Strengthening capacity for agricultural research for development
Multi-stakeholder collaboration to achieve impact

The establishment of effective multi-stakeholder partnerships for agricultural research for development (ARD) requires a coherent and flexible capacity strengthening strategy to support the co-creation of knowledge, learning and innovation. In this way, partnerships can achieve positive impacts for the intended beneficiaries of research outputs, as long as:

- An iterative and responsive capacity strengthening strategy is developed to support multi-stakeholder partnerships for ARD. It is important to recognize that the capacity strengthening needs of partnerships change as the partnership progresses and new challenges emerge. Capacity strengthening should therefore be understood as a continual process that needs to be regularly reviewed and adapted.
- Time is invested in consolidating multi-stakeholder partnerships and establishing the different roles and capacities of the partners involved. It is necessary to bring stakeholders together in facilitated workshops to establish a solid understanding of ARD, mobilize interaction between partners and allocate defined roles depending on the capacities of different partners.
- The multi-stakeholder partnership is supported to develop a strategic but flexible action plan for ARD to achieve maximum impact. Stakeholders need support to think strategically about the different pathways to innovation to ensure that the capacities of each partner are effectively utilised and the partnership is able to adapt to new challenges as they arise.
- The proposal writing capacities of stakeholders are strengthened to help ARD partnerships source funding. Workshops, or ‘writeshops’, to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships to develop strong proposals are important to help consortia compete for relevant funding opportunities.
- More funding opportunities for multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships are created. There are very few funding opportunities for African-European ARD partnerships involving both research and ‘non-research’ organizations.
- Partners are facilitated to acquire new skills and capacities in areas that they are less familiar with to improve the functioning of the partnership. This includes analytical, project planning and management, and collaborative skills.
- External facilitation is acknowledged as necessary for effective reflection and learning as partnerships implement ARD projects. A feasible mechanism to fund external facilitators needs to be established so that partnerships can be supported to document the change process and capture the lessons learnt.
- The capacity of external or internal facilitators is built so that they can effectively respond to partnership needs. It is also important that the role of facilitators is clearly defined and understood by all partners.
- African partners are facilitated to recruit European organizations and incentivize them to participate in partnership activities. One solution is to develop and manage a database of potential European partners.

Recommendations

PAEPARD approach to capacity strengthening for multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships

PAEPARD was established in 2009 with the objective to build joint African-European multi-stakeholder partnerships in agricultural research for development (ARD) to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve this, PAEPARD aims to mobilize relevant stakeholders and increase their capacity to finance and undertake ARD in order to find solutions to agricultural innovation challenges.

In particular, PAEPARD focuses on strengthening the capacity of African stakeholders to compete for and access available ARD funding opportunities. Strengthening the capacity of ‘non-research stakeholders’ (such as farmer organizations, private sector companies and NGOs) to participate as equal partners in the ARD process is also a priority for the project.

PAEPARD has facilitated these stakeholders through innovation networks, as well as brokering, facilitation, mentoring and training support to establish effective ARD partnerships; articulate innovation needs; develop research project proposals; and improve negotiation, project and financial management skills.

This policy brief outlines how PAEPARD implemented an integrated and iterative approach to capacity strengthening to facilitate the establishment of sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships for ARD, and highlights the key challenges encountered during this process.

CALL 1: 9 Consortia

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CALL 2: 10 Consortia

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ULP: 5 Consortia

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Figure 1: PAEPARD consortia development.
The role of AIF in PAEPARD capacity strengthening activities

Central to the PAEPARD capacity strengthening strategy was the creation of a pool of AIF to support the networking, proposal development and capacity strengthening of consortia to enable them to respond to ARD funding opportunities. The terms of reference developed by PAEPARD for the AIF saw these individuals as neutral actors, who would promote fair, open and inclusive procedures to accomplish the work of the multi-stakeholder partnerships.

To fulfil this brokerage and learning role, two types of facilitator were considered: internal facilitators from one of the partner organizations and external facilitators, who were independent from the partnership.

Facilitators for the 1st call

Under the 1st call in 2010, all nine partnerships selected were requested to nominate external facilitators as part of the call procedure. In reality, only two of the nine groups included individuals nominated specifically as facilitators, and these were both selected internally from one of the consortium partners. Instead, most groups nominated a ‘leader’ from within the partnership. Other than their participation in the inception workshop, along with other consortium members, no additional effort was envisaged by PAEPARD to develop the capacity of these two facilitators.

Building the capacity of AIF

Towards the end of 2011, PAEPARD organized an initial induction workshop in Entebbe, Uganda for 25 external AIF selected to support the 2nd call consortia from a variety of farmer organizations, NGO, research organizations and private sector companies. The main objective of this workshop was to familiarise participants with their potential role as facilitators of the “agricultural innovation partnerships” established with the support of PAEPARD.

In November 2012, a second induction workshop was organized in Entebbe for 17 representatives of the five ULP consortia, the internal facilitators nominated by them and the ULP project leaders.

Reflection on the success of AIF

Though the role of the AIF was heavily debated throughout the PAEPARD project, with many groups finding it difficult to distinguish between a consortium leader/coordinator and a facilitator, in most cases, the AIF helped to broker and facilitate interaction between the stakeholders during the inception and multi-stakeholder research question (MSHRQ) workshops. Their presence helped to ensure the creation of balanced partnerships and the development of coherent action plans.

The AIF were less successful in brokering linkages between the consortia and external sources of finance, however, and this task was mainly achieved by international project personnel within PAEPARD who had close links to donors. Among the 2nd PAEPARD call consortia, AIF hardly played a role after they had organized the inception workshops to bring partners together and explore collaboration. External AIF only exceptionally participated in the proposal development workshops or went on to play a role in the implementation of funded projects.

The intention to create a large pool of AIF across the continent to facilitate stakeholder interaction and learning, proposal writing, and acquisition of funding proved over ambitious due to the lack of clarity on how to finance them via external sources. There was also a concerning lack of enthusiasm from partners to support the development of AIFs proposed by PAEPARD. However, as consortia acquired funding and began to implement research outputs, the role of AIF in facilitating project management, as well as supporting reflection and learning activities, began to be recognized.

Building balanced ARD partnerships

Inception workshops

Once consortia had been selected from the 1st and 2nd calls, inception workshops were organized to facilitate stakeholders to explore their selected research issue and develop an action plan to implement the project. Between June and August 2011, ICRA and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) facilitated three partnership inception workshops in Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Pretoria for the 1st call consortia, while AIF co-facilitated inception workshops for consortia from the 2nd call.

The workshops were designed to agree on the key principles for the creation of a working partnership and clearly define the roles, responsibilities and commitments of the different partners. The participating consortia were required to produce the following immediate results:

- A shared analysis of the core challenge identified by the non-research partners;
- A consensus on what the partners intended to achieve together;
- An in-depth analysis of the interests of the partners and other actors involved in the innovation process, as well as their expected roles and responsibilities in the process;
- An action plan for the joint innovation process and research proposal development;
- A governance and management mechanism for the partnership;
- A concept note that could be further developed into clear funding proposals.

MSHRQ workshops

During 2012, so-called ‘federating themes’ (research issues) for the five ULP consortia were defined and clarified through desk reviews carried out by both internal and external consultants. This was followed by multi-stakeholder research question (MSHRQ) workshops to integrate the perceived research needs identified by the various stakeholders involved. On the basis of these questions, an integrated research concept note for each of the five ULP consortia was developed. In addition to identifying federating themes, some of the ULPs – such as the EAFF consortium - developed concrete strategic plans that assisted them to draft proposals and mobilize funds.

Reflection on the success of inception and MSHRQ workshops

The initial consortia workshops were designed to facilitate the different stakeholders represented in the partnerships to arrive at a consensus on the intended outcomes of their collaboration. The brief concept notes developed by the consortia at the workshops consisted of a logical framework agreed between partners, and a brief background and justification for the project. Meanwhile, partnership action plans helped to outline the additional activities needed to:

a) Identify new partners;

b) Identify potential funding sources;

c) Prepare a full proposal.

In retrospect, some consortia partners felt that these workshops alone were not sufficient to build strong and balanced partnerships, and that additional follow-up activities such as familiarisation visits, would be useful to build confidence and trust. Stakeholders also indicated that more formal written commitments defining the expectations of the partners and establishing accountability mechanisms needed to be made during the project development and implementation process.

Enhancing consortia capacity to access funding

One aim of PAEPARD was to increase the capacity of African stakeholders to compete for available ARD funding opportunities. After the brokerage of potential ARD partnerships through the inception and MSHRQ workshops, the next step was to support the consortia to convert the research concept notes into full project proposals in response to defined funding opportunities.

Over the period 2012-2016, a total of nine proposal development workshops were organized by PAEPARD. As a result of these workshops, 38 PAEPARD consortia proposals were produced. However, due to the competitive nature of the calls and the lack of funding opportunities for the balanced multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships supported by PAEPARD, only four succeeded in gaining funding. Nevertheless, the workshops still helped to build
Participants’ proposal writing capacity, even if consortia proposals were not successful. The workshops were also beneficial for:
- The consolidation of consortia as well-established and functional multi-stakeholder partnerships,
- The development of participants’ skills in research writing for the documentation of research outcomes and production of scholarly manuscripts or popular knowledge products.

Reflection on the success of PAEPARD writeshops

A key assumption of the PAEPARD project had been that ARD-related funding, which promoted African-European partnerships would be readily available for the consortia. This, however, was not the case and meant that the partnership development and capacity strengthening process needed to be both innovative and flexible. This allowed for changes to consortia membership, including the addition of new emerging partners, and even changes to the commodities or research ideas that the original consortia had been formed around.

Given the lack of appropriate financing for the concept notes developed, many groups struggled to maintain the initial momentum generated by the inception workshops and writeshops, which caused difficulties in consolidating their ARD proposals. However, between December 2015 and December 2017, PAEPARD consortia have successfully leveraged a total of EUR 36,709,844 from an initial EUR 14,054,819 provided by the European Commission (80%) and partners participating in the consortia (20%). The return on investment (ROI) as defined by economists – (net profit/cost of investment) x 100 – for PAEPARD initial seed funding is therefore 161%, which offers an alternative perspective on the success rate of the PAEPARD facilitated proposals.

Consortia development and learning

To take stock of PAEPARD achievements and address the outstanding challenges facing consortia, a reflection workshop was organized from 27 to 30 April 2015. Building on a common understanding of ARD, the workshop identified and analyzed the key strengths and challenges of the PAEPARD consortia, and elaborated short and mid-term potential solutions and actions.

Finding solutions to identified challenges

The identified challenges were grouped into five themes: (i) partnerships, (ii) facilitating the multi-stakeholder platform process, (iii) communication, (iv) management and organization of consortia, and (v) PAEPARD coordination – and proposed solutions were recommended for each group.

To address the challenges related to partnerships it was suggested, among other solutions, that stronger links to regional research organizations in Africa be established, a database of potential European partners be developed, and stronger advocacy efforts undertaken to increase funding for ARD and strengthen European-African co-funding procedures.

With regards to multi-stakeholder learning and development processes, the need to move beyond the sole focus on calls for proposals and institutionalize multi-stakeholder processes, procedures and guidelines was highlighted. The role of facilitators of such processes was now more strongly recognized by the consortia that had started to implement research activities and it was proposed that a facilitator database be set up for those consortia that wished to engage an AIF in future.

There was also a call to develop, implement and monitor a communication strategy between all PAEPARD parties to produce communication tools in English and French and empower consortia to use them.

Defining innovation pathways

In December 2016, another brief reflection exercise was undertaken with the funded consortia, which made it possible to more clearly define pathways of change for the PAEPARD project and provide an analytical framework to assess how change within the consortia projects had come about. Through its ARD approach, PAEPARD consortia and their partners have followed four main pathways to innovation (Figure 2).

A two-day training was also held on project cycle management for 25 consortia representatives attending the RUFORUM Biennial in Cape Town, in December 2016. During this event, the PAEPARD communication strategy was developed with appropriate tools and consortia members were trained on the use of these tools.

PAEPARD experience clearly demonstrates that capacity strengthening needs change over time as partnerships face emerging challenges or acquire new insights.

Early capacity strengthening efforts may be concentrated around identifying and accessing funding opportunities. Whilst consortia that have accessed funding, need to focus on strengthening their capacity in the chosen research area and scientific discovery. When a partnership moves to addressing market linkages for research outputs and widening the scope of the stakeholders involved, new challenges related to project management, value chain analysis and trust building begin to become more central to its effective functioning.

Capitalization of PAEPARD experience

In October 2017, during a final workshop in Cotonou to capitalize on the learning from the experiences of PAEPARD consortia and partners, a session was held on capacity strengthening interventions. Participants unanimously agreed that inception workshops were critical for understanding the PAEPARD process and building the consortia teams. These workshops served as springboards for building functional partnerships. Similarly, the proposal development workshops received a positive response, both in terms of helping to mobilize funds and increasing understanding of the wider complexity of the context in which the projects were embedded, as well as the opportunities they provided to exchange ideas and experiences with other consortia.

In contrast, the response was generally negative in regards to the AIFs. The main criticism was that external facilitators were often not committed to the project or lacked in-depth understanding of the subject matter to help drive the project.

What next?

With regard to future efforts of PAEPARD, it was felt that there should be a continuation with existing consortia and ULPs to deepen and develop partnerships. PAEPARD should, however, also focus on continuing efforts to consolidate funding, improve capacities for project management and administration, and address emerging technical needs both at individual and organizational levels. For new African-European partnerships to be developed in the future, a better way of identifying European partners with a shared interest in the consortia’s research focus is required. Lessons from other EC-funded projects, such as the Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS), CAAST-Net Plus, Pro-IntensAfrica and Value Chain Analysis for Development (VCA-4D), should be learnt and integrated into future innovation platforms for ARD.

Figure 2: PAEPARD innovation pathways.
The Platform for Africa-Europe Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) is a 8-year project sponsored by the European Commission (80%) and partners’ own contribution (20%).

It has been coordinated by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) since December 2009, and was extended until end of 2017.

It aims at building joint African-European multi-stakeholder partnerships in agricultural research for development (ARD) contributing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. On the European side, the partners are AGRINATURA (The European Alliance on Agriculture Knowledge for Development, coordinating the European partners), COLEACP (representing the private sector), CSA (representing the NGOs), ICRA, specialized in capacity building in ARD, and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA). On the African side and in addition to FARA, the partners are the Pan-African Farmers Organization (PAFO), the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) based in Kampala, and the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) based in Pretoria. PAFO involves its members that are the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF) based in Nairobi, the Réseaux des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs d’Afrique de l’Ouest (ROPPA) based in Ouagadougou, and the Plate-forme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d’Afrique Centrale (PROPAC) based in Yaoundé. The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) is an associate partner of PAEPARD.

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