

Notes from ERA ARD Mid Term Conference:
“AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT (ARD) IN
EUROPE:
TOWARDS A SHARED VISION”.

28th - 29th June 2007, Egmont Palace, Brussels, Belgium

Background:

Denmark is an active participant in the ERA net project entitled ERA ARD. For more information please see the project website www.era-ard.org. There are 15 consortium members from 14 countries in this 4-year project under the 6th Framework Programme.

The ERA ARD project aims at reducing the fragmentation of European ARD by improving coordination between consortium member states. The project seeks to improve synergies between the European national ARD programmes, increase the effectiveness and efficiency of European research planning, funding and implementation to fight poverty and hunger and to support a more rapid and sustainable development in the poorest countries in the world and thereby contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The conference was held immediately after the conference organised by the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) and held on 26th and 27th June in Brussels by DG Research. For more information about SCAR, please see http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/index_en.cfm and look under “What’s new?” for information about the conference. The SCAR Conference was based on a foresight process, which aimed at identifying possible scenarios for European agriculture with a 20-year perspective and appropriate research responses.

The ERA ARD Mid Term Conference then put an international dimension into the European discussions.

Agenda:

The programme was divided into five plenary sessions and a working session after the official closure of the conference.

The first day focused on a vision for European ARD from a European perspective, while the second day presented views on the needs and expectations of partner countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, leading up to a debate on a possible common vision.

The focus of the conference was exchange of views on among others the following questions:

- What will the ARD landscape look like in 2025?
- Will there still be need for an ARD capacity in Europe in 2025?
- How should the European ERD capacity evolve to meet its partners’ needs and enhance its contribution to MDGs?
- What could then be a shared vision for European ARD?

At the end of the conference there were parallel working sessions on these sub-programmes.

If you want to know more about the conference, please check the conference website through which basically all the presentations are now accessible under “programme” by a click on the agenda item (<http://conference.era-ard.org>).

Participants:

More than 150 participants attended the ERA-ARD conference from 38 countries (including 8 European countries not yet members of ERA-ARD, four of them having expressed interest of joining the project). The European Commission was committed with 14 senior and high-level representatives. There were also 23 representatives from the South - South America, Asia, and Africa - who actively participated. There were representatives from various global, regional and sub-regional fora, from ministries, NGOs, and universities as well as representatives from Civil Society Organisations.

Inputs from the many representatives from the South were important in enhancing the two-way communication regarding ARD.

Key points from the individual sessions:

Session 1: ARD challenges for Europe and its partners.

With globalisation and the overshadowing climate change there is an urgent need to look at agricultural research not only in a European, but a global perspective. In addition, there is consensus, and it was emphasised many times, that agriculture is a strong driver to reach many of the MDGs both directly and indirectly. However, there is a need for ARD to be even more efficient and effective for the benefit of the poor. The agricultural research agenda is changing rapidly and embraces not only traditional agriculture, but sustainable rural development, including the use of water, natural resources, climate change, energy, food supply and safety, nutrition, production with focus on the private sector, trade and access to markets. Moreover, there is a growing awareness of the important role of capacity development including education and training for agricultural development. ARD has been losing ground in Europe, but the EC is now strongly committed to achieving the MDGs, and ARD is recovering. Policies get more and more integrated, and there is now consensus that research is an engine for growth, sustainability and prosperity. The 'Life Science' and biotechnology sector will be important for agriculture. On the other hand, two years ago more money was spent on ARD in developing countries than in the North. Climate changes condemn us to collaborate.

Session 2: The possible futures of ARD in Europe

The MDGs are now influencing policies at all levels, including country policies (although only 6 EU countries have direct focus on the MDGs in their ARD policy). Most programmes focus on MDG1. We still need to make ARD more relevant to the MDGs and beyond. Global dynamics will influence the future: Poverty will mainly be in Africa, agricultural production will be global, climate, energy, biodiversity, water crisis, WTO/regional trade will play a key role.

Among the problems mentioned during this session were:

- Voices from the South are not sufficiently heard when donor countries elaborate development strategies, including ARD.
- The North has considerable focus on Monitoring and Evaluation, and less on the impact of ARD on poverty and economic growth.
- Programmes are often nationally led, implying many different policies.
- European ARD mainly focuses on the public research institutions, not much on the private sector or farmer organizations.
- The trade agenda and private-public partnerships are underestimated in ARD for poverty alleviation.
- 65 % of Africa's arable soil is degraded, and 'the green revolution' bypassed the continent.
- Drought, flooding, and loss of biodiversity increase the wealth gap.
- There is a missing link between ARD and practice as extension services have failed in many countries.
- 40% of people involved in agriculture in Africa will retire within 10 years.

Views on the possible future of European ARD included:

2015: Increased collaboration between disciplines, sectors, and stakeholders.

2025: MDG1 (decrease of extreme poverty) partly achieved, but not quite in Sub-Saharan Africa.

ARD will be marginal in Europe, but there will still be agricultural training

Increased research and capacity development in the South.

More ARD for Africa in Brazil and China.

More collaboration between governments, CSOs, and research institutions in the South.

Among the recommendations were that CGIAR linkages with EU institutions should be stronger. Some efforts along this line are carried out through establishment of new 'Challenge Programmes' by inviting institutions from EU to participate within the themes: climate change, desertification and horticulture. It is likely that some clustering of the CGIAR centres will be seen in the future.

It was stressed that the scope of ARD should be broadened to fundamental political priorities, like infrastructure, access to markets and the private sector.

Session 3: The needs and expectations of the Partner countries

During the sessions a strong need to support ARD including capacity development in developing countries was expressed, and participants from developing countries expressed an interest in building a stronger relationship with EU partners. Africa was very much in focus. Income and life expectancy are decreasing slightly, except in West Africa, where recent development has shown a small rise in income. There is a need to strengthen and build partnerships to support local investments in agriculture to obtain the 6% growth targeted by African leaders, (who through NEPAD (<http://www.nepad.org/>) has asked FARA (<http://www.fara-africa.org/>) to contribute to the development of African agriculture). The whole chain from basic research to the livelihood of the farmers needs to be embraced, including integration of the young. It will also be important to build South-South linkages and to ensure that NARS and

regional centres are operational. Technology and capacity development (CD) is a highly needed component at all levels involving farmers, merchants, extension services, and research.

Themes that were underlined by several speakers were:

- Importance of CD of farmers and of extension and information dissemination.
- Need for seed systems, phytosanitary issues and crop improvement.
- Partnerships between different stakeholders in South and North.
- Support to farmers' associations, including CD.
- Certification for fair trade and organic products.
- Importance of multi-stakeholder and 'bottom-up' approaches.

Global concerns of the speakers included the focus from the EU and USA on bio-fuel vs. food security, environment, and biodiversity. Several speakers also mentioned the problem of migration and brain drain in relation to local development. Europe should be willing to change its paradigm and take co-responsibility of poverty in developing countries.

Session 4: Toward a common vision

The session was introduced by a speech from the session chair: A common vision does exist, but it is hard to put it into practice, since the balance differs much between various players. ARD is an important ingredient, but the development process demands the participation of all stakeholders, and a common vision also demands intersectorial interplay, like inclusion of serious diseases and nutrition. Up- and out-scaling is a shared responsibility for all stakeholders. Whether agriculture is high on the agenda in developing countries is decided by National Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans, and often it is not.

Other speakers mentioned the problem that Africa is loosing 2/3 of their share of the international market plus local markets, and that privatization has not been successful. The exodus to urban areas is fast, and inclusion in the urban milieu cannot follow suit. This means that people are left outside both milieus. ARD should be a two-way process, because innovations that are developed in collaboration between farmers and research are adapted before they are even officially released, and are easily spread.

Closing session: How best to mobilise all European ARD forces

It was underlined that collaboration between the EU and Africa must be on Africa's agenda, and that we must collaborate with all stakeholders for development of agriculture. Other contributions mentioned new, relevant policies being promoted by the African Union (AU), like:

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which will use ARD for sustainable agriculture, environment, and water management in close collaboration with Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA); and the Banjul Declaration of the AU from 2006, which states that coordination of ARD should be reinforced for the effective implementation of agriculture within AU and 'New Partnership for Africa's Development' (NEPAD). Likewise the African Farmers' Forum under AU was created to give farmers a voice in policy-making processes. AU also targets a new, holistic strategy for agricultural development in collaboration with EU. In general, the atmosphere for collaboration for ARD is much better now than it

used to be; and the present multi-stakeholder conference was highly appreciated by the speakers.

Working Sessions:

Experience from FP6 has shown that most of the knowledge and experience in coordinating national programmes is gained by trying to implement joint activities (coordination of existing (sub-)programmes) and Transnational Activities (coordination of new programmes), even if only in a pilot form. The ERA ARD Steering Committee has decided on “Food Safety”, “Capacity Development” as sub-programmes, which can benefit from implementation as joint activities and “Food and Energy” as being a relevant topic to implement as a Transnational Joint Activity.

The objective of the working session was to discuss with participants the relevance of the specific topics under each sub-programme: Food Safety, Capacity Development (CD) in ARD and Food and Energy.

Austria is responsible for implementing the ERA ARD project activities in connection with Joint Activities, whilst Denmark is responsible for implementing the Transnational Activities.

Food safety: Approx. 15 participants were in the group. This group mainly aimed at a better dissemination of current project results. (Some time was spent on discussing the purpose of the paper and the overall aim of the discussions).

The text proposal included the key words: risk analysis systems, water hazards, chemicals (pesticides), microbes, food borne illness. Some additional key words were suggested for inclusion: diagnostics/identification of microbes, allergies, GMO risks, risks by using substitutional pesticides, inclusion of the whole food chain (food safety starts in primary production). The text proposal also highlighted non-research related issues such as the development of partnerships to maximise effectiveness and harmonization of policies. The text proposal was based on consultation of 85 existing Food Safety related projects. Suggestions will be incorporated in the text. (Brita Dahl Jensen participated from DK).

Capacity Development (CD) in ARD:

Key words from the theme were presented on Power Point for the group to comment on. Points underlined during the session were among others:

- CD should be included in all national and regional agendas and into young professionals' programmes
- It is important also to pay attention to the important research carried out in connection with M.Sc. and Ph.D. theses
- Increase the capacities of the poor to adapt to climate changes
- Change of educational curricula to focus more on farmers' problems and to recognize field-work in scientific careers
- IT and innovation skills should be strengthened
- Question-and-answer systems could be used by local media to address farmers' needs

(Lone Frederiksen participated from DK).

Food and Energy:

The ERA ARD project will implement a Transnational Joint Activity entitled Food and Energy. A small task force had written a draft concept note in preparation for the Working Session. Some 20 participants discussed the first draft of this Concept Note and provided their ideas. An extended consultation will now be held electronically with all stakeholders. The *concept note* defines “Food and Energy” and identifies “Specific Topics” that might be relevant for including in a call.

At the present time these topics include:

- A. Socio-economic and policy aspects of biomass production
- B. Increased profitability of agriculture through added-value products by improved utilisation of biomass for energy purposes
- C. Low water and fertilizer inputs and reduced energy demand in agriculture for bio-energy production
- D. Assessment and improvement of efficiency in agricultural production systems and valorisation of marginal lands
- E. Technological aspects of whole plant utilization for bio-energy
- F. Technological aspects of biomass transportation
- G. Land use patterns and resource optimization

The concept note will be an element of an overall Action Plan for the implementation of transnational joint activities, which will be the focus of Workshop 6 to be held probably in September 2007 in Denmark.

(Alex Percy-Smith participated and led this session).

Overall Conclusion

Perhaps the most important conclusion from the ERA ARD Mid Term Conference is the “political” support ERA ARD received from the European Commission. There is now a convergence of agendas for ARD and for agricultural research in broader terms and a contribution has been made to the emergence of a unique European “International agricultural research” agenda strongly supported by both DG-Research and DG-Development.

Danish participation - summary notes and further information:

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(ERA ARD project representative for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Lone Frederiksen (Danish Development Research Network), lf@ddrn.dk

From Denmark participated also:

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