



PRISM – Strategy to Action and Back

An Illustration: Pioneer Agricultural Innovation Fund (PAIF)

The Firm

Pioneer Agricultural Innovation Fund (PAIF) is an agricultural R&D investment fund operating in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda with 60 percent funding from member governments and 40 percent from a consortium of donors.

PAIF's stated mission is to scale up promising agricultural innovations and thereby render agricultural R&D a more potent and reliable contributor to agricultural transformation and broader rural and structural transformation.

The Challenge

Following a recent large injection of funds from PAIF's funders, the Director General, Dr. Askal Merawi, is under intense pressure from the Executive Board to show results. She argues that, given the rapid pace of change in the region's agrifood system, PAIF's existing Strategy is no longer fit for purpose. The Board agrees that a new Strategy would be appropriate.

The Initial Solution

Askal moves quickly and tasks PAIF's Deputy DG and three Department Directors to develop a draft of the new Strategy, taking full account of the guidance from the Board that the link to transformation efforts must be crystal clear and compelling.

To Askal's pleasant surprise, six weeks later the DDG presents her with an exceptionally well-written strategy titled, "Agricultural Innovation for Transformation – PAIF to 2030."

Taking an "agricultural research for development" approach, the new Strategy features 4 strategic outcomes addressing transformative technologies, transformative capacity development, transformative policies and institutions, and transformative knowledge management. Under each strategic outcome are between 3 and 5 strategic results, with each of these strategic results further cascading to 4 or 5 strategic activities.

Askal is not fully comfortable with the heaviness and complexity of the draft Strategy, but she is delighted with the coherent link to the transformation agenda, and confident that the document establishes a firm platform on which PAIF can build over the coming decade. She provides the DDG and Directors with several suggestions for emphasis and refinement and prepares to receive the revised draft Strategy for onward sharing with the Chair of Programme Committee of the Executive Board.

The Problem

But then she has a chance encounter with Dr. Joanne Achen, the leader of PAIF's small but dynamic Market Access team within the Programme Department. When Askal tells Joanne that she likes the way markets and institutions are handled in the new PAIF Strategy, it is quickly evident that Joanne has never seen the draft, and that she was consulted very peripherally. It is a stunning revelation.

Further discussion with the DDG and three Department Directors reveals that the four senior managers wrote the new Strategy themselves with minimal input from the rest of the organization's 86 staff.

While disappointed and annoyed by the process, Askal remains convinced that the draft Strategy is on target. But the politician in her knows that there is no way she can send the document to the Programme Committee Chair without a proper internal consultation process. She also cannot ask the DDG and three Directors to fix the problem. She needs help from outside PAIF.

The PRISM Solution

Askal approaches NGI for support. NGI launches a PRISM initiative featuring intensive consultations with PAIF's senior leadership team and middle managers, targeted document reviews, and a full 3-day, 5-module, workshop with 25 participants comprising senior leaders, middle managers, and thematic leads and coordinators. An integrated set of results is produced under each module, yielding an implementation-ready Strategy for PAIF whose teams are poised to be strategically action-oriented.

Module 1 – Strategically Relevant Client Characteristics

Positives/Strengths	Negatives/Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAIF is small, well-led, relatively flatly structured, collegial, mission-driven, and bold Transparency and shared accountability are core values and principles Member governments and donors trust the leadership team and PAIF overall Despite its small size, PAIF is a major player in agricultural innovation investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAIF is small, teams are stretched The manner in which the DDG and Directors developed the new Strategy has led to a loss of trust in the leadership PAIF is having difficulty spending existing resources, let alone the new injection of funds Linkages and partnerships with the private sector are weak, despite long-standing commitments to the contrary

Module 2 – Strategy Perception and Awareness: Gaps and Corrective Measures

Misperceptions/Misunderstandings/Puzzles	Corrective Measures
Staff perceive the new Strategy as a threat to jobs	DG clarified that the new Strategy is linked to the positive funding developments and the need for PAIF to be able to meet the higher expectations. But change should be expected, and staff will be impacted
PAIF is simply jumping on the “Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D)” bandwagon. This is not in keeping with PAIF’s boldness and creativity. Moreover, PAIF invests in much more than research.	AIF will frame the new concept of “Agricultural Innovation for Transformation (AI4T)” more deliberately as the hook for the new Strategy, and brand “AI4T” as PAIF’s newest contribution to the field of agricultural innovation investment.
Not all four of the current Strategic Outcomes are equally important	The priority setting process/step will address this concern directly.
Why so many Strategic Results and Strategic Activities? A Strategy should help to focus effort not disperse it.	The priority setting process/step will address this concern directly.
Why is conflict ignored yet it is major driver of change in the three focus countries?	Conflict will be handled as a cross-cutting issue, aiming to affirm that in many cases transformation processes lie the root of conflict.

Module 3 – Setting Priorities

All 18 Strategic Results (SRs) and 53 Strategic Activities (SAs) in the draft Strategy were subjected to rigorous examination using the PRISM priority setting tool, which identified evaluation objectives and criteria based on the AI4T vision and mission, grouped and rationalized the SRs and SAs as required. The process yielded 8 high-priority operationally significant SRs and 14 similarly defined SAs.

Strategy Component	Before	After
Strategic Objectives	4	4
Strategic Results	18	8
Strategic Activities	53	14

Module 4 – Action Planning

For each of PAIF’s 14 prioritized strategic activities, individual PAIF Departments and constituent functional units developed detailed three-year action plans comprising:

1. Targets
2. Timelines and milestones
3. Resource needs
4. Responsibilities and accountabilities

Module 5 – Implementation Requirements and Arrangements

Taking into account PAIF’s organizational positives (strengths) and negatives (weaknesses) as identified in Module 1, each Department and functional unit identified critical internal and external implementation requirements and arrangements for the three-year action plans. The result for human resources (HR) team is shown below.

Functional Unit	Internal Implementation Requirements
Human Resources	<p>Based on learnings during the workshop, the HR team will focus on four interrelated areas of the workforce that together boost performance and catalyze and enhance conditions of trust and commitment. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Talent acquisition, to make sure that the staffing complement is fit-for-purpose, with a special focus on gender parity. Actions and investments would aim to bring PAIF’s brand closer to key professional communities through job alerts, LinkedIn, professional mailing lists, referrals, market research, career fairs, and other such platforms;2. Career and capability development support to grow the skills and confidence of staff. Actions and investments would include investments in career development, mentoring programmes, and stretch assignments;3. Employee engagement and wellbeing to enhance emotional and psychological connection to PAIF and its mandate, and thereby boost willingness to apply discretionary effort and “go the extra mile” for PAIF, be active ambassadors for PAIF, and proactively participate in the process of generating value for PAIF; and4. Accountability and ownership of key organizational outcomes, especially by middle managers who are the main custodians of organizational values, and thus the most immediate catalyzers of change and innovation. This requires explicit articulation of values, goals and targets for which managers will be held accountable, thereby enabling execution to happen. Conversations and mind-shift sessions to explain the “why” of key organizational values and targets and walk the journey together would also be prioritized.