



RIU Malawi, Africa Country Programme Annual report, 2009-2010

Cotton platform

Enhancing public-private partnership in cotton development

i. Why are you working on/facilitating this innovation experience?

The government of Malawi has prioritised cotton as one of the strategic crops that requires intervention and support in order to achieve the desirable growth targets. Currently production of cotton in Malawi is low averaging 800kgs/ha against a potential of 2500kgs per ha. The major identified cause of low yields is the low adoption by farmers of recommended cotton production practices. The cotton platform has therefore established demonstrations in all key cotton growing areas in Malawi to show-case to the farmers the recommended technologies and practices for boosting cotton production and productivity. The rationale is to demonstrate the potential to increase farmers' seed cotton yield per unit area through application of recommended technologies.

ii. What is your role (what do you mainly do) and how has this changed development(s)?

The role of RIU in this initiative is to provide back-up support on cotton coordination issues; contributing grant funds to the cotton development platform for running the cotton demonstrations and facilitating coordination meetings.

iii. What is driving the innovation (market, project, policy change, etc)?

It is also a public-private partnership led innovation – the supply of inputs to the sector (business) is driving the participation of the private sector in the innovation.

iv. What forms of partnership are involved and what is their significance in respect of the outcomes thus far?

Four thematic groups, each headed by a member of the platform have been formed and these are on: policy; pricing and marketing; seed supply; and Extension. The progress made in the thematic groups is reported to the overall cotton platform.

v. What is different/special about the way partners interact and how is this evolving over time?

This arrangement has enhanced the communication and direct intensive interaction between private sector and government especially on determining cotton seed prices through joint consultations. The cotton platform is in the process of registering as a Cotton Development Trust with the aim of becoming a legally recognized body that can sustain itself beyond project support.

vi. Are there any special ways of working required/evolving that will allow the innovation to be achieved?

The private sector is contributing its own resources towards meeting certain obligations within the platform

vii. Who are the key players and why are they important – and how are key players and their respective roles evolving?

Key players: ginners, input suppliers, government research and extension divisions, NGOs and cotton farmer associations. All these work synergistically through collaboration in addressing bottlenecks and exploiting opportunities in the sector.

viii. Is there an innovation champion or coordinator?

There is a chairperson as well as an institutional coordinator. AICC as an institution is the coordinator.

ix. What strategies are in place to link local innovation activities to the wider economic and policy environment?

There is the National Innovation Coalition (NIC) that acts as platform for leveraging policy advocacy with government. The platform representative from the Ministry of Agriculture is the senior hence is pivotal in providing government policy support.

x. What strategies are used to ensure inclusiveness of stakeholders and opinions – particularly the poor?

The National Cotton Farmer Association has been formed to champion farmers' interests/views in the cotton industry.

xi. What have been the unexpected outcomes thus far, and what was/is their significance?

Unexpected outcomes: The government consulting the stakeholders in determining buying price for cotton this season. Last season, government dictated its minimum buying price for cotton which was far much above what the Ginners were prepared to pay. This stand-off disadvantaged cotton farmer who eventually made losses from their cotton. The Cotton Development Platform has facilitated dialogue with government whereby prices have been agreed upon in a consultative manner taking into consideration various aspects from all the stakeholders in the cotton value chain.

xii. What strategies/mechanisms are used to learn, adjust and refocus during the innovation experience?

There are quarterly platform meetings where members review progress and share experiences; platforms also document and produce quarterly reports capturing progress, successes, challenges and lessons learned.

xiii. What have been the main lessons learned thus far and how has this influenced your way of working and the innovation experience?

The platform approach helps in quickly resolving stand-offs between concern stakeholders hence propagating harmony through improved communication and consultation.

xiv. To what extent is the innovation experience influenced by/ dependent upon the political environment and how are you dealing with this?

The government of Malawi has consulted with major stakeholders in determining the cotton price unlike the previous years.

xv. What new skills and knowledge are emerging as a result of your work?

Working together in partnership in addressing key challenges.

xvi. What indicators quantify the social and economic changes occurring through your activities in this innovation experience?

Indicators:

- increased productivity of cotton from 800kg/ha to 2500kgs
- increased number of farmers exposed to the recommended cotton technologies

xvii. Formulate a statement that builds plausible connections between your activities and the indicators identified under (xvi), to substantiate – in hard figures – the scale of the impact, and indicate how you expect this to evolve over time.

Around 140,000 farmers will increase their cotton production from current 800kgs/ha to 2500kgs per ha by adopting the recommended technologies of cotton.

Further information

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