



INITIATIVE ON  
Diversification in East  
and Southern Africa

# Concept Note for Ukama Ustawi's Learning Alliance

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# Background

Knowledge management plays a vital role in agricultural development, enabling researchers, farmers, and extension workers to exchange valuable information and innovative practices. Despite the wealth of agricultural research conducted in Africa, the dissemination of findings to farmers and extension workers is often inadequate (Salami, et al., 2010; Maertens, et al., 2020; Fabregas, et al., 2022). Research findings remain trapped in academic journals, inaccessible to those who need them the most.

While knowledge management is important in promoting innovation and sustainable development in diversified maize-based farming systems in East and Southern Africa (ESA), several challenges persist. These challenges can hinder the effective acquisition, organization, and dissemination of knowledge, and limit the successful implementation and scaling up of innovative practices.

Many farmers, especially those in remote and marginalized areas, face challenges in accessing relevant and timely information and technologies. Limited infrastructure, such as internet connectivity, hinders their ability to access digital platforms, market information, and online resources. This lack of access inhibits their capacity to adopt innovative practices and leverage agribusiness opportunities. On the other hand, the availability of knowledge does not guarantee its effective dissemination and utilization. Weak knowledge-sharing networks and limited collaboration among stakeholders hinder the flow of information between research institutions, extension services, policymakers, and farmers. The absence of platforms for sharing experiences, lessons learned, and best practices slows down the adoption and scaling up of innovations across the farming systems.

A Learning Alliance is a vital component of the CGIAR Initiative, Ukama Ustawi (UU), which aims to support climate-resilient agriculture and livelihoods in 12 ESA countries. This initiative involves various stakeholders, from smallholder farmers and extension services to governments, enterprises, and advocates for gender equality and social inclusion (GESI). By providing a structured network for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and innovation, a Learning Alliance enables these diverse voices to work together effectively and offer a pathway for scaling up impactful practices.

UU's Learning Alliance was initiated with Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), Forum on Agriculture Research for Africa (FARA), Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and AKADEMIYA2063 to engage UU with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) and regional bodies. This effort further builds on the Knowledge Management Framework co-developed with these and other Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme ex-Pillar 4 (CAADP XP4) partners. This framework is centred around bringing upfront existing agricultural knowledge (identified, acquired, created, shared, captured, and

applied) in a holistic, oriented, and systematic way, such that its relevance contributes to addressing the needs and achieving the purpose of the end beneficiaries (individual or organization).

A major gap identified by the CGIAR-CAADP X4P partners is the need for more systematic knowledge sharing and learning opportunities between CGIAR and research and development. At the same time, it has been recognised that regional initiatives such as UU can play a critical role in bridging this gap. It was also recognised that many regional and national 'web-based platforms' already exist and considered, it would be more beneficial to focus on the relationships and interconnections between CGIAR and regional research institutions.

### **Our purpose and focus**

UU's Learning Alliance supports learning around diversified maize-based farming systems and innovation (agribusiness, policy, scaling) in ESA. It will be a demand-led collaborative knowledge sharing network established between CGIAR, CCARDESA and ASARECA in ESA. It is intended to be a collaboration model to implement the CGIAR-CAADP X4P Knowledge Management Framework. It is centred on building relationships, effective communication, trust, and mutual understanding with regional organizations with the aim of creating a sustainable and collaborative learning environment.

Strengthening knowledge sharing networks, investing in research and extension services, creating supportive policy environments, and building capacity for scaling up are essential steps towards overcoming these challenges and promoting sustainable innovation in diversified maize-based farming systems in East and Southern Africa. Additionally, the Learning Alliance aims to facilitate practical application by providing small innovation grants to NARS and advisory services. These grants enable NARS to test and put into action the insights gained from UU, tailored to their respective regions, catalysing the broader adoption of innovative practices, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of agricultural development efforts in ESA countries covered by the initiative.

### **Activities**

The Learning Alliance operates through a multifaceted approach aimed at maximizing the impact of the UU. It actively links regional and national knowledge platforms to the valuable knowledge outputs generated by UU, ensuring that this knowledge and data are readily accessible in shareable formats. This facilitates seamless knowledge transfer and dissemination across diverse stakeholders, including farmers, researchers, policymakers, and extension services, enabling them to leverage the insights and information generated by UU for practical applications. A key aspect of the Learning Alliance's strategy is the systematic lesson learning and capitalization of UU activities. This involves packaging outputs and learning derived from UU, such as digitalization approaches, mixed farming systems, gender considerations, and policy-related insights, in a manner that is easily digestible and actionable.

Additionally, the Learning Alliance fosters collaborative learning through activities that bridge the knowledge gap between national researchers and UU researchers.

The Learning Alliance is dedicated to enhancing the productivity, resilience, and economic prospects of farmers in the region through targeted learning events. By facilitating interaction and knowledge exchange among researchers from various backgrounds, the Learning Alliance stimulates cross-pollination of ideas and the co-creation of solutions that enrich the overall impact of the UU initiative.

- **Strengthening farmer-led knowledge-sharing networks**, which can take the form of farmer field schools, community-based organizations, or cooperatives. These networks not only provide platforms for farmers to exchange experiences and best practices but also serve as effective channels for disseminating vital information, including market trends, agribusiness opportunities, and policy updates, ensuring that farmers are well-informed and empowered to make strategic decisions. These activities include webinars, field trips, peer assists, and leveraging existing network platforms like groups.
- **Leveraging digital technologies in knowledge management and innovation within maize-based farming systems.** By leveraging digital solutions such as mobile applications, online platforms, and interactive decision support tools, the initiative aims to provide farmers with real-time access to valuable information on climate-smart practices, pest management, market prices, and agronomic techniques, effectively bridging information gaps and promoting the adoption of innovative farming approaches. The focus here would be to potentially bring together best practice on digital technologies and test out innovative ideas through a small grants program.
- **Facilitating knowledge exchange among researchers within CGIAR, AROs (Agricultural Research Organizations), and NROs (National Research Organizations),** fostering a collaborative environment that enables the sharing of research findings, innovative ideas, and impactful insights, ultimately driving continuous improvement and advancing the agricultural sector in the region.
- **Ensuring interoperability of information systems to strengthen learning among the consortium partners and countries.** CGIAR, AROs and NROs have valuable data and knowledge products to share. The focus here would be to ensure that CGAIR and AROs explore innovative ways to share knowledge and potentially repackage it. We could also explore the use of AI in synthesizing and summarizing information.

### Mode of working and next steps

The learning alliance will work through a collaboration agreement between CCARDESA, ASARECA and UU to develop a shared workplan and set of activities. This would include:

- Annual workplan that is agreed upon and budgets appropriately provided to partners,
- Regular review meetings and,

- Annual learning/M&E.

### Next steps

- Finalize initial results from the scoping study carried out by CCARDESA and ASARECA,
- Hold a workshop to review what has been done and plan for 2024 and
- Produce a brief.

### Partners

	Partner name	Country/Region
<b>FARA</b>	Forum on Agriculture Research for Africa	Continental Africa
<b>CCARDESA</b>	Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa	Southern Africa
<b>ASARECA</b>	The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa	East and Central Africa
<b>AAAS</b>	African Agriculture Advisory Services	Continental Africa

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