

ERA-ARD Briefing Paper



Strategic vision for European ARD: beyond ERA-ARD

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Background

For developing countries, agriculture is crucial for economic growth, through its role in food security, and in addressing global issues such as bio-energy, climate change, etc. Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) responds to the needs to feed growing populations and to drive economic growth in a sustainable manner.

The second phase of ERA-ARD is a € 1 million European Research Area Network (ERA-Net) project funded under the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme from 2010 to 2013. The project is a partnership of 17 organisations involved with funding agricultural research for development in 15 European countries. ERA-ARD aims to improve ARD coordination between national research programmes and promote collaboration in European agricultural research for the world's poor.

ERA-ARD briefing papers are made available widely to sensitize the European population to the critical importance of ARD and that its results and impact are not limited to "outside Europe" but also have direct benefits for "within Europe". The achievements of ERA-ARD are documented and made available through its website www.era-ard.org, to benefit both stakeholders and the wider public.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of EC.

Strategic vision: beyond ERA-ARD

Rationale

Agricultural research is one of the main options available to address the challenges of food security and reduction of poverty, particularly in the longer term. Cooperation between funders of research should promote the efficiency and impact of research. In this respect, ERA-ARD has developed as a network community aiming at better cooperation between European states and developing countries and has existed since 2005, to improve the impact of agricultural research for the poor. Research and capacity strengthening are being developed within the European Research Area (ERA) which is in turn part of a global network, working in line with the GCARD Roadmap: the key priorities are now being set by the developing countries; there is a focus on (sustainable) partnerships between stakeholders; research programmes are aimed at structural changes; capacity strengthening is included and research is not an isolated activity, but integrated in the wider change process. In other words, ERA-ARD is directed towards impact, both in science and society.

Europe provides the majority of public donor ARD funding, worldwide, through bilateral and multilateral channels. European funding for ARD programmes channelled through institutions such as the CGIAR, FARA, ASARECA, the various national agricultural systems of developing countries, and some CSOs, etc., is estimated at around 350 M€ per year. The European public investment in ARD through funds channelled through European research institutions, is estimated at another 350 M€ per year.

The impact of the latter funding, which includes a vast number of national and bilateral initiatives, has traditionally been less visible due to lack of transnational cooperation and coordination. Therefore, for European countries to reduce this fragmentation, they should aim at improved coordination, increased numbers of transnational partnerships, increased amounts of joint funding and increased numbers of alliances with development partners.

List of acronyms

Acronym	Description
AR	Agricultural Research
ARD	Agricultural Research for Development
ASARECA	Association for strengthening agricultural research in Eastern and central Africa
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
EIARD	European Initiative on Agricultural Research for Development
ERA	European Research Area
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GCARD	Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
SEAG	Southern and Emerging economies Advisory Group
SCAR	Standing Committee on Agricultural Research

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Strategic objectives regarding European ARD

The strategic objectives of ERA-ARD have been in line with international recommendations: to increase the impact of European research in achieving the MDG's and promoting sustainable economic development of the world's poor and to improve European contribution to global ARD by joining forces, strengthening partnerships and improving access to knowledge. The ERA-ARD consortium members have confirmed messages expressed at various global conferences such as GCARD2 (2012); the second conference on Climate Smart Agriculture in Hanoi (2012); the Foresight study on food and farming¹ and the scientific conference on Climate Smart Agriculture in Wageningen (2011); putting both the sustainable intensification of production and the resilience of agricultural systems on the agenda. ERA-ARD sees integrated approaches as important: multidisciplinary or even trans-disciplinary collaboration between different stakeholders, public, private and non-governmental, should have greater impact than sector research alone. Similarly, the need for approaches at various levels of scale is acknowledged: individual household, local community, sub-regional and regional levels, integrating effects on resources such as water and biodiversity across these various levels. This has been reflected in the ERA-ARD activities of the network and will be continued in future transnational partnerships between EU member states and developing countries.

Outputs and added value of ERA-ARD

The ERA-ARD net started with phase I in 2005, involving 15 European countries. ERA-ARD aimed to coordinate and optimise European ARD funding to better support the EU MDG policy and its implementation, and to maintain and develop European scientific capacities and innovation systems in the field of ARD.

ERA-ARD phase I and II have collectively generated the following results, some of which are still being developed and refined:

- European stakeholders:
 - Documented ARD research policies in partner countries
 - Developed recommendations to improve Europe's impact for achieving the MDG's
 - Tested mechanisms for European transnational programming of ARD
 - Contributed to the SCAR/EIARD/ERA-ARD task force on bridging the gap between AR and ARD
- Developing country stakeholders:
 - Built a network of national ARD partners from both European and southern countries in the niche of joint programming of agricultural research and transnational cooperation.
 - Developed mechanisms for mobilising and articulating southern advice in European ARD programming via its Southern and Emerging economies Advisory Group (SEAG), explicitly targeting the users and linking research to implementation.
 - Experimented with a *modus operandi* to coordinate research demand and offer in a flexible manner, through investment in regional and thematic multi-stakeholder platforms in the South.

¹ Foresight. The future of food and farming, 2011. Final project report, Gov. Office for Science.

The ultimate value of the ERA-ARD policies and partnerships must be translated into improvement of activities aimed at achieving the MDGs through application of knowledge, but this is difficult to quantify in the short term and on the basis of an individual activity. The challenges of ARD are huge given the limited life span of a project. The outcomes, considered in terms of the theory of change, are less easy to monitor as they often consist of qualitative changes. In addition, the number of joint projects funded through the two calls during the ERA-ARD project periods has been rather modest.^{2/3} These joint calls have not proven a viable mechanism due to the high transaction costs with limited funds. There are, however, other positive outcomes, which have arisen as a result of having joint calls. A better understanding of the differences and similarities of the various funding mechanisms in EU countries has been gained, and the benefits and need for a shared European ARD research policy have been strongly acknowledged.

Two major benefits from ERA-ARD have been identified:

1. *Strengthened networking and consultation*

More clearly quantified is the added value of the ERA-ARD network in itself, which is to link funders with a view to greater contribution of the European efforts towards achieving the MDGs. To this end, ERA-ARD has tried and tested various joint efforts to streamline transnational processes towards harmonised research policy. The network has been successful in generating mutual understanding and a focus on priority themes, fed by various consultation processes both in Europe and in Africa. The consultation processes have included developing the ARD-Alliance concept, the aim of which is to build on the diversity and experience within Europe and establish a mechanism for forming regional ARD-Alliances around joint activities and a common understanding of priority thematic areas. Based on the agreement on common values and goals, the ARD-Alliance concept seeks to increase the complementarities of the contributions of its members and to foster synergies. For this purpose parties are involved in a demand driven cycle of goal-oriented consultations towards strengthening innovation. Its value is mutually beneficial for the demand and the supply sides: better demand articulation generating more appropriate projects as basis for more impact. Involvement of representatives from the South has been considerably enhanced by the ERA-ARD formation of the Southern and Emerging economies Advisory Group (SEAG), to provide input from partners from developing and emerging economies countries in the decision-making process of ERA-ARD; to deepen the demand-oriented approach of ARD and to lay the fundament for a more permanent consultation mechanism for the European ARD policy makers. The consultation of regional representatives has been considered valuable to focus on priorities from the demand side and it is hoped that it will continue on a voluntary basis by the member states, also after finalizing the current ERA-ARD net.

2. *Improved transparency in the European research landscape and practical tools for improving contribution to MDG's*

Improving transparency in the diversity of the European offer comes through a suggestion for a European ARD portal - a portal of portals – that aims at the facilitation of access to European ARD information, expertise and collaboration partners as well as

² Joint transnational funding of ERA-ARD projects was 1.6 M€ and 1.5 M€ brought together by 11 and 6 funders, in phase I and II respectively. The overall available European funding of national and international research programmes in ARD is estimated at 700 M€.

³ SCAR/EIARD/ERA-ARD Task force Improving the contribution of ERA to ARD

the facilitation of interaction and networking⁴. By building on the current ERA-ARD portal, this will be initiated in the near future. The MDG toolbox being developed by ERA-ARD II is useful to estimate the relative value of various MDG aspects and impact in practice;

The added value of ERA-ARD is, therefore, in the improved alignment of ARD programmes between European states as well as policies and programmes between Europe and developing countries', being a much strengthened basis for better coordination policy of ARD.

Perspectives for the future

Considering the ambitious objectives of ERA-ARD and its added values, there is a strong desire to keep the ERA-ARD network alive and working towards improved coordination and alignment of policies in Europe and between Europe and the Southern policy and programme partners. As outlined above, transnational calls are only an appropriate avenue to provide increased coherence and synergy between European investments when transaction costs can be limited. For the near future, the policy-makers continue to value the goal of making better use of results generated by each other's research efforts; to improve alignment between European AR and ARD; and also to increase visibility and accessibility of the European comparative advantage in the ARD area in research and capacity strengthening for partners in developing countries.

Several options are available for European ARD the future. They are not mutually exclusive, but might be applied at the same time or sequentially:

1. **Continuation as a network** for transnational cooperation and joint activities, using the current Alliance concept with demand articulation through a strong SEAG participation, aiming at alignment of national funding. This would involve agreement to form (ad-hoc) coalitions between individual partners to collaborate on thematic programmes, avoiding duplication and fragmentation of European ARD efforts. This approach should be associated with an increase from project to programme level. The MDG Toolbox might be helpful to estimate the potential strength of partnerships.
2. Development of a **Strategic Working Group**, keeping ARD research coordination and prioritization on the agenda of EU, in line with AR and with a view to ensure that EU contributions will also benefit the rural poor.
3. **Merging and scaling-up bilateral, national and international initiatives**, such as developing an Article 185 on food security.

Option 1 would mean keeping the Alliance concept and SEAG alive through a European transnational network funded by national governments. The Alliance concept and SEAG participation may favour shared ARD visions and avoid duplication or fragmentation at programme level. National funding offers an opportunity to avoid high transaction costs and work together, adding value by bringing in specific expertise. It is recommended to assign particular member states to be in charge of coordination of a given theme or for a specific region. The outcome of ERA-ARD's second multi-stakeholder workshop to be held in West Africa in March 2013 will complement experience from the first workshop held in East Africa in 2012 and will lay the foundation for future success.

⁴ ERA-ARD Briefing Paper Suggestions for the European ARD portal - a Portal of Portals

Option 2, already being prepared under SCAR, provides a good opportunity for opening up to other Member States and consolidating the achievements by contributing to the mainstream discourse. This option could lead to better coordination of European ARD if positioned as a step in a process of alignment. EIARD already provides a policy framework to facilitate such dialogue, and is open to cover this broader area. The Strategic Working Group is a logical follow-up to the work by the SCAR/EIARD/ERA-ARD task force. One of the main tasks will be to further promote the alignment of AR and ARD at various levels of scale. The experience of the ERA-ARD network provides a valuable input.

Option 3 is the longer-term ambition and a suitable follow-up to this ERA-Net. In fact, the actual incentive of the EC wishing to explore an Article 185 initiative on food security seems attractive. A joint programming with a longer-term partnership might be a powerful and sustainable tool to improve coordination and, in the end, increase impact, although not all the details and consequences are yet known. For example option 3 could offer the possibility to align international research programmes with national and/or multinational efforts. An alternative way is to reinforce, at EU level, certain CGIAR programmes by a consortium of research partners from one or more EU member states with increased leverage and EU visibility as an advantage. This might be an extension of the collaboration that already exists in some European countries. Again, it demands for better synergy between various national research funding agencies, which has already been addressed by the current ERA-ARD partners.

Conclusion and recommendations

Although the level of ambition of the ERA-ARD network would fit much larger initiatives, reality is that most of the ARD funding is at present provided via national research institutes, independent from CGIAR funding. As a result, coordination on global food security within Europe will continue to be limited, unless member states confirm the urgency of making progress by intensified cooperation. Despite several attempts to improve coordination, bringing the envisaged ambitions to practice has been difficult. The European ARD landscape still appears to be rather fragmented. At the national level, there is often a struggle for coordination or even communication between the various ministries involved in ARD funding and programming (e.g. agriculture, foreign affairs, science and education). Similarly at the European level, improved coordination between Directorate Generals ought to be given a higher priority. Member states discuss contribution to the CGIAR through EIARD, but so far, EIARD has not widely been exploited to align national ARD programmes, unlike SCAR for AR.

Option 1, voluntary **continuation of a network** in transnational cooperation with actual national funding, seems to be a feasible step for the near future. High transaction costs are mitigated and the current benefits of the network (alliance with the south, efficient match-making between supply and demand, mutual learning) are retained.

Option 2, the preparation of a **Strategic Working Group**, has, at the time of writing, been initiated, and may extend coordination efforts towards facilitating national ARD coordination to the EU level, but has the risk of remaining non-committal.

Option 3 has the highest added value in both alignment and visibility, but requires better coordination at the national level and is very ambitious. Perhaps an **EU Article 185** initiative on food security is an instrument that can improve the effectiveness by scaling up various scattered projects into a larger transnational framework. First inventory steps are being taken on request of EC DG Research and Innovation.

Follow-up

The ERA-ARD consortium partners would like to invite feedback and further discussion of the proposed strategy. Please contact Patricia Wagenmakers at p.s.wagenmakers@minez.nl (ERA-ARD Strategic vision for European ARD: beyond ERA-ARD briefing author) and/or Sander van Opstal (ERA-ARD coordinator) at A.J.F.M.vanOpstal@minez.nl.

Quotation

Wagenmakers, P.S. (2013) Strategic vision for European ARD: beyond ERA-ARD. ERA-ARD briefing paper (<http://www.era-ard.org/outputs/phase-ii/>) - 7 pp.