

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

SUPPORT TO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT (ARD) AT SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL

CONCEPT PAPER

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1 Background

- **In August 2001**, the European Commission (EC) published a **strategy document on Agricultural Research for Development¹** (ARD). Its objective was to provide guidelines to assist decision making for the consideration of EC support for ARD in partnership with Developing Countries.

The strategy document indicates that the European Commission considers that ARD can make a vital contribution to sustainable development and the fight against poverty, and therefore recommends to continue supporting Agricultural Research for Development.

Working from the relevant Commission texts, the document describes the **actors**, **functions** (co-ordination / facilitation and implementation) and **levels** (national, regional and global) involved in ARD, as well as the main principles guiding the European Union's external co-operation in the field of Agricultural Research for Development, i.e.:

- ⇒ Increased **Civil Society** participation and **Private Sector** involvement, leading to **participation and ownership of the beneficiaries**, and
- ⇒ **Synergy** between the national, regional and global levels.

As a result, the European Commission decided to concentrate its support for ARD towards:

- ⇒ Research co-ordination / facilitation functions at national, regional and global levels, and
- ⇒ Research implementation functions at regional and global levels.

Therefore there are three strategic choices for EC support to ARD:

- ⇒ Support to setting up / strengthening genuine National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) at **national level**,
- ⇒ Support to research activities of sub-regional interest and their co-ordination at **sub-regional level²**.
- ⇒ Support to co-ordination and / or implementation of research of international public goods nature at **global level**.

In view of addressing common problems in an efficient manner, the **EC primary strategic choice focuses on research activities of transboundary interest at sub-regional level and their co-ordination**.

¹ See copy <http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/rurpol>

² Eastern Africa for example is a sub-region -Africa as a whole is a region

More specifically, the EC strategy document recommends that **at the sub-regional level** the EC should continue to support:

- *The establishment and/or strengthening of "light" sub-regional organisations involved in co-ordinating and facilitating agricultural research agenda setting of sub-regional importance, and*
 - *Implementation of research at a national level, within the framework of agreed regional strategies and the priorities defined by National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) members who are the "owners" of the sub-regional level.*
- The aim is to assist the creation of a critical mass of researchers linked through networks. This will provide economies of scale, and will also support capacity building and the strengthening of NARS.*

- **Over the first half of 2002**, DG Development, in close collaboration with other services in the European Commission (DG RTD, AIDCO³, etc.), worked on **how to "operationalise"** support to ARD activities of transboundary interest and their co-ordination at the sub-regional level.

The main EC operational concepts agreed upon were included in a joint European Commission - World Bank paper entitled "African Agricultural Research for Development: Increasing effectiveness and financial sustainability", prepared at the beginning of 2002. The findings were presented at the FARA⁴ Meeting in Maputo (Mozambique) in March 2002 and discussed with other donors⁵, African ARD organisations⁶ and GFAR⁷ in Brussels in June 2002.

It was then suggested that this approach could constitute a comprehensive common position amongst contributors and NARS to organise joint support to ARD at the sub-regional level, as a means of improving:

- Relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of research,
- Ownership, Partnership, Subsidiarity, Transparency,
- Involvement of all stakeholders (National Agricultural Research Institutes, Private Sector, Civil Society, Universities, Advance Research Institutes, International Research Centres, farmers organisations, etc.),
- Co-ordination of donors' and others' contributions.

The purpose of the present document is to briefly detail this approach and its operational implications for both financial contributors to ARD at the sub-regional level and recipient partners.

³ Research Directorate-General, EuropeAid Co-operation Office

⁴ Forum Africain pour la Recherche Agronomique

⁵ World Bank, African Development Bank, FAO, IFAD, Norway, Italy, Belgium, UK, NL, EIARD Secretariat, EC. (Apologies: USAID, CIDA, France)

⁶ SADC, SACCAR, ASARECA, FARA

⁷ Global Forum on Agricultural Research

2 Policy and Approach

2.1 Strategic planning and setting of research activities

We assume that:

- Decision makers of the sub-region recognise ARD as a priority area of intervention in the sub-region to combat hunger and poverty, and have decided to allocate resources for this purpose (e.g. ARD is part of the PRSP⁸ / CSP⁹ (for A.C.P. countries) / CSS¹⁰ (for other developing countries) and will therefore contribute to poverty reduction in the considered area/country,
- All stakeholders involved in ARD in the sub-region concerned (i.e. NARS actors) are willing to work together, have designed and agreed upon a sub-regional strategy and have chosen the ARD priorities to be tackled at sub-regional level (**demand-driven technological ARD**), and
- The sub-regional strategy and priorities are properly articulated with those implemented at local / national, regional and global levels.

These constitute the minimum pre-requisites that should be fulfilled in advance, bearing in mind that they are evolving processes requiring continuous and regular updating.

We distinguish two main tasks to be carried out to advance ARD at the sub-regional level:

- Functional support, and
- Research implementation.

2.2 Functional support

A “light” sub-regional mechanism should **facilitate and co-ordinate** activities amongst the various stakeholders involved at the sub-regional level, not only in ARD but also in extension and development issues.

This mechanism, usually a Secretariat with limited staff, should **provide services** at the sub-regional level, such as the organisation of:

- Meetings,
- Training and capacity building sessions,
- Information collection and dissemination,
- Studies of sub-regional importance,
- Etc.

⁸ Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

⁹ Country Strategy Papers

¹⁰ Country Support Strategy

The Secretariat requires **sustainable financial support** to perform its facilitation and co-ordination functions. **Primarily the countries of the sub-region** and the NARS members should provide the necessary funding.

Donors could also contribute directly to the functioning of the sub-regional mechanism and / or to the services implemented at the sub-regional level through this Secretariat.

As a matter of principle, donor support to specific services should preferably be channelled through the sub-regional Secretariat in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to improve make its facilitation / co-ordination role.

Funding for the functional support as described above (Secretariat and services such as capacity building or training sessions for the members of the networks) and **funding for research programmes** (competitive fund) should **be treated separately** in order to clearly delineate the focus and purpose of competitive funding (see below).

2.3 Research implementation

As indicated above, ARD strategy and priorities at the sub-regional level are designed and decided upon by local stakeholders. Clearly the sub-regional level co-ordination mechanism should play a key role in facilitating this process of prioritisation.

Regarding the implementation of sub-regional research priorities, it is suggested to discontinue the past approach focused mainly on funding distinct research projects. Instead it is recommended:

- To support **research networks** that are established according to the sub-regional priorities identified and that involve all stakeholders concerned, and
- To set up / strengthen a **competitive fund** to sponsor research activities.

2.3.1 Research networks

Research networks should be primarily seen as platforms where researchers and other stakeholders / actors meet to discuss research strategies and priorities in specific thematic areas, and to share information and experiences. Research activities are not carried out by the networks but by groups belonging to the sub-regional networks (or possibly other stakeholders) who compete to get access to the financial resources of the sub-regional competitive fund.

Financial resources should be made available to the research networks at sub-regional level to sustain and allow continuous exchange of information amongst all members of each network. It refers to the **"basic metabolism"** of the research networks. Basic metabolism encompasses support provided for annual meetings of the network members, electronic links between them to facilitate information flows, and other support services.

Stakeholders from the sub-region should head the networks but other experts from outside the sub-region should be allowed to join at their own expense.

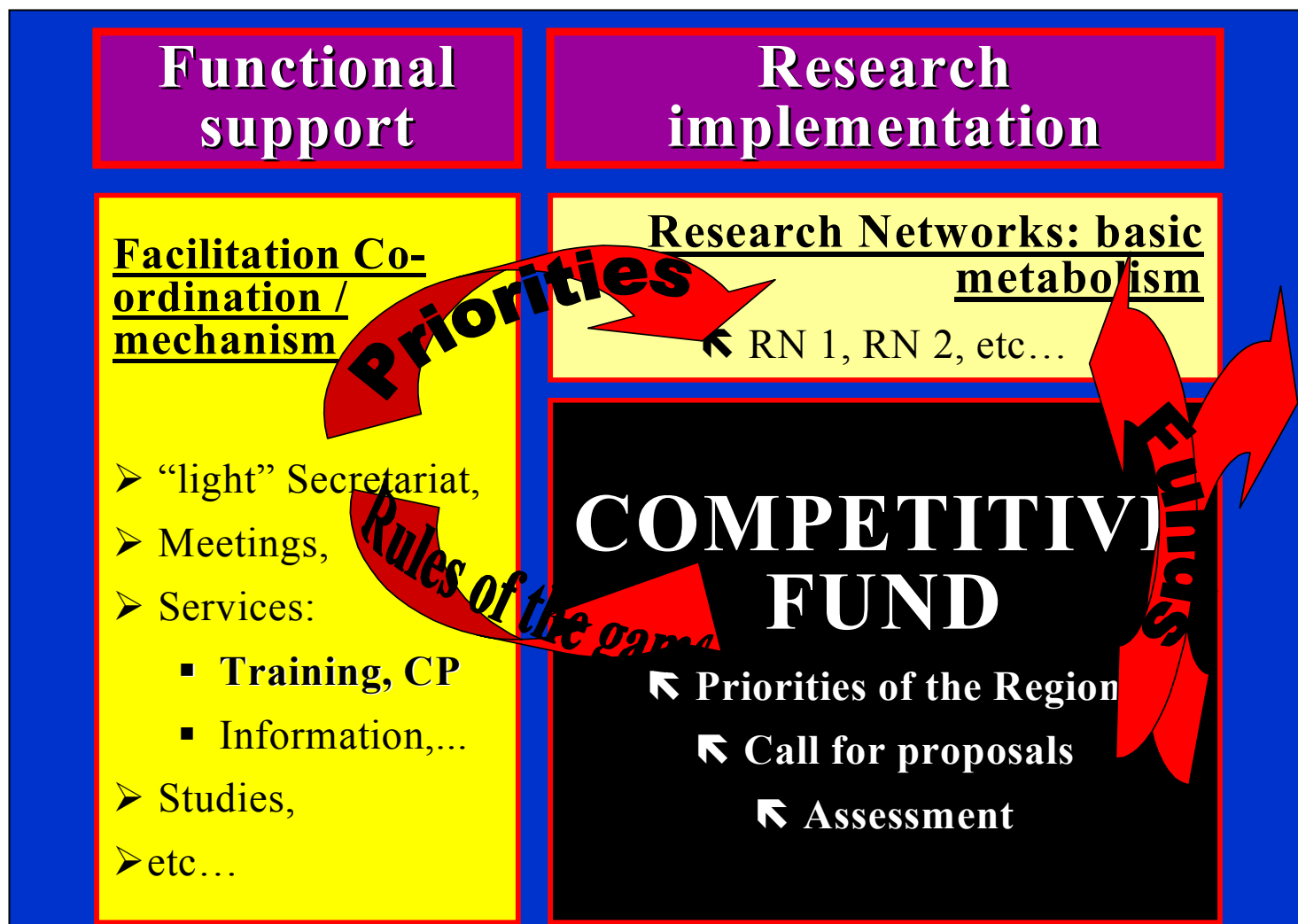
2.3.2 Competitive fund

The competitive fund aims to build up the NARS and to foster the sub-regional dimension of collaborative ARD. The **"rules of the game"** of the process, from launching a call for proposals through to selecting the best research proposals received, was discussed in great detail amongst donors, GFAR and African ARD organisations during our meeting in Brussels in June 2002 (see above).

The discussions resulted in a "template" **Manual of Procedures** (see attachment) to be applied to local requirements of each sub-regional organisation and/or to be used to improve existing procedures. The template will be applied implemented in the coming months by ASARECA, CORAF and the relevant services in SADC dealing with ARD. It might also be applied to other sub-regions of the world.

It is highly desirable for coherence purposes that **one single Competitive Fund mechanism is set per sub-region**, and not one Competitive Fund per source of funds. Furthermore, each sub-region should launch **one single call for proposals per period and go through one single selection process** for the proposals submitted. The various sources of funds made available for competition purposes by donors should then be utilised to finance only the selected proposals. The source of funds to support the selected proposals should be decided afterwards, according to the limits / conditions demanded by the respective donors.

The above mentioned concepts can be summarised as follows:



3 Implementing the research agenda

3.1 Transition period:

The concepts presented above lead to allocations of financial resources towards three "targets":

- "core activities" of the sub-regional mechanism,
- "basic metabolism" of the research networks, and
- one single **Competitive Fund** per sub-region.

This concept should be applied immediately in sub-regions that have decided to follow these proposals. But it is well understood that in some sub-regions the concept may represent a future ideal to be aimed for, as and when circumstances allow (for example, in sub-regions that continue to follow a "project approach" to ARD).

In sub-regions where research projects are under way, the contracting parties have to fulfil their commitments and to wind-up projects as appropriate. However, the shift towards a sub-regional mechanism, networks and a competitive fund should be prepared as soon as possible and the scheme progressively engaged.

3.2 "Non exclusive" concept

The understanding is that, as much as possible, fair competition organised along the lines indicated above will encourage transparency as well as quality and relevance of research for development.

However, it could appear that specific situations might require direct allocations. For example, it could be envisaged that traditional project and programme type funding for major priority issues are maintained. But in this case, it is recommended that this be done in a decreasing way over years to ensure long term financial sustainability.

Likewise it may happen that some contributors willing to participate in ARD efforts in a sub-region are unable to mobilise resources according to these principles because of particular administrative demands from their Organisations.

Therefore the proposed guidelines for implementation of ARD at the sub-regional level should be applied with **flexibility**, taking local conditions fully into account, but with the objective of improving sustainability, transparency, relevance and quality of research.

4 Conclusions

- The approach described above has been extensively discussed with many partners in developed and developing countries. It will be applied in the coming month in two sub-regions in Africa, taking advantage of competitive fund experiences conducted at national level (for example in Kenya and Senegal) and at the international level (e.g. the EC Directorate-General for Research - INCO-DEV programme). A review will be carried out after two years to draw lessons and modify the system as appropriate.
- Through GFAR, this approach will also be submitted for comments to other sub-regions / regions of the world in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, with a view to possible implementation in these sub-regions / regions.
- Further work will be undertaken to articulate the competitive grants scheme at the sub-regional level with other financial resources allocated, particularly the support provided to the regional (FARA, other regional research fora in the world) and global levels (GFAR, CGIAR).
- Impact on strong and weak NARS. Although some incentives may be put in place to have the weaker NARS participating in collaborative research programmes, it is generally agreed that competition may not only build co-operation, but through a learning process will also strengthen the capacity of the weakest NARS. Thus, it is expected that in the end competition will lead to overall capacity building in the region. Moreover, research findings will be made available to all NARS and stakeholders for the targeted beneficiaries.
- The same principles apply to the regional level: the example of the Africa Region
 - ✓ As with sub-regions, FARA funding should primarily and mainly consist of contributions from the sub-regions,
 - ✓ As indicated in its Charter, FARA should only continue to provide facilitation and co-ordination services to sub-regional networks and institutions,
 - ✓ FARA should work to link sub-regional research in Africa with the global institutions (GFAR, CGIAR), in the same way that the sub-regional networks link their national and local counterparts with the regional level.

Since FARA has just been created (Maputo, March 2002), for the time being a regional competitive funding mechanism may not be appropriate. If

activities of continental scope are to be implemented, sub-regions should "merge" their efforts and resources to encourage collaboration and the sharing of results, with support for facilitation and co-ordination from FARA.

5 Annexe: the Africa sub-regions "Manual of Procedures"

**Manual of procedures
final version awaited**