

## **Research facilitation for commercial agriculture sector in Sri Lanka on the key performance drivers: with special reference to the themes of ‘research for society’ and ‘economic gains’**

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Critical Success Factors (CSF) of a research institute, once prioritized strategically, possess the potential to drive its research culture towards innovation. In the context of the commercial agriculture sector in Sri Lanka (CAS), the most deliberated Key Performance Drivers (KPD) amongst the CSFs those focus on achieving the 2nd Sustainable Development Goal – ‘Zero Hunger by 2030’ include the “Research for Society”, “Commercialization”, “Technology Transfer” and “Research Collaboration”. Taking into account the theme of “Research for Society” on one side and the economic feasibility of research reflected by the rest of the themes of “Commercialization”, “Technology Transfer” and “Research Collaboration” capacities on the other, it was revealed that, in the face of resource scarcity resulting from a pandemic situation like COVID-19, research institutes working on CAS followed a nascent movement of trading-off these performance drivers in their research development process. The prime focus of this study was to examine empirically the previous studies on those KPDs and comprehend the key issues in cards and how could they be tackled sensibly in planning and undertaking a well-administered program of research to balance the socio-economic benefits of research outputs for the wellbeing of the sector. In this context, the perspectives of the ten (10) top administrators of those research institutes working on the CAS were analyzed by creating 119 codes on those data which were collected by way of a series of semi-structured questionnaire-based personal interviews using Thematic Qualitative Models generated through MAXQDA Software. The codes were then sorted, organized, renamed, merged, and deleted several times to synthesize five themes similar to above mentioned KPDs. The strengths and weaknesses associated with the current systems of performance management, particularly in developing a socially-responsible program of research that warrants the participation of now largely ignored rural communities as stakeholders were disclosed. How the KPD - “Research for Society” can enhance the participation of this stakeholder group in the research development process with the support of digitally enabled performance management systems was much highlighted in the study. Further, the digitally-enabled key performance indicators (KPIs) to assist evidence-based decision-making to guarantee demand-driven research, as a remedy to overcome those performance concerns specifically mentioned in the crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, were ascertained. Since the results particularly implied encouraging stakeholder participation in research for innovative commercial agriculture, a new set of policies and management strategies such as promoting Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data in modern PMS were recommended to systemize real-time stakeholder participation and collaborations in such research.

**Keywords:** Commercial agriculture, Digital transformation, Key performance indicators (KPIs), Performance management, Research culture

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