



Implementing the SCARDA programme in the ASARECA region: insights and experiences in organisational change.

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Implementing the SCARDA programme in the ASARECA region
– insights and experiences in organisational change.

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Introduction

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 PICOTEAM-implemented SCARDA-East and Central Africa project thrusts focus on improving research leadership and management (thrust 1) skills, and facilitating the development of a mentoring culture (thrust 3) in National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) in three countries, to fulfil 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).

This paper provides an overview of PICOTEAM’s experiences and lessons learnt in implementing the above mentioned thrusts. It starts with a description of the approach used for the management and leadership capacity development, including the special approach in the field of mentoring capacity development. Challenges and opportunities experienced during the implementation process are highlighted leading to a presentation of major achievements. Finally, some light is shed on potential impact pathways.

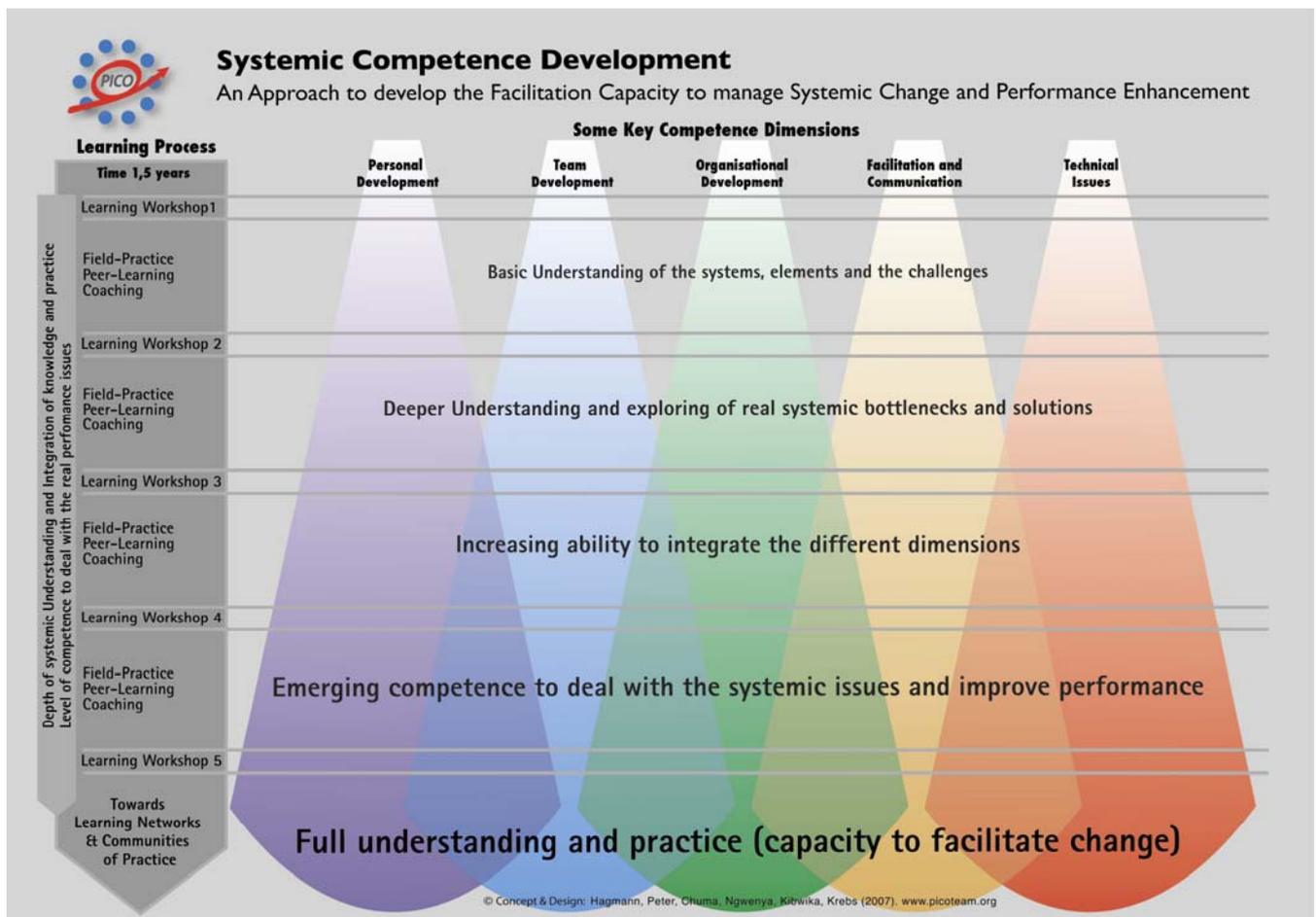
1. PICO APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The overall purpose of PICOTEAM-led thrusts of SCARDA, reframed from the terms of reference and consistent with the above approach, can be summarized as: **to develop the capacities of the NARIs to be more strategic in their agenda-setting and more proactive in their program implementation.** The approach itself is characterized by the following:



1. Systemic competency development (as defined above; see Figure 1)
2. It is based on dynamically identified priority intervention areas that reflect the context of each organization. We engage with target organizations and teams to identify priority intervention areas and on that basis co-create learning programs.
3. It is recalibrated based on emerging issues. The learning process is adaptive, being adjusted as deeper issues emerge during the ensuing interactions.
4. It focuses on strengthening analytical capacity and problem-solving orientation of organizations. The learning process includes problem and challenge identification and analysis. These are then assigned to teams (e.g. *peer learning groups*) and individuals to address, using principles acquired during the group learning sessions.
5. The learnings are sequentially deepened over multiple learning workshops. Lessons learned in the 'practice and problem solving processes' are shared with the broader participant groups in subsequent learning workshops.

Figure 1: Systemic competency development for performance enhancement





This design based on the concept of ‘systemic competence development’ ensures that 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 skills and concepts and their implications, and the development of practical strategies 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 were 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 developed the basis for practical action based on the basic principles learned. The potentials for peer coaching and exchange were explored.

The learning programme focused 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 Figure 2.

Figure 2: The five PICO competency areas





Within these broad areas, the interventions identified - during the initial scoping missions and subsequently in the first round of interactions with all the three FIs - that the following specific competency areas needed special attention:

- 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 individual, team and organization performance.

2. MENTORING APPROACH FOR NARIS

- (1) Facilitating understanding of mentoring and coaching (M & C) principles.
- (2) Establishing the extent to which M & C are being practiced (if at all), who is currently involved, how formal or informal the practices are and how effective the practices are.
- (3) Identifying gaps and developing what will work in the organizational context. For example in the SCARDA project, one conclusion from the first set of learning workshops was that mentor-mentee pairings across countries is unlikely to work; even between organizations within country can only work under limited conditions; M & C within teams and/or geographical locations have a high chance of working because face to face meetings can be effected at no cost.
- (4) Identifying those who need mentoring and facilitating a process through which mentees can identify mentors, and confirming appropriateness, willingness, availability of the identified mentors for this function, as well as determining logistics for the process.
- (5) Coaching of the mentor-mentee pairs on the mentoring process: roles, responsibilities, obligations, acceptable behaviour, etc.
- (6) On-going review and support of the mentoring process – troubleshooting, including modalities for problem solving and/or handling incompatible mentor-mentee pairs.

Given the specificity of many of these steps, other than the general principles, there is **no single (cook book) framework for all cases**. The M&C context has to be defined and on that basis a process developed for each situation (e.g. for ISAR and ISABU) In this project,



the first learning workshop served to: introduce the principles; start the inculcation of the M & C culture – based on co-created principles; and to establish peer learning groups to further develop the specific activities that would underpin formalization of M & C. Following the introduction of the basic concepts, nearly 90% of participants in the learning workshops (in ISAR and ISABU) wanted to be mentored, while only a handful of individuals were willing to be mentors. This eventually became a challenge across the board; one that was worsened by the absence of critical number of individuals within these organizations who are willing and able to be mentors.

3. CHALLENGES

Leadership to drive change: While many individual staff in the FIs were able to pick up principles and use these to begin their personal development, the engagement of senior management in some of the FIs has generally been inadequate, even lukewarm. This means that change at the organizational level is unlikely to happen at all or will only be patchy with some individual managers making modest progress in their units. Organizational change needs a committed change driver at the top.

In both ISABU and ARC, the CEOs have changed two times (including acting roles) over the 12 month period of the SCARDA program. The time and financial investment needed for organizational transformation is significant, and without committed leadership at the top this will go to waste as no sustained change will happen. The challenge is how to ensure that the CEOs of the FIs and their senior team engage strongly in the program and treat the process as an important exercise for the future of the entire organization. We strongly recommend a process for **leadership for change** that is led from the top and in which the top remains strongly engaged through out the process, learning with staff, identifying opportunities for transformation and actively engaging staff in the implementation process. There is need for a **fully mandated change team**, which is driven by people who have the passion for change, but well supported by senior Management. The immediate challenge now is how to maintain the momentum of the ongoing change process.

Achieving the tipping point: Our conclusion on the basis of the design missions was that there was need for at **least four** learning workshops and strategic coaching in between in all the three FIs to take the organizations to a level where transformation could start to happen. We figured that the available resources could, if the approach was re-configured, cover two learning workshops for each country. Therefore, there was need to mobilize additional resources as a matter of urgency to ensure that the project could realize the expected outcomes. These findings were shared with the FIs and ASARECA and formed the basis for the revised implementation strategy of two learning workshops and mentoring orientation workshop for each FI. Unfortunately only Burundi went through two learning workshops, although there were resources for the same number in all the three countries. Slow disbursement was the main issue in this respect problem (see '**slow disbursement**' challenge below). Importantly however, there is still a need to find resources to continue the learning workshops to achieve at least four per FI.

Mentoring capacity: Many of the FIs have limited number of individuals with the capacity to mentor others. This calls for a different approach that will facilitate harnessing of the available regional human resource capacity to support mentoring in these countries.



Change process support: The resources available could not allow sustained support by PICOTEAM resource persons between learning sessions. Many teams were not able to give adequate attention to the learning commitments they had made during the workshops. Short mentoring and coaching missions are required during the intervening periods to keep the learning momentum.

Resource mobilization: As pointed out above, resource mobilization was not an explicit focus of the SCARDA thrusts implemented by PICOTEAM. However, it became manifestly clear that all the three FIs are quite weak in mobilizing resources. Future capacity development initiatives need to pay attention to this capacity gap.

Language difficulty: In ISABU quite a number of personnel are not able to communicate in English. While we (PICOTEAM) were able to use bilingual resource persons, this may present a problem for the implementation of a regional mentorship program as suggested above. In addition, it was clear that with the 'Anglophonization' of East Africa, Burundi could use deliberate help in fast-tracking the strengthening of English language in ISABU to allow it fully participate in regional (e.g. ASARECA) initiatives.

Serious bottlenecks in budget disbursements. The serious delays in disbursements of funds at all levels – to FARA, to ASARECA and to Service Providers – led to substantial loss of time and compromised project implementation in many ways. For example, at the time the first set of 'program review' was taking place actual implementation had not even started.

4. OPPORTUNITIES

In this section we would like to highlight the ongoing change processes within ISAR and ISABU as opportunities to be seized for the implementation of the learning workshops. In this respect there are no particular opportunities to be highlighted as far as ARC is concerned.

A. Rwanda:

A major institutional change process was 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 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 adopt a change process intervention underpinned by sound learning of basic principles underlying processes of change.

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 were 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 workshop in the period that was available to organize the workshops.

B. Burundi:

Organisational change was high on ISABU's agenda during the whole learning process. Supported by an institutional support project funded by Belgian Technical Cooperation an internal organisational audit was conducted on the basis of which a new research master plan was developed. Both processes were facilitated by international consultants. During the first learning workshop participants were helped to engage constructively in this change process through 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. Participants committed to an on-going engagement in the change process in the time period of several months between the first and second learning workshop. There was recognition that ISABU managers needed to 'hold change by the hand', otherwise 'change would grab them by their legs ...' During the second learning workshop the state of the change process was analysed and participants committed themselves to take an active role as part of a change team.

5. RESULTS REACHED

The results reached need to be appreciated against the background of what actually has been implemented in terms of capacity development activities within the three NARI. The following table describes the implementation status.

Table 1: Actual implementation status

	Learning Workshop 1	Mentoring Orientation Workshop	Learning Workshop 2
Rwanda (ISAR)	x	x	
Burundi (ISABU)	x	x	x
Sudan (ARC)	x	x	



Overall, we would like to highlight the following points in terms of what has been achieved so far:

- (1) We contributed to focus the change process on the 5 key areas in an action-oriented manner that facilitated understanding by the teams and managers. They were able to link the change processes with areas like resource mobilisation, having the control at the right level, capacity they need and what they do not have. They became aware of what they do not know.
- (2) The learning process was successfully connected with the ongoing change processes in both ISABU and ISAR. This is supported by the fact that change projects and teams to drive the projects were identified at the end of the first learning workshop. For ISABU, these teams transitioned (with adjustments in membership and terms of reference) into change management teams linked directly to the Strategic Planning process, a process driven by the Belgian-funded capacity development project which is on-going.
- (3) Participants grasped the opportunities of participation and interaction offered by the PICOTEAM methodology.
- (4) Participants became familiar with the key concepts and practices of good and effective leadership; being proactive, being solution-oriented and problem solvers; inspiring others; and how to succeed as leader/manager in his/her field of responsibility.
- (5) Participants have become aware of the necessity to match self development (“managing self”) with managing teams and units within the organisation.
- (6) Participants expressed their strong commitment to practise what they have learnt in order to continuously improve on their management and leadership capabilities.
- (7) Top management has been exposed to the requirements for sound management and leadership practices.
- (8) The process was quite intense given the high interest and hence large number of participants: e.g. 57 participants in one learning workshop. Despite our misgivings initially, we concluded that it was possible to handle such a large number if planned well in advance and adequate resources, including number of resource persons, are available. It can be a cost effective way to deliver capacity development when demand is high; but it has to be thought through carefully to ensure it really works for all participants.
- (9) At the end of the process we (resource persons) felt that we had touched a deep cord in these organizations in terms of self awareness and desire to do things differently. It was, for them, not just another workshop, but a true learning/self-awareness experience.

6. POTENTIAL IMPACT PATHWAYS OF THE APPROACH

Taking in consideration that only in the case of ISABU (Burundi) we have been able to reach the stage of realizing a second learning workshop conclusions with regard to impact pathways of our approach need to be drawn with caution. From our experience it is especially after the third learning workshop that positive impact regarding the change



dynamics within a focal institution becomes more and more visible still needing, however, to be sustained through the fourth learning workshop and eventual follow up.

Especially with regard to ISABU (Burundi) we have indications for a **positive change of mind sets** with regard to the following key areas:

Feedback culture: Action and reflection on feedback culture and practices, i.e. the, by and large, weak feedback culture and the inappropriate practices within the three NARI, served as a strong eye-opener. Practicing feedback during the learning workshops made it evident for everybody that giving feedback in an appreciative and motivational manner is a joint responsibility even if the role of top management of being exemplary in how they give feedback to their staff members is emphasized.

Organizational change: The slogan coined during the second learning workshop with ISABU (Burundi), “hold change by your hand, otherwise change will grab you by your legs” was a real eye-opener. The research managers realised that they need to take an active role in the change process in order to influence the direction of change and to seize all the opportunities a good change process is offering. The creation of a change team on the last day of the second learning workshop in ISABU (Burundi) indicates clearly this change of mind sets.

Resource mobilization: Participants experienced that resource mobilization is not mainly a matter of being able to write a good project proposal. What is more important is a sound resource mobilization strategy being a joint effort of all the managers within a NARI. Improving human resources, developing credible motivational systems are key elements in such a strategy together with the strengthening of the organization’s visibility. But there is also a need for decentralizing project management and for improving on the utilization of research products for resource mobilization. These five key challenges will not only improve the conditions for resource mobilization. They also resume what would need to happen in order to make the organizational change process moving forward.

We would like to emphasize the need for sustaining these changes of mind sets through further management and leadership support for the research managers but also for the top management of the three NARI.