RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2020 -2025

AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION, YOUTH EMPOWERMENT & NARROWING THE GENDER GAP

MENIGTE FARMS LIMITED

"My Smart Farm Agent"

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Executive Summary

Megnite Farms Ltd (also referred to as Mefarms Ltd) vision and mission are, to be the leading Agri-tech service provider in the world and to provide good quality products and services at affordable prices through application of technological principles in agriculture to ensure its modernization and advancement respectively.

High quality evidence and research play a key role in our journey towards achieving this. By setting out this five-year strategy, Mefarms Ltd aims to emphasize the importance of research evidence to achieving its organizational goals and provides guidance to its staff, partners and other stakeholders on why and how it will do so. Gathering and disseminating sound research evidence is the best way of ensuring our programmes are demonstrating scalable and cost-effective approaches that are meeting smallholder farmers' needs. Research evidence is also a strong tool for advocating with governments and policy makers for improved policies and environments that allow farmers equal opportunities for participation within society.

This document sets out our strategy for strengthening the role of research evidence in our programmes and advocacy as well as the role of our organization in the global research agenda. The document aims to provide Mefarms Ltd.'s staff, partner organizations and wider stakeholders with a clear understanding of why we are committed to research, our strategic goals and priorities in the next five years; and our plans for delivering these to high standards.

We have identified four objectives that will guide our decision making around research over the next five years:

1. Keep up to date with the existing body of evidence and ensure its effective use in our programmes and advocacy.

2. Conduct high quality research to generate new evidence to address global knowledge gaps and our operational challenges. In particular:- Understanding and describing needs, systems and contexts of our programmes; testing new approaches to the delivery of Agriculture and social inclusion services; and assessing the impact and cost-effectiveness of our interventions.

3. Build organizational capacity and effective partnerships to generate, understand and use research evidence.

4. Ensure effective dissemination of research findings within and outside the organization.

Mefarms Ltd research conceptualization, design, implementation, use and dissemination are the responsibilities of multiple stakeholders within and outside the organization. Although this strategy and the Research Governance Framework set out broad frameworks for collaborative working, early and clear communication with key stakeholders are important components of all successful research.

Finally, this strategy describes how Mefarms Ltd will monitor its research work and identifies a number of indictors that will be used to monitor its progress towards these objectives.

What this Strategy contributes to:

This strategy:

- Articulates Mefarms Ltd.'s organizational approach to undertaking and using research evidence;
- Defines objectives and priorities which will guide our decision-making around research;
- Reflects a strong focus of our research portfolio on testing innovative approaches to service delivery and evaluating cost-effectiveness and impact;
- Explains how we envisage the delivery of our research through partnerships between Mefarms Ltd' research staff, other teams within the organization and academic collaborators;
- Outlines how we plan to maximize the impact of our research through enhanced dissemination, partnerships and capacity building; and
- Provides indicators for measuring our progress and achievements.

Introduction

Megnite Farms Ltd is a registered company under the government of Uganda, and are tech integrated bio-diversified crowd goat farms in strategic satellite areas, our goal is to increase food security through raising awareness of the issues facing smallholder goat farmers in Africa, help them achieve independence and create a crowd farming digital and physical platforms while narrowing the gender gap, our core business is organic goat meat selling, goat trading, breeding, goat farming training, networking subscribers and investors, packaging, and branding goat manure for crop production.

This document sets out our strategy for strengthening the role of research evidence in our programmes and advocacy as well as the role of our organization in the global research agenda. The document aims to provide Mefarms ltd.'s staff, partner organizations and wider stakeholders with a clear understanding of why we are committed to research, our strategic goals and priorities in the next five years; and our plans for delivering these to high standards.

The strategy has been developed through a consultative process with both our staff and colleagues outside the organisation.

We undertook a historical review of research supported by Mefarms Ltd and conducted a series of consultations on evidence gaps within our programmes. We considered our priorities in the wider context of Agricultural research to ensure that the new evidence we generate is pertinent to the global research agenda. We also undertook a rapid review of our internal systems and capacities for generating and sharing research evidence with the view of how these can be strengthened to ensure effective delivery of this strategy.

Although research is not new to Mefarms Ltd, this strategy for the first time explicitly describes our organizational approach to research, the areas of our focus and how we deliver them and monitor the progress. We believe that by articulating our research priorities and principles we will:

- Provide a clearer understanding of the role of research evidence within the wider organizational objectives;
- Maintain focus on areas and questions that are of most strategic importance to the organization;
- Achieve better coherence between generating evidence and improving our programmes and advocacy;
- Articulate to our funders and research collaborators the added value of Mefarms Ltd as a research partner organization;
- Maximize the effectiveness of our existing academic partnerships;
- Provide a basis for developing new academic partnerships and collaborations with other agricultural transformation NGOs;
- Promote a culture of evidence-based decision-making within the organization; and maximise the benefits of research evidence for our beneficiaries.

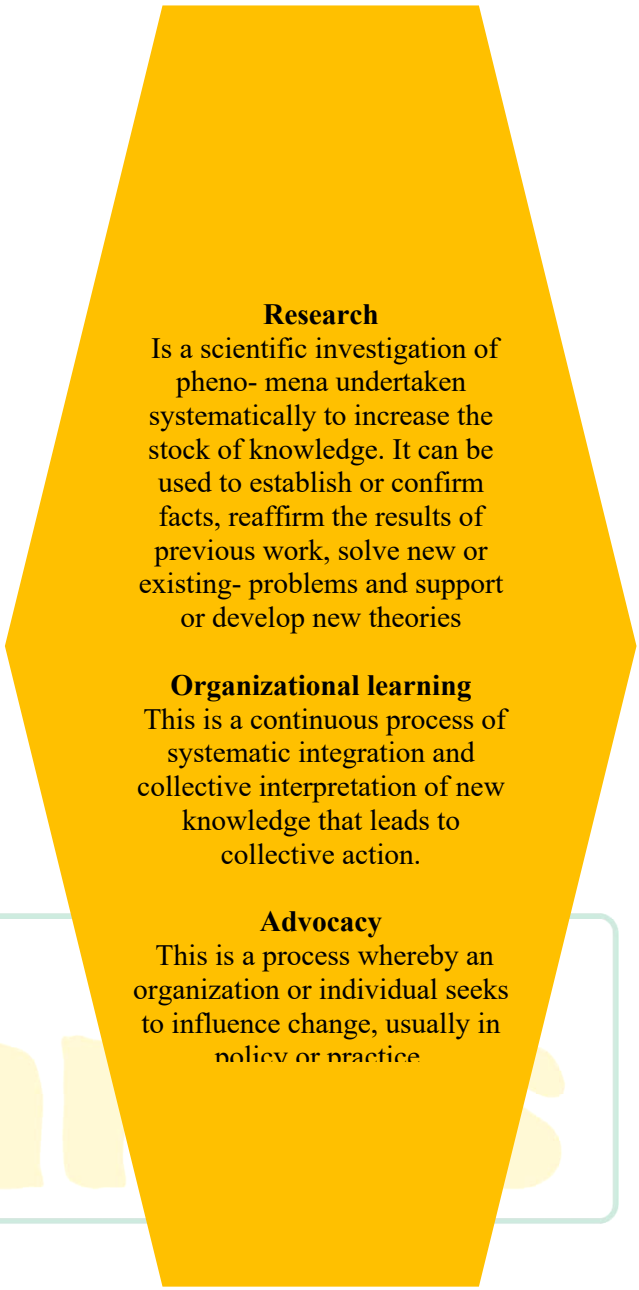
The role of research evidence in our work

Evidence based decision-making has become increasingly prominent on the national and international development agendas. An evidence-based approach helps policy-makers and practitioners make well informed decisions by putting the best available evidence at the heart of policy and programme development and implementation.

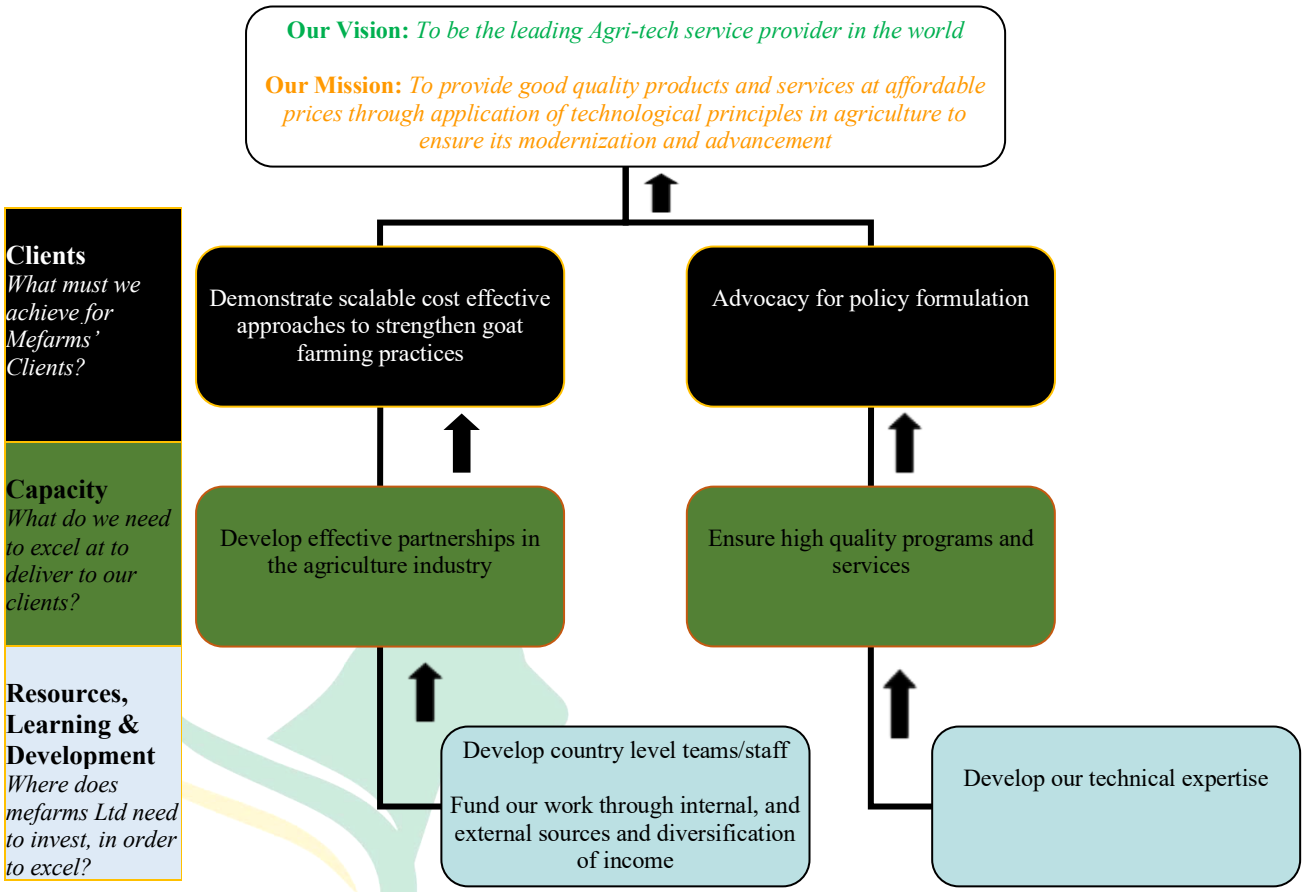
Evidence is the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.

Research is an important, but not the only, source of evidence utilized by Mefarms Ltd. The evidence base that underpins our programmes and advocacy is developed through the analysis of our service output statistics; programme evaluations; quality assessments and organizational audits. Research has a particular niche within this mix of evidence, as rigorous scientific scrutiny and transparency make research findings most credible and comparable sources of evidence, which are accorded a greater weight among decision-makers and practitioners.

At Mefarms Ltd, research is a core organizational activity which contributes to organizational learning, improved quality of programmes and effective advocacy. We therefore support research which has practical implications for our programmes and the policies we advocate. The knowledge gaps we address can be generic or context-specific but the relevance of research findings to our work is critical.



STRATEGY MAP



Mefarms Ltd strategic objectives and priorities

Mefarms ltd contributes to research efforts, that provide a sound evidence base to support scalable and cost-effective programmes and related advocacy in agriculture and social inclusion.

Our work is centered on four interrelated objectives:-

- Keep up to date with the existing body of evidence and ensure its effective use in our programmes and advocacy;
- Conduct high quality research to generate new evidence to address global knowledge gaps in goat farming, opportunities and operational challenges;
- Strengthen organizational capacity and partnerships to generate, understand, and use research evidence for decision making; and
- Ensure effective dissemination of research findings within and outside the organization.

Specific activities to achieve each strategic objective are agreed annually and described in our annual work plans. Below we describe our broad vision of the key areas of our work in the next five years.

Objective one: Keep up to date with the existing body of evidence and ensure its effective use in our programmes and advocacy. Our organizational strategy explicitly states that "we underpin our work with the best available evidence and research".1 Therefore staying up to date with the existing body of knowledge and ensuring that this knowledge is effectively used is the responsibility of all staff involved in the design, implementation, evaluation and advocacy of our interventions.

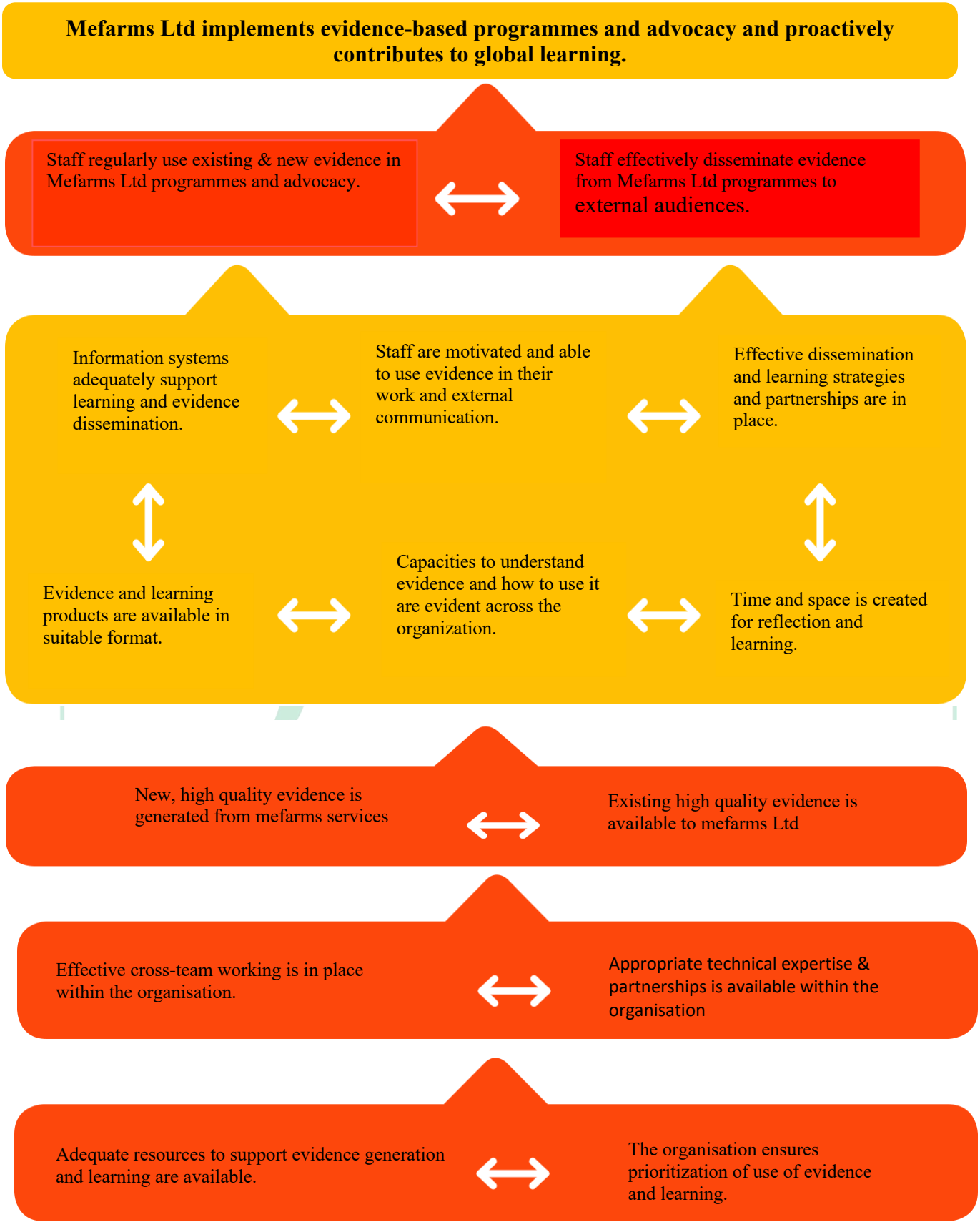
In the next five years we will strengthen the use of quality evidence in everything that we do from project proposals and technical guidance through to awareness raising materials and media communiqués. To achieve this we will:

1. Increase our investments in comprehensive and systematic reviews of literature and analyses of knowledge gaps;

2. Work with other development organizations and international non-governmental organizations (iNGOs) on joint initiatives, which aim to consolidate and improve access to available sources of information, for example data repositories, indicator databases, and farmers' concentration areas.

3. Develop our organizational infrastructure to support the effective storage, retrieval and sharing of research evidence across the organization. This will include developing a repository of all our research and evaluations, links to relevant peer-reviewed publications and a compilation of systematic reviews using evidence gap maps.

Theory of Change underpinning our Research Strategies



Objective two: Conduct high quality research to generate new evidence to address global knowledge gaps and our operational challenges.

Under this strategy we will support research in Agriculture. Our research questions will be guided by our thematic strategies and the fast track initiatives as well as operational challenges experienced by our programmes. In Agriculture and goat farming we will focus on opportunities for the scale-up of quality.

Examples of research focus are shown below:

- Micro level: resource allocation; household level demand for products, processing, distribution, and consumption of products
- Macro level: Effect of policies on farms and farmers i.e. produce, inputs and price.
- Market trends/business forecast
- Client responsiveness and accountability.

Testing new approaches to the delivery of Agric - tech services.

Innovation is central to the improvement of quality of our programmes. We define innovation as a process, which adds value to our activities by addressing a problem in a new way. This may mean an entirely novel way of delivery of services or modification of existing practices using novel ideas, technologies and methods.

In Agriculture we will focus on innovative approaches to the delivery low cost and community-based models of improving livelihoods and generating high revenues to farmers. We will also test changes in specific aspects of Agricultural practices and information.

Objective three: Build organizational capacity and effective partnerships to generate, understand and use research evidence.

We are aware that the availability of evidence alone is not sufficient to ensure evidence-based programmes and advocacy. It is therefore import- ant that in addition to generating new evidence, we contribute towards the development of evidence-based culture and practices within our organization and in the countries where we work.

Historically our capacity building investments in evidence and research will focus on financing short-term courses and support to professional bodies and networks. Although we will continue supporting these types of activities where appropriate and relevant, priority will be given to initiatives which

- Demonstrate direct relevance and benefits for our programmes;
- Develop sustainable technical expertise in the countries where we work;
- Contribute to building long-term research partnerships with our programmes;
- Demonstrate formal recognition by national professional bodies; and
- Use cost-effective approaches and provide value for money.

These activities may include but are not limited to specific training programmes, university student placements, e-learning resources and other knowledge exchange initiatives. We will be particularly interested in joint capacity building activities with other iNGOs, academic institutions and research funding bodies.

Another distinct area of our work will be building internal organizational capacities for generating new evidence and learning from it. To facilitate this, we will enhance our research and evaluation functions at the programme level by appointing cross-country or where appropriate in-country staff with research and evaluation expertise to build a critical mass of Mefarms Ltd' staff with skills to collect and analyze programme level data and to provide advice and support to our country offices and partners.

We will also expand our efforts to improve the capacity of our programme staff to understand different types of evidence, appraise its methodological quality and interpret its implications for programmes and advocacy. The capacity building mechanisms will include research seminars, reflection workshops, knowledge sharing meetings and research and evidence training. We will work with our country and regional offices to ensure that specific research capacity building needs of programme staff are identified and monitored alongside other skills and that individual staff and country offices have the necessary time to ensure effective professional development and learning.

Objective four: Ensure effective dissemination of research findings within and outside the organization. We are committed to consolidating and strengthening our evidence dissemination efforts with the aim to:

- Support our decision-making processes and programmes;
- Inform national and international policies and advocacy campaigns;
- Contribute to the international body of evidence; and
- Increase Mefarms Ltd' profile as a credible research collaborator.

We are committed to disseminate our work widely both internally and externally and through variety of sources. To achieve this we will maximize our efforts to ensure that the findings of our research and evaluations are submitted to peer-reviewed journals.

How we shall deliver our strategy

Guiding principles and processes
The key principles guiding our research are outlined in our Research Governance Framework. These state that:

All research supported by Mefarms Ltd should focus on a clearly defined question or problem and be grounded into existing literature. All research should use pre-defined study protocols, systematic methods, validated tools and internationally accepted principles and procedures;

All staff involved in research design and implementation should be trained in research methods and have a full understanding of the subject area;

All participants should be informed about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research; and all research involving human subjects, their tissues or data should obtain ethics clearance;

The independence of research should be clearly described, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be declared; and

Where appropriate, the research should be designed with a disability and equity focus, to ensure the views of people with disability and other vulnerable groups are heard.

Under this strategy we will support both:

Primary research, which collects data first-hand through field research; and Secondary research, which can involve systematic literature reviews or the collation and analysis of data that already exists. For example, it is important that routine output statistics collected within our programmes are used not only for monitoring but for analytical purposes to answer specific research questions or develop hypotheses for further research.

With regard to methodological approaches, descriptive studies will remain an important part of our research portfolio. However, with the increased focus of our organizational strategy on demonstration approaches, we aim to expand the number of studies using experimental, quasi-experimental and mixed method designs to examine the impact and cost-effectiveness of our interventions.

Where feasible and appropriate we will undertake a thematic approach to researching. This means we will identify a broad research theme or problem and a set of interrelated questions, which could be addressed through a range of studies, all contributing to the broader research theme.

Although we will continue supporting stand-alone research projects, our aim is that the majority of our studies are integrated within our intervention programmes. This is particularly important for the studies which address specific operational challenges or the questions of costs and cost-effectiveness.

MONITORING PROGRESS

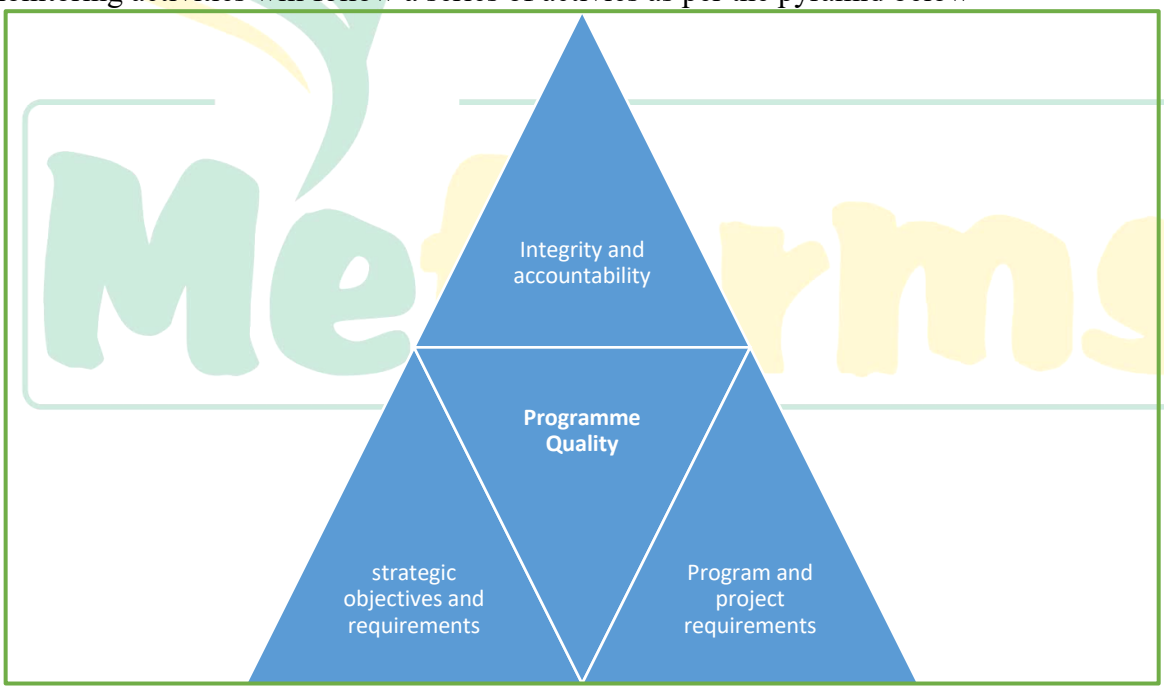
The research and development team will support programme quality assurance by conducting Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning activities. The department will be responsible for development and implementation of effective and efficient system for ongoing quality assurance for the programme. This includes, but is not limited to, (1) ensuring the programme is implemented in accordance to overall mefarms strategy and aligned to the vision and accepted agricultural standards or SDGs;
(2) Outcomes are achieved; as well as measures for indicators committed to donors are applied;

(3) Verification is conducted, to ensure that the programme implementation corresponds to SDGs is performed through periodic visits to implementation locations through observation exercises; collecting information on implementation from clients and Mefarms/Partners' staff; using non-beneficiaries as data source through a set of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques;

(4) Achievement of outcomes is measured through specific outcome-level indicators for grants through periodic measurements applied on quarterly/semi-annual or annual term. These can be measured either through review and aggregation of existing data or by implementing a separate data collection exercise; and

(5) Measuring the quality of implemented activities and outputs is carried out through ongoing monitoring visits to implementation locations, interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, measuring sector-specific quality indicators.

All monitoring activities will follow a series of activies as per the pyramid below



In conclusion, the implementation of this strategy will be monitored annually to assess progress against four strategic objectives and to make adjustments where necessary to ensure the mefarms Ltd remains on track. We will assess progress by using a set of indicators reflecting both the process and outcomes of the strategy delivery.
Process and outcome indicators to monitor the progress:-

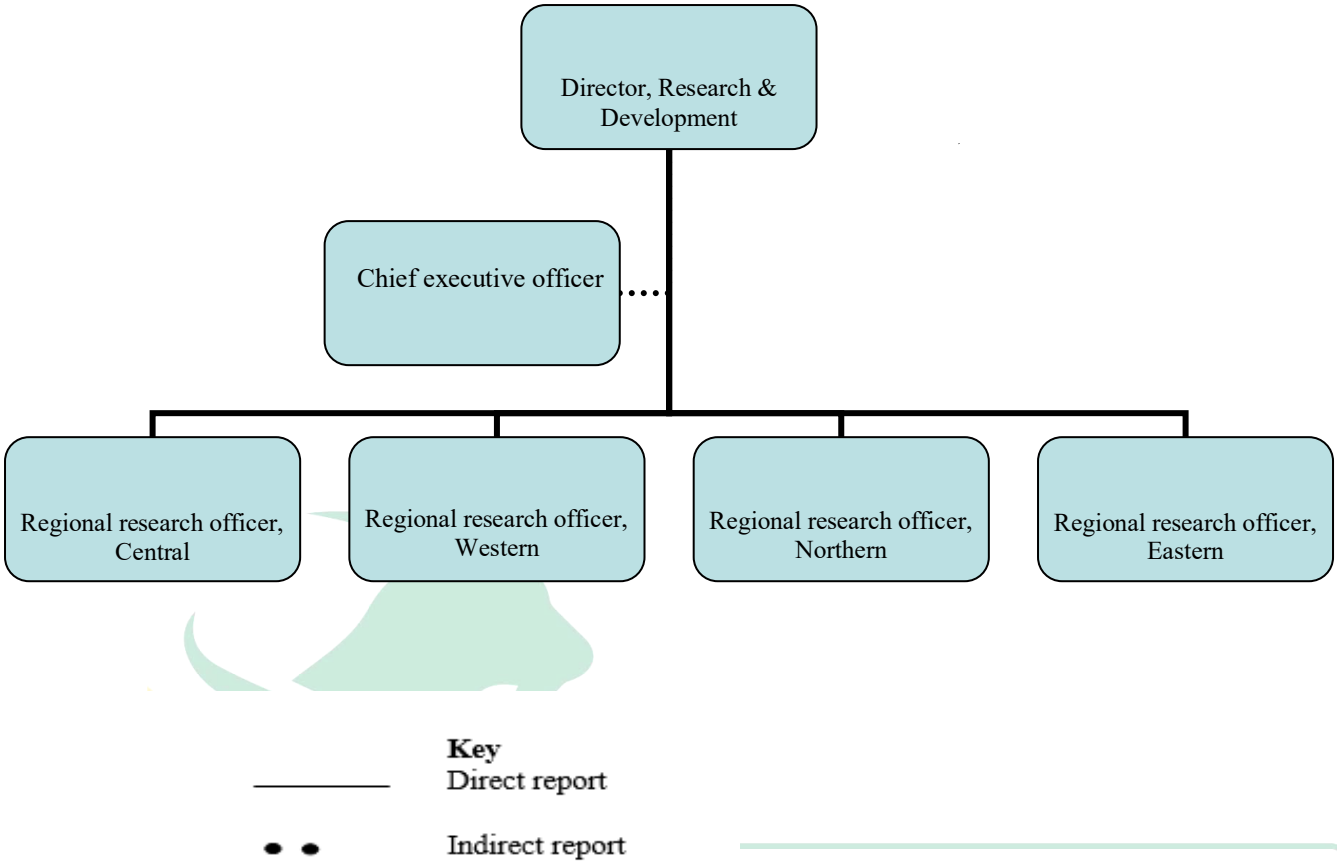
- Number of research projects implemented and completed,
- Number of research grants submitted and successful,
- Number of internal research seminars conducted,

- Number of visits to and downloads from the internal and external website research pages,
- Percentage of organizational income spent on research,
- Percentage of projects that generate new evidence through high quality research,
- Percentage of completed studies, which disseminate new evidence to external audiences.

Mefarms

Annex one

Research and Development organigram



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