



INITIATIVE ON  
Diversification in East  
and Southern Africa

# Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance: Scoping Study Final Report



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## CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa

The [CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa](http://www.cgiar.org/initiative/diversification-in-esa/) aims to help smallholders transition to sustainably intensified, diversified, and de-risked agri-food systems based on maize in 12 East and Southern Africa (ESA) countries. Specifically, it seeks to enable 50,000 value chain actors, including farmers (at least 40% women, 40% youth), to adopt climate-smart maize-based intensification and diversification practices and one million to access digital agro-advisory services. In emphasizing the role of the private sector in driving such transformation, UU targets to support at least 30 start-ups and SMEs. Learn more about Diversification in ESA here: <https://www.cgiar.org/initiative/diversification-in-esa/>

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## Executive Summary

This scoping study for Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance (UULA) was inspired by the need for better collaboration and experience sharing among research providers dedicated to creating agricultural knowledge and its dissemination in the East and Southern Africa (ESA) region. It provides recommendations on the potential institutional arrangements for setting up a Learning Alliance (LA) to achieve the desired end and to also guide Knowledge Management and Learning (KML) around diversified maize farming systems. The recommendations were developed following a desk review of relevant literature and analysis of data collected from key implementing partners at the national and regional levels.

UULA is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in partnership with the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), AKADEMIYA 2063, and several members of the Global research partnership for a food-secure future (CGIAR). The network promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing, focusing on climate-smart, diversified maize farming practices. It engages national research systems and regional bodies to drive innovation and effective knowledge exchange in agriculture.

From the literature review, the study has observed that a Learning Alliance is a socialization mechanism for generating transdisciplinary knowledge in the context of application and uses a double loop learning process. It derives its strength from dealing with practical problems that require partnership based on the understanding that there is no single individual or institution that can solve them on their own. Within the context of a Learning Alliance, a contextual problem is resolved through several repetitive cycles. The double loop learning process at the end of each cycle is what gives rise to the name "Learning Alliance".

Based on the consultations conducted and analysis of data collected, the following are the key findings:

- Although partners envisaged a Learning Alliance consistent with theoretical frameworks, they did not articulate a clear value proposition to support its implementation. Similarly, no institutional arrangements were put in place to support effective implementation of the Alliance.
- Knowledge management is the main driver of the UULA among the implementing stakeholders. However, it does not have dedicated champions at the highest levels of management who can be held responsible and accountable for its results. This lack of formal champions has serious implications in terms of potential delays in approvals and rolling out of new ideas like the Learning Alliance.
- Resources for knowledge management, especially financial and human are limited among the implementing partners. Regional bodies are better equipped than their national-level counterparts on Knowledge Management (KM) tools and systems, but these are not seen as being adequate for an impactful roll-out of a Learning Alliance at country level.
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) skills exist among implementing partners, but there are inadequate capacities among partners in terms of staff numbers required to take on additional M&E roles presented by the Learning Alliance.

- There are many 'Learning Alliances' in the ESA region, but none are consistent with literature. They use the name 'Learning Alliance' just as a business name: they do not generate transdisciplinary knowledge nor use a double loop learning process in implementation.
- There are many knowledge hubs in the ESA region, with benefits seen in improving dissemination processes, providing more effective community interventions, and creating policy assessment tools, among others. There are challenges of sustainability and access to knowledge and information for many last-mile users.

As a way forward, the study proposes the following recommendations anchored around institutional arrangements for a Learning Alliance and knowledge management:

### **Institutional arrangements**

The implementation of the Learning Alliance should be undertaken in a phased manner involving three (3) phases. These include: (i) consolidation of KM activities; (ii) iteration and (iii) roll out. Phase 1 will entail consolidation of the ongoing activities of knowledge exchange among implementing stakeholders. During this phase, the aim should be to establish a knowledge exchange alliance with an appropriate governance structure such as a steering committee and delivery mechanism. Phase 2 (Iteration Phase) will focus on refining and improving the UULA concepts and implementation mechanisms within the context of a project through continuous application of best practices. It is anticipated that this will take perhaps two to three years after which the Learning Alliance will be rolled out to cover the National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES) in the ESA region. Given the intensive resource requirements and the need for partners to appreciate how it works, the Learning Alliance should be first be tested and refined further. If this is deemed successful, a full Alliance arrangement can then be rolled out (Phase 3).

### **Knowledge management and learning**

It is important to invest in the improvement of knowledge management among the UULA partners, even where circumstances may not allow for the development of a knowledge exchange Alliance and later a Learning Alliance. To achieve this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Regional research bodies should appoint formal and active knowledge management champions at the highest level of their organizations who are high-level managers responsible for KM interventions to facilitate institutional buy-in and support for new KM investments.
- Mobilize resources to carry out activities funded by the UU Initiative and invest in activities related to improving KM. Such resources would enhance the visibility of knowledge management in regional and national institutions.
- Institutions should develop optimal staff capacity in areas relevant to KM that seem to be weak, including strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity to track KM deliverables.
- Mobilize pertinent KM tools/systems to support National Agricultural Research Organizations (NAROs) in reaching out or discharging frontline activities to farmers. The NAROs should address issues of connectivity and access for most of their target audience.
- Global research partnership for a food-secure future (CGIAR) centres should have adequate budgets to support local partners' participation costs in joint activities and explore the possibility of more participation in dissemination work.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<b>ASARECA</b>	The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
<b>CCARDESA</b>	Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa
<b>CGIAR</b>	Global research partnership for a food-secure future
<b>CIAT</b>	International Centre for Tropical Agriculture
<b>ESA</b>	East and Southern Africa
<b>FARA</b>	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
<b>FRN</b>	Farmer Research Network
<b>ILRI</b>	International Livestock Research Institute
<b>IWMI</b>	International Water Management Institute
<b>KE</b>	Knowledge Exchange
<b>KEA</b>	Knowledge Exchange Alliance
<b>KM</b>	Knowledge Management
<b>LA</b>	Learning Alliance
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MNLA</b>	Malawi National Learning Alliance
<b>NARES</b>	National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems
<b>NARO</b>	National Agricultural Research Organization
<b>NLA</b>	National Learning Alliance
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>SAIRLA</b>	Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa
<b>SAWBO</b>	Scientific Animations Without Borders
<b>SECC</b>	South East Coastal Communities
<b>SHEP</b>	Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion
<b>UU</b>	Ukama Ustawi
<b>UULA</b>	Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Ukama Ustawi Initiative

The Ukama Ustawi (UU) Initiative is a four-year project estimated at US\$40 million that promotes diversification for resilient agribusiness ecosystems in ESA. It will end in 2024 and has targeted 12 countries in this region: Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The main goal of UU is to address food and nutrition security risks in the region arising from overreliance on maize intensification through a climate-resilient, water-secure, and socially inclusive approach. It aims to help smallholders sustainably transition to diversified and de-risked agri-food systems based on maize farming systems in target countries. Specifically, it seeks to enable 50,000 value chain actors, including farmers (at least 40% women, 40% youth), to adopt climate-smart maize-based intensification and diversification practices and one million to access digital agro-advisory services. In emphasizing the role of the private sector in driving such transformation, UU targets to support at least 30 start-ups and small-medium enterprises (SMEs). UU's vision is to achieve system-level development through innovative partnerships: together, we grow and develop.

## 1.2. Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance (UULA)

As a component of Ukama Ustawi, the Learning Alliance (LA) is a demand-led, collaborative knowledge-sharing network led by IWMI and the ILRI. It works in partnership with ASARECA, CCARDESA, FARA, AKADEMIYA 2063, and various members of the CGIAR. Together, these partners support the implementation of the Africa Knowledge Management Framework.

UULA focuses on building relationships, effective communication, trust, and mutual understanding with regional organizations to create a sustainable and collaborative learning environment. It enables UU to engage effectively with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) and regional bodies. Its goal is to present agricultural knowledge in a comprehensive, solution-oriented, and systematic way to meet the needs of end-users, whether individuals or organizations.

The Alliance creates a structured, multi-stakeholder network for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and innovation in areas such as agri-business, policy, and scaling successful practices. It brings together diverse stakeholders, including smallholder farmers, extension services, governments, enterprises, and advocates for gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). By fostering collaboration among these voices, UULA provides a pathway to scale up impactful practices across the agricultural sector.

The objectives of the UULA are to:

- (i) Curate knowledge on maize-based farming systems in ESA and surrounding innovation,
- (ii) Repackage knowledge,
- (iii) Share and exchange knowledge between UULA consortium partners and other stakeholders,
- (iv) Foster connections and linkages between CGIAR, regional and local research organizations, and
- (v) Provide opportunities to national and regional research organizations and partners to engage, test, and innovate.

### **1.3.Purpose/Objective of the Study**

UULA was established to improve the sharing of experiences among key agricultural research providers, enabling them to learn from one another on effective ways to create and disseminate research knowledge for maximum impact. There is a need to explore institutionalizing this knowledge exchange sustainably and cost-effectively, leveraging technical and administrative linkages within the knowledge management systems of participating partners.

The Alliance aims to go beyond creating a simple technical platform or linking existing, stand-alone knowledge management systems. Instead, it seeks to add institutional dimensions for dynamic management in a complex environment. UULA is designed as a foundation for a lasting, sustainable Learning Alliance among Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) service providers, intended to operate effectively beyond the lifespan of the broader Ukama Ustawi Initiative.

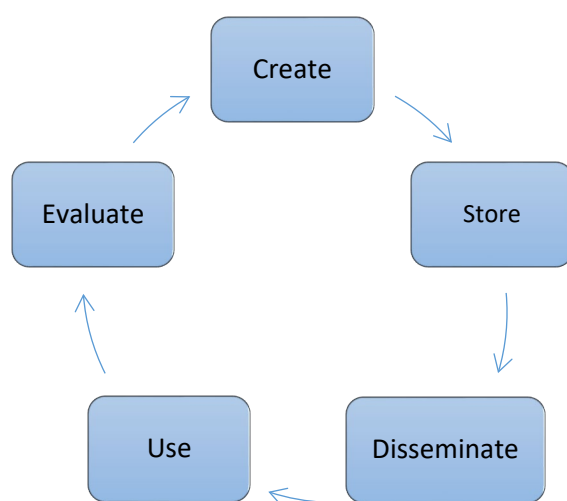
According to the Terms of Reference (TORs), the objective of this study is to **“to undertake a scoping study and develop concrete recommendations to guide Knowledge Management and Learning (KML) around diversified maize farming systems in ESA.”**

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Theoretical/Conceptual Issues

The conceptual basis for the scoping study is closely linked to the understanding that better knowledge exchange among agriculture research providers in the ESA region would result in better uptake and use of knowledge products by users - mostly farmers and their extension agents. The key assumption is that research knowledge providers in the UULA have the willingness, resources, and capacity to exchange knowledge among themselves, which would increase the uptake of their knowledge products. If the assumption does not hold, necessary action will be required to address underlying problems limiting knowledge exchange.

Data collection and analysis was guided by the knowledge management theory adapted from Leung et al. (2013), who identified the five stages in knowledge management (KM) including: **create, store, disseminate, use, and evaluate knowledge**. These stages are interrelated and are best illustrated by the figure below:



**Figure 1: Five stages of the KM Process (Source: Authors)**

The five stages of knowledge management are created (stage 1), store (stage 2), disseminate (stage 3), use (stage 4), and evaluate (stage 5), as shown in Figure 1 above. The activities start in stage 1 (create), proceed until the last stage (evaluate), and then start again in an iterative manner. In the context of the UULA, institutions and individuals get involved at each stage, as shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Stages of KM and Stakeholders in the UULA**

Stage	Participants
<b>Create</b>	CGIAR (IWMI, ILRI), FARA, CCARDESA, AKADEMIYA2063, ASARECA (Research scientists), NAROs (as partners)
<b>Store</b>	As above
<b>Disseminate</b>	As above

<b>Use</b>	Extension Institutions; Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs); Farmers; Agro-businesses (smallholders; commercial)
<b>Evaluate</b>	CGIAR (IWMI, ILRI), FARA, CCARDESA, ASARECA (Research scientists), AKADEMIYA2063. NAROs (partners)

These stages determined the data and information that was collected during stakeholder consultations using primarily two study instruments - structured and semi-structured questionnaires to guide key informant interviews and online respondents.

## **2.2. Information/Data Collection**

The study used literature/desk review, in-depth key informant interviews, and a structured questionnaire for data collection. Through consultations, we confirmed that four partner institutions (CCARDESA, ASARECA, FARA, and AKADEMIYA2063) are interested in establishing the UULA. Out of the 12 targeted countries in ESA targeted by UU, three countries (Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda) were purposively sampled to participate in the scoping study. Zambia is the highest recipient of UU interventions, while Malawi and Uganda are the fourth and sixth, respectively. For purposes of triangulation, primary data was collected through key informant interviews as well as desk reviews from the three countries (Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda) selected to participate in the study.

## **2.3. Limitations**

The study had initially targeted four institutions - AKADEMIYA2063, CCARDESA, ASARECA, and FARA to respond to the capacity assessment questionnaire. However, only three were interviewed, and one institution was unable to respond at this time. So, the capacity assessment questionnaire was filled out by three institutions.

## 3. Literature/Desk Review

### 3.1. Theoretical Foundations of a Learning Alliance

Literature indicates that the UULA approach emerged as a socialization mechanism for a new form of knowledge production, with roots tracing back to the work of Gibbons et al., (1994). Gibbons, et al., introduced the concept of **Mode Two** knowledge production, distinguishing it from the traditional **Mode One** model. In Mode Two, knowledge production, multidisciplinary research teams work together on problems that exist in the real world, from developing hypotheses to finding solutions jointly with stakeholder partners for the identified contextual problem.

This is different from *Mode One* knowledge production, which at the extreme “is motivated by scientific knowledge alone and which is not bothered by the applicability of its findings”. The two modes of knowledge production are not replacing each other; they are dealing with different ways of generating new knowledge. Gibbons et al. (1994) noted that this new type of knowledge generation “promotes the interaction of multiple actors with multi-layered sources of knowledge to cope with the complexity of fostering continuous technological, social, and institutional innovations to respond to rapidly changing contexts and demands.”

The literature highlights further advancements in theories of knowledge production, culminating in the emergence of **Mode Three** knowledge production, as outlined by Carayannis et al. (2016). *Mode Three* integrates concepts from systems theory, knowledge, and innovation more directly, emphasizing the interplay between systems and networks, the application of systems theory within knowledge frameworks, and bridging systems theory with knowledge processes. Its socialization mechanism operates through national knowledge and innovation systems and their connections to global systems, distinguishing it from the mechanisms of *Mode Two*.

While *Mode Three* follows a different trajectory and is not explored further here, *Mode Two* knowledge production remains significant. Despite facing criticisms, its role in establishing a socialization mechanism for collaborative and context-driven knowledge production stands out as one of its most notable contributions.

The key features of Gibbons et al. (1994) seminal work is that the new mode of knowledge production operates within a context of real-world application and that problems are not set within a disciplinary framework. It is developing its own cognitive and social norms to govern its production, legitimization, and diffusion (communication).

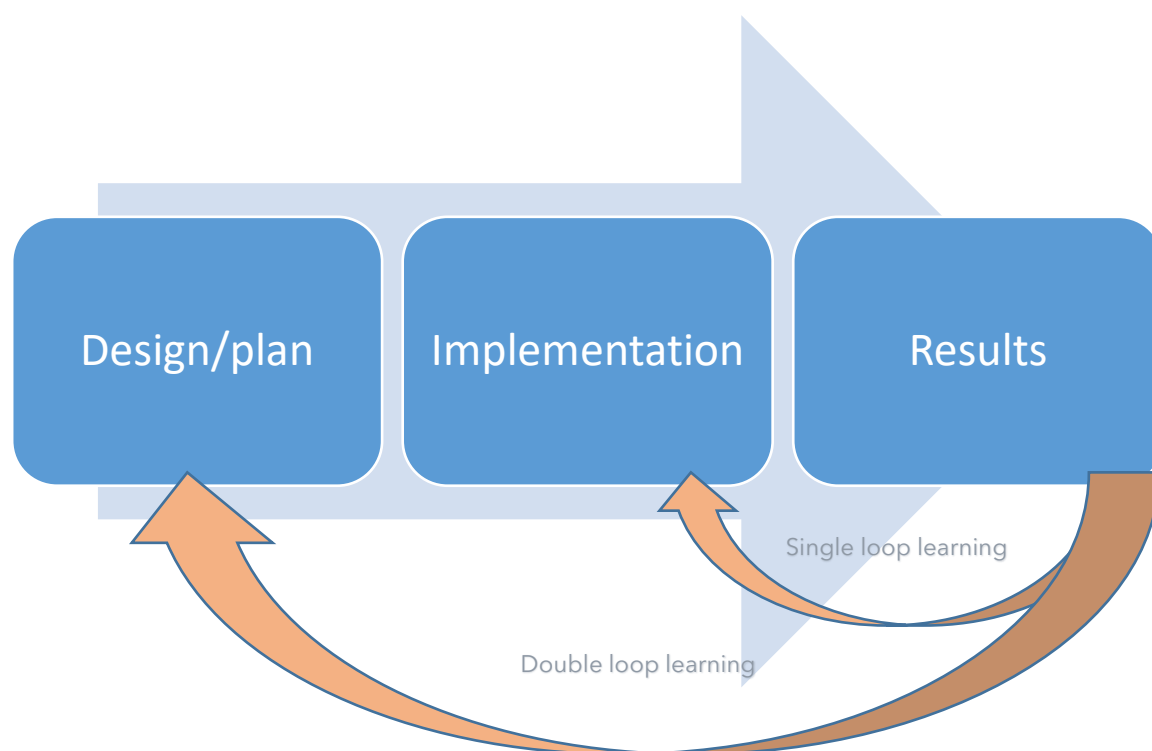
Its distinguishing traits are that problem setting and solving is in the context of application; it is transdisciplinary by nature<sup>1</sup>; it is characterized by heterogeneity, more heterarchical and transient in organization; and more socially accountable and reflexive, confined to a specific and localized context.

The language for conveying this form of knowledge production is still in its infancy. For example, the convention of science and scientists is more appropriate for Mode one production, but knowledge and practitioners for Mode Two. The outstanding question is whether Mode Two is probably just a variant of Mode One with its focus on application or represents a long-lasting changing trend for Mode One. Gibbons et al. (1994) believe there is more work to be done to distinguish the two forms of knowledge production in a clearer and complete manner.

<sup>1</sup> The teams are multidisciplinary; but the means and results are transdisciplinary.

As already pointed out, this new type of knowledge production also has its own social norms, and this is where a Learning Alliance comes in as one of the options for institutionalizing production. Under the arrangement of a Learning Alliance, voluntary institutional partnerships use multidisciplinary teams to provide transdisciplinary solutions to developmental problems defined within a specific locality and context. The solutions can have as their starting point the adaptation of innovative ideas or the generation of new ideas altogether.

The 'learning' itself, which has given rise to the name 'Learning Alliance,' comes from the use of the double loop learning process, which is a distinctive feature of Mode Two knowledge production. The double loop learning process is distinguished from the single loop learning process, which has the stage of planning first, followed by action, then evaluation of results, and then back to planning to start another single cycle. Adjustments are only made to correct errors or problems made in implementation. A 'double loop' process includes a period of broad reflection after results are evaluated - correcting for errors, any underlying policies and goals, and program design and systems. This helps to avoid the trap of replicating ineffective approaches because it facilitates critical thinking about what needs to be done. This double-loop learning process for each topic of interest is the primary means by which the alliance learns - hence, the name "Learning Alliance".



**Figure 2: Illustration of learning processes (Source: Authors)**

From these conceptual foundations, experimental Learning Alliances began to appear as early as 2000, and non-experimental ones as early as 2009, especially in the education and humanitarian sectors.

## **3.2. Empirical Experiences**

### **3.2.1. CIAT Learning Alliance experiments**

The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) was one of the first institutions to experiment with the Learning Alliance approach, in 2000 in collaboration with Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) Nicaragua, with eight local partners in 10 municipalities. From there, the idea moved to Eastern Africa, where a Learning Alliance covering 6 countries was established with the East Africa regional office hosted by the

Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Then, it returned to Central America for the second phase with new features such as representation of multiple partners in research and development (including donor partners). Also, it introduced a multi-lingual virtual platform to facilitate learning within and across partner organizations. The CIAT model has been limited to identifying, sharing, and adapting good practices in research and development in specific contexts.<sup>2</sup> These can then be used to strengthen capacities, generate and document development outcomes, identify future research needs or areas for collaboration, and inform public and private sector policy decisions.

In general, the CIAT experiences show that a Learning Alliance approach is not suited to all agricultural research projects. However, the approach can be of significant use for researchers and projects that work directly with or aim to effect change in a specific rural or agricultural innovation system. The following specific challenges were noted:

- **Partner and participant selection:** selecting partner agencies and appropriate individuals within those agencies is critical. Partner and participant turnover should be avoided or at least minimized since this has a significant negative impact on the learning process.
- **Process facilitation and coordination:** Establishing a Learning Alliance can take time especially if appropriate partners and individuals cannot be easily identified. To stay vibrant and relevant, a Learning Alliance must adapt and change as learning occurs and new questions arise. It is recommended that research and support staff be assigned to this area of process facilitation and coordination to achieve set goals and keep partners interested. Financial resources are also needed to support time allocation for personnel to engage in Learning Alliance activities.
- **Funding:** Donor agencies are not keen to fund open-ended learning processes but are likely to fund specific research and development projects that use a Learning Alliance approach as an implementation mechanism. Linking the Learning Alliance to large scale development initiatives may make it easier to secure funding. This efficient use of researchers' time, and participation in alliance activities can complement dissemination and training budgets. Funding issues should be part of project design considerations and in the alliance-building processes to guarantee a minimum level of sustainability.
- **Linking learning across levels:** Given technical capacity and management requirements and limitations in implementing partners, selecting a few key research questions that link partner agencies is one way to manage the high demands of the Learning Alliance approach.

### 3.2.2. The South-East Coastal Communities (SECC) program

Many Universities in the United Kingdom manage university-community partnership projects to learn about new research opportunities, new developments in the curriculum, and opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills outside the 'classroom.'

<sup>2</sup> It is one of the ways for implementing Mode 2 knowledge production; it can also proceed without prior identification of best practice, just by identifying the problem to be solved and developing the theoretical framework jointly for resolving the problem.

Under the SECC Program, nine universities and one not-for-profit organization managed the program collectively. Universities were encouraged to collaborate to engage communities, identify opportunities and scope, manage, and sometimes deliver research project activities. Key questions for the program were, therefore, whether cross-university collaboration can bring added benefits to university-community partnership work, whether it can enhance the support mechanisms for such work, and whether it can influence the likely sustainability of support mechanisms and partnerships (beyond individual projects).

All the projects supported under the SECC Program had a common theme (health and wellbeing), a common broad geographical focus (coastal communities), and a common goal to facilitate 'demand-led' community knowledge exchange, working in partnership with local organizations to leverage added resources and value for the benefit of coastal communities. The health and wellbeing theme was deliberately chosen because it was seen to be sufficiently open to encompass the wide range of subject disciplines offered by the partner institutions. Still, it could equally have been another theme. Some form of organizational arrangement or structure was implemented at the central and regional levels, with representation from participating universities and community partner organizations.

An evaluation of the SECC Program revealed the following key lessons:

- Collaboration between universities may be an efficient and effective way of engaging with local communities. Still, such collaboration is not cost-free and requires high-level strategic buy-in (at the top management level). Such buy-in is crucial for ensuring that core staff and structures are supported during periods 'between grants.'
- The financial resources required to initiate and sustain individual projects can be quite small. However, the resources required to create the 'infrastructure' to support community engagement should not also be overlooked. In most cases, the resources are for academic and administrative support staff time, although there may be marketing and promotion related costs and general office overheads. Overall, government grants were key to the sustainability of the entire initiative.
- An effective interface for community partners is essential for the long-term sustainability of community-university knowledge exchange. It builds trust, raises awareness, and provides a flow of potential projects and/or knowledge exchange activities for the future.

### **3.3. Overall lessons from the Literature Review**

- A Learning Alliance is a vehicle for developing transdisciplinary knowledge to solve real-life contextual problems and nothing else. All five stages of knowledge management - creation, storage, dissemination, usage, and evaluation- are built-in; it is a complete package. The research-usage/uptake gap does not apply, and none of the new knowledge generated can be trapped in journals or research seminars.
- It derives its strength from dealing with a problem that can best be resolved through partnerships, meaning no single individual or institution can solve it independently. It will not work where there are incentives for individual solutions.
- The capacity of individuals is enhanced through generating knowledge to solve a contextual time-bound problem, and once the problem is solved, they move on with their enhanced capacities, and they do not have to work in the same team or geo-context again.

- It uses only a double loop learning process, which has been the basis for calling it a Learning Alliance. It can have a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, policymakers, local practitioners, farmer representatives, NGOs, etc., participating in resolving a defined contextual problem.
- It requires high-level institutional buy-in for its success and sustainability. This helps determine who participates from the partnering institutions and facilitates continuity of staffing and funding where gaps exist.
- It is unsuitable for all types of agricultural research, and its outputs are very much contextual and time-bound, leaving the 'documented experience of joint problem-solving' as the key output/deliverable to be shared with others.

Literature shows that the following principles should be applied to establish and implement a successful **Learning Alliance** (Lundy et al., 2005; Lundy & Gottret, 2007):

- Setting clear objectives-these should be based on the participating institutions' needs, capacities, and interests.
- Shared responsibilities, costs, and credit.
- Using outputs as inputs: research and development (R&D) outputs should serve as inputs to the innovation process, and they are place- and time-specific.
- Differentiated learning mechanisms- these should be flexible but connected learning methods are needed to cater to differences in participants' capacities and interests.
- Long-term, trust-based relationships- this is critical in influencing positive change and understanding why a change has occurred requires long-term, stable relationships.

## 4. Findings and interpretation

### 4.1. Formulation of the Ukama Ustawi Learning Alliance

The written conceptual beginnings for establishing the UULA can be traced to a paper of February 2023 titled *'From Platform to Learning Alliance.'* The paper shows that a Learning 'platform' was provided for in the design framework of UU and that after further review, it was decided to replace it with a Learning 'Alliance.' The paper also provides descriptive differences between a 'Learning Platform' and a 'Learning Alliance,' and highlights initial thoughts about objectives and potential partners - CCARDESA, ASARECA, FARA, and AKADEMIYA2063. It does not go as far as showing differences between a platform and an alliance on institutional structure and resources.<sup>3</sup> However, the Learning Alliance's description is exactly in line with theory and practice.

Later, in 2023, a Learning Alliance (LA) Concept Note was developed. It states that the UULA will provide **a structured network for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and innovation** for the various stakeholders under the UU Initiative. The Concept Note also does not provide the Alliance's institutional arrangements and working modalities. However, it specifies the same partners as identified in the presentation mentioned earlier on - CCARDESA, ASARECA, FARA, and AKADEMIYA2063.<sup>4</sup>

**In practice, the activities conducted under the LA framework to date do not** fully align with the intended concepts of a learning "platform" or "alliance," as these structures have yet to be fully established. The activities have primarily centred on dissemination and knowledge exchange rather than fostering structured, collaborative learning (Beukman et al., 2023a). **This divergence may stem from delays in formalizing the UULA, prompting a focus on simpler, more immediate tasks in the interim.**

As defined in theory and practice, a Learning Alliance is a relevant mechanism to address the need identified in the UULA Concept Note i.e. *more systematic knowledge sharing and learning opportunities between CGIAR and national research and development organizations.* The intention is for CGIAR, NAROs, and a broad range of relevant actors, including farmers, to continuously engage in joint knowledge generation and application to solve contemporary agricultural development challenges. This process naturally promotes collaboration through the incentive of solving shared, context-specific problems.

**However, a Learning Alliance may not be the appropriate vehicle for delivering all the functions outlined in the UULA Concept Note, especially those centred primarily on 'knowledge exchange.'** These activities would be better suited to a different framework or mechanism that can carry out such tasks effectively, building on the UULA's initial activities.

### 4.2. Value Proposition of the Ukama Ustawi Learning Alliance

Three foundational documents were reviewed for this study on the establishment of the UULA i.e. UU's Proposal, the UULA Concept Note, and a workshop document titled "Operationalizing Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance for Impact" (Beukman et al., 2023b). The latter outlines activities planned for 2024 that align with the LA's objectives. However, the objectives stated in the Concept Note are broader than standard LA objectives, which complicates the task of clearly demonstrating the LA's value proposition.

<sup>3</sup> February 2023 presentation, *'From Platform to Learning Alliance.'* And November 2023 presentation, *'Developing a Learning Alliance.'*

<sup>4</sup> The role of the continental research bodies is not very clear, as the same Concept Note says that the UU LA will be established between CGIAR, CCARDESA, and ASARECA in East and Southern Africa. This would leave out FARA and AKADEMIYA2063, and one of these two has also not responded to consultations about this study.

A Learning Alliance derives its value by being the most effective mechanism for resolving problems that cannot be addressed individually or would be resolved inadequately. Scientists are drawn to it because they can immediately apply the knowledge they generate, ensuring it is not left unused. Users engage with the alliance because it adapts to their needs throughout the knowledge generation process, eliminating the need for separate extension efforts. Policymakers, agri-businesses, and other participants are similarly motivated, gaining skills to tackle similar problems in various contexts. To effectively market the concept of a Learning Alliance, it is essential to clearly capture and communicate these aspects of its value proposition.

### **4.3. Governance/Institutional Arrangement**

#### **4.3.1. Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance**

Consultations and documents regarding the UULA indicate that no clear organizational arrangement has been proposed. Current indications suggest that a complex formal structure, including one requiring substantial overheads, is not anticipated. However, some stakeholders feel that this area requires further guidance.

Any alliance arrangement necessitates the presence of roles for leading, managing, and operating, whether on a part-time or full-time basis. Typically, this includes a steering group or committee with a chair, a manager or management team who reports to the committee and drives operations, and those responsible for implementing activities or operations. While these roles can be assigned to existing positions within institutions, establishing at least some full-time positions might be the most effective way to ensure operational alliance management.

The current UULA must clearly define its partners' roles and responsibilities. Additionally, it needs to secure strong high-level management buy-in from regional research bodies. Such commitment is crucial to ensuring the continued availability of staff and resources, particularly when project funding is either temporarily or permanently depleted. Evidence of this buy-in would ideally take the form of a collaboration agreement or a memorandum of understanding, solidifying the partnership and its shared objectives.

#### **4.3.2. Knowledge management**

Two out of the three respondents interviewed expressed a consistent view that knowledge management lacks formal champions at the highest level of their organizations. There are no top managers responsible for and accountable for its KM results. One respondent mentioned an assigned top-level formal champion but noted that this individual was inactive. Similar responses were given regarding the presence of a steering or advisory committee within each organization. Only one institution reported having a formal and functioning group, while the other two do not have such arrangements. These responses suggest that, generally, knowledge management is not a prominent domain among the Learning Alliance partners.

On a positive note, all respondents reported the presence of formal structures for community engagement and sharing innovative practices, indicating the availability of users who can participate in delivering research solutions through a Learning Alliance.

However, this prevailing situation challenges the development of an ESA Learning Alliance, as its key driver is knowledge management. Without visible knowledge management, securing high-level institutional support for projects like the Learning Alliance will be difficult. Although the Learning Alliance may not cover all types of agricultural research subjects, it would support the transformation of agricultural research to be more developmental and demand-oriented, thereby minimizing the scope of knowledge that may not be utilized.

## **4.4. Resources**

### **4.4.1. Finance**

Most respondents have indicated that their institutions do not provide adequate resources for knowledge management, either from other budget lines or external sources such as projects/donor partners. This suggests that institutions would need additional financial resources to undertake new knowledge management activities, such as establishing a Learning Alliance. In the context of the current UU, there is no indication of resources specifically allocated to facilitate the participation of other partners in delivering services for the Learning Alliance. The Learning Alliance Concept Note mentions providing small grants to NAROs to support the implementation of interventions identified under UU, particularly for scaling up innovative practices.

Institutions participate in a Learning Alliance because they recognize its value proposition. They might be willing to increase their contributions to share the benefits even if they have previously allocated limited resources. Additionally, if the cause is well justified, securing seed funding from external bodies is possible. In summary, potential alliance members' participation and support for a Learning Alliance will depend on access to extra resources. This is especially true for most NAROs, which must be involved in implementation rather than managing the alliance. Unlike regional research bodies, such NAROs do not receive regular support from external sources, and government funding remains very low.

### **4.4.2. Human resources**

Respondents indicate that their institutions differ in terms of staffing capacities and turnover. These differences are crucial considerations for a Learning Alliance partnership i.e. costs will be minimized if existing staff can be deployed to execute alliance functions part-time or full-time. Partners with stronger staff capacities can assume more demanding functions, such as operational management and reporting.

Two out of three institutions report staff shortages in KM and M&E. CCARDESA and FARA face limitations from KM staff and are barely adequately staffed for M&E, though they are more stable in overall staff turnover compared to ASARECA. ASARECA has a better KM staffing situation but is more unstable regarding overall staff turnover. A Learning Alliance will require adequate and stable staffing for knowledge generation and related management processes, as well as administrative support, including logistics and finance. Staff unavailability (common with part-time arrangements) and turnover (especially among researchers) could disrupt the continuity of learning processes.

A fully-fledged Learning Alliance will need a reasonable full-time staff complement through managing partners, even if resources come from elsewhere. Therefore, it is important to start with minimal administrative staff arrangements in the early stages and plan for part-time support where a lead or managing partner has capacity limitations.

### **4.4.3. KM tools/systems/infrastructure**

All three respondents give the impression that their institutions are generally well-equipped with KM tools and systems, such as mobile learning apps, online platforms, and interactive decision support tools. Such tools are quite useful for a Learning Alliance, especially given the potential distances between participating institutions working on specific problems. However, the challenge lies in keeping these tools and systems up to date in a rapidly evolving information technology landscape. This requires adequate financial resources, which is a major

challenge. In contrast, the NAROs consulted are less well equipped and rely on social media channels for support—such as Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Some struggle to sustain costs for hosting their websites and other technology platforms, which are not regularly operational.

Respondents also indicate that while all institutions have a KM resource center, it lacks targeted information on KM best practices and is not actively managed or moderated with activity measures. It is stocked with general KM resources, except for one institution that has indicated some level of targeting in the organization of its knowledge products.

**Zambia best practice example:**

***KM tools overcoming illiteracy...***

To address illiteracy barriers in extension, CCARDESA has teamed up with Purdue University through Scientific Animations Without Borders (SAWBO) to adopt scientific animated videos to fast-track dissemination of improved technologies across the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region. SAWBO works to increase accessibility of knowledge products to low-literacy learners through scientific animated videos that utilise smartphones to allow for rapid transmission of messages between individuals. The videos can be overlaid with multiple languages for use across a wider area. CCARDESA and Purdue's first intervention has been the SAWBO training in Petauke, Zambia, as a pilot. The training involved learning relevant processes and tools, and at the end of training, participants were given equipment digital gadgets such as mobile phones and Pico projectors for distributing and displaying animated videos targeting larger groups. The initiative will help to expand the net coverage of extension services to benefit more farmers. From Zambia, the initiative will be extended to other SADC countries under the Food Systems Resilience Programme (FSRP).

#### **4.5. Dissemination**

The overarching goal of KM is to facilitate the sharing of knowledge/information - dissemination - with users. This issue is central to the UULA, which has set its focus on improving the uptake of innovative practices, especially those developed under UU. It intends to provide small scaling grants to NAROs to facilitate action on this front, even though this study has not come across rules and amounts associated with such grants.

Respondents who are also UULA partners indicate that arrangements are in place to deliver effective dissemination services. However, according to NAROs in the two countries consulted, the gap between research technologies developed and those under usage is widening. They believe either dissemination efforts are weakening, or the technologies developed are not demand-responsive. Regional research bodies appear adequately equipped and prepared for accelerating dissemination, but reaching many farmers, especially in rural

areas, is the main task for their national counterparts, the NAROs, and their extension counterparts where available. The challenge at the national level appears to be the lack of resources and mechanisms for reaching out to many farmers who are not literate and not connected to modern communication systems. They have noticed that pilot projects or initiatives mostly work when they are still under implementation; farmers slow down or even stop the uptake of innovative practices and technologies when they close. The challenge they see is that the projects' incentives disappear when the project closes.

Some NAROs have observed that dissemination tools are not friendly or attractive to farmers partly because they are not built around or linked to providing valuable information for their farming activities. This information is mostly about the prices of their products and accessible markets. NAROs think such information would provide incentives for their access and recommend the use of audiovisuals/animation features in local languages to overcome illiteracy challenges.

#### **4.6. Knowledge Exchange**

Knowledge exchange among peers is at the center of the UULA, not only in the context of UU but even in other research initiatives on agriculture and development in the ESA region. The focus of the first implementation workshop for UULA was to foster knowledge exchange among farmers and local implementing and supporting officers, along with national (NAROs), regional (CCARDESA and ASARECA), and continental (FARA) research institutions and UU partners.

Just like in the dissemination above, UULA partners have an edge in the capacity to handle this compared to their national counterparts. The regional and continental research bodies have well-established knowledge exchange processes as part of their KM approach, with links to external stakeholders. The NAROs are very conversant with the regional research bodies but tend to regard their interactions with CGIARs as confined and subject-specific, with little spill-over to dissemination action. To work more closely with CGIARs is a two-way process, but given resource constraints, support for participation in joint activities may be needed.

#### **Malawi best practice example:**

##### ***market-driven extension...***

The Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion (SHEP) Approach is an extension and advisory approach, that aims to help farmers to access and benefit from markets by changing their mindset from "**Grow and Sell**" to "**Grow to Sell**". (In the SHEP Approach, a core group of farmers is selected, trained, and visits an adjacent market and conduct market survey to see for themselves and better understand the market's functioning. Based on this experience, they then develop a crop calendar or a business plan according to the identified market demands. Having seen and understood what the price, required quality, timing and volume of production is, the target farmers are able to better adapt their farming and production to the market demands. They move thus to "Farming as Business" by establishing relations with market actors and filling the information gap regarding quality, price etc. The end result has improved livelihoods for farmers. The SHEP Approach proves that it is possible to improve farmers' livelihoods by tapping into local human and technical resources, without advanced technology.

### **Uganda best practice example:**

#### ***Farm clinics...***

The farm clinics promote the idea of doing agriculture as business and in Uganda they are being hosted on a quarterly basis at any one of the research institutes in each geographical province. The power of the farm clinic is in the provision of all relevant information about a crop at a given time and place to a farmer. Farm clinics are responding to the demand to get enough and accurate information about good agricultural practices including inputs, seeds, easily and quickly from credible sources. Demonstration farms at a research institute site for showcasing best practices is chosen and forms the basis for each farm clinic. Researchers provides farmers with awareness of soil health, appropriate seeds, and suitable weather that is needed to produce and harvest a good crop. Farmers may also require capital and that is where financial institutions come in. Other services needed include harvesting, storage, marketing, and related transactions. Policy and strategy experts also come into farm clinics to communicate with farmers and other related stakeholders - agribusiness, NGOs, financial service providers, etc. The initiative brings in a diverse range of stakeholders, including the media for purposes of publicity and extension, into one centre and hold comprehensive dialogue on all aspects of a particular crop. The farm clinics are sponsored by the Central Bank of Uganda as part of extending its financial services to farmers.

## **4.7. Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Respondents have provided a mixed picture regarding the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) situation in their institutions.** In some cases, M&E capabilities may be adequate but insufficient to address new challenges. Effective M&E requires pertinent institutional arrangements and resources, particularly human and financial. The UULA currently lacks these resources, raising questions about how the M&E capacity of partners can be utilized to support the monitoring of the Learning Alliance (LA). Given the current limitations, it seems the UULA will need to establish its own M&E capacity.

**The presence of existing M&E capacities within partner institutions and NAROs is advantageous for UULA,** as activities conducted within these institutions would align with their M&E frameworks. If the UULA's activities are entirely new, establishing and integrating M&E capacity should not be overly difficult, as it would involve adapting existing frameworks to accommodate additional indicators. The critical initial steps for the UULA include defining organizational roles, responsibilities, and capabilities, determining incentives and demands for M&E, and ensuring the sustainability of the M&E system. Institutions that have addressed these issues, even if only on paper, would benefit from having an M&E framework and key performance indicators already identified.

## **4.8. Learning Alliances in ESA Region**

The Terms of Reference envisaged that this study would identify Learning Alliances comparable to UULA in the ESA region through consultations and a literature search. However, respondents from all the NAROs consulted had never heard of anything like the UULA.<sup>5</sup> The same is true for literature searches i.e. there was nothing similar to the UULA in the ESA Region or other sectors. Using a search engine creates a real difficulty i.e. many institutions of education and training—teaching professionals, students, and researchers—use the term 'Learning Alliance' either as an ordinary business name or for collaborative partnerships in the delivery of training and disciplinary research.

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4 for references on the definition of the UU LA.

For example, in Ethiopia, they have what is called the **National Learning Alliance (NLA)** of the Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Research and Learning in Africa (SAIRLA) Project that seeks to generate new evidence and design tools to enable governments, investors, and other key actors deliver more effective policies and investments in sustainable agricultural intensification. The NLA started in 2017, and it is fully funded by one donor (United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office - UK FCDO) through ILRI. However, from the description of its objectives and activities, the NLA is like the **learning platform** initially designed for the UU Initiative. Though many stakeholders are involved, they only meet to share 'lessons' or 'exchange knowledge' on best practices.

The NLA is not designed to conduct transdisciplinary research. In Malawi, the Malawi National Learning Alliance (MNLA) is hosted by the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). It has partners from the University of Malawi, the Government of Malawi, and the media.

The same project, SAIRLA, which supports the Ethiopian Learning Alliance, also supports the MNLA in working on priority issues for the country's agriculture sector identified by members. Its main activities are generating evidence for policy reform, capacity building for implementing stakeholders, and dissemination/extension. It is a learning platform in design and practice, just like the Ethiopian NLA.

There are more examples to buttress our findings i.e. *the name 'Learning Alliance' is commonly used for institutional arrangements that, in practice, are not Learning Alliances. We believe that the ESA region does not have a **Learning Alliance** that corresponds to applicable literature and is similar to the UULA. Most of the so-called Learning Alliances in the ESA region are not jointly funded, nor do they carry out transdisciplinary research in the application context. In an earlier chapter, Section 2.2, we have already given examples of the Learning Alliances similar to the UULA - CIAT and SECC Program, except that they are not from the ESA region.*

The country respondents' (NAROs) **expect that UULA would work as a 'learning platform' to be more relevant and successful** and should focus on knowledge exchange on best practices and services related to improving the uptake of farming technologies. It should also be involved in relevant capacity-building efforts for KM. The target groups should be farmers themselves, and any staff engaged in frontline services to reach farmers with requisite technologies. The mechanisms should be multi-faceted i.e. through any institution that interfaces with farmers, cultural, religious, social, educational, health, developmental, media, etc. The expectation of the NAROs is based on the common understanding that a 'Learning Alliance' is just a name given to any collaborative partnership arrangement that focuses on sharing knowledge, not necessarily something technically defined for purposes of transdisciplinary knowledge generation.

#### **4.9. Knowledge Hubs**

Findings from the study indicate that many countries in the ESA region have active knowledge hubs on various topical subjects, including specific subjects on agriculture - agro-dealerships, agro-ecology, climate resilient agriculture, etc. These knowledge hubs facilitate the mobilization of pertinent subject knowledge and benefit the key stakeholders involved, including universities, farmer organizations, farmer research networks (FRNs), research institutes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), extension services, private sector organizations, policymakers, etc. Some of their benefits include improving dissemination processes, providing more effective community interventions, ensuring informed care, and creating policy assessment tools.

Like elsewhere, knowledge hubs have their limitations and challenges. Generally, they relate to funding, resources, and resolving conflicting perspectives. In the ESA region, many of these hubs are project and donor-funded, and their survival beyond such interventions may not be guaranteed. Additional problems related to knowledge hubs include challenges related to access and language in the context of the ESA region: poor connectivity for rural areas and high illiteracy which implies that most farmers have no access to knowledge hubs. Participation in knowledge hubs can be a useful source of partnership information for the UU Learning Alliance when it starts operations. Given the time-related risks for the existence of knowledge hubs, it would only be useful to assess the availability and functionality of knowledge hubs when the UULA starts its operations.

## 5. Way forward and Recommendations

**This study has noted that establishing a Learning Alliance grounded in applicable theory and literature can effectively strengthen research relationships between CGIARs, Regional Research Organizations, NAROs, end users, and last-mile service providers.** Achieving this objective leverages the inherent benefits of a Learning Alliance, which include the development of knowledge through application and solving contextual problems with multidisciplinary research teams from participating partners and beyond.

**However, a Learning Alliance does not align with the current structure of Ukama Ustawi for generating and sharing 'knowledge since it is organized around work packages.'** Therefore, the study proposes a three-phased approach for establishing the LA: Stage 1 which involves an alliance formalizing its existing practices. At the same time, stage 2 focuses on refining and improving the learning concepts and implementation mechanisms to establish a proper Learning Alliance, while stage 3 will focus on rolling out the implementation of a fully operational alliance.

### 5.1. Establishing a Proper Learning Alliance

**A proper Learning Alliance incorporates work-based incentives to enhance research relationships at individual and institutional levels, including end users.** The value added is clear to partners i.e. it fosters synergy by facilitating collaboration to solve complex problems that individual organizations cannot tackle alone. This closer collaboration among research providers, users, policymakers, NGOs, and others materializes through problem-solving projects executed by multidisciplinary teams. Such an alliance ensures that new knowledge is applied directly within its context, bridging knowledge generation and usage gaps. It builds the capacities of all participants—researchers and users—throughout the entire problem-solving process, embracing modern dimensions of research knowledge generation despite new risks.

**Given the findings of this study, we propose delaying the establishment of a proper Learning Alliance for 2 to 3 years.** This recommendation stems from the current unpreparedness of key implementing partners, revealing critical gaps and shortfalls in capacity that need addressing first. There is also limited awareness of the Learning Alliance's potential to generate transdisciplinary knowledge. These gaps include issues related to governance, knowledge management, resources (financial, human, technological), and high-level institutional leadership. The study outlines recommendations to address these issues, and once progress is made, the establishment of a Learning Alliance can be reconsidered.

A Learning Alliance for the ESA region could have the following structural features:

#### ➤ **ESA LA Board**

We propose that the ESA LA Board be established to oversee governance and overall management and provide policy and direction for the UULA. The LA Board may have 9 - 12 members representing regional and continental research bodies, CGIAR Centers (2 or 3), NGOs (1 or 2), and Universities (1 or 2). These are resource providers engaged using pooled and non-pooled resources.

#### ➤ **National LA Board**

The proposed National LA Board will be responsible for the national LA research agenda, and project topics/ideas. The Board will have between 12-15 members representing NAROs, Resident CGIAR Centres with

representatives from farmers, private sector (agribusinesses), NGOs, policy makers (national or local government), extension institutions, and universities. The regional research bodies can have representation at proxy level, that is, choosing representatives where they have no in-country presence.

#### ➤ **ESA UU LA Secretariat**

The Secretariat will perform the coordination function and will have about five staff: support management, finance, reporting, and help desk. It will be hosted in one of the partner institutions. Arrangements will be made to ensure that the help desk is established in each of the partner institutions.

#### ➤ **Funding**

Funding is critical for the functionality and sustainability of the UULA, which will heavily depend on pooled resources from partners of the Alliance. Some participation costs can be paid directly by each partner. Members of the Boards at the national or regional level will require facilitation to support their participation in the meetings and other activities.

#### ➤ **Operational features**

The following issues should be noted about the working arrangements of the Learning Alliance:

- The entry point for knowledge generation will be identifying a research problem related to the overall research theme in the geographical space. That itself will require collaboration with local communities and partners. Hypotheses and assumptions will be made jointly by the multidisciplinary research teams from the participating partners. Depending on the context, the proposals will have to be accepted first by the national boards, and in that way, the research follows the demand-driven route.
- The national board is the main mechanism for collaboration between researchers–CGIAR and NAROs—and fieldwork in resolving contextual research problems. Different subject scientists from across CGIAR and NAROs may work in one team with policymakers, partners that work with communities, and the communities themselves where problems are to be resolved.

## **5.2. Institutionalising UULA Knowledge Exchange Activities**

The 'Learning Alliance' that can be established straightaway (stage 1) is the one that should take over activities that a group of existing stakeholders have been working on together, in an informal manner, to implement some knowledge exchange activities in the context of establishing the UULA. Most of the activities done and planned are important as they help increase knowledge uptake, but they largely fall in the 'knowledge exchange' (KE) domain. Consultations with country NAROs show that they need some of these activities to achieve meaningful impact on a much grandeur scale. This would help to bridge what is seen as a widening gap between knowledge and usage. Also, the 'Learning Alliance' would be mandated to implement recommendations and other measures to establish a proper Learning Alliance in the future.

This study recommends that the institutional partnership in phase one be referred to as "**ESA Knowledge Exchange Alliance (EKEA)**" or any other appropriate name the partners can settle for. There is no problem retaining the same name as the Learning Alliance, calling it the ESA Learning Alliance, even though it may create a misleading impression, especially to high-level authorities, that a proper Learning Alliance has already been established. The knowledge exchange alliance can evolve into a proper Learning Alliance - two or three years

later. Still, it is also possible to continue in this format for a long time, given that any Learning Alliance to be established will not cover all forms of agricultural research, at least in the foreseeable future.

EKEA would have to consolidate all pertinent knowledge exchange interventions by individual stakeholders into one program and perhaps take on other functions in the context of the Africa Knowledge Management Framework. This will help achieve greater impact and avoid fragmentation when working with national-level counterparts. EKEA would run a joint knowledge exchange program (or *collaborative knowledge-sharing network*) with the following features:

- A Steering Committee or Board chaired by one regional research partner, say CCARDESA. CCARDESSA would, therefore, provide a chair and a manager as part-time positions (2 representatives with their alternates). ASARECA should provide planning and monitoring functions (2 representatives, with alternates), FARA, AKADEMIYA2063, and the CGIAR centers (IWMI and ILRI) should provide at least one representative.
- The Steering Committee should set its rules for meetings and procedures. Quarterly meetings are recommended, and others will be held as needed. The Steering Committee or Board and its members should have high-level buy-in from the topmost management of the institutions they represent.
- Deliberate efforts should be made to get high-level buy-in from the implementing institutions. This will certainly benefit ongoing funding and the availability of staff, especially those who work part-time because they have other jobs. Evidence of the high-level buy-in would be a signed collaboration agreement or memorandum of understanding by the partnering institutions.
- Given sentiments expressed during consultations, EKEA's joint program of action on knowledge exchange should focus on a few things that may be more impactful and implemented effectively and intensively. On this basis, the EKEA can have the following scope (based on the first two activities in the LA Concept Note):
  - Strengthening farmer-led knowledge-sharing networks: there can be many activities under this task, and the alliance should focus on one or two activities i.e. field trips and peer assistance, or any other that may be seen as feasible and with significant impact
  - Leveraging digital technologies: there can also be many activities under this task, and the alliance can again focus on one or two things: audio-visuals and animation for technologies in local languages to reach even the illiterate farmers.
  - Implementing recommendations for progressing KM among partners, including the possible establishment of the Learning Alliance if approved at the highest level of the institutions.
  - Undertake pertinent capacity-building efforts on KM and readiness for the Learning Alliance, especially in support of NAROs. There is a need for awareness efforts about the operations of a Learning Alliance in all partner institutions.
- EKEA should develop a schedule or program of activities. This would cover the remaining period of the UU Initiative. Some expected activities, like providing small grants to facilitate the uptake of innovative practices, require prior planning and packaging for ease of administration. Guidelines should be made available to the expected users/applicants.

- One other activity in the Learning Alliance concept note - ensuring the interoperability of information systems - does not seem to have much traction at the country level; perhaps it can be left to other project initiatives. It appears to have costs that benefits in the current context may not justify.
- Knowledge exchange is an important entry point for reducing the knowledge generation and uptake gap, especially where it captures capacity-building elements for national-level stakeholders. When national institutions are well equipped to use modern technology-based solutions for dissemination with better reach for rural farmers, they may stand a chance to improve research knowledge uptake.
- EKEA would not greatly impact building closer relationships between researchers as individuals or institutions. Researchers would not find it incentivizing as they are more interested in linking up to generate new knowledge, and not exchanging existing knowledge. For researchers, the Learning Alliance remains the more impactful solution.

### 5.3. Recommendations on Knowledge Management

Based on the findings presented, in addition to establishing an alliance for knowledge exchange and learning, this study proposes the following recommendations, which can be undertaken either in preparation for a Learning Alliance or to enhance knowledge management in the ESA region:

- **All alliance partners should appoint formal and active knowledge management champions at the highest level of their organizations.** This high-level manager should be responsible and accountable for KM results. This arrangement will facilitate institutional buy-in for new KM investments and support the development of a Learning Alliance for the ESA region, as knowledge management is its core driver.
- **Mobilize resources to sustain activities funded by the UU initiative and invest in improving Knowledge Management, including preparation for a Learning Alliance.** These resources would boost the visibility of knowledge management within regional institutions and NAROs. Leveraging initiatives like Knowledge Management for Agriculture Development (KM4AgD) could be viable option for consideration.
- **Develop optimal staff capacity in knowledge management, including strengthening monitoring and evaluation capabilities to track KM deliverables.** Institutions should allocate resources for additional staff, provide appropriate training to enhance skills and address any capacity gaps.
- **Mobilize relevant KM tools and systems to support NAROs in effectively reaching farmers.** These tools should address connectivity and access issues for the target audience. Tools that provide market information and utilize formats that address illiteracy—such as local language audiovisuals and animations—would be particularly beneficial.
- **CGIAR centres should allocate adequate budgets to support the participation costs of local partners in joint activities.** This support would strengthen collaboration among researchers and users. CGIAR centres should also explore greater involvement in dissemination efforts.

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## Annex 1: List of Contacts for data and consultations

	Institution	Name and Position
Capacity Assessment Questionnaire	AKADEMIYA2063	
	FARA	Benjamin Abugri KM Lead Specialist
	ASARECA	Ben Ilakut TC Officer
	CCARDESA	Bridget Kakuwa ICKM Officer
Key informant Interviews: NARO Reps	Malawi	Upile Muhariwa ICKM Focal Point_DAES
		Hector Malaidza ICKM Focal Point_DARS
	Zambia	Dorcas Kabuya Chaaba ICKM Focal Point_NES
		Kabosha Lwinya ICKM Focal Point_ZARI
	Uganda	Emily Arayo ICKM FP_NARI
		Victoria Mbingidde ICKM FP_NARO
Key Informant	Independent	Ruth Beukman