



Terms of Reference (TOR)

Consultancy to Test and Validate the Agribusiness Learning Alliances (ABLA) Proof of Concept Based on Innovation Platforms of Six Third-Party Projects (TPPs)

Activity: AIRTEA Activity 3.1.2:

1.0. Background and Rationale

Drawing from past lessons with the Integrated Agriculture Research for Development (IAR4D) approach, Innovation Platforms (IPs) have proven essential in putting the approach into practice. IPs, established as forums for stakeholders in a commodity value chain, support knowledge exchange, technology development, collaboration, capacity building, agribusiness growth, and policy influence. By adopting IPs, engagement is enhanced, strengthening the entire agricultural innovation system (Schut et al., 2017), including researchers, producers, the private sector, extension services, and policymakers etc.

Despite their potential value, many Innovation Platforms (IPs) have struggled to achieve sustainability and economic efficiency, particularly in increasing farm profitability. This is often due to their project-based nature, leading to a decline and disintegration after project completion, coordination challenges, limited government support, and a failure to leverage innovations like digital technologies. One key limitation of many IPs towards their sustainability has been identified as general lack of their linkages with businesses and the private sector which provide business services such as marketing and financial support to the IPs. To address these issues, one strategy that is being developed and tested by FARA is the concept of the Agribusiness Learning Alliance (ABLA). ABLA strengthens linkages and entrepreneurship within IPs, incubators, and similar facilities by integrating business development learning. This approach helps generate solutions, build

capacities to overcome business challenges, and scale business ideas, providing socio-economic benefits for stakeholders and beneficiaries.

With financial support from the European Union Commission (EUC) under the CAADP-XP4 consortium, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), in collaboration with the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and the Eastern African Farmers Federation (EAFF), has been piloting the Agribusiness Learning Alliances (ABLA) model in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda under the "Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Ecosystem for Inclusive Rural Transformation and Livelihoods in Eastern Africa" (AIRTEA) project. The ABLA concept is aimed at enhancing an alliance between the IPs and the private sector to provide business approach and services needed to sustain the IPs.

The main goal of the AIRTEA project is to support sustainable agrarian livelihoods and rural transformation by fostering an inclusive innovation environment. Implemented through the Innovation to Impact Framework, the programme focuses on institutionalizing Innovation Platforms (IPs) to guide national prioritization, IP management, and multistakeholder collaboration. By facilitating partnerships and connecting stakeholders, the ABLA approach helps generate business development insights, create solutions, and build capacity to overcome business challenges and scale up ideas.

A recent assessment was conducted to review and articulate the ABLA concept, develop a methodology for establishing proof of concept to guide its implementation. This was needed to establish a baseline for the AIRTEA third-party projects to better understand the status, challenges, and areas for improvement for the various IPs operating under the third-party projects to bring them to a level where they would be viable for private sector engagement.

The baseline highlighted key areas for improvement, such as weak IPs-private sector engagement, improving market access, financial sustainability, and business models. Clearer governance roles and responsibilities within IPs are necessary, and limited access to capital remains a barrier for stakeholders in implementing and scaling innovations. Leveraging ICT and digital platforms is crucial for modernizing operations and improving engagement. Additionally, engaging women and youth is essential for fostering diverse and innovative ideas. The process also highlighted the need to empower stakeholders in third-party projects by enhancing their understanding and practical application of the Agribusiness Learning Alliance (ABLA) concept. This would include building capacity for business development and market access strategies, providing critical insights, and developing valuable skills along priority value chains.

2.0. Scope and Objectives of the Assignment

2.1. Overall objective:

The overall objective of this assignment is to systematically assess the IPs formed under the Third-Party Projects (TPPs) to identify existing capacity gaps and provide the needed support services to make them viable for private sector engagement and alliance for their sustainability. This will positively impact the private sector's role, stimulate commercialization efforts and strengthen the business-related elements of the Innovation platforms.

2.2. Specific Objectives:

The objective of this assignment will be implemented across six TPPs with specific objectives to:

- a. Review the status of the IPs formed under 6 TPPs (3 in Kenya_TPP1, TPP9 and TPP8, 2 in Uganda_TPP5 and TPP6, 1 in Rwanda_TPP3)
- b. Identify and assess key gaps (business, organizational, capital investment) and capacity needs of the IPs.
- c. Develop capacity-building and intervention modules and facilitate strengthening of IPs in support of and working towards the proof of ABLA concept.

This assessment serves as a crucial foundation for implementing the ABLA approaches, enabling targeted interventions and improvements to guide Innovation Platforms towards becoming fully functional and efficient as ABLAs.

2.3. Activities/ Tasks

The consultant will collaborate with FARA as the coordinator of the AIRTEA project to:

- a. Prepare and present a brief inception report detailing the process and methodology for the assignment including identifying an assistant scientist to work with to carry out this assignment.
- b. Validate the selected TPPs based on their representativeness within the AIRTEA project and opportunities within the respective value chains.
- c. Develop a template for assessing the status and situational position of IPs in selected TPPs across Kenya (TPP1, TPP8, TPP9), Uganda (TPP5, TPP6), and Rwanda (TPP2).
- d. Facilitate the development of detailed action plans for IPs, including timelines, to address gaps and enhance the capacity (skills, knowledge, and resources) of IP members.

- e. Define the criteria and identify a facilitator for capacity building in business planning, financing, youth and gender inclusion, policy advocacy and partnership building, as part of the ABLA concept validation.
- f. Create user-friendly and simplified training materials for IPs as a guide to improve their viability for private sector engagement.
- g. Develop an ABLA publication (a manual / handbook) that can be adopted across the ARD network as a support mechanism for IPs and MSPs.
- h. Develop a final consultancy report summarizing the activities, findings, and recommendations.

3.0. Output and Deliverables

- a. Inception Report: A brief report outlining the process, methodology, and work plan for the assignment, including timelines.
- b. IP Status Report and Action Plans: A report detailing the status of IPs, developed action plans, and capacity-building efforts.
- c. Training Material and ABLA Manual: User-friendly training materials or a manual/handbook for the ABLA approach.
- d. Final Consultancy Report: A final report summarizing activities, findings, and recommendations, including an executive summary, impact of interventions across the TPPs projects, key insights and lessons learned in validating the ABLA concept.

4.0. Duration of the Assignment and Timelines

The duration of this assignment will be 60 Man Days spread over five months:

- This assignment shall be conducted from **November 2024 – March 2025**
 - o Develop and share a template with selected TTPs on IPS status. **November 2024**
 - o The consultant will submit an inception report within 2 weeks of contract signing.
 - o Field visits (to discuss ABLA and interventions strategy): **Nov 2024**
 - o Intervention, training and back stopping: **November 2024 and January 2025.**
 - o A final report on the assignment to be submitted to FARA by **March 2025**

5.0. Location of the Assignment

The assignment will be carried out virtually from the consultant's place of domicile with work missions to the 6 TPPs project sites, FARA secretariat or any sub-region, if necessary and possible.

6.0. Performance Criteria

The Consultant is expected to undertake the services with the highest standards of professionalism and ethics, competence, and integrity. He / She should be able to deliver the listed assignments in Section 3 most effectively and efficiently, within the period of assignment stated in Section 4.0.

7.0. Reporting

The consultants shall report through the AIRTEA Project Lead to the Acting Director of Research and Innovation of FARA on the assignment.

8.0. Facilities to be Provided By FARA

FARA will provide the consultants/ facilitators with all relevant documents to support the activity and any other logistical support, as may be agreed, to ensure execution of the assignment. The consultant will closely work with the Project Lead at FARA to carry out the assignment with the selected TPPs.

9.0. Type of contract

- Short term

10.0. Consultant's Reporting Obligations

The Consultant is expected to deliver the following:

- a. Inception Report: A brief report outlining the process, methodology, and work plan for the assignment, including timelines.
- b. IP Status Report and Action Plans: A report detailing the status of IPs, developed action plans, and capacity-building efforts.
- c. Training Materials and ABLA Manual: User-friendly training materials or a manual/handbook for the ABLA approach.
- d. Final Consultancy Report: A final report summarizing activities, findings, and recommendations, including an executive summary, impact of interventions across the TPPs, key insights and lessons learned in validating the ABLA concept.

11. The agreed payment schedule is as follows:

- i. 20% of the consultancy fee shall be paid upon submission and clearance of the inception report.
- ii. 30% of the consultancy fee shall be paid upon the submission and clearance of IP status report and action plans:
- iii. 30% of the consultancy fee shall be paid upon the submission and clearance of the training materials; and
- iv. 20% of the consultancy fee shall be paid upon submitting an impact final report with feedback and recommendations from key stakeholders.

12. Application Process

Interested candidates should send their expression of interest and a comprehensive curriculum vitae via email to the address below

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FARA Affirmative Action Statement on Employment: there is no discrimination based on gender race, religion, ethnic orientation, disability, or health status.