



Deutscher Tropentag, October 11-13, 2005, Hohenheim

“The Global Food & Product Chain—
Dynamics, Innovations, Conflicts, Strategies”

Impact Orientation of Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa

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Abstract

The development and management of food chains is a priority in many developing countries. Its driving forces are urbanisation, growing market shares of supermarkets and the demand on agricultural research to contribute more to creating wealth among the rural poor. Those who want to develop or optimise food chains depend on knowledge and services from agricultural research such as market information or technology and management options that are required to meet international grades and standards. Serving their needs requires a renewed culture of impact orientation.

In January 2005, twenty senior researchers from ten national agricultural research institutes (NARIs) in Eastern and Central Africa met, to deliberate on how research institutes could increase the probability of achieving development impact with their research. The development of food chains, value addition and competitiveness of agricultural production are priorities in the region that call for new partnerships and alliances since other actors also influence knowledge and innovation. They require approaches that combine science with the development and adaptation of technology and link up to comprehensive commercial strategies. The participants asked: “How would one recognise an agricultural research institute that is impact-oriented? What would it ideally look like?” They came up with a range of characteristics and found that impact orientation rests on four key pillars:

Pillar 1: Client Orientation and Policy Dialogue (social demand).

Pillar 2: Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Impact Assessment.

Pillar 3: Management of Research Resources.

Pillar 4: Management of Linkages and Partnerships with Stakeholders.

NARIs in the region demonstrate different levels of impact orientation. While some are well ahead in one area, they are also deficient in others. The paper presents a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to impact orientation in the 10 member countries of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA). Opportunities for sharing of experiences and forging of networks to tackle common interests are explored.

Keywords: Impact orientation, research management