

Stay in Your Lane



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"Stay in Your Lane": Euphemism used in technical forums and websites to indicate a user has strayed into an area in which they clearly have no expertise. —Urban Dictionary

The **Regional Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes (ReNAPRI)** is a relatively young network, established in 2012 at the initiative of African-led agricultural policy research institutes.

Since its inception, ReNAPRI has wrestled with the question of its mandate — finding our lane so to speak. The prevailing tendency of the donor world has been to measure impact according to the number of policy changes implemented, creating the temptation for us to “change lanes.” After much soul-searching, the ReNAPRI leadership determined at the 11th Board and Technical Meeting in March 2018 that it is not for us to change policies; rather, our mandate is to support and engage with decision-makers by providing timely, accurate and policy-relevant evidence. We found our lane!

The development ecosystem is best viewed as a complex adaptive system composed of various actors, each with their own unique set of incentive structures (forthcoming MSU-AAP & ReNAPRI thought-piece). The complexity stems from the dynamic networks of interactions that are not merely an aggregation of the individual static entities, but rather an emerging pattern within the system that cannot be directly linked to the individual behavior of its components (Mittleton-Kelly, 2003; Ramaligam et.al, 2008; Barder, 2012). The development ecosystem in which we all

work functions better when there is a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of each of the players within the system.

One of the most important roles of governments is to create an enabling environment that supports rising living standards. Doing so requires evidence on what works, what doesn't, and why. The role of ReNAPRI and its member institutions is to generate and translate that evidence into policy recommendations and/or programs as well as to engage in continual dialogue with policy-makers. As Dr. Akin Adesina, president of the African Development Bank, pointed out: our relevance, impact and sustainability depend on how often policy-makers call upon us to guide them. Table 1 demonstrates how ReNAPRI is operating within its role.

Country: Institution	Government Policy Request	Department	Method of Engagement
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (IRES), Universite de Kinshasha	Provide analysis of the economic growth and potential economic development areas for the DRC.	Ministry of Agriculture	Research report tabled to ministry.
Kenya: Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development, Egerton University	Provide expertise and technical information towards the preparation of the Agriculture Sector Growth and Transformation Strategy (ASGTS).	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation	Participation in working group; draft ASGTS.
	Calculate projections of cost for 2018/19 maize production, which is a guide for determining prices under the strategic food reserves (SFR) program.	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation	Findings reported to the SFR.

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Malawi: Center for Agriculture Research and Development (CARD), Lilongwe University of Agriculture & Natural Resources (LUANAR)	Contribute to Malawi's annual Food Balance Sheet (FBS).	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD)	Initial training and presentations on the partial-equilibrium model to government representatives.
	Assess performance of agricultural estates and smallholder farmers cultivating within the bounds of the estates.	Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MoHULD)	Results informed the agricultural commercialization programme.
Mozambique: Research Center for Agriculture Policy and Agri-systems (CEPPAG), Eduardo Mondlane University	Recommend how to prevent and address biological invasions into the Mozambique's ecosystems.	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security & Academia	Presentations and working paper.
	Recommendations on price setting mechanisms for farmers and tax policies on import/export trade.	Ministry of Agriculture & Food Security	Technical notes, policy briefs, and presentations.
South Africa: Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP)	Request for comments on the "Land Expropriation Without Compensation Resolution" passed by Parliament.	Constitutional Review Committee	Written review and recommendations tabled.
	Analysis of the effect of zero-rating VAT for meat products on red meat consumption.	Red Meat Industry Forum (RMIF)	Written report.

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Tanzania: School of Agriculture Economics and Business Studies (SAEBS), Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA), Tanzania	Conduct research regarding women empowerment, poverty alleviation, pre- and post-harvest technologies and climate smart agriculture.	Kilimanjaro District Council, and the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar	Workshop on findings.
	Review of cashew nut marketing policy.	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries	Dissemination workshop and paper publication.
Uganda: Makerere University	Analysis of the dairy value chain & development of the strategic plan for the food sector in Uganda.	National Agricultural Advisory Services	Position paper and report.
	Evaluation of the Fisheries Value Chain.	African Development Bank	Position paper and report.
Zambia: Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute	Assess nutrition figures.	Ministry of Agriculture	Advisory note.
	Provide technical support on report analyzing fish consumption and demand.	Ministry of Agriculture	Report presented to Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, and Zambia National Farmers Union.

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Zimbabwe: Department of Agricultural Economics & Extension, University of Zimbabwe	Draft Zimbabwe's Agriculture Marketing and Trade Policy.	Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement	Policy documentation and dissemination workshop.
	Review of the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Framework.	Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate Change	Meetings, workshop, recommended changes to CBNRM Framework.

This table shows how we interact with policy-makers and other stakeholders to provide options for their consideration and to tease out the benefits and costs, and who wins and who loses, from alternative policy options. We do not believe that it is our role to force policy-makers to change policies in particular directions. That is for civil society, and for society as a whole, to decide. This delineation clarifies the roles of the respective agents within the system (our lanes). If we stray into areas that are not within our mandate we change the incentive structures and create the potential for corruption and erosion of the system — in short, we are in danger of a pile-up.

The expectation by external organizations that ReNAPRI demonstrates impact by the number of policy recommendations adopted will force us into the political arena where decision-making is dependent not only on evidence but also internal political mechanisms — a “lane” which we are not equipped (and neither should we be) to handle. On this road to development, it is important to stay focused and play to our strengths thereby ensuring safe arrival at our destination.

References:

1. Barder, O. (2012). The Implications of Complexity for Development. Lecture. Centre for Global Development. Available online at: <http://www.cgdev.org/doc/CGDPresentations/complexity/player.html>.

2. Mitleton-Kelly, E. (2003). Ten Principles of Complexity and Enabling Infrastructure. Complex Systems and Evolutionary Perspectives on Organizations: The Application of Complexity Theory to Organizations. Elsevier Science Ltd, Oxford, UK. ISBN 9780080439570.
3. Ramalingam, B.; Jones, H.; Toussaint, R.; and Young, J. (2008). Exploring the Science of Complexity: Ideas and Implications for Development and Humanitarian Efforts. Working Paper 285. Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London, U.K.