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Enhancing Agricultural Productivity in Sub-saharan Africa through IAR4D and Competitive Grants Processes: Experiences and Lessons

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Abstract

Revitalizing agricultural research in Africa will require addressing issues like demand-led approaches, accountability, and building of critical mass, avoidance of duplication, sustainable financing and capacity strengthening. The emergence of Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D) as a basis for conducting research has presented an opportunity to address sub-Saharan Africa's persistent problems in new ways. IAR4D involves an innovative set of principles, an integrated research agenda, and a recognised need for greater organisational capacities and flexibility among research partners. Research is not merely intended to develop and escort new technologies to farmers but also empower farmers to better understand and respond to changing circumstances as they emerge. Competitive funding has been widely adopted as one mechanism of encouraging institutional innovation and change necessary for implementing research using the IAR4D paradigm. Research funding is moving away from open-ended institutional support towards a performance-based system where the research aims, and plans for research implementation, are developed and decided in the context of agreed priorities and value-based criteria. This situation has warranted assertive action for promoting complementary mechanisms of financing agricultural research that attracts financial resources through evidence of capability to deliver against set targets to a standard that meets the expectations of all stakeholders. Agricultural research systems must communicate better with other parties in the agricultural sector, critically question their own goals and strategies and develop the capability to showcase the contribution they make to rural development more evidently. The emerging evidence is that with careful planning and conscious commitment, competitive funding can be meaningfully harnessed to change the manner in which agricultural research is conducted and lead the transformation process necessary to turn Africa around.

Keywords: ASARECA, Competitive Grants, FARA, IAR4D, SROs, sub-Saharan Africa