“To Achieve Impact, Our Research Investments Must be Scaled-up,” USAID Official

“The research investments of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have generated hundreds of technologies,” according to Dr. Nora Lapitan, Head of Research Division at the USAID/Bureau for Food Security.

“For them to create impact, they have to be scaled-up.”

Dr. Nora was speaking on Monday, September 9, 2019, in the Senegalese resort of Somone. USAID and West African agricultural research actors have been mulling over the creation of a physical and virtual platform to better coordinate research activities with the overarching goal to ensure the uptake of innovations by end-users, planners, and businesses.

“In an initial pilot phase of approximately four years, the platform will have a particular, although not exclusive, focus on USAID’s activities in Feed the Future and Resilience Zones in Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Niger,” indicates a working document currently under consideration by CORAF and USAID.

The Research Division of USAID and its network of Feed the Future innovation labs produce hundreds of research outcomes each year. The West African Regional Mission of USAID as well as bilateral missions not only fund agriculture research activities but also need the results in the design of their interventions.

“We envisage this platform as one for coordination, alignment, and integration of research,” added Dr. Nora. The outcome, she hoped, should be to meet the needs of the key actors, including producers, policymakers, and the private sector.

At the Senegal convening between the key players of CORAF and USAID, the focus was placed on co-creating and co-developing the platform.

Initial working documents of the platform envisage three key components:

• Improve coordination, alignment and integration of relevant activities
Create and strengthen technology parks and facilitate effective flow of information and innovations

Build human and institutional capacity

Scaling-up of technologies, strengthening of human and institutional capacity, and knowledge management are also central to the 2018-2027 strategy of CORAF.

“We value this collaboration because it is fully-aligned to the strategic plan of CORAF,” says, Dr. Abdulai Jalloh, CORAF’s Director of Research and Innovation. CORAF has the mandate to coordinate agriculture research in West and Central Africa. It is the largest sub-regional research organization in Africa, covering 23 countries.

CORAF uses many different virtual and physical approaches to disseminate and scale up innovations. These include innovation platforms, technology fairs, an online market place of technologies known as MITA. To accelerate the supply and demand of seed technologies, CORAF uses an online platform known as WASIX. It is currently deploying an online forecasting tool to facilitate the uptake of quality seeds as well as a virtual platform to facilitate access to fertilizers and seeds.

For two days, both parties discussed the value-addition of the platform, refined its objectives, target audience, purpose, and possible measures of success.

With consensus almost achieved on the scope and the main components of the initiative, the parties will now hammer out the logistics before proceeding to implementation.

CORAF is expected to host the initiative with initial funding from USAID.