

## **Prospects for increasing productivity, profitability and competitiveness of Maize in Nyagatare District, Eastern Province/Rwanda**

### **Resolutions from the Maize Innovation Platform workshop held in Nyagatare 28-29 October 2009**

#### **1. Introduction**

- The Maize Innovation Platform is one of the platforms supported by the Research Into Use Programme (RIU) in Rwanda. It was established in June 2008 and is composed by 55 members including:
  - i. Maize farmers' cooperatives
  - ii. individual maize farmers
  - iii. Extension services in Nyagatare District
  - iv. the regional centre of the agricultural research institute
  - v. Umutara Polytechnic University
  - vi. financial institutions
  - vii. agro inputs dealers
  - viii. maize traders.
  
- In order to achieve its objective, the Maize Innovation Platform is dedicated:
  - i. to address constraints related to maize production and markets
  - ii. promote use of new knowledge and use knowledge by many people to increase profitability of the maize value chain
  - iii. develop improved organisational arrangements in the maize value chain.

#### **2. Background to the 28 - 29 October Maize Platform workshop**

##### **2.1. Objective of the workshop**

The general objective of the two days workshop was for RIU to agree with the members of the Nyagatare Maize Innovation Platform on key activities to be implemented from November 2009 to March 2011.

##### **2.2. Expected outputs**

- Participants updated on recent changes within RIU Programme in general and in RIU-Rwanda Country Programme in particular
- Renewed agreement on maize Platform objectives
- Agreement on key activities to be conducted between November 2009 and March 2011.

### 2.3. Overview of workshop agenda

- Introduction
- Presentations and discussion on:
  - i. Current status of RIU Programme
  - ii. Summary of RIU workplan 2009-2011
  - iii. RIU Flexibility Fund
- Brainstorming on:
  - i. Platform objectives
  - ii. Bottlenecks in the maize value chain
  - iii. Platform functions
  - iv. role of actors in the maize Platform
- Group work on:
  - i. Prospects for maize platform development
  - ii. Enhancing demand for research outputs
  - iii. Promoting access to adequate financial services
- Plenary presentation and discussions
- Evaluation of the workshop
- Concluding remarks

## 3. Key results from group discussions

### 3.1. Prospects for maize platform development

- The objective of the Maize Platform was re-defined and key functions agreed upon
- It was agreed that strengthening the capacity of the Maize Platform was central for developing it into a key player in the Maize value chain in Nyagatare District. For this to happen, RIU Programme was requested to accelerate the recruitment of the consultant who will support the Platform to develop its 3-5 years strategic/business plan. The Platform will thereafter design quarterly workplans and seek resources from RIU and other actors in the District.
- Additional members will be contacted and motivated to join the platform: The Platform Committee was tasked to do that.
- Training needs assessment will be refined, but urgent capacity strengthening activities were identified as follows:
  - i. Platform development and management
  - ii. Communication for change
  - iii. Community mobilisation
- The platform will play a more pro-active role in policy-dialogue at District level. The platform has in particular to make known what it is and what it has been created for. A demand to attend meetings of the District Joint action forum will also be addressed to the Mayor of Nyagatare District.

- The platform will pay more attention to communication issues: it will in particular develop close relationships with the Nyagatare Community Radio<sup>1</sup> in order to get farmers and other actors informed and provide to them adequate space to communicate between themselves and with their partners. The most expressed information needs are related to:
  - i. government programmes and instructions
  - ii. plant diseases
  - iii. innovations
  - iv. markets
- As the Nyagatare Maize Investment Group (NYAMIG) was established in order to tackle the issue of lack of profitability in maize trade, participants recommend that the platform members play a pro-active role in mobilising new shareholders to join the NYAMIG and ensure that non performing shareholders do honour their commitments.

### 3.2. Enhancing demand for research outputs

- The major questions raised by Platform members were:
  - i. What is the alternative solution to the poor effectiveness of extension services due to insufficient number of extension officers
  - ii. How to enhance proper use of existing technologies not adequately applied by farmers such as quality seeds and fertilisers ?
  - iii. How to improve the current inputs supply system?
- With regards to extension services, the Platform decided to initiate and promote a system of 'Teams of volunteer-farmers' who will provide advice and coaching to their neighbours. These dedicated team of farmers will be identified in November-December 2009 and trained. The District Agriculture Officer and the representative of RDO in Nyagatare District were tasked to organise that activity.
- Platform members appreciated the commendable efforts made by the Ministry of Agriculture in making maize seeds available in due time. However, it was observed that many farmers did not properly use these seeds. The inappropriate practices result into use of a higher quantity of seeds than required and poor development of maize plants due to competition for soil nutrients. The Maize Platform recommended that a special campaign be to reduce the density of maize plants be conducted along with weeding activities. The District Agriculture Officer accepted to coordinate that particular activity.
- The platform assessed the fertiliser supply system applied during this planting season (2010A) by the Ministry of Agriculture under the Crop Intensification Programme (CIP)<sup>2</sup>. It was decided

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<sup>1</sup> The Nyagatare Community Radio made a wide coverage of the Maize platform workshop: i) an interview with RIU Country Coordinator was broadcasted on the National Radio with the support of the Community radio and; ii) A special 45 minutes radio programme was produced and broadcast with the participation of the chairman and platform members as well as the District representative who participated in the Workshop.

<sup>2</sup> Under the Crop Intensification Programme, the Government of Rwanda is trying to boost agriculture production and productivity through the following measures: i) Fostering regional specialisation by focusing support on most promising/suitable commodities by District: Maize is for instance chosen as a priority crop in Nyagatare District, where the Maize Platform is operating; ii) Promoting land use consolidation, as provided for by the Organic Land Law; iii) Ensuring bulk import of fertilisers and applying subsidy on prices in order to get them easily accessible to small farmers; iv) Develop a network of services providers who are contracted to implement inputs supply at local level.

that a special working session be organised (end November-early December 2009) by the platform in order to decide on how to improve input supply system and make adequate recommendations to the service provider and the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources.

- The issue of access to adequate post-harvest technologies was again raised. The Research Into Use Programme will facilitate links to source of knowledge and the Platform will discuss on how farmers/cooperatives can effectively acquire these technologies.
- As local authorities are increasingly involved in conveying to farmers messages/advice related to maize production and intensification, the Maize Platform decided to organise information/training sessions specifically targeting this group.
- The Platform decided to set up an ad hoc committee that will design how the 'Maize Innovation day' will be organised.
- The Platform finally recommended that Farmer Field School be applied starting next planting season for creating space for community interaction and learning on proper maize husbandry and intensification.

### **3.3. Promoting access to adequate financial services**

- Platform members have expressed concerns about lack of access to credit. This is seen as a major constraint for acquisition of fertilisers and paying for labour.
- The lack of access to credit contributes to reduce profitability of maize as many poor farmers are obliged to sell their crops before maturity as they are in critical need of money. This practice called 'KOTSA IMYAKA' is a major cause of poverty in rural area.
- It was also highlighted that lack of timely access to credit hampers maize traders' operations.
- Consequently, the Maize Platform decided to convene a special workshop in December 2009 with representatives of banks and other financial institutions in order to agree on specific actions for improving agricultural financing to actors of the maize value chain in Nyagatare District.

**For further information please contact**

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