

14. About 10–22% women benefited from SCARDA capacity strengthening at managerial and technical competence and skills development levels. In future, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure increased representation of women of the NARS of each participating country.
15. Successful completion of MSc training to contribute a critical mass of technical skills set at NARS was highly appreciated by the NARIs of beneficiary countries. Further, supporting the reintegration process of graduate MSc students to their respective national systems is an important new lesson of the training process. Some of the students indicated that the reintegration support empowered them to gain confidence to engage more productively with both the Management of their organisation and the clients they serve.
16. It was unanimously recognised that both the transformational approach to effecting fundamental change at the NARS through attitudinal and mind set changes of ARD actors as well as the transactional approach to enhance the managerial and technical skills competencies including materials and tools that improve the performance of the system are complementary and the emphasis of each will depend on the context and specificity of the typology of the NARS.



Vision

A sustainable reduction in poverty and food insecurity in West and Central Africa through increased agriculture-led economic growth and improvements in key aspects of the agricultural research system

Mission

Sustainable improvements in agricultural productivity, competitiveness and markets in West and Central Africa by meeting the key demands of the sub-regional research system as expressed by target groups

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Strengthening Capacity for
Agricultural Research and
Development in Africa (SCARDA)

Policy Brief



1. The FARA-initiated institutional analysis of NARS in sub-Saharan Africa provided useful data and information on the typology of NARS in the ASARECA, CORAF/WECARD, and SADC-FANR (CARDESA) regions¹.

In future:

- Institutional analysis should also identify fora at regional level to encourage heads and top managers of organisations to initiate peer review and pressure for action through reflection and sharing of best institutional practice to improve the performance of their organisations in R & D within the agricultural sector.
- Institutional analysis should be systematically carried out to identify, among others, options for the robust engagement of a critical mass of transformational leaders at various levels, including representation from NARS management committees in each beneficiary country.

2. Robust involvement of National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI)'s senior management-- in particular, a critical mass of the organisation's Management Committee-- has been a major challenge to initiating timely decision making and action on products and tools generated by Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research and Development in Africa (SCARDA) to improve performance of the NARIs and their collaborators.

3. The concept of a focal institution and focal person at NARI's level as key SCARDA entry point resulted in weak involvement of other key critical actors in agriculture in the SCARDA process. At least, an additional focal institution and person from development and/or agricultural training institutions should be selected in order to systemically mainstream the agriculture-based capacity strengthening process.

4. Mentoring and coaching of young and high potential individuals and organisations has been at the core of SCARDA. Implementation of mentoring was however a

challenge. For example, there was lack of clarity on the concept and process of mentoring and coaching. Realising mentoring orientation workshops, especially in the ASARECA and CORAF/WECARD regions, contributed significantly to creating a common understanding on the potential and good practices in mentoring.

5. The active engagement of role models, that is, persons of high social standing, competence, experience, and trust; continues to be the guiding principle for mentor/mentee relationships.

6. 'Systemic competency development' and/or 'modular approach' to capacity strengthening were some of the main approaches used to institutionalise SCARDA training modules. It was however recognised that while the modular approach generally tends to focus on delivering interconnected skills in phased out steps both in time and space, the systemic competency development of Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) actors places emphasis on holistic generic skills that are needed at each point in time to improve performance at each step.

7. The desirable signs of change and performance at the NARIs as a result of SCARDA have not realised their full potential due to the inherent challenges of performance-based reward and incentive systems of the public sector service. By increasingly mainstreaming private sector values and best practices in public sector service delivery, the performance of the NARS and the agricultural sector in general can be enhanced and sustained.

8. Change management processes take a relatively long time to trigger attitudinal and structural changes with a fair chance to be sustainable. The 'tipping point' of such transformational change was observed to manifest itself when the commitment, will, and ownership by key stakeholders including the focal institution's top management are actively involved. This requires a series of learning workshops with intermittent practice periods for peer learning to take place.

9. The quality assurance of SCARDA enabled the identification of institutional best practice on desirable change. To further capitalise on these best institutional practices, it is necessary to systematically:

- Sensitise relevant stakeholders by institutionalising joint analysis, and experiential learning and sharing among stakeholders and organisations.

- Conduct leadership and managerial skills training as well as mentoring and/or coaching of staff at all levels including management, scientists, technical, and administrative and financial staff.
- Institutionalise functional and credible reward incentive systems to motivate and reward staff performance.

10. Tool-based training supported by mentoring and coaching was found to be more useful and productive to trainees and institutions, especially in situations where outputs in the form of concept notes and proposals, and marketing and advocacy plans among others were produced.

11. In its design, SCARDA took into consideration the active involvement of other constituents of the NARS in each beneficiary country. These are called 'satellite institutions'. However, during implementation, satellite institutions' participation was generally passive in technical skills strengthening activities and virtually absent in leadership and managerial skills development. The interaction between the NARI focal institution and satellite institutions did not demonstrate a functional NARS concept and this further risks the integration of research, development, and training.

12. The initial mechanism of fund disbursement did not work well due to systemic institutional challenges resulting in up to 9 months delay in fund disbursement. And when funds were available, a delay of about 2 weeks in bank transfer and timely justification of funds was experienced at the levels of SRO/FIs and service providers, and this affected the start of activities at the country level.

- There is a need to find participatory and consensual mechanisms among stakeholders on efficient means of fund disbursement and accounting.
- Delay in fund transfer and justification not only impacted on subregional research organisations (SRO)/FI planned activities but also affected the plans of the service providers whether organisation or individual consultants, and it is always difficult to arrive at new arrangements

13. Monitoring & Evaluation and communication were not implemented on time. Considering their importance in tracking progress and reporting, and facilitating experiential learning and sharing, mechanisms should be put in place that involves the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

1. FARA: Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa; NARS: National Agricultural Research Systems; ASARECA: Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa; CORAF/WECARD: Conseil ouest et centre africain pour la recherche et le développement agricoles/West and Central Africa Council for Agricultural Research and Development; SADC-FANR: Southern African Development Community-Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources; CARDESA: Center for Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Africa