

## **CONCEPT NOTE**

### **2022 Annual WCA Agriculture Research Leaders Forum (CORAF-RLF)**

*Hosted by CORAF to*

Enhance technical capacities to build resilience to address evolving challenges impacting agricultural productivity in West and Central Africa

Location: Yaoundé, Cameroon

**October 19-21, 2022**

Sponsored by: The Swiss Cooperation under the Scaling Up Agricultural Technologies and Innovations for Increasing the Resilience of Production Systems and Family Farms in West and Central Africa (TARSPRO project) and the EU/IFAD under CAADP-XP4 project implemented by CORAF



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## INTRODUCTION

1. The West and Central Africa Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF) was originally established in 1987 as the Conference of Heads of African and French Agronomic Research Institutions. Membership of CORAF was expanded in 1995 to include 23 National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) of the following West and Central Africa (WCA) countries; Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tomé & Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.
2. CORAF is the largest of the four Sub-Regional Organizations (SROs) under the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA – the apex body). The primary objective of CORAF is to improve livelihoods in West and Central Africa through sustainable increases in agricultural production and productivity, as well as promoting competitiveness, and markets. This objective is achieved through addressing the critical issues of food and nutrition insecurity, chronic poverty, and youth unemployment within the framework of (i) Coordination and Capacity Strengthening, (ii) Scaling Technologies and Innovations, (iii) Creating an enabling regional environment at regional for technology flows and increased trade, and (iv) Knowledge Management and Learning.
3. CORAF's core functions mutually reinforce each other to (a) set up a regional Community of Practice - cooperation, dialogue, knowledge and information exchange amongst NARS and their partners, (b) harmonize existing research programs, through creating synergy and reducing duplication (c) advocate and mobilize resources for sub-regional agricultural research (d) define common sub-regional priority research themes and objectives, (e) serve as an advisory council for research conducted by research and development organizations in West and Central Africa, (f) strengthen capacities and ensuring implementation of sub-regional research that adds value to national programs, and (g) create new regional programs and operational research units in West and Central Africa.
4. With a strong regional convening advantage, CORAF is best placed to take proven research solutions and cutting-edge technologies from university laboratories and research labs of NARS and international research partners to the fields across WCA that can substantially unleash the agriculture economy. But the lasting solutions to addressing our food system are not only scientific and this the need for multi-pronged, inter-sectorial, and integrated approaches bringing together diverse actors in the agriculture ecosystem to solve the complex challenges facing WCA agriculture.

## BACKGROUND

5. The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest disruptor of the regional food system that has suffered from the brunt of climate change, poor soil and seed quality, and diseases for many years. Additionally, challenges linked to insufficient agronomic practices, post-harvest losses, lack of market information, inadequate policies, poor access to markets, limited entrepreneurial opportunities for youths and women, lack of water management tools, low mechanization, difficult access to finance, difficulties in accessing proven innovations, highlight the extent to which the regional food system is impacted. As a result of CORAF's catalytic role in the sub-region, various financial and technical partners have supported its mandate and vision with resources to surmount the daunting challenges in agriculture.
6. For instance, the European Union, via its Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA) initiative aimed at deploying science and innovation to achieve an inclusive, sustainable and climate relevant transformation of agriculture and related food

systems in partner countries across the globe is provided funds to five African organizations for agricultural research for development including CORAF. The purpose of this initiative is to strengthen these organizations to improve their governance of agricultural research and innovation and support the countries in Africa to develop capacity to take measures to improve agricultural productivity and resilience of farming systems to climate change. CORAF will lead the implementation of the project in West and Central Africa and engage with the NARS of its 23 constituent member countries along with other key stakeholders involved in the CAADP implementation at the country and regional levels.

7. Among other key financial partners is the support provided by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) for a better deployment of promising agricultural technologies and innovations to ensure food, nutritional and economic security for the populations of Central and West Africa. West and Central Africa is experiencing persistent food insecurity due to the low capacity of its agricultural sector to meet the growing food demand. This disconnect between local food supply and food demand is the result of an agricultural sector that is not very productive and is dominated by small family farms (80%) with little use of or access to agricultural innovations and modern means of production. The SDC-funded "Agricultural Technologies and Innovations for Increasing the Resilience of Production Systems and Family Farms in West and Central Africa (TARSPPro) project is implemented by CORAF and its partners and proposes to: (i) to increase the resilience and productivity of family farms; (ii) to sustainably meet the demand for know-how (technologies and innovations) of family farms; (iii) to ensure a coalition and synergy of actions of stakeholders in agricultural transformation. To increase the resilience and productivity of Family Farming Enterprises (FFE).
8. A transversal challenge which cuts across the efforts of many stakeholders is the consistent need for knowledge and information sharing to strengthen existing linkages on technical issues as well as policy engagements. For example, connections in regional programs do not always reflect national priorities. More so, decades of science-driven programs and initiatives have shown limited inter-regional policy synergies across West and Central Africa. CORAF's activities and advocacy efforts echo an urgent need for a concerted role and increased dialogue towards enhanced R&D priorities in agri-science and technology to overcome the systemic challenges facing agriculture in WCA<sup>1</sup>.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE FORUM**

9. To boost the performance of smallholder agriculture and achieve food and nutritional security and high incomes in West and Central Africa, there has been a multitude of response-programs involving an impressive number of development agencies and research organizations. CORAF and its constituent NARS continue to serve the region through the development and use of improved agricultural technologies along the value chain of key commodities and by enhancing the capacity of a range of stakeholders in the agricultural sector.
10. A framework for the establishment of a West and Central African Research Leaders Forum for agricultural productivity is needed to facilitate the convening leaders of National Agricultural Research Systems to deliberate on forward-looking solutions to tackle emerging issues affecting agricultural productivity in the region. A forum of this magnitude, organized on an annual basis will present an opportunity for a cross section of sector-wide leaders – research development and technology adoption – to meet every year and highlight trends that can influence the national and regional agricultural R&D agenda in West and Central Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> CORAF Strategic Plan (2018-2027); Theory of Change: The uptake of quality science, technology, and innovations, access to markets, free trade and common regulatory frameworks are the root solutions to agriculture transformation in West and Central Africa. They contribute to food and nutrition security.

11. The expectation of such a dialogue platform will encourage a consistent review of ongoing initiatives and policies planned to increase agriculture productivity and endorse forward looking scientific orientations to facilitate evidenced-based decision making at the policy level.
12. In the face of today's large-scale and urgent food crisis, CORAF intends to profile this forum and foster an enabling environment to effectively address issues related to agricultural research and development in the region. The forum will look to further mobilize the WCA's food systems community and partners around immediate needs, while also focusing on approaches to build more innovative and technology-based resilient food systems that better mitigate and adapt to future shocks. It will provide a platform for coordinated large-scale action by research leaders to evaluate and highlight the successes of regional research programs, technologies, and system level capacity building interventions in R&D.
13. In this regard, CORAF seeks to bring together leading agricultural researchers, policymakers, academia, and the private sector to harness their expertise and resources towards enhancing technical capacities to build resilience in addressing evolving challenges impacting agricultural productivity in West and Central Africa. CORAF, in partnership with ECOWAS and ECCAS, and under the auspices of the hosting country's sector Ministry seeks to convene an Agriculture Research Leaders Forum over a period of 5-years<sup>2</sup> with the long-term outcome to promote the review and dialogue in the role of R&D as well as Technology and Innovations to enhance sustainable and resilient agri-food systems and their transformation in West and Central Africa. Each annual forum will be organized under a specific theme linked to the current political economic situation and its impact on the food system.

## **PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE 2022 FORUM**

The purpose of the 2022 maiden Leaders Forum is to galvanize CORAF's R&D stakeholders to discuss the trends in sub-regional priority agriculture research themes and evaluate their contribution towards increasing agricultural productivity and building a resilient food system in West and Central Africa.

The specific objectives of the forum include:

- Present an overview of the state of Agriculture R&D in West and Central Africa focusing on top trends and a comparative analysis (where are we today vs 5yrs ago)
- Discuss a CORAF commissioned study on trends affecting agricultural R&D and technology & innovation in sustaining WCA's food system transformation
- Dialogue and review existing frameworks on both national and regional levels in agricultural R&D space and determine whether the levels of efficiency and contribution to economic growth in the sub-region.
- Examine required actions for effectively improving productivity along the agriculture value chain through R&D. (Facilitated panel discussions with scientific leaders).
- Share lessons-learned and identify priority areas in Ag R&D for subsequent research leader forums to stimulate technology and innovation adoption in West and Central Africa.

## **EXPECTED RESULTS**

The forum will provide stakeholders the opportunity to critically reflect on regional and national level agriscience-focused initiatives across WCA. Participants and leaders will be encouraged to

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<sup>2</sup> The annual convening will take place on a rotational basis in any of CORAF's constituent countries across West and Central Africa.

share knowledge and promote learning across all areas of their work and emerging issues as well as encourage partnership building discussions. It will allow partners to take stock of their collective achievements on the commitments undertaken thus far and craft a new set of actions (complete with modalities for achieving specified targets) for joint implementation into the next forum. After the action and policy items and recommendations are endorsed by the participants the full report and proceedings of the Research Leaders Forum will be produced and disseminated to participants.

The following are expected outcomes of the Forum:

1. Shared understanding and consensus on:
  - a. Agriscience R&D and technology innovations delivered at the national and regional levels towards contributions to the agriculture sector performance.
  - b. Performance of the agriculture R&D systems and at national and regional levels regarding planned, achievements, perspectives, and emerging issues.
  - c. Progress towards increased synergies between regional and national level initiatives to stimulate technology and innovation adoption.
2. Increased awareness on:
  - a. Regional and national level agriculture research priorities and the role of policies in sustaining WCA's food system transformation
  - b. Innovations, new technologies in agri-science and private sector contribution to technology adoption in WCA.
  - c. Key emerging research issues and initiatives in the agriculture sector identified and documented.

## **VENUE AND DATE OF THE 2022 FORUM**

The forum will take place in a hybrid format from **19–21 October 2022** under the theme of ***“Fostering scientific knowledge sharing to strengthen inter-regional linkages in agriscience and food systems resilience building in West and Central Africa.”*** The Forum aims to foster an enabling environment and a mechanism for dialogue to effectively address issues related to agricultural R&D in the sub-region. A forum of this magnitude, organized on an annual basis will present an opportunity for a cross section of sector-wide leaders – research development and technology adoption – to meet every year and highlight trends that can influence the national and regional agricultural R&D agenda in West and Central Africa.

It is expected that this dialogue platform will encourage a consistent review of ongoing initiatives and policies planned to increase agriculture productivity and endorse forward looking scientific orientations to facilitate evidenced-based decision making at the policy level. **The Forum will be organized in Yaoundé, Cameroon and hosted by the Government of Cameroon.**

## **STRUCTURE**

The Research Leaders' Forum will promote fluid communication and accountability to accelerate research into products and solutions for West and Central Africans. The Forum will meet once a year in one of the 23 countries and alternate between West and Central Africa over the duration of 5 years. Each Forum will last for a minimum of 3 days and documents will include a keynote paper based on a specific theme/commissioned study around which other key presentations will be developed.

The forum will use parallel and plenary sessions. A dedicated media room will be arranged for journalists and communication experts to cover the forum. An invitation-only meeting room will

be set up to discuss and review progress towards stimulating market system change, with donors and sector investors. Press conferences will be organized for the forum - one at the opening and one at the end of the session. There will be a dedicated networking event/session where NARIs and businesses, along with their stakeholders, partners and customers can demonstrate and exhibit their products, technologies, and services. It will be a venue for free interaction among research and private sector players with a focus to partner and find synergies.

## Participants

A cross-section of research leaders and innovators of the following stakeholder groups will be targeted to participate in this Forum with the expectation to include a representation of 40% women ensuring gender balance.

Stakeholder Group	Roles	No.
<b>National Governments (5 each year)</b> <b>Ministries of Agriculture and /or Scientific research</b>	Ministers	5
	Cabinet Directors	5
<b>Host Country Representatives</b>	Associated National Reps	8
<b>National Agriculture Research Institutions</b>	DGs + Directors	46
<b>International Research Institutions and Centers (CGIAR, etc)</b>	DGs + Center Leads	8
<b>Technical Partners (FAO, CILSS, A2063 etc)</b>	Heads and Technical Experts	8
<b>RECs - ECOWAS</b>	Commissioner	1
<b>ECCAS</b>	Commissioner	1
<b>UEMOA</b>	Commissioner	1
<b>CEMAC</b>	Commissioner	1
<b>SROs</b>	FARA, AFAAS, ASARECA, CCADERSA	4
<b>Donors/Financial Partners</b>	USAID, World Bank, EU, AfDB, SDC, BMGF, IFAD, IDRC, etc)	8
<b>Producer Organizations</b>	PROPAC, ROPPA	2
<b>Private Sector</b>	FEWACCI (WA), Central Africa	2
	Total estimated Participants	100

## Agenda

The below block agenda is tentative and will be adapted and revised for the final forum

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
9am – 1am	<b>Opening Ceremony/Session</b> Welcome & Introductory Remarks	<b>Plenary Session</b> Discuss key R&D issues affecting productivity along the agriculture value chain	<b>Parallel Side Events</b> Facilitate interaction of the scientific leadership during side events on regional and national level ag issues.
<b>Morning Break</b>			
11am – 1pm	<b>Plenary Session</b> Forward-looking agri-science orientations	<b>Parallel Side Events</b> Review progress towards stimulating technology and innovation adoption, enhanced institutional and human capacity in AR4D	<b>Plenary Session</b> Share lessons-learned and identify priority areas in Ag R&D for subsequent research leader forums to stimulate technology and innovation adoption
<b>Lunch</b>			
2pm – 4pm	<b>Plenary Session</b> WCA overview & performance of ag R&D at national and regional levels	<b>Parallel Side Events</b> Facilitate interaction of the scientific leadership during side events on regional and national level ag issues.	<b>Closing Ceremony</b> <b>Concluding Remarks</b>
<b>Afternoon Break</b>			
5pm – 6pm	<b>Networking Cocktail</b>	<b>Parallel Side Events</b> Facilitate interaction of the scientific leadership during side events on regional and national level ag issues.	