

International Conference

European Agricultural Research towards greater impact on Global Challenges

Summary of presentations and discussions of the International Conference, held in Brussels, Belgium, on 5th June 2013

The following has been prepared by the organisers as a support to participants and others, but is in no way a thorough and exhaustive report from the conference. Presentations can be found on the ERA-ARD Website at <http://www.era-ard.org/international-conference/>.

Session 1 Opening Session

The conference built on the belief that there is a need to strengthen coordination to achieve greater impact in ARD. The first and immediate impact of this conference has been the large turn-out of participants from a variety of stakeholders: 150 participants registered for the conference. Agriculture is back on the agenda, but the ARD community needs innovative approaches for continued and strengthened partnerships.

Conference expectations:

- 1. Bring Agricultural Research (AR) and Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) closer together, and ARD to take a more bottom-up and multi-stakeholder approach;**
- 2. Collate ideas and examples that strengthen the impact of AR – ARD as a springboard to next steps into the future.**

Session 2 The Global Challenges: Europe and the GCARD Road Map

Europe needs to strengthen national innovation systems and have a coordinated approach to support global, regional and sub-regional ARD programmes and strategies, not confined to the CGIAR. The private sector is increasingly interested in ARD; they are also important stakeholders in this debate.

ARD partnerships need to allow space/support for farmer-led innovation. Multi-stakeholder approaches need more time than generally allowed by traditional funding instruments. There is a requirement for flexible funding instruments (more programmatic) and for a permanent web portal that tracks investments, actors and programmes.

There is overlap between various ARD initiatives. This overlap should be reduced through a stepwise approach to combining processes from the national level upwards. A Joint Strategic Working Group under EIARD and SCAR should be established to address this, based on lessons learnt in completed and on-going ARD initiatives.

Conclusion: There is a need to link AR - ARD, for better coordination between regions, countries and programmes, and for flexible financing instruments promoting ARD aligned with demand, particularly from smallholder farmers. Alignment and coordination needs to feed into global processes through GCARD.

Session 3 ERA-ARD – lessons learnt

The ERA-ARD project outputs reinforce the need for cooperation in the AR – ARD domain, looking for co-ownership and mutual relevance. The proposed Strategic Working Group under EIARD and SCAR will need to develop strategies that integrate AR – ARD.

There is political commitment to address the challenges of contributing to the MDGs. The MDG toolbox, developed by ERA-ARD, is a step forward in improving ex ante and ex post evaluation of the contribution of projects and/or programmes to MDGs. This could be used by funders and programmes.

The Alliance Concept, developed by ERA-ARD, should be used for development of collaborative research projects, with funders and beneficiaries participating from the start. It is important to capitalise on existing networks and partnerships, not generate new ones, and to involve all stakeholders and in particular farmer organisations and the private sector. Alliance concept documentation should be made available through an open-access portal.

It is important to harmonise ARD programming procedures across Europe. Existing mechanisms and structures need to be the entry point for strengthened collaboration within Europe. Interdisciplinary research adds value, but new research partnerships add to the challenge of coordination.

Conclusion: A shared vision, better cooperation and improving efficiencies are essential for the future of ARD. We need to address the gap at the programme level, and focus on being catalytic with funding, rather than generate new initiatives.

Session 4 Research and Innovation partnerships between Europe and other regions of the world – learning from a diversity of approaches

PAEPARD¹ learnt that there is a need for advocacy to influence donor policies, test ideas that ARD funds should be governed by research-users, and help build National Innovation Funds by SROs² who work with NARS³.

The recently started ERA Net - ERAfrica – has shown that strong commitment and support from both African and European governments is a key success ingredient. Coordinators of ERAfrica transnational proposals are predominantly from Africa.

¹ Platform for African European Partnership on Agricultural Research for Development

² Sub-regional Research Organisation

³ National Agricultural Research Systems

EMBRAPA⁴ encouraged promotion of opportunities for international cooperation at the frontier of knowledge in AR / ARD of shared interest to the partner countries.

The SEAG⁵ role in ERA-ARD was to create more involvement of Southern partners, representing the regional fora under GFAR⁶ (FARA, FORAGRO, CACAARI, APAARI, AARINENA), to share experiences from southern countries and countries with emerging economies, to participate in work packages and comment on key documents, etc. However, there still is an innovation divide, and a need to further improve real two-way collaboration: It is imperative not just to hear but also to listen to SEAG partners.

Conclusion: Multi-stakeholder partnerships are rapidly developing from aid to international cooperation and co-ownership. Effective partnerships are a key factor to success. However, developing these partnerships takes time. We need, therefore, to capitalize on existing partnerships, through flexible funding instruments.

Session 5 Improving the contribution of European agricultural research to addressing global challenges

Addressing global issues is not only in the interest of developing countries, but also for Europe. We must translate rhetoric into action. Current global challenges call for a more ambitious research agenda at all levels, not limited by geographical boundaries.

Global challenges include food and nutrition security, climate change, food and health, stewardship and biobased economy – all are related to the agri-food sector which is both a contributor as well as part of the solution. At the same time, agriculture is the engine of developing economies, of the bio-economy, as well as the basis for food security, sustainability, all-inclusiveness and a climate smart future. With an increasing global population and rapidly growing welfare, there is an urgent need for sustainable intensification.

Conclusion: We need to close the gap between research and innovation. The basis is mutual challenges, the perspective is mutual benefits. The challenge is to align.

Session 6 Linking the past with the future

Dr. Guido Gryseels, Director-General of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) presented how the RMCA aims to link, through cooperation, research and collections of the past with global challenges of the future. He focused on Biodiversity research in Central-Africa, showcasing the Congo Biodiversity Initiative and its main accomplishment, the 'Centre de Surveillance de la Biodiversité' in Kisangani, DRC.

⁴ Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation

⁵ Southern and Emerging economies Advisory Group for ERA-ARD

⁶ Global Forum on Agricultural Research

Session 7 Summary and Conclusion

How can we contribute to greater impact on global challenges through European research?

- Global impact has no geographical boundaries, therefore, fragmented initiatives will not achieve this goal. Europe should have a coherent regional approach and strengthen the capacity in the South.
- We need to ensure involvement of end users in the development of the research as well as translation of research outputs to the end users. ARD is in Europe's own interest and there are many similarities between the challenges in the South and in Europe. Agriculture must be more attractive so that young farmers wish to take over.
- Linking to existing initiatives will increase efficiencies and impact. There is an increasing need for access to information as well as showing the impact of research.
- We need to be ambitious and look across the whole food system instead of primary production (crops, livestock, and fisheries) only.

Concluding remarks:

The conference recommends to collectively focus on:

Shared vision:

- Linking AR and ARD, should be taken up by a Joint Strategic Working Group under EIARD and SCAR
- Improved coordination between countries should lead to more synergy and a more efficient use of research funds
- Greater impact of European research on solving global issues should be achieved

Better cooperation:

- National, regional and global multi-stakeholder partnerships should be built acknowledging that this takes time and effort, and should involve end users and SME's as well.
- Improved alignment is required, building on existing strategies, global (GCARD) as well as regional (CAADP)
- Southern consultation needs to be increased and advice listened to

Improving efficiencies:

- Funding instruments should be flexible and catalyse existing initiatives, rather than generating new initiatives (programmes or partnerships)
- Europe should support intensification of research collaboration in sustainable intensification of food production (such as IntensAfrica).
- Lessons learned from ERA-ARD should be used.

Translate rhetoric into action. The moment is now.