

European partnerships for demand-led agricultural research and capacity development: the case of Africa

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Introduction

AGRINATURA is a grouping of European universities and research organizations with a common interest in supporting sustainable agricultural development (<http://www.agrinatura.eu/>). It is a member of the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development (EFARD), which represents the European constituency in the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR). EFARD is analogous to the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). AGRINATURA believes that research and higher education will underpin the innovations needed to increase agricultural production, productivity and sustainability to feed rapidly expanding populations and help protect the natural resource base for future generations.

AGRINATURA can draw on diverse multi- and inter-disciplinary expertise and experiences both in Europe and elsewhere. As a member of EFARD, it implements selected programmes on its behalf. It works through strategic partnerships with agricultural research and development (ARD) organizations and is especially active in sub-Saharan Africa but recognises the global nature of emerging agricultural issues which affect Europe too. The complex links, such as between food and energy security, require multi-sectoral solutions and inter-continental cooperation.

AGRINATURA acts in partnership with its international collaborators such as the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). It seeks to nurture scientific excellence through joint research, educational and training programmes and projects, and advocates greater support for agricultural research and educational programmes that contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the new agenda of Sustainable Development Goals.

Partnerships for demand-led agricultural research

The Platform for African-European Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) demonstrates Europe's engagement with promoting demand-led agricultural research. PAEPARD is a joint initiative of FARA and EFARD and is funded by the European Commission (EC). AGRINATURA represents EFARD in the initiative and contributes to most activities. PAEPARD aims to increase the involvement of African organizations in European agricultural research programmes and of organizations from civil society and the private sector in agricultural research. It works with consortia of partners interested in specific research themes by identifying relevant research questions, funding sources and preparing research proposals. Agricultural innovation facilitators, who receive training through the project, act as neutral agents to help achieve consensus amongst stakeholders with differing expectations and ways of working.

Working with Farmers

While competitive calls for proposals from PAEPARD, resulted in some innovative ideas, the process often led to unbalanced partnerships that did not adequately reflect the interests of some stakeholders; in particular, farmer organizations. A new process gave farmer organizations a central role in determining research priorities, commissioning studies to identify gaps and opportunities, and build research teams to address specific research questions. For example, the East African Farmers' Federation instigated a research consortium on extensive livestock which has submitted research proposals to enhance animal health and productivity in the beef sub-sector.

The increased importance of farmer organizations within PAEPARD is mirrored in two agricultural research initiatives led by AGRINATURA. One is the Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets (ESFIM) project, which began in 2007 and is now in a third phase of implementation. It has had several notable achievements. ESFIM supports demand-driven action research that aligns with the policy aims of farmer organizations and enhances their capacity to access markets by producing evidence that influences the policy and regulatory environment and contributes to the establishment of effective economic organisations and institutions. The project facilitates learning between countries on the effectiveness of different instruments and institutional arrangements, crucial to the successful adoption of ESFIM's innovation and policy design process.

The newly established (2012) Pan Africa Farmers Organization (PAFO), an umbrella organization for farmer organizations at the regional, national and local levels is a key partner in ESFIM, the Farm Risk Management for Africa (FARMAF) project and PAEPARD. PAFO and its constituent members are key to ensuring technical and institutional innovations are adapted to local conditions.

FARMAF operates in Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Zambia. Smallholders in rainfed areas in sub-Saharan Africa are exposed to many risks, including droughts, floods, pests and diseases and volatile markets. FARMAF aims to make various tools available to enable them to manage these risks and to leverage finance, procure and use productivity-enhancing inputs and adopt marketing strategies to gain better returns. FARMAF has a particular focus on women farmers, who are responsible for a large proportion of agricultural production in Africa.

Box 1 Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets

The '*Support to advocacy agenda through collaborative research*' component of phase 2 of the ESFIM programme assisted national farmer organizations in several developing countries to formulate feasible, evidence-based propositions to change the institutional environment to enable effective market access for smallholders. In Kenya, an ESFIM study on the government's interventions in agricultural input and output markets, especially on the effects of subsidies to farmers for maize seed and fertiliser showed that only 12% of the target smallholder farmers benefited directly. Although they had increased yields and lower production costs, their net benefits were substantially reduced, because of persisting systemic constraints associated with poor infrastructure and limited access to formal markets. Moreover, the interventions in the input markets restricted the development of private input distribution systems, making future input supply more uncertain for most smallholder farmers. KENFAP used this evidence to support a formal resolution to the Kenyan Government to address the identified weaknesses before expanding the programme to cover other crops. (Ton and de Grip, 2011).

Capacity strengthening in agriculture and related sciences: partnering with universities

Capacity strengthening is a top priority to achieve full benefits from planned increases in investment in agricultural research. Within the PAEPARD project, there is a separate work package on capacity building which is jointly led by RUFORUM and AGRINATURA¹, which benefits the target research consortia and the organisations themselves. In multi-stakeholder teams, individual partners frequently have different capacity needs; individual, organizational and institutional which must be addressed holistically so that capacity strengthening interventions are mutually reinforcing.

AGRINATURA and RUFORUM have also collaborated in implementing several projects funded through the Educational Linkage (EDULINK) programme for cooperation between ACP countries and EU member states which is funded by the EC. EDULINK supports capacity strengthening and regional integration in higher education through institutional networking, and enhancement of the quality of higher education to meet labour market needs and development priorities of ACP States. In 2006-2009, six of the 55 projects funded concerned capacity building in agricultural education and agriculture, which has remained a key theme in subsequent phases. Through the partnership, quality assurance systems, leadership, management and cross-cutting professional competencies in research and innovation have been enhanced.

Advocacy for funding for demand-led agricultural research

AGRINATURA works with African partners to identify and disseminate evidence which can influence policy makers. It seeks to encourage key decision makers, including the EC, the African Union and other international partners and donor agencies, to mainstream multi-stakeholder agricultural research for development approaches within their programmes. For example, PAEPARD seeks to provide evidence to support its advocacy activities, whilst also aiming to influence the orientation and content of various calls for research proposals including the open Calls issued by the Africa Union itself.

Emerging partnership opportunities between Europe and Africa

The emerging post-2015 Development Agenda will integrate development objectives (post MDGs) and sustainable development objectives (post RIO+20); with objectives and specific

¹ AGRINATURA members involved are the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), The Istituto Agronomico Per L'Oltremare (IAO), the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) of the University of Greenwich, and the International Centre for Development Oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA).

targets for all countries. Integration and universality will provide a high-level policy framework to strengthen collaborations between North and South, and to further develop joint multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Horizon 2020 is a new European Commission programme through which research initiatives will be commissioned during the period 2014-20. One of the three priority themes is termed ‘Societal Challenges’ (to EU communities) which can be addressed with innovation developed through multi-disciplinary collaborations. In Horizon 2020, food security is considered to be a European challenge, although it is linked to a global challenge and is associated with sustainable agriculture. It is also linked to other societal challenges, such as energy and climate action, through the concept of the bioeconomy.

While Horizon 2020 focuses on European issues and competitiveness of Europe, there will be opportunities for international collaboration. Ecological intensification is of interest to both Europe and Africa and will benefit from close collaboration between research and education organizations and other stakeholders (Figure 1). A knowledge-intensive approach and substantial investments in research and innovation will be needed.

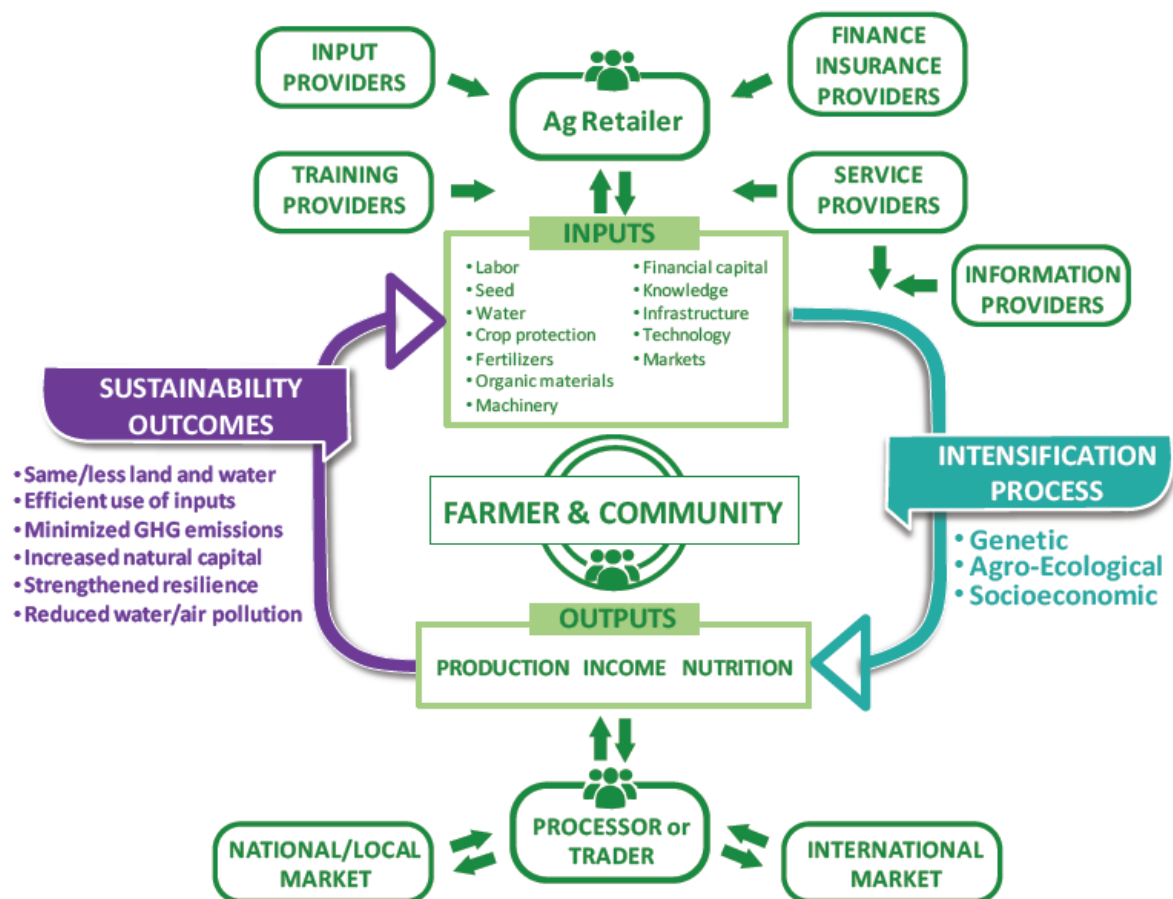


Figure 1: Schema of a sustainable intensification system (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2013)

Lessons learned from partnerships

Much of AGRINATURA's collaboration with partner organizations has involved multi-stakeholder partnerships to facilitate and advocate for demand-led ARD. This has raised awareness of the importance of such approaches among research and development organizations, governments, development partners, and other actors in agricultural innovation systems. The PAEPARD project highlights that multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships take time to develop and consolidate. Organizations from different working cultures need to reconcile disparate perspectives, acknowledge differences in expectations and build an effective working relationship. Differing capabilities may be a strength in a partnership, but also suggest capacities need to be enhanced through appropriate interventions. The time taken is sometimes considered a transaction cost. However, if funding agencies take a longer-term view and support initiatives beyond the standard three- or four-year project term, beneficial outcomes are much more likely. The 'transaction cost' represents an 'investment cost'. For example, PAEPARD project partners have been able to demonstrate to the EC the need for continuous investment in the project to be able to generate the evidence that multi-stakeholder partnerships can work for the benefit of farmers and other end-users.

To date, PAEPARD has revealed that current funding mechanisms are not adequately oriented towards demand-led ARD, despite the growing body of evidence that it can bring benefits to rural communities². PAEPARD is using the lessons learned to advocate for mainstreaming demand-led ARD in the programmes of national governments and donor agencies.

Many researchers in Europe and elsewhere want to engage in development-oriented research, but have little incentive to participate. Career progression depends on publishing scientific papers in journals with high impact factors. Multi-disciplinary studies are generally rated less highly than research in individual disciplinary areas. There are signs in some European countries that greater value is now being attached for recognizing that research for development impact should be seen as a key measure of research success.

Conclusions

AGRINATURA demonstrates how common interests in supporting agricultural development can translate into tangible initiatives for poverty eradication and food security. Sourcing experiences and scientific insights from across Europe and Africa have been shown to be essential for addressing the complexity of challenges related to agriculture and food systems. Moreover, inter-continental partnerships contribute to the balancing of interests.

Given global food security and agricultural issues, the existing strong relationships with regional bodies and research organisations provide the basis for new research partnerships between Europe and other continents including Africa. These partnerships would no longer view agricultural development challenges in isolation, but address issues that are of common interest to European and African societies and beyond, refocusing capacity development and higher education to meet joint needs.

References

² For example, from the sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme led by FARA (<http://www.fara-africa.org/our-projects/ssa-cp/>).

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