

**This report presents the various sessions of the Pre Event held in Brussels prior to the DG AGRI Conference presenting and discussing their new strategic approach to research and innovation. The report has been written by *Nicole Metz and Vanessa Nigten from Dutch Food & Business Knowledge Platform.***

**Report ARCH Pre-event: How to foster the impact of agricultural research and innovation for global challenges**

***The role of platforms, partnerships and policies***

On January 26, 2016, the Strategic Working Group [ARCH](#)<sup>1</sup> of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) and the European Commission organized a pre-event before the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) Conference on Agricultural research and innovation titled, *[“Designing the path: a strategic approach to EU agricultural research and innovation”](#)*. The pre-event addressed the issue of global cooperation and food and nutrition security, one of the main objectives of the two-day conference. Topics focused on key features of research and innovation platforms, partnerships and policies and aimed to provide recommendations for future activities. Discussions at the pre-event were later brought to the main conference by ARCH Co-chair, Patricia Wagenmakers. She presented seven recommendations that can contribute to research and innovation for global food and nutrition security that were warmly welcomed by the audience.

The half-day session (video available [here](#)) gathered about 100 professionals with a private, public and/or research background in the field of agriculture and food and nutrition security. During the opening remarks, Marc Duponcel of DG AGRI of the European Commission stressed the aim of the pre-event which was to move away from identifying needs towards concrete proposals for how partnerships could be implemented for global food security challenges. The pre-event outcomes would serve as input for the European Commission’s research and innovation strategy. In her opening speech, Patricia Wagenmakers, Policy Coordinator at the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, stated that *“we need to change our entire view on the future of producing and consuming food. This is innovation: not just doing things differently, but doing different things.”* In addition, Aldo Longo, Director for general aspects of rural development and research at DG AGRI, emphasized the importance of research for global food security issues in Europe, Africa and Asia. The pre-event concretely focused on scaling local impact and involving the private sector for increased research impact. Both of which were later illustrated by the example of multi-stakeholder partnerships in several areas, including the field of food losses. Respective [presentations](#) were given by the following experts: Laurens Klerkx, Associate Professor of Knowledge, Technology and Innovation at Wageningen University; Morag Webb, Policy Advisor at COLEACP, an inter-professional network of the private sector promoting sustainable horticultural trade and; Craig Hanson, Global Director of Foods, Forests and Water at the World Resources Institute. Following the presentations, lively debates ensued, including interesting reflections from three different groups of panel members from various continents, plus valuable additions from the audience. From these debates, seven recommendations emerged.

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<sup>1</sup> A Joint EIARD SCAR Strategic Working Group for improved linkages between Agricultural Research and Agricultural Research for Development aims at identifying and working towards ways to increase the contribution of European Agricultural Research investments for solutions to global challenges.

### **1. Start from a need**

There is empirical evidence suggesting that innovation platforms and partnerships are useful tools to handle complex problems that involve multiple actors, geographical levels and spheres, such as technological, socio-economical and institutional domains. In various current agri-programmes, this complexity is already somehow being taken into account. *“The European Commission has, for example, reflected on and started implementing the elements coevolution, multi-level and multi-actor in the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability”*, said Rob Peters of DG AGRI. Founding a platform can be interpreted in many ways by different actors. *“A Platform, what is it? Is it a thing, a space, an entity? However, somehow you need to create a spark”* stated Morag Webb from COLEACP. That spark can only be realized whenever there is perceived platform ownership by its members. Acknowledgment of the need of companies for economic returns of their membership was also stated. Jean-Pierre Halkin from DG DEVCO mentioned the necessity to listen more to the needs of farmers, in particular marginal farmers, and the needs of consumers. Generating commitment by levying membership fees could also contribute to spurring platform development, however investments are sometimes higher than returns. The establishment of a platform should start from a problem as felt on the ground. Collaboration becomes indeed valuable when it is generated from within, as stated Yemi Akinbamijo, Executive Director of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). He noticed that commonly the demand to collaborate indeed comes from those who need a solution for problems they encounter in their work. Laurens Klerkx added that for a spark, a person with conviction at the right level, ‘a champion’, or an executive leader to catalyse the partnership process is essential. *“Pioneers are needed that want to cooperate and innovate and see the benefit of the overall development of the platform they participate in”* was said by Marian Blom from Bionext, the umbrella organization for Dutch organic food. Furthermore, at the beginning of developing a platform, how ‘the champion’ will foster innovation must be clear for facilitating agencies. It should also be taken into account that platforms may not be the solution for everything.

### **2. Be aware of platform dynamics**

The second recommendation presented was that processes in multi-stakeholder knowledge platforms are very dynamic and that there are many differences in perspectives. Rémi Kahane, the Deputy Manager of the Platform for Africa-Europe Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD), shared that it is not always easy to work with actors from different backgrounds. PAEPARD has developed some rules and instruments to help members agree on how to partner in strategic alliances, including a users’ led process. Other partners besides researchers are leading the knowledge processes. Involving all actors inclusively is important, as well as building trust and confidence and developing skills for conflict management. There was also a recommendation to make explicitly clear that goals in a collaborative setting don’t have to be the same. *“Innovation can emerge from many sources within a dynamic knowledge process”*, said Christof Walter, a consultant in the field of sustainable agriculture and agri-investment. Various ways of investing in capacity building for co-evolution in platforms are possible. To make this a success, the need to include innovation as a part of educational curricula in food insecure countries was pleaded for by Tim Chancellor from the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich (NRI) and Michael Kuegler of the European Forum of Rural Advisory Services (EUFRAS).

### **3. Jointly work on innovation**

Some additional ideas were mentioned on how knowledge collaboration with various stakeholders could take shape. Key barriers in the whole value chain should be identified, as recommended by Youssouf Camara of the West and Central Africa Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), and Amare Ayalew of the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA). Laurens Klerkx elaborated on how this is done in the East Africa Dairy Development programme with a multi-stakeholder platform that supports dairy farmers in building a more commercialized system. In Dairy Hubs, farmers are linked to other actors, including important local leaders to address constraints they face in markets, logistics, artificial insemination and feeding. Subsequently, support is organized for

the farmers in the form of advice, veterinary training and access to credit. This collaboration around milk marketing is a valuable example that has created concrete contacts between farmers and milk processors, and has resulted in the delivery of the right quantity of good quality milk at the right time. The question was also raised of how to make problems measurable and how to set targets and standards as based in research and policy. Also be aware that in co-evolution, no silver bullet exists.

#### **4. Brokerage is essential**

Clearly the essence of a brokering entity to enhance positive dynamics in a platform was mentioned. Time and means should be available to connect the various “worlds of knowledge” of the members, preferably by an independent actor. How to institutionalize this role in different countries is still a challenge. A single contact portal where everything is accessible is helpful as professionals have very limited time to find information. Brokerage involves promoting learning across partnerships and making knowledge valuable, for example, by mapping, merging, synthesising and drawing upon lessons learned. In order to successfully implement brokering, further capacity building for brokers is needed, as stated by Michael Kuegler. Representing the Sustainable Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform (FABRE TP), Jan Venneman added that in the animal sector industry, research and development often happens at the industry level, not at the farming level. That is why farmer discussion groups are set up in the Netherlands, to decide how to implement industrial innovative products that could work well at farms. *“In those groups links are made between research, industrial partners and farmers for which brokerage to coordinate is essential.”* Also, COLEACP has brokering as its core business. The organization provides technical assistance and training to producers and exporters of ACP countries in view of strengthening the resilience of horticultural value chains and producers access to markets. To overcome producer challenges, COLEACP has started connecting producers to companies via associations, smallholder support services, public-private stakeholder platforms and training centres to provide good practices and establish solutions as adapted to local contexts. As such, like in the FABRE TP example, private sector research and innovation through brokering has eventually brought action and impact. How to sustain this brokerage role remains an open question.

#### **5. Aim for benefits for all**

*“Well functioning platforms must create economic benefits for all partners”*, stated Yemi Akinbamiyo. The FARA catfish innovation platform in Nigeria, which aims at strengthening the value chain, was mentioned as a good example of a working platform driven by the benefit it has generated. Besides agreeing on economic benefits, platforms should also be profitable for members via other types of benefits, such as access to market information and training. Christof Walter mentioned that generating benefits and creating access to what is already known is as important, or even more important than innovation. Many participants in the session were in agreement.

#### **6. Role for public sector**

During the discussion it became clear that although not always a leading one, the role of governments as a partner in platforms is appreciated. Financial governmental support is important, but it is not necessarily the only source. Scaling, vitality and sustainability can happen with or without government support. Youssouf Camara mentioned FIRCA (Fonds Interprofessionnel pour la Recherche et le Conseil Agricoles) in the Ivory Coast as a platform that is funded 90% by private member contributions, and only 10% is supported by the government. FIRCA concentrated on staple food value chains. The platform focused on which market factors pull the value chain and identified the backward linkages back to the farm level, including key barriers and forward linkages. Actors that were confronted with key nodes in the chain financed this analysis under the condition that they would get 2% of the revenue of the plan. This experience has increased interest throughout the region. In addition, Hans Marvin, a researcher of safe food at Wageningen UR, presented an example of a platform that was, on the longer term, fully sponsored by members and/or related partners. He explained that the EU-Asia Food Safety Platform (SELAMAT) functioned for four years in a very dynamic way. All contributing partners decided to pay a membership fee for two additional years (to

start with) and in return, those members expected to get something back and organized activities at their discretion for training courses and workshops. In addition, Amare Ayalew emphasized the reverse: that agri-food policy frameworks could be shaped by successful innovations generated by platforms.

### ***7. Flexible instruments needed***

Research programmes of the European Commission and others should allow for flexibility and engagement of actors of the agri-value chain. Adaptation throughout the innovation process is needed as the business model for platforms considering that many factors for collaboration change over time. Remi Kahane demonstrated two experimental funding instruments of PAEPARD in this regard. The first is Incentive Funding, an instrument to adapt and connect farmers to funding opportunities related to self-chosen priorities. The second is Competitive Research Funding where pilot projects are financed to learn about need for entrepreneurship and the management of multi-stakeholder projects. PAEPARD helps actors in the value chain to work on an enabling environment that helps manage projects more sustainably and develop new proposals. Platform impact should be able to be measured and take particular innovation dynamics into account. Relationships between key actors that develop frameworks for research and innovation such as CGIAR and European Commission can be reinforced as well, as mentioned by Patricia Wagenmakers. In the development of frameworks, it would, furthermore, be good to see platforms as transformers that do not necessarily need to exist forever but cease if they are no longer needed.

The outcomes of the pre-event were presented on January 28, 2016 by Patricia Wagenmakers during the parallel session, "[The global dimension: fostering the contribution of EU research and innovation towards global challenges through multi-lateral cooperation](#)". They will be taken into account in the further development of the strategic approach to EU agricultural research and innovation. A video report of that session can be found [here](#). In the coming months, DG AGRI will finalize their strategy paper and the actual comments on global cooperation will be further reflected upon.