

Experiences of the SADC FANR managing EU-funded projects; a personal interpretation

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Lessons (being) learnt...

1. The case of the ICART Project
2. Managing Competitive Grant Systems for Agricultural Research & Training



1. Implementation and Coordination of Agricultural Research and Training (ICART)

- Project is housed within the Directorate of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR) within the SADC Secretariat
- EU supported to the tune of € 15 million; agreement signed in Nov 2003
- Implementation over 5 years (2006 – 2010)



Project Purpose

Improve NARS **capacity** to manage research networks, implement common research and develop regional opportunities **addressing regional constraints** for **improving incomes of small-scale farmers** and **other end-users** in the SADC region



Main components

- The ICART project is composed of **four** components with **six** main result areas
- **Component A:** Institutional support to the SADC Secretariat (€3.60 million)
- **Component B:** Support to Research Networks (RN) development (€2.95 million)
- **Component C:** Regional Research Projects to be implemented through mechanisms of competitive grant funds (€5.60 million)
- **Component D:** Specific activities of Information, Communication and Training (€2.35 million)



Background (I)

- Project was developed as an 8th EDF supported project but is being financed under the 9th EDF, with a different set of rules
- D+3 rule: Funds for special commitments, especially grant contracts and budget estimates have to be committed within 3 years of signature of project financing agreement (i.e. by Nov 06)
- Timing of signature of Project financing proposal coincided with restructuring at the SADC Secretariat and also at the Regional EC Office



Background (II)

- Derogations were required to apply ICART approach under 9th EDF
- Delays in recruiting project staff while D+3 maintained
- Therefore, actions had to be initiated (e.g. Call for Proposals for Competitive Grants) prior to the arrival of Project staff to satisfy the D+3 rule
- Staff recruited as from Feb 2006



The Decommitment process

- Funds committed to ICART but not disbursed are lost from ICART, SADC and the ACP countries (goes back to the EU Member States)
- However, SADC can decommit funds in advance and redirected to other projects (within SADC Secretariat) or other beneficiaries (ACP countries)
- Implications: If not sure we can spend all the funds for ICART, decommit part so that SADC can use it for other projects before Dec 2007 (end 9th EDF)



Hope?

- Idea of a second Financing proposal in response to D+3 emerged in July 2006
- Proposal for action plan elaborated in September 2006 (with details of how the two phases of ICART will be carried out)
- Final Programme Estimate approved in November 2006 along with revised action plan up to Dec 2010
- Proposal expected by end of March 2007



Positive signs...

- €10.2 million of €15 million foreseen for the project has been committed before D+3 date
- A second Financing Proposal has been submitted to use the balance (after some inevitable losses) of funds remaining, to complete the activities planned for ICART which could not properly be addressed by D+3
- Agreement has to be approved and signed by December 2007. EC HQ-positive comments.



The modified approach

Implementation of ICART (2006-2010)

- ICART-1 (2006-2010)
 - Strengthening Capacity of SADC
 - CGS (CRARF & RTP) Award and Monitoring
 - Capacity building (Networking/Proposal Writing)
- ICART-2 (2008-2010)
 - Support to networks
 - Consolidating ICT & ICM
 - Capacity building



Lessons or Fate?

- Project implementation approach and regulations must be compatible!
- Do not underestimate procedures (SADC+EU)
- Rules and Procedures sometimes determine approach rather than support rational implementation
- Allow time for staff to learn the procedures initially
- One never stops learning! (here comes the 10th EDF)



2. Competitive Grant Systems at the SADC FANR Directorate: Experiences and lessons learnt



Why CGS?

- Redirect technology development focus on emerging priority areas, linked to national policies & client-identified constraints
- Promote NARS reform by requiring competition
- Demand-driven research and extension involving beneficiaries
- Fostering partnerships through joint proposal preparation
- Improving proposal quality and innovation



SADC Experience

- Three Competitive Grant Systems (CGS) have been launched and are currently being implemented
- Learning experience for the SADC-FANR



SSA Challenge Programme

- Implementation in the Zimbabwe-Malawi-Mozambique corridor
- Launched in 2004
- Two stage process: Concept note followed by call for full proposal from consortia of institutions
- Three grants awarded
- Projects led by CGIAR Centers with partners from the NARS



SADC-EU ICART Project

- Implementation and Coordination of Agricultural Research & Training (ICART)
- Two CGS currently being implemented:
 - Competitive Regional Agricultural Research Fund (CRARF)
 - Regional Training Programme (RTP)



ICART-CRARF (i)

- Call for Proposals launched Nov 2005
- Guidelines and selection criteria provided in the Call for Proposals
- Applications open to consortia with at least 3 institutions from at least 2 SADC Member States
- Awareness workshop organised, attended by Directors of Research & Deans of Faculties of Agriculture from SADC Member States
- Independent Help Desk Facility provided



ICART-CRARF (ii)

- 49 proposals received by deadline
- After administrative compliance stage, 34 projects taken through a technical and financial evaluation
- Examples of requirements often not respected:
 - Signed original version with the submission (not scanned); same for partner institutions
 - Supporting documentation as required e.g. legal entity
 - Recent audited accounts; latest annual report
 - Budget in the currency required (Euro)



ICART-CRARF (iii)

- 7 grants awarded; Euro 5.3 M over 3 years
- Projects led by International Research Institutions with regional partners covering 10 SADC Member States
- Consortia led by regional institutions often did not get past administrative eligibility stage
- EU guidelines for evaluation required that a project achieves a rating of 20/25 on relevance
- Most that passed did not rate high enough on other evaluation criteria
- Yet criteria for evaluation were clear



ICART-RTP (i)

- Call for proposals launched in January 2006
- Fund Masters programmes in the Agricultural sector and short professional training courses to be administered by a regional University
- Awareness workshop with Deans of Faculties of Agriculture carried out in March 2006
- More detailed explanations on the process of submitting a proposal at the workshop (based on experience with CRARF)



ICART-RTP (ii)

- Independent Help desk facility to assist applicants
- 17 proposals received
- 15 made it through administrative eligibility stage!
- 7 projects recommended for funding
- Euro 1.45 M available could only support 4 projects
- The others remain on a reserve list at SADC



SADC FIRCOP Project (i)

- French Funding for research projects
- Two stage evaluation process - Call for concept notes followed by call for full proposal
- Applications from consortia of at least 3 regional institutions, led by a regional institution
- CGIAR and International Agricultural Research Institutions to keep an advisory and support role
- 104 concept notes received some with overlapping interests



FIRCOP Project (ii)

- 34 concept notes selected (consortia with similar research areas advised to consider merging efforts into one full proposal)
- Technical Assistance provided to consortia providing comments on the proposals
- 15 consortia supported to hold workshops and develop proposals; 12 full proposals selected
- Workshop organised to finalise proposals (2 participants per consortium) before final evaluation
- Finally 7 grants awarded (Euro 1M)



Observations

- Two-stage process of proposal selection takes a long time
- Regional institutions still need capacity building in proposal writing to access competitive funds
- Interactions among regional institutions to form consortia cannot be taken for granted
- Implementation will require close monitoring
- CGS will still be implemented in future, e.g. through the upcoming SADC-MAPP



Lessons

- The establishment of CGS is a long process, which may not necessarily match the donors' expectations of achieving impact quickly
- Need to facilitate the process of information sharing on current research activities and needs
- Need to facilitate interactions among potential partners



Current thinking & approach (i)

- SADC FANR has started the process of a situation analysis of Agricultural Research & Training in the region
- Process will continue through data collection by national teams
- Inventory of 'best bet' technologies
- Establish an information system on Agricultural Research & Training
- Research priorities both regional and national to be established in consultation with stakeholders



Current thinking & approach (ii)

- Potential partnerships need to be encouraged, established and even nurtured – creation of networks around Research Problem Areas
- CGS can then be more focused and programme oriented – competition is among ideas on how to address the problem rather than competition on themes for research activities
- Need to harmonise systems for competitive funds from different donors

