Promote collaboration in European ARD to strengthen Agricultural Research for the world's poor

SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

ERA-ARD Briefing Paper

Towards a European ARD Portal

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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.

Towards a European ARD Portal

Abstract

It has always been a challenge to provide an overview of the diversity in the European offer and to guide partners towards collaboration in Agricultural Research for Development (ARD). Facing this challenge, this report provides suggestions for the concept and development of the European ARD portal - a portal of portals - aiming at the facilitation of access to European ARD information, expertise and collaboration partners as well as facilitating interaction and networking. The suggestions in this paper are formulated on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the needs for information and knowledge management solutions in ARD, the evaluation of the existing offer of ARD portals and consultations with Southern partners.

The needs for information and knowledge management solutions were derived from the actions that are described in the internationally mutually developed GCARD Road Map and the ARD-Alliance concept that was developed in the frame of the on-going ERA-ARD project. A range of ARD portals were evaluated in order to assess the offer and gaps. Options for collaboration with southern partners were explored during expert consultations in Africa.

As a result it is suggested to develop a portal that is structured following to the six principles of the GCARD Road Map. Accordingly, main sections should include: key priorities, partnership, structural change, capacity development, integration and impact assessment. Each section should offer a range of thematic pages that will provide an introduction to related issues and links to selected ARD portals. Users should be able to find an overview of the ARD landscape in Europe and be guided to relevant initiatives, expertise and organisations.

Regarding implementation, it is proposed that the portal will systematically build on the achievements of its partners in Europe and promote their activities. A powerful content management system should enable decentralised management. It is envisaged that content will be contributed by research organisations in Europe and managed in common agreement with the main ARD actors in Europe.

List of acronyms

Acronym	Description
ARD	Agricultural Research for Development
ASARECA	The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
CORAF	West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GCARD	Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development
IARC	International Agricultural Research Centre(s)
KM	Knowledge Management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
RAILS	Regional Agricultural Information an Learning System
SADC/FANR	Southern African Development Community - Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources

Current situation

A study was done by ERA-ARD to present suggestions for the concept and development of the European ARD portal – a portal of portals. The resulting suggestions are formulated on the basis of a three-fold analysis.

1. Analysis of needs for ARD information and knowledge management solutions

The study considered the needs for information and knowledge management (KM) solutions of the policy community, the research and development community and the community of practice.

For the identification of a comprehensive set of processes and actions, this study refers to the Road Map that was developed by the GCARD[1] and the ARD-Alliance concept[2], which was elaborated by the ERA-ARD consortium and its partners. The GCARD Road Map is at present the most comprehensive and widely accepted political framework for ARD[3]. Compared to the GCARD Road Map, the ARD-Alliance concept is an operational framework that addresses the program management level.

In order to obtain a single set of needs for information and KM-solutions for all ARD actors, the study followed a stepwise approach. It first analysed the processes and actions that are described in the six principles of the GCARD Road Map and the corresponding actions of the ARD-Alliance concept. For this purpose the actions of the ARD-Alliance concept were aligned with those described in the GCARD Road Map. It is worthwhile mentioning that the alignment revealed an almost perfect match of the two concepts. The conformity underscores the relevance of the ARD-Alliance concept as a contribution to achieving the objectives of GCARD Road Map. In a second step we verified the completeness of the identified needs by considering two selected concepts: an innovation continuum and a networking model. A total of 34 specific information needs and 15 different needs for KM-solutions were identified.

2. Evaluation of the existing offer of ARD portals

The evaluation of the offer of information and KM-solutions that match the identified needs was based on a review of ARD specific internet based information sources, information systems and KM-solutions in the South, in Europe and those of international organisations.

A comparison between the needs and the offer reveals that the main gap is the lack of interaction and exchange within and (mainly) between communities, in particular the exchange with communities of practice. The lack of integration of the community of practice in the processes is reflected by the lack of accessible information on traditional knowledge and of immediate expressions of needs. Another important gap is the lack of data, information and KM-solutions for systematic assessment of impact.

The study exposes the complementarities between Europe and the South in terms of information and KM-solutions. The European platforms and those of International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs) offer a broad range of high quality scientific and technical information for innovation. Compared to the international centres, the information offered by

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[1] The GCARD Road Map: Transforming Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) Systems for Global Impact
[2] Bernard, M. (2013) The ARD Alliance Concept. ERA-ARD briefing paper (http://www.era-ard.org/outputs/phase-ii/) - 6 pp.
[3] The Ministerial Declaration "Action plan on food price volatility and agriculture", issued by the G20 Agriculture Ministers from their meeting in Paris 22-23 June 2011, recognizes GFAR and the GCARD Road Map as essential mechanisms to strengthening agricultural research and innovation systems.

many European research centres is less ARD specific and more fragmented. Southern platforms are characterised by advanced networking and tailored KM-solutions for exchange, interaction and collaboration. The South is successfully driving the development of regional and thematic networks.

There is a trend that networks are increasingly contributing to knowledge generation, capacity development and therefore these are becoming important knowledge hubs in ARD.

3. Consultations with Southern partners

At a consultative meeting with knowledge management experts from the regional (FARA) and sub-regional organisations (SADC/FANR, ASARECA, CORAF) the expectations and options for collaboration were evaluated. Southern partners stressed the need for a European portal that provides a more coherent overview of the European ARD landscape. The European portal should function as a gateway - portal of portals - facilitating access to relevant resources and by encouraging interaction with European partners. Southern partners should perceive the portal as an offer for collaboration towards strengthening their regional and national innovation systems. It should promote information sharing and African ownership. In particular it was suggested that the European ARD portal should strengthen African initiatives by referring to their information systems and KM-solutions and by encouraging their use by researchers from Europe.

In summary, suggestions for a European ARD portal should consider the gaps and complementarities, the role of Southern ownership, the position of Europe in the global partnership, and acknowledge the achievements of others. The idea of a portal of portals complies best with these criteria.

Ten suggestions towards a portal of portals

Purpose

1. Encourage interaction, networking and collaboration

2. Contribute to the efforts of global integration

3. Promote the interests of actors in ARD

4. Advocate for capacity development and ownership of knowledge in developing countries

Structure and content

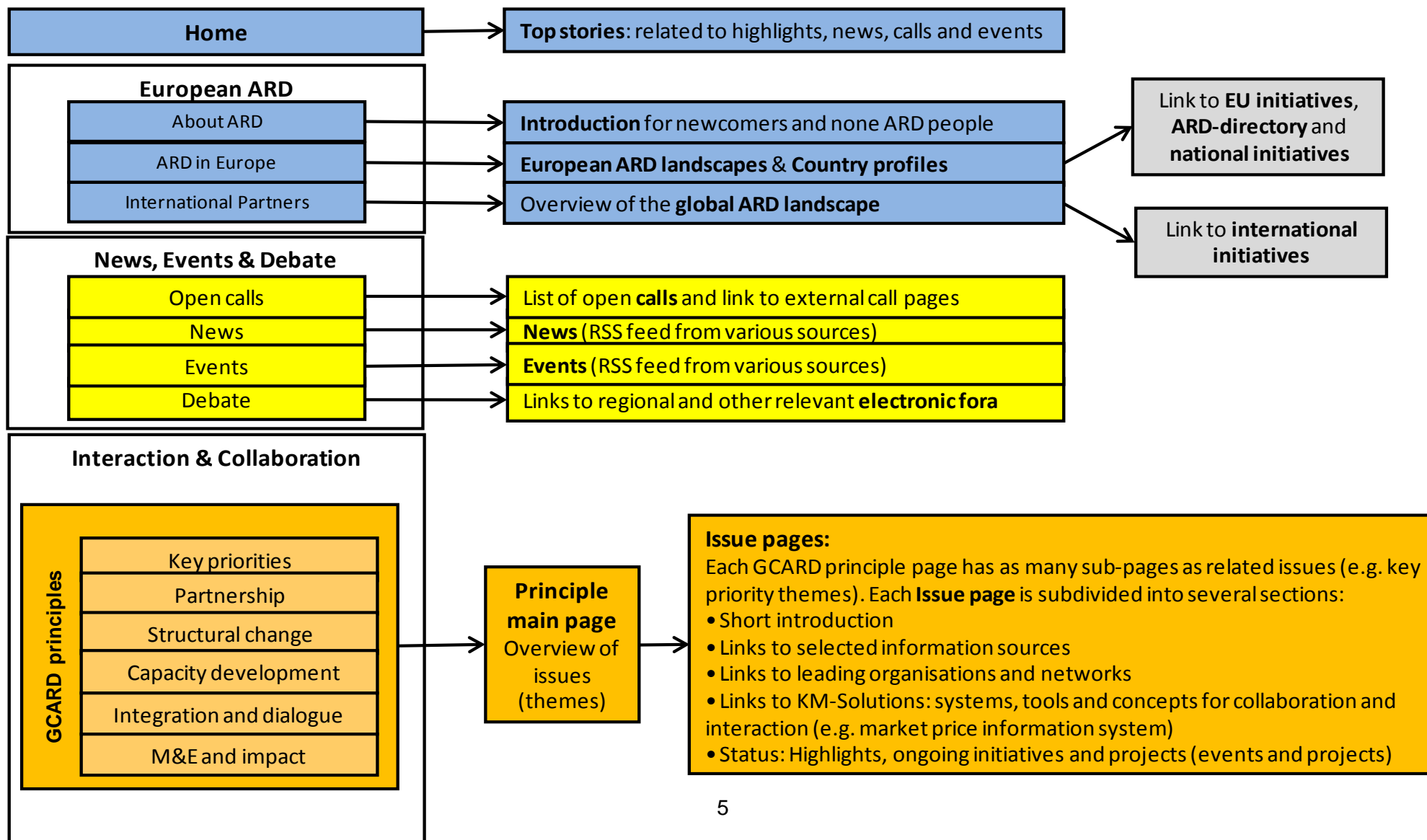5. Recognise and build on the achievements of partners

6. Simple structure of three main areas: European ARD, News/Events/Debate and Interaction/Collaboration

Operational issues

7. Decentralised content management

8. Allow for decentralised content management

9. Link to external KM-solutions for special KM-services

10. Update the ARD directory in collaboration with the regional and sub-regional networks

ERA/ARD
The Agricultural Research for Development (ARD)
Dimension of the European Research Area (ERA)

Promote
collaboration in
European ARD
to strengthen
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Research for
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Figure 1

Suggestion for structure and content of the European ARD portal

| Home | → | **Top stories**: related to highlights, news, calls and events |

European ARD

About ARD	→	**Introduction** for newcomers and none ARD people	→	Link to **EU initiatives**, **ARD-directory** and **national initiatives**
ARD in Europe	→	**European ARD landscapes** & **Country profiles**		
International Partners	→	Overview of the **global ARD landscape**	→	Link to **international initiatives**

News, Events & Debate

Open calls	→	List of open **calls** and link to external call pages
News	→	**News** (RSS feed from various sources)
Events	→	**Events** (RSS feed from various sources)
Debate	→	Links to regional and other relevant **electronic fora**

Interaction & Collaboration

GCARD principles

| Key priorities |
| Partnership |
| Structural change |
| Capacity development |
| Integration and dialogue |
| M&E and impact |

→ **Principle main page** Overview of issues (themes) →

Issue pages:
Each GCARD principle page has as many sub-pages as related issues (e.g. key priority themes). Each **Issue page** is subdivided into several sections:
• Short introduction
• Links to selected information sources
• Links to leading organisations and networks
• Links to KM-Solutions: systems, tools and concepts for collaboration and interaction (e.g. market price information system)
• Status: Highlights, ongoing initiatives and projects (events and projects)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The needs analysis reconfirms the importance of an up-to-date ARD-directory. Past experience shows that updating of content of InfoSys+ has always been a challenge. The regional and sub-regional networks in Africa, such as FARA-RAILS, are using InfoSys+ as ARD-Directory and are at present investing into the improvement of the system. It is therefore suggested to evaluate the possibility to partner with the FARA-RAILS network of national focal points to assure regular updating. To implement the European ARD portal, the following steps are recommended:

1. Conduct a consultative process for generation of ownership and urgency

Owners of existing portals should be included in the consultative process. The concept should be presented and further elaborated in exchange with the ARD stakeholders in Europe (EIARD, EFARD, SCAR, Agrinatura) and in other regions (FARA, AARINENA, FORAGRO, etc).

2. Pilot in the frame of the ERA-ARD project

To verify and validate the concept, example pages for the section "Interaction & Collaboration" could be elaborated on the website of ERA-ARD (www.era-ard.org) in collaboration with the consortium members. This would add to the documentation of ERA-ARD project achievements.

3. Elaborate the terms of reference for the development and content management

A lead organisation for the process needs to be identified. Besides the operational issues, the terms of reference should deal with governance and provide guidelines for the secretariat and editors of the contributing organisations. Up-dating of the ARD directory and the provision of news and events should be considered in collaboration with other regional fora.

4. Explore support for the implementation and management of the portal

Several options for funding should be evaluated in exchange with ARD stakeholders in Europe. The financial resources that are required for the development of the portal and for sustainable content management will be assessed on the basis of experience with similar portals in collaboration with partners.

5. Implementation and launch of the European ARD portal

Depending on the willingness of consortium partners and the availability of resources, a work plan and time table should be agreed, to implement and launch the portal.

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 Towards a European ARD Portal briefing author) and/or Patricia Wagenmakers (ERA-ARD coordinator) at p.s.wagenmakers@minez.nl.

Quotation

Bernard, M. (2013) Towards a European ARD Portal. ERA-ARD briefing paper (http://www.era-ard.org/outputs/phase-ii/) - 6 pp.