

AMEA CONVENING 2024

21-22 OCTOBER 2024

ACCELERATING AGRI-SME GROWTH IN CHALLENGING TIMES: THE ROLE OF STANDARDS AND QUALITY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Over 35 members, partners, and staff from AMEA gathered in Delft, the Netherlands, to meet for the second time in person since April 2019. Our aim was to strengthen the Network by fostering debate on the latest trends and best practice, find opportunities for Local Network engagement, and strategize on learning initiatives and influencing policy.



On these two days, we also launched the International Standard 18716:2024, strategized on resource development and agreed on the commitments for the next phases of AMEA's work.



WATCH THE FULL VIDEO [HERE](#)

The 10 key commitments we made at the end of our Convening were:

1. Re-launching the Global Guidance Working Group to mobilize all members and partners to invest in promoting and using ISO 18716
2. Officially launching two new Working groups on Youth and Environment
3. Toolbox WG to develop our thinking on measuring BDS cost effectiveness and collating learning on BDS standards and accreditation.
4. Learning into Action (LiA) baseline reports to be shared to enable members/partners to consider ways to engage in the initiative
5. Members/partners to collaborate to find ways to use LiA case study work to influence Donor mission staff to integrate best practice in new designs.
6. Mark to work with Edmond and CNFA to energize the Rwanda start-up.

7. Explore potential for new Local Networks in India (NAFPO), Nepal (Corus/Local Org) and Nigeria (Corus/CNFA).
8. Encourage a transition of Local Network leadership to local institutions, as inspired by the ANSAF Tanzania model
9. Rene/Mark to work with Dieter to look at opportunities to engage USAID/IADB on ISO and opportunities in LAC Region.
10. Work with members/partners to fundraise for AMEA work either directly or indirectly. Opportunities include sharing the ENABEL proposal and pursuing opportunities with WB/IFC, TIFS, MOF and IFAD.

A summary of the key insights over the two days is provided below. The full PPT deck can be [found here](#) and we encourage people to share the resources on the International Standard which can be [found here](#).

FUTURE THINKING

This Convening organized 4 sessions to enable members and partners to exchange learning on key themes and consider how we should integrate this into our future plans. We called these sessions Future Thinking.

FUTURE THINKING #1 – DATA DRIVEN AGRI-SME PROGRAMS

The session focused on fostering discussions on how AMEA members/partners can implement and promote data-driven practices to strengthen the agri-business support sector.

Hedwig (AGRA) started with a “provocation” that most members/partners are collecting poor quality BDS/SME data for donor reporting and this data is rarely shared. Instead we should be collecting data that delivers business insights for BDSPs and SMEs and enables access to finance. It was also noted that donors set the indicators but are often unwilling to invest sufficiently in data collection, especially after the project ends. This approach hinders BDS sector growth as BDSPs are not measured by results achieved. Hedwig highlighted AGRA’s

planned investments in data system development and the need for standardized metrics and shared databases. The initiatives in Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda were good examples where there is an opportunity for AMEA members/partners to contribute to data projects.

Harry highlighted Argidius' explanation that analysis of their extensive database of BDSPs and SMEs led them to conclude there was no "silver bullet". However their analysis revealed the practices of the best performing BDSPs. These best practices are promoted in the SCALE report and included in the draft Uganda/EA BDS Standards. Argidius feels that we now know enough about best practice and we should now be focused on promoting it, such as their work with the USAID Chief Economist.

Naomi from AMI finally reflected on their journey which led them to move from direct delivery through projects to a more programmatic/systemic approach to supporting BDS market development. This is evidenced by their previous work on BDS standards and the upcoming work with AMEA in Uganda.

Participants were encouraged to brainstorm solutions, emphasizing collective action to build impactful, scalable data practices. This led to discussions around the challenges of attribution and the risks of cost-effectiveness analysis providing misleading guidance on the cost of BDS. A concluding comment was that BDSPs need to have closer relationships with investors and financial institutions in order to be effective at supporting SMEs to acquire finance... and that without additional finance business plans will remain theoretical.

The debates on data will be taken into Toolbox WG meetings to plan their work for 2025. For example, there appears to be significant interest in reviving the discussions around integrated BDS packages (which enable shared data) and refining thinking around BDS cost-effectiveness measurement.

FUTURE THINKING #2 – NEXT GENERATION OF TOOLS AND APPROACHES

The session provided a space for participants to discuss the latest trends and implications for scaling effective BDS for agri-SMEs. The session started with an introduction of the potential drivers for scaling high quality BDS, as shown in this graphic.



Cees (AgriGrade) and Alan (IFC) led a discussion around four key questions related to these drivers.

1. Regulatory frameworks and government intervention are more critical for scaling BDS services than market demand
2. The demand for BDS services is largely project-driven. Without donor-funded initiatives, there is little genuine market demand, as the purchasing power of farmers alone is insufficient to sustain scaling efforts.
3. Digital solutions are the only viable path to scaling BDS services for smallholder farmers and agri-SMEs in the next decade.
4. AMEA's ambition should be nothing less than becoming the global standard for certifying BDS tools and services, making accreditation a prerequisite for any meaningful and scalable agri-SME development intervention.

Participants expressed their views and it was clear from all questions there was significant diversity. There was more consensus on the need for Government intervention and the distortion of the BDS market. However many participants cautioned against viewing digital solutions as the **only** path to scaling and that we also need to consider the quality of those scaled services. Finally there was a significant division between those who saw AMEA as an active participant in the BDS market (e.g. certifier) and a facilitator (supporting others to set up accreditation mechanisms).

These discussions were helpful for the next phase in developing and supporting implementation of Local Network BDS Roadmap developments. The AMEA Board

and Toolbox WG can also consider AMEA’s current and future role with regard to the development and promotion of the Toolbox and other tools.

FUTURE THINKING #3 – LEARNING INTO ACTION (2024-2027)

Learning into Action (LiA) represents a new phase of AMEA’s knowledge generation and dissemination activities. It builds on previous AMEA case studies and ISF research with the aim to influence policy and practice with 70 mini case studies over the next 3 years. In order to do this we have selected strategic partners in each country.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

COUNTRY	NATIONAL INSTITUTION
Benin	African Center for Equitable Development (ACED)
Côte d’Ivoire	National Agency for Rural Development Support (ANADER)
Ethiopia	Agriculture Transformation Institute (ATI)
Ghana	Chamber of Agribusiness
Honduras	Consejo Hondureño de la Empresa Privada (COHEP)
India	National Association for Farmer Producer Organisations (NAFPO)
Kenya	Ministry of Cooperatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
Rwanda	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) / Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB)
Tanzania	National Economic Empowerment Council (NEEC)
Uganda	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)

In 2024, a comprehensive baseline of more than 130 programs has been developed from which the first 10 case studies are being selected based on the project’s national importance, potential for replication, and data availability for impactful insights across AMEA’s networks and partners. Given the confidential and anonymous nature of these case studies, participant organizations will have the opportunity to better understand what has worked or not in their programs while contributing to the collective knowledge of scalable, cost-effective BDS approaches.

If you would like to know more about LiA or to participate by proposing we examine data available from your programs, please reach out to Filipe Di Matteo at matteo@ameaglobal.org.

FUTURE THINKING #4 - ACCELERATING OUR LEARNING ON ENVIRONMENT AND YOUTH

The session on **Environment** started with a video from a “superstar”. Jason Clay provided an [excellent framing](#) for the session. This inspired a wide-ranging discussion based on member/partner interest. The conclusion was that there is energy and interest, therefore AMEA’s **Environment Working Group will advance to full status**, with Casey/Nuru leading. The group will refine deliverables, leveraging the value proposition that farmers and pastoralists as land managers can boost income and environmental outcomes through nature-based solutions (NbS). ISO 18716’s core capacities could de-risk NbS projects, making BDS crucial in supporting agri-SMEs and cooperatives in environmental markets. Next steps include a November meeting to finalize deliverables, share AMEA’s positioning, and outline a position paper on ISO 18716’s role in environmental goals.

The session on **Youth Empowerment** reviewed the draft objectives and achievements of the workstream. Participants shared experiences, highlighting the need for evidence linking youth empowerment and productivity. Discussions also covered youth’s role in business continuity, strategies to make agriculture appealing to youth with clear income pathways, and distinct approaches for rural vs. urban youth, recognizing youth diversity by age, gender, and interests. Finally, participants emphasized the role of donors to align support with youth-driven needs rather than predefined programs. These ideas led to an agreement that the **Youth Empowerment Working Group should advance to full status**.

If you are interested in joining either or both Working Groups, please contact Filipe Di Matteo at matteo@ameaglobal.org.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR PROGRESS IN 2024 / PLANS FOR 2025

A quick recap of [our Strategy](#) was provided and then we reflected deeply on the progress on our four priority areas for 2024.

PRIORITY 1: ADOPTION AND ACTIVE USE OF THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

AMEA had ambitious plans with the publication of an International Standard to serve as common language and guidance for professional farmer organizations and their partners. ISO 18716 was published in September with 27 countries voting YES for its approval. The Netherlands was the first country to nationally adopt the standard following publication. In 2025, we are aiming for at least 8 more countries to adopt it. To lead the work on promotion and use of the ISO 18716, AMEA

will revive the Global Guidance Working Group.

It was clear from our discussions that [ISO 18716](#) was a landmark achievement for AMEA following 6 years of investing in the process following our 2018 Convening in Delft which led to the draft Standard (IWA29). We launched our campaign for the use of this Standard with our Netherlands-based partners, including NEN and MOFA. This launch concluded with the [Campaign Video](#) and a call for members and partners to promote and use the standard. Please view, share and use these resources. A first step, which also provides insight into the Standard, is to use our [ISO 18716 mapping tool](#) to benchmark your approach/tools. Other resources can be found on [our website](#) and in this QR code.



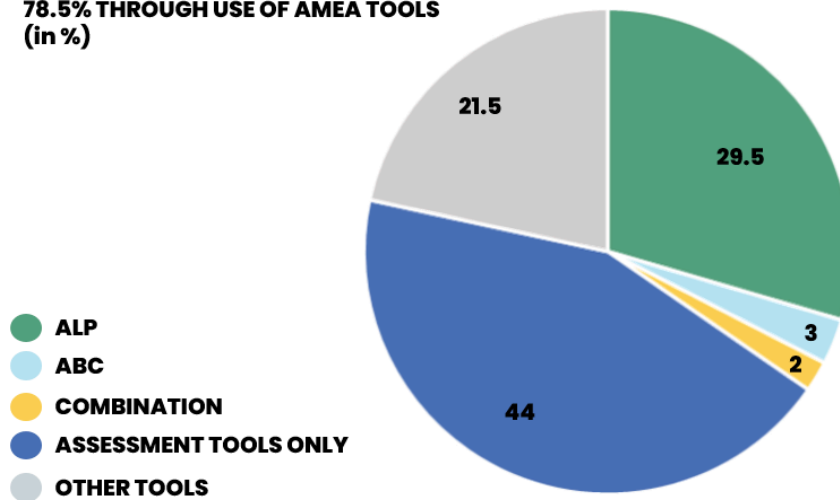
PRIORITY 2: INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF AMEA APPROACHES

AMEA promotes a Toolbox which contains peer reviewed tools that have a strong evidence base for effectiveness across different Regions of the World and in different value chains. Each year we measure the reach of these Tools, however we are now adding in Tools that demonstrate ‘improved, coordinated’ approaches. The reach of these Tools in 2023 was 1.36 million farmers through 13 AMEA members in 2023. This represents **growth of 20%** from 2022 reports.



1.36 MILLION FARMERS REACHED IN 2023

78.5% THROUGH USE OF AMEA TOOLS
(in %)



This result means we appear to be on the right track but we will need exponential growth to achieve AMEA's ambitions to reach 50 million farmers by 2030. The key to unlocking this growth will be to progress on each Local Networks' [BDS Roadmaps](#). We have made progress reaching 5 out of 10 targeted milestones in 2024 but we need to accelerate this. In 2025, we expect to achieve the following:

- National adoption of the International Standard in 9 countries
- Communities of Practice established or strengthened in 10 countries
- BDS accreditation mechanisms established/improved in Uganda and Benin
- BDS platforms and registries established or improved in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Benin, Ivory Coast and Ghana
- BDS Cost Share Facilities piloted in Uganda and Tanzania
- Government assessment tool improved in Benin

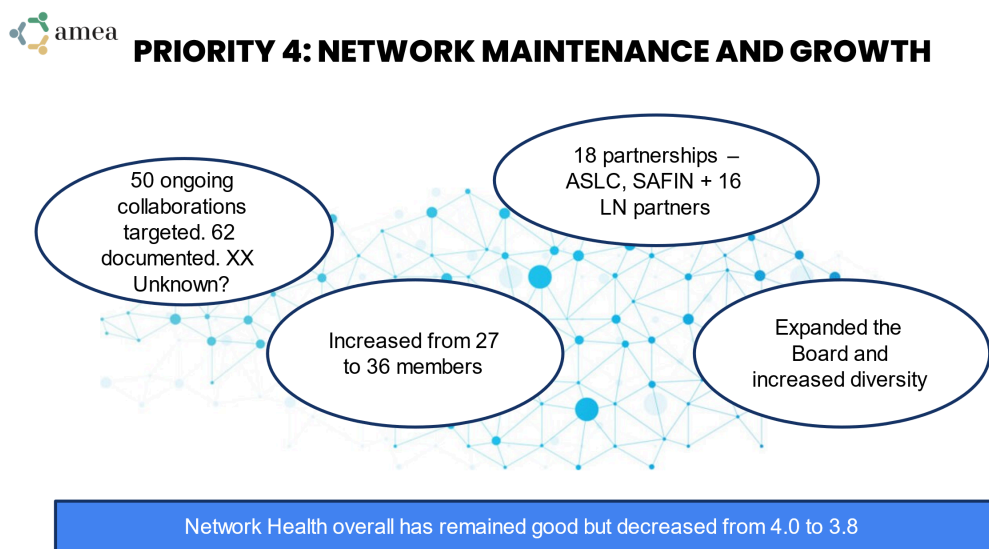
PRIORITY 3: CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

AMEA continues to invest significantly in our collective learning and improvement of practices. In 2024, we completed [6 case studies](#) and we aim to complete 10 pilot case studies under the [Learning into Action initiative](#). We also continued to invest in highly-interactive learning events, such as our [Annual Learning Event](#), the ALP Developers Conference, AgTech webinars, and Local Network events (field trips, coop days, webinars). AMEA is also part of the Agri-SME Learning Collective (ASLC) and has co-drafted a segmentation paper for Agri-SMEs.

In 2025, we aim to produce 20 case studies and continue with interactive learning activities including National Dialogues in all Local Networks through Strategic Partnerships. In addition, we expect the newly formed Youth Empowerment and Environment Working Groups to enable members to share and learn.

PRIORITY 4: NETWORK MAINTENANCE AND GROWTH

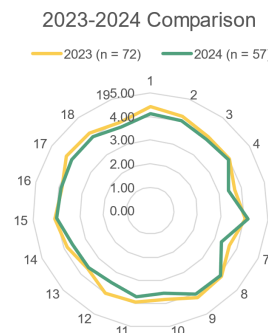
We were proud to share that 2024 was a year with many positive developments for the AMEA Network as this graphic shows growth in memberships, partnerships and collaborations.



We also monitored our Network Health, scoring well again in most components across the Local Networks and identifying where we need to focus in 2025 to strengthen AMEA.

amea **PRIORITY 4: NETWORK HEALTH SURVEY**

- Lower scores (< 3.75) on:
- 5 – Honouring commitments
 - 7 – Addressing controversial issues
 - 10 – Self interest vs shared interest
 - 11 – Knowing latest news/progress
 - 12 – Using Network technology tools
 - 13 – Able to make time to participate
 - 14 – Aligned with organization priorities



On Day 2 we invested significant time to dive deeper into Local Networks examining the different models for facilitation/leadership. We also discussed strategic focus areas and sustainability models for Local Networks in 2025. The session concluded with a reflection on whether AMEA should focus on expansion or consolidation in 2025. Participants suggested that AMEA should continue to use models which enable AMEA to deliver value to members/partners. We should not assume one model will work everywhere but the aim will be to transition leadership/facilitation to local institutions when there is an opportunity to do so.

In terms of new local networks the challenges to get Ghana and Rwanda moving were noted and specific offers of support were made to accelerate this work. In terms of further expansion we agreed to focus on a limited number of countries with India and Nepal targeted in 2025.

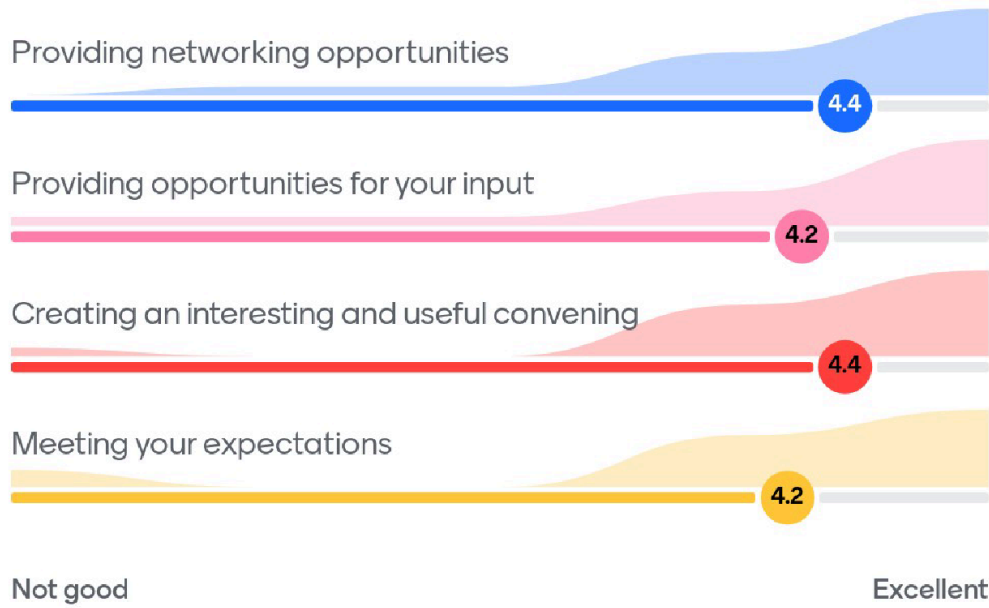
RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

To support AMEA's mission, accelerated fundraising is critical, and member ideas and contributions are essential. AMEA targets €500-700k per year and can offer up to 25% co-financing coupled with exceptionally low admin costs.

Strong relationships with donors valuing networks, like Argidius and Small Foundation, along with committed staff from organizations are vital for influencing sub-granting and integrating AMEA activities into proposals. Participants were invited to discuss ways to fund AMEA's work without it being seen as competing with their own fundraising work, emphasizing innovation, co-financing, and a low-cost network approach. A number of ideas were proposed including engaging with USAID/IADB for the LAC Region, working with IFC on upcoming opportunities with USAID and WD, exploring opportunities with TIFS through Nuru and continuing to work with IFAD on their new concept note related to Farmer Organization financing. We also agreed to share AMEA proposals to members/partners to enable greater reach to prospective donors.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

We could not doubt our members' commitment based on this Convening. It was a re-energizing two-day event, full of ideas and plans. It was also very enjoyable! This was reflected in your scoring and we take your ideas for improvement into the 2025 Convening which we expect to hold in Africa.



We finished by thanking everybody for their contributions. However there was one person who deserved to be singled out. Alan Johnson completed his 2 terms as our Board Chair and after 8 years is handing over the reins to Casey Harrison. We thank him for the immense support over the years. AMEA could not have become the force it is without this support.

He is hanging up his hat as a Board member... but as you know he remains committed to AMEA so we hope to see him again next year!



AMEA CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS	ORGANISATION
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