



RAE ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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Summary

The Research and Education Agency (RAE, www.rae.co.ug) is a Non-Governmental Organisation operating in Uganda to support efforts to improve livelihoods of rural communities by enhancing access to basic education, agricultural technologies, drinking water and basic health services. RAE specifically focusses on working with marginalised and underserved rural communities to foster inclusive rural development through improved access to development opportunities. In August 2023, RAE transformed into a Non-Governmental Organisation still with the same aspirations but with a vision to expand operations beyond Uganda. This Report provides a synopsis of actions taken during 2023, which aimed to consolidate on delivery of previous efforts and to provide strategic direction for activities to be undertaken during the period 2024-2030 ([link](#)).

Background

Globally, access to livelihood opportunities are often constrained by structural and non-structural barriers that leave especially rural communities underserved and most often excluded from development process and practice. This is true in Uganda where there are wide variations in the development index across the country with northern and eastern Uganda recording the highest poverty levels and the rural communities having significantly higher poverty levels than urban areas. These areas and other similar places often lack basic amenities especially in terms of access to education, drinking water and basic health services and hence poverty and hunger is widespread. These challenges spurred the founding of RAE in 2015 as a Community-Based Organisation (CBO) to engage with the communities and other stakeholders to contribute to improving livelihoods of the rural poor. Focus was placed on increasing access to basic education, since education is a key enabler of development opportunities. Secondly, priority was given to increasing access to improved agricultural technologies, as rural communities depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Over the last eight years, RAE engaged actively to deliver on its missions, and benefitted greatly from support from strategic partners to fund its activities. Importantly over 2000 students were supported to access basic education with over 200 supported to join universities for undergraduate studies, majority of whom were female students and from marginalized communities such as Karamoja, the most impoverished region in Uganda. . RAE also in partnership with the Uganda National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) piloted use of Community based Agricultural Technology Dissemination Centres, to promote dissemination and adoption of improved agricultural technologies especially tuber, legume and grain crops. In the same vein the two institutions established School Garden learning labs for Skilling School and out of school youths and as nucleus for disseminating improved agricultural technologies and practice. Notwithstanding the progress made, a number of challenges were met especially the limited capacity to reach more communities in need, the COVID 19 pandemic which disrupted the Community Technology Dissemination Centres, the increasing number of youth dropping out of school and the challenges brought about by climate change and variability, amongst others. These challenges and lessons learned stimulated a rethink of the RAE thrusts and approaches, and for a more robust organisational set up for RAE to continue to contribute to rural transformation in Uganda and possibly beyond. Discussions with key stakeholders during 2023 led to three key developments:

- Transforming RAE from being a CBO to becoming a Non-Governmental Organisation, still focused on community advancement especially for the rural poor and marginalized communities
- Development of a six Year Vision Strategy (2024-2030) that will guide RAE Mission and operations

- Creating a framework for expanding RAE activities beyond Uganda

This Annual Report presents Highlights of the Key Activities undertaken in 2023 and also provides a glimpse on future direction of RAE as it works to deliver on its Vision and Mission Strategy

Programmatic Highlights

Development of the RAE 2024-2030 Strategy

Consultative meetings were held with various stakeholder groups in Uganda and at regional level in Yaoundé Cameroon during the period 25-31 October 2023. These consultations concluded that RAE core Thrusts over the last eight Years remain valid but needed to be tuned to respond to the evolving landscape being shaped by rapid population growth in Uganda and Africa at large, a growing population of unemployed youth, wide disparities in development with many rural communities remaining underserved and underdeveloped, marginalization of women continues to exist, wide disparities in access to education (and other livelihood needs) especially for the girl child, increasing rather than declining poverty levels, low agricultural productivity and value addition, and degradation of the environment and natural resource base which have been worsened by the devastating impact of climate change and variability. Moreover, many rural communities and schools lag behind in access and use of digital technologies. These and other development Challenges which RAE needs to respond to are depicted in Figure 1 with RAE serving as an Enabler (Figure 2). As a result consensus was reached that RAE would have the following Ambition, Vision, Mission and six Strategic Objectives:

- **Ambition**

Research and Education Agency: Transforming Lives through Inclusive Education and Skill Development for Job Creation

- **Vision**

Vibrant inclusive rural communities that have improved access to good quality information and are employed in generating sustainable livelihoods from agriculture

- **Mission**

To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and job opportunities for underserved, marginalized and vulnerable communities especially in rural Uganda and other parts of Africa, as enablers of human development

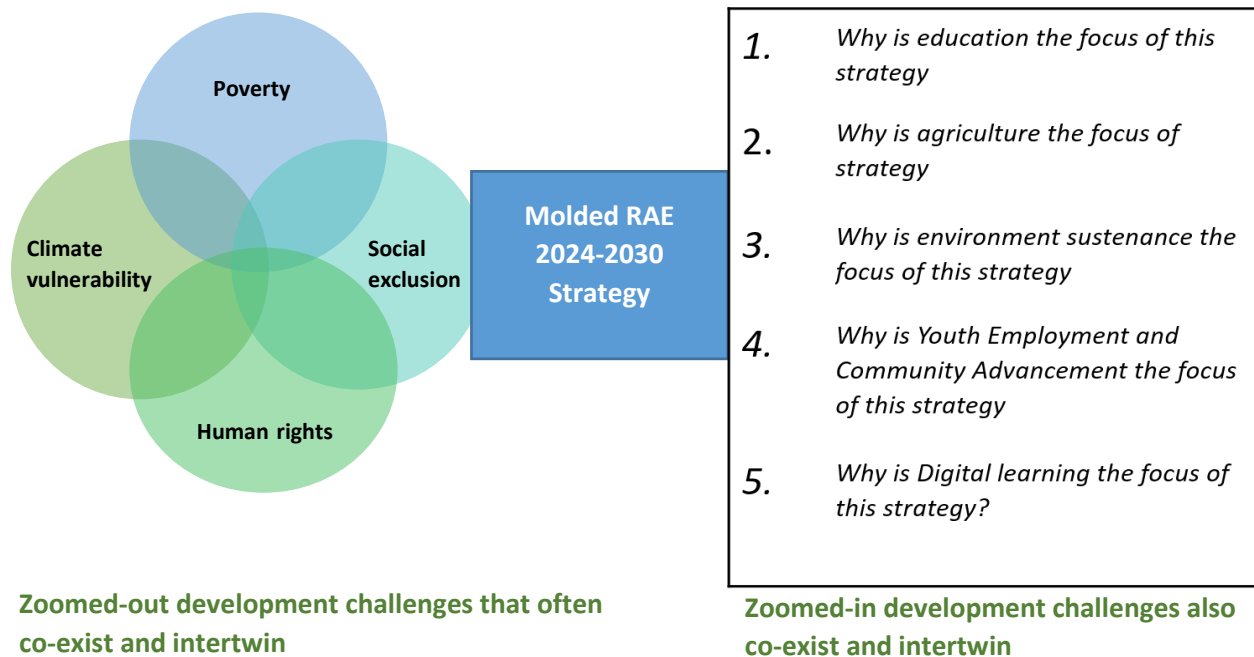


Figure 1: Underpinning the ‘Big five’ Development Challenges

Strategic Objectives

1. Narrowing the **access to education** gap (especially for **young girls and women** and other excluded demography)
2. Addressing the issue of **youth unemployment**, especially since a vast majority of the youth will not attain university education so as to enhance youth **integration into the cash economy** as workers and employers of all types
3. Turning **technologies** into innovations that **improve livelihoods** (science in action)
4. Enhancing access to **digital technologies** and learning for **rural schools and communities**

Key thrusts for 2024-2030

Focus Area 1: Providing remote populations with greater access to basic education

Focus Area 2: Implementing and improving digital learning in communities and schools in remote areas

Focus Area 3: Advancing agricultural education through learning labs and school gardens

Focus Area 4: Enhancing rural communities access to information for improved agricultural and business innovations

Focus Area 5: Boosting rural youth and women's groups involved in agricultural value streams' entrepreneurship potential

Focus Area 6: Boost rural communities' ability to withstand climate shocks and encourage the sustainability of the rural environment

Governance and Management

To oversee and guide implementation of the Strategic Initiatives, consultations led to the creation of a new RAE Governance and Management Structures (Annex 1). Key experts were identified and the Board Membership ratified during the Board Meeting held on 01 December 2023. The same Board meeting also established the RAE Services and Management Organogram (Annex 2) and appointed a team of six experts to serve as Members of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), to backstop operations of the Board and RAE Coordination Unit (RCU).

RAE Guiding Policy and Operation Documents

During the Year, RAE Coordinating Unit consulted widely especially with similar Agencies to develop Operational Guidelines and Policy Instruments to guide operations of the Organisation and to ensure alignment to the Uganda Non-Governmental Organisation Bureau guidelines. The Instruments below were approved and adopted during the RAE Board Meeting of 01 December 2023. The Instruments have been registered with the Uganda Registry of Companies.

List of RAE Board Approved Policy and Operations Instruments

- a. RAE Articles of Association
- b. RAE Governance Manual
- c. RAE Board Governance Organogram
- d. RAE Services and Management Organogram
- e. RAE Finance Manual
- f. RAE Human Resource Manual
- g. RAE Gender Equality Policy
- h. RAE Safeguards Policy
- i. RAE Anti-Fraud Policy
- j. RAE Whistle Blower Policy
- k. RAE Conflict of Interest Policy
- l. RAE Investment Plan and Policy
- m. RAE 2024-2030 Strategic Plan

Resource Mobilisation Efforts

During the Year efforts were geared at sourcing for funding to support RAE Core Operations but also to support Partners in their resource mobilisation efforts. RAE team developed and submitted a) solicitation letters for possible partnerships with Agencies in the Middle East, Canada, and USA and these are being followed up, b) RAE partnered with a number of African

and European Institutions to prepare proposals to the European Union Horizon 2023 Call, and is a Partner in Five proposals to be submitted in February 2024, and c) RAE worked with 27 Universities consortia (each of 4-6 African Universities and one European Partner University) to submit proposals to the 2023 Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Call, of which five teams were funded to the tune of Nine Million Euros. These efforts are providing valuable lessons for RAE as it builds its Resource Mobilisation capacity. Moreover, RAE continued with its Crowd Resourcing efforts for maintaining the girl child in School and schooling for disadvantaged rural school students.

Partnership and Networking

Efforts were made during the period to develop Partnerships and collaboration arrangements with a number of agencies as part of efforts to leverage experience and resources for scaling up delivery of RAE Services. Notably RAE established formal partnership with three Women Groups operating in Uganda (WOUGNET- Women of Uganda Network; PKWI- Popular Women Knowledge Initiative; and ADOCERIT- Women led Farmers Group in Amuria). RAE also established Partnership with a number of Universities including Nkumba University in Uganda, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences, Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda, University of Abomey Calavi in Benin and University of Juba in South Sudan, amongst others. RAE in particular benefitted from partnership with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) that enabled RAE to hold its Stakeholders meeting at the sidelines of the 19th RUFORUM Annual General Meeting held 28th October – 02 November 2023 in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The Cameroon convening also enabled RAE leadership to support development of three proposed initiatives for strengthening Higher Education and Research in African universities.

Achievements, Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Notably, more children/students from disadvantaged communities were supported to join secondary and High School education (30), mostly from Karamoja region. A few (10) were supported to join University education, majority of whom (6) were females. RAE also partnered with the Kuwait funded Direct Aid Agency to run Medical clinics in two impoverished areas (Kalaki and Kakure) in North Eastern Uganda. Importantly, the School Garden Learning Labs were resurrected and implemented by three Schools in Kalaki, Kaberamaido and Amolotar districts, all in North-Eastern Uganda, and more schools are interested to adopt the practice. RAE also funded a baseline study to assess the state of ICT training/Digital learning in seven districts of Uganda (Kalaki, Kaberamaido, Amolotar, Dokolo, Kapelebyong, Orungo and Serere). While the schools are keen to integrate digital learning as required by the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, only three Schools had the basic infrastructure (about 10 desktop computers) but again, with the challenge of very low internet connectivity.

While the communities have embraced sending children to school, three key challenges are impeding the education process. Firstly, while there has been more than tripling in numbers of students joining primary schools, schools lack basic infrastructure (classrooms and teachers) to cope up with the high numbers. For example a School like Kakure Primary School in Kalaki District which was constructed to accommodate/train about 300 students, but now has close to 1,500 students with the same basic infrastructure (seven classrooms) and few teachers (12) ([see report](#)). Moreover, the dropout rate remains

very high (especially for the girl child), with almost 60-70% of the students joining primary education not proceeding to Secondary School education level. The other challenge is lack of a school feeding program in most rural primary Schools. The associated challenge is the education divide between rural and urban schools, with less than 15% of students who join primary education proceeding to post-Secondary education as compared to their urban counter parts, where close to 70% proceed to post-Higher School education. This is also reflected in access to digital learning for schools and communities. This trend if not addressed will continue to leave rural communities, especially those in impoverished regions such as in Northern and Eastern Uganda, more marginalized and underserved.

The RAE intervention areas (North-Eastern Uganda), like in other parts of Uganda, have very high population growth rate (3.8%), with the majority of the youth (90%) being unskilled and unemployed, and putting pressure on available land resources resulting in land fragmentation, widespread deforestation and unsustainable land use management practices. Moreover, the impact of climate change is very apparent resulting in frequent floods and droughts and unpredictable times of farming for the farmers. These are compounded by other challenges such as limited availability of health services and alternative coping measures

Clearly the above opportunities and challenges require a multifaceted approach and alliances amongst different stakeholder groups, including policy. Thus RAE will give priority to forging alliances with strategic partners to try to help the target rural communities improve their livelihood opportunities. Accordingly, RAE will partner with other organisations to support efforts to extend education and other services to marginalized and underserved rural communities, including refugees, displaced persons and persons with disabilities. In these efforts RAE will continue to focus on retaining the girl child in school, supporting their post-primary education and training a pool of mid-career (MSc level graduates) women scientists. RAE will also prioritize initiatives to strengthen entrepreneurship skills and business development especially for School and out of School Youth and Women groups.

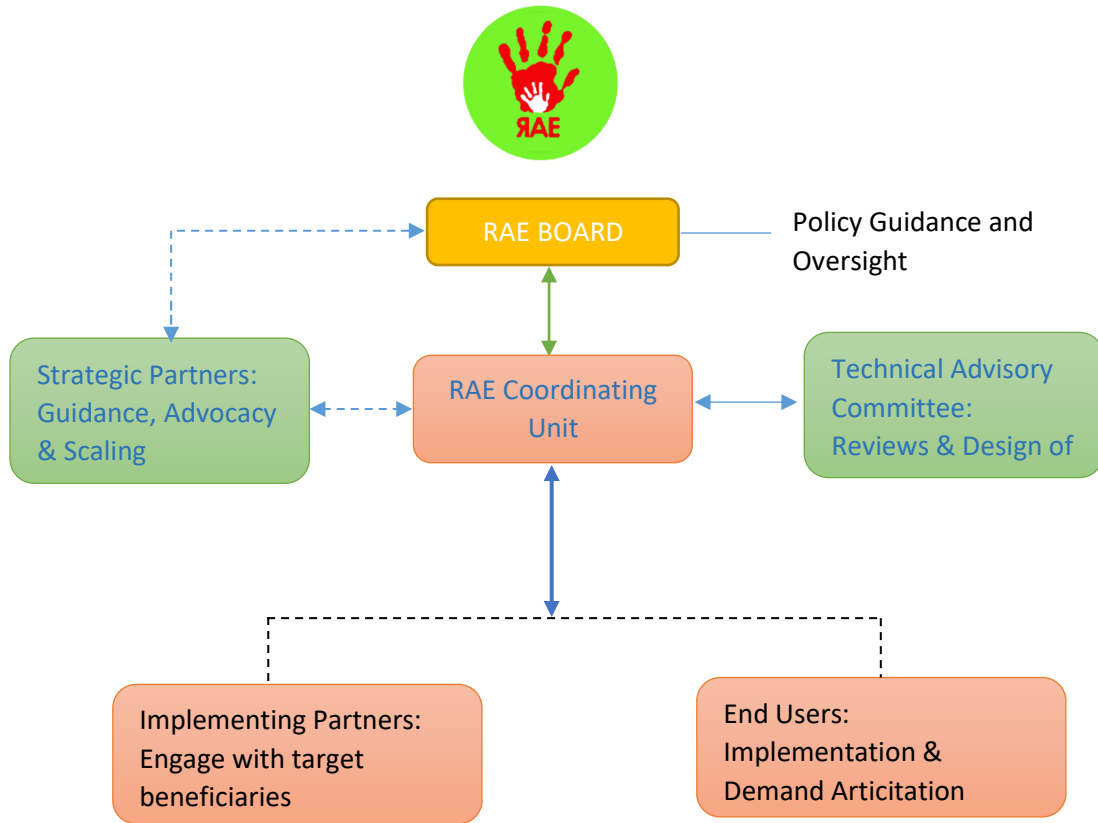
Key Thrusts for Financial Year 2024

The RAE Board Meeting of 01 December 2023 approved the following as Key Thrusts for the Year 2024:

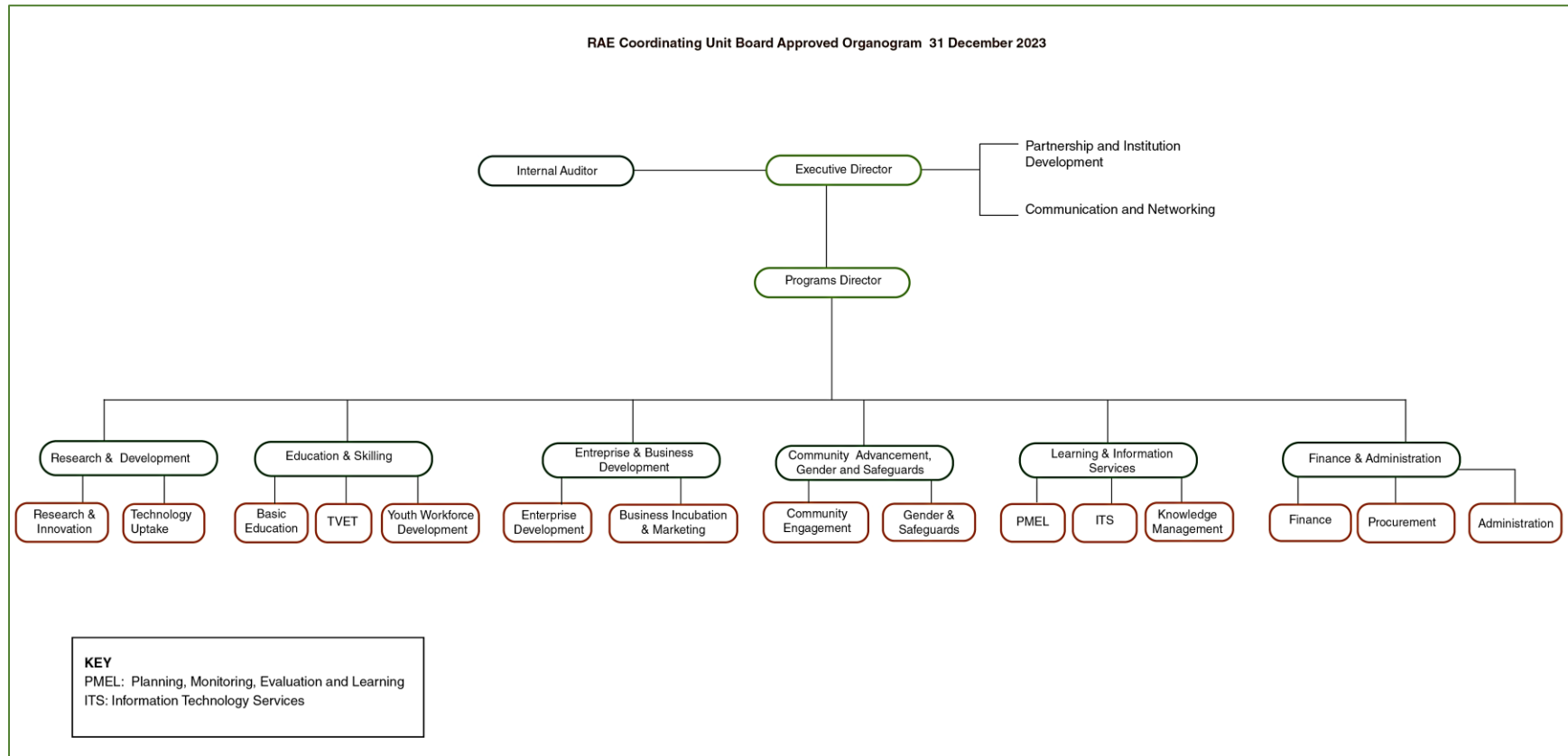
1. Developing Operation capacity and arrangements for the RAE Coordinating Unit
2. Development of the Operational Plan for the RAE 2024-2030 Strategy
3. Resource Mobilisation with a target of US\$ 3 Million for the Year
4. Forging Strategic Partnership for enhanced delivery and quality of RAE services
5. Financial Audit for the Financial Year 2023

Annex 1: RAE Governance Organogram

RAE GOVERNANCE ORGANOGRAM AS APPROVED BY THE BOARD 01 DECEMBER 2023



Annex 2: RAE Services and Management Organogram



Annex 3. List of RAE Board Members

- a. Mr James Okello, Academic Registrar, Soroti University and RAE Board Chair
- b. Dr Damalie Akwango, National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), Uganda and RAE Board Deputy Chair
- c. Dr Joseph Oryokot, an Agricultural Specialist, Board Member
- d. Dr Robert Kawuki, Agricultural Specialist, Board Member
- e. Prof. John Akec, Information Technology Specialist and former Vice Chancellor, University of Juba, South Sudan, Board Member
- f. Prof. Julius Ochuodho, from University of Eldoret in Kenya, Board Member
- g. Prof. Adil Deifalla, an Agriculturalist from University of Gezira in Sudan, Board Member
- h. Associate Prof. Tahra El-Obeid, a Food Science Specialist at Qatar University in Qatar, Board Member
- i. Dr Mary Shawa, a Gender Specialist working with Plan International in Malawi; Board Member
- j. Prof. Kay Muir-Leresche, Education and Sustainable Development Specialist based in South Africa, Board Member,
- k. Dr Milton Edimu, Engineer and Founding Director of RAE, Board Member
- l. Prof Adipala Ekwamu, Executive Director and Founding Director of RAE, Board Member and Board Secretary

Annex 4. List of RAE Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Members

- a. Dr Abigael Otinga, from University of Eldoret in Kenya; Chair of TAC
- b. Dr Drake Mirembe, an IT Expert at Makerere University; TAC Member
- c. Dr Duncan Ongeng, from Gulu University in Northern Uganda; TAC Member
- d. Mr Malenge Baker, the Principal of Nakapiripirit Technical Institute in Karamoja, Northern Uganda, TAC Member
- e. Dr Babra Zawede Mugwanya, NARO Zonal Director & Expert on Entrepreneurship and Business Development, TAC Member
- f. Mr. Owen Singura, Youth Skill Development Expert, TAC Member