

# THE EMERGING POTENTIAL FOR GOVERNMENT IN DIGITAL AGRICULTURE: THE KENYA AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK RESEARCH ORGANIZATION (KALRO)

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by Victoria Clause

**There are very few ‘quick wins’ for agri-tech organizations working to provide smallholder farmers with affordable and meaningful products and services. It can take many years for innovators to reach the scale they need to become viable, with one of the main reasons being the critical need to keep products affordable for a segment of the farming population with very low spending power.**

Plugging into an existing ‘platform’ can help agri-tech organizations to reach a large, established base of farmers or customers. Different emerging models of **Digital Agriculture Platforms (DAPs)** are explored in detail in a recent White Paper written by GIZ, Mercy Corps AgriFin, and Dalberg. This blog highlights some of the lessons we’ve learned from working with a government-led platform, the Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO). KALRO is an African leader in harnessing the power of technology and agricultural science to meet the needs of the diverse stakeholders of agricultural markets, including smallholders themselves.

The potential for government to engage in the digital space for agriculture is immense, given their access to data, policy-makers, agricultural expertise, donor funding, investment, and a public mandate to drive sector-wide advancement. Technology innovation is not, however, a typical core strength of government and government-based DAP face both opportunities and challenges that define them. Our joint learning with GIZ and KALRO points to the following key points:

- **Neutral role and public trust in building networks and partnerships:** Government institutions such as KALRO have pre-existing, and often long-standing relationships with other government bodies and public sector organizations that they can leverage to bring in additional value and depth quickly. For example, by making an adjustment to an existing MOU, KALRO can access a wide range of other datasets, scientific research, and even products that private sector players would not have access to. This provides unique value and an important role for government DAPs as they look to enable market actors in line with government priorities;
- **There are strategic gaps for government to address in order to drive fully functioning platforms:** Whilst government institutions like KALRO have strong expertise in scientific research and production of important resources, they have not typically built expertise in other areas that are critical to functioning as an enabler or facilitator for technology innovators. One of the gaps is an external-facing team that understands private sector needs and can promote the platform agenda by a) developing an updated marketing strategy and ‘business development’ plan to identify the right partners; *(continued on next page)*

b) solidifying partnerships with tech innovators (e.g. getting MOUs and data sharing agreements signed); c) managing relationships with partners over the long-term and working to inform improved policy regimes to drive digital innovation.

- **Need for technology integration, data management, and product development expertise:** government institutions like KALRO need to remain demand-driven, responsive, and collaborative with the private sector when it comes to providing best-practice agricultural products and data that can enable growth for farmers and agricultural stakeholders who provide retail services to them. This requires investment in data management skill and infrastructure, as well as product development expertise including user-centric designers and data scientists, to create products that add value to the market. There is also strong potential for government platforms to build integrations with market stakeholders through open APIs to share information, data, and products to transform markets.

Ultimately, government DAPs could be a driver not only for the expansion of technology innovators across value chains but can also interact with other digital platform providers, including mobile network operators, banks, and agribusinesses to provide a unique and transformative value proposition if governments are ready to embrace digital opportunities for change and collaboration.

To find out more, please refer to our [\*\*White Paper on Digital Platform Blueprints\*\*](#).

## MERCY CORPS AGRIFIN

Mercy Corps' AgriFin programming (MCAF) represents USD 35 million in innovation funding from the Mastercard Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Swiss Development Corporation to support development, testing and scale of digitally-enabled services for smallholder farmers. With this support, AgriFin now reaches more than 8 million smallholders.

## GIZ

The Tech Entrepreneurship Initiative 'Make-IT in Africa' promotes digital innovation for sustainable and inclusive development in Africa. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) implements this project on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), as part of BMZ's Digital Africa Initiative. In close collaboration with more than 30 corporate and finance partners, social enterprises, hubs, and networks, 'Make-IT in Africa' supports an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs – to enable better access to finance, markets and skills.

For AgTech start-ups Make-IT in Africa has recognized digital platforms as a viable path to improve market access, drive financial sustainability and increase impact. The D4Ag Initiative therefore aims to improve conditions to help AgTech start-ups scale their digital solutions via platforms. D4Ag supports AgTech Start-ups to integrate their solutions into digital platforms through expanding opportunities, building capacities and facilitating partnerships.

### To learn more, please get in touch with us!

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#### CONTACT

**Leesa Shrader**  
**Program Director | AgriFin**  
lshrader@mercycorps.org

 [www.mercycorpsagrifin.org](http://www.mercycorpsagrifin.org)

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