

# Fixed Term Employment and Its Influence on Workflow: A Case Study of SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre.

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**ABSTRACT Purpose:** A case study was conducted at SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre on thirty-six employees to investigate the influence of fixed term employment on the flow of work at the institution. The specific objectives of the study were; (i) to investigate the influence of having fixed term employment on the workflow of SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre, (ii) to suggest the necessary actions that need to be taken in order to reduce the negative effects at the institution and (iii) to determine the ideal type of employment contract for senior employees superintending over longer term projects.

**Methodology:** The study was carried out as a case study. Data was collected from respondents through a questionnaire and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 2017.

**Findings:** Results showed that fixed term employment contracts, to a greater extent, negatively affected workflow at the institution. Projects suffer stillbirth, are abandoned along the way and yield unsatisfactory results. Negative influences could be minimized if employees could be hired based on experience of working in plant gene banks as well as matching projects with employment contracts. It was found out that the ideal type of employment contract should be renewal of four year contracts until retirement age or offering permanent employment based on performance.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Intergovernmental organisations are therefore recommended to lengthen employment contracts as well as renew them until the employee reaches retirement age or even award permanent positions to high performers. More research work should, however, be done in future to understand if intergovernmental organisations need to hire employees specifically for projects that have a known life span and match the contracts with the duration of the project.

**Keywords:** Employment contracts, intergovernmental organisation, employees, long term projects

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC) is a SADC institution that was formed with the mandate of conserving plant genetic resources or plant germplasm, SADC Secretariat Monthly Newsletter Issue 4, April (2018). It falls under the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR) Directorate of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat. The institution works in coordination with a network of National Plant Genetic Resources Centres (NPGRCs) in each of the Member States to conserve and preserve the genetic diversity and variability of Southern African plant stocks. These SADC Member States are Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The organization's aims are; to promote and coordinate a regional network for plant genetic resources management through national centres of SADC Member States, train specialists in plant genetic resources conservation, develop national plant genetic resource management programmes, and to prevent erosion and loss of regional plant genetic resources through collection and preservation efforts.

The institution and its national counterparts also perform important roles in research, documentation, training, and education of communities in the area of plant genetic resources conservation. The conservation of plant species is done in order to minimize risks of extinction on these plant genetic resources (Yearbook of International Organizations, 2018).

Conservation of plant genetic resources in the region, for present and future generations contribute to food security and livelihoods (Southern African Network for Biosciences, 2018). Mkamanga et al (2000) mentioned that Information about the collection sample is important for its searching and retrieval from the gene bank. The organization, through its mother body employs its staff on fixed term contracts of four years which are renewable once for an equal period. The work being done at the institution is scientific in nature and some projects would require the implementer to work on them to completion. However, these experiments and projects, in some cases, go beyond the contract of employment of the initiator. The SADC Protocol on Employment and Labour (2014), described the terms of employment for the SADC Secretariat as a period of four years, which is renewable once for a similar period, and is based on the performance of the employee. After the expiry of the second contract, no further renewal on these contracts is done. As such, all senior officers are hired from different nationalities of the SADC member states on a competitive basis. The nature of work that is done at the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre requires high expertise in agricultural sciences and plant genetic resources conservation. Once the two term contract has expired, Senior Programme Officers doing the conservation work are usually not given extension of contracts to nurse their projects to the end and a new officer has to take over.

Wagner (2017) found out that there can be a tendency in the management of projects at organisations to take a midwifery approach of passing the child on at birth and wishing the parents good luck. This places the benefits realization or achievement of the project's desired goals at risk because it does not give time for the incoming officer to master what is required on the project by the implementer. However, it should be noted that the termination of contracts for the senior officers at SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre could have some effects on the flow of work at the institution. These effects and their impact to the organization as well as member countries are the ones studied in this research project. Recommendations on how best the negative effects, if any, could be avoided are also given.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The short-term nature of contracts for relatively long term projects superintended by the regional workers at the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre has got some potential negative influence on the workflow and the achievement of desired goals of the organization (SPGRC Annual Report, 2015). Most projects may not succeed to achieve the desired goals for their implementation. This is because the implementer leaves the project on expiry of his work contract, in the hands of newly recruited staff who might need some time to learn new systems and deliver as expected. In this case, these new employees may fail to carry on the project as expected on its inception.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

- (i) To investigate the influence of having fixed term employment on the workflow of SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre.
- (ii) To suggest the necessary actions that need to be taken in order to reduce the negative effects at the institution.
- (iii) To determine the ideal type of employment contract for senior employees superintending over longer term projects.
- (iv)

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

The study shows problems of coming up with short term contracts for long term specialist jobs in intergovernmental organizations. It helps with advice on the necessary actions that need to be taken by the intergovernmental organizations to reduce the negative effects of short term contracts in long term projects. The goal is to help SADC and its member states to adjust and change some policies on contract of employment in the case that negative effects are noted. The study also helps fill the research gap left by other researchers who tend to concentrate on the effects of the fixed term contracts on the employees themselves, not researching much on the influence to the workflow of the organization. It will also aid to the already existing pool of knowledge for other researchers as well as scholars. Some organizations with operations and hiring policies that are related to that of SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre will also benefit from the recommendations that are going to be suggested by the researcher, and, based on the research.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Human Resources Management

Tracey (2016) defines human resources as "the people that staff and operate an organization," as contrasted with the financial and material resources of an organization. A human resource is a single person or employee within an organization. Human resources are an important asset in an organisation since they are the ones who coordinate and perform work activities thereby, helping the organisation achieve its goals.

Ongera et al. (2000) established that despite a growing acceptance that temporary employment is likely to be a persisting and significant feature of contemporary work, there is no clearly defined idea about how it affects the satisfaction, well-being and performance of workers. Studies attempting to shade some light on the influence of temporary employment on employee performance are more generalist and have failed to give detailed insights and analysis of the issues.

### 2.2 Fixed Term Contracts

De Cuyper et al. (2008) defined a fixed term contract as a contract of service for a period exceeding twelve months, renewable for a further term provided that the cumulative duration of successive fixed term contracts shall not exceed the period as prescribed under the law. De Cuyper et al. (2008) further suggests that fixed term contracts may be a source of negative outcomes for both individuals and the organization.

Anyim (2018) cited employment on short-term contract as being perceived to be a result of persistent changes in the working structure across the world and has turned into an important factor in the last four decades as long-term contracts seem to be declining in the different industries. Although contract employment has been around for a while, the influences and impacts on workflow, employees and organizations are yet to be fully established because of the many associated factors that can affect the outcomes.

### 2.3 Workflow in Plant Genebanks

Webster (2019) defined workflow as the sequence of steps involved in moving from the beginning to the end of a working process. Nelson et al (2015) stated that effective workflow is essential in the conservation and coding of plant genetic resources. Genebanks are valuable sources of genetic diversity which can help to cope with future problem. Workflow analysis has often been used with the goal of improving efficiency in intergovernmental organizations. In response to financial pressure and incentives driving provider organizations, minimizing slack time has become important. Some of the studies carried out demonstrated the power of analyzing and changing workflow to improve efficiency. Genebanks are valuable sources of genetic diversity which can help to cope with future problems of global security caused by of a continuously growing population, stagnating yields, natural disasters, nuclear wars and climate change.

### 2.4 Conceptual Overview

Jabareen (2009) defined a Conceptual Framework as a network of linked concepts. Conceptual framework analysis offers a procedure of theorization for building conceptual frameworks based on grounded theory method. The advantages of conceptual framework analysis are its flexibility, its capacity for modification, and its emphasis on understanding instead of prediction. Conceptual framework is used in the analysis of many variations and different contexts. It is applicable to a wide variety of projects where an overall picture of the process needs to be understood and it is needed mainly for making distinctions and organizing ideas.

#### 2.4.1 Skills Shortage

Most senior posts at SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre require specialized skills and advanced qualifications in the field of Agriculture, and specifically, Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics. The number of Plant Breeders in the region, or even globally, is not high as compared to other professions. Therefore, the skills shortage challenge also affects the recruitment process as in some cases, the organization end up having to adjust for people with related qualifications to take the jobs of plant genetic conservation, (SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre, 2015).

#### 2.4.2 Long Periods of Vacant Positions

Given that some posts at SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre are regional, a longer period is involved between advertising vacant posts and finally recruiting the ideal candidate to fill in the vacant position. The vacant posts are supposed to be sent to all member countries to apply through their respective ministries which act as the first screening point. An adequate period of at least one month is required in the member state only before the applications are sent to the SADC Secretariat in Botswana. The applications are further screened as per the advertised qualifications and

experience, taking into consideration whether the country has got a quota for its nationalities to be considered. If all the applicants do not meet the requirements of the advertised vacancy, the process is repeated again by re-advertising (Southern African Development Community, 2012). The long process of verification of qualifications and contacting references of potential candidates also lengthens the already long process of hiring. This in some cases results with long periods of vacant positions which affects the flow of work at the organization.

## **2.5 Theoretical framework**

Camp (2001) defined a theoretical framework as a framework based on the existing theory in the field of study being undertaken. The theoretical framework is a structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. It introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. The theoretical framework allows the researcher to understand certain aspects of the phenomena subject being studied while concealing other aspects. Although many researchers have researched on fixed term employment contracts, very little have been done to address the issue of their influence on the flow of work in intergovernmental organizations. The researcher is, therefore, going to fill the gap of knowledge on how workflow is affected by fixed term contracts and staff turnover.

Kryvoi (2018) mentioned that fixed term contracts have been in existence for intergovernmental organizations from time immemorial. These have been studied based on their effects to the employees whose contracts come to an end as a result of the expiry of contracts of employment. This included how the employees were going to copy at the period when they leave the organization up to until they find alternative employment. The studies also showed how the standard of lives and well-being of employees is affected when employment ends. It is of importance to note that by employing their employees on fixed term employment contracts, intergovernmental organisations will be trying to cut costs of employment. Some projects carried out at these organisations just require to be done for a certain period after which the employee, if employed on a permanent basis will be redundant.

Anyim (2016) studied the influence and impact of long-term and short-term contracts on employee behavior. The findings were that short-term employees experience low morale leading to negative attitudes about their job. There is need therefore to address short term contracts and performance in intergovernmental organisations. De Cuyper and De Witte (2006) studied the impact of job insecurity and contract type on attitudes, wellbeing and behavioral reports. They found out that fixed term contracts may be a source of negative outcomes for both individuals and the organization. A research gap on how the fixed term contacts affect the workflow of organisations have been left out.

### **2.5.1 Analysis of the Theoretical Framework of Fixed Term Contracts from Previous Researchers**

Staff turnover in intergovernmental organisations is an area of concern since these organisations tend to loose big brains to other organisations instead of retaining them for other related projects. High staff turnover can result with the institution being a training ground for other organisations. The theory in this field holds that the rate of staff turnover could not be at such a rate that it impacts negatively on the income of the organization. Reh (2014) researched on The High Costs of High Employee turnover. The findings were that too many employees leaving in any given period of time can ruin a company. However, there is need to research further on the other effects on the workflow of the organization rather than higher costs only.

It can be noted that there is need to broaden the research to address the influences of the fixed term employment contracts to intergovernmental organisations.

### **2.5.2 Theories backing the study**

#### **2.5.2.1 The Human Resources Theory**

Fundamental Assumptions of Human Resource Theory are based on the fact that organizations exist to serve human needs (Shafritz et al, 2005). Organizations and people need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent and people need careers, salaries, and work opportunities.

Humans find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the human talent and energy that they need. Behavioral scientists "focused attention on seeking to answer questions such as how organizations could and should allow and encourage their people to grow and develop. From this perspective, it is assumed that organizational creativity, flexibility, and prosperity flow naturally from employee growth and development. People are considered to be as important as or more important than the organization itself. The organization is not the independent variable to be manipulated in order to change behavior, even though organizations pay employees to help them achieve organizational goals. Instead, the organization must be seen as the context in which behavior occurs (Global Journal of Human Resource Management, 2016).

As the theory holds that organisations need employees for them to thrive, the study will either support or contradict with the theory based on what happens during the period when the employment contracts of the senior programme officers come to an end whilst they still have running projects at the organisation and with other stakeholders.

#### 2.5.2.2 The Economic Theory

The economic theory states that a decrease in the marginal disutility of labour, as expressed by the real wage for which additional labour is available, decreases productivity. The theory states that withdrawal in the labour market by some workers will decrease production, thereby, an impact on the flow of work processes from one stage to another. Wide variations are experienced in the volume of employment with some apparent change either in the minimum real demands of labour or in productivity. The study will either support or disagree with the theory on whether the withdrawal of labour by officers who are replaced after some time affects the flow of work processes in the production process at the organisation.

### III. Research Methodology

Research methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic. In this research, the methodology section allows the reader to critically evaluate the study's overall validity and reliability. The methodology section answers how the data was collected or generated and how it was analyzed. The research methodology enables the Researcher to organize their efforts into one cohesive and conceptual product idea generation.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Adams et al. (2007) defined a research design as an outline that is used to effect research objectives and answering research questions. It is the master plan that specifies the methods, as well as procedures for collecting and analyzing the information which is needed for the research. This research was conducted at SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre. In this research, a Case Study was used and this is a descriptive case study. The study is a qualitative research. SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre's employees were used as the population and a sample of thirty- six employees were chosen to participate in the study. The researcher used Purposive or Judgmental sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their study. The institution was considered to be appropriate for the study as it is a purely intergovernmental organization that fairly represent other related organizations. Proximity of the population by the researcher was also considered in the choice of the population.

Data was collected using the 5 Point Likert scale Questionnaire. This type of questionnaire allows the respondents to show their level of agreement, neutrality or disagreement. The Questionnaire is divided into two sections, with Section A providing general information and Section B with statements focused on much deeper details of the topic under study. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants for them to respond in writing at their own time.

### IV. Presentation of Data and Discussions

The gathered data was tabulated and displayed through pie charts and tables with the aim of identifying and discerning any patterns that aided in providing the best interpretation of the results of the study. All the thirty-six respondents to whom the questionnaires were given responded.

#### The terms of employment contract for SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre

Table 1. The terms of contracts have got potential negative effects on the operational performance of staff at the organization

Response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	8	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Neutral	4	11.1	11.1	33.3
	Agree	12	33.3	33.3	66.7
	Agree Strongly	12	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

A larger percentage of respondents agreed to the opinion that the terms of employment contracts have got some potential negative effects on the operational performance of staff at the organisation which proves the opinion to be valid. These, according to the respondents, have been witnessed by the still- birth of some planned projects, abolition of projects halfway and not fully achieving what was planned on the implementation of the project. The general flow of work and the collection of plant genetic resources have also been negatively affected by the exiting of the key persons superintending these on the expiry of their employment contracts. De Cuyper et al. (2008) said that fixed term contracts may be a source of negative outcomes for both individuals and the organisation. The results from this study, therefore, tend to agree with him as some negative outcomes have been witnessed, according to the respondents.

**Table 2. There is reduced overall performance during the training period of new staff.**

Response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree Strongly	2	5.56	5.56	5.56
	Disagree	4	11.1	11.1	16.7
	Neutral	8	22.2	22.2	38.9
	Agree	22	61.1	61.1	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

The majority of respondents agreed that there is reduced overall performance as new employees are being trained. All new employees can only perform better after going through the learning process of how systems of the organisation work. Even the most experienced employees who would have worked for the member countries' gene banks and research institutions also need to adapt to the changes in the work environment before they contribute to the conservation work at the organisation. Respondents making up 22.2% of the sample were neutral on the subject, perhaps that situations always differ on how quickly the trainees master their jobs. A proportion of 11.1% disagreed and 5.56% disagreed strongly to the opinion that there is reduced overall performance. This could be that their departments are comprised of local employees who have the privilege to renew their contracts of employment until they retire.

**Table 3. Some planned projects are not implemented, some are abandoned along the way or do not achieve satisfactory results as the contract of employment of the initiator expires.**

Response		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree Strongly	4	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Disagree	4	11.1	11.1	22.2
	Neutral	3	8.3	8.3	30.5
	Agree	17	47.2	47.2	77.7
	Agree Strongly	8	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

Most respondents were of the opinion that some projects suffer still birth as the contract of employment of the initiator comes to an end. Some projects have been witnessed to have ended on paper and were never implemented. Wagner (2017) cited that there can be a tendency in the management of projects at some organisations, of taking a midwifery approach of passing on the child to the parents at birth, and wishing them good luck. This, therefore, has been known to place benefits realization and achievement of organizational goals at high risk. In most cases, it is the initiator of the project who understands what objectives need to be achieved and how to achieve these objectives. Some planned projects are not implemented, although they might have sounded good, with good promises towards the achievement of the organisation's goals. There could also be a feeling by any incoming employees to contribute in the form of those projects which are their brainchild for the need to leave a mark at the organisation when their contracts expire.

**Table 4. The organisation incur high costs due to high staff turnover.**

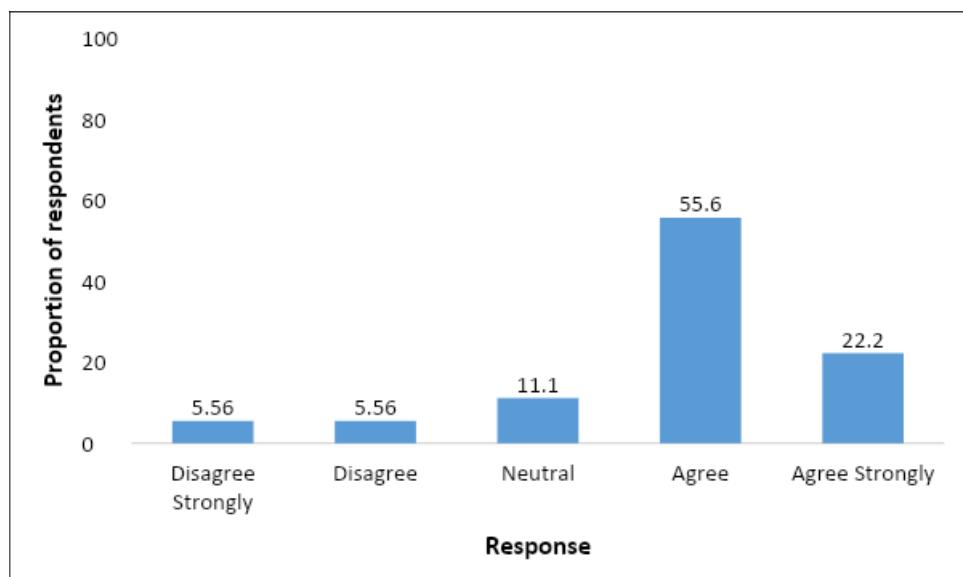
	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree Strongly	4	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Disagree	14	38.9	38.9	50
	Agree	18	50	50	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

From the findings, 50% of the respondents agreed that the organisation is incurring high costs due to high staff turnover whereas 38.9% disagreed and 11.1% disagreed strongly. Abbasi (2000) established that high employee turnover may be harmful to a company's productivity. Sell et al stated that employee turnover has got the potential of decreasing customer service, lowers company profits and causes training and expatriation losses. An (2019) stated that low staff turnover saves the company money in the form of decreased hiring and training costs. It can therefore be noted that the company is neither losing or saving as it is in-between the two

**Table 5. The gap of knowledge and experience between the outgoing initiator of a project and the new officer in most cases results with a compromise in the results achieved.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	8	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Neutral	4	11.1	11.1	33.3
	Agree Strongly	24	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

The gap of knowledge and experience between the outgoing initiator of a project and the new officer in most cases results with a compromise in the results achieved. 66.7% of the respondents agreed strongly to the above. The incoming employee would be handed over an ongoing project and in some cases without fully understanding how it started, what is expected from him and the desired goals of the project. This employee is expected to take over the superintending of the project whilst in the learning phase and therefore, probability is high that the desired goals and objectives of the project could be compromised. A proportion of 11.1% of the respondents were neutral on the matter, an indication that this issue could depend on how skilled the incoming employee is, and how complicated the project is.



**Fig. 1 Senior Officers should be allowed renewal of contracts until they retire.**

The majority of respondents agreed to the above as it is likely to save the organization on spending on costs associated with recruitment of new employees. It can be noted that every employee improves in terms of effectiveness and efficiency as time goes on. Allowing these senior regional workers, the opportunity to renew their contracts until they retire will also give the organization time to maximize from these workers in terms of quality deliverables.

## **V. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions of the study**

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that;

- Short term employment contracts in intergovernmental organisations have got a number of negative effects which need to be addressed. This is because long term specialized roles most of the time do not match with the fixed term employment contracts offered in these organisations. Most projects go beyond the contract of the initiator, with the implementer of the project leaving the organization before the contract which he or she is supervising comes to an end. The nature of the employment contracts and the projects duration therefore do not tally. This has resulted with projects not yielding expected results in terms of quality, being abandoned along the way or even dying on plan.
- The fact that there is no induction and handover between the incoming and outgoing employee on the ongoing projects means that the incoming employee will require a longer period of mastering the systems of the organizations so as to perform as expected. Handling of species of plants for conservation is a very sensitive job that requires thorough training and induction. The reasonable learning period for new employees is roughly two years before they begin to make a noticeable impact by other stakeholders.
- Delays in the recruitment of new employees resulted with longer periods of vacant positions. This has affected the flow of work at the organization, with some projects on the collection and multiplication of plant genetic resources being temporarily halted until there is sufficient staff to carry out the tasks.
- The majority among both regional and locally recruited staff support the lengthening of the employment contracts, or even, offering permanent positions subject to performance or until one reaches retirement age.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions given above, it is recommended that:

- (i) The organisation's employment policies should be reviewed from short term fixed contracts to periods much longer than the current ones, matching the length of projects with the length of employment contracts, or even renewing the employment contracts until the employee reaches retirement age so as to allow long-term projects and experiments to come to an end being superintended by one Research Officer.
- (ii) The incoming and outgoing employees should be given a period of induction and handover so as to allow the incoming officer to have much appreciation of what needs to be achieved on the ongoing experiment because of the sensitivity of their jobs.
- (iii) The organization should quicken the hiring process, giving preference on employment to employees already working at sub-gene banks on specialized conservation of plant genetic resources. This reduces the period of time needed on mastering the systems of the organizations on conservation work.
- (iv) Senior regional employees should be given permanent positions based on their overall performance at work. This will help in keeping high talent in the organisation as well as motivating workers to work even much harder. This will also help to avoid making the institution a training ground for other organisations in related industries who offer much longer contracts of employment.
- (v) A maximum period of one and a half to two years should be adopted and accepted as a learning period for all new employees, so that they master how to manage large and complex projects, handling of sensitive plant genetic material and maintenance of germplasm health before they begin to deliver what is expected of them.

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