



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

ARIMNet

Work Package 3_ D 3

Implementation of joint activities: identification and specification of the enabling conditions



2012



1. Introduction

The challenges of the global food crisis, followed by those of the global financial crisis, have made room for more integrated policy reforms and have given more importance to the agricultural sector. The Mediterranean countries have different advantages in agricultural fields and some of them have accumulated rich experiences in application of agricultural high technology, biotechnology, and agro-digital technology. It is clear that similarities and complementarities among these countries are a good basis for international cooperation and exchanges.

The ARIMNet is an FP7 action that addresses common Mediterranean agricultural research issues to convert national research programmes to common benefit transnational research programmes through establishing a platform which can carry out cooperation and knowledge exchanges between different Mediterranean countries and the enhancement of common development in agricultural sector in order to gradually increase agricultural productivity. Therefore, the scope of the cooperation can be flexible and diversified, and can be conducted for integrated projects (transnational activities) that aim at exchange of successful agricultural reform and management experience and/or to share quality plant, animal varieties and germplasm resources (joint activities). It could also furthering regional agricultural research integration in a framework of transnational cooperation through supporting partners in certain agricultural fields by:

- Implementing new knowledge and technology to ensure the appropriate and sustainable use of natural agricultural resources, exchange technical expertise between partners,
- Increasing the use of information and communication technology, improving participation in international research programmes and ensuring co-ordination between various stakeholders,
- And finally identifying the demand-based needs of agricultural research in the light of climate changes and global food crisis.

Bearing in mind that cooperation of Mediterranean countries may create a lot of opportunities for scientific and economic development, however, terms and conditions for Agricultural cooperation could display a huge diversity among countries and among even individual projects.

The ARIMNet project is expected to address those issues with the overall objective to trigger and enhance the coordination of national programmes through the demonstration of its feasibility and a final target that is to translate this coordination into action, mainly through the launching of a call to promote transnational cooperation but also through identification of possible joint activities.

The ARIMNet project is classically broken out in work packages (WP), where each WP represents an essential source of information for the next one. It could be broken out as well into two phases.

The first one, which extended from October 2008 to December 2010, was devoted to the identification and the analysis of the national programmes (WP1) and the identification of strategic priorities (WP2) as a driver for the following work packages.

The second one, which started in January 2011, was strongly targeted on the preparation, the launching and the management of a call that was actually considered by the partners as a priority. Thus, WP4 has been developed before WP3 and the work done by the Egyptian and



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

the Portuguese partners for WP3 has been strongly influenced by all the work done for and lessons drawn from WP4, even if the project was initially to lead both work package in parallel. That means also that priority has been given to transnational activities over joint activities for which, in the light of WP4, it became clear that a first step – identifying the basic requirements to organise various kind of joint activity (“enabling conditions for implementation of joint activities” as written in the ARIMNet Document of Work) – was necessary. The WP3 tasks were therefore partly re-designed in that way to serve as a tool to identify and specify decision-making process that should lead to the implementation of various joint activities to promote greater coherence at Mediterranean scale.

2. Barriers that could hinder coordination and cooperation

One of the tasks that were identified in WP2 was precisely the production of a report on barriers that could hinder coordination and cooperation in the Mediterranean¹. The purpose here is not to re-discuss the report but to highlight some points that could be important in the case of joint activities.

A first remark is that the experience gained through the ARIMNet call shows that there are very few barriers to coordination and cooperation, once the choice of a virtual common pot has been chosen for the funding process and management.

Two main issues, already identified in the above-mentioned report, would certainly need to be deepened:

- Recruitment and exchange of young scientists in a perspective of capacity development (a crucial issue in the Mediterranean)²;
- IPR management.

Nevertheless, experience gained from ARIMNet call is not necessarily relevant in any case of joint activities where the purpose is to organise the convergence of national practices that could be very different from one country to another. What is a potential barrier in the case of a transnational activity will not be considered as such in the case of the implementation of a joint activity.

A joint call results from a decision of the partners to empower bodies that, at least for the common part of the activity, are substituted to national bodies (Call Board, International Evaluation Committee). Specific tools and rules are implemented (Electronic Submission System, Guidelines for applicants and for evaluation)

A joint activity results from the common will of the partners in a specific field of activity to work together but according to their own rules. That means to make coherent practices that are different and the adoption, as driver, of common standards that each national set of rule should tend to adapt (e.g. evaluation and selection procedures, recruitment and mobility, opening of facilities and data bases, etc.). The organisation of joint activities is a process of internationalisation of research activities that imposes constraints that must be carefully and precisely assessed. The work done in WP3 is an attempt towards such an assessment.

3. Lessons drawn from ARIMNet Call

Open calls for collaborative projects aim to enhance and to foster scientific research and cooperation among the ARIMNet partners’ scientific community. This ERA-NET has successfully developed the 1st Call on collaborative projects, and the steps already fulfilled are summarized in the table below.

¹ ARIMNet WP2: Analysis of gaps and overlaps in current research activities. Task 2.2: Barriers that hinder future cooperation. January, 2011.

² See below Chapter 4



STEPS	EXAMPLES: ARIMNet 1st CALL
1 - Definition of beneficiaries	Researchers, public/private (SME's), research institutions, NGO's dealing with research in Med-Agriculture.
2 - Scientific topics and subtopics	Agricultural production and sustainability; management of land and natural resources; food chain and security; soil management, water de-pollution.
3 - Funding commitment accordingly to size/capacity of scientific community	Budget availability of each partner stated in a formal document (MoU).
4- Common eligibility criteria	Minimum 3 partners; geographical distribution - North/South.
5 – Common public announcement of the Call	Common webpage; simultaneous national/regional webpages.
6- Production of Guidelines and setting up of an ESS	Guidelines for Applicants, Guidelines for Evaluation Electronic Submission System (ESS)
7- Setting up a Call Office	
8- Setting up a Call Board	
9- Setting up an International Evaluation Committee	
10- Common evaluation and common selection procedures + Feedback to the applicants	Common evaluator's database; joint final evaluation meeting; global ranked list of all the evaluated projects;
11 – Common timetable aiming at calendar synchronisation	Common deadlines for all the procedures, including contracting and beginning of the projects.
12 – Follow-up	Common follow-up through ARIMNET secretariat and national funding agencies follow-up.

This report is not the place for an exhaustive return of experience on ARIMNet Call but some comments are necessary that could be useful for the implementation of joint activities.

The funding commitment of partners in the call was secured through a MoU between them. Problems arose with the large differences in the level of funds partners committed to. It created discrepancies in the ability to participate and then a limitation in the number of projects that could finally be funded. Even if the situation is not the same in the case of joint activities, the issue of the level of commitment of each partner should be carefully explored and secured before implementing a joint activity.

The issue of eligibility criteria is rather crucial, especially when the improvement of coordination should lead to an enlargement of the participating institutions. The success of joint activities is related to the coherence of the process among the partners.

The organisation of the follow up process is also very important to sustain the momentum created by the decision to implement a joint activity and to enhance the networking of scientific communities that remain national in this kind of organisation but linked together



through the project jointly implemented. The creation of a database of projects and results (publications, conferences, workshops, patents, etc.) could help in increasing capacity of each national researcher and could avoid overlapping, improve synergies and the quality of national research, and ensure better co-ordination between partners and agriculture-related Institutions as well.

4. A methodology to explore basic requirements to implement joint activities and three case studies

The kind of table on “Collaborative Research Projects” *supra* that identifies the different steps of a process has been built *ex post* in this case but while set up *ex ante* is a powerful and useful tool to think to any action that the partners would like to implement as a joint activity. The idea, proposed by the Portuguese task leader in a specific workshop held in Lisbon, is to build “scenarios”, that is to put the partner in the situation they do have to implement a joint activity:

- What is really expected?
- What should really be done?
- Who are the real beneficiaries?
- What are the different elementary steps?
- How should they appear in the course of implementing the activity?
- How to organise an adequate follow up?

Three examples are proposed below concerning the mobility of researchers (and more specifically young researchers), the networking of institutions (or part of them), the mutual opening of facilities, databases and laboratories.

4.1 - Scenario for Mobility (Welcome)

A joint action on Mobility can have many purposes, e.g. training, building networks, sharing information and facilities and fostering coordinated and cooperative scientific research. The following steps and examples’ landmarks correspond to a training/capacity building activity, for which the welcome team will request funds. Subsequently, the teams select the researchers to undertake the activities framed within a work plan initially presented.

STEPS	EXAMPLES: Welcome capacity Building Programme
1 - Definition of beneficiaries	Welcome teams, R&D institutions.
2 - Scientific topics and subtopics	Topics according to ARIMNet priorities.
3 - Type of activities	Training and capacity building; advanced training.
4 - Researchers	Grants, missions, bench fees to allow the mobility.
5 - Duration of mobility	To be agreed depending on category of the researcher



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

6 - Funding commitment	Each National agency/host institution funds one welcome team through grants (cf. NB below).
7 - Eligible criteria	Beneficiaries (Welcome teams) and welcomed researchers shall both belong to ARIMNet partner countries.
8- Evaluation and selection procedures + Feedback to the applicants	Common evaluation forms and criteria to evaluate working plan and infrastructures available (cf. NB below).
9 - Follow-up	Periodical reports of grant holders and contractor Institutions (advisors, welcome teams). Grant holders common meetings (kick off and final).

NB: funding of mobility is often shared between the country/institution whose the recipient is coming from and the country/institution host.

The compatibility between national and common procedures and rules will have to be checked over.

4.2 - Scenario for Networking: Institutions and Projects

Networking activity could be triggered at different levels. One is certainly the level of research teams, which is taken into account in "Collaborative research projects". Another one is considering research institutions as a whole which relevance is more on the side of Joint Programming Initiatives. The level that is developed below is considering subset of research institutions (basically research units of laboratories) which complementarities are necessary to organise in a federation of labs in order to address research issues that cannot be addressed at the level of one single laboratory. It requires agreement between the research institutions they are belonging to (e.g. to set up an appropriate governance for the network), funding commitment of these organisations.

STEPS	EXAMPLES
1 - Definition of beneficiaries	Research structures/units belonging to all kind of institutions: public/private research organisations, Universities, firms (SMEs...), NGOs dealing with Food and Agriculture at large.
2 - Scientific topics and subtopics	Topics according to ARIMNet priorities.
3 - Funding commitment	Funding commitment from the institutions + funding agencies.
4- Common eligibility criteria	Minimum 3 partners; geographical distribution - North/South.



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

5 – Network selection mode	<p>Identification of the potential network(s) through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis by ARIMNet members (selection on invitation in a top down process) - Open Workshop/Call (bottom up process)
6- Common evaluation and common selection procedures	<p>Common selection procedures established by the funders concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Science (International Scientific Committee) - Governance of the network (basic requirements)
7– Common timetable aiming at calendar synchronisation	All kick offs meeting shall start synchronized
8 – Follow-up	<p>1 - External to the network through a common Monitoring and Evaluation Committee set up by the funders.</p> <p>2 - Internal to the network through a Steering Committee and a Management Committee.</p>
9 – Prevention of conflicts	Protocol of Collaboration between networking partners (cf. NB below).

NB: There could be a conflict between the current evaluation at national level of one or several of the research structures involved in the network of institutions and the running of the network as a whole. A body to address such issues should be set up and general rules established in advance to resolve the potential conflicts.

4.3 - Scenario for Mutual Opening of Facilities and Laboratories (MOFALA)

The main focus of this action would be to allow the sharing of information (data bases) and facilities (especially large ones), to foster the exchange of information useful for on-going research and to optimize the available resources of the Institutions.

The selection of the infrastructures where MOFALA should take place would be accomplished on a top-down basis, i.e., by invitation from the funding agencies to the Institutions responsible for the facilities and laboratories or by the research institutions themselves.

It is important to point out that a simultaneous double funding strategy would be desirable: a) funding of travels and subsistence of the facilities users by national agencies of the users' countries; b) subvention to the welcome facilities Institutions by national agencies of the welcome facilities' countries.

STEPS	EXAMPLES
1 - Definition of beneficiaries	Research programmes supported by ARIMNet
2 - Types of facilities	Laboratories; specific equipment/installations, databases, experimental stations.
3 - Scientific topics and subtopics	Specific topics according to ARIMNET



	priorities.
4 – Identification of available infrastructures	Mapping of main national facilities/laboratories related to ARIMNet domain; questionnaire to national institutions about their availability/interest to participate in MOFALA action.
5 – Selection of the Infrastructures	Top-down (invitation).
6 – Typology of funding	Travel, subsistence, subvention. Each agency pays x subvention to the infrastructures in its countries, and x travels/accommodations to their national researchers that go abroad to work in foreign infrastructures. Another possibility could be rooted in the programme/project that benefits from this opening and its funding scheme.
7 - Common eligibility criteria	Location of the infrastructure; size and capacity of the infrastructure.
8 - Common evaluation and common selection procedures	Common adoption of infrastructures (Evaluation Committee/ARIMNet partners). Common evaluation forms and criteria to evaluate users.
9 – Common timetable aiming at calendar synchronisation	Common deadlines for procedures.
10 – Publicizing of the action	Common (ARIMNet and national agencies databases).
11 – Follow-up	Common follow-up (procedures, information, communication) and common monitoring.

NB: General comment on this fourth scenario: the opening of one specific facility to enable a programme/project to achieve its objectives will be decided on a case by case basis. Therefore the decision will take place at the level of the management of the facility and the one of the programme/project. The evaluation of the demand of the programme/project should be organized at the level of the facility, even if a body, set up by ARIMNet should look on it. On this basis, if agreed, lines 7 and 8 should be written in another way.

5. Conclusion

Originally, WP3 and WP4 should be run simultaneously and part of the work done for WP3 should be used to prepare a call that was the core action of WP4. A priority was given by the partners through their financial commitment to launching a call as early as possible in this second phase of the ARIMNet project. The result is that WP3 actually benefited from the experience gained in WP4 and the preparation, launching and management of the Call. It shows that the identification of barriers was not enough to successfully implement properly a



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

joint or a transnational activity. The precise identification of the different steps, one by one, one after the other, is at least as crucial and can lead to look at the barriers in a different way.

The implementation of joint activities is complementary to the implementation of transnational activities in two ways.

First, it could be organised jointly with a transnational activity, e.g. mobility of researchers and collaborative research projects in response to a call.

Second, transnational activities organised through calls are promoting the establishment of scientific networks and promote the emergence of a scientific community that is the basis for further coordination and cooperation. Joint activities are the embryo of joint programming activities, when scaling up is plausible and feasible.

In that sense, WP3 and WP4 considered together are certainly a first step that helped to build trust among the partners of ARIMNet and are an opening on and an encouragement for further developments in the coordination of Mediterranean Agricultural Research.



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

ANNEX 1. All participant partners barriers/overlaps for each scenario

Scenarios for Joint Activities – scope and rationale

Within the scope of the Work Package 3, namely task 3.1 - “*To elaborate and release a joint action plan (basis for a durable cooperation)*” - and in the sequence of other partner’s suggestions, discussions and inputs, FCT (task leader) has presented 4 scenarios of joint activities: *Collaborative Projects, Mobility, Networking and Mutual Opening of Facilities and Laboratories (MOFALA)*.

This presentation constitutes a methodological approach for common thought, discussion and decision on feasible and consensual plans for future joint activities of the consortium.

Each scenario (described in the document above) presents a step structure which corresponds to a column with examples of actions to be undertaken. The objective was to draw an ideal scenario that could subsequently be adapted to the legal and organizational capacities of the national agencies. In order to precisely understand at what extent the agencies could fit in the model requested by the scenarios, partners were invited to stress, in another table, possible barriers in the accomplishment of each step and related example, and also to point out any overlaps of national procedures that could be identified for each action. Please find below the tables with the barriers/and overlaps.

Regarding to the barriers/overlaps steps “definition of beneficiaries” and “funding commitment” for scenarios *Mobility* and *Networking* assembled the highest number of remarks, once they are both closely dependent on each national agency eligibility rules and financial availability. However, there is no sign of objective impediment for the pursuit of any of the scenarios, hence we can conclude for their general feasibility by the consortium.



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area
A.1 - Questions for Collaborative Projects Scenario

STEPS	BARRIERS	OVERLAP WITH NATIONAL PROCEDURES
1 - Definition of beneficiaries		
2 - Scientific topics and subtopics		
3 - Funding commitment accordingly to size/capacity of scientific community		
4- Common eligibility criteria		
5 – Common public announcement of the Call		
6- Production of Guidelines and setting up of an ESS		
7- Setting up a Call Office		
8- Setting up a Call Board		
9- Setting up an International Evaluation Committee		
10- Common evaluation and common selection procedures + Feedback to the applicants		
11 – Common timetable aiming at calendar synchronisation		
12 – Follow-up		



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

B.1 - Questions for Mobility Scenario

STEPS	BARRIERS	OVERLAP WITH NATIONAL PROCEDURES
1 - Definition of beneficiaries		
2 - Scientific topics and subtopics		
3 - Type of activities		
4 - Researchers		
5 - Duration of mobility		
6 - Funding commitment		
7 - Eligible criteria		
8- Evaluation and selection procedures + Feedback to the applicants		
9 - Follow-up		

C.1 - Questions for Networking: Institutions and Projects Scenario

STEPS	BARRIERS	OVERLAP WITH NATIONAL PROCEDURES
1 - Definition of beneficiaries		
2 - Scientific topics and subtopics		
3 - Funding commitment		
4- Common eligibility criteria		
5 – Network selection mode		
6- Common evaluation and common selection procedures		
7– Common timetable aiming at calendar synchronisation		
8 – Follow-up		
9 – Prevention of conflicts		



Coordination of the Agricultural Research In the Mediterranean Area

D.1 - Questions for Mutual Opening of Facilities and Laboratories (MOFALA) Scenario

STEPS	BARRIERS	OVERLAP WITH NATIONAL PROCEDURES
1 - Definition of beneficiaries		
2 - Types of facilities		
3 - Scientific topics and subtopics		
4 – Identification of available infrastructures		
5 – Selection of the Infrastructures and of the actions to be developed		
6 – Typology of funding		
7 - Common eligibility criteria		
8 – Common timetable aiming at calendar synchronisation		
9 – Publicizing of the action		
10 – Follow-up		