



Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa

Association pour le Renforcement de la Recherche Agricole en Afrique Orientale et Centrale

ASARECA Research Grants Management System

CALL FOR CONCEPT NOTES: Ref ASARECA_RC09_PROG7-02

Upscaling and Knowledge Management Programme

Please read and note well:

1. It is essential that those persons and organisations competing for funds of the ASARECA grants thoroughly read all parts of the following document.
2. Persons and organisations competing for funds under this Research Call, **Ref ASARECA_RC09_PROG7-02**, must strictly adhere to the stipulations given for compliance for competition. Failure to meet these specifications will make the submission non-compliant and will irrevocably eliminate the submission from the competition.
3. The guidelines provided for Concept Note (CN) preparation should be carefully followed.
4. A CN must be prepared using the outline format that is provided in this Research Call
5. It is permissible for potential competitors who have queries concerning the compliance stipulations, other requirements and technical details of this Research Call to contact the Programme Manager for clarification. All queries should be submitted by email addressed to l.kimenye@asareca.org.
6. **The deadline date for electronic submission of CN is 31st July 2009. CNs received after this date will not be included in the competition.**
7. The decisions taken as a result of the review process will be notified to the Principal Investigator of each CN submission latest **by 31st August 2009**.
8. CN submissions should be made to: Programme Manager Upscaling and Knowledge Management, ASARECA Secretariat, Plot 5 Mpigi Road , PO Box 765 Entebbe, Uganda; Email: l.kimenye@asareca.org

1. Requirements for Compliance

The following criteria **MUST** be met in order for a Concept Note to be eligible for the competitive evaluation process of the ASARECA Research Grants System:

Requirement 1: The research must be undertaken in at least **three ASARECA member countries**.

Requirement 2: The research must be undertaken by at least **four organisations working in the Eastern and Central Africa**, variously located in the three chosen member countries (for compliance with Requirement 1), that agree to work in partnership on the proposed research. There must **be at least one participating organisation in each of the three specified member countries**.

*Requirement 3: **Letters of firm intent to participate*** in the proposed research, as defined in a submitted Concept Note, written on the letterhead of each of the four or more participating organisations addressed to the lead organisation (that submits the CN), MUST be attached to the hard copy of the submitted Concept Note.

Requirement 4: The CN **MUST** not exceed **seven (7) pages, 1.5 spacing and font size 12**. There must be strict adherence to the number of pages that is specified for each section.

2. Overarching Guiding Principles for Concept Note Preparation

- 2-1. ***CN Format:*** The outline format for the CN provided in the call must be used for preparation of Concept Notes.
- 2-3. ***The proposed Principal Investigator:*** The CN requires specification of the Principal Investigator (PI) for the proposed research. This person must be a staff member of the organisation that is prepared to take lead responsibility for the research, should it compete successfully. She/he would be the person who would lead and coordinate the research project, should the CN be selected and become a commissioned project.
- 2-4. ***CN submission – electronic:*** The deadline date for electronic submission of CNs is 31st July 2009. The submission should be a single file with the file name: ASAR_RC09_PROG7-02_CN xxx_zzz.doc, where xxx refers to the last name of the PI as stated in the CN and zzz refers to the acronym of the lead organisation named on the CN.
- 2.5. ***CN submission – hard copy:*** An identical hard copy of the CN submitted as an e-file must reach the ASARECA Secretariat within 10 days after the deadline date for e-file CN submission. This copy must have attached the letters of firm intent to participate in the proposed research of each of the four or more participating organisations (refer requirements for compliance, *requirement 3*). In addition, it must contain the original covering letter indicating willingness to lead the implementation and management of the proposed research signed on headed notepaper by a senior authority in the organisation of the named PI.
- 2.6. ***Seeking advice:*** Persons planning to compete on this Call may contact the Programme Manager, Upscaling and Knowledge Management for advice and assistance if required. This includes requesting some assistance with identifying potential collaborators.
- 2.7 ***Evaluation of CN:*** The key criteria that will be used to assess the CN will include: research problem interpretation; innovativeness in the design, approach and methodology proposed for addressing the problem; the multi-disciplinarity of the partnerships, the complementarity of role/functions of the different partners; the value added and upscalability of the approach used as well as the results. Involvement and opportunity to impact on youth, women and vulnerable groups would also be considered in the evaluation

3. Background-Overview of ASARECA

The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) is a non-political not-for-profit sub-regional organisation (SRO) of the *National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS)*¹ in the ten countries of Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) – *Burundi, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan,*

¹ / In this document the term *National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS)* refers to the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs), Universities, and any other organisations in the NGO and private sectors that may engage with NARIs and Universities in collaborative work.

Tanzania, and Uganda. ASARECA serves as a platform for promoting regional collaborative research to address trans-national problems and sharing of benefits and spillovers arising from such research, thereby adding value to what can be achieved at national level. The Mission of ASARECA is to “*enhance regional collective action in agricultural research for development, extension and agricultural training and education to promote economic growth, fight poverty, eradicate hunger and enhance sustainable use of resources in Eastern and Central Africa.*” ASARECA has five results:

1. Performance driven gender sensitive governance and management structures and systems established and operational
2. Generation and uptake of demand driven agricultural technologies and innovations facilitated
3. Policy options for enhancing the performance of the agricultural sector in the ECA sub-region facilitated
4. Capacity for gender responsive agricultural research for development in the ECA region strengthened
5. Availability of information on agricultural innovation enhanced

ASARECA delivers its research through seven research programmes: Staple Crops; Non-staple Crops; Agro-biotechnology and Biodiversity; Livestock and Fisheries; Natural Resource Management and Forestry; Policy Analysis and Advocacy; Up-scaling and Knowledge Management.

The Upscaling and Knowledge Management Programme is responsible, for delivery on the farmer empowerment objective in the Comprehensive African Agricultural Productivity Programme CAADP Pillar IV, which ASARECA is committed to implement. The purpose of the Upscaling and Knowledge Management Programme is “*enhanced utilization of agricultural technologies and knowledge in eastern and central Africa*”. It has four results:

1. Uptake and upscaling of selected demand driven technologies in ECA sub-region catalyzed
2. Capacity of the NARES in the ECA sub-region to scale up agricultural innovations strengthened
3. Availability of knowledge and information on scaling up agricultural innovations in the ECA sub-region enhanced

THE RESEARCH CALL: ASARECA_RC09_PROG7-02

Title: Farmer empowerment for enhanced agricultural productivity and growth in eastern and central Africa (ECA)

1. Introduction

Capacity building in agricultural development has always focused on research and extension institutions and very little attention has so far been given to farmer organizations yet these represent the demand side of agricultural knowledge and technologies. In the past, cooperatives were the main organizational arrangements that represented farmers' issues especially with respect to input and output markets. With failure of cooperatives in many eastern and central Africa (ECA) countries, farmer organizations in various forms and hierarchy levels have emerged as key institutional innovations through which smallholders can improve access to productive assets and services and hope to be competitive in a world of value chains and globalization. However, farmer organizations in the sub-region are weak and lack capacity as institutions to play these roles effectively. Organizational development is therefore a critical prerequisite to overall farmer empowerment.

Farmer empowerment is defined as “a process for ensuring that people [farmers] have the highest possible self-drive for initiating and facilitating their development”². In smallholder agricultural development, empowerment is a precondition for developing demand-driven agricultural services; efficient use of public resources and enabling farmers to be more potent actors in value chains and in other areas that influence their livelihood³. Farmer empowerment is one of the objectives of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Productivity Program (CAADP) Pillar IV, which ASARECA is committed to deliver within the ECA sub-region.

2. The problem

ASARECA seeks to support interventions that aim to strengthen farmer organizations (FOs) and empower smallholder farmers in ECA to make them more active participants successfully integrated in agricultural value chains. This requires developing capacity of FOs transforming them into strong institutions able to deliver valuable demand driven services to their members. However, successful institutional development of farmer organizations is not easy. Farmer organizations in the sub-region face a variety of challenges. Many of the challenges stem from weak institutional structures and leadership, lack of managerial, technical capacity and skills in a variety of areas. These weaknesses are manifested in bottlenecks such as; inability to effectively engage in high value chains and for effective participation in high level negotiations, limited capacity for managing a heterogeneous membership and resolving conflict between efficiency and equity⁴. Other related bottlenecks include lack of member-based ownership and trust;

² Inwent and IFAD, 2006

³ Neuchatel Initiative, 2004

⁴ World Development Report, 2008

leadership that is not accountable to membership and inability to organize and utilise collective advantage to influence input-output markets among others.⁵

Due to the systemic nature of these bottlenecks, conventional piece-meal approaches to farmer empowerment and organizational strengthening, which attempt to address them as if they were independent of each other, cannot yield meaningful results. Alternative innovative approaches able to address these bottlenecks in a holistic and systemic manner are therefore needed.

The Upscaling and Knowledge Management Programme of ASARECA seeks concept notes for a regional project to facilitate strengthening of national and sub-regional farmer organizations (FO) with a focus on organizational development and enhancing their capacity to empower farmers to be potent actors in value chains. The project would also aim to generate best-bet approaches and solid outcome analyses for scaling up.

3. Objectives

- i. Analyse and synthesize the strength, weakness, opportunity and threats (SWOT) of the target farmer organizations in ECA to understand their current status, the environment in which they operate and determine specific organizational development challenges to be addressed;
- ii. Assist the target national farmer organizations and the Eastern African Farmers Federation (EAFF) to undertake their organizational development and to develop capacity to overcome bottlenecks hindering their effectiveness;
- iii. Test, validate and recommend model(s) a for holistic approach to farmer organizational development and empowerment in ECA;
- iv. establish an institutional map and directory of organizations involved in farmer organizational development in the sub-region and facilitate the creation of a pool of competent resource persons capable of facilitating and supporting farmer organizational development & empowerment with appropriate institutional arrangements for sustainability;
- v. generate solid outcome analyses of farmer organizations in ECA sub-region that demonstrate organizational development and empowerment as a result of the proposed intervention

4. Method and Approach

While a key result of the project is to have cases of strengthened farmer organizations, the proposed intervention has to be conceived as an action research and learning activity expected to generate lessons and recommendations on alternative holistic approaches to farmer organizational development and empowerment. Therefore, the concept notes should be designed with a regional perspective and learning orientation to generate lessons with opportunities for spillovers across the sub-region.

However, because the farmer organizational bottlenecks are systemic, the concept note (CN) must address the need for a holistic and systemic approach to the development of capacities that enable

⁵ A report of workshop to determine critical needs for strengthening farmers' organization sin ECA is available on the ASARECA website www.asareca.org

FOs undertake their reform processes. Such a process will have to take into account the unique contexts and needs of the targeted farmer organizations. The mechanisms for determining the unique contexts and needs of target FOs should be integrated into the project design and be part of activities in the early phase in the project implementation plan.

Furthermore, to ensure sustainable farmer organizational development and empowerment, availability of competent human resource pool to facilitate processes both at national and sub-regional levels would have to be considered in developing the methodology. Similarly, a directory of organizations involved in farmer organizational development and empowerment would be valuable information for FOs in the sub-region. An appropriate methodology for implementation of this initiative will have to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- a) *Ensuring a good understanding of the current status of the target FOs, the policy environment in which they operate and their specific organizational development and empowerment needs.* The methodology will need to include an in-depth situational analysis and synthesis of the target FOs in order to understand their current status in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) as well as the environment in which they operate. Such analyses are critical in identifying an FO's unique needs for organizational strengthening and in establishing benchmarks to assess outcomes of the intervention;
- b) *Ownership by the targeted partners.* How the relevance and ownership of the intervention by all partners will be created must be portrayed in the types of participatory processes that will be proposed in the methodology. The methodology must show that targeted FOs are seen to be driving the initiative with clear vision of the anticipated results. This calls for inclusion of mechanisms that demonstrate active engagement with the relevant partners, especially the target FOs right from the design through implementation to evaluation. The types of partners and their roles in the proposed intervention would have to be clearly stated and justified;
- c) *Experiential learning.* The design of the project should bear in mind that organizational development involves a reform process often embedded in action learning where the farmer organizations are supported to progressively move from where they are to the desired levels. Thus, the methodology must portray an iterative learning process characterized by for example, activities for development of requisite competencies for farmer organization development and empowerment, creating opportunities for practicing, reflection etc to generate confidence and providing for technical backstopping, coaching and mentoring into the process. The methodology should provide for continuous participatory critical reflection and analysis of the processes and outcomes in order to draw lessons for enhancing success;
- d) *Innovativeness and adaptiveness of process.* Innovation to farmer organizational development and empowerment is a key anticipated result from this intervention. Demonstration of innovativeness and adaptability of the proposed approaches is therefore critical given the systemic nature of bottlenecks that FOs face and also for dealing with emerging challenges in this subject;
- e) *Managing diversity and multi-level intervention.* National farmer organizations comprise of diverse membership arranged in a hierarchy e.g. farmer groups, district associations, commodity association, etc. The CN would have to demonstrate how the intervention will be designed and implemented in a manner that can address all this diversity and hierarchies. It would be required to show the development of capacity transcend from the national farmer organizations to the sub-regional farmer organization namely the Eastern African Farmers Federation (EAAFF).
- f) *Linking capacity development and empowerment to interventions in value chains:* The CN should not focus on organizational development for its own sake. Rather, organizational

development should be linked to interventions in selected value chain(s) in order to show how farmers have been empowered and to show impact. Therefore, the CN should include approaches for empowering farmers to overcome bottlenecks that hinder their effective participation in the selected value chain(s);

- g) *Outcome/impact orientation.* The focus is on building functional farmer organizations and ensuring farmer empowerment as overall outcomes. Therefore, the CN must describe the anticipated outcomes among the target FOs and how these outcomes will be assessed including possible bench-marks.⁶ The implementation plan must be structured into two 2-year phases, each with well thought out schedule of the necessary activities and timeframe for delivering the results. These activities should include monitoring and evaluation with processes for collating and synthesizing lessons. Therefore, clear systems and tools for monitoring and evaluation on outcomes will have to be spelt out including provisions for documentation. To ensure ownership and sustainability, due consideration must be given to participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation, clearly spelling out the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. Milestones for measuring progress on project activities, outputs and for reflecting on specific outcomes in each phase of the project should be stated.
- h) *Mechanism for communication and catalyzing regional spillovers.* Whereas the intervention targets three countries in ECA, the CN should include a mechanism for the successes to be shared and exposed to the non-targeted member countries to enhance scaling up/out. A strategy for communicating/ sharing the results, lessons learned and recommendations to stakeholders within target countries and across other countries in ECA should be an integral part of the project design and implementation plan. This is critical for purposes of cross-learning, creating awareness and scaling up/out. It therefore, calls for knowledge management processes, including effective communication tools and strategies within the FOs as well.
- i) *Selection of target farmer organizations and other partners.* The intervention would target to support at least three national farmers organisations and the EAFF. A good justification for the selected countries (and national FOs) will be required. The selection of target countries should show adequate representation of national farmer organizations that are at different levels or stages of development and growth, i.e., national FOs that are relatively fairly developed, those at medium level, and those at relatively low level of development. Though subjective, this criterion should be used as a guide to ensure such representation in the target FOs. This would broaden the base for analyses and increase the diversity in approaches and lessons for upscaling. In addition, there should be evidence that the target national FOs are recognized nationally and they show a vertical hierarchy stretching from grassroots to national and possibly to the sub-regional level. However, it is not mandatory for the target national FOs to be within the umbrella of EAFF since the latter does not cover all ten ASARECA member countries. The methodology should further demonstrate how the project will engage with other stakeholders who are involved in farmer empowerment such as training institutions, NGOs, and National Extension Systems (NES) and research institutions.

The proposed partnership must be multi-disciplinary and contain competencies and experience in the area of farmer organizational development and empowerment with demonstrated ability to

⁶ Refer to report on an ASARECA workshop to determine critical challenges on farmer empowerment and organizational strengthening, 2-6th May 2009; Also, refer to literature on valuable experiences of processes of farmer organizational development in the continent.

deliver the desired outputs. Of critical importance is evidence of ability to work in teams, with multiple partners, and in multi-disciplinary settings. The partnership must demonstrate ability to analyse the problem and design an appropriate process of intervention and to deliver the expected results. International exposure of the principle investigator to farmer organizational development would be an added advantage.

5. Key outputs and outcomes

The project is expected to make a significant contribution to cutting edge approaches and processes for farmer organizational development and empowerment and provide solid outcome analyses of successfully strengthened and empowered farmer organizations.

The main outputs are:

- i. *An analytical description and synthesis of the current status of the target farmer organizations, indicating the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).* This important output resulting from a SWOT analysis of the target national FOs and the EAFF would form a benchmark for assessing the outcome and impact of the intervention.
- ii. *Recommended model(s) for a holistic approach to farmer organizational development and empowerment in ECA sub-region developed and documented.* The recommendations on model(s) based on rigorously tested approaches in the context of smallholder agriculture in ECA are part of the expected output. Empowerment is important for successful partnerships between farmers and their organizations on the one hand, and agricultural service providers (both public and private institutions) on the other and for effective farmer participation in value chains. Thus, documentation of the successful model(s) for a holistic approach to farmer empowerment would be a key output.
- iii. *A directory of a pool of competent resource persons and institutions capable of facilitating and supporting farmer organizational development with an appropriate institutional arrangement for sustainability in place.* To run and manage effective FOs, presence of quantity and quality of human resources, and the leadership role taken by farmer organizations are significant factors. Accordingly, strengthened skills and competencies of major farmer empowerment facilitators in selected key topics/areas is part of the output. To this end, a pool of competent resource persons capable of facilitating and supporting farmer organizational development in the participating countries selected and trained. The pool of resource persons should be within and outside FOs. A regional directory of organizations involved in farmer organizational development and empowerment and the pool of trained resource persons would be a key output.
- iv. *Appropriate institutional arrangements for sustainable farmer empowerment established and described.* Sustainability of farmer organizational development will depend on existence of institutional arrangement that guarantee long term engagements of the resource persons with the farmer organizations. These institutional arrangements may be formulated as elements that complement the approaches.

The expected outcomes

Documented cases of farmer organizations that demonstrate empowerment as a result of the proposed intervention in the ECA sub-region is an expected outcome. Among the key attributes of farmer organizations that show empowerment include: evidence of established successful partnerships with service providers; ability to organize members to effectively participate in value chains, for example, by organizing members to exploit economies of scale in output and input markets through collective action; capacity for effective engagement/ negotiation for favourable

policy with government. It is therefore expected that cases of farmer organizations demonstrating these characteristics at regional and national levels in the target countries will be identified, documented and lessons analyzed for future scaling up/out.

6. Budget and project duration

Farmer organizational development and empowerment process is envisaged to take about four (4) years of intense engagements to bring about real-life show cases of strengthened farmer organizations and farmer empowerment. However, the project design and implementation plan should be structured into two phases of two years each. For each phase, it should be clearly articulated the activities that would be accomplished, their budget, expected outputs and milestones. In addition, the first phase should show an indication of what will be done in the second phase. Outputs such as the results of the SWOT analysis, some capacity development, an institutional map/directory of organizations engaged in farmer organizational development and empowerment in ECA and some progress to creation of a pool of resource persons could be target outputs for the first phase. Outcomes and impacts may be realized in the second phase.

A detailed budget is not required at this stage. A summary budget will suffice. The following should be noted:

- a) The amount of funds that will be allocated shall not exceed US\$ 765,000 over a period of four years. The budget should be split into the two phases of the project implementation. Reasonableness in allocation of funds across budget categories commensurate with the expected results is necessary;
- b) The grant is not intended to provide funding for core or permanent staff salary costs or for large capital items e.g. vehicles. Allowable items include, but are not necessarily limited to: research and scaling up supplies; equipment; costs of dissemination of results; subcontracts for selected analyses or services; travel expenses; monitoring and evaluation and institutional overhead costs

7. Other points relating to this call

- Being innovative and clearly articulating the added value in the design and implementation of the project to national efforts
- Clear and pragmatic strategies to address social equity/inclusion, with emphasis on gender and youth
- Clear description of partnership and organizational approaches and how attributes of effective partnerships and grassroots client groups will be demonstrated or tested
- Demonstrable upscalability, replicability and sustainability of the results and an exit strategy for the initiative
- Gender and environmental consideration. Participation of and impact on women, youth and vulnerable groups and environmental friendliness.
- Justification for the budget (items and levels). Budget items and levels must show realism commensurate with the expected outputs and outcomes
- Indication of the risks that might hinder achievement of objectives of the project in the timeframe

8. Logical framework

The project goal is enhanced sustainable productivity, value added and competitiveness of the sub-regional smallholder agricultural system. The team must proceed to develop the complete project logframe, bearing in mind the need to state clear milestones/indicators in each of the two phases of the project implementation plan.

9. Concept note outline

The length of the CN should not exceed 7 pages (excluding cover page, profile of lead institution and CVs of team), single spacing, font size 12

1. Contact details (cover page)

2. Background (1 1/2page)

This section should include interpretation of the research call, analysis of the problem including challenges to farmer organizational development and empowerment in the context of smallholder agriculture in Eastern and Central Africa and demonstrated adequate review of relevant literature and on-going or past initiatives on the subject.

3. Justification (1/2)

Among the issues to be shown in this section: potential contribution to ASARECA strategic objectives, value added of the methodology and approach & outputs and outcomes, potential up-scalability and spillover to other countries.

4. Approach and method as per the objectives (2 pages)

5. Target countries (1/2 page)

6. Expected outputs and outcomes (1/2 page)

7. Project logframe (1 1/2 page)

8. Project summary budget (1/2 page)

9. Profile of lead institution(1/2 page) and CVs of team members

10. Commitment letters from partner institutions

Sections 9 and 10 should be presented as an annex to the body of the CN