

Strengthen Knowledge Management Competence Centres to drive the Transformation of African Countries into Knowledge Societies

Thematic Policy Brief N° 5/10



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About FARA

The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) is the apex continental organisation responsible for coordinating and advocating for agricultural research-for-development. (AR4D). It serves as the entry point for agricultural research initiatives designed to have a continental reach or a sub-continental reach spanning more than one sub-region.

FARA serves as the technical arm of the African Union Commission (AUC) on matters concerning agricultural science, technology and innovation. FARA has provided a continental forum for stakeholders in AR4D to shape the vision and agenda for the sub-sector and to mobilise themselves to respond to key continent-wide development frameworks, notably the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

FARA's vision is to "Reduced poverty in Africa as a result of sustainable broad-based agricultural growth and improved livelihoods, particularly of smallholder and pastoral enterprises" its mission is the "Creation of broad-based improvements in agricultural productivity, competitiveness and markets by strengthening the capacity for agricultural innovation at the continental-level"; its Value Proposition is the "Strengthening Africa's capacity for innovation and transformation by visioning its strategic direction, integrating its capacities for change and creating an enabling policy environment for implementation". FARA's strategic direction is derived from and aligned to the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (S3A), which is in turn designed to support the realization of the CAADP vision.

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Executive Summary

For many developing countries, especially in Africa, Knowledge Management is still a dream. Despite the integral part played by the Knowledge Management function in individuals, and organizations' well being, most entities have not embraced it. Clearly, the creation of knowledge, its processing, storage and transfer is necessary for boosting agricultural development, as well as achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Knowledge Management competence centres are some of the avenues that this knowledge could be shared, curated, and disseminated. However, there are only few and weakly capacitated Knowledge Management competence centres in Africa. To make it worse, it is not clear if concepts of Knowledge Management are known. Where will people get the knowledge about Knowledge Management? How can this knowledge be captured for future generations? How will partners know what we have achieved? Who is building the capacities? While some indicators display an improvement of the Knowledge Management trend in Africa though the improvements do not tally with the ideal benefits if knowledge is managed well. Many observers have lamented the poor culture of passing on knowledge from generation to generation let alone the incompetence of the few existing Knowledge Managers in various organizations. Why has the modest progress in adoption of knowledge not matched with the quality of knowledge products available? Why are Knowledge Management competence centres missing in Africa, and what can be done to redeem this dire situation and set up these badly needed services? This policy brief attempts to provide alternatives to this question.



This policy brief proposes the following policy options:

1. Leverage institutions of higher learning and research centres to host Knowledge Management Competence Centres in cooperation with international KM Competence Centres, like the School of Knowledge Sciences of K4DP
2. Providing adequate resources for research and education to KM Centres and make use of their services, like assessments, consulting and advisory, to professionalize KM.
3. Formalise MoUs with KM experts to advise and set up alliances for KM competence centres at least 2 per region
4. Build capacity of staff in Knowledge Management and have standard operating procedures with clear measures of knowledge management.

Key words: Knowledge management, competence centre, agriculture

Rationale for establishing a Knowledge Management competence centre

As a lever for continental development effectiveness, Knowledge Management (KM) is still ramping to gain popularity and credibility in Africa. In the agricultural sector, particularly in the field of research and development, the reality calls for questioning. In the age of the Knowledge Society, many African institutions intervening in this sector at national level lack the know-how to properly embrace knowledge management and its technological changes so as to build in-house organizational knowledge. While relevant infrastructure to process KM might exist, KM Competence Centers in particular are not scaling up. This could be due to issues including: i) knowledge skill gap; ii) lack of research evidence on KM for agricultural development; iii) Weak enabling environment. How relevant are they in acquiring, generating and sharing knowledge? What place does the accreditation of KM Competence Centre could play in uplifting the sector and positioning it as the master piece for a sustainable tomorrow in Africa.





Why knowledge management competence centres are missing in Africa:

KM competence centres are needed and growing, but not yet enough. There are several limiting factors, and a lot what the different stakeholders can contribute:

i) **Lack of professional courses in Universities for KM:** Lack of courses and trainings for KM capacity building: This coupled with limited experts to scale up exacerbates the problem.

ii) **Knowledge Capacity/skill gap/Lack of KM experts:** In most areas, individuals can not differentiate between knowledge and information. While some companies do generate some information through processes like surveys and interviews, it takes a Knowledge manager to capitalise the experience and integrate perspectives for better impact. The inability to integrate this makes a competence centres difficult to justify. According to Mchombu (2007), the new era of knowledge management challenges information specialists to reinvent and reposition themselves as infomediaries and knowledge managers who can efficiently manage the process of converting data and information into knowledge for development.

iii) **Lack of research evidence in the agricultural knowledge ecosystem in Africa:** Measuring knowledge and Knowledge Management (KM) is not simple. However, knowledge flows determine strongly

agricultural performance. More evidence on the deficiencies of knowledge flows would create more awareness for KM and nurture the legitimation of KM Competence Centres. Research is therefore needed to underpin the relevance of knowledge in agricultural development and thereby the relevance of KM.

iv) **Knowledge recognition and demonstration:** In instances where knowledge is not linked to Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation systems, building a case and the linkage to overall institutional strategic plans/objectives can be close to impossible. This influences budget allocation, making KM less priority. M&E needs to understand better the impact of knowledge (management) on agricultural development.

v) **Scanty or no documentation of knowledge:** In most organizations, the area of knowledge management is a new concept. Traditionally, Africa is a rich source of tacit knowledge which is quite difficult to document. This is an information loss with high risk assuming the knowledge bearer leaves the organization. Africa has to find its own knowledge identity and KM approaches.

vi) **Lack of policy frameworks for enabling environment for Knowledge Management;** While each organization may have their own KM, there is need for coordination at macro-level. This coordination could also put in place guidelines and control mechanisms to shape the subject of Knowledge Management. For example, leaders of institutions in the region such as ministries, leaders (organisational, community, or charismatic leaders) could be requested to formulate their commitments and share them widely, also video interviews, knowledge talks or comparable knowledge products suitable for social media dissemination could work well. There is need to intentionally design programs while leveraging the existing 'low hanging fruits', such as CAADP framework

vii) **Lack of experts to scale up the centres.** Knowledge Management being a new concept on the continent (the few professionals are overworked and the majority are still grappling with the concept).

viii. **Limited resources/ collaborations:** A KM competence centre would be possible with multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaborations. Without these, pooling resource envelopes may be inadequate to establish a centre, design and deliver the courses

ix) **Limited management of intellectual capital:** Since Knowledge Management is

related with identification, exchange, creation, storage and knowledge assurance, it should also consider the protection of knowledge, its valuation, negotiation, commercialization and use as a source of organizational knowledge.

Opportunities

Knowledge has emerged as one of the most important development resources and that full utilization of knowledge can considerably accelerate development effectiveness towards achieving organizational goals.

Frameworks such as CAADP-XP4 to guide; The Akosombo Integration/data capture strategy is a good tool that if adopted/adapted could enhance standardisation on Knowledge Management.

Vision and goals of a KM competence centre

Reliable, performant and resourceful master house for sustainable information flow of agricultural knowledge for all, KM Competence Centre function to provide relevant informative knowledge to its end users, leveraging easily accessible and comprehensible means, and offering a stage to broaden knowledge and improve end-to-end networking and collaboration.

A knowledge management centre would like, participants shared various perceptions including: a space where all knowledge is centralized in one single database (for digital) , or archive for non-digital; a space to interact, centred on collaborations, situated in a research or training institution; highly skilled interdisciplinary manpower to run the activities, interdisciplinary teams, inclusive. See figure 1 below:

Key tenets of a KM competence centre

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Key actions to be taken

How can Knowledge Management competence centres be managed sustainably? Here are some recommendations:

- i. Identify skill and competency gaps efficiently. Add a competency framework to the talent management program by collecting and combining competency information to create a standardized approach to performance that is clear and accessible to everyone in the organization.
- ii. Embed digital competence in organizational strategies. To be emphasized for agricultural professionals. Systematic strategy for personnel training and skills updating should be established,
- iii. Recruit and select new staff effectively to run the KM competence centres
- iv. Evaluate performance effectively and have a robust M&E framework
- v. Provide customized training, professional development and continuous learning
- vi. Adequately fund the needed infrastructure
- vii. Use KM to influence policy
- viii. Competence should respond to specific needs, demand driven towards the job market
- ix. Political Leadership shall help anchoring KM at public levels (eg Universities, Public KM Competence Centre)
- x. Mainstream and upgrade existing libraries to make them "live" as opposed to the current status where they are dormant
- xi. Promote cross-sectoral dialogue (knowledge partnerships) to develop evidence-based solutions for policies
- xii. Focus on a particular domain of expertise at a time
- xiii. Provide strong processes to communicate activities and disseminate knowledge effectively

Conclusion

In the scientific world, as the flood of knowledge is increasing, there is a greater need for reviewing and analyzing knowledge, if we are to do these then knowledge services, and particularly knowledge competence centres, should be established and operationalized. Installing such master houses within which agricultural knowledge flows in and out systematically without barriers, will not only be at the reach the last miles and intervening stakeholders, but will create an enabling environment were cross learning will be enhanced across agricultural related fields, and better collaborative opportunity will be fostered. Executing the actionable points this brief highlight, by African leader and policy makers, and assessing its evaluative performance will benefit the people, nations and the continent at large.



References for further reading

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About the KM4AgD Challenge

This is an initiative that seeks to operationalize the recommendations of the Continental Data Capture Strategy by generating content for FARADatInformS, creating Communities of Practice and strengthening the Knowledge ecosystem by building the capacities of at least 25 KM country focal persons from at least 20 African Countries and generating key knowledge products such as the country KM concepts, policy brief and profiles of KM capacities, through a set of sub-activities. Under the CAADP XP4 programme, this challenge was launched by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, in collaboration with AFAAS and SROs (CCARDESA, ASARECA & CORAF).

This policy brief is based on dialogue and discussions from a Knowledge cafe on Knowledge Competence centres organized under the KM4AgDChallenge of the CAADPXP4 project implemented by [FARA](#), [K4DP](#) with funding from The International Fund for Agricultural Development ([IFAD](#)) through the European Commission ([EU](#))



Development
Symbol



Growth Arrow



A leaf signifying
Agriculture



Knowledge
Management





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Agricultural experts ?

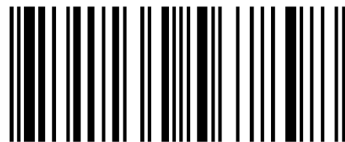
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