

# Organizational Knowledge Management Professionalization

Thematic Policy Brief N° 4/10



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## **Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)**

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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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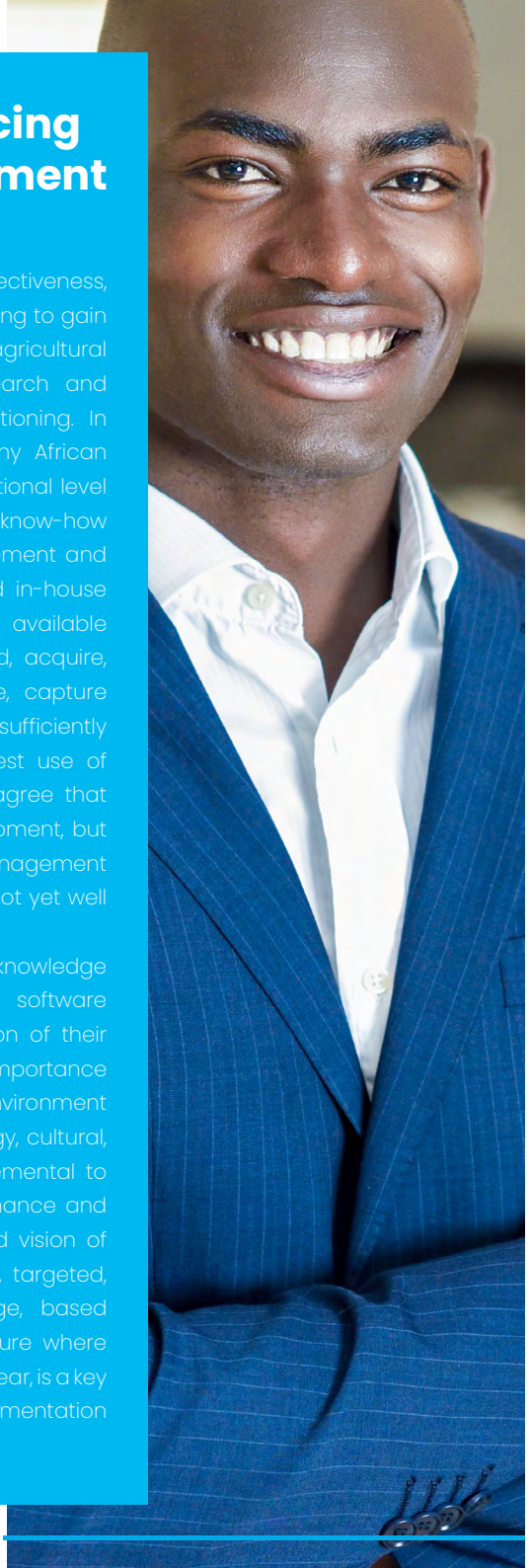
# Acknowledgement

Sincere appreciation goes to the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and all CAADP-XP4 partners (AFAAS, ASARECA, CCARDESA and CORAF) for instituting the knowledge for Agriculture Development (KM4AgD) Challenge and for offering this golden opportunity. Special acknowledgement is extended to all facilitators of the challenge for the training and knowledge they have imparted during this entire challenge life line. A hearty thank you goes to the Knowledge for Development Partnerships (K4DP) for providing technical support to the continent. The excellent and outstanding leadership, support and guidance exhibited during this challenge is one to reckon with. To the respective employers, you are much appreciated for permitting authors to be part of this challenge. Profound appreciation goes to the FARA Team for ably spearheading this groundbreaking activity and for unreservedly sharing their experiences on the subject. All team members are acknowledged for contributing and committing to put this document together. Finally to the European Commission (EC) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for funding the initiative.

# Rationale for enhancing Knowledge Management professionalization

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 human, financial and technical know-how to properly embrace knowledge management and its technological changes so as to build in-house organizational knowledge. Knowledge is available in abundance, but the capacities to find, acquire, internalize, adopt, apply, share, organise, capture and leverage on knowledge is not yet sufficiently available for many reasons to make best use of the existing knowledge. African leaders agree that knowledge is essential for Africa's development, but the professionalization of Knowledge Management is still behind because the concepts are not yet well understood and common.

In Africa, many organizations still view knowledge management (KM) as launching some software programs without adequate consideration of their organizational characteristics, when the importance of focusing on creating a knowledge environment that is made up of appropriate technology, cultural, structural and human resources<sup>1</sup> is incremental to enhance in-house organizational performance and effectiveness to meet the mandates and vision of the institution. Thus, following a strategic, targeted, and integrated approach to knowledge, based on powerful tools and a knowledge culture where employees share at ease and without any fear, is a key recommendation for the successful implementation of KM.<sup>2</sup>



This policy brief is intended to inform policy-makers on the relevance of knowledge management as a major lever to enhance organizational performance and effectiveness to meet its development objectives, be it in the agricultural sector or any other field of intervention.

# 1. Uplifting Agricultural Development through KM Professionalization

Easy access to knowledge accelerates development and at the same time lowers cost. Not only information flow through KM will be essential to meet this milestone objectives, but tapping as well into indigenous knowledge will break the chain of poverty. Plenty of tacit knowledge exist in Africa but how much of it is available and applicable by the end-user like the smallholder farmers? Digitalisation is a big opportunity to make knowledge available to more people at low cost. Knowledge Management can be a driver of the digitalisation of knowledge flows, this will enhance knowledge sharing and experience capitalization, as well as data integration through KM among sectors/actions for the better functioning of the system. It is foreseen that professional KM will increase agricultural prosperity and sustainability, if organizations are appropriately capacitated with technical and functional skills so as to deliver on critical development issues.

# 2. Professionalizing KM in Africa: Enabling Environment

Development organizations, private sectors, public sectors, academia, CSOs, governmental bodies are all actively intervening, in various ways and form at societal level, to contribute in making the world a better place. Their efforts can achieve even more impact when embracing and leveraging on Knowledge Management at organizational level, which will: (i) sustainably contribute in uplifting development effectiveness at national level; and (ii) play a major role in addressing continental policies and programmes for a transformational change into knowledge economies.

Efficiently and effectively promoting Knowledge Management at institutional level, such that its relevance contributes to achieving the specific objectives of the organization, encompasses the integration and systematic appropriation of some fundamental approaches and standards:



- a) **Promotion of KM Standards (ISO 30401)** within the organization is critical will prepare them for ISO 30401 KMS certification or align their KM capabilities to the requirements of the standard.
- b) **Development of educational programmes with a common core of KM** should be enforced as it will enhance a systematic construction, embodiment and dissemination of KM skills to scholars.
- c) **Establishing a widely recognised “KM job profile”** will give more credibility to KM as a valuable profession and trigger more engagement from organizational teams to build appropriate capacities on the latter;
- d) **The installation of strong KM promotion institutions** is incremental to further popularize KM across organizations and foster cross sharing of KM successes and failure for better learning.
- e) **Organization of regular events and conference on KM** increase KM awareness, inclusion and expansion, as it will enhance gathering of organizations to discuss pertinent KM related issues;
- f) **Enhancing KM Peer Review and assist visits** will increase quality assurance of knowledge products to be shared and provide KM secondment opportunities to organizations.
- g) **Fostering Agricultural Knowledge Partnerships and Knowledge Agenda** shall consolidate a knowledge ecosystem that will ensure effective and efficient knowledge flow across organizations.
- h) **Establishing KM/K4D Competence Centres** shall ensure appropriate gathering, generation, management & sharing of organizational knowledge that shall be at the reach of the last miles.
- i) **Promotion of KM4D Framework and Award Programmes** will provide guidance to organizations to follow a common KM approach linked with global standards & also acknowledge Knowledge Managers who excelled in their function at organizational level.
- j) **Creation of Professional KM Community/ Society** will enhance inclusiveness among organizations and empower them by increasing access to and preservation and sharing of information and knowledge.
- k) **Promoting KM Assessments** will permit a better understanding of the knowledge flow and storage across the organization, identify knowledge gaps & the ones untapped, keep teams better aligned by establishing a shared view of the knowledge that exists across the company.

### 3. Sustainable Success Factors

It is quite another to have a vision and tenacity to implement KM frameworks and strategies and see it through. Creating an enabling environment is indeed not to be neglected but to ensure the sustainability of the process, some success factors need to be defined and constantly observed over time by organizations in their journey to long last KM Professionalization. These includes:

- a) **Ceaseless awareness raising and promotion**, which encompasses among others: (i) the use of both traditional and current/mainstream media platforms e.g. social media platforms, use of traditional sources of knowledge/information such as community elders and historians among others; (ii) the use of change agents such as KM professionals/officers to advocate on the need, importance and benefits of KM systems within organizations and institutions as well as to the end users and consumers of KM products; and (iii) making use of available means to reach the end users via KM products, not limited to physical training, technology and interactions.
- b) **Regular development of capacities**, achievable through: (i) the execution of continuous learning/professional development training programmes for KM specialists / professionals e.g. The KM4AgD Challenge; and (ii) building of the KM units through availing KM related infrastructure, structures as well as adequate funding to ensure its sustainability.
- c) **Institutionalization of KM** so as to ensure it is mainstreamed into the existing organizational Strategies and others to come.
- d) **Creation/Running of In - Country Professional Associations** for exchange and sharing of KM approaches, experiences, successes and lessons learnt. Often, insights that spark progress comes from hearing how others tackled a thorny issue, rather than through robust analysis. Regional **Professional Associations** can also be relevant in KM as no country, Association or Society can “go at it alone” thus need to enhance regional integration and synergy within regions. Africa needs to exchange know-how as better knowledge sharing will continue to be a powerful tool for tackling our collective knowledge deficit and development constraints.
- e) **Permanent conducting of periodic tests and spot checks** to review the effectiveness of strategies put in place for KM.
- f) **Sustainability of KM requires unconditional engagement of the various professionals** in other units as a step to integrating KM, as KM cannot be a standalone, hence the need for integration. In addition, KM can be built into the way people work to promote sustainability.
- g) **Leveraging donors** to push KM agenda through organizational incitation to develop KM strategies, as a requirement for funding/subventions to be granted.

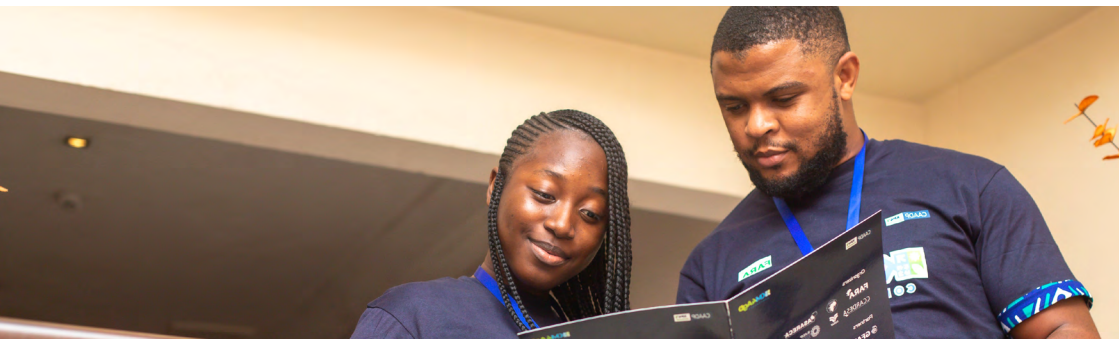
## 4. Proven Case Examples of KM Professionalization at Organizational Level

It is clear that Knowledge Management has a significant role in innovation. Organizations and companies need to innovate to survive and innovation requires knowledge, knowledge also requires knowledge management and knowledge management's functional role is perceived at organizational management, organizational culture and also at individual behaviour<sup>3</sup>. Many organizations worldwide have perceived the relevance of mainstreaming KM to enhance performance, effectiveness and innovation, but most organizations in the African continent are still to capture it. Some of these organizations include:

**UNESCO** - Has been a pioneer in enlarging its vision of technology, in moving beyond infrastructure to human needs. The Organization's thrust to create knowledge societies has its base on the conviction that universal access to information is essential to building peace, sustainable economic development, and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, UNESCO has created several tools and programmes to promote 'Openness' in content, technology, and processes through awareness raising, policy formulation and capacity building<sup>4</sup>.

**AFAAS** - Recognizes the role of KM and it started from defining knowledge and information. To not let KM be a standalone concept, it is currently focussing on building up a KM strategy that is integrated into other units like M & E, Communications, Information Technology, Public Relation among others.

**FARA** - in collaboration with AFAAS and the Sub-Regional Offices ([ASARECA](#), [CCARDESA](#) & [CORAF](#)) are engaged in Agricultural Research for Development, have individually embraced KM and professionalized KM, and currently joined forces to conduct the [KM4AgD Challenge](#) that aims at building appropriate KM capacities, establish KM CoPs for artificial intelligence and strengthen mechanisms for knowledge generation to accelerate the achievement of the CAADP Malabo goals by 2025 and the SDGs by 2030.



# Conclusion

Enhancing organizational performance and effectiveness so to meet business objectives could be reached if within every organization, knowledge is appropriately leveraged and mainstreamed. But for that to be done, it has to be nurtured, embodied and sustainably cultured at every organizational resource level, thus fostering its professionalization. This paper informs on the enabling environment and success factors to be considered, put into practice and observed. Embracing the highlighted points of considerations by policy and decision makers, and adopting as well as adapting them to their context so to fit the purpose shall be a gamechanger in the way organization functions and value knowledge.



## 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

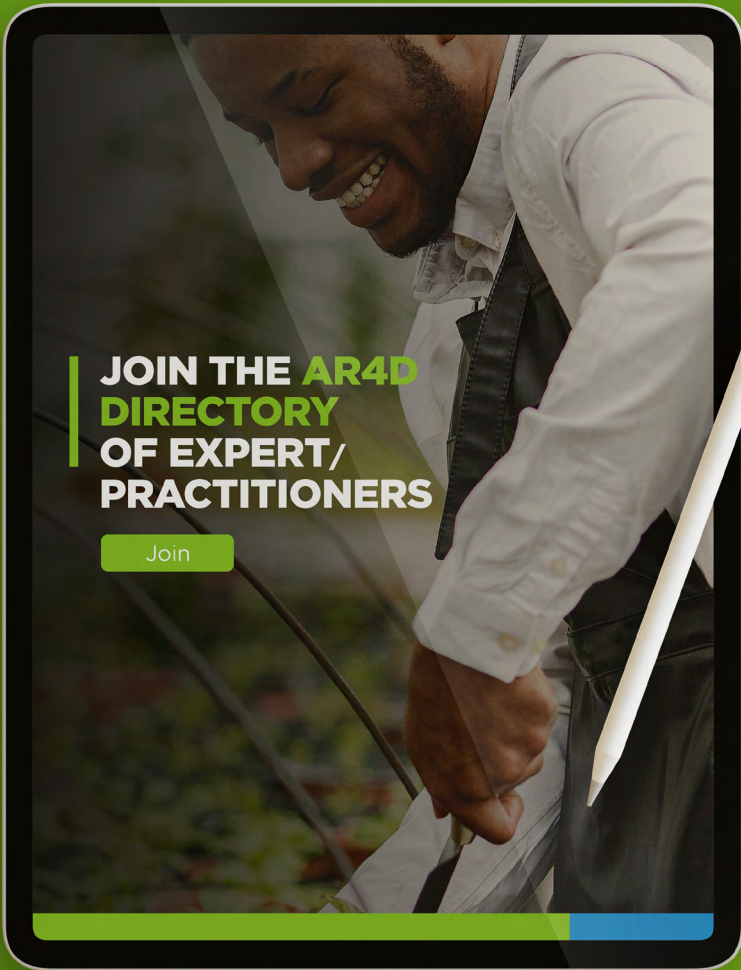


A leaf signifying  
Agriculture



Knowledge  
Management





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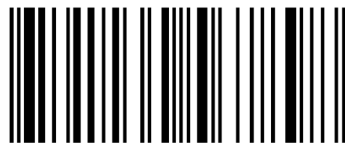
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