

Neuchâtel Initiative Concept Note

Consultation on agricultural advisory service support in Africa

December 2007

Context

For the past twelve years the Neuchâtel Initiative (NI) has provided a forum for discussion of the reform and development of agricultural advisory services (www.neuchatelinitiative.net). NI has worked with a major (but not exclusive) focus on Africa. The affiliates of NI have primarily been donors and other Northern-based actors working in development cooperation. Over the years this group has brought together a range of concepts and approaches for analysing and promoting pro-poor, market oriented advisory service reform and development. Considering the success of this dynamic process, NI decided during its last meeting (27-29th of November 2007, in Montpellier) to explore the opportunities for this process to continue, but with leadership and direction coming from Africa, specifically through initiatives related to pillar four of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

Objective

During 2008 NI proposes to consult with existing advisory service related actors and networks in Africa regarding their interests in pursuing such a process with support from the original NI group. The auspices of this effort will be NI's status as a working group linked to the Global Donor Platform on Rural Development (GDPRD).

Addressing the Framework for Africa's Agricultural Productivity

The goals of CAADP's pillar four are to revitalise, expand and reform agricultural research, technology dissemination and adoption efforts in Africa. The structure for CAADP pillar four is the Framework for Africa's Agricultural Productivity (FAAP), which emphasises catalysing institutional reform and is coordinated by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). These goals have thus far emphasised research related efforts. If impact on the lives of the poor is to be maximised it will be essential that the results of FAAP are linked to the improvement of sustainable advisory service structures of various kinds and that research results are elaborated, discussed and promoted through a process involving all stakeholders (advisory services structures, farmers' organisations, private firms, etc.) with awareness and understanding of the prevailing market context. This is where NI may be able to provide added value by contributing advice on strategic direction for public investment in strengthening institutional structures and organisational capacities among advisory services.

First steps needed for launching the process

During 2008 NI proposes to enter into a dialogue with FARA and a selected group of existing African organisations working at continental level or regional level to jointly consider how to revitalise, expand and reform the performance of agricultural advisory services. If the African actors deem this to be a priority and if they see an added value in collaboration with NI, then a proposal for future activities will be developed and agreed upon at the NI Annual Meeting in November 2008 and submitted to the GDPRD for their consideration with an aim to begin activities starting in 2009.

Several NI affiliates (thus far SDC, Sida, GTZ and IFAD) have pledged resources – which they will confirm before the end of 2007 - for this consultation process during 2008. Based on consultations

with FARA, a plan will be developed for how to begin discussing if and how African networks would like to work to strengthen advisory services, and what role NI could play in supporting this capacity building process. NI has steadfastly endorsed a highly pluralistic view of advisory services, stressing the importance of engagement by farmer organisations, private sector actors, academic institutions, civil society and existing line ministry public advisory systems. Given that only a modest level of resources is available for this consultation, a decision has been made to begin work with a limited array of potential partners, but with the intention of expanding efforts in the future in accordance with this pluralistic vision.

Linkages with other ongoing initiatives

The European Commission is starting efforts to strengthen the fledgling African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS). Since it is presumed that this network will initially focus on public sector service structures, the NI effort will complement the AFAAS efforts by beginning its consultation with existing networks of either farmer organisations or academic institutions, while maintaining close contact and coordination with AFAAS. Both farmer organisations and academic institution are highly appropriate entry points for different reasons. Working with networks of farmer organisations would have the advantage of building directly on demand from farmers. Starting with academic institutions would have a more natural link with the stakeholders which are already most active within FARA and engaged in FAAP, as well as having a direct link into curriculum reform for advisory services related courses. The decision of where to start will reflect both strategic aims and also pragmatic assessment of where the consultation is most likely to achieve positive results with limited available resources.

First steps

This concept note will be used to inform stakeholders (primarily FARA, AFAAS and GDPRD) of this intended consultation and encourage feedback. Based on these initial reactions a decision will be made about which entry point is most appropriate and a planning meeting will be organised in February to prepare Terms of Reference for the consultation.

Neuchâtel Initiative, December 2007.