

SCARDA in Institutional Development Initiatives in Rwanda and Burundi

SUMMARY

Under the SCARDA project, ASARECA, RUFORUM and PICO team have partnered in Capacity Development initiatives in Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan. Recently, design and learning workshops were conducted at ISAR in Rwanda and ISABU in Burundi as part of the capacity building initiative. The learnings from the design workshops helped to focus the program on those leadership and management issues that were of highest priority to the staff and Management and using an approach that allowed dynamic unravelling of issues, open, candid discussions and co-creation of solutions. Some of the areas that dominated the workshops in both FIs were: staff motivation as a performance enhancer; enhancing skills for personal and organizational visioning and strategic thinking; feedback as a means of improving quality of communication and effectiveness of teams (including its application in the context of staff performance management); role of mentoring and coaching in enhancing individual/personal development, performance improvement overall career development and in creating a cadre of next generation leaders and managers; and situational performance management. Other areas identified were time management, and resource mobilization. The development of specific tools for addressing these and other areas was started, peer learning groups were formed around some of these issues and further development will continue in the second learning workshops. In both Rwanda and Burundi, staff and Management were facilitated to see on-going organizational changes (re-structuring in Rwanda and Strategic Planning process in Burundi) as presenting not just challenges but also significant opportunities for making the changes that are needed to address the current organizational bottlenecks and to enhance overall performance and impacts. Staff appreciated the role they need to play to effectively engage in these change processes.

1. BACKGROUND

The SCARDA Programme goal is: **“strengthening the institutional and human capacity of African Agricultural Research and Development systems to identify, generate and deliver research outputs that meet the needs of poor people.”** SCARDA has two components of strengthening (a) Competencies and capacity in agricultural research management, and (b) Capacity for professional development in agricultural research and development. While the project has several sub-components, the ASARECA-RUFORUM-PICOTEAM focus on improving research management (thrust 1) and mentorship (thrust 3) for three National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs), to fulfill their mandates of responding to contemporary agricultural research for development imperatives. Focal Institutions (FIs) are Agricultural Research Corporation in Sudan (ARC), Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Burundi (ISABU) and Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Rwanda (ISAR).

2. THE SCARDA-ECA APPROACH

The SCARDA-ECA PICO learning process includes identification of key issues/challenges which are then assigned to teams (e.g. peer learning groups) and individuals to address, using principles acquired during the group learning sessions. Lessons learned in the ‘practice and problem solving processes’ are then shared with the broader participant groups. The design of this learning is built on the concept of ‘systemic competence development’, where theory, practice and coaching support are integrated in one coherent learning process, supporting directly the performance on the job by participants. The aim of the learning

workshops is to gain a better understanding of trends and related concepts and their implications, and the development of practical strategies and skills to enable participants to develop the know-how to engage effectively with new approaches in addressing the leadership and management challenges they face. Due to the complex nature of current changes facing managers and leaders and the fact that there are no blueprints in dealing with change processes, participants are not “trained” to carry out certain activities, but rather equipped with basic principles and inspired and motivated to explore practical ways of dealing with their own situations as issues arise in their day to day work. Each participant develops the basis for practical action based on the basic principles learned. The potentials for peer coaching and exchange are explored. The learning programme focuses on five key competence areas in the management of research organizations and programs. In each of these areas, participants are expected to gain, over time, a level of proficiency that will enable them to professionalize their engagement in change in their organisations and to improve their overall performance as leaders and managers.

The five competence areas are summarized in the diagram below.



In addition to these broad areas, the interventions identified - during the initial scoping missions and subsequently in the first round of interactions with ISAR and ISABU - the following specific soft skills are considered:

- a. Enhanced **responsiveness** and commitment of purpose by managers (including through introducing **business thinking** and practice)
- b. Greater ‘big picture thinking’, including ability to identify, analyze and harness opportunities and challenges traditionally not captured in ‘project thinking’
 - Sharper focus on outcomes and impacts (not just activities and outputs)
 - Value-based, results-focused program development and implementation
 - Visioning, mission- and goal-setting
- c. Increased proactive management of multi-stakeholder arrangements through facilitating project/program development and implementation processes and using

- these as platforms to strengthen (project design and implementation) capacities of researchers and research managers
- d. Inculcating feedback culture in teams
 - e. Mentoring and coaching as vehicles for change and enhanced performance

The main focus was is on sharing of experiences, generating and developing further innovative solutions to the challenges participants face in their real life working situations and fostering the initiative and commitment to try out some new ideas which are within the scope and span of control of the participants. The workshop approach emphasizes interactive learning methodologies, experiential learning, self-reflection / analysis on the professional situation and one's own role, group dynamics and team building. The approach has a strong focus on **identifying solutions that can be achieved with what is or can (with innovative thinking) be made available; and helps to foster a strong solution-focus and departure from the common tendency to retire to hopelessness modes when faced with problems at work.**

Key learnings from the workshops in Rwanda and Burundi

A. Cross-cutting issues/areas

The work environment: In their characterization of the general work environment, participants' lack of appreciation and motivation in the organizational work environment was a major gap. For example, asked when they last received an appreciation from their supervisors some participants responded that 'this happened quite a long time ago' (months, or more than a year!) whereas the majority could not even remember. Moreover, they reported that when feedback is given, it is done in a non-motivating style. Staff presented a picture of a preponderance of 'corrective' or 'negative' feedback, with little validating positive feedback; thus, defensive communication is common phenomena in the organizational environments. Participants also clearly presented a general lack of motivation – material and non-material - in the system. The discussions pointed to underutilised human potential within both ISAR and ISABU, a situation which can, in large part, be attributed to lack of a proactive supportive culture in these organizations. The specific issues were:

- **Lack of appreciation and motivation.** A fair block of workshop time was spent on developing the concepts and tools and facilitating participants to practice on how to appreciate and motivate their colleagues, supervisors and those who report to them
- **Feedback** as a tool for improving communication, validating staff enhancing and enhancing overall performance and: Rules for giving and receiving feedback were introduced and participants were given multiple opportunities to practice the techniques for effective giving and receiving feedback.
- The above were combined with some inputs on best practices regarding staff motivation and on individual dispositions for improving internal communication in the organization, including in the context of staff performance management. Importantly, **peer learning (and Change project)** groups were established with a number focusing on practising feedback and on developing a feedback culture within teams and the organization as a whole.
- **Mentoring and coaching:** Participants explored the concepts of mentoring and coaching and learned how the mentor can support the mentee – e.g. personnel they supervise or other colleagues in their teams or in the organization. The learning workshops were used NOT to mentor individuals but to facilitate the introduction of mentoring and coaching into these organizations

with the expectation (and plans to be developed) that a large number of staff will be mentored by colleagues over time in a process supported (during the SCARDA project) by PICOTEAM. Some peer learning groups established during the workshop will focus on how to develop a mentoring and coaching culture within the organizations.

B. Specific gaps and proposed interventions: Some of the key gaps identified during the workshop and which were subsequently developed into peer learning group (PLG) thematic areas or 'change projects' (CPs) are summarized in the table below.

Key issue/area	Organization (FI)	Action*
Strategic management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to enhance capacity to influence top management and policy makers ○ How to effectively align research to national policies ○ How to decentralise decision making within the organization 	ISAR & ISABU	PLG & PC
Feedback as a tool for supporting good performance, practices, behaviour and improving performance at individual level and strengthening spirit of team work	ISAR & ISABU	PLG
Mentoring and coaching as tools for technical and leadership capacity development in organizations and teams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	ISAR & ISABU	PLG
Proactive resource mobilization beyond the national public sector sources	ISAR & ISABU	PLG
Improving human resource development , (e.g. through staff motivation and recruitment of personnel according to merits and qualification)	ISABU	PLG
Improving scientific writing skills	ISAR	PLG
Improving technical publication capacity	ISAR	CP
Research planning and tracking (including M	ISAR	PLG & CP
Interfacing with end-users for impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to better respond to farmers' needs? ○ What institutional changes are needed for increasing impact? ○ How to develop and strengthen participatory research? 	ISAR & ISABU	PLG PLG

Improving efficiency in procurement procedures	ISAR	CP
New Research and Extension organizational structure (in the context of the on-going re-organization (ISAR) or planning process (ISABU))	ISAR & ISABU	CP CP

**PLG= Peer learning group; CP=Change project. The PLG and CP teams undertook to perform specific tasks (and they will be supported as needed by the facilitators) and progress made will be reported and discussed at the next learning workshop. PLG and CP are processes driven by self appointed teams to ensure that the learning and sharing continues (PLG) or that a process for changing ways of doing business is designed and implemented in an organization.*

- In addition to the PLG and CP tasks, participants committed themselves to individual areas for personal development – which they would like to focus on during the period leading to the next learning workshop. The common areas identified in both ISAR and ISABU were:

- My management style
- How can I interact with others better – i.e. self confidence
- How can I give and receive feedback
- How strategic I am in use of my time -Time management
- Improving my ability to develop my personal vision
- How I can motivate others
- How I can facilitate others to grow – i.e. mentoring and coaching

Overall, we see the inculcation of cultures of mentoring and coaching, feedback and business thinking (including being proactive) as being areas with significant potential in both ISAR and ISABU. Progress in these areas should help unleash the leadership and management potential in these organizations.

Country-specific context issues

A. Rwanda:

- A major institutional change process is starting across agricultural service institutions in Rwanda. Research (ISAR) and the crop and livestock extension services are being brought under one organization. At the same time, research will be decentralized and the new 'Zones' (geographically defined units) will be the drivers and core implementers of research (and extension). This means the challenges for the research systems have changed. The major challenge of all is how to make the new system function in a way that it really delivers research outputs into a system which demands them and makes use of them. The new roles and responsibilities and the working modalities, including client-orientation approaches need to be developed. As we prepared for the first learning workshop, we were fully aware that our strategy had to take into account this changed context. Specifically that we had to adopt a change process intervention underpinned by sound learning of basic principles underlying processes of change. As we expected, the issues and concerns emerging from the re-organization process came up in various forms and significant time was devoted to addressing these in a 'change management framing'. Indeed, any attempt to 'teach management principles in the traditional textbook approach' would have failed as the minds of people in ISAR are currently pre-occupied with these change dynamics. A change project was defined during the workshop specifically to develop a mechanism for engaging top ISAR Management in addressing what managers see as challenges and opportunities presented by the on-going re-

organization and how ISAR can position itself to capture these opportunities. Unfortunately, despite our desire to do so, it was not possible – due to internal reasons - to include representatives from the extension service in the learning workshops in the period that was available to organize the workshops. This has been flagged as an important matter that needs to be addressed before the second learning workshop.

B. Burundi:

Organisational change: Organisational change is currently on ISABU's agenda. Supported by an institutional support project funded by Belgian Technical Cooperation, the *strategic planning process* is still at a relatively early stage. Participants were facilitated during the learning workshop through a process of reflection on how they can play an active and constructive role in the ongoing change process. This was preceded by a presentation of the Belgian institutional support project and how the change process is being envisaged. This presentation outlined the process. It will start with an organizational audit to be conducted in January followed by the elaboration of a research master plan. Both processes will be supported by international consultants. These will be opportunities for the ISABU staff (especially the managers) to actively engage in the change process. To facilitate the constructive engagement process, participants were helped through a process of identifying the key values and principles that should underpin the ongoing change process. Many issues came up in relation to the change process; not all could be addressed during the workshop but the discussions provided opportunity for fears, concerns and uncertainties to be expressed in constructive ways. The outputs of the discussions provide valuable material for senior Management in their design of the change process; participants committed to an on-going engagement in the coming months, through to the next learning workshop. There was recognition that ISABU managers needed to 'hold change by the hand', otherwise 'change would grab them by their legs ...'

Opportunities. There is good opportunity for the institutional support project funded by Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) to align with and be complemented by the learnings in the SCARDA project. Discussions with the principals behind the BTC explored the possibility for resources to be availed through the BTC project to support additional learning workshops to be conducted beyond the two funded by SCARDA. The prospects for this look good. This would facilitate a comprehensive capacity development for leadership and management in ISABU in a process that at the same time would support the critical stages of the on-going change process.

The new Director General of ISABU participated almost fully in the learning workshop. The impact of his presence was phenomenal: it served as a message that ISABU took the workshop seriously and expected staff to do the same. And the result was seen in attendance and the sense of commitment and enthusiasm. Having a new DG at this time and one who is serious about change for improved performance is a big opportunity for ISABU.

Key learnings and achievements to date

- a) **Developing a mentoring and coaching framework.** Mentoring and coaching (M & C) are processes – not events. When working with individuals and teams who have not previously had a formal M & C culture, it takes time to establish the understanding to a point where individuals volunteer to be mentors. Participants tend to be reluctant to take on the responsibility of nurturing others and only gradually can individuals develop a relationship that leads to productive mentoring and coaching arrangement. This is exactly what has emerged in this project so far. Both ISAR and ISABU have not had a culture of M & C; and staff had not understood what M & C entailed. Following the introduction there was a lot of excitement about the possibilities M & C has for personal development; however, not many persons could immediately see themselves as mentors. In any case mentoring and coaching only works if the mentee chooses their mentors or enthusiastically accepts one suggested for them – based on the inspirational impact the latter has had on the former. So, it is not a matter of ‘assigning’ mentees to mentors. For that reason, participants were given time to consider their personal development needs, the persons they know who could help them develop and to initiate the process of identifying mentors. The key principles in this process were developed in the workshops. See box 1 below.
- b) **Developing a feedback culture in the FIs:** The principles and practice of feedback as a key tool in strengthening communication among staff and increasing team work and effectiveness was appreciated and taken on board in both ISAR and ISABU. This is to be re-enforced during the second learning workshop to ensure that the appreciation translates to cultural change in the organizations.
- c) The intervention strategy – a learning workshop which allows priority management issues to surface and to be addressed – allowed a critical link to be created between the management and leadership capacity development and the on-going change process in ISAR as well as the development of a new strategy in ISABU. Indeed, implications for leadership and management of the change process became dominant elements in the framing of the various topics – moving back and forth from the organizational to the personal levels. Participants got to understand the dynamics of organisational change and identified possible roles they can play as individuals and collectively in the on-going change processes being underpinned by a set of principles and values.
- d) The learning workshops touched some very deep issues in these organizations, issues which if tackled can turn around the functioning and performance of the whole organization. A stage is set so that, with serious engagement by senior management, prospects are excellent for major changes to occur.
- e) Special attention was and will continue to be given to the following specific areas:
- i. Visioning – personal and organizational: participants are being facilitated to develop the capacity to articulate their visions and to be strategic in their outlook
 - ii. Team development, managing interpersonal relations and conflict management
 - iii. Mentoring: the ability to facilitate the growth of others – colleagues and subordinates
 - iv. Facilitation, visualization skills and self confidence