flexible ECF scheme into project funding with ECF opportunity and timing linked to specific projects.

#### **8.1.5. Communications matter**

FAC has invested in professional communications capacity and this is reflected in the large volume of knowledge product outputs available and the high user demand for these. There is growing use of new media as well as exposure in traditional non-specialist mass media of newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. The latter is probably most important for influencing politicians and higher level policy makers. Innovative approaches like running competitions for journalists to attend and report from FAC conferences seem to have been successful. This could perhaps be extended to covering some specific 'hot issues'. Continuing investment in communications, especially with non-specialist audiences, will add value to FAC's overall impact.

#### **8.1.6. Mainstreaming Gender and Social Difference**

Mainstreaming GSD across FAC is a challenge. Achieving this will require a commitment from all senior staff across the network, especially mentors. It will also require systems for ensuring that GSD principles are incorporated into the planning and implementation phases of research and engagement activities and which also ensure a GSD component in peer review. This will necessitate additional human resources, preferably decentralised to Africa. Systems for monitoring the progress of mainstreaming in each theme and as a cross-cutting issue should be developed.

#### **8.1.7. Promoting synergy across themes and geography**

FAC has often delivered most value when it has achieved synergy between themes, bringing different disciplines together to bridge a knowledge gap or solve an overlapping problem (e.g. bringing social protection and pastoralism together - nascent in Ethiopia). Systemic incorporation of PE across themes has been successful and can be further deepened. Geography is also important, with much agricultural policy being driven at national level – creating FAC organisational capacity and synergy at country and regional hub level is a future challenge and opportunity for FAC.

#### **8.1.8. Improvement needed in monitoring, reflection and learning**

Monitoring outcomes and impact from research and policy influencing is not straightforward. Prior to 2011 monitoring was focussed on outputs. The PIPA system introduced in 2011 and used for planning in 2012-2013 had the capacity to reflect on and record outcomes and potentially even impact. However, there was insufficient monitoring capacity to ensure the system was properly consolidated and to make links to the logframe and DFID reporting. Consequently, PIPA was effectively abandoned as funding uncertainty has ended annual workshops. This has left FAC with a weak evidence base on both outcome and impact. There is both a need and an opportunity for FAC to experiment with ways of monitoring and learning about outcome and impact. This should be linked to the TOC. There is expertise within FAC's consortium member ODI on the ROA methodology, which would be useful here.

#### **8.1.9. Invest in sufficient management, M&L and organisational capacity**

It is important that FAC remains lean and networked in order to maintain its comparative advantage, VfM and sustainability. During 2008-2013 FAC has produced (with DFID core funding) significant outputs with a very limited institutional and management footprint. To an extent this has relied on goodwill and above contracted hour commitment from key staff. With the move to increased multi-donor project funding, the management load will increase in both winning funds, managing an increasingly complex portfolio, and reporting to more donors. Judicious additional investment in management, M&L and organisational capacity is therefore needed. With core funding coming to an end, project funding will have to contribute more towards core costs and there may be a temporary deficit that needs to be managed. A clear business plan is required.

#### **8.1.10. Enablers and constrainers**

The impact case studies found policy influencing enablers to be very context specific, requiring contextualised analysis, planning and reflection. However, there was some commonality in the following enablers (with appropriate farming metaphors):

- Dynamic and committed individuals in decision making positions interested in using evidence (fertile ground);
- Pre-existing research evidence and political economy analysis (quality seed);
- Experienced and respected capacity to support the process (a good farmer);
- An appropriate *moment* (the right season).

Inhibitors were also context specific and were commonly an external event and difficult to influence political systems. PE analysis of the influencing context, working with appropriate people within the system and being sufficiently 'nimble' to deal with surprises were all ways found useful in reducing the influence of disablers.

### **8.1.11. Hub model appears to be working and evolving**

The evaluation team was not asked to do an organisational development assessment and so these observations are tentative. Although very new, the hub model with hubs hosted by existing African organisations appears to be working. The level of synergy with the hosting organisation is variable, but an advantage of the current arrangement is that hosts can be changed if the arrangement ceases to be beneficial to either side. The hubs provide an opportunity for further evolution, with increased African leadership and further decentralisation, including some country level capacity. However, optimum development will require a degree of funding confidence over a few years. Some hubs may need a local legal status in order to qualify for some funding opportunities and this is an issue that needs to be looked at.

## **8.2. Learning on DFID support for agricultural policy research**

### **8.2.1. FAC develops from a consortium into a network with hard questions of sustainability**

DFID started by funding a consortium of UK based research organisations. This has developed into a network of 130+ evidence producers, 2,000 regular and 65,000 occasional evidence "consumers", increasing exposure in the African media and increasing success in winning project funding. This underscores the current and potential future value of this network (over and above the value of the consortium members that will remain even if FAC ends), and raises the question as to whether it is important for it to be sustained, whether it can survive without DFID core funding and whether DFID has particular opportunities in this regard.<sup>86</sup>

### **8.2.2. Funding a researcher led network has some specific comparative advantages**

The VfM evaluation question showed that a researcher led network approach has a number of features of flexibility, non-financial incentives based on organisational culture and consequent lower costs that make it good value for money. There are other delivery mechanisms, such as a research grant management agency, call-down capacity (e.g. CEIL PEAKS) or through formal institutions (e.g. CG Network) that provide very different strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation team were not asked to do a formal comparison of different delivery mechanisms, so learning is focused on what was discovered about FAC. This found that a researcher led network seems to have a comparative advantage in getting topical policy relevant evidence rapidly into the public domain, in providing alternative framing to debates, in convening debate and in building African policy researcher capacity while doing this.

### **8.2.3. Finding ways to derive synergy between DFID and the research and policy influencing process**

DFID has avoided micro-management and created space for researchers to prioritise themes and activities which has positively reflected on the relevance of FAC's outputs to many users. It is

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<sup>86</sup> It is important to avoid arguing to recoup sunk costs. However, having used taxpayer's money to create something with potential future value, managing the withdrawal of core funding in a way that maximises this future value could be considered both an opportunity and a responsibility.

important that FAC is an increasingly African dominated network and this should not be compromised. However, there seems to be significant under-exploited opportunities for more synergy between FAC evidence, Africa based FAC capacity and DFID advisers, who are also actively engaged in policy influencing activities. It seems that the work of country based DFID advisors could benefit from greater awareness of FAC evidence and from being aware of the excellent intellectual and knowledge resource of the FAC membership in their country of station. Similarly, FAC members could benefit from a greater understanding of the agenda setting of increasingly integrated donor activities in their own country.

## 8.3. Recommendations

### 8.3.1. Recommendations to FAC

1. Invest in an outcome and learning focussed M&L system with adequate capacity. This could be linked with innovative approaches to measuring and learning about outcome and impact, with a focus on enablers and inhibitors in different contexts. This could profit from the experience of ODI.
2. Invest in additional limited high quality management and organisational capacity. This should be linked to a clear business plan with project funding contributing sufficiently to core costs.
3. Continue to evolve the hub model, and further reinforce African leadership, input and output. The additional capacity recommended in (2) should be located in one or more of the African hubs, providing virtual input across all hubs, similar to what is currently being successfully practiced on communications. The appropriate legal status of the hubs should be further investigated.
4. Develop ways of integrating the ECF scheme in a flexible way into a largely project funded portfolio to maximise synergy between evidence generation and capacity building. Dedicated funding for ECF capacity building should also be sought.
5. Look into ways of co-creating evidence to ensure relevance and ownership by policy makers and practitioners. Develop institutional mechanisms for end-user input into research generation and peer review.
6. Mainstream gender and social difference by developing appropriate organisational systems, including for planning and peer reviewing work, and provide the resources required to back these up.

### 8.3.2. Recommendations to DFID

1. Having invested in the creation of a network with future value, DFID should manage its exit from core funding in ways that minimise risk of value loss and maximise potential future returns from the investment made.
2. If the exit strategy from an accountable grant includes an opportunity for replacement with competitive funding, this should include realistic assessment on the timescale for DFID launch and contracting and formal consideration of contingency risk management actions if the timetable changes.
3. While not making recommendations on criteria for a future competitive tender, lessons from FAC suggest that consideration should be given to:
  - a. There are some specific advantages in a researcher led structure in terms of flexibility, getting information rapidly into the public domain, convening and framing debates; therefore, it would make sense for a proportion of future research funding to be researcher-led;
  - b. The potential VfM of creating synergy between policy research, communications, capacity building and using the evidence to influence policy;
  - c. Ways of combining African ownership which is valued by policy makers with access to global thinking and communications;

- d. Organisational culture, relationships and individuals matter and help deliver value; therefore, support organisational models that build and increase VfM through non-financial incentives.
4. Develop institutional mechanisms to enable DFID staff, country offices and partners to engage creatively with centrally funded research, evidence generation, communication and policy processes, thus releasing the latent opportunities for synergy.

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