



Converging to Innovate: A new West and Central African business model for Agriculture

Converging to Innovate (C2I) presents a new model for agriculture development in West and Central Africa (WCA). The C2I document explores which national, regional and international partners would like to join CORAF/WECARD, partners in Benin, Ghana and Mali of the former Convergence of Science (CoS) programme, the Alliance of Wageningen University & Research centre (WUR), Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and ICRA, and the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Based on encouraging results of Innovation Platforms (IPs) and the Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D) approach across West and Central Africa (WCA), achieved by CORAF/WECARD and CoS partners, the C2I programme would help CORAF/WECARD to successfully implement its second Operational Plan (OP2, 2014-2018).

For the 22 countries in WCA that are members of CORAF/WECARD the OP2 aims to out-scale and up-scale agricultural innovation systems (AIS) thinking as currently emerging on IPs using IAR4D and value chain approaches. The partners have identified five Programme Facilities, that will be the backbones of the new C2I programme for a four years period from 2015 to 2018. Each Facility highlights specific capacities and results, that, together, support the mainstreaming of AIS innovation system thinking throughout the agricultural research & development communities of WCA.

C2I Facility I: Capacity strengthening to innovate agriculture. Unleash and strengthen African capacities to make their Agricultural Business Case

The specific objective of this Facility is to strengthen human capital for rural innovation in the W/C Africa region. A vast experience in professional training on research for innovation is already available in regional universities in WCA and in on-going projects being implemented by national and international programmes, including those of the CGIAR. This Facility will capitalize and build on these existing initiatives, scale out education, research and outreach in innovation, and create new opportunities for capacity strengthening within the regional universities, including the “universités des paysannes” being established by farmer organizations in the region.

Facility I will reassess BSc curricula to introduce IAR4D and AIS concepts and competencies in the existing education programmes on agriculture, including emphasis on practical experience with multi-stakeholder projects. It will support ongoing and new MSc and PhD programmes on agricultural research and innovation at selected universities such as the Abomey Calavi University and Ketou University in Benin, the University of Dschang, the University of Ouagadougou, IPR-IFRA (Mali) and the University of Ghana at Legon.

Facility I will also introduce short training programmes for continuing professional staff development of NARS constituent organisations (research, NGOs, farmer organizations, private sector, etc.) to support Facilities II, III and IV. Key topics will include, diagnostics of smallholder constraints and opportunities in agricultural domains, facilitation of innovation processes, systems and institutional thinking, experiential learning, organizational management, and innovation policy analysis, development and advocacy. These continuing professional development programmes will promote learning through experience by embedding the learning in ongoing IAR4D projects and programmes,

and produce a cadre of innovation facilitators and managers among the different NARS organizations that can spearhead IAR4D processes in the region.

A number of regional universities will be selected as regional Tertiary Agricultural Education (TAE) “Centres of Excellence” in agricultural innovation. The Facility will select these Centres through an open call process. Best practice from these centres will be scaled out through strengthening existing TAE networks and communities of practice such as ANAFE, REESAO, AAU. Through these networks, links and information exchange will also be made with other TAE programmes in the region (e.g. the Nuffic NICHE programme; the EU-ACP EDULINK programme, etc.). The selected universities will also be supported by the Alliance of Northern Partners (Wageningen UR-KIT-ICRA), who will make available training opportunities in Europe, resource persons and training materials.

C2I Facility II: IAR4D implementation by the National Agricultural Research and Development Organisations working for the farming community in WCA

This second Facility will support key organizations of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) towards becoming research and development organizations providing relevant solutions for the farming community in West and Central Africa. Key NARS organizations in WCA will be motivated to ensure greater agricultural development impact. This entails an evolution of the NARS so that practice becomes a more significant driver of the research and development work undertaken. Much can be learned from the pioneering route and the leadership of the NARIs that have already begun transforming themselves.

Restructuring the work of agricultural research institutes, Universities and other relevant organizations to respond more effectively to farmers’ demands more than changes in the work of individual actors alone; it requires organisational change and leadership. It requires a more thorough understanding of what leadership means in the context of science for impact in WCA: how does an ARI, University, or Farmers’ organization govern and what mechanisms ensure inclusive and effective decision-making?

The implications for the ARIs, Universities and other development organizations to implement IAR4D are substantial. This Facility has set up an ambitious long-term trajectory of organisational change and a framework for supporting it. The Facility intends to help R&D organizations in developing capacity for scoping and diagnostic research and network analysis to allow them to understand the context and become demand-driven. In this way C2I will support R&D organizations by coaching and facilitating cross-learning on principles such as awareness creation within the organization, reformulating incentive systems, explicit budgeting for IAR4D and its activities, creating political will, changing administrative and organizational procedures to stimulate IAR4D, and making end-users’ voice more visible in decision making during the research design, diagnostics and process.

C2I Facility III: Action-Research and Learning on Agricultural Innovation Systems to support capturing impact, documenting and sharing the deeper learning

Facility III is a WCA learning experiment in science impact. It aims at deepening methodologies and developing good practice, including the development of new concepts. This will be done together with Facility I through new curricula. Facility III will also build networks and collaborative learning among regional Agricultural Universities and Faculties, research centres and the CORAF/WECARD Executive Secretariat. This Facility will start from actual practices in IPs from which learning questions emerge, and then design and implement action research to improve practices in IPs and AIS thinking on facilitation, collaboration, but also on technical aspects.

Facility III would employ about 40 PhD students and 60 MSc students from regional agricultural Faculties and Universities, in close coordination with Facility I. The PhD students could obtain joint PhDs supervisors from European Universities like Wageningen UR and African Universities. Functions of the support Facility would include generating syntheses and additional data collection, with comparisons within the WCA region to support reflection and learning, enabling dialogue amongst stakeholders, and supporting the capturing and learning about innovation process dynamics and systemic changes. In this way Facility III contributes to conceptual and methodological deepening

and insight on innovation processes; it will support learning about IP actor roles and performance for impact; and it will feed policy forums at different levels with good practice and lessons learned. The Facility will provide opportunities for young African scholars to publish and their interaction will provide a critical mass for developing an 'African Renaissance'.

C2I Facility IV: Strengthening CORAF/WECARD as a Regional Change Agent

This Facility would strengthen the capacity of the C/W Secretariat in various domains to support its 22 NARS, including Universities and tertiary agricultural education institutes and especially the individual ARIs in terms of management, organisation, and implementation of development trajectories. The C2I programme will require the establishment of a functional unit within C/W's organizational structure aligned appropriately within the organizational architecture of C/W and positioned as a key focal and coordinating unit.

The C/W coordination unit is expected to mature as a full-fledged unit with adequate competent human capacity and resources to move the agenda of the Facility after the proposed programme has come to an end in 2018. It is anticipated that the senior heads of this unit will be composed of one Anglophone and one Francophone. The unit would be supported with an assistant and a network of post-docs, visiting scholars and researchers. These post-docs and visiting scholars would participate in all activities of the programme, and be involved in its research (Facility III), and especially in the activities of Facility II, in support of ARIs who implement Innovation System approaches.

C2I Facility V: Governance, coordination and implementation of the C2I programme

The present partners have identified the following principles for the governance and coordination of the C2I programme. Firstly, it is important to build on existing structures wherever possible. Coordination and governance membership can be built gradually, based on the actual engagement and interest shown from the countries. At each of the governance levels it will be ensured that stakeholders and individual champions are represented. Legitimacy and representativeness of those who govern the different level bodies is crucial for impact. The C2I new programme will have a legal status approved by the Governing Board of C/W to ensure ownership. CORAF/WECARD and its partners will develop a collective proposal and submit the proposal to the Technical & Scientific Committee of C/W and interested donors.