

Strategies for strengthening the Institutionalization of the Early Generation Seed (EGS) Business by public institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa

Using a peer-to-peer assessment method, senior researchers have engaged since 2016 in developing strategies for strengthening the institutionalization of the Early Generation Seed (EGS) Business in four partner public institutions. The business plans were started in 2016. But this study, and the development of strategies started in 2017. With CIP's technical support, KEPHIS (Kenya), RAB (Rwanda), INERA (Burkina Faso) and DARS (Malawi) have developed strategies to address technical, administration and finance, social-cultural and policy bottlenecks. This will contribute to the sustainability of the EGS Business.



Fig. 1 IIAM DG Dr Olga Faftine and colleagues discuss SWOT of IIAM's Sweetpotato EGS Business Plan (Credit S. Rajendran)

► What is the problem?

Sweetpotato farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) face challenges of timely access to quality sweetpotato planting material (seed) and improved varieties. A solution to this includes ensuring a consistent supply of Early Generation Seed (EGS). Public institutions may have the mandate to produce EGS, but are hampered in their seed production and dissemination by unreliable funding flows, the absence of validated production models, and clear business cases. To address this, since 2016 NARIs have developed and launched business plans for sweetpotato EGS with technical support from the International Potato Center (CIP). The success of the business plans depends on the extent to which the technical, finance and administration, socio-cultural and policy components of the new business practices are integrated into the organization to achieve institutional change.

► What did we want to achieve?

After 18 months of implementation of the business plans, we analyzed the technical,

financial, socio-cultural and policy components of the business. This analysis then formed the basis of strategies to improve the performance of the EGS business, increase revenue and ensure sustainability.

► How did we make it happen?

A participatory internal and external peer-to-peer review process was used with the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs). The external peer team (SASHA principle investigator for seed systems and senior research management) reviewed documents, conducted focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and observation of work practices in seed production facilities as part of the assessment process.

A questionnaire was developed based on the four pillars of institutionalization. Under each pillar, statements were formulated to assess the extent of implementation of the business plan. The responses were scored on a Likert scale with one being the lowest and four being the highest level of institutionalization. Different types of evidence (e.g. NARI strategy, work plans, committee meeting minutes, production records) were needed to justify awarding each score on the Likert scale. The questionnaire was applied as:

- i. an individual (self) assessment by host NARI team members,
- ii. a joint assessment (internal reflection by the host team NARI)
- iii. an external peer-to-peer review.

The lowest scoring pillar was identified and a "Strengthens, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats" (SWOT) analysis used to formulate strategies to address the contributing factors (Fig. 1).



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KEPHIS
Kenya Plant Health
Inspectorate Service



RAB
Rwanda Agriculture
and Animal Resources
Development Board



INERA
Environmental Institute
for Agricultural Research



DARS
Department of Agricultural
Research Services



CGIAR
RESEARCH
PROGRAM ON
Roots, Tubers
and Bananas

Partners

- International Potato Center (CIP)
- Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate service (KEPHIS)
- Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board
- Environmental Institute for Agricultural Research (INERA)
- Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS)

What did we learn?

The study methodology allows us to identify patterns such as certain pillars being scored consistently higher or lower; but does not allow us to rank performance across NARIs. For the four institutions assessed to date; the policy pillar was strongest, and the administration and finance pillar the weakest (Fig. 2). The policy pillar was strongest for KEPHIS & RAB; whereas for INERA and DARS the technical and social pillars respectively were strongest. For KEPHIS, the weakest pillars were the technical and administrative/financial ones whereas for RAB and INERA the weakest was the administrative/financial pillar; and for DARS the technical pillar was weakest.

Closer examination provides insights into factors contributing to the weaknesses. For RAB, the lowest scoring statements under administration and finance relate to; the extent to which operational procedures and structures facilitate the use of business plan; whether the revolving fund approach had been put in place; and timely procurement of supplies for EGS production. For INERA the lowest scoring statements under administration and finance reflect the extent to which the organization budgeted EGS production costs from the revolving fund; and whether the NARI maintained a customer database. For KEPHIS and DARS, the lowest scoring statement under the technical pillar relates to staff training and learning opportunities related to the business plan.

The results (Fig. 3) were reviewed together by the host and peer NARI, and CIP to identify strategies to leverage strengths and to address weaknesses under each pillar. The strategy for DARS proposed “to conduct systematic capacity needs assessment and training plan to support the EGS business develop implementation; and, by increasing and diversifying revenue sources (revolving fund, development partners, private sector, DARS service charter provision), DARS can take advantage of college and university business training opportunities”. The extent to which each institution’s M&E system had incorporated the business plan and revolving fund did not score well within the technical pillar, for three institutions. However, this scored higher for DARS (Malawi). DARS reports actual revenues against targets as part of their annual institutional report and compares results across centers. This reflects a high level of commitment to the business plan and revolving fund (“fund order account”) as tools to increase revenue streams.

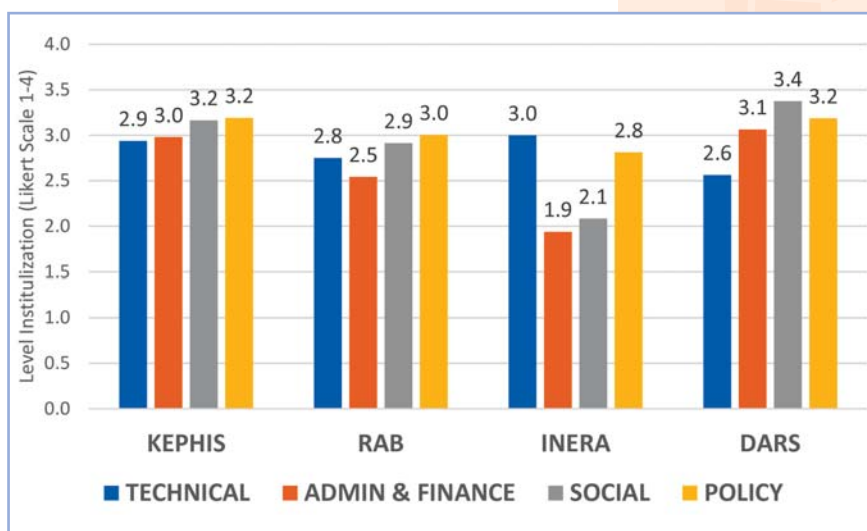


Fig. 2 Average score of joint and external assessment of institutionalization of sweetpotato EGS business and average score of each pillar for all NARIs

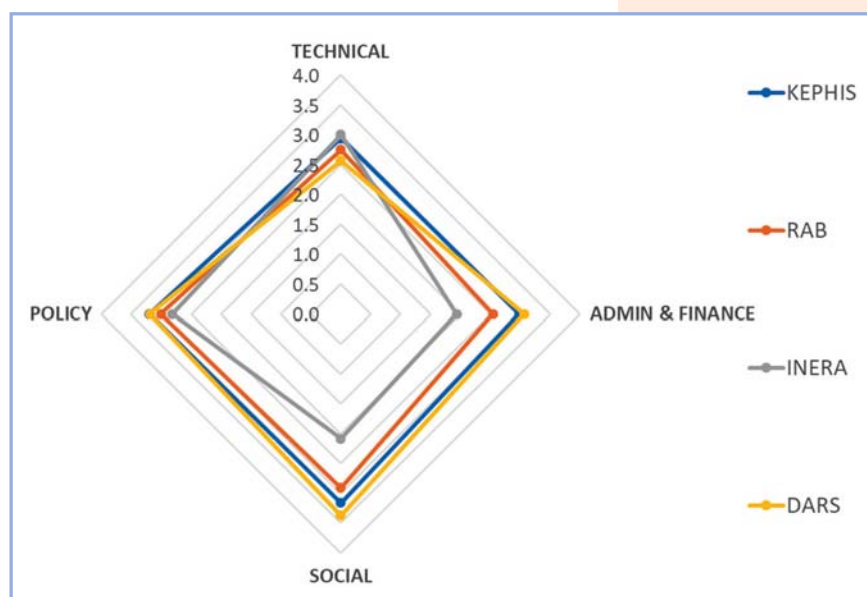


Fig. 3 Level of Institutionalization of sweetpotato EGS business by NARIs (Likert scale from 1-4)

Conclusion

The study will be completed by early 2019 for a total of seven institutions. To date, the bottlenecks identified include lack of: marketing strategies, monitoring and evaluation systems, customer databases, and ensuring that EGS production costs are budgeted from the revolving fund. The study highlights that the buy-in of senior management is critical to run the business. This peer review process has encouraged open exchange and cross-learning among the institutions.

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