

QUESTION: What is the “ideal state” for the agriculture and food policy research system in Africa?

Take 10 minutes as a group to brainstorm. You can either share your feedback out loud and your facilitator will take notes or you can add to the document As you think of what the ideal state for this system is, remember to add detail!

Example: “We envision a future in which agriculture policy research centers inform government decision makers and influence policy through evidence-based analytical processes ...”

- What does that look like? Or describe what this looks like:
 - Agr. policy centers of excellence exist in every ReNAPRI member country
 - Policy decision makers look to centers of excellence to inform their agriculture sector strategies/work

Group ONE: Alphonse and John

“We envision a future in which:

- Policy makers value and actively seek out researchers’ guidance on policy issues.
- Policy research experts are adequately trained, equipped, and produce international quality work.
- Policy decisions are shaped by data and evidence, not whims.
- The policy system is responsive to the agricultural development needs of the country, and also regionally, continentally and globally oriented and aligned where possible.
- Policy research is adequately funded at least partially by the national governments and/or private sector.
- Researchers communicate effectively with policy makers through well-packaged, interest-generating communication.
- Policy makers value and utilize the guidance of experts.
- Policies are not only well made, but also well implemented and enforced.
- Policies are collective, inclusive, based on discussions among all relevant stakeholders, and all stakeholders (including and especially smallholder farmers and other underrepresented groups) have a voice.
- Policy is made based on the wellbeing of all and not just the rich and powerful.
- Policy must be flexible to accommodate changing circumstances, and subject to evaluation and reform as needed.
- Ag policies are transparent, predictable, and ideally supporting private sector development.

- Policy is relevant and broad-based, taking into account the political-economic needs of the country.

Group TWO: Nalishebo and Cait

“We envision a future in which:

- Policy makers both demand and utilize the evidence emerging from objective institutions, those not bought-out by special interests
- Policy makers, businesses, and research centers create research questions for countries which are then used and acted upon
- Individual countries in the continent would be the main sponsors of these research centers
- Agr. transformation will be guided by evidence and actionable recommendations from ReNAPRI and other networks
- Policy makers demand and use evidence generated by research centers
- Diversified views encouraged
 - What does this look like? Strong views representing different opinions are elevated and individuals and policy makers are able to compare opinions
- Policy Centers **are strengthened**. What does this look like?
 - Centers have strong foundation (inc. core knowledge products, capacities)
 - Relevant and timely relationships with policy leaders = constant engagement
 - Ministries recognize the policy makers, know they have access to data and use it (trust)
 - Ad hoc policy research and projects become the minority: focus on the strategic purpose/core issues.
 - A focus on the data that supports the evidence
 - Communication: constant debate and engagement with a diverse network
 - Ground-truthing of strategic interaction
- We envision a future in which makers, businesses and research centres co-create research questions - the outcomes of which will inform action. In this framework, African countries should be the main sponsors of these research centres
- **Policy makers and private sector value** the evidence so that they are willing to pay for it
- Policy Centers are sustainably financed by the users (public sector, private sector, etc)
- Active and relevant engagement where common ground for public and private sector to connect

- Public and private sectors are both well developed-private sector becomes a key player, investing in policy research and recognizing the benefit
- Strong policy networks which are cost-effective and learn from each other, share data/information across networks
- Policy centers to collaborate with NGOs/pressure groups/apex private sector associations to take recommendations to Government on their behalf

What does that ideal future look like in practice?

- Agr. policy centers of excellence exist in every ReNAPRI member country
- Policy decision makers look to centers of excellence to inform their agriculture sector strategies/work
- There should be a number of research centers providing reviews. Policy makers should be able to shop around for strong research centers
- Policy centers emphasize long-term issues, not just short-term challenges / emergencies (clear strategic vision)
- Concrete, actionable recommendations from policy centers to address challenges prioritizing recommendations, not simply a list
- Recommendations based on market/government demand so that there is incentive to act
- Local governments are incentivized to pay for policy work: they clearly see the economic and social benefits of their investment in evidence-based decision making
- Policy makers are able to make informed decisions based on multiple viewpoints and recognize a strong collective voice
- Policy makers view the network as a go-to institution for sustainable research
- Some of the work of the Centers should be common in order to show the synergies across the network

Potential Future Discussion Points:

Key Question: should policy centers go into implementation? Evidence without actionable recommendations can lead to thinktank failure

Key Shared Points

1. Diversified funding sources to policy research centers that include public and private sources. This will ensure public/private sector buy-in and enhance evidence uptake
2. Funding is necessary but should not be the sole determinant of policy work. Critical for independent centers focused on offering insights led by evidence.
 - a. Diversified funding allows for greater objectivity
3. Evidence-based decisions/policy are critical
4. Local financing by policy makers and private sector which means there is demand and hence will drive local consumption of recommendations
5. Communication: there is an interest in objectivity: policy makers are looking for what they believe is objective advice

6. Communication and messaging: messages are communicated in a clear, interesting way (packaging) that is targeted for the audience
 - a. Example: this looks like training researchers on better ways to communicate and share data-breaking it down into digestible, clear points
7. A system of ongoing, sustained capacity development to ensure high-quality, internationally recognized research evidence.
8. A future with strong, reliable data (example: data endorsed by National Bureau of Statistics). Stronger relationships with researchers and government such that more data is shared and trust is built
9. Public and Private sector should have appetite to pay for the service offered by local policy centers.
 - a. What does this look like? How might we stimulate this appetite?

Common Language/Themes

We

- Communication and packaging
- Evidence-based
- Relationship building
- Strong centers
- Engaging public and private sector to generate policy questions
- Nationally based, but regionally and globally oriented and aligned
- Joint research on regional and global level