iCra
building trust

ABC Training & Coaching
Guidelines & tools for Agribusiness Cluster formation

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This iCRA-toolkit contains free, practical tools and checklists to facilitate accurate Training and Coaching of Agribusiness Clusters.

In case of questions, or if you need support, please reach out to
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Introduction

Agribusiness Cluster (ABC) formation aims at strengthening business relationships among farmers, their buyers, and other chain partners and service providers in their local network, for their common benefit. If small scale farmers, input dealers, and aggregating or processing SMEs work on their own, it will be very difficult to become or remain competitive and serve a market successfully. Instead of working individually, ABC formation guides agribusiness actors to collaborate, align and improve on their operations, to become competitive as cluster of enterprises.

An ABC is defined as an informal agribusiness network among a local network of farmers, their buyers, varied agro-input dealers and service providers, that co-create a shared vision and competitive strategy on how to tap into shared market opportunities and find solutions to shared input, production, and processing problems. Clusters often focus on one specific agricultural commodity and its multiple end products; and are spearheaded by the business ambitions of a farmers' cooperative union or well-performing aggregating or processing company (lead firm).

One or multiple of these clusters are formed around the identified market actor ('lead firm'), which offtakes raw material from farmers. Lead firms can be an aggregating or processing company, or an association/group of traders. Together with the farmers they source from (members of legally registered cooperatives, or from informal farmer groups), the lead firm brings together other local business actors to form the network, build business-to-business relationships, strategically plan how to tap into shared market opportunities. They jointly explore constraints and strategize on solutions to shared input, production, processing and marketing problems; and collectively arrive at shared cluster action plans.

The assumption is that if agribusiness actors are facilitated to connect and collaborate, they can build trust, and come with sustainable solutions that improve the efficiency of their value chain and profitability of all business actors involved. As the cluster actors better understand each other's mutual interests and needs, this makes their business relationships more sustainable and eventually optimizes their business in terms of higher revenues, lower transaction costs and better access to production resources. Especially in low-trust societies however, long-term agribusiness relationships do not emerge spontaneously. iCRA and its implementing partners therefore contract, train and mentor ABC trainers who will proactively:

- link farmers to markets and facilitate a participatory process of joint action & learning to realize business growth and build long-term, win-win business relationships.
- link farmers with local agro-input dealers and service providers and build their business relationships. Think of input retailers (seeds, fertilizers, crop protection

products), credit-, transportation- & extension service providers; and/or other providers of services requested by farmers; including for example soil testing, land preparation, spraying services, rental services of small farm equipment, and other.

- strengthen the cluster actors' capacity to partner & design and implement competitive business strategies.

Below table gives an overview of the different phases, steps, activities and tools to support facilitating the process of agribusiness cluster formation and partnership building. These steps are further elaborated upon in the next section.

Phase	Steps	Activities	Tools
Phase 1: Preparations for ABC formation	1a. Identification of key commodities / crops	Identification and selection of key crops with good marketing potential, based on market assessment in targeted areas.	Guiding questions for focus group discussion as part of a market study (annex 1)
	1b. Quick scan and identification of key markets (lead firms / business champions): aggregators, traders, processors.	Through formal calls for inclusive business ideas, or more informal networking and quick suitability assessment, lead firm candidates are identified to spearhead the to be formed agribusiness partnerships.	Partner suitability quick scan (annex 2)
	1c. Selection of ABC trainers	Launch a (internal) vacancy for ABC trainers, and conduct interviews to select the most appropriate ABC trainer candidates	ABC trainer profile & Terms of Reference (annex 3)
	1d. Profiling, selection, and grouping of farmers	- Selection of farmer groups or organisations - Grouping of farmers that make a good fit with identified offtakers.	Farmer profiling and assessment
	1e. Sensitisation of farmer group(s) and lead firm, through a first trust building workshops and participatory assessment	- Host a first meeting for each farmer group or organisation, for trust building & goal clarification purposes - Host second meeting for each farmer group & lead firm representative for quick assessment of key value chain players and service provider in the local network	Participatory actor mapping & analysis (annex 4, or step 1 in the D&D manual in annex 5)
	1e. Identification and selection of cluster coaches	- Asking partnership actors for cluster coach candidates - informal interviews - final selection & sensitisation	Cluster coach profile & Terms of Reference (annex 4) Selection

		workshop with all coaches to agree on role, responsibility and tasks	questionnaire & scoring table
Phase 2: Baseline survey		*< specific to client and project partners' M&E framework >*	
Phase 3: Diagnostic & Design workshop	Joint situational analysis, visioning and strategic planning with representatives of all clustered stakeholders	- Deliver D&D workshop - Report on each D&D workshop, including annual cluster action plans - Break annual cluster action plan down into activities for 8-12 week implementation cycles - Final selection of cluster coach (during, or just after the D&D workshop)	D&D manual (see annex 5) including facilitation tools: historic timelines, trend mapping, prouds & sorries, Future scenarios, Action planning, Ritual dissent for improving action plans D&D reporting template
Phase 4: Implementation of cluster action plans in implementation cycles		- For each cycle, a workplan is made for each coach and cluster - Each cycle starts with a training workshop for coaches - ABC trainers make field visits to mentor cluster coaches - Each cycle ends with a peer-to-peer learning workshop, reviewing results, and planning ahead	- Template cluster coach workplan - Diagnostic matrix (annex 6) - Outline for a 1-day review workshop with cluster coaches (annex 7)
Phase 5: Tracking annual cluster performance		*< specific to client and project partners' M&E framework >*	
Phase 6: Annual evaluation of the ABC trainers' performance	Evaluating performance of ABC trainers in achieving cluster results	Evaluate the trainers' performance	Evaluation tool for ABC trainer performance *(under development)*
Phase 7: Annual partnership quick scan	Quick assessment of the performance and maturity of the cluster (partnership) supported	- Quick check on red flags for continued support to the partnership / cluster - Quick check on partnership progression (business performance, impact indicators, partnership maturity)	The partnership quick scan (annex 8)

Phase 8: Reflect & Adapt, workshop	An annual moment to reflect on achieved results and refine or adapt the strategies and collaboration activities undertaken by the agribusiness (cluster) partnership(s)	The R&A process has 6 steps. 0. Reporting M&E data and interviews & selecting R&A workshop participants 1. Discussing results 2. Finding obstacles on the road to results & ways to handle them 3. Measuring the partnerships' health 4. Discovering common ground 5. Reconsidering intervention logic and adapting action plans 6. Reporting on the R&A process	Reflect & Adapt workshop manual (annex 9) Demonstration videos for R&A steps 0-5 in English and French.

Phase 1: Key preparations for ABC formation

Step 1A. Identification & selection of key crops

An initial analysis and selection are made on what commodities/crops are already in production and in high demand, but troubled by a poorly organized market (of offtakers: traders, aggregators, processors). When available, information sources such as sector and market studies can be used; and additionally focus groups discussion can be organised (see annex 1 for guiding questions that can be used for this). Based on this analysis, a reasonably accurate picture of the current and potential market size of shortlisted commodities will emerge, and key constraints in current marketing and production can be identified at level of the farmer, including expected increase of production volumes and required quality improvements of produce.

Step 1B. Quick scan and identification of key offtakers (buyers, e.g. traders, aggregators, processors)

For each selected crop/commodity, key offtakers (or lead firms: aggregators, traders, processors) are identified that can spearhead the agribusiness cluster partnerships and provide farmers a reliable market. From the total number of identified lead firms, an initial 5 to 10 key offtakers are shortlisted to start with. To select the right market players, the quick scan guidelines in annex 2 can be used. In short, lead firms are selected based on their:

- Market potential
- Business ambition
- Commitment to develop a new / strengthen existing partnership with farmer groups/organisations

Once key market players are ready to commit to explore a longer-term cluster partnership, it is recommendable to start formulating a partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding.

Step 1C. Selection of ABC trainers

Not everyone possesses the talent to be a good facilitator, so a profile has been created for the ABC trainer position (see annex 3), detailing roles & responsibilities, tasks, and the ideal profile & characteristics of the ABC trainer. The job or consultancy position can be promoted among public government extension or local NGOs, or private consultants from local BDS providers. More established lead firms can also put forward their sourcing managers or extension staff as ABC trainer candidates. Whatever the position, candidates must be based and operate in proximity to the production areas where lead firms source their raw materials. All candidates undergo a formal assessment – including review of application letters and intake interviews; to check on motivation and experience and assure selection of the best ABC trainers. It is recommendable to ask the lead firm to join the intake interviews; and to include their considerations when selecting the best candidates.

Step 1D. Selection and grouping of farmers

Ideally the identification and profiling of farmers starts with the farmers that the lead firms already work with, and those farmers in their surroundings. Alternatively, well-established farmer groups or cooperatives in the area can serve as a starting point for profiling farmers.

Farmers are selected based on their ambition and willingness to cooperate to a longer-term cluster collaboration. Selected farmers are grouped and matched to the short-listed lead firms. ABC trainers take a leading role in this step.

Step 1E. Joint orientation of farmer group(s) & assessment of the business network

ABC trainers host a first meeting to bring together the grouped farmers and the lead firm, to get to know each other, explore common goals, and jointly assess their current business situation. Jointly they map all the actors that (the farmers and the lead firm) currently work with, including input providers that the farmer work with, agronomic extension providers, transporters, financial service providers, traders and others. Outcome of this joint orientation is a longlist of stakeholders that could or should be invited for the D&D workshop (step 2 of the D&D manual provides tips how to make a purposeful selection of D&D participants from this longlist).

This joint orientation will be complemented with further data collection (baseline survey, see phase 2) and validated during the Diagnostic & Design workshop.

1e: Identification and selection of local cluster coaches

Cluster coaches undergo pre-testing to assess their qualities and potential to effectively fulfill the role. Not everyone possesses the talent to be a good facilitator and coach, so a profile has been created for the cluster coach position (see annex 4). The final selection will be based on a brief selection process. At this phase you have already identified the

network of actors who will form the cluster and you can follow these steps to identify the coach.

    a. Explain to the cluster actors the role of a cluster coach and share the profile with them. This can be done as the last session during the focus group discussions.
    b. Ask the actors to suggest possible candidates, this can be done within a week.
    c. Contact and interview the candidates face to face and make a final selection based on your observation and perception. Its highly recommended that you involve the lead firm representative in carrying out the interviews.

Phase 2: Baseline survey

The baseline survey is specific to the clients' and project partners' M&E framework. However, iCRA has its own Monitoring & Learning framework including few indicators that must be included in the baseline survey.

Phase 3: Diagnostic & Design (D&D)

The D&D workshop facilitates actors of an envisaged ABC to jointly analyse the current state of their inter-connected business operations and to envision the desired business situation. The actors jointly define major business trends, based on which they formulate joint ambitions and strategically plan future actions captured in an annual cluster action plan. The goal of this plan is to become more profitable individually as cluster members ánd more competitive as cluster of enterprises.

The D&D workshop requires crucial preparation steps as well as follow-up steps; with as key outcome a D&D report including a cluster action plan that is broken down into 3 implementation cycles (of 8-16 weeks) with actionable interventions. Detailed instructions on how to prepare and deliver a D&D workshop, are presented in the D&D manual (annex 5). The manual explains step-by-step how to guide cluster members to focus on the past, present and the future by using facilitation tools including: historic timelines, trend mapping, prouds & sorries, future scenarios, action planning.

- *Invite and 'warm-up' D&D workshop participants* (where required one-on-one). Certain actors might need more guidance beforehand; to be able to participate confidently in the dialogues during the D&D workshop. Others might need to be motivated to have an open attitude for the new collaboration. Tips are provided in step 2 of the D&D manual.
- *Deliver the D&D workshop*
  Checklists are provided for the facilitators of the D&D workshop, with practical guidance for the ABC trainers how to deliver each step of the workshop. As final annex of the D&D, worksheets are provided for the D&D participants (the cluster members).
- *Turn D&D outcomes into an annual cluster action plan*
  The ABC trainer, supported by a small delegate of cluster actors, report on the D&D

outcomes and formulate an annual cluster action plan. The cluster action plans describes key interventions and concrete field activities.

- *Break annual action plan down into activities for 8-12 week implementation cycles.* The ABC trainer, in close collaboration with the cluster coach and lead firm, tactically plan and prioritize field actions and training & coaching activities in 3 iterative implementation cycles of 8 to max 12 weeks.

Phase 4: implementation of cluster action plans

- *For each implementation cycle, ABC trainers formulate a specific workplan for each coach and cluster*
  For each cycle, ABC trainers formulate a specific workplan for each coach and cluster with concrete tasks and activities. Coaches sign this workplan as way of confirming they understand and agree on the workplan, and commit to its successful implementation. Also terms for compensation (travel, communication, pocket money) are agreed upon. Based on these workplans, the ABC trainers coordinate and supervise the work of cluster coaches; through regular phone calls.
- *ABC trainers deliver training workshop for cluster coaches*
  During the training workshops for cluster coaches, the ABC trainer:
    o trains and empowers the coaches on topics and skills that are required to implement their cluster work plan. These topics are not pre-defined; but based on the D&D workshop and through interaction with the coaches, training are defined (using the diagnostic matrix; see annex 6)
    o mentors and guides cluster coaches on the next steps they need to make in the cluster collaboration process and implementation of the cluster action plan. These activities and deliverables are defined and specified for each cluster coach for the next cycle of 16 weeks and are agreed upon in a short Terms of Reference (ToR) for each coach.
- *ABC trainers organise field visits and mentor cluster coaches on-the-job.*
  ABC trainers are expected to join coaches as they conduct important field activities For example, when a coache convenes a meeting with cluster actors. The ABC trainer only co-delivers these activities when required but is present mostly to backstop and mentor the coach on-the-job.
- *ABC trainers deliver a peer-to-peer learning & review workshops for the coaches*
  At the end of each implementation cycle, the ABC trainer conducts a workshop with the cluster coaches to look back on the past (16 weeks) implementation period. He keeps the cluster coaches accountable on what they agreed to deliver (according to their workplans), and harvest success stories and achievements. Bust most importantly, peer-to-peer learning among coaches' challenges is facilitated (for example: how to manage expectations of the lead firm, how to broker new relationships with new / other input dealer(s) or service provider(s)? How to engage

a bank, micro-finance institute or NGO with the farmers' request for input credit? etc.)
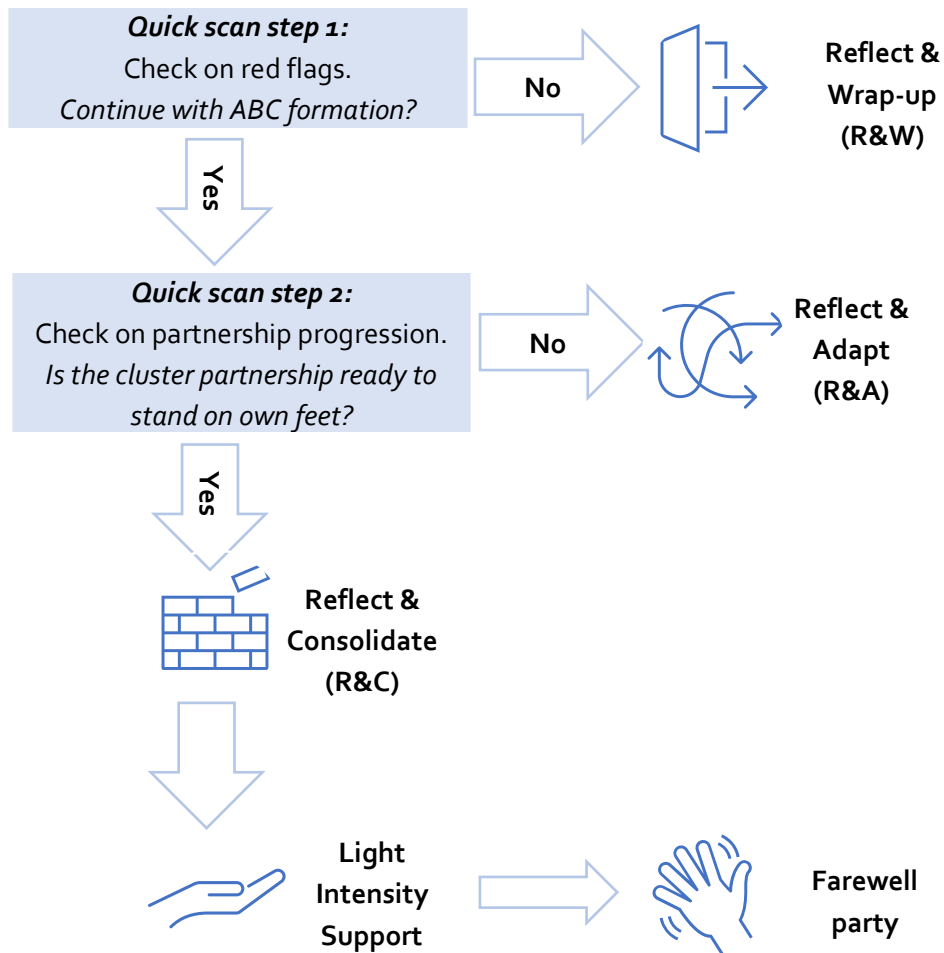
Phase 5: Tracking annual cluster performance

Data collection on the performance of a cluster (after one year of collaborative action) must be specific and tailored to the requirements (theory of change and impact targets) of the client or funder. Suggested impact indicators to track each year include: #volume traded, #formal contracts / clear informal agreements, $ access to loans realized #actors doing business within the cluster.

Phase 7: Annual partnership quick scan

The partnership (portfolio) quick scan supports ABC trainers to do a quick assessment on the performance-level and maturity of agribusiness clusters. The key goal of the quick scan is to allow ABC trainers to make an informed decision about the continuation, phasing-out or quick wrap-up of cluster formation activities. After a first year of implementation, continuation of cluster formation activities is the obvious choice; as partnerships generally need at least 2-3 years to grow, mature and deliver results. So generally after one year a Reflect & Adapt (R&A) workshop is organised to transition to a second year of implementation (see phase 8). Especially after year two, the annual partnership quick scan (annex 8) comes in useful as tool that ABC trainers can use to decide if:

- Continuation (for a 2nd or 3rd year of support) is the appropriate choice for a cluster.
- The cluster collaboration is mature enough consolidate activities by itself; allowing a slow phase-out of external cluster formation support. This process is facilitated during a Reflect & Consolidate (R&C) workshop.
- A full-stop exit of cluster formation activities is required; as minimal conditions for continuation are not in place. To facilitate a full-stop of the cluster activities, a Reflect & Wrap-up (R&W) workshop is organised.

Find the quick assessment tool in annex 8. Interested in the R&W or R&C manuals? Contact iCRA. For the R&A workshop, check the next phase 8 and annex 9.

Quick scan step 1:
Check on red flags.
Continue with ABC formation?

→ **No** → Reflect & Wrap-up (R&W)

↓ Yes

Quick scan step 2:
Check on partnership progression.
Is the cluster partnership ready to stand on own feet?

→ **No** → Reflect & Adapt (R&A)

↓ Yes

Reflect & Consolidate (R&C)

↓

Light Intensity Support → Farewell party

Phase 8: Reflect & Adapt workshop

ABC trainers can use the R&A facilitators' manual (annex 9) and suggested dialogue and facilitation tools to lead an open dialogue with the different partnership/cluster actors; with the purpose to reflect and adapt cluster strategies and action plans for a next year of implementation. Similar to the process of D&D delivery, R&A workshop participants need to be selected, invited, and prepared for an effective R&A workshop. In addition, the ABC formation team needs to prepare for the meeting by compiling M&E data on the delivered results so far (phase 5), to present this during the workshop as input for the dialogue.

The R&A manual provides detailed guidelines and checklists how to prepare the workshop, deliver it and follow-up on it afterwards. The manual goes through the following steps:

Step 0a	Reporting M&E data and interviews
Step 0b	Selecting Reflect & Adapt workshop participants
Step 1	Discussing results (morning day 1)
Step 2A	Finding obstacles on the road to results (afternoon day 1)
Step 2b	Reflecting on risks & tensions and ways to handle them (evening day 1)
Step 3	Measuring the partnership's health
Step 4	Focus on the next season: Discovering common ground (afternoon day 2)
Step 5	Reconsidering intervention logic and adapting action plans based on clustered ambitions (afternoon day 2)
Step 6	Reporting on the R&A process (1 week after the workshop) 30

Demonstration videos for R&A steps 0-5 can be found here in English and here in French.

ABC trainers are responsible to turn R&A outcomes into an action plan for the second year of cluster formation. Key interventions and concrete field activities are tactically prioritized and planned over in 3 iterative implementation cycles of 8 to max 12 weeks.

Annex 1 – Guiding questions for focus group discussion as part of scoping studies

Find attached as separate document.

Assessing the potential of an agribusiness partnership Part 1: Suitability of the leading buyer(s)

As agribusiness advisors you want to:
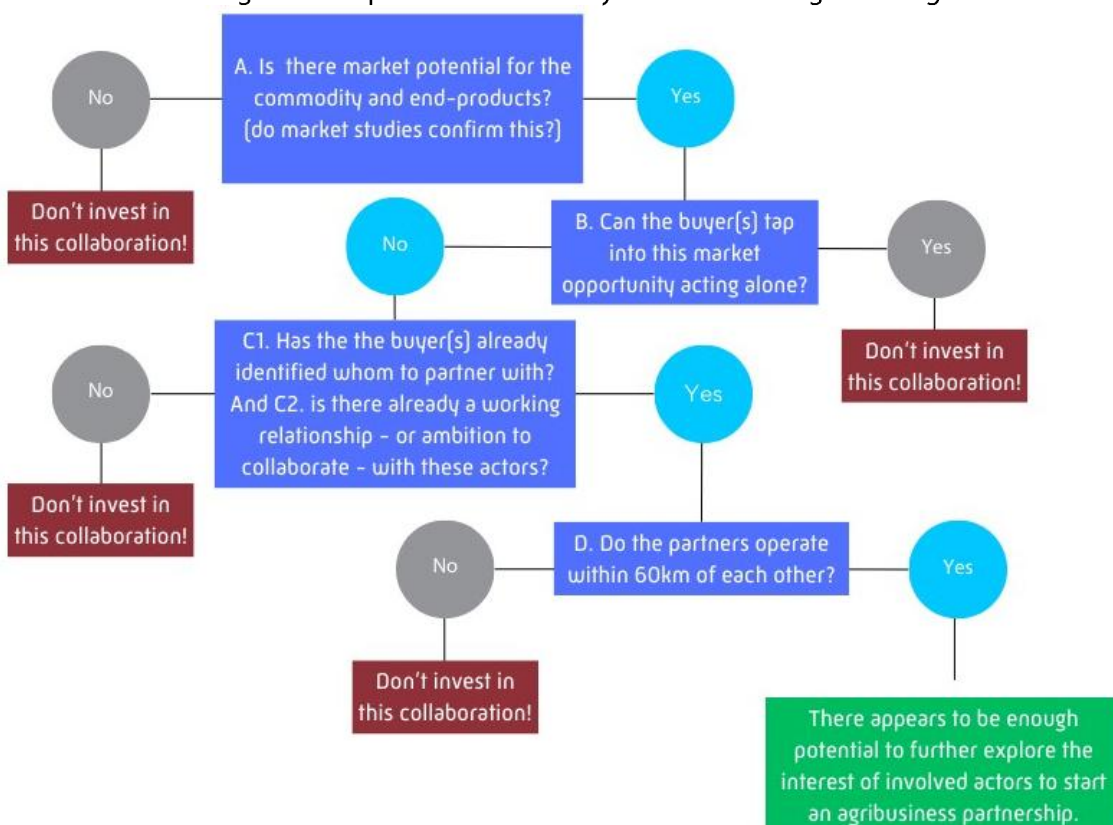
1. Identify the leading buyer(s)

- What leading buyer (offtaker) (farmer cooperative, aggregator, processor) do you target?
- What is the key marketing challenge of this enterprise?
- What business idea(s) does this enterprise have to overcome its key challenges?

2. Dig deeper into the buyers' capacity & issues in marketing & distributing its products

- What is the understanding of the buyer on:
  - It's target customer? (see customer persona & segmenting the market, for more info)
  - The size of its targeted market segment? (see tool: sizing the market, click for more info)
  - Its products' price/quality compared to similar products offered by competitors?
- What is the buyers' impression of consumers' satisfaction of its product(s), in terms of:
  - D. *Acceptability*: what do consumers value in terms of the products' attributes (taste, formula, packaging, branding, etc.). Are they aligned to consumers' needs, dominant behaviours, and customs? Do consumers accept the product as it is now?
  - E. *Affordability*: what price is the consumers able & willing to pay for the product?
  - F. *Awareness*: how are target consumers made aware of the products' benefits?
  - G. *Availability*: How is the product made accessible? (through what outlets?)

3. Do a quick scan: is it suitable for the buyer to initiate an agribusiness partnership?

- Follow below decision tree to assess the suitability of this (lead) buyer to initiate an agribusiness partnership with producer groups/organisations and other agri-SMEs in a local business network.
- Go through below questions and base your answers on gut feeling.

Assessing the potential of an agribusiness partnership

Part 2: Assessing the urgency for collaboration between the leading buyer(s), producers and other business counterparts in the local network

As agribusiness advisors, you want to:

4. Dig deeper into the buyers' demands for raw material supply

- What quality of produce is required? (Variety, size, moisture content, etc.)?
- What quantity of produce is demanded? (Required volumes: "X" metric tons/month)
- What are the buyers' terms of payment? (Price offered, payment method & schedule etc)
- What are the terms of delivery? (Aggregation points, transport means, schedule)

5. Identify the key producers & their capacity to deliver on the buyers' demands

- What (leading) producers (informal farmer groups, cooperatives or 2nd level cooperative unions) do you target for the potential agribusiness partnership?
- What volumes do they produce? (Metric tons harvest per farmer, per season)
- What are producers' cost of production? And do cost benefit & margin analyses indicate the business opportunity is worth it?
- How is collection & transport organised? (Are the producers selling as a group? Are logistics in place to allow efficient aggregation & transport?)
- What is the level of organization & collaboration amongst producers? Are governance and leadership structures in place? Can producers respond & deal with emerging constraints & risks? Can the producers respond to new emerging opportunities?

6. Summarize the gaps between buyers' demands & producers' capacity to supply

- Sum up the "pain points" (constraints) in current demand & supply of raw material
- Sum up key "gain" points (benefits) in case of an improved producer-buyer relationship

7. Meet with the buyer(s) & assess its commitment to collaboration

- Don't talk about solutions yet. Discuss first the key pains & gains of closer collaboration.
- Ask: what happens if "pain point X" is not addressed, and gain point "Y" not pursued?
- How important is "pain point X" and "gain point Y"? Ask the buyer to score the points from 1-10. With an average score lower than 7, a collaboration isn't of added value.
- Ask the buyer about its willingness to invest time & resources in a closer collaboration with producers and other involved business counterparts.

Annex 3 – ABC trainer profile & Terms of Reference

Role & responsibilities of an ABC trainer

It's the role and responsibility of the ABC trainer to convene and facilitate cluster actors towards the overall objective of agribusiness cluster (ABC) formation, which is: to strengthen the business relationships, align the business strategies, and strengthen the competitiveness of the clustered agribusiness actors. More specifically, the ABC trainers' role is to:

a) Guide cluster actors to improve on competitiveness factors such as product quality, volume, consistency, and price. The ABC trainer leads the co-creation and promotion of improved practices and appropriate innovation options, that help to overcome key business constraints along the chain.

b) Strengthen or consolidate relationships between the cluster actors through relationship building activities, guided negotiations, guided contractualization, introduction of complementary service providers to the cluster partnership.

c) Facilitate and broker access to (new) output markets, deploying marketing expertise and tools (could include market research, gathering business intelligence, market prospecting & planning, brand development).

d) Facilitate and broker access to essential inputs, equipment, finance and services and broker (new) relationships with the required agro-input and service providers.

Tasks of an ABC trainer

The overall tasks of an ABC trainer is to:

- **Support the project team to make a purposeful selection of stakeholders** to start and lead the ABC formation process; and to start convening a collaboration among a collation of willing actors.

- **Invite and prepare representatives of selected stakeholders** (where required one-on-one) for cluster inception or Diagnostic & Design (D&D) workshop. Certain actors might need more guidance beforehand; to be able to participate confidently in the dialogues during the D&D workshop. Others might need to be motivated to have an open attitude for the new collaboration.

- **Deliver the D&D workshops: facilitate invited actors to co-create & design their own competitive cluster strategy** (using the D&D facilitators' manual and suggested dialogue and facilitation tools)

- **Turn D&D outcomes into an annual cluster action plan** (together with a small delegate of cluster actors). The annual cluster action plan prioritizes business interventions and (capacity strengthening) training & coaching activities for the cluster actors

- **Appoint (one or multiple) cluster coaches**. Appropriate candidates for the coach role are suggested by the cluster actors themselves during, or just after, the D&D workshop. Based on a provided profile and terms of reference, the ABC trainer in close collaboration with the project team make a final selection. A cluster coach is a trusted figure in the community (for example a lead farmer, input dealer, trader/aggregator, extension officer or service provider) with the right profile and competence to serve as the key facilitator and convener of the cluster action plan. The cluster coach regularly convenes the cluster actors and coordinates and guides the implementation of agreed actions and interventions.

- **Break the annual action plan down into strategically designed action-learning cycles**. The ABC trainer, in close collaboration with the cluster coaches, tactically plans and

prioritizes field actions and training & coaching activities, in 3 iterative implementation and learning cycles of 16 weeks.

- **Coordinate and oversee the progress cluster coaches make** on cluster action plans and planned activities during each action-learning cycle.
- **Deliver training workshop for cluster coaches.** During these workshops the ABC trainer:
  - trains and empowers the coaches with skills that are required to address the needs of the cluster actors (topics are identified during the D&D).
  - mentors and guides cluster coaches on the next steps they need to make in the cluster collaboration process and implementation of the cluster action plan. These activities and deliverables are defined and specified for each cluster coach for the next cycle of 16 weeks and are agreed upon in a short Terms of Reference (ToR) for each coach.
- **Deliver field mentoring for cluster coaches.**
  ABC trainers are expected to join coaches as they conduct important field activities (for example: when convening a meeting with cluster actors). The ABC trainer only co-delivers these activities when required but is present mostly to backstop and mentor the coach on-the-job.
- **Deliver a peer-to-peer learning & review workshops for the coaches**
  After each cycle, the ABC trainer conducts a workshop with the cluster coaches to look back on the past (16 weeks) implementation period. He keeps the cluster coaches accountable on what they agreed to deliver (according to their ToRs), and harvest success stories and achievements. Bust most importantly, peer-to-peer learning among coaches' challenges is facilitated (for example: how to manage expectations of the key buyers of the farmers? How to broker new relationships with new / other input dealer(s) or service provider(s)? How to engage a bank or micro-finance institute with the ABC's request for input finance? etc.)
- **Deliver end of season cluster evaluation (Reflect & Adapt) workshops.** ABC trainers use the R&A facilitators' manual and suggested dialogue and facilitation tools to lead an open dialogue with the purpose to reflect and adapt cluster strategies and action plans for the new year, with a specific focus on consolidating and scaling the most promising and successful interventions in pilot projects. Similar to the process of D&D delivery, R&A workshop participants need to be selected, invited, and prepared for an effective R&A workshop. In addition, the project team needs to prepare for the meeting by compiling M&E data on the project, to present this during the workshop as input for the dialogue.

Profile & key characteristics of an ABC trainer

✓ **Understand the language, cultural norms, and values of the community**
The ABC trainer is a young professional who understands the language and cultural norms and values of the community in which the cluster is located. The ability to understand and speak the local language, as well as respect the traditional norms of the local communities are desirable qualities for the ABC trainer to be accepted. Developing trust and relationships starts from understanding the context of involved actors. And a good understanding of the language and cultural values of the community has a major role in this.

✓ **Fluent in English and demonstrated experience as a trainer or facilitator or business mentor coupled with focused expertise in one or more technical areas like: good agricultural practices, plant protection, sustainable agriculture, post-harvest practices, value chain development, agribusiness development, marketing, and sales.**

The ideal ABC trainer is a young professional with a background in agribusiness development and with the potential to become a professional trainer and facilitator. The ABC trainer plays a central role in developing the cluster's social capital, which is its most precious resource. He or she needs to have the profile not only of a facilitator, but also of a strategic business coach and project coordinator.

- In terms of facilitation skills, the coach must have the ability to involve all potential cluster members and encourage joint reflection and decision making. The ABC trainer has to make cluster players aware of the benefits of cooperation, encourage them to get together, facilitate effective exchanges, and gradually build the necessary climate of trust. In this process, he or she is regularly called upon to manage conflicts of interest, facilitate the negotiation of win-win collaboration agreements, and support the formalization of these in contracts. As the cluster takes shape, the ABC trainer might find him/herself in a position to steer the growing network through synergies and partnerships with new actors (for example new input or service provider), from both the public and private sectors.
- In terms of strategic coaching skills, the ABC trainer must have the ability to lead participative diagnoses and support the development of collective strategies and action plans.
- In terms of project management skills, the trainer must have the potential skills to monitor and evaluate the impact of the cluster development project, communicate the results, and embed and ensure the sustainability of the coaching function within the cluster. The coach could also be asked to assist in brokering external finance for the implementation of cluster action plans.
- During a final selection of in total 5 ABC trainers, the project aims to put together a multidisciplinary team of trainers, with technical background and expertise ranging from good agronomic practices (GAP), post-harvest handling, access to finance, marketing. In this way, the trainers are more versatile and can be asked to train cluster actors on diverse technical themes, when needed.

✓ **Showing good interpersonal skills**

The ABC trainer should exhibit good people skills and have the ability to relate easily to others, irrespective of different personalities among ABC actors and other stakeholders. The ideal ABC trainer should exhibit good leadership qualities and be regarded as having integrity and good existing relationships in the local network. Having work experience or background involving some level of skills and capacity for interactive/participatory processes and partnership facilitation is regarded as an added advantage.

✓ **Neutral and unbiased**

The ABC trainer strives to be neutral and unbiased at all times when facilitating multi-stakeholder collaborations. He/she should understand the need and be willing to embrace neutrality and work with a participatory and collaborative mindset, while building good relationships with people. He/she should be able to easily recognize and call the project team for the involvement of more neutral facilitators and subject matter experts if situations in the ABC demand this. It is of critical importance for ABC trainers not to have any vested economic interest of his/her own in the business of the cluster.

✓ **Available and ready to learn**

The ideal ABC trainer should have the time; not holding a too busy position or operating within a business that leaves little flexibility or time for work with the ABC actors. Facilitating multi-stakeholder collaborations is a complex art. Candidates for the role of ABC trainers are expected to be curious and eager to invest time and develop their partnership facilitation skills.

✓ **Entrepreneurial drive**

The ideal ABC trainer should have a strong entrepreneurial drive, and eagerness to understand the business model and dynamics of the ABC. Owning or operating a business related to the ABC's business, or having good knowledge, experience, and skills relevant to the business of the ABC gives the insights and also ensures the likelihood of the trainer to continue providing its services to the ABC over the long term, after the project ends.

Annex 4 – Cluster coach profile & terms of reference

Role and responsibilities of a cluster coach

Farmers and agribusinesses (input dealers, traders, service providers) that form a cluster are considered partners that pro-actively co-design and co-implement a joint business strategy and co-invest in desired interventions. The key role of a cluster coach is to convene local-level exchanges, joint problem-solving and decision making amongst farmers and their business partners in the cluster. This is a complex task, and cluster coaches are asked to facilitate this as best as possible. They are however not on their own, as cluster coaches are supported by an ABC trainer.

Cluster members themselves suggest and accept the candidate that is taking up the cluster coach position. The opinion of a possible aggregating or processing company linked to the cluster, should also be seriously considered in the selection process. Cluster member may decide to select not one but a pair of two coaches, if they feel this lowers the likelihood for conflicts of interest. The cluster coach could be:

A. A leading farmer, or a member of a local and dynamic farmers' cooperative society
B. A local extension officer (local government)
C. The owner or a staff member of a local input dealer
D. A trader or (procurement or sourcing) staff member of the off taking SME (aggregating or processing company) that is buying the produce (raw material) from the farmers in the cluster

The coach should be motivated and have an entrepreneurial mindset. The coach should clearly realise that a flourishing cluster is beneficial for him as well, and not be motivated solely based on external incentives (allowances). In this regard, the options A, C and D above are recommended as coaches working from these positions are expected to enjoy a win-win scenario from business growth within the cluster.

Tasks of a cluster coach

The overall tasks of a cluster coach are:

1. To raise awareness among cluster member on the benefits of collaboration, encouraging cluster members to get together, facilitating effective exchanges, supporting the process of discussion and decision-making. Convening recurring business network sessions to help members:
   o express their problems and needs
   o refine the strategy and actions to be taken
   o update each other on the progress made on the cluster action plan
   o define next activities and action to be carried out and encourage cluster members to implement these jointly
2. Identify gaps in knowledge and skills within the cluster member actors, and advise the ABC trainer on appropriate training and coaching activities to help build the capacities of cluster members.
3. Setting up technical demonstration plots and organization of experience-sharing visits for the benefit of cluster members.
4. Visit cluster members one-on-one, especially those that need more intense guidance and support to participate successfully in the cluster activities.

5. Encourage cluster members to take on responsibility and deliver on activities assigned to them in the cluster action plan. The cluster coach should be careful not to overload himself (which would make the cluster dependent on him) and to avoid managing the cluster's finances.
6. Support ABC trainers in monitoring and evaluation of cluster formation actions.
7. Support the ABC trainer in brokering relationships with other value chain actors or service providers that need to be involved in the cluster collaboration.
8. Contact person at the field level in the cluster

Profile and characteristics of a cluster coach

A cluster coach has the following characteristics:

✓ **Trusted figure from the community**
The cluster coach must be a trusted figure from the community, and known for its:

- *Listening skills:* A cluster coach gives the good example by listening, He/she shows curiosity about the perspective and viewpoint of the cluster members, and encourages cluster members to listen to each other.
- *Honest and modest*: A good coach has the ability to assess his/her own knowledge and abilities, and acknowledges what he/she does not know and cannot do.
- *Respectful and service oriented*: A coach respects others, and does not place him/herself above the group. The opposite: the coach has a serving mentality and is service oriented towards the cluster members.

✓ **Understand the language, cultural norms and values of the community**
The cluster coach must understand the language and cultural norms and values of the community where the cluster is located. The ability to understand and speak the local language, as well as respect traditional norms, are crucial qualities.

✓ **Averagely educated: able to read, write and express oneself**
The cluster coach should be able to draft basic reports (using Microsoft office), and to comprehend written information in the preferred language of communication of the ABC actors. Obviously, agronomic background (knowledge of good agronomic practices, crop protection, post-harvest handling) in line with the clusters' commodity focus is an asset.

✓ **Good networker and relationship builder**
The cluster coach should be a skilled networker and relationship builder, possessing a strong existing network and solid relationships within the local community. They should be able to easily connect with others, regardless of the diverse personalities among cluster members and other stakeholders.

✓ **Showing good people and communication skills**
A cluster coach should be able to communicate effectively. He or she should be able to communicate openly with respect and kindness, and know how to:

- Ask the right questions
- Give helpful feedback to cluster members
- Set clear expectations

- Bring across ideas in a clear and simple way

✓ **Neutral and unbiased**

The ideal cluster coach strives to be neutral and unbiased, and does not impose its own solutions when facilitating meetings among cluster members. They should understand the importance of being impartial and work with a participatory and collaborative mindset, while building strong relationships. They should be able to easily recognize when the involvement of more neutral facilitators or mediators is necessary in situations within the cluster.

✓ **Available and ready to learn**

The cluster coach candidate should be able to free sufficient time (6 to 8 hours a week) for cluster coaching activities (see next section) in view of its usual occupations. He or she should be keen to learn from the ABC trainers in the project and attend training and mentoring sessions. If the core business of the cluster coach leaves him/her little or no time for any coaching activities, other candidates should be considered.

✓ **Driven by an entrepreneurial spirit**

The ideal cluster coach has a strong entrepreneurial drive and willingness to understand the business dynamics within the cluster. Having personal insight into the businesses operations of the cluster actors enables the coach to perform optimally.

✓ **Within the gender and age bracket that stakeholders regard as appropriate**

Many multi-stakeholder projects focus on the empowerment of youth and females. This therefore should be a consideration in the selection of the cluster coach. Young people have the energy, are highly mobile, and they are the future of any system. Working with youth as cluster coach is therefore recommended but not compulsory.

Annex 5 – Diagnostic & Design workshop manual

Find attached as separate document.

Annex 6 – Diagnostic matrix

Conduct an intake session with the cluster coaches you supervise, and define three to five real-life challenges (challenging situations) they will be facing for the coming action-learning cycle. For each real-life challenge, fill out the matrix below to diagnose what trainees need to learn to meet that challenge well. Delete the questions and replace the questions in the matrix with your own answers.

Real-life challenge In which situation does the person experience difficulties? Are there external factor(s) that trigger the undesired behaviour?	**Current or undesired Behaviour** What are the common mistakes made when they tackle this challenge? What is the undesired behaviour they often show? Can you show what happens?	**Negative effect** What is the negative effect of the behaviour? At personal level? For the organisation or company? For other parties?
	Desired behaviour What would you like to see him/her do after your session? What is the desired way of tackling this challenge? What are tips you have for the person? What would you see them do?	**Positive effect** What is desired effect? At personal level? For the organisation or company? For other parties?

Looking at your 3-5 filled-out diagnostic matrixes, analyze them using the 20-80 rule: (a) which real-life challenge is most often perceived? (b) Which negative effect has the largest impact? (c) Which desired behavior is easiest to change? Based on the answers to these questions, come up with 3-4 training topics or skills you include in your training workshop for the coaches.

Annex 7 – Outline for a 1-day review workshop with cluster coaches

Find attached as separate document.

Annex 8 – Annual partnership quick scan

Find attached as separate document.

Annex 9 – Reflect & Adapt facilitators' manual

Find attached as separate document.