Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Strengthening Agricultural Innovation Systems in Africa

Proceedings of the Consultative Meeting

16 September 2021

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BACKGROUND

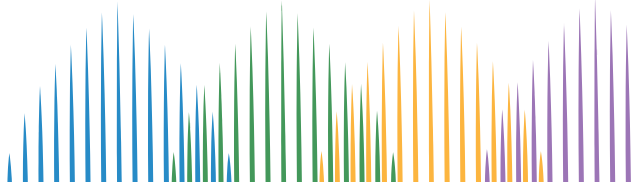
The African regional agriculture research and extension organizations are key players in efforts to strengthen the capacity for agricultural innovation, within a broader goal "contributing to the climate-relevant, productive and sustainable transformation of agriculture and food systems". The European Union's initiative for the Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA) is supporting several global projects that work with the 'the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) ex-Pillar IV organizations' on strengthening Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) in Africa. While each project has its unique design, they complement each other in developing capacities for agricultural innovation in Africa.

On 16 September 2021, a virtual consultation was organized by the FAO's TAP-AIS project to explore areas of collaboration and create synergies among four EU-funded DeSIRA projects, implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Agrinatura, Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR), and the 'African CAADP ex-Pillar IV organizations'[African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), Conseil Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricoles (CORAF), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)] for strengthening AIS in Africa. The event was attended by 40 people, including representatives from the EU Commission, Agrinatura, GFAR, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as well as heads of the Regional Research and Extension Organizations (RREO). Preparation of the meeting was done through close consultation and contribution from the CAADP ex Pillar IV Technical Committee. In particular, the Chair of the Committee, Max Olupot, provided inputs for the concept note by mobilizing the partners and developing the agenda.

The **TAP-AIS project**, *Developing Capacities in Agricultural Innovation Systems: scaling up the Tropical Agriculture Platform Framework,* implemented by FAO's Research and Extension Unit Office of Innovation (OINR), aims to support the transformation of national AIS, through strengthened regional and national research, extension and advisory, and education organizations, in particular the 'African CAADP ex-Pillar IV organizations' (AFAAS, ASARECA, CCARDESA, CORAF and FARA) as well as Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) and Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (APIRAS) in Asia and the Pacific, the Red Latinoamericana de Servicios de Extensíon Rural (RELASER) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) for the Forum of the Americas for Agricultural Research and Technological Development (FORAGRO) in Latin America and the Caribbean. The project is committed to provide technical support to CAADP ex-Pillar IV organizations and to strengthen their capacity to scale up this mission in Africa. However, implementation of regional actions in Africa is expected to be done in close collaboration and support from other DeSIRA projects. Therefore, the organization of this virtual consultative meeting with key partners to discuss and explore opportunities to identify synergies among DeSIRA projects implemented by CAADP XP4 organizations and IFAD, Agrinatura, GFAR and FAO, was very important.

The **main objectives** of the meeting included:

- Introduction of DeSIRA funded projects supporting RREOs in Africa;
- Presentation of key findings from regional and global Joint Rapid Appraisal (JRA) report by FAO and Capacity Gap (CG) analysis by CAADP XP4; and
- Identification of common entry points and areas of intervention for strengthening AIS among different DeSIRA projects.



The meeting was opened and moderated by Selvaraju Ramasamy, Head of the Research and Extension Unit, Office of Innovation of FAO, who welcomed participants and presented the objectives, agenda and speakers of the consultative meeting.

Guy Faure, European Commission, in his opening remarks gave an overview of the DeSIRA initiative globally and emphasised that over 80 projects – global, regional and national – are currently being financed to promote transformation of agriculture and food systems in low and middle-income countries.

Silim Nahdy, AFAAS, gave an opening address on behalf of the CAADP XP4 organizations and emphasized the timeliness of the meeting to share progress of the different DeSIRA projects and ensure future collaboration.

THE FOUR DESIRA PROJECTS

TAP-AIS (2019-2024). Selvaraju Ramasamy, FAO, presented the main elements of the project *"Developing Capacity in Agricultural Innovation Systems: scaling up the Tropical Agriculture Platform Framework"*. The project aims to strengthen AIS by promoting and scaling up the Common Framework on Capacity Development for AIS, by the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP). The project has the following four outputs.

Output 1, focuses on the governance of TAP, including support to the Secretariat hosted in FAO OINR. This includes: the organization of TAP Steering Committee meetings, TAP Partners Assemblies, coordination of the Capacity Development Expert Group (CDEG), the revision of the TAP Common Framework, the participation to G20 events and setting-up a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system.

Output 2, focuses on country level activities supporting nine countries (Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Eritrea, Lao PDR, Malawi, Pakistan, Rwanda and Senegal) to strengthen their capacities for innovation. Assessments of AIS has been completed in six countries, whilst organizational capacity needs assessments, identification of capacity development interventions and policy dialogue processes are currently ongoing.

Output 3, focuses on regional and sub-regional levels, the output aims at integrating TAP tools and approaches into RREOs in Africa, Asia and Latin America, including CAADP ex-Pillar IV organizations. The JRA by RREOs was carried out to identify gaps and entry points for strengthening capacity to innovate in all three regions. Based on the JRA, a joint agenda for action has been developed by RREOs, and they will be strategically supported by the project.

Output 4, focuses on awareness, knowledge exchange and communication activities across the project to reach out to more partners and stakeholders, and scale up the TAP Common Framework at global, regional and national levels. One of the mechanisms for this is TAPipedia, with more than 3 500 resources available online.

CAADP XP4 DeSIRA (2019-2023). Max Olupot, AFAAS (CAADP XP Technical Chair), introduced CAADP XP and Aggrey Agumya, FARA presented the project aimed at supporting the five CAADP XP4 organizations: AFAAS, ASARECA, CCARDESA, CORAF and FARA. The project has the overall objective of enabling agricultural research and innovation to contribute effectively to food and nutrition security, economic development and climate mitigation in Africa. The specific objective is to strengthen the five institutions to implement their mandates and their capacity to collaborate effectively in delivering CAADP results, through strengthened regional and international

partnerships, production and exchange of agricultural knowledge, effective communication and monitoring.

Mr Agumya presented the Theory of Change of the project and the main outcome which is to improve the mainstreaming of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) in the CAADP process and the immediate outcome which is to strengthen collaborative capacities of CAADP XP4 organizations to coordinate research and innovation.

DeSIRA LIFT (June 2021-May 2024). Helena Posthumus, Agrinatura, presented the overall objective of the DeSIRA-LIFT project which is to support the implementation of DeSIRA initiative to enhance its impacts. The specific objectives are:

- to support country-based DeSIRA project implementers to enhance their capacities to manage change-oriented interventions on climate-oriented innovation systems in line with sustainable agri-food systems transformations (Pillar 1);
- to support CAADP XP4 organizations, GFAR and TAP in promoting AIS (Pillar 2); and
- to make knowledge work for the EC policy [Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), EU delegations and their partners) and contribute to the policy dialogue on agri-food system transformations for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Pillar 3).

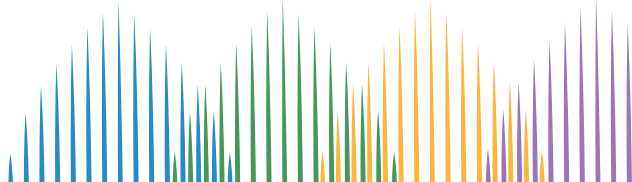
DeSIRA LIFT proposes on-demand and pre-defined support services to DeSIRA implementers, with the aim to meet their various capacity needs to achieve their roles and mandates in line with the objectives of the DeSIRA initiative, building on the Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS), the Platform for Africa-Europe Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) and other experiences. Under the Service area 2: the project will support CAADP XP4 organizations, GFAR and TAP in their respective AIS-related roles. DeSIRA LIFT will complement and add value to the EU-funded projects and initiatives managed by IFAD, TAP/FAO, GFAR, the One Planet Fellowship Programme and other partners. The next steps of the project include the finalization of:

- bilateral meetings with Sub Regional Organizations (SROs),
- Theory of Change and draft joint action plans with FARA, AFAAS and SROs; and
- knowledge management plan with CAADP XP4 organizations.

GFAR (2020-2024). Hildegard Lingnau, GFAR, briefly introduced GFAR, created in 1996 with the broad mandate to "mobilize stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development and support them in alleviating poverty, increase food security and promote more sustainable use of natural resources".

The objective of GFAR's DeSIRA project called *"Reconnect the world"* is to mobilize, develop and mentor innovative inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches that allow them to work collectively. More concretely, it aims to:

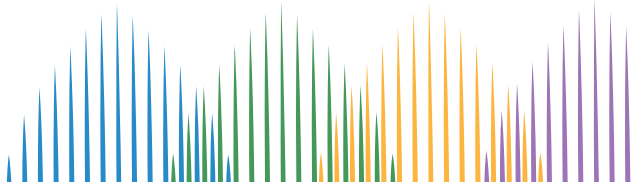
- empower farmers and communities at the center of innovation;
- turn knowledge and innovation into opportunity and enterprise;
- strengthen institutional architecture and capacity of agricultural research and innovation organizations, improve learning and enable dialogue among regions;
- integrate and strengthen knowledge management, policy advocacy, communication, impact-demonstration and investment in transformed agri-food innovation systems; and
- strengthen GFAR capacities and improve planning, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and learning.



The table below summarizes the outputs of each of the DeSIRA project that was presented at the meeting. The communalities across all four projects and potential areas of synergies are highlighted in orange.

Table 1. Summary of DeSIRA projects presented: potential areas for collaboration

DeSIRA project	OUTPUTS
TAP-AIS	1. TAP governance and Secretariat; 2. Strengthen National Agriculture Innovation Systems; 3. Scaling up TAP tools and approaches by integrating them into RREOs; and 4. Knowledge management and communication.
CAADP XP4	1. Strengthen the capacities of the individual continental and regional organizations in competencies needed for the successful implementation of the programme; 2. Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Innovation established and in operation; 3. Policies in support of climate relevant agriculture and food systems transformation formulated; investments increased, advocacy and market linkages strengthened; 4. Knowledge Management (KM) and Communication for decision support, sharing innovation and advocacy related to climate relevant agriculture transformation; and 5. Effective planning, coordination, MEL and reporting.
LIFT	**Service area 2: Support to CAADP XP4 organizations and partners:** 1. Assist CAADP XP4 organizations to enhance their capacities, and those of their member countries, to support and manage AIS that deliver impact; 2. Assist CAADP XP4 organizations to enhance their capacities, and those of their member countries, to provide effective input in the implementation of Malabo-CAADP commitments and the EU-Africa (EU-AU) cooperation in Research and Innovation(R&I) partnership on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA); 3. Strengthen linkages with the High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) – FNSSA process on the African Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) side; and 4. Provide support to develop effective, sustainable and long-lasting multi-stakeholder partnerships between African and European organizations which focus on AIS in the context of agri-food system transformations.
GFAR	1. Empower farmers and communities at the centre of innovation; 2. Turn knowledge and innovation into opportunity and enterprise; 3. Strengthen institutional architecture and capacity of agricultural research and innovation organizations, to improve learning and to enable dialogue among regions; 4. Integrate and strengthen knowledge management, policy advocacy, communication, impact-demonstration and investment in transformed agri-food innovation systems; and 5. Strengthen GFAR capacities and improve planning, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and learning.



PRESENTATIONS OF KEY FINDINGS FROM TWO STUDIES

Joint Rapid Appraisal on strengthening Agricultural Innovation Systems

Delgermaa Chuluunbaatar, FAO, presented the Joint Rapid Appraisal (JRA) study that was conducted between August 2020 and January 2021 by FAO together with RREOs in Africa Asia and Latin America, supported by Natural Resources Institute (NRI), Greenwich University. The JRA study in Africa was carried out by AFAAS and FARA jointly. The focus was to stock take and examine initiatives and approaches to facilitate and strengthen agricultural innovation processes. The main findings were presented as follows:

- Innovation requires a combination of multiple and complementary inputs by various players in the system to be sustainable. A comprehensive review is the first step to deliver the innovation and to identify areas (technological, social, market and political) that need strengthening.
- Investing in human capital and capacity development (functional and technical), rather than promoting specific innovations over others, is crucial to unleash innovation potential.
- Establishing and strengthening mechanisms to support informed policies, investments and planning; MEL systems to promote learning and reflection are key for scaling up innovation.
- Knowledge has a tacit component and it is therefore important to promote inclusive innovation processes which take into account indigenous and local knowledge.
- Interaction and feedback are at the centre of the innovation process; therefore putting in place an effective multi-stakeholder mechanisms involving private sector is needed.

In addition, there is a lack of policy and institutional instruments to bring actors to work together in an interdisciplinary context.

Krishan Bheenick, consultant, former FARA, pointed out the importance of documenting and learning from what had worked at national level. He also emphasized the need for continuous support and capacity development at the region level as well as linkage between regional and national intervention to ensure impact at the community level.

Samson Eshetu, AFAAS, emphasized that the methodology used was mostly qualitative and the alignment of the key findings of the JRA with the Capacity Gap Assessment by SRO and AFAAS provide the foundations to design joint capacity development areas among the different DeSIRA projects.

Capacity Gaps Assessment for ASARECA, CCARDESA and AFAAS

Enoch Warinda and Blaise Amony of ASARECA presented the main findings of the Capacity Gap Analysis on behalf of ASARECA, CCARDESA and AFAAS. Ms Blaise first informed participants of the five outputs of the CAADP XP4 DeSIRA project; the Capacity Gap Analysis was undertaken as part of Output 1, and implemented with the support of NRI. The stakeholders whose capacities were assessed were the board members of the three institutions (AFAAS, ASARECA and CCARDESA), ministries of agriculture, extension and advisory services, farmers, youth and women organizations. Other target groups included Regional Economic Communities[1], higher education institutions, NGOs and donors. Capacity Gaps (CG) were assessed using the TAP's 4+1 capacities to innovate 3 capacities domains (individual, organizational, and enabling environment), among others. Ms Blaise highlighted the main findings:

[1] https://au.int/en/organs/recs

- Recognition of the relevance of the organizations at regional and country level. This leads to the recommendation of mapping out local actors connected to the organizational mandates and increasing the engagement with potential partners from different sectors.
- Position the organizations as promoters of agricultural technology and innovation and develop the capacities of the staff to promote STI at country level.
- Position the organizations as promoters of gender and youth mainstreaming.
- Build on the diversity of the Boards of Directors to reach out to different sectors and build their capacity in resource mobilization.
- Organizational leadership, investment in staff and organizational culture, capacity development for the SROs.
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) was one weak area and it was recommended to organize training sessions on MEL.
- Finalize the Knowledge Management (KM) strategy in the institutions and prioritize KM activities as they support value positioning of the organizations.
- Policy analysis and formulation, focusing on harmonizing conflicting country-level policies to allow countries to collaborate on projects of mutual interest.
- Communication, branding and channels for feedback, need to be institutionalized.

The CGAs report was used to develop Capacity Strengthening Plans (CSPs) for the three institutions who are using these plans to address the gaps for an effective implementation of the CAADP XP4 Programme. However, not all gaps can be addressed this way; remaining CG could be addressed by other DeSIRA projects.

GROUP DISCUSSION ON COMMON ENTRY POINTS AND SYNERGIES FOR STRENGTHENING AIS AMONG DIFFERENT DeSIRA PROJECTS IN AFRICA

This session was facilitated by David Nielson, Advisor to the CAADP XP4. The session provided opportunity for participants to reflect on the two studies presented and to discuss common issues, challenges and opportunities for collaboration.

The participants joined three groups and discussed the following three questions:

1. *What are the key entry points to fill the gaps/issues at stake in strengthening AIS?*
2. *Who will take action - role of DeSIRA projects based on their project workplan and priorities?*
3. *How to create synergies and integration among DeSIRA projects (proposed joint actions, entry points and mechanisms for collaboration)?*

Each group moderator presented their group discussions and the following points were shared by the moderators, including the inputs received through virtual boards. The table below summarizes the main ideas shared.

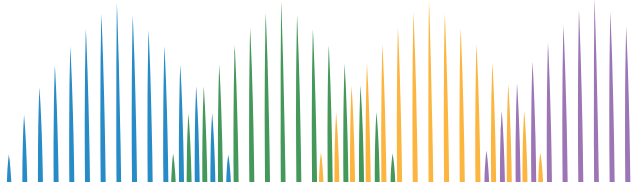


Table 2: Summary of group discussions

1. Key gaps at stake in strengthening AIS

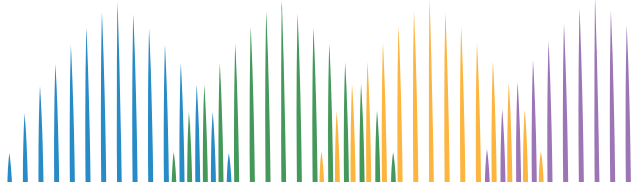
- ⇒ Recognition of each CAADP XP4 institutions – importance of strengthening their capacity to support and promote AIS approach in Africa.
- ⇒ Limited understanding and clarity on innovation system approach: promoting and articulating common AIS concepts and capacity development framework such as TAP is needed.
- ⇒ Weak collaboration and coordination at multiple levels: multi-stakeholder perspectives and processes are needed to promote more integrated and holistic approaches at country level.
- ⇒ Limited facilitation of co-creation of innovation, co-learning, inclusion of farmers in innovation processes: empowerment of the weakest stakeholders to speak up in the fora of agricultural research, policy dialogues and related power balances/imbalances.
- ⇒ Insufficient inter-operable KM across organizations: KM should be seen as cross cutting and connection between different KM systems need to be strengthened.
- ⇒ Lack of evidence of impact on capacity development interventions: RREOs operate at regional level but impact happens at country level - tracking that evidence is not easy. Putting in place MEL mechanisms to monitor capacity changes at various levels.

2. Main entry points to strengthen AIS in Africa

- ⇒ Promote and mainstream the TAP approach for capacity development among SROs, National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES) and higher education institutions in Africa.
- ⇒ Putting in place effective mechanisms to facilitate document and sharing lessons learned and joint knowledge product development.
- ⇒ Strengthening of multi-stakeholder processes and partnerships at various levels including North-South and South-South. At national level, inclusion of diverse groups of actors as well as beneficiaries (incl. gender, youth and private sector) need to be embedded in AIS processes.
- ⇒ Engage relevant national stakeholders in promoting AIS approach and integrating system approach in national agri-food policies and investment plans.
- ⇒ Developing training materials, tools and guides for facilitators, taking advantage of e-Learning, and other resources on documenting processes, managing a training/capacity building of institutions.
- ⇒ Promote and establish national level innovation networks of relevant actors.
- ⇒ Co-hosting of high-level policy dialogues or other national, sub-regional and continental dialogues to promote AIS approach.

3. Proposed actions to support CAADP XP4 organizations

- ⇒ Put in place communication mechanisms among the organizations implementing the four projects in partnership with CAADP XP4 organizations, to facilitate synergies and collaboration among them (e.g. regular joint meetings, trainings).
- ⇒ Developing a database of experts with relevant experience and skills to act as trainers and facilitators for innovation and collaboration between the North and the South. The database made available to partners to respond to emerging calls.
- ⇒ Enhancing capacities of CAADP XP4 and their partner organizations on resource mobilization, and make their voices more prominent with donors.
- ⇒ Reinforcing CAADP XP4 organizations and other relevant agencies, their positioning, renewed relevance in strengthening AIS in Africa, and provide financial and technical support.
- ⇒ Establish staff exchange programmes between institutions.



CONVERGING ISSUES

- The two assessments provide many entry points. The next step is to decide how these will be addressed, and by whom. Developing a joint action plan will help to address the priority areas identified and this mechanism will seek to harmonize and look at synergies between projects.
- The importance of leadership was stressed: CAADP XP4 have formed working groups and have assigned lead organizations for different areas.
- Harmonization of the systems thinking and AIS concept is needed among DeSIRA projects to ensure all partners use the coordinated approach in their interventions. Participants acknowledged that TAP Common Framework for capacity development for innovation serves this purpose well and should be promoted among partners.
- Facilitating co-creation of innovation, and institutionalizing and strengthening facilitation skills are needed.
- Taking harmonized approach and common voice for policy level dialogues and interventions among DeSIRA projects to avoid duplication and misunderstanding.
- Collaboration and coordination among partners is very important. For effective collaboration we need common goals, we need to know each other, build relationships and trust.

WAY FORWARD

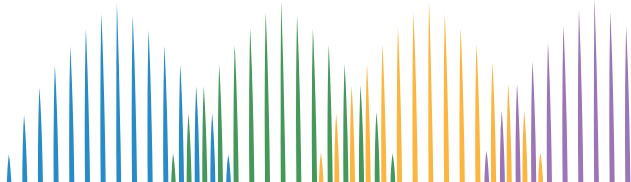
From the group work and following plenary discussion, the following eight messages were shared by Selvaraju Ramasamy:

1. Develop a common, shared understanding of the innovation systems approach through revised TAP Common Framework.
2. Enhance joint action to promote knowledge management and dissemination of good practices around AIS through TAPipedia.
3. Policy dialogue and related processes on AIS for policy-level support and investments through country projects.
4. Develop facilitation skills at country level to make the process locally driven, including multi-stakeholder innovation platforms.
5. Coordination of DeSIRA actions by implementers at multiple levels: country, regional and global.
6. Integration of functional and technical capacities, including understanding functional capacities in different technical contexts.
7. Broader cooperation beyond DeSIRA, with close engagement of RREOs and achieving Malabo declaration and its targets.
8. Joint resource mobilization by the partners for further strengthening capacity of CAADP XP4 organizations.

The collaborative way forward for the four DeSIRA projects involves:

- periodic meetings among the DeSIRA project partners;
- aligning the work plans with the CAADPXP4 priorities to avoid duplication and pool resources;
- integration of activities of the DeSIRA project partners relevant to the priorities identified in the JRA and CAADP Capacity Needs Assessment reports into the TAP Action Plan (2022-2025); and
- DeSIRA LIFT can provide new opportunities to further support the partners within DeSIRA.

The meeting was closed by Yemi Akinbamijo (FARA) and by Guy Faure (European Commission) who emphasized the importance of the meeting to ensure cooperation between DeSIRA projects and to bridge the gaps highlighted from the studies. They thanked FAO for organizing the meeting.



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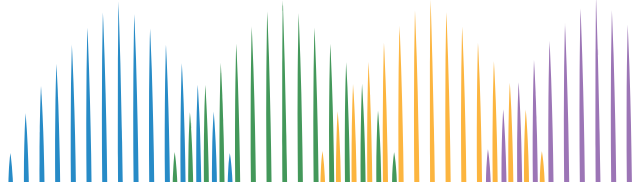

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