



State Capability whitepaper



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Driving agricultural transformation through state capability enhancement and flagship programs

By Asseta Diallo

In its early years of operation, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) worked mainly with smallholder farming communities, research entities and the private sector in its bid to deliver agricultural transformation. Before long, however, the organization realized that engaging with government would be critical to scaling and sustaining registered gains. Since that time, AGRA has been working with government and other key players to identify and articulate capacity gaps, co-create evidence-based interventions, and make investments to strengthen state capability. Today, this work is vital to AGRA's efforts to drive national and regional agriculture as the surest path to prosperity on the African continent.

Through our work in this area, we have found that developing flagship programs is one of the most effective ways of supporting governments to achieve agricultural transformation. Flagship programs – prioritized, bankable investment projects selected from a national agriculture investment plan (NAIP) – enable governments to address key areas to rationalise agricultural investments. They help to mobilize partners, resources and investments, and leverage core assets and operations. They also enable governments to address delivery capability issues and, crucially, build a cohesive narrative that unifies a range of organizations and initiatives.

In fact, flagship programs have become our signature delivery model in state capability enhancement. They are now core components of AGRA's trail-blazing efforts to drive an inclusive and sustainable green revolution in Africa.

SHAPING IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

State capability is the ability of government to administer effectively. It defines a political system and shapes the impact and influence of governing bodies. The building of state capability, therefore, is one of the most transformative devices in African agriculture and development.

Governments are vital partners for organizations like AGRA; we need them onboard to ensure that every effort and investment we make is underpinned by legitimacy, and that every initiative can be developed at scale and sustained over time.

Political players and decision makers have always determined the success or failure of aid programs and development schemes. From the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s, when aid was used to deliver neoliberal economic reforms, to the present day, where the emphasis is on encouraging ownership to embed long-term improvements, the trust and influence of government has always been crucial. Indeed, the informal structures that shape the way governments make decisions are often more important than a project's technical design.

Today, government remains the biggest investor in social and economic development and provides the enabling environment on which the private sector relies. In agriculture, government plays a critical role, helping to build institutions and systems while facilitating private sector involvement in agricultural growth. And it brings together key agricultural stakeholders for effective program delivery.

During AGRA's first ten years, there were marked improvements in government activity – coordinated at national, regional and continental level – to boost agricultural productivity. By 2016, 42 member states of the African Union (AU) had signed up to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), with 14 of these meeting or exceeding the CAADP target of a 10% allocation of public expenditure to the agricultural sector. However, other key CAADP targets, such as 6% annual growth in agricultural GDP, have not yet been achieved in many countries, and engagement with government remains critical to drive further sectoral improvements.

Working with governments enables AGRA and partner organisations to address key gaps and weaknesses in national policy and approach, which we identify through coordinated Institutional Capacity Assessments (ICAs) and other studies. These gaps can include outdated and misaligned policies, inadequate capacity for policy design and program implementation, and limited or poor participation of non-state actors in policy formulation, implementation and review. Elsewhere, we might see a lack of available quality data, poor organizational structures, inadequate human resources, and minimal incentives for private sector engagement.

By working with governments to address these issues and inadequacies, AGRA plays a vital role in strengthening state capability. Specifically, our goals in this area are to support ministries of agriculture to cultivate political and technical buy-in. We also help to prioritize and design NAIPs, which were first established under the CAADP framework and must now account for the continent-wide targets of the 2014 Malabo Declaration. Other key goals include establishing stronger sector coordination platforms, developing mutual accountability mechanisms, and ensuring that monitoring and evaluation functions are in place.

LEVERAGING A COUNTRY'S UNIQUENESS

The way we engage with governments is critical to our efforts to strengthen state capability. For example, many people assume that working with government means dealing only with ministers and permanent secretaries – but this is not the case.

At AGRA, we engage with government across all levels within ministries and at sub-national level, which is vital when trying to scale and sustain agricultural solutions. In particular, we prioritize engagement with technocrats – the key personnel and decision-makers whose technical knowledge and expertise help us work more effectively with government. In fact, the success of a project often depends upon the extent to which we can collaborate with these and other political entrepreneurs. Because the technical viability of a project alone is never enough to guarantee positive impact; the influence of these stakeholders is essential to secure momentum internally. The chances of success are also greatly enhanced by involving technocrats early on in the process. Given their influence in program design as well as implementation, the sooner they are engaged the greater the output and outcome.

In everything we do at country level, we need to ensure there is a sense of ownership and leadership. For this reason, we also ensure our work with governments is country and context-specific. From experience, we know that a one-size-fits-all approach to government engagement does not work; a country's uniqueness is what drives progress. To this end, we listen to and work closely with governments to understand their specific requirements and devise bespoke national strategies. Governments are tired of being supplied with solutions created elsewhere for other national administrations. In order to truly own a program of work, they need to believe it is theirs, entrenched in their own unique context and culture, and designed to meet the singular needs of their people. This approach aligns with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action, which assert that enabling local ownership, leveraging local systems, and accounting for the recipient's objectives, are key to improving the impact of aid and development.

And as AGRA has seen in recent years, the best way of devising solutions that are locally owned, driven and implemented, is through the development of flagship programs.

THE FLAGSHIP PROGRAM DELIVERY MODEL

A flagship program is a prioritized, bankable investment project. It is selected from a range of NAIP priorities to help governments achieve focus and impact in areas of national priority. Such areas might include water shortages, low crop productivity, poor coordination and delivery capability, climate vulnerability or supply chain bottlenecks. Whatever the issue, flagship programs help governments focus their efforts on the interventions most likely to deliver results.

By definition, flagship programs usually command a higher level of funding than other programs; they tend to be 'standalone' and may go beyond the scope and duration of an overarching sector strategy. They also involve a high degree of consultation. Within the context of CAADP implementation, flagship programs translate Agricultural Sector Strategy (AgSS) priorities into bankable projects designed to spearhead NAIP delivery. They also represent big investment opportunities to convert NAIPs into tangible actions and impacts.

But above all, flagship programs provide unity and cohesion. Using global best practice, flagships unite resources and activities under a single banner, providing a cause around which local offices and operations can rally. The model allows smaller, ad hoc initiatives to continue alongside flagship endeavours, while securing a relentless focus on a priority issue area. Most importantly, it enables governments to create a cohesive narrative that is easy for others to adopt and support. A good story well told can mobilize and motivate; and a strong flagship narrative helps to unify diverse individuals, organizations and initiatives by clearly demonstrating a government's intent. This, in turn, paves the way for fully integrated support mechanisms to drive sector growth.

Of course, our state capability work comprises a number of other key components. These include working with governments to articulate alternative policy options to create an enabling environment. We also work to enhance implementation capacity, with a view to increasing service delivery and executing commitments. We collaborate with development partners to strengthen intra- and inter-ministerial coordination, and to bolster key platforms. And we support governments and partners to establish mutual accountability frameworks.

But to date, the flagship model remains AGRA's primary and most successful tool for enhancing state capability, and supporting governments in their quest for agricultural transformation.

Flagship program design and launch

Flagship programs must align with a government's overarching agricultural development strategy and vision. To this end, the design and launch of an inaugural flagship program is critical, as it becomes the template for future endeavours and provides a modus operandi for others to follow.

But a standard-bearer program can only be achieved through a truly collaborative process. This process should involve government players, private sector partners, development partners and other interested parties, all working to define and address the key issues of the day. Only together can these stakeholders allocate the necessary resources, forge the right partnerships, and ensure robust measurement frameworks are in place.

With these preconditions in mind, AGRA has defined five key steps to helping governments develop a flagship program. These are:

1 Government leadership

The government, through responsible ministries, takes the lead and identifies a priority area within the NAIP or national development framework – a process which must be supported by evidence. While AGRA can provide the necessary technical support and ensure adequate input from key stakeholders, it is important the government owns the entire process and leads from the start.

2 Stakeholder consultation

The government, through the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), consults other relevant ministries, partner organizations, research institutes and NGOs via the national flagship steering committee. This ensures the program is fully representative, giving AGRA the opportunity to contribute to the process. These consultations can be conducted through the Agriculture Sector Working Group (ASWG).

3 Coordination and accountability

MoA to oversee the flagship process and appoint relevant consultants. The committee initiates the design process, ensuring everyone understands the tasks involved and the expected outcomes, encapsulated in the terms of reference. This coordination platform also ensures the accountability of the process.

4 Reporting

The program's inception report will most likely be delivered through the ASWG, with the MoA ensuring all partners' comments are included. Consultation meetings with AGRA and partners' technical teams follow, providing the necessary expertise to support the draft report submission. Once the report is validated it can be handed to the MoA, then presented to stakeholders to trigger the release of necessary resources.

5 Implementation

Once the flagship program has been approved, it is then phased and incorporated into the government's resource planning, usually through the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) which ensures budget availability. It is further used as an investment plan to draw in resources for implementation. At this stage, AGRA provides support with resource mobilisation, planning and technical assistance to support the implementation process.

These five steps represent a tried and tested path to scaling up sustainable agricultural interventions while building systems and institutions. It facilitates private sector investment and brings together all key agricultural stakeholders. As such, it is a process we strongly advise governments to follow if they want to ensure flagship program success.

DELIVERING LASTING VALUE: AGRA'S APPROACH TO FLAGSHIP PROGRAMS

Our strong partnerships with government, and our understanding of the African agricultural landscape, means AGRA is ideally placed to support the development of flagship programs. And while flagship programs are not in themselves unique, our approach in this area – characterized by ownership, partnership, participation and integration – most certainly is.

For example, while certain bodies use technical teams to design flagship documents, at AGRA we engage a range of partners in a focused prioritization exercise. Our aim here is to ensure there is a participatory element to the process and that everybody's voice is heard.

Once we have identified a country's priority investment areas, we assess these areas together with government, honing our focus to one or two interventions to make implementation manageable. We then use additional evidence to see how competitive the identified priority areas have been; and we bring all key actors together to ensure everybody has a sense of ownership.

What is also unique is our alignment of flagship programs with our way of delivering integrated country support. We don't design a program and leave it to somebody else to deliver; instead, we try to see what role we can play on the implementation side, taking a more holistic approach that encompasses initiation and design right through to final execution.

In fact, to facilitate delivery we often draw on our consortia model. Consortia are coalitions of local value chain actors who rely on each other for functioning food systems, with the farmer at the centre. Consortia are important as they help to achieve local coordination and alignment. They enable the integrated delivery of technologies, services and knowledge, and encourage local government and private sector engagement. To date, AGRA has invested in 26 consortia across 11 countries, reaching 44 million farmers (as of January 2020) – an established and extensive network which can be leveraged to maximise flagship impact. Indeed, once a flagship program has been devised, it can be delivered through AGRA's localized interventions via our consortia channels, ensuring greater reach and enhancing the prospects of success.

IMPACT AND EVIDENCE

Over the last decade, we have learned that country commitment lies at the heart of accelerated agricultural transformation. We have also seen that government remains the most critical partner for sustainable development.

Those countries that demonstrate political commitment are able to improve food security and achieve inclusive economic growth in a very short time period. In recent years, a number of governments have begun to unlock the potential of their country's private sector and smallholder farmers, driving progress throughout their economies with the right programs, policies and investments.

In Nigeria, for example, there has been significant investment in agriculture since 2010, which has increased agricultural output by 21 million tonnes. Nigeria has also reduced food imports from \$11 billion to \$3.2 billion, and expanded jobs by 3.8 million.

In Ethiopia, there has been consistent investment of 15% of the national budget per year for over five years, while the country as a whole has quadrupled agricultural output and reduced the rate of rural poverty by 4% a year.

And in Rwanda, support for agriculture since 2008 has led to the tripling and quadrupling of major crop yields. The share of the population that is hungry has dropped from 55% to 21%, while poverty has reduced from 45% to 29%.

In these and other countries, flagship programs have been key to helping millions of smallholder farmers in the quest to reduce poverty and hunger. And across our 11 focus countries, AGRA is currently supporting a number of these programs. They include a rice value chain irrigation scheme in Burkina Faso; the Promoting Sustainable Agriculture Productivity program in Mali; an intervention designed to promote youth and women in agribusiness in Malawi; and an agriculture productivity enhancement program in Kenya, among others.

COORDINATION AND SOLIDARITY

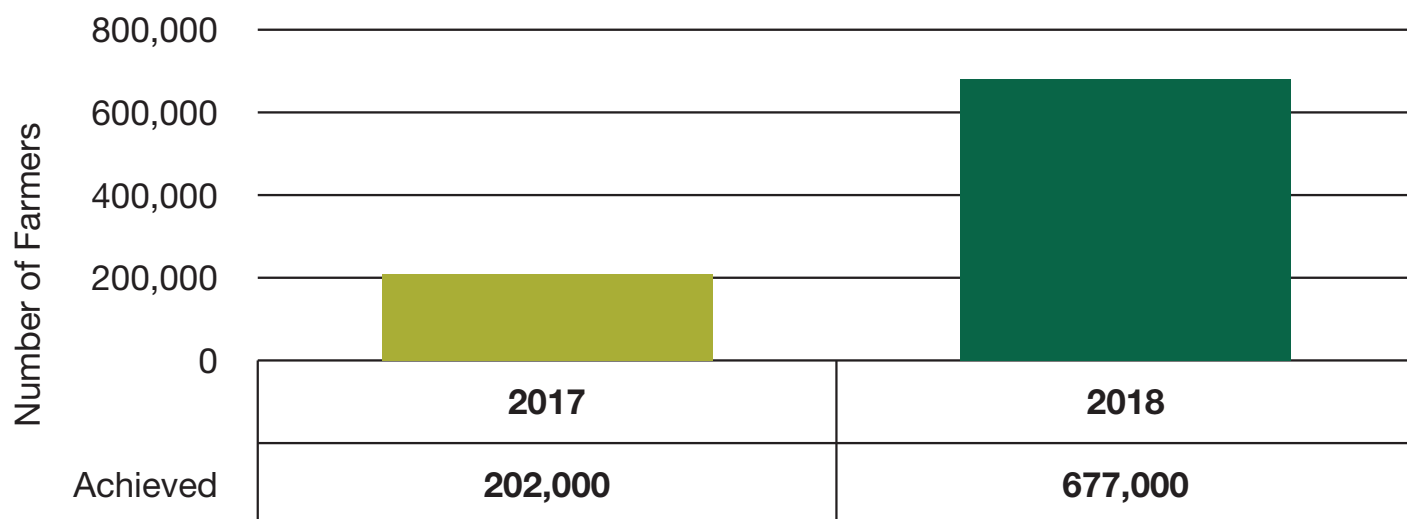
The progress made via these flagships reminds us that, through the engagement of governments and the bolstering of state capability, we can unite disparate organizations and institutions in the effort to achieve agricultural transformation in Africa.

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has also reinforced the need for coordination and solidarity in the face of regional and global crises. At the time of writing, the flagship program approach is helping AGRA coordinate a swift response to the coronavirus outbreak in Africa. Through active engagement with our host-governments and other partners, we are working to unify efforts at national level to limit the impact of COVID-19 on food systems and agricultural supply chains. By working with governments, institutions and organizations, we aim to ensure that food security and agricultural resilience remain front and centre of all response planning. Only in this way, and by working together, will we find a pathway out of the present crisis.

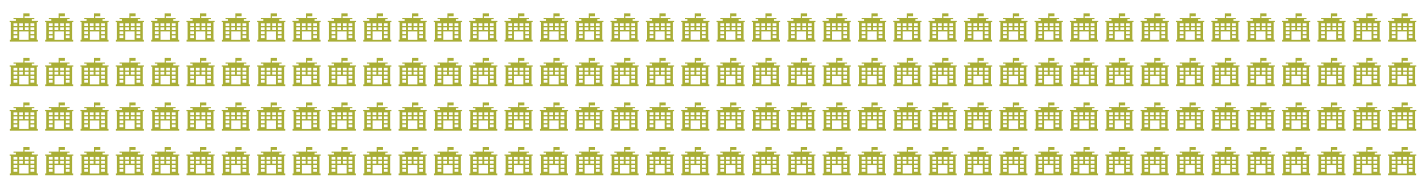
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PFJ case study

One key AGRA-backed flagship program that has delivered tangible results is **Ghana's Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ)**. Running from 2017 to 2020, the program's aim is to help modernize Ghana's agriculture sector, and deliver structural transformation of the national economy through food security, employment opportunities and poverty reduction. It also seeks to motivate smallholder farmers to increase their crop yields by mobilizing access to input- and output markets, while generating employment opportunities along selected value chains.



In 2017 and 2018, PFJ exceeded its farmer beneficiary targets, reaching **202,000** and **677,000** farmers respectively, while also mobilizing **160** senior high schools, **10** public and private universities and other institutions in crop cultivation.



In 2017, a total of **4,400** metric tonnes of certified cereal seed and legumes was made available to farmers through the program, including four metric tonnes of vegetable seed.

And in 2018, a total of nearly **7,000** metric tonnes of various crop seed, including groundnut and vegetables, was distributed. PFJ has also helped to build the capacity of selected seed producers, with the potential to increase grain yields and incomes by about **30%**.



Overall, the program has led to an improvement in Ghana's agriculture biennial review (BR) performance, which has increased from **3.9** (not on track) in 2017 to **6.67** (on track) in 2019, promising a tangible shift in fortunes for Ghana's smallholder farmers.

3.9

6.67

For more information

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