

Comments on CRP1.3 Proposal: Harnessing the Development Potential of Aquatic Agricultural Systems for the Poor and Vulnerable

FC Member	Comments
Australia	<p>General Comments:</p> <p>The proposal is innovative in the pre-eminence of participatory gender analyses and outcomes, its demand driven integrated approach, the emphasis on livelihoods of the poor, use of resilience theories, its grounding in development processes and embrace of a large and diverse array of committed R & D partners. However innovation implies risk and there is a real chance that the program is excessively complex.</p> <p>The emphasis on gender equity and empowerment of the poor is appropriate, but in places it appears that the program will foster political advocacy and activism to achieve these outcomes. The Fund Council needs to affirm that it agrees with this interpretation, as it could fundamentally change the nature of the CGIAR and compromise its hard won, well deserved and necessary “honest broker” reputation.</p> <p>The program will use innovative approaches to social change that involve process-intensive action research that will require building new skills and capabilities in the CGIAR. The FC needs to deliberate on whether this is a strategic direction it wishes the CGIAR to move in.</p> <p>The budget seems top heavy with CRP coordination and management costs of around 25% and another 14% as overhead costs (Fig 10) seems high. The FC will need to examine this issue carefully once all CRPs have been submitted.</p> <p>Specific Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integrated research based upon a demand-driven participatory gender approach will involve the whole range of enterprises, activities and options in smallholder systems, including “...both old and new technologies that combine permutations of farming, fishing, aquaculture, livestock rearing and forestry with processing and trading of agricultural commodities, and with non-agricultural livelihoods. The demand-driven focus will help tailor these solutions to the specific needs of different households living in different environmental and socio-cultural conditions.” (p. vii). There are two risks associated with this. Firstly it is an extremely complex and omnibus agenda; and secondly it is likely to be quite location-specific, which could limit IPGs. • The integrated R & D approach is predicated on the apparent failure of single component approaches. The program suggests that the failure has been because of lack of “integration”. It would be helpful to have more information from past evaluations and <i>ex post</i> impact assessments of these component approaches as context to better judge the point of departure and prospects for success of the new approach. • The emphasis on gender equity and empowerment of the poor is appropriate but in places it appears that the program will foster political advocacy to achieve these outcomes. For example in Box 3 (p.8) it is stated that: “We will seek to use action research as a tool for emancipation and social change”. Further in Fig 1

(p.2) objective 4 is stated to be “Reduce gender disparities in access to and control of resources and decision making through beneficial changes in gender norms and roles.” These are normative intentions that need to be more circumscribed to relate to other objectives like sustainable productivity improvements, where arguably there is more scope for win-win outcomes and which better exploit the CGIAR’s comparative advantage. As it stands these elements of the proposal imply an activist role for the CGIAR in social engineering/transformation as an objective equal to productivity gains. This is made clear on p.12: “...transformation often requires confrontation or negotiation with entrenched structures of power..... (iii) As transformation will favour some people over others, who will lose and who will win? (iv) Do research organizations have a legitimate role in this process? Additionally, the processes that the program will employ to build and sustain knowledge sharing and learning for a public audience will include (p.68, Table 9): “Media, *nonviolent protest and direct action*”. This activist gender perspective is apparently in response to the GCARD endorsement of a “transformative gender agenda” in the CGIAR’s R for D. The Fund Council needs to affirm that it agrees with this interpretation, as it could fundamentally change the nature of the CGIAR and compromise its hard won, well deserved and necessary “honest broker” reputation. While such an activist agenda may be appropriate for some of its NGO partners, it is doubtful if it is in the interests of the CGIAR per se if that is really what is intended.

- The focus on “place” or “hubs” and deriving demands from men and women in participatory diagnoses and situation analyses as the starting points, rather than using entry points related to particular technologies or sectors (p.14), runs the risk of more rather than less location-specificity and less chance of developing IPGs. More importantly, it is unclear to what extent the proposed approach of participatory demand-driven diagnoses will result in new potential interventions, when it seems development challenges and resultant research questions have already been elaborated for each regional AAS hub in the proposal (Tables 2 and 3, pp.29-30 and Annexes 3 and 5).
- The program will move away from *ex post* impact assessment to better understanding of impact pathways using learning alliances and impact networks at the hubs to scale up and out (pp.15-16). This is consistent with the SRF. However, these would seem to be complements and not alternatives. Little detail is provided on the proposed use of participatory impact evaluation.
- There is a good outline of selected verifiable outcome and impact indicators which need to be further elaborated and quantified in the operational plans (Table 1, p.18). However later (p.36) they become generic e.g. “tools”, “livelihood trajectories”, “training modules”, “action network”, “options...for social media” etc. The valuation of the benefits provided by aquatic agricultural systems (including food, income, health and nutrition, employment, enterprise diversification, biodiversity, water purification, aquifer recharging, soil fertility) could also be elaborated.
- It is pleasing to see that the earlier suggested preferred nomenclature for impact pathways has been adopted in this proposal i.e. research and related outputs → research outcomes → development outcomes → impacts. If this is adopted in a revised SRF document and in all CRPs it will greatly ease appraisal

	<p>of CRPs and the subsequent M & E processes in the new CGIAR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The action research activities in Fig. 5 (p.25) read more like social and economic development cum advocacy activities beyond the comparative advantage of the CGIAR e.g. gender awareness training, loans and savings, agricultural technology transfer, improved health services, judicial system strengthening etc. Clarification would be useful. . • Theme 6 on knowledge sharing and learning will use “...innovative approaches to social change.” that involves “process-intensive action research.” (p.39). It is not clear that the CGIAR has or should develop a comparative advantage in this theme. Indeed it is acknowledged in the proposal (p.48) that full immersion into action research in AAS requires building new skills and capabilities in the CGIAR. The FC needs to deliberate on whether this is a strategic direction it wishes the CGIAR to move in. • Themes 5 and 6 are expected to be the main contributors to the generation of IPGs from CRP 1.3 (p.40). They will offer comparative experiences in scaling out. Research on development approaches will cultivate a body of learning and general principles on processes for delivering development outcomes and impact in AAS. This would be an excellent outcome from the program if realized. • The proponents are to be commended for the extensive involvement of a wide range of prospective partners in the development of the proposal, with many letters of in-principle support (although these were dated well before the current proposal was finalized and it would be good to know if key partners subscribe to the current draft). Many CG centers are to be involved. For example it is proposed to access germplasm for evaluation in crops like rice, wheat, maize, sorghum, millet, coconut, bananas, plantain, cassava, etc. Just how this will be accomplished is not clear and serves to further emphasize the potential complexity of the program. • The M & E program is impressive but is it deliverable? For example it is proposed to have for various dynamic categories of the poor, baseline gender-disaggregated data on a wide range of indicators such as poverty, food security, health, consumption, diet diversity, ecosystem health, perceptions of satisfaction etc. It would be useful to know how will such data be generated over time and importantly, how will the key issue of counterfactuals and attribution be addressed in assessing the impact of CRP 1.3 on these indicators? • The budget seems top heavy with CRP coordination and management costs. For example it appears from Tables 13 a,b, and c that these amount to about 25% of total operating costs over the period 2011-13. In addition, “overheads” amount to about 14% of the total budget. These seem excessively high but are perhaps inevitable when the CRPs have been encouraged to be inclusive and participatory in developing partnerships. The FC will need to examine this issue carefully once all CRPs have been submitted.
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<p>World Bank-ARD</p>	<p>Overall Assessment</p> <p>We have reviewed the proposal with great interest and appreciate the efforts to address complex aquatic systems described in it. The proposal is strong in its problem formulation. However, the framework for scientific approaches and specific outcomes is weaker. The management structure needs additional clarification. We appreciate the mainstreaming of gender into the aquatic systems.</p> <p>Other Suggestions re: Quality Enhancement. Although we do not recommend making these conditions of approval, we think the CRP would be strengthened if,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CRP 1.3 can identify specific gender research topics in the context of aquatic systems (in addition to mainstreaming gender into the overall program). Make sure that the Gender Strategy has a specific budget allocation. 2. CRP 1.3 can be more specific in identifying specific partner contributions and participation in the different thematic areas to illustrate partner buy-in and feasibility in implementing its partnership strategy. <p>Recommendation: Conditional approval.</p> <p>Revise proposal to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Add a section on methodologies to answer the research questions identified in each thematic area. The CRP 1.3 has nicely defined 6 research themes (i.e., sustainable increases in system productivity, equitable access to markets, social-ecological resilience and adaptive capacity, gender equity, policies and institutions to empower users, and knowledge sharing, learning and innovation). The CRP has a list of research questions for each Theme. However, the CRP lacks a description on research approaches and methods to address these questions. 2. Clarify the management and reporting structure, particularly the roles of the Program Oversight Panel (POP), the Program Leadership Team (PLT) and the Program Leader and Program Support Unit. Based upon the current diagram, PLT and POP both report to the Lead Center. It is important to ensure that the decision making power for CRP 1.3 does not solely reside in the Lead Center. 3. Further define outcomes and impacts in the impact pathways by providing quantifiable measures for outcomes and impacts. In Table 1, CRP 1.3 should include outputs and research deliverables and to explicitly link a cluster of outputs to outcomes, impacts and to SRF level Objectives. <p>Other Comments (from Global Partnership on Fisheries, WB-ARD):</p> <p>1. The scientific formulation of the issues and proposed solutions, and CGIAR comparative advantage on this topic.</p> <p>The proposal for the CGIAR Research Program 1.3. ‘Harnessing the Potential of Aquatic Agricultural Systems for the Poor and Vulnerable’ focuses much needed attention on the role of natural resources in development and poverty reduction. The reality and complexity of the relationships between natural resources, including both terrestrial and aquatic in the case of ‘aquatic agricultural systems’ (AAS) are described, and the importance of these resources as components of so-called ‘aquatic agricultural systems’ are highlighted and emphasised. However, the definition of the AAS is given as a simple</p>
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footnote early on in the proposal but a more detailed characterisation and typology of these systems seems to be critically important. It is not clear that the concept of AAS is particularly useful analytically since such systems do not seem to depend on the physical characteristics of the resources but on the use made of them. In the proposal, such systems may be integrated but they may also be single species fisheries (e.g. sardines in the Philippines). Since usage depends on institutional arrangements, the typology of AAS must also depend on and vary with such arrangements.

The general theme of the proposal - which attempts to link the usage of aquatic natural resources with poverty reduction in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, based on specific countries - is both timely and important for a number of reasons.

First, the recent World Bank-FAO assessment of the **economic value** of the World's fisheries, 'The Sunken Billions' (2008), indicates that this could be in the range of USD 50 billion per year on a sustainable basis if institutional arrangements were to be designed that encouraged economically-rational exploitation of global fish resources.

Second, other international studies commissioned by the World Bank, particularly 'Where is the Wealth of Nations?' (2006) and 'The Growth Report: Strategies for Sustained Growth and Development' (2008), highlight that natural resources form a significant part of the **wealth portfolio** of many developing countries and that the appropriate use of this wealth can generate economic growth and in turn poverty reduction.

Third, reviews of the performance of international aid (e.g. see The Political Economy of Natural Resource Use – Lessons for Fisheries Reform; World Bank with PERC (2010) in relation to the use of natural resources for development stress the importance of designing interventions and programmes on the basis of a **sound theoretical underpinning** and to learn lessons about past performance in this regard. In the case of fisheries, aid investment which has not been underpinned by effective fisheries management based on sound economic principles, has contributed to economic and biological over-exploitation and to the general failure of fish resources to contribute to development and poverty reduction in general.

Fourth, while there is no doubt that natural resources can make a significant contribution to the macro-economic goal of poverty reduction, there is some debate as to the precise **role of specific sectors**. A joint meeting of experts from different NR sectors organised by UK's Department for International Development (2003) revealed that each set of experts felt that their sector (in this case, forestry, fisheries, water and rangelands) had a special role to play in supporting the livelihoods of millions of poor and vulnerable people in developing countries, often in the form of a social safety-net. Looking at the set of CG research proposals reveals a similar bias. From another perspective, and in many situations, the same people can be considered to be locked into an '**equilibrium of poverty**', where governance arrangements and limited connectivity to other parts of the economy, encourage intensive overexploitation of their natural resource base, giving few opportunities to improve incomes and livelihoods, and little or no contribution to economic growth overall.

Fifth, it has long been recognised that increased economic growth brings about **changes** in the structure and composition of economies over time. This will also have a social impact such as the relative size of particular income groups and the urban-rural population. As an economy grows and expands, new opportunities arise for people to earn a living, labor often flows out of agriculture and other NR sectors into industry and service sectors and the economy transforms and changes structurally, breaking the equilibrium of poverty. In other words, through this dynamic process, economies and component sectors can be transformed and often very quickly. The Growth Report explains that ‘The growth of GDP may be measured up in the macroeconomic treetops, but all the action is in the microeconomic undergrowth, where new limbs sprout, and dead wood is cleared away.’ Most growth-oriented policies and reforms are designed to foster this microeconomics of creation and destruction, and, crucially, to protect people who are adversely affected by these dynamics. This poses a big challenge for approaches that seek to continue to distinguish specific groups of people labelled originally as ‘the poor’, or poor people within specific sectors (e.g. ‘poor fishers’), especially if the intention is to use them as a target for development or poverty alleviation interventions.

Sixth, therefore, if economic growth is desirable as a means to address poverty, and if NR sectors can both contribute to and benefit from progressive change, what are the **important factors** which should be addressed in general? Recent studies – the Growth Report (2008) and the ODI Mapping Progress, Evidence for a New Development Outlook (2011) – clearly identify good leadership and government, well-defined and coherent policies, appropriate institutions and ‘openness’ to international markets and transfers (investment, knowledge and technology). In the specific case of countries with rich natural resource endowments, the generation of significant resource rents, which can be re-invested to stimulate economic growth is a major opportunity. In this way, society in general can benefit from resource exploitation, rather than benefits being limited to those in the sector (fishers, farmers etc). Indeed this question of the key beneficiaries of policy change and this research proposal in general is a key issue. Is the main challenge to ensure sustainable rational resource exploitation to help alleviate poverty, or is the issue to “help the poor fishers”? The proposal by focussing on the well-being of AAS-dependent people chooses the latter approach but it is not clear that the proposal presents any empirical evidence that this can be expected to lead a lasting improvement in the situation. The question of the dynamics of poverty alleviation and what happens to these groups if the situation can be improved in the short term is not addressed. Overall then, the challenge for each country is to identify and address the **opportunities** for inclusive and green economic growth to increase national prosperity and to reduce poverty, bearing in mind the range of issues which are known to be important (above).

To what extent does the current program proposal meet this challenge?

There is no doubt that this proposal exhibits some worthwhile strengths and positive attributes. First, the process of consultation by which the program proposal has been developed is impressive. It is certainly important to draw upon the full range of national and international partners available to the CGIAR network in developing a major program. Furthermore the ability of a program to harness and utilise the knowledge and experience of these partners in program implementation is also vitally important. Second, the proposed program also clearly recognises the value of aquatic agricultural

resources for sustainable development and focuses on a set of countries in both Asia and Africa where these natural resources are an important component of regional and national economies. Third, the proposal also stresses the importance of an integrated research approach given the nature of AAS, with multiple resources, multiple stakeholders and different options for exploitation and utilisation of resources. Fourth, the six program areas - system productivity, markets, resilience, gender equity, policies and knowledge sharing – are all important and relevant to the proposed research into AAS. Fifth, the general idea that the research should be demand-driven and that tailored solutions (targeted investments) should be developed to meet specific needs of different households living in different environmental and socio-cultural conditions is coherent with much of the current international literature and thinking on development. Overall then, the proposed program has a range of strengths and positive features.

The proposal also shows a range of weaknesses. **First**, the underlying formulation of the relationship between agricultural aquatic systems and poverty reduction seems to lack a solid theoretical base. Of course, there are many perspectives on how poverty reduction can be achieved, but the formulation presented in the proposal is narrow and limited in scope. In particular, the relationship between natural resources, poverty and economic growth is not considered to any significant extent.

Second, the proposal identifies upfront that the limited performance of past development efforts (through the CGIAR system). It is easy to agree with this assessment and not only of the CGIAR, but the issue of why it has happened is more difficult. In the case of fish resources, the failure to develop policy that builds on the wealth of the resource (in particular resource rents) explains the widespread poor state of fish resources generally as well as the few successful exceptions (such as New Zealand, Iceland and also Namibia). The proposal however is based on the hypothesis that it is the focus *per se* on singular components of AAS rather than the multiple options and choices which these resource systems present which is the issue. The proposal for the program is therefore built upon the assumption that an integrated research approach will improve the well-being of AAS dependent people. Unfortunately, this appears to be too simple an assumption. Given what is now understood in general about the central role of economic growth in transforming and improving well-being and reducing poverty, it would have been very useful to understand how this thrust could also be included as part of an integrated approach.

Third, the program aims to benefit the poor and vulnerable in particular, by tailoring solutions (targeted investments) to specific needs of different households living in different environmental and socio-cultural conditions. Presumably this means largely working with the poor and vulnerable, rather than a broad-base of actors within the AAS. It can be argued that unless a development program is working at all levels of a system and with different socio-economic groups, then it is unlikely that the necessary uplift of the system will take place – instead any benefits generated will tend to get captured by the rich and powerful. Furthermore, it is unclear in the proposal whether ‘the poor and vulnerable’ are a distinct grouping at present in the target AAS and how the program would handle the dynamics of change – would households which move out of the poor and vulnerable category still be included in the program?

Fourth, the six areas of work which make up the program (system productivity, markets, resilience, gender equity, policies, knowledge sharing) are clearly important and relevant to many development initiatives. However, it is unclear how these six were selected and how they relate to the past work and experiences of the CGIAR centers, and to what extent the selection and development of these areas is due to the input of various partners (NAR, ARI etc) in the consultation process. But more importantly, it is unclear whether each of these areas will be given the same priority, how they will relate to one another and if there is a sufficient unifying framework.

Fifth, given the importance that the Growth Report (and others) attach to the central role of **good governance** in sustainable development and poverty reduction, one might expect a program on poverty reduction to give this aspect a greater emphasis than appears in the current proposal. Clearly, issues of governance would be handled under the 'policy' work topic, but it would have been preferable to see this playing a central role. This also then raises the issue of the sequencing of the different work topics and overall coordination. It is unfortunate that the topic of 'system productivity' appears at the top of the list of work topics since this gives the proposal a perhaps unintentional ring of the kind of conventional production-oriented program that has been a key cause of the overexploitation of fish resources.

Sixth, the issue of **resource management** is given relatively limited attention as a key topic. Given the importance of capitalising on the wealth of NR through effective policy development and management to contribute to EG and also other direct benefits for resource exploiters (income, food, employment), as highlighted in the Growth Report (and others), this appears to be a major omission. It is noticeable that although in Annex X (Country Profiles) the issue of resource overexploitation in AAS is highlighted, the issue of resources rents (the fundamental driver of overexploitation and overcapitalization) is not dealt with at all.

Finally, in terms of whether the CGIAR has a comparative advantage on the topic proposed as described in the title of the proposal – Harnessing the Development Potential of Aquatic Agricultural Systems for the Poor and Vulnerable – some concerns must be expressed. If the proposal is deemed credible as it stands, then the lead institute (World Fish Center) plus the three main partners (Biodiversity International, CIAT and IWMI) clearly have appropriate expertise in the relevant agriculture/aquatic resources. However, the proposal appears to have some deficiencies, as outlined above, with particular reference to the **conceptualisation of poverty reduction linked to economic growth, and how this might be translated and operationalized into a programme of rural development** (in the first instance). It is not certain whether the lead CGIAR centers involved have the necessary capacity or expertise to undertake high-level research and development activities in these areas, even if they were present in the proposal.

2. The innovation or scientific breakthrough as a result of this CRP

The proposal fails to make a convincing case that there is either a major innovation or scientific breakthrough involved. There is no obvious 'big idea'. The research proposes to make a shift from looking at AAS from a singular perspective to a more integrated approach. While this is clearly important, it is certainly not the first time that this has

been thought about, or attempted. It would have been useful and helpful to see this explained more in the proposal, with reference to past experiences from the international literature, if there is in fact a real innovation involved. The proposal claims that the program will try to get the CGIAR to think in a 'new way' but the case for this is unconvincing.

The proposal also puts forward a concept entitled 'research *in* development' but the explanation is not convincing. There is no doubt that there is much need to re-orient and better integrate research into policy development and into the operationalization of rural development programmes. It would have been good to see this area better explained, and pathways and solutions proposed.

Moreover, with a better review and knowledge of the international literature on natural resource management, with particular reference to economic growth and poverty reduction, then it might have been possible to capitalise on the past research activities of the CGIAR in many good areas – agricultural productivity, water management, fisheries and aquaculture research – to produce a truly innovative program of research. Evidently, this would require specific expertise and critical capacity in areas such as economics and political-economy which may be lacking in the CGIAR centers involved.

3. The program management structure and partnership (internal and external CGIAR centers)

The proposers acknowledge that CPR1.3 is an ambitious program. There is evidence in the proposal that some careful thought has been given to how the program can be managed to achieve a good level of performance using a fairly standard results-based management approach. The proposers seem quite concerned to provide '*an environment where the resources of the program are focused on achieving program objectives, rather than diverted by complex administrative arrangements*' (p.76). While this is a laudable sentiment, it is questionable how realistic this really is, and given the large size of the program, there seems little way to avoid complex administrative arrangements as shown in the management structure diagram (p.78).

Of greater concern, however, are the nine categories of risk which have been identified (p.79 Managing Risks). The proposal states that '*these risks are significant and reflect the challenge which the CGIAR faces in working in new ways required to have greater impact*' (p.80). Amongst the higher/medium risks include limited engagement of CGIAR centers with the proposed program, existing projects (ongoing) leading to a dispersion of effort, and the absence of strong management. While the proposal certainly attempts to put forward a set of risk management actions, the possibility that the program could be derailed or hindered significantly by these risk factors must be taken into account by potential investors.

4. The near-term performance outcomes, and longer-term performance impact pathway, and the likelihood for achieving the outcomes and impact

The CRP1.3 seeks to improve the lives of 15 million poor and vulnerable people over the next six years, and to increase that number to 50 million by 2022. Although, at first sight, this seems to be a measurable, time-bound objective, it is undermined by the vague and subjective nature of "improving the lives". The term "well-being" is left *undefined* making it difficult to know what the program would really achieve were it to be successfully implemented, or how 'success' may be measured other than on the program's own terms. This might be an acceptable risk in small projects but such a

major research investment would seem to require a far tighter definition of what it expects to achieve.

Three pathways -partnership, knowledge-sharing and learning- at multiple scales are suggested- (cornerstones of a scaling up strategy):

- Significant but localised benefits achieved through direct engagement with partners in specific research sites in selected program hubs;
- More extensive achievement of benefits through learning alliances and impact networks developed by the program in these hubs;
- Expanding the program networks nationally, regionally and globally, to build a global coalition for knowledge sharing and learning in AAS.

The rate at which poverty reduction has been achieved in certain countries, improving the lives of millions of people, has been very impressive over the past 20 years. Analysis contained in the recent Growth Report (and others) show that this is **directly attributable to economic growth**. The factors which can enable economic growth have been identified and there is increasingly knowledge about how this can be achieved – better leadership and government, policies and institutions and more open economies. The main issue is to develop an enabling environment characterised by good governance and a conducive macro-economic framework to provide the necessary economic opportunities and incentives for people to prosper.

While the proposal for CRP1.3. has elaborated a useful pathway architecture – at different scales, engagement with different actors and partners – there is not sufficient cognizance of or linkage with the types of factors, through the proposed research framework, which have been increasingly shown to enable significant levels of poverty reduction.

Given the ‘risks’ faced by the program (above), there must also be concerns that the development and roll-out of such an elaborate set of pathways will absorb large amounts of funding resources, with high transaction costs, under conditions where effective program management is one of the risks, leading to minimal development impact.

Overall, therefore there is a high degree of uncertainty attached to the pathways proposed and the likelihood of achieving the proposed impact is probably minimal.

5. Constructive recommendations for addressing the CRP shortfalls, if any

Poverty reduction and the management of AAS are two major challenges for many countries in Asia and Africa. There is no doubting the difficulty of attempting to design and implement a suitable program which can link the two issues and achieve major impact.

The current CRP1.3. proposal clearly draws upon the wealth of experience and knowledge of the CGIAR centers involved and there are many good attributes to the current proposal. The honesty with which the challenges and risks faced in attempting to implement the program is refreshing but also revealing.

Overall, the proposal is hamstrung by not **getting to grips with the current economic**

thinking on economic growth and poverty reduction. While there may be some debate over the process of economic development and the transformation which it has produced in many countries in recent years, it cannot be ignored. Economic growth is certainly a necessary part of the process of poverty reduction and it should be acknowledged to a significant degree in any program which focuses on the poor and vulnerable.

In addition, the proposal shows weaknesses regarding the overall research framework. The six themes should be better linked and articulated. It can be argued that **governance, policy development and resource management for AAS should be the core activities.**