Innovative Agricultural Research Initiative (iAGRI)

Purpose: The Innovative Agricultural Research Initiative (iAGRI) aims to strengthen training and research capacities of Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) and the Tanzanian National Agricultural Research System (NARS).

Goal: The goal is to improve food security and agricultural productivity in Tanzania.

The project purpose is aligned with the themes and road map of the USAID Feed the Future (FtF) initiative and the Government of Tanzania (GoT) Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme Compact and Agricultural Sector Development Programme (ASDP).

Objectives:
- Provide advanced degree training in agriculture and nutrition for 120 Tanzanian graduate students;
- Establish a program of collaborative research on agriculture and nutrition;
- Strengthen capacity of SUA to develop and implement instructional, internship, and outreach programs;
- Promote cooperation between SUA, U.S. universities, and Global South universities.

Partnership Arrangement: iAGRI is a partnership of Tanzanian institutions and The Ohio State University Consortium (OSUC) -- six U.S. land grant universities, including The Ohio State University (the lead institution), Michigan State University, Virginia Tech, University of Florida, Tuskegee University, and Iowa State University.

Approach: The design of iAGRI draws upon successful development approaches to agricultural research, extension, and education, building on the U.S. land grant model. These approaches minimize training and technical assistance costs, emphasize the developmental content of academic programs, and engage private sector, NGO, and civil society stakeholders. The project’s activities reflect Government of Tanzania and donor priorities.

Needs Assessment and Priority-Setting: iAGRI began with an assessment of the human-resource needs of SUA and the NARS, as well as the curriculum and infrastructure needs of SUA. Assessment team members came from SUA, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives (MAFC), and the OSUC universities. MAFC includes NARS and extension services. Drawing on the needs assessment findings, representatives from SUA and NARS identified training and research priorities for iAGRI during a workshop in the first year of the project.

Long-Term Graduate Degree Training: The goal of iAGRI’s long-term training component is to equip the next generation of Tanzanian researchers and managers with skills and knowledge for achieving food security throughout the country. Degree training priorities were identified during the needs assessment study and priority-setting workshop in the first year of the project.

Collaborative Research: Institutional collaboration under iAGRI is fostered through the following elements:
- Shared setting of priority research topics;
- Project Advisory Board of stakeholder members;
- Tanzanian and foreign advisors jointly guiding the research of each Masters and PhD trainee;
- Research grants for teams of SUA, MAFC, and OSUC researchers working collaboratively.

Institutional Capacity Building: iAGRI is collaborating with SUA’s Quality Assurance and Promotion Bureau to (1) revitalize the University Teaching and Learning Improvement (UTLIP) program for instructors, (2) launch a pilot program to utilize postgraduate students as Teaching Assistants, (3) equip classrooms with audio-visual equipment, and (4) create a service unit to monitor and maintain teaching facilities. Other activities include short courses for faculty and students, pioneering the use of video conference technology in teaching and research, and providing leadership and management training.

Tripartite SUA—U.S. University—Global South University Cooperation: iAGRI is enlisting universities in Africa and Asia to host degree trainees and visiting researchers. Through a partnership with RUFORUM, the project is placing trainees in African universities outside Tanzania. OSUC faculty members collaborate with Tanzania counterparts in supervising trainees’ research and participate in curriculum development, teaching short courses, and other capacity-building activities in Tanzania.

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