

Workshop on Self-Led Institutional Innovation and Change for NARS and NPPs

National and regional agricultural research organizations are facing increasing demands for demonstrating development impact, requiring that researchers and research managers acquire new skills for managing "paradigm shifts" within their own organizations.

One of the key mandates of the African Highlands Initiative is to build awareness and institutional capacity of its national and regional partners (NARS, ASARECA¹) to institutionalize desired changes in organizational mandate and practice to enhance impact from research interventions. The "paradigm shifts" accompanying institutional reforms require changes in researcher attitudes, behaviour and skills, as well as changes in institutional structures, operations and values. This workshop will provide the fundamental skills and strategies for research managers and researchers to organize self-led institutional change activities toward the achievement of each institution's own objectives.

Steps in the Workshop

The workshop is divided into the following components, which correspond roughly to steps in the institutional change process:

- 1) Development of an institutional vision and road map toward desired change;
- 2) Self-assessment of enabling and impeding conditions to desired change, and the contextual factors influencing these;
- 3) Formulation of strategies for mainstreaming new ways of working in ongoing and planned activities at various levels within NARS and NPPs;
- 4) Development of concrete plans of action for managing change.



Dr. Abera Deressa, former DDG of the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization (EARO), presents group results on how to implement desired institutional changes.

In the **first step**, NARIs and NPPs conduct self-reflection to assess the status of affairs (institutional baselines) and identify challenges faced in reaching more profound development impact. This helps to concretize the "paradigm shift" the institution is aiming to promote from within. Participants are exposed to concepts of visioning, institutional innovation and pluralistic research systems, and to strategies for achieving impact, fostering innovation, and managing interdisciplinary teams and multi-stakeholder processes. Key questions are: What are the desired paradigm shifts? Where are we now? How prepared is our organization for this change, and what needs to be done?

In the **second step**, workshop participants will assess the prevailing conditions internal to their organizations that enable and impede the uptake of new attitudes and practices, and achievement of desired

¹NARS = National Agricultural Research Systems; ASARECA = Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa

outcomes. What are the envisioned benefits of the new paradigm shift? What competencies are needed by researchers and managers to make more efficient use of human and financial resources in reaching stated objectives and creating large-scale development impact? Participants will be assisted in the application of individual and institutional self-assessment tools, and the facilitation and communication skills that will enable them to apply these tools within their own organizations. They will also learn how to manage a feedback culture and reflection-learning within their organizations and with partner organizations.



Workshop participants discussing competencies needed to institutionalize the “Integrated Agricultural Research for Development” paradigm within EARO.

In **step three** of the workshop, strategies for mainstreaming new ways of working into ongoing and planned activities at various levels of the institution will be discussed. Key questions in this section might be, “How do we wish to operationalize INRM in our organizations?,” “How do these concepts look in everyday practice, i.e., within planning and monitoring systems?,” or “How must managers and researchers change and interact with others to bring about desired changes?” A case study of an institution selected by the participants will be utilized to illustrate concrete changes that need to take place at diverse levels to meet organizational change objectives. These might include internal changes in organizational structures and practices, or external changes such as linkages and advocacy with key stakeholders (farmers, policy-makers, the private sector), improved resource governance or stronger farmer institutions.

The **fourth step** will lead to the development of draft action plans with specific activities required to accomplish institutional objectives (What needs to be done,

and by whom? When should it be done, and what resources are needed? What do we do next to get started and sustain the process?). These provisional plans of action are developed to generate a deeper understanding of institutional change among participants, and must be subsequently negotiated and refined with their respective institutions so they harmonize with ongoing activities and planning procedures. Participatory monitoring and evaluation tools and processes are introduced to enable organizations to monitor and track progress made toward desired outcomes.

Application Domain

This method has been applied within NARS and the AHII program, but can be applied to any organization going through paradigm shifts. NARS participants are encouraged to invite participation from external collaborators such as universities, extension and non-governmental organizations toward the development of a common vision and agenda for achieving impact.

Workshop Details

Teaching Methods: Formal instruction (using case studies to illustrate principles); group work and buzz groups (to work through specific challenges); and analysis of organizational structures and procedures. Additional methods will be utilized to carry the work forward following the workshop, including interviews with key stakeholders; organizational self-assessment (in terms of characteristics, values, and what needs to change); and documentation of best practices and success stories for further scaling up within the organization and beyond.

Duration: 5 days.

Criteria for Selection and Nomination of Participants

The selection process will favor those individuals who: are respected within their organizations and seen as “performers” and champions of change; have previous exposure and participation in IAR4D programs; will remain in the organization for several years to ensure continuity; can demonstrate their commitment to lead others through a demanding process; can demonstrate their potential as facilitators (extrovert, confident, team player, negotiator) and have a personal commitment to rural development and livelihood improvement.



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Key partners in this work have been research specialists from AHI’s NARI collaborators (EARO, DRD, NARO); Ethiopian and Ugandan universities (Alemaya, Debub, Jimma, Makerere); representatives of NGOs and extension; and Dr. Jürgen Hagemann (consultant).

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