

ERA-ARD Briefing Paper

The Alliance Concept – a framework for Agricultural Research for Development

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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.

ERA-ARD Alliance Concept

Abstract

The ERA-ARD Alliance Concept is a coordination instrument for policy makers, funders, researchers, and stakeholders to form regional ARD-alliances and pool expertise and resources. In an nutshell, the steps that are required for the formation are:

1. Formation of a regional ARD-alliance which defines a framework for joint ARD activities, including a joint strategy, and the identification of a common under-standing of a priority thematic area
2. Assess needs and identify the corresponding offer following the mapping of on-going programmes and existing relevant thematic networks. Alliance members negotiate complementary investment into research
3. Organization of two types of support to ensure the integration of actions to-wards innovation:
 - a. Programmes that fund complementary research and capacity development activities within the frame of calls for proposals
 - b. Programmes that support accompanying measures to allow on-going projects to join into the framework
4. Actors from projects emerging from a new joint call, but also actors from on-going projects (actors from Europe and Africa), form sustainable collaborative transnational thematic networks (CTTN), i.e. research alliances

Based on this, Alliance members will proceed with decision making towards joint funding (i.e. call for proposals), the alignment to and strengthening of, or complementing current ARD and capacity development landscapes. The approach will support a continued dialogue among scientists, extension specialists, stakeholders and users, to generate impact on the ground.

List of acronyms

Acronym	Description
ARD	Agricultural Research for Development
ASARECA	Association for strengthening agricultural research in Eastern and central Africa
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
CTTN	Collaborative Transnational Thematic Network
ERA	European Research Area
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GCARD	Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

Launching a reference framework for ARD

Background and rationale

The first phase of ERA-ARD (I) among others promoted a shared vision and strategic agenda on ARD in Europe, analysed collaboration models to implement joint and transnational activities and increased involvement of Southern partners through the establishment of an Advisory Group. The second phase of ERA-ARD (II) continued to work towards expansion of joint and transnational activities, and at the same time the design and implementation of European ARD programmes with significantly stronger involvement of end users.

According to GCARD, characteristics of a well-functioning ARD system include:

1. Priorities based on demand and needs: Inclusively define key ARD priorities and actions, driven by evolving national, regional and global development needs
2. Partnership as the basis for change: Invest in ensuring equitable partnership and accountability among all stakeholders in agricultural innovation and developmental change
3. Structural change: Actively achieve increased investments in human, institutional and financial re-sources for ARD systems to meet demands in development
4. Capacity development: Develop required human and institutional capacities for generation, access and effective use of agricultural knowledge in development
5. Integration and dialogue: Effectively coordinate linkages relating innovation to development programmes and policies
6. Monitoring of progress and impact: Demonstrate its value and gains recognition by society through involvement of stake-holders in effective demonstration and reporting of outcomes

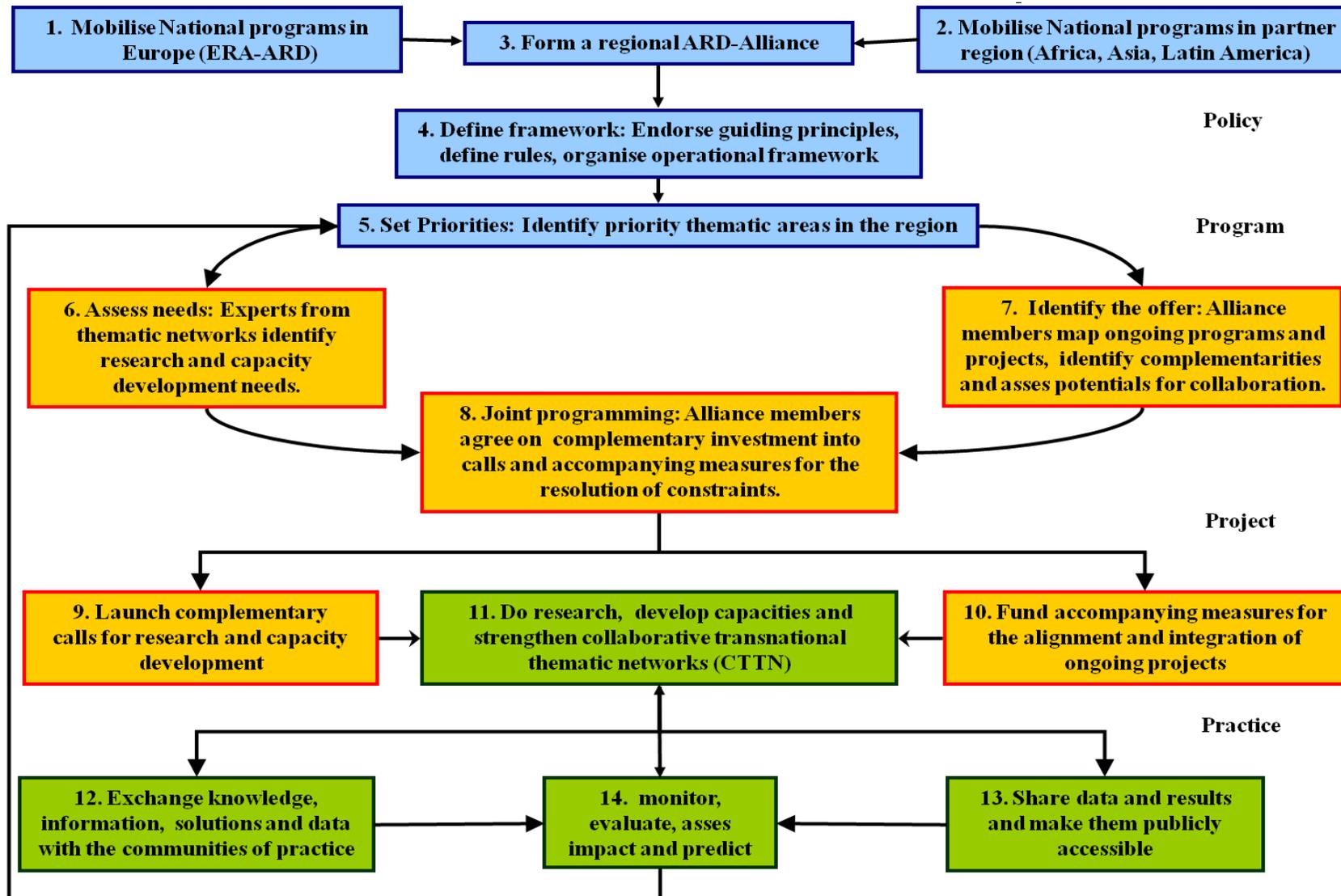
Funding modes therefore need restructuring to support integrated systems including not only research and capacity development but also necessary infrastructures, supportive technicians, extension specialists and stakeholders.

ERA-ARD set out to develop an instrument for transnational coordinating policymakers, funders, researchers and stakeholders from regional ARD-alliances to pool expertise and resources. This reference framework is a component of ERA-ARD's conceptual basis: the Alliance Concept (see Figure 1).

Regional ARD-Alliances

In a pilot for East & Central Africa, ERA-ARD together with FARA and other regional experts tested an approach for strengthening collaboration with partners in the target regions towards the achievement of the MDGs. The resulting approach promotes the formation of Regional ARD-Alliances by ERA-ARD consortium members and respective regional / national government funding program owners or managers (representing the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme - CAADP process, National Development Plans, Agriculture Sector and Education Administration, Agriculture Sector Development Strategy and Investment Plans, etc.). Other governmental or international institutions or programmes, foundations, agencies, NGOs, etc., active in ARD or academic capacity development in the respective region could join the Alliance.

Figure 1: the ERA-ARD process for collaboration towards impact



The process to form Regional ARD-Alliances comprises different steps, as follows:

- Set up a regional alliance between European and Southern national programmes in a specific region (e.g. ASARECA Region) to jointly support ARD
- This Alliance will jointly negotiate and define a framework for the implementation of joint activities within the scope of ARD (research and funding), assuring a harmonised thematic scope and complementary investments
- The Alliance will identify and take into account Southern research needs
- The Alliance will assure the integration of existing activities and thus implement or strengthen so called collaborative transnational thematic networks. Such networks assure integration of actors and the implementation of sustainable structures
- Programme owners are intended to both launch new and joint calls, but also initiate the integration of ongoing projects, which are carried out in the frame of their programmes

Regional ARD-Alliance members are requested to follow specific **guiding principles**:

- Focus on impacts on MDGs and in particular the improvement of livelihoods of the rural poor
- Contribute to the formation and strengthening of impact oriented collaborative transnational thematic networks
- Follow recommendations of the Dialogue of Ministers of Agriculture, Science and Technology
- Share ownership of programmes with respective National Development Plans
- Complementary investment according to the needs identified during joint programming.
- Follow value chain approach
- Addresses the research, capacity development and innovation continuum from basic research to farmer training
- Data and solutions are common good and are made publicly accessible for sharing
- Joint M&E and Impact Assessment

The **thematic areas** of the Regional ARD-Alliances are regionally specific and based on pre-evaluation of

- Bottom-up demand as expressed in farmer information networks
- Catalogue of running research and capacity development projects
- Respective bottlenecks identified by the regional National Development Plans, Investment Plans or comparable documents

Evaluation will follow three dimensions to focus the demand forming the technical agenda of the co-ordination and alignment event of the Regional ARD-Alliance:

- Critical level for need of intervention in the ARD continuum (research and innovation, demonstration, extension, training)
- Bottleneck (thematic area) along the rural production value chain (production environment, genetic resources, production technologies, postharvest & processing, market environment)
- Relevant agricultural commodities and products

Conclusion and Recommendations

Regional ARD-Alliances will invite relevant experts to present scientific solutions meeting evaluated demand. Proposed solutions will be discussed with scientists and stakeholders for prioritization. Based on this, Alliance members will elaborate a reference framework for selected thematic areas that will guide national programs in decision making towards joint and complementary funding (a call for proposals), the alignment to and strengthening of, or complementing current ARD and capacity development landscapes.

Representatives of strategic and policy institutions (SCAR, EIARD, the Global and the co-organizing Regional Forum for Agricultural Research) are invited to observe the process. Monitoring and feedback to the Regional ARD-Alliance is provided by participating regional (NAROs, extension services, university alliances, professional associations, farmer networks, civil society organisations) as well as ERA-ARD stakeholders (AGRINATURA, and other European as well as national ARD organizations).

Expected Outcomes and Results of the Regional ARD-Alliance Process:

- Improved contribution and visibility of Europe towards achieving the MDGs due to higher effectiveness and efficiency of its research for development programs
- More coherence of ERA-ARD co-operative research and capacity development interventions
- Better access of rural sectors in developing countries to European ARD expertise
- Increased ownership of research and capacity development initiatives by regional producers and policy makers
- Commitments for additional investments by ERA-ARD, regional governments', and other interested programme managers.

Follow-up

The ERA-ARD consortium partners would like to invite feedback and further discussion of the proposed step-wise approach. Please contact Marc Bernard at mbe@zadi.de (ERA-ARD The Alliance Concept – a framework for Agricultural Research for Development briefing author) and/or Patricia Wagenmakers (ERA-ARD coordinator) at p.s.wagenmakers@minez.nl.

Quotation

Bernard, M. (2013) The Alliance Concept – a framework for Agricultural Research for Development. ERA-ARD briefing paper (<http://www.era-ard.org/outputs/phase-ii/>) - 6 pp.